

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

In that life remains at least a very collaborative effort, it is imperative that we allow living space for even the most contrasting perspectives and choices. Specifically because our knowledge and understanding is limited within every circumstance and situation to the amount and type of information we have each received, there is always the possibility of receiving new information or insight which could change everything we think we know--and consequently how we conduct ourselves.

To value such "buried treasure," however, we must be willing to concede the possibility of its existence. The reward for being willing to concede that possibility, is that we may someday live with everything with which the particular treasure may bless us. The penalty for being unwilling to believe in such possibilities, is that we will never enjoy anything better than what we already have.

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

Free to Disagree

"My way is the only way!" Literally thousands if not millions of people have said this about a very wide variety of things, since the beginning of human history. In every instance, this declaration has at least restricted and possibly even prevented all further true and honest communication. In the presence of such a conviction or statement of faith, nothing is able to offer us any improvement of relationships, circumstances, or outcomes.

Like the strong forceful exhale which is used to extinguish or "blow out" a candle, the result is a state of emptiness, perhaps even painfully so. If appropriate inhalation does not follow, life ends.

Inhalation is a complete contrast to exhalation. Instead of pushing away, it draws toward. Not only does it draw toward, this action takes what the eyes cannot see and pulls it into the body's deepest and most vulnerable spaces.

Exhalation and inhalation are as different from one another as day and night, but each

depends upon the other in order to find the ability to repeat what it is meant to do.

Similarly, it is often our adversaries that provide opportunities for us to perceive and understand the truth of ourselves and our ideological positions. We may think, for example, that democracy is the best form of government--until someone astutely points out democracy's short-comings. If we are listening, we may be able to correct the problem in some way, to the benefit of everyone everywhere. If we are busy maintaining a self-perception of perfection, however, the problem remains unaddressed.

One of the most haunting quotes which I generally keep within arm's reach in my home office area is drawn from the book "Nuremberg Diary" by G. M. Gilbert and attributed to Hermann Goering, Adolf Hitler's Deputy Chief and Luftwaffe Commander: "Of course the people don't want war...that is understood. But after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country."

The freedom to disagree is the invitation to see what we would otherwise not see. Additionally, the freedom to disagree can create allies instead of adversaries by allowing every voice to feel that he or she has truly been heard. If a person feels he or she has truly been heard, there is no need to resort to more forceful means as an attempt to get the attention the particular problem legitimately requires.

Allowing for peaceful, constructive disagreement is thus a healing act of love.

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

Free to be Unique

If I disagree and am heard, the inner emotional and psychological push to be heard quickly fades. In order to remain within the room long after the sound of my disagreement has faded into silence, however, I must also be free to be unique. To be unique is to disagree and to be different in a way which does not fade into silence.

The first benefit of being free to be unique is that there is a wider palette of possibilities and colors with which to create the painting of that particular moment in time and space. It's as if the words of disagreement have not faded into silence but rather have remained with us in order to offer an ongoing contribution rather than simply a momentary one.

Making that contribution a positive one is the task of revealing to the world just how much of a treasure and a gift from God we each are.

I recall a number of stories which I read during childhood, each of which included a number of characters with odd and apparently useless abilities. Within each variation of a very similar plot line, the band of misfits would embark on a journey and encounter highly unusual challenges along the way. Each challenge, however, was easily met and overcome by the unique abilities of one member of the band. In the end, the journey was successfully accomplished only because of the combination of the abilities present within the group as a whole.

The lesson was that everyone has something necessary to contribute, as humanity continues its typically confused and stumbling journey through time. Consequently, everyone must be treated with respect and love, so that his or her best effort can reasonably be expected, when the moment of greatest need finally arrives.

Within our own time, however, uniqueness is more often seen as an adversary and conformity as a virtue. While this may be helpful to simplistic administration of large groups, it does not ultimately prove to be in anyone's best interests.

Uniqueness does require more effort but ultimately delivers far more reward than conformity ever could. When conformity is valued, individual uniqueness is devalued. When individual uniqueness is devalued, the person (or persons) most directly concerned is denied opportunities to share the creative vision and contribution which are quite probably the very reason for the person's existence.

Someone who is unique can be encouraged to express this uniqueness positively. If they are not supported in doing so, however, it is more likely that the uniqueness will come out anyway, but usually in a less positive form.

By allowing for not only disagreement but also diversity, humanity collectively empowers itself with more ways to perceive, understand, and ultimately resolve every challenge it will ever face.

To value diversity, however, we must begin by believing that more uniqueness exists than we have so far discovered. We must also believe that what we have not yet discovered is wonderful and valuable in some way that will at some point most likely be revealed as absolutely essential. We may even go so far as to say that God knew we would one day face that particular need and therefore sent us just the right person for that particular job.

So why are there so many in the world who seem to have no vision, no motivation, no goal, no ideal, no vitality, no calling, or no purpose? I suggest it is because they were not allowed to be unique when it mattered most to be unique and their gifts to humanity now lie buried beneath a great mass of psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual scars.

Can such wounding be healed so that the wondrous uniqueness may resurface? I don't know whether or not it can. I do know, however, that if it can, the treatment will have some element of unconditional love in it. I also know that if I am a person of faith, if I consider myself a decent person at all, and if I want to face my uncertain future with the availability of the blessing of what God can do through that person, I must try to help in whatever ways I can; the future survival of myself and my loved ones might depend upon it.

When I was in first grade in elementary school, the nuns and teachers arranged for each student to create something out of clay which would then be bisque-fired, glazed, and fired again. Because each piece was pinched and squeezed into whatever desired shape, our fingerprints were permanently preserved in the surface of the clay. Much like the pottery, each person's uniqueness may be the fingerprints of God. What we do with that uniqueness, however, makes as much difference as whether a particular piece of pottery was to be used for holding cigarette ashes or for displaying flowers.

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

Free to be Original

As one who is unique, I stand out in a crowd. If I wish to go a step further yet, however, I also reach deep within myself for the creations, words, thoughts, actions, or beauty of whatever form which God has placed there. Each person is a "Care Package" from God, endowed with diverse and unusual qualities which are often initially mysterious to even the bearer of the particular gift. Uniqueness is a passive state in which individual gifts are openly displayed. Originality is an active state in which the individual gifts begin to move and (hopefully positively) contribute to the surrounding world.

Whenever someone speaks, even to just say "hello," it is obvious to everyone within earshot that the person has a voice.

Whenever someone begins to sing, however, all sorts of subtle clues about the dimensions and experience of his or her soul begin to subtly weave themselves into the performance. Those listening hear not only the words but also the feelings.

To express originality, however, several things are necessary. First and foremost, I must believe that God didn't make a mistake in deciding to create me and that consequently I am valuable and worthy enough to be the channel by which this originality can be shared with the world.

Second, I must be willing to prepare by doing preliminary sketches, practicing my musical scales, or rehearsing my performance in whatever ways teach my body how to move in service to the desired expression.

Third, I must show up and accept the opportunity without hesitation when the moment of performance arrives. All objections, fears, and concerns must be categorically labeled as

inadequate to prevent the performance from happening. In preparing to conduct a combination of ritual and education regarding the Third Order Franciscans for a particular class session while in theological school, the classmate with whom I would be conducting the ritual asked if I was ever afraid of anything. Although I was astonished, having never thought of myself that way, I responded, "I'm afraid all of the time, but I do not consider fear an adequate reason to stop doing what one knows to be the right thing to do."

All that being said, however, we can collectively make a significant difference by creating places, spaces, and even a world in which it is physically and emotionally safe for originality to be expressed. Freedom cannot be purchased by military forces at the expense of countless lives ended and blood spilled. Freedom is what we can give to each other by practicing unconditional love. The freedom resulting from military conflicts is nothing more than the imposition of a different set of rules, reflecting a different set of values, with which we may or may not be agreeable. The freedom resulting from the practice of unconditional love, however, allows each life to blossom with a greater fragrance and beauty than anyone ever imagined to be possible.

In actual practice within past and present times, institutionalized religion has mostly abandoned its original purpose of facilitating positive relationship between human and Divine, turning instead to the maintenance of some particular system of behavioral rules. The rules, however, rather than facilitate genuine and honest divine relationship, have mostly created unwieldy and frequently violent competition for the deepest passions and psychological ambitions of humanity.

Within a practice of spirituality which begins within one's own heart, expresses itself throughout one's life, and may or may not choose to also join with others to create communal celebrations, however, one comes once again to know that God is indeed much bigger than any church and far more deserving of any amount of honor and worship one can give. From this deep knowledge, it becomes clear once again that each individual and consequently each church has a standing invitation to serve the loving and honest originality which the Source of greatest love and wisdom has bestowed, rather than allowing enslavement to mere rules.

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

*"I don't recommend
any particular religion;
I recommend
a positive relationship with God."*

-- Sister Who

Free to Live with Integrity

I was rather aghast during a phone conversation with a minister this morning, when rather than regard integrity as a virtue of personal character rightly to be pursued, he instead sarcastically suggested that it was a myth without any genuine reality. In response to his challenge to name such a person, I responded that I continually strive to be just such a person.

I have encountered similar reactions whenever I have advocated honesty. Although honesty must be tactfully done, if it is to be wielded as a surgeon's scalpel instead of as an executioner's axe, I remain convinced that honesty is essential to trust and that trust is essential to basic functioning of every human civilization.

Integrity, however, is even larger and more encompassing than honesty, since it begins before a single word is spoken and endures long after all words have ceased. Integrity is the silent and invisible but determinative canvas upon which all honest words and actions are painted.

Integrity is the opposite of hypocrisy, that quality of character and behavior against which Jesus spoke more than any other sin--the sin which ironically has been virtually synonymous with institutionalized religion and the majority of its leaders and practitioners since shortly after the first religious assembly ever occurred.

Integrity is the congruence between what I believe and how I live, the expression of the values I genuinely hold within each word I speak and action I do, and the persistence with which moment by moment and one person at a time I seek to recreate the world around me better than it has ever been.

Integrity is when God calls me to speak up, to act with love, and to extend forgiveness when circumstances recommend otherwise and I choose to live in harmony with the vast and expansive world of divine Spirit rather than with the tiny and constricting world of immediate experience.

Integrity is just one more way that God calls me to get off my butt and be better than I have ever been; to do more than I have ever done for the cause of life, unconditional love, and divine wisdom; and to leave each moment I touch a little better than I found it.

May you be blessed with strength to live with integrity, now and always.

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

On a Personal Note

I remain amazed at the ability of good things to happen in the midst of the least supportive circumstances. The past month has included many unsupportive circumstances.

The February mortgage payment is due sometime during the next two weeks and I still do not have the necessary funds.

My ongoing job search remains thus far unsuccessful.

Just as I was leaving my home to participate in the annual Martin Luther King Parade, a UPS truck smashed into the back of my car. It is my understanding that because my insurance company believed the actual circumstances and responsibility for the accident to be too difficult to prove, I was assigned complete blame for the event. Thankfully the car is still driveable, but remains far from being repaired and other expenses will most likely follow.

In spite of all of the above, approximately two-thirds of the songs for a second album entitled "Prayers" have been written and the music for three-fourths of the completed songs has been recorded into my computer.

Forty-eight episodes of "Sister Who Presents" have been reformatted with the new introduction and been submitted to Denver Open Media for re-cablecasting in the Denver-metro area and perhaps also for eventual availability using "streaming video" over the Internet. Another twenty episodes may be added within the next year, depending upon certain technical challenges which I strongly suspect I will be able to resolve.

Following closely on the above, I am now offering DVD copies of the above-mentioned shows, which may be especially appealing to those living outside of the Denver-metro area, as well as those who wish to have copies of the shows to view at home or at any other gathering they wish.

Onward and hopefully upwards.

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

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