

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

A human individual is a very complex integration of many different elements and dimensions of being, so it only makes sense that fully understanding another or even one's self is a most difficult action to embrace. There are even dimensions and aspects of which circumstances have allowed one to become less aware--but which are still there.

Awakening Peace

It is my contention that every person who is without peace, is attempting to survive in spite of unmet needs. The added complication is that the attempts, like a person drowning, are frequently flailing and ineffective actions that exacerbate the problem. To prevent drowning, one must learn effective movements before the risk is ever real, so that wisdom--not fear--guides the response.

Any pursuit of peace within others or within the world, is thus hypocritical if it does not pay attention to what needs are unmet. More directly, if peace is the goal, then satisfying every need is the means by which peace is achieved. Apathy and any absence of compassion are more accurately the enemies against which one must persistently battle, until every need is met.

Food, clothing, and shelter are traditional areas of focus, but equally and perhaps even more important are concerns of mental, spiritual, and emotional health. The unmet needs in these areas may be invisible, but often have more effect than any physical injury would. Grossly oversimplified, one might conclude that love in all of its manifestations is most essential of all.

The added complication of swimming (and many other activities) is that there is not one single method that is effective within all circumstances. The speed, strength, direction, and temperature of currents and waves must all be considered, as well as the training, mental focus, emotional state, and ability of the particular individual. This is why the outcome of every swimming competition is uncertain.

Fully living requires embracing uncertainty in

constructive and collaborative rather than adversarial and competitive ways. As long as there are winners and losers, humanity will never reach its full potential. Only by building each other up, will accomplishments reach further than they otherwise ever would--each generation metaphorically standing on the shoulders of those which preceded its moments in time.

I still remember the first bodybuilding event in which I participated. Each time a category was called to go to the stage, everyone in the room where weights for warm-up exercises had been provided would stop and applaud, validating each person's participation within the overall event. In that sense, the event was far more collaborative than competitive and the real accomplishment was how each had inwardly grown.

Peace was a matter of knowing that none of the effort had been meaningless, during the long months of preparation. Awakening that peace had required the discipline of showing up for daily exercises that provoked the development of muscles in specific ways. Yet this process was also one of embracing change, knowing that one would somehow never be the same.

The peace I subsequently found after the event, was inseparable from the awareness that I had grown. I had embraced a new and larger sense of who and what I was. If it is true that the only evidence of life is growth, peace arose from an awareness that I was truly alive.

Perhaps that is the best gift that any can give to another, because at a basic level, every creature needs to know that it is alive, beautiful, and significant. It is not only that every life is inherently valuable, but that it is also valued and respected. It is self-sabotaging to deny these, because they are what empower one's self.

Peace ultimately arises from demonstrations of love. To awaken peace, love must be given life by moving beyond words into actions. Failing to express love that may be internally held, especially during times of great need, contributes to fracturing rather than wholeness. Peace is thus inseparable from actively healing.

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

Awakening Faith

A big part of having faith in someone is believing in inherent qualities of which even the individual may not be self-aware. From one perspective, no one can fully know another without some awareness of the beliefs, emotions, thoughts, memories, and passions that are absolutely real within the individual's heart and mind. Yet from another perspective, another's point of view may be essential to awareness of externally obvious characteristics and qualities.

There is a sense in which I never know the full truth of myself until I engage in honest conversation with others. Ideal understanding is a wise integration of all perspectives. A primary challenge to that, of course, is that additional new perspectives are encountered throughout life, but may be overlooked for various reasons.

In that sense, faith is a matter of learning to see and understand more completely than superficial circumstances and appearances might encourage. Alternatively phrased, a great many mistakes are the result of not seeing all that is there. Humanity's shortcomings may thus be described as stumbling around blindly, rather than engaging in truly empowering relationship.

"If I had only known..." has introduced many different statements of regret, but is too often not followed by efforts to prevent any such oversight in the future. If I spend too much time obsessing about what went wrong, I might neglect taking further steps to ensure that developments henceforth turn out right. Faith is the belief that better actions and choices are possible.

Conversation and dialogue are among the primary ways that each person's wisdom and understanding potentially empower the entire surrounding community. The more individuals isolate, however, the less these are shared and the more true it becomes that wisdom is not so much inadequate as it is fractured.

Faith involves reconnecting wisdom and understanding with all of their other pieces. If I consider any particular individual or even myself incapable of wisdom or insight, I will miss the particular examples of those that are already there. Interactive relationship is how these move from one to another throughout community.

Within such reconnection, however, it is essential that individual integrity be maintained, in order to ensure that the best contributions of

each are that which is actually exchanged. One cannot make one's best contribution, however, if one is attempting to embody the expectations and understandings which others' already have, rather than providing new ideas, resources, and directions in which to grow. More concisely, if one only repeats what has already been said, no new learning or growth will occur.

I have never believed that life consists in metaphorically "running in place." Faith insists that stagnating in that way is neither necessary nor recommendable. One of the quotes that hangs on my wall is one of many attributed to Albert Einstein (widely suspected of having been autistic). "The person who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The person who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever seen before."

Awakening faith, therefore, is deciding that one is willing to be alone, if doing so will in any way increase wisdom and love, but equally includes that this is not where one's journey ends. Within virtually every artistic manifestation are elements of wisdom and love and also within every creative expression is a longing to be shared. Creativity has always been a relational activity that longs to be shared.

Faith is not some worn-out dogma, but rather the earth from which new growth springs within every springtime season. In a similar way, awakening faith often involves planting new seeds and cultivating whatever growth follows. If one discovers a new garden to till, it may be because one is being called to be its gardener.

One need not expect the garden's plants to inherently know how to grow to their best possible forms. Some will need a trellis provided by a gardener. Others may need more space in which to spread, such that other plants need to be appropriately distanced.

The wise and loving gardener responds to the needs of each appropriately, such that the harvest that will eventually follow is not a solitary work, but rather a collaboration. Ideally, that combined effort will benefit far more than only the specific individuals most directly involved. I continue to be impressed, wherever I look, at how extensively symbiotic all of life actually is.

Faith is the ground upon which hope and love can endlessly dance, if empowered to do so.

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

Awakening Hope

I have long hoped for family and community that have yet to manifest within my life in any enduring sense. A few friends have wanted very much to fill such a role, but circumstances have prevented us from having any actual ability to embrace the true meaning of such words. What has been more distressing are those who toss the words around without any commitment to actually doing them.

Parallel to all of that are the heart-wrenching ways that loss has marked the evolution of my life. The departure of objects long held as symbols of particular relationships, sometimes served as messages that those persons didn't really care and remembrance is no longer needed, because when difficult times arose, the strength of commitment to stand with each other while the particular storm passed, was conspicuously absent.

They narcissistically persisted in enjoying the blessings that I wasn't individually equipped to share, unconcerned that their lives no longer included the blessings of my contribution. I was more or less relocated by adversity to a new place to do whatever ministry I could. The challenge I took with me each time, was that of reawakening hope for good time to follow.

Part of that was awakening to the fact that relationships which I thought somehow defined my life and myself, didn't actually do so. What was needed was to embrace new possibilities that the previous forms had been unable to support. I became a larger person than the previous participants were willing to embrace--an example of which was the woman who at first offered herself as a second mother when I "came out" to my birth mother about being gay and was emphatically rejected, who, as this ministry developed, chose as her last words to me, "Don't weird me out."

For a while I tried very hard to figure out

***"Faith is the decision to try,
hope is the direction to go,
and love is when the movement
begins to actually happen."***

– Sister Who

what was so weird about what I said or did. It all seemed governed by basic ideas within the realm described as "common sense." Ultimately it became one more confirmation that integrity was something I couldn't afford to lose.

Indeed, it was rather perplexing how often I discovered that conformity consistently pointed in the opposite direction in comparison to integrity. Honesty insists that I have never done anything with the intention of being different. It is only that I engaged in deep self-reflection and looked for ways to artistically express who I truly found myself to be, because of how clearly objectionable living a lie would conversely be.

Hope is what arose from seeing possibilities of who and what I truly was, rather than argue for that reality being unacceptable. More directly yet metaphorically, if I found myself to be a platypus, then I needed to be the best platypus the world had ever seen. The problem, of course, is that for a time, the world was not willing to believe that a platypus was in fact a true and genuine creature.

Part of hope, consequently, is that when Godde decides to create something absolutely new, the world will learn and grow so that the newness can be embraced, rather than rejected, ostracized, and marginalized. Yet it may be that finding one's self alone is a phase through which everything that is new must pass. Hope is the belief that societal circumstances will not always be what they currently are.

On a similar note, I once saw a poster that urged, "Don't give up five minutes before the miracle occurs." I persist that miracles do still occur, but that they are unpredictable. The best any can do, is to create circumstances, beliefs, and attitudes that will welcome and celebrate any such occurrence as effectively as possible.

This is what inspired me to begin praying frequently over Gawain, my emotional support dog, who at one point was diagnosed with unstoppable cancer. Remarkably, his condition began to improve, until a new (and expensive) veterinarian declared his condition to be quite treatable. The first veterinarian had proposed ending his life in order to avoid suffering.

Yet I had to be willing to make personal sacrifices, which encouraged me to part with resources that no longer served my life.

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

Awakening Love

It has often been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. My contrasting firm conviction is that the road to hell is never paved with genuine love. Love may, however, often require interpretations and definitions to be revised, because love is inseparable from spiritual expansion and growth.

Love is also inseparable from truth, but truth can be inconvenient to established norms and at odds with traditional interpretations. One must grow in order to encompass any truth discovered. Included within that larger sense of truth is that physical bodies are not eternal, but rather begin with birth and end with death.

The challenge is engaging both--and everything in between--with as much integrity as one can manage. Ideally, the very best of one's knowledge, wisdom, love, and abilities should be brought to bear upon each unfolding moment. Whoever avoids honest engagement, consigns him or her self to sometimes subtly deplorable examples of human behavior.

The common notion of maintaining physical safety at the expense of emotional, mental, or spiritual safety, is a mistake I aspire to never make again. The cost was far too high, but I'm not certain how that particular situation could have otherwise been addressed. Painful within such confrontations is respecting my limitations as a human being; that I am not nor ever will be omnipotent--but I still need to do whatever, in fact, I can truly and genuinely do.

As challenging as it may be to recognize at last, is that accepting being victimized is easier to accomplish with integrity. If others choose to wound me, but they still cannot make me less of who I am and consequently of how I will be remembered by those who value truth.

I remain inspired by a particular witticism, even if the cost within particular circumstances is uncomfortably high. Bernard Baruch began the quote, "Those who matter don't mind and those who mind don't matter," but Dr. Seuss expanded the meaning by introducing the words with "Be who you are and say what you feel, because..." This is the fundamental definition of integrity. May we all find the strength to put it into practice.

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

On a Personal Note

The doctoral ceremony has been postponed indefinitely. If anyone would like to be advised specifically when it is finally scheduled, they are invited to contact me during the interim.

A more worrisome concern during the past couple of months, which is still in process, has been the diagnosis of Gawain, one of my registered ESAs (emotional support animal) and a member of my immediate family since 2014, with cancer. The application of extensive prayer and holistic methods, however, seems to be having some effect. Indications of anything wrong have actually been minimal, so I can only hope that the problem was noticed very early and may thus be more treatable.

Requests for more videos continue to be received, most recently from South America. I would very much like to provide those, but current resources and environmental elements are adversarial at the very least. Nonetheless, I strive to persist in doing whatever good I can do within spiritual, social, and interpersonal relationships.

Three book manuscripts are now in process and especially the first, which tells much more of the story of Sister Who, is rapidly moving toward completion, but there is also much yet to be done. Two of the manuscripts directly result from my academic work. I hope that they will soon empower readers all over the world.

For now, the dogs and I simply continue living one day at a time, hoping tomorrow is better than today.

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

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