

# SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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## Overview

Fresh perspectives are sometimes helpful, but, of course, there are always those that one does not see. This month's essays suggest some possibilities, but it is expected that they will be interpreted and adapted in a myriad of ways by each reader. The goal, as always, is to find whatever is individually empowering.

## Divine Understandings of Suffering

On a few occasions, I've been blessed to address a room filled with numerous people, but responses have been minimal and did not often lead to subsequent opportunities, because I did not make glowing promises or tell how to live in perpetual happiness. I did tell some ways to get more out of life, but mostly I offered questions that could lead in empowering directions. It is therefore not a comprehensive understanding of suffering that I offer here, but rather thoughts that might travel beyond whichever next steps are individually appropriate.

Truth, of course, is unavoidably contextual, such that one changes the truth by changing the context. What is often unexpected is how very dramatically specific truths change. Central to all such creativity is attempting to make sense of perceptions initially not understood.

The central problem of all speculations and projections of divine perspective and opinion is the absence of divine perspective within human observers--which makes any imposition of human perspective eternally and inescapably open to questions. There is also the possibility of ill-founded arrogance, as various degrees of megalomania seek to control others, essentially also embodying the dynamic of man playing Godde--which the former has never had sufficient wisdom to do well. Any suggestion that this is akin to parenting ignores that guiding the development of children is done by amateurs who are (ideally) continually learning.

Additionally a central problem is that the word "suffering" is so subjectively defined and never a competitive sport within which the

suffering of any can legitimately be described as greater or lesser than another's experience. How much one suffers is usually directly proportional to how tightly one clings to that which potentially will be lost as well as whether one has found effective ways of coping. The only respectable response to every instance is providing as much compassion as is available.

An additional mystery is the discernment of what specific empowerment any particular moment or season of suffering could serve. If suffering forms building blocks for future empowerment and maturity, then Godde may have exceptional reasons for allowing such to occur at all. Yet within the midst of such experiences this grants little help or strength.

It is only by having a perspective that extends beyond the present moment that one is able to consider future benefits purchased by enduring current adversity. Why might the Divine thus allow suffering? Specifically because of abilities of wisdom and love which are thereby achieved.

What thereby becomes important during such times is not to give all attention to what is being felt. One must also notice precisely whom one is becoming--which may prove to be essential within a future challenge. My rather human lament is nonetheless whether some less painful method might have gotten the message across.

The moment will pass, as every moment does. What remains are the ways that one's behavior and character have changed--hopefully for the better. These will proceed to affect every subsequent interaction long afterward.

In this way, the temporary experience limited by time casts a shadow across eternity--and not all shadows are bad. They are after all what allows for three-dimensional perception. What matters is not always what they are, but rather what and how accurately they identify what comes into view along one's path.

So I strive to truly look and listen so that harsher methods of communicating will not--perhaps even never--become necessary.

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

## Divine Understandings of Pain

A country-western song by Johnny Lee advises that “the secret to surviving is dividing the burden by two” and this is echoed within the biblical text, “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Central to this is the notion that pain may have been intended to bring us together collaboratively, rather than create isolation. If so, narcissism as well as any other kind of selfishness, prevents pain from having any good effect.

More concisely, perhaps Godde created pain so individuals actually need each other. An early ministerial witticism advises that “Life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need.” Yet it is sometimes astonishing the lengths to which some will go to avoid taking their turn when that time finally comes.

Additionally, that which advocates for withholding help from individuals in need is adversarial to being described by any sort of faith. Voting for governments and organizations which behave this way, makes one an enabler of oppression rather than a much-needed channel of healing toward the surrounding world. This further suggests that in reality one is a member of a construction crew building a road to hell paved with good intentions.

Requiring poverty before love is extended is likewise evil and leaves victims worse. Popular theology and psychology assert that sufficient wisdom and industriousness will keep all evil and misfortune away, but this has never been true. If it were, love would matter far less.

The divine perspective suggests that we may be surrounded by opportunities to engage in healing that remain mostly neglected. The simple fact is that humanity really does have the power to make a constructive and perhaps even miraculous difference. Pain is a tool that, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad, but rather has messages to communicate to those who are truly listening and willing to respond.

Collaborative relationships can be the better outcome that the Divine may have intended all along. From a certain perspective, one might even say that pain is more truthfully a verb rather than a noun. It is not pain’s feeling that matters, but rather what pain or the observance of pain inspires one to do.

On a different note, pain may also arise from

anger that expectations were disappointed--even expectations one did not previously realize one had. In some instances, one is subconsciously projecting a very specific definition of “normal,” the very existence of which one was previously unaware. An important concern of self-reflection is to thus take whatever time is necessary to fully understand exactly what one wanted--which may not be as universally applicable as imagined.

It is not the elements themselves which are painful, but rather their incongruity with the surrounding context. The obvious task which must be embraced is not elimination, the creation of conformity, or any sort of indoctrination, but rather constructive dialogue and integration--which also lead to growth. Learning how to positively utilize what has never previously been encountered, results in growth that produces a wiser and more mature individual.

Perhaps more concisely, pain is the result of life challenging one to fill a larger space or role and in this sense can always be viewed as an opportunity, if also a most uncomfortable one. I sometimes do not feel ready to embrace a particular new challenge--and, in all honesty I may not be--but what seems most important is that I make whatever attempt I am able, rather than sinking into any sort of stagnation. If I begin to settle for less, none of the beautiful dreams in my heart and mind, will ever come true.

Now, that *would* be painful in more enduring ways. Settling would also enable wrongly shifting pain toward being a noun without constructive or motivating effect. As unpleasant as pain may be, it is ideally inseparable from spiritual growth and self-sacrifice, but these never occur by accident or without significant personal investment.

On a similar note is having to face challenges alone--which the Divine never intended. Even the component of personal boundaries is not defined by orientation or gender, but rather is inseparable from basic integrity. Accepting a compliment is never to be misinterpreted as inviting interaction that cannot be done honestly.

It is actually sometimes pain which must be employed specifically so that words will be said honestly, rather than being hidden by social or professional conventions. When truth is calmly spoken, healing can finally begin.

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

## Divine Understandings of Struggle

First to note is that this is always a means and never an end in itself. It is neither what it is nor how it functions that matters, but rather to what it points. To view it otherwise creates disempowering imbalance before one has even begun to constructively respond.

Second to note is that struggle never occurs in isolation from the ongoing manifestation and demonstration of life. Without life, there is no struggle. Indeed, without struggle, it is difficult to legitimately claim that life is truly present.

All of this makes it most peculiar that innumerable promoters of popular psychology and religion advocate for pursuing life that is devoid of struggle, rather than seeking to educate about more effective responses to any struggle that occurs—including prevention of adversarial circumstances that might otherwise be more probable. There are times when I therefore sarcastically remark that a primary reason the Divine may have created humanity was for comic relief. Human intelligence is certainly not the reason for continuing survival of this most peculiar species.

Faith in yet-unrealized positive possibilities may in fact be the best reason of all. This would imply, however, that the physical is actually based upon the spiritual; that the seen is founded upon the unseen. Those who look exclusively with physical eyes will consequently never see all there is to see.

Perhaps it is analogous to the busy ant hills often discovered within fields of my youth. No apparent pattern within the myriad of insects each moving relentlessly in individual directions was ever obvious, yet somehow they collectively kept a communal collaboration going that was far larger than any acting in isolation could ever accomplish. There was both an ongoing sense of struggle within their frenetic behavior and a sense of everything occurring so automatically that success within every area appeared absolutely guaranteed.

I never understood how they could persist

with such apparent confidence within every motion, yet had no way of knowing whether their individual contributions would be both effective and meaningful within the larger resulting wholeness of the combined outcome. It was as if any reality of struggle was so instinctively embraced and so fundamental to basic realities of individual and communal manifestations, that they never entertained any contrasting thought of uncertainty or momentary hesitation. Every action was accomplished with such immediacy and efficiency that the collective reality seemed virtually engineered, but what was more likely the case was simply individual understanding of symbiotic interconnection and interdependence.

A more concise rendering would be the African word “ubuntu: we are because I am and I am because we are.” The contrasting realities are not individually in competition, but rather each completes the others. It is simultaneously both the absence and the normalcy of struggle that is equally continuous and ongoing.

That is why work has sometimes been described as the activity that allows humanity to have integrity, if the specific work effectively corresponds to individual identity. Unsuccessful attempts would confirm that none can effectively do any work that is not truly their own. In a similar way, any work left undone impoverishes the surrounding community, even if there is no understanding of why communal empowerment and ability have waned.

Being idle is consequently not an indication of success, but rather of ineffective utilization of individual gifts and abilities. Finishing earlier than expected creates opportunity for ingenuity, but on too many past occasions, my supervisors instead resented being challenged to go further than they’d planned. More concisely, they were unprepared for any opportunity to grow.

This very much questions whether struggle and growth are fairly constant travel partners. In contemplating a fundamental underlying thread that runs through all of physical life, the only conclusion that has withstood all of the queries and cross-examination I’ve generated is that life is ultimately oriented to the growth of the soul.

Every response and challenge are measured by whether or to what extent the dimensions of the soul have increased within its relationships.

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

*"Struggle is an indication  
that life continues."*

– Sister Who

## Divine Understandings of Love

Enabling encourages ongoing experience of current problems and is thus not an expression of genuine love. Empowering moves toward better ways, improved forms, and genuine resolutions. Any ideal relationship, therefore, reaches consistently toward bringing out the best within each other.

The perception of what truly does bring out the best in both one's self and others, however, remains central to both maturity and continual growth. This is why there are many times when I am compelled to acknowledge my inability to understand divine love without also having divine perspective--which, in spite of all my best attempts, usually at least partially eludes me. A way that I try to reassure myself is by freely acknowledging I'm standing too close to see the larger picture--sometimes because I can't and shouldn't separate from my humanity.

It is human capacities for love, which open doors to miraculously transforming situations and circumstances. Transformations are what I personally believe That Which Is Truly Godde finds most thrilling. The true story of any life may in fact be more measured by such shifts of growth than by more obvious accomplishments.

Perhaps it's a stretch, but I'm tempted to say that Godde is most proud and especially loves us within moments when growth is observed. A challenging aspect of such moments, however, is that one is not always aware when they are happening, because one is once again standing too close to realize how a particular experience has changed how one will understand and love within every subsequent opportunity. To some extent, this is also a gift we can give to each other--letting each other know transformations and shifts that are observed.

If the other is truly being honest, such words can be received with gratitude, allowing one to either build upon a validation or, through dialogue, correct an expression that might not have come out as intended. Additionally, self awareness can be increased, but to both improve and remain honest, self-consciousness and perfectionism remain unnecessary, specifically because of love and good will seeking to assist in creating the best possible.

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

## On a Personal Note

Responding to neurological challenges is ongoing and creates a bit of a roller-coaster within daily life experiences, praying for creative abilities to return and trying not to judge myself too harshly for having great difficulty with what was formerly easily accomplished. Certain pending future tasks seem quite daunting indeed, unless an unanticipated surge of communal support arises at the best moment. I can only hope that prayers will be positively answered when that time comes, but, for now, I embrace a "wait and see" attitude, knowing that circumstances could go either way.

I worry at times that the minimal response to last month's words suggests that my creative and ministerial contributions have been less significant than imagined, but perhaps it is also an indication that others would not know how to use the tools I've created--or maybe a hope that if no provision is made, any undesirable turn of events will be thereby discouraged. My only concern is to be as prepared as possible, yet remember that the good has every bit as much chance as anything unfortunate.

The book manuscript continues to move slowly toward publication and I know that many are eagerly waiting, so I apologize for the delay.

Twenty-four new episodes of "sister Who Presents..." as well as a fifth album of songs are mostly all planned, but continue to wait for other essential production components to be found. If anything, life remains irritatingly unpredictable, yet my ministerial commitment never wanes.

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

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