

Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Overview

For many people, perfection is a problem. Either there's not enough of it or there's a demand for too much. As is the case with most things, empowering truth seems to be found somewhere in between the extremes, within what one might call the gray areas or transitional moments of life. We may not know where we're going or why. We may not even have a particularly clear sense of where we are within the present. Nevertheless, we somehow intuitively know that perfection is supposed to be good.

So why isn't it always good? What happens when it is? How we could utilize rather than abuse perfection's possibilities?

This month's late newsletter (my apologies) offers some food for thought on these and related questions. I pray that you will find the discussions insightful and empowering to whatever challenges and opportunities invite your participation.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Perfection's Attraction

We all know how problems and difficulties hurt--physically, emotionally, mentally, or in some other way. Consequently, it is reasonable to envision an ideal of what life might be like without such things. It is also then natural to envision only what is desired and never the complete reality of how the alternative experience would look, feel, and so forth. From such romanticized (and probably unrealistic) visions, somewhere early within human history, the idea of perfection arose.

What most of human history has failed to accept or to remember, is how contextual perfection is--that is, what seems perfect within one situation is virtually never as perfect within a different situation or for a different person. The primary concern of perfection, most concisely, is the apparently flawless resolution of a particular challenge.

While this is wonderful to experience (but generally a fairly rare occurrence), the danger hidden within even the perception of such a possibility is the temptation to expect that such

perfect resolution will become the common experience rather than an occasional one. The presence of such an expectation is generally problematic to relationships to others and to ourselves, because most of our life circumstances and experiences do not manifest the ideal we have envisioned--which the expectation of perfection says we desperately need. As long as we perceive perfection as being essential, we put pressure upon others and upon ourselves to manifest that perfection--whether or not the ability to do so is present--and experience frustration, anger, and fear whenever that doesn't happen.

Imagine a man walking outside on the night of a new moon, when the sky is filled with brilliant stars and deciding that one is so beautiful that he must have it, hold it within his hand, take it home with him, and so forth. He begins to run toward it, thinking that he will somehow, someday be able to reach it. Because he is on earth and the star is in the heavens, however, (if the oceans were not in the way) he could run around the world indefinitely, like a giant treadmill, never getting any closer to the star at all.

Our ideals and our perceptions of perfection are like stars: points of light which we can use for guidance of our efforts, actions, thoughts, words, and so forth. It is appropriate, good, and right to strive to do and be our very best--or at least what is the best that the immediate circumstances will reasonably allow. It is not appropriate, good, or right to remain discontent, abrasive, or adversarial if perfection is not achieved. Like the man running around the world in pursuit of the star, all that is accomplished is perpetual discontent. What matters is the daily practice of love, of ideals, and of the best possibilities within our own lives.

From a certain perspective, the stars were not put into the night sky so that we would pursue perfection, but rather simply to inspire insight, beauty, and ultimately love.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Perfection's Rejection

Within every age are those who, like the man within the previous article, have pursued the star of perfection, running around the world, for so long that both their bodies and their hopes are exhausted. When they finally stop running, instead of redefining their relationship to the star according to a more truthful and holistic perception, they become cynical and critical of the pursuit or even of the desirability of the star. In turning their back upon the star, however, they find themselves in a place of darkness with no light upon which to focus their attention--or from which to draw inspiration for any further pursuit of excellence within any area of their life.

This is the rejection of perfection, instead of the creation of a more healthy relationship with the ideals of self-development and of excellence. Although no such conscious choice may have ever been made, what such a person has essentially done, is to bounce from one extreme to the other--still avoiding a middle-ground of ongoing integration and discernment. This is analogous to an addictive personality who goes through life randomly exchanging one addiction for another.

A person whose first primary experience with addiction was alcoholism, may be successfully in recovery and boast of being sober for literally years, while demonstrating compulsive and obsessive involvement in religious activities, perhaps even engaging in an extreme of dogmatism that is in some ways as harmful to their personal relationships as their alcoholism was.

Whether through drugs, alcohol, sex, social activities. or anything else, the primary criteria is whether that particular activity or substance is standing in the way of honest perception and truthful engagement in the resolution of problems and the transformation of raw materials into beautiful things.

As much as idolizing perfection can make us blind and difficult for others to love, rejecting perfection can be equally problematic. To live life fully, deeply, broadly, meaningfully, and (some might say) abundantly, is to engage in full awareness and transformative creativity within every moment, drawing out the most joy, love, peace, and fulfillment the particular moment has to offer, regardless of how good or bad the particular moment in and of itself may seem to be.

Another perspective of perfection which seems relevant at this point, is the perception of

perfection as a destination; a point of development of being finished; the suggestion that nothing better lies beyond that state or accomplishment of development. If one believes one's self to have reached perfection, therefore, anyone else encountered who has more accomplishment (by whatever measure or in whatever area), can only be a fraud. If no one can be better than the standard of perfection demonstrated within one's self, then all challengers to such a claim must be eliminated by one means or another. Isn't it obvious yet that this is just another version of the game, "King of the Hill," within which no one ever wins and the game continues as endlessly as anyone is willing to play, as successive monarchs conquer and are deposed and replaced by others?

Perfection's rejection, in this particular case, may be the choice of opting out of the game altogether, in order to discourage its continuance. If others value and desire the inclusion of one's self, however, even the act of abstention becomes polarizing. One might say this could be equivalent to lacking the freedom to disagree agreeably, if no one is in fact allowed to abstain.

One additional possibility to note is the possibility of "burning out." That is, becoming so exhausted by monumental past contributions that instead of modifying one's methods to allow for the continuing contribution of one's wisdom, one instead forsakes the pursuit of the goal, saying something such as, "I've done my share; now it's up to others" or "I don't have anything left to give."

Usually, neither of these statements is actually true, except as an indication of being temporarily emotionally exhausted. Whether or not the emotional exhaustion will be temporary or evolve into an enduring condition, I suggest, depends upon finding a new vision or approach with the ability to inspire, motivate, and empower.

In neither rejecting nor idolizing perfection but rather in nurturing each others' best human qualities, however, we can be the inspiration, motivation, and empowerment for each other. We can all be contributors and supporters of the abilities of those around us to escape the pitfalls of either erroneously extreme relationship with the ideal of perfection, helping each other instead toward the integration of true wisdom and unconditional love. Specifically because we each see things differently, by working together we have a better chance of seeing all there is to see.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Perfection's Definition

Considering how many statements have been made about perfection throughout human history and how often a general assumption is present that "we all know what perfection is," why is it then such a difficult word to define? If we really do understand about what we are speaking, why is it so difficult to name that about which we are speaking? Drawing from an insight received during a conversation with an elderly friend very familiar with the quilting of fabrics, "How much you see, depends upon how close you look."

On a similar note, when composing academic papers for my first graduate degree, I would begin by naming my subject and then ask, "What are the constitutive pieces and parts?"

In order to have an ideal of perfection at all, at least two things must be present within the action, object, or idea being evaluated: (1) an example which contains observable flaws and (2) an imagination or vision of the particular example without any flaws whatsoever. (The problem with assuming the latter, however, is that other flaws may become apparent once those currently noticed are removed).

Considering any particular example a bit further, with regard to the first requirement, one must answer what makes the flaw a flaw and not simply a creative difference? What if, for example, people with light brown hair were considered to be flawed in comparison with people with blond hair? Within certain subcultures, this sort of value-judgment has actually already been practiced. It is important to note, however, that such valuation changes from time to time within the same geographical region, such that it is advantage to have blond hair within one historical time period and an advantage to have brown hair within a different period--within the same area.

A further consideration of the first requirement is the question of whether or not the

flaw is observable, which has moved individuals within many subcultures to sometimes go to great lengths to hide qualities of which the surrounding subculture does not approve--even though no such disapproval may be present within even the majority of other cultures around the world. A visitor or immigrant from another culture, therefore, may initially be quite puzzled about why a local or native resident would go to great lengths to hide a particular quality or characteristic.

Is perfection then most accurately defined as that form or accomplishment which will be most societally rewarded, whether or not there is anything inherently right, wrong, difficult, easy, coarse, refined, or developed about the particular form or accomplishment? If so, perfection would then be defined by the subjective opinion of the popular majority rather than by any objective standard of quality.

In recognition that what works for one person does not always work as well or in the same way for another, I long ago adopted the habit of encouraging others to hold onto whatever is helpful and to let the rest go; to allow whatever the rest is, to float downstream into someone else's waiting hands. Every good thing placed within the world was not designed or intended for specifically me; some of it was designed to meet the needs of other individuals. The world is a shared space and the needs of others--which are not experienced by myself--need to be met if those others are to be available (in whatever ways they can be) to respond to the needs which are experienced directly by me.

The definition of perfection, therefore, is at least partly about needs being met--yours, mine, ours, and everyone else's too. Within a perfect world, one might say, everyone's individual needs are met in ways that do not simultaneously create problems for others; everyone is loved and valued simply for being who and what they are and not because they have successfully earned love or value by performing this or that task; and everyone is continually nurtured toward their individual maximum development and potentiality throughout their lives. Specifically because many persons within the world still struggle for basic physical survival, however, the above idealistic statement may be beyond their grasp.

Until the success of life, love, and wisdom includes every individual person, however, how can we accurately define it as being "perfect"?

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

*"What I am, is alive.
What I am, is growing.
What I am, is multidemsional.
What I am, is in relationship
with everything around me.
What I am, is myself."*

--Sister Who

Perfection's Ambiguity

For many the pursuit of perfection is so intense and specific that the notion that perfection can change, is too much to handle. A certain comfort comes from familiarity, from knowing what to expect, and from a certain confidence that the challenges will not be overwhelming.

Specifically because perfection has the ability to be ambiguous, it remains a worthy ideal by which to navigate certain aspects of our lives and relationships. It is because of perfection's ambiguity that it is able to inspire different specific goals within various individuals and even within a single individual over the course of time.

Specifically because perfection is ambiguous, there is also the possibility of forming an interactive relationship between myself and this particular ideal. I can allow perfection to teach me about my own expectations, making things clear and obvious that might have otherwise remained hidden. I can also allow perfection to say something different within a future moment than what was said during a previous one, thereby making perfection yet one more available teacher, as I continue to explore the breadth, length, and depth of my own life's spectrum of experience.

I can allow perfection to teach me about my contributions--my thoughts, words, and actions--illuminating ways that each or all of these could be more effective, more interconnected, more wise, and more unconditionally loving both toward others and also toward myself.

Over and over again, I continue to find that perfect solutions are more likely when I stop thinking in terms of "either...or..." and start thinking in terms of "both...and...." It has often been my observation that the loving and wise integration of opposites often produces exactly what the general human opinion insisted was impossible.

Within its ambiguity, perfection reveals itself to be a flexible tool, able to ask the questions we might never otherwise get around to asking. Instead of declaring something "impossible" or "unacceptable," we can ask "what would it take to...?" Instead of labelling ourselves incapable, we can once again simply ask, "what would it take to...?" Perhaps when all is said and done, we can be perfect at being the physical, spiritual, emotional, social, and psychological persons that underneath it all, we've always been.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

On a Personal Note

I have a new definition of hell: crawling around on one's belly for four consecutive days (about fifteen hours each day), stuffing fiberglass insulation into an attic. Hopefully this will mean lower heating bills this coming winter.

After many long hours of work, I have completed construction of a giant chess set (pieces up to five and half feet tall and a canvas board sixteen feet square) to be initially used within an updated introduction to the ongoing television series "Sister Who Presents" and within the 2011 desk calendar. I hope to have the video and photographs done within the next week, the new introduction completely edited by mid-November, and at least four new episodes of the series created before the end of this year.

Work on a third album of original songs has been delayed by an over-abundance of other demands upon my time and energy, but I hope to return to this project in earnest very soon.

Every motorized vehicle I have has needed some sort of repair lately, but I am hopeful that this season of devastating expenses is nearing its end.

With regard to probable conclusions, I appreciate whatever prayers any might wish to offer for a wirehair dachshund ("Ludwig") my former lifepartner and I brought back from Germany in 1996, who is now taking half a dozen medications to deal with a degenerative heart condition and unexplained seizures. I did get to visit him one more time, but have no idea how much longer he will be with us.

After four years of relatively peaceful and harmonious relationship, the life-threatening disagreement regarding dominance between two dogs has been answered with certain adjustments that allow us to continue to be family. I do not see them as being my pets or belongings (especially since three came from animal shelters), but rather that when we each had nowhere else to go, by the grace of God and of love, we found each other.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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