

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

As someone with autism, my experience is that competing sounds tend to blur together.

To understand what anyone is attempting to communicate, I must find ways to recognize each word or expression as a specific, unique, and correctly interpreted detail within the overall spectrum of relationship.

I suspect the same is true of many other areas of life and offer this month's essays toward greater understanding of this possibility.

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

Normative?

While it seems true that conversation is usually oriented around generalities, assumptions, and categories, I find it equally true that no individual or individual example is the embodiment of any category. In actual fact, we are each a complex mix of diverse emotions, thoughts, and choices. Specifically because we each see every moment of life from our own unique perspective, it is easy to forget just how different the world may look to every other individual we encounter.

What this means in practice, is that we cannot legitimately presume that our choices, perceptions, and conclusions are normative—that they are more or less the same as the majority of those around us. An added consideration is that in order to avoid conflict with those around them, many who disagree do not say so. Their silence, however, is often misinterpreted as agreement and further presumptuous public statements are made that make it even more difficult to openly speak.

Societally, the cumulative result is that many things presumed to be normative are in fact absolutely not. Relationally, this idea or collection of ideas works to create a world that represses, excludes, and even punishes (rather than celebrates) what would otherwise

be empowering diversity. What ultimately becomes normative, therefore, are the common practices of self-censorship, disempowerment, and misunderstanding.

In striking contrast are the possible conclusions that what is normative for myself is not necessarily normative for anyone else, that what works for me may not only be custom-fit solutions but also solutions which need to be custom-created each time, and learning about the ways that others have created custom-fit solutions within various and diverse contexts will provide more tools and possibilities with which to address my own future challenges. It may be true that certain friends and I are in agreement about effective ways to respond to challenges, but it may also be that my current confidence in chosen responses encourages my friends' silence about any disagreement they may actually have. I prefer them to speak.

Central to expectations that anything is normative, is the perception that diverse circumstances and challenges have more in common than they do. Not seeing contrasting details, however, is poor justification for believing such details don't exist. Confidence that is based upon ignorance is consequently a peculiar minefield through which to travel.

It may ultimately be that nothing in life is truly normative; that the very idea of anything being so is a societal construct oriented to administrative control, coercive homogeneity, and repression of otherwise-empowering diversity. What many fail to realize is how blinding the idea of normativity is. I cannot see who you truly are, if I begin with an expectation that you are just like everyone else. I cannot perceive (much less embrace) the empowering truth Godde has hidden within you, if I presume that you are only what I think you are.

To live fully is to be attentive to who we truly are and to how we are growing and changing by every experience we encounter.

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

Perfection?

The most pervasive general assumption about perfection is that it is singular, unified, and constant, regardless of any diversity or difference within those either perceiving or pursuing it. Even a superficial consideration, however, quickly discloses that what is perfect for one, may be completely inappropriate for another. It is at this point that a goal of perfection becomes duplicitous—wanting both for perfection to be singular and simultaneously for it to be individually appropriate.

Perhaps what is needed is either a more multi-dimensional idea of perfection or perhaps the recognition that every true perfection is unavoidably a paradox: two (or more) simultaneous but contrasting realities. In order for each one to experience what is individually perfect, therefore, it is imperative that we support diverse manifestations rather than "one-size-fits-all" answers. This may be at least part of the reason that the Divine has been perceived in so many ways throughout human history and also of the reason why we need to allow for similar diversity of manifestation within the present and future.

If Godde is the embodiment of perfection, one might ask "and how exactly does that look?" to which I would respond, "To whom?" At that point, however, I return to my common assertion that it is not so important how one perceives Godde as that one does.

What if Godde were to decide within particular circumstances, that it would be most perfect and effective to appear in drag? While this would be intriguing to some but offensive to others, all I would offer in response is a shrug and the rhetorical question, "who am I to argue with Godde?" One might ask, "Which dress would Godde wear?" The possibilities are infinite, including both a burning bush as well as the liturgical attire of alternative religions. The essential point, however, is not what form Godde chooses, but rather whether we are attentive to the understanding the Divine wants to convey.

As with autism, the diversity of possibilities and details can feel overwhelming, if I am forced to confront more than one at a time. Common sense suggests therefore that I

respond to as many as possible (toward the accomplishment of a holistic understanding), but focus upon one after another sequentially.

An additional challenge after selecting this method, is to remain flexible about the sequence. For various reasons, it may be necessary from time to time, to move some things to the front of the line while asking others to wait a little while longer. Choosing to do so is complicated, however, by the additional voices of others who for various reasons would like to rearrange the sequence for me. On one hand, it may be that they have already accomplished greater perfection, such that they have extra time available to assist me. On the other hand, it is equally possible that their challenges feel so overwhelming that they would like to use mine as a distraction and an escape. If I love them in any sense of the word, however, I will value their own growth and development enough to decline to be the reason they fail to attend to their own life work.

Conversely, if each was narcissistically attending to his or her own pursuit of individually appropriate perfection, a great many essential tasks of personal and spiritual growth would never be accomplished. There are parts of myself that I will never see without the mirror of you; there are examples of perfection which may shine within you from time to time, without which my efforts will fall flat; and there are developments of great significance which can only be accomplished within a collaborative yet mutually respectful community. All things considered, therefore, perfection must always integrate whatever so-called imperfections may appear.

Ultimately an understanding of perfection—even after thousands of years of human searching—is still an ongoing quest. For some this would be sufficient reason to quit, to cynically write off the pursuit as meaningless, and to lower expectations so much that any notion of perfection is deprived of meaning. I find, however, that there is a kind of hunger for greater perfection, greater completeness, and greater fulfillment within each impulse to grow, to develop, and to live with creativity and integrity—that may even be Godde-given.

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

Interconnection?

It has often been said that going into a garage does not make one a car, that going into a church does not make one a Christian, and that being within a crowd is no protection from loneliness. What all three of these juxtapositions require, is discernment—such that one is able to distinguish when the object within the garage is or is not a car, when the person within the church is or is not truly a Christian, and whether the specific experience of loneliness is relevant to whatever presence or absence of others exists. Similar concerns relate to being able to distinguish between tolerance, apathy, assimilation, and integration—each of which illustrates different forms of interconnection (or lack thereof).

On a somewhat parallel track is the typical progression of any marginalized population, moving from oppression to tolerance to assimilation to integration (but not necessarily in that order). As much as this progression may be experienced collectively, it may also be experienced individually. In both cases, however, discernment is essential in order to distinguish when the interconnection is real and when it is merely pretended.

What is often overlooked within efforts to implement assimilation is that individual and collective examples of humanity are simultaneously being schooled in apathy. The particular identity, practices, language, and spirit of the people in question are trivialized, devalued, and normalized to fit in with dominant paradigms, rather than working toward a truly inclusive paradigm (which would accompany integration). More concisely, the people and all that being themselves includes, are objectified and denied their own unique voice. That being accomplished, their reality during times of crisis is of no great importance

*"If you're a jigsaw puzzle piece
that doesn't fit anywhere,
perhaps you belong
to a new and different puzzle."*

-- Sister Who

and all recognition of them may be swept aside within the briefest of moments without a single word of protest. Even more astonishing is that members of marginalized populations have often encouraged assimilation, not realizing what it would ultimately cost them.

Interconnection is ultimately about being valued. It is not merely that you are allowed "to ride in the back of the bus," but rather that your presence or absence are noted, that your welfare is as important as anyone else's, and that others understand that the success of any individual equals greater success for the community. Similarly, when interconnection is only pretended and does not actually have real substance, it snaps and breaks within the first moment that any weight is placed upon it.

Within the holiday season stretching from mid-November to early January which typically focuses upon families of one description or another, there is sometimes an effort to include guests within particular aspects of celebration. The inspiration for doing so, however, is often not because of any qualities of the particular guest, but rather because the host wishes to maintain a particular mythology that everyone should experience that particular holiday in the more or less ideal way the host has envisioned. True interconnection is a matter of embracing the holistic truth of each other and out of that embrace forging a greater transforming and ongoing creative work than either could manage alone.

Central to true interconnection is the pulsing of life energy through interdependent relationships. Central to false interconnection is an unsatisfying emptiness, populated with meaningless distractions. Life is not only concerned with finding one's place within a larger puzzle, but also with finding the larger puzzle within which one is happy to be included. What is particularly distressing, is how often anomalous pieces are told that their particular puzzle doesn't exist. Obviously this is a lie, however, because if that larger puzzle didn't exist, neither would any of its pieces. We are each therefore the proof of a more beautiful puzzle than the world has thus far ever seen, seeking to be beautifully reassembled.

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

Unity?

I recall various times over the years, being at gatherings at which a particular leader with a microphone would repeatedly call to the crowd, "We are one!" After a while, I would sometimes wonder who he was trying to convince—us or himself. Somewhere behind all of this exaggerated performance, however, I do believe that genuine unity awaits discovery.

My intuition suggests that such unity is not only unthreatened by diversity, but is in fact empowered by it. As has already been said, "The creation of an orchestra is not the annihilation of violins." Contrasting examples of individuality do have the ability to act in complementary ways, if understanding and communication have been sufficiently developed between them.

Within a pretense of unity, on the other hand, censorship is virtually always present. If the goal to be unified is exercised obsessively, whatever is adversarial to that unity—no matter how legitimate it might otherwise be—becomes the embodiment of all that is bad, of a frequently hypothetical enemy, and perhaps even of evil. Regardless of whether the belief is scientific, religious, medical, or social, history strongly suggests that any truth that is contrary to the dominant paradigm can expect only punishment for making itself known.

So why do so many individuals continue to defend truth, virtue, love, wisdom, and unity—sometimes even with their lives? There is certainly no easy answer to that question, but I suspect it is related to a perception of unified truth within one's soul. When all the confusing pieces come together, filling one with awe, even if it takes years to just begin to explain what the perception was and what it meant, life can never be the same. This sort of creative, compelling, and constructive life change is not, however, something false unity can ever do.

Within a holistic, inclusive, and unified fusion of body, mind, and spirit, conversely, is the eternal treasure that renders all of the struggle along the way sufficiently meaningless that it can finally be forgotten—so that only love remains. That would be a unity to treasure.

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

On a Personal Note

After a difficult search, I finally located a technician who affordably repaired my printer—so good copies of the 2014 calendar are once again available upon request.

As of January 3rd, the newest episodes of "Sister Who Presents," numbered 279-302, have all been submitted to Denver Open Media for local cable-casting and uploaded to the Internet at www.YouTube.com/DenverNeVaar.

Production and submission of forty-eight more episodes between now and the end of April has tentatively been planned, each one just as dense a package of thoughtful reflection as anything produced in the past.

I persist in my efforts to create DVD recordings of three modern "morality plays" and have a new possibility to explore.

Finally, I was also recently a guest for one hour on the Internet radio program, "Everlasting Evolution," which is distributed via www.blogtalkradio.com/everlastingevolution.

One other important date is that just before Christmas, I began the process of submitting my second-to-last pre-dissertation doctoral paper. Only one more paper to go and then it's on to the dissertation. Woo-hoo!

The dogs and I are finding ways to cope with any other challenges that arise, but a special blessing is the custom seat for Bedivere on my motorcycle—so that I no longer have to choose between fuel economy and my autism service dog. I will post a photo on Facebook.com, as soon as one is available.

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

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