

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

"When you're up to your ass in alligators, it is difficult to remember that the original goal was to drain the swamp." This was a wall plaque I saw many years ago, but may be an accurate metaphor for the way that life has become so busy for so many, that it is easy to forget and neglect what is fundamental.

When Everything is Alive

On far too many occasions, in reference to allegedly inanimate objects, I have heard individuals insist that "it's just stuff." The same persons were often inclined to dismiss any concern I might have for the non-humans I count as family: "It's just a dog." In discussing such persons with a very close friend recently, we jointly made the observation that their perspective generally leads to objectifying other people as well.

As much as life is less complicated without emotional attachments and within considering everything and everyone to be expendable, a door is thereby thrown wide open to excesses of the mental illness of narcissism--which, upon closer inspection, in relation to true spirituality, is mutually exclusive. Every genuine spiritual expression and experience leads away from isolation and toward relationship.

In accepting the possibility that literally everything is alive in some way, the story of my life can thus be read as a complex sequence of overlapping lives and experiences of various forms, such that the loss of any is deeply felt and interconnection with any--especially during times of crisis--is empowering in ways that defy intellectual description. The fact that the current development of my human mind can fully neither perceive nor describe the consequent dynamics and effects, does nothing to make any of them less real.

Yet it is only by accepting the possibility of universal life, that empowering relationships can become part of my life experience. In the

absence of this possibility, one is blind and unaware of infinite potential and life will not be fully lived. This may be a new spin on the African word, "Ubuntu" ("I am because we are and we are because I am").

The invitation, is to consider that "we" refers to more than humanity--which all too often views itself as the center of all that is. A similar (but not synonymous) idea can be found within the Lakota Sioux term, "Mitakuye Oyasin," which recognizes all other living beings as one's relatives. A healthy understanding of either term, encourages balance (neither placing one's self narcissistically at the apex nor floundering within excessive rather than genuine humility), allowing one to follow whatever path one's life may take, being respectful of all others while knowing the strengths and weaknesses of one's self--beginning with accepting any and all current limitations of perception and understanding.

In participating in various fairs promoting a wide range of metaphysical tools, it always seemed a bit peculiar to me, how many would gravitate toward methods of prognostication--specifically because in seeking to persuade all others to embrace a particular response to any specific challenge, the reasons given were consistently based upon "what will happen" if any other response is selected. In both cases, however, the future is unformed and affected by every choice made along the way, by every living thing in any way connected to the specific unfolding moment of time. So while professing to know the future that will absolutely follow a particular course of action, countless persons persist in seeking a reliable way to predict such outcomes--as if they themselves know just how unreliable and uncertain their predictions are.

When everything is alive, respected, and even loved, however, one may finally recognize that life is not a competitive effort, but rather a collaborative one--within which it really is possible for all to emerge as winners.

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

When Everything is Included

This is a difficult topic to address, because of the innumerable times when I sincerely wanted to literally include everything, but had not the strength nor resources to do so. Most especially in regard to certain dogs who shared their lives with me in times past, I will probably never forgive myself for being unable to do better than I did. In spite of such times, however, I am humbled by even the idea that they might have been given a choice of where to spend the limited number of years of their lives--and they chose to spend them with me.

For their sakes more than my own, I wish my life had not been one of such frequent struggle and hardship--not because of my choices, but rather because of the confused and broken world within which I live. Yet their choice was not because life with me would be perfect, but rather because they would be truly and fully loved. While I could not give them everything, they knew I would not hesitate to give them everything I could.

Sadly, with innumerable others, that was not the case. There have been times when I would have liked to rescue dogs and even children from loveless homes, but there is neither an effective test to verify such a state nor did I have sufficient resources to offer something better. Additionally, like angels on assignment, the reason for dogs being where they were, was sometimes to teach their humans how to love--but people are often slow learners.

Be that as it may, it is essential that every living thing be given opportunity to do so. The most loving thing I can do for my dogs, is to spend time with them, providing the instruction and training necessary for them to achieve patterns of behavior that are consistent and empowering. If I don't think they're worth my time, it is an accusation made by my own actions that I don't truly love them and they might be more appreciated somewhere else.

Yet we often struggle through such lessons, because I do not fully understand them and they do not fully understand me. Nonetheless, all good possibilities begin with inclusion. If we do not take the time to be with each other, no recommendable form of relationship will follow.

The same could be said of relationships that are spiritual in nature. An investment of time

and attention is essential in order to begin any subsequent process of development. Being invisible does nothing to make anything less real, but innumerable points of description may be more difficult to define.

Without inclusion, however, life becomes like a library within which all of the book shelves are empty. There is no access to contrasting perspectives, understandings, and reports. The definition of reality cannot exceed one's own small existence and expressions of love and wisdom will never be more than whatever one already knows--essentially denying the future any means of being more than the past.

Often within human societal struggles, a marginalized population will at some point begin to argue, "We're just like you" (which, of course, is never true). Repressing individuality in order to create an inherently false pretense of social integration, however, only replicates a narrow definition that is unable to include all that life could ultimately be. The universe is a vast and potentially wonderful place that is unable to fit within such tiny definitions.

Perhaps the situation is analogous to a gardener within a verdant climate who has selected four vegetables to cultivate and named every other plant a weed--to be pulled up and thrown away. Only after all of the other plants are gone, is the understanding finally achieved, of how essential biodiversity is. I insist that diversity within the human species is equally essential and will not survive in the presence of societal demands for conformity, that take no notice of what particular individuality offers.

It is therefore not a question of whether a specific person or creature should be included, but rather of how. Every person and creature one ever meets, has valuable lessons and qualities to offer, but there is equal opportunity for both empowering and adversarial relational dynamics. All too often, the response is to push away whatever is not understood.

Perhaps specifically because of being a common element within life experience, the basic element of communication is too often "taken for granted," instead of remembering and respecting how many thousands of years were required to develop the systems currently in use--that include everything we know.

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

When Everyone is Embraced

A poster reacting to hyper-sensitivity to touch experienced by many persons with autism, first advocated for forming communal relationships, but then teased against any expectation of holding hands. Within various accounts written by parents of such children, a common emotional pain described, is not being able to hug their children (because of resulting sensory overload). What seems to be needed, are broader understandings of how embracing one another can be accomplished.

From another perspective, how can any such embrace transcend political, religious, or ideological differences? Without some more fundamental understanding, for myself at least, such a hug would feel dishonest. Finding that "common ground," however, is likely to require interest and effort from both sides.

To the extent that policies, laws, and rules written long ago, blindly dictate behavior in ways that ignore current circumstances, the effect is equivalent to a dishonest hug--forcing someone into limitations that neither feel good nor serve anyone other than small-minded bullies. Ideally, ongoing communal discussion would empower all such written codes to be constantly updated so that effectiveness can be continuously maintained. Unfortunately, issues of power and identity too often sabotage what could otherwise ultimately produce growth.

It's often been said, "If you are what you do, when you don't, you're not." The idea is that if one's identity is synonymous with one's activity, knowing who and what one is, ceases the moment the activity stops happening. I persist in my belief that identity begins with the existence of the individual, rather than the assignment of societal responsibilities--which is confirmed by an individual moving from one job to another, yet bringing the same personality to all that the particular person does.

I've also heard it said that "Everyone working together, makes the world work." This

presumes an integration of diversity--precisely because of how many diverse perspectives, value systems, and tasks are involved. The human body is an excellent metaphor for this, encompassing lungs, heart, liver, stomach, brain, and a long list of small glands providing highly specialized regulation.

The challenge of embracing everyone is similarly tied to effective communication among all participants, regarding needs, current states, and anticipated developments. An inescapable challenge of being human, is that we remain ever and always, creatures of time sharing a common space. Both of these qualities can be found within the Native American wisdom that "We do not inherit the land from our ancestors, but rather borrow it from our children."

Most concisely, if everyone is embraced, life goes on. If not, life falters and a myriad of problems are likely to follow. When Alan Turing was embraced, the Nazi code was deciphered and the Allies were able to put an end to the evils the Nazi regime spawned; when he was thereafter marginalized, he committed suicide.

When Nelson Mandela was marginalized, he endured years in prison; when he was embraced, he became a most remarkably president of South Africa. Countless other examples illustrate the same pattern. In every case, love equals gain; its absence equals loss.

Imagine what would follow if every child and every adult could enter a room filled with supportive individuals, communities, and governmental entities--a feeling of being loved and embraced rather than constrained by expectations and demands. I was once told that Carl Sagan believed that, were it not for humanity's wars, the journey to the moon accomplished by Neil Armstrong would have happened during the 1700s (two hundred years earlier). I have to wonder how many Leonardo da Vincis, Michaelangelos, and Beethovens would be part of human history--past, present, and future--if every individual could spend the entirety of life feeling loved.

If administrative individuals preoccupy themselves with adherence to rules instead of effective provision for every individual's needs, an enormous volume of human potential is wasted. Love offers better possibilities.

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

*"Love is what opens hearts,
minds, and--ultimately--hands;
nothing will survive without it."*

– Sister Who

When Everything is Good

While it has been argued that nothing is inherently good or bad in and of itself, but rather only in relationship to a specific context, far too many get stuck trying to decide whether some thing or action is inherently good or bad, instead of noticing and remembering the specific understanding and relationship that allows each thing to be genuinely good. This in no way, however, excuses refusing to see anything that is not. More legitimately, one could instead announce that, "It is good, because I made it so."

All too often there seems to be a detached laziness that wants circumstances to be good, without having invested any effort. Having grown up within an agrarian environment, I am very familiar with the basic understanding that no farmer expects to reap a harvest without doing the work of planting and cultivating a field. Likewise, no income related to livestock is expected without diligently caring for animals.

In both cases, it is essential to be mindful and involved in relationships surrounding one's life experience, instead of merely projecting attitudes of entitlement and self-centered expectations. One might even say that what makes something good or bad, is usually the specific personal investment contributed to the particular relationship. So the measure of life, therefore, is not determined by what one gets, but rather by what one gives.

Within the Christian Bible, this same idea is reflected within the words ascribed to Jesus, that whoever wants to be the greatest, must be the servant of all. Slavery is a reversal and perversion of self-generated loving service. It is disappointing, however, how seldom slavery is recognized for what it is.

There are even times when I wonder if freedom is a passing ideal that future humanity will regard as quaint, having opted instead for governmental and corporate control of virtually everything. Yet freedom cannot function without self-discipline and communal concern for every individual, that reaches beyond selfish narcissism. For everything to ultimately be good, therefore, begins with seeing both that potential and ways to move in that direction.

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

On a Personal Note

Recognizing that life is currently difficult everywhere, could inspire empathy and compassion. Yet from a contrasting angle, such an attitude is dismissive, as if being so common makes constructive response less important. I nonetheless persist in my belief that if all the discouraged, wounded, and hurting people work together, healing and progress can be absolutely accomplished.

For myself, that means that no matter how discouraged or devalued I may feel, I must still get up every day and persist in doing any good I can. I don't want to ever be the one who is not doing all he can to "work together" with any others willing to address the challenges of love, wisdom, and holistic health for every individual.

The notion of being concerned that every individual have enough of whatever is needed, is not just a pretty thought, but an ideal to which humanity must dedicate itself, if survival is to be a present and future reality.

I'm reminded of John Denver's song, "It's About Time" and encourage everyone to find, read, and contemplate the powerful words of that song. Sometimes that's the inspiration that keeps me going, as I persist in creating a new video production set more impressive than anything I've done thus far and returning to studio production at Denver Community Media.

Work on a fifth album of original songs is also continuing. No lack of funds or support, is ever sufficient reason to refrain from continuing to try, to do whatever one still can.

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

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