

sister who's perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue 247, January 2020, copyright

Overview

My hope is that any positivity expressed within these monthly newsletters will always be both genuine and solidly grounded, but I concede also the content of each month's essays very much reflects the tone of what is unfolding within my own life as well.

The abiding challenge within times of great difficulty is nonetheless that they reveal rather than define, the truth and the strength of who and what one truly is.

Moths and Butterflies

My intent was to focus upon inherent dynamics that either empower or oppose life's continuance. I was astonished, however, to also encounter a discussion within a public forum, in which participants were arrogantly asserting their opinions about who deserved (for whatever reason) to live and, conversely, who deserved to die. Considering that one species has been displacing another since the beginning of time, it seems more logical and loving to me, to allow each to do as much good as it can for as long as it can, but to yield the stage (so to speak) when the time is right, for the next "performer" to continue.

The ideal would be to find a balanced configuration that integrates all of life's infinite possibilities, but I'm not at all certain there is sufficient wisdom within current human comprehension to realize this. Granting the reality of such limitations, however, makes the intended focus of this essay equally difficult to address. In spite of a virtually infinite number of moths having died after getting too close to a nocturnal source of light, apparently no one has succeeded in learning why they do so.

Some have speculated that moths are mesmerized by the light and may be mistaking it for that of the moon. Others have suggested some sort of confusion of sensory perceptions related to procreation. What

remains true in either case is that moths are creatures of the night and butterflies of the day. Additionally, moths could be interpreted as merely responsive, whereas butterflies might be thought to be more independently intentional, but a conversation with either about such a complex topic, is obviously not within humanity's current range of abilities.

Applying the metaphor to humans, a first possible distinction is the question of which one's are superficially mesmerized and which conversely seek true beauty and sustenance, capable of not only sustaining life but also of providing diverse forms of empowerment. In both cases, there is a metamorphosis, but the important question is into what one is gradually changing. It is unlikely that the specific "caterpillar" would have any answer, knowing only that change was happening, but not being able to predict the outcome, since--in every case--the creature has never previously had such experiences.

A comedic personality commented quite some time ago, "If what doesn't kill us, makes us stronger, then I should be able to bench-press a Buick by now." My response to such a comment is that most of us are standing too close to the particular change to realize the effects that are very, very, very gradually becoming obvious. Yet unless one specifically engages in self-reflection when more experiential, intellectual, and emotional distance is available, resulting insights and strength might never be consciously known (nor inspire additional constructive action).

A significant challenge to both butterflies and moths, however, is how very limited their mortality is--making wise use of each and every moment all the more essential. Yet this imperative does not prevent them from taking time to dance on the wind and visit each flower along the way--because they know that such activities can be done in a sacred way.

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

Admiration and Love

Initial problems within admiration are the ways it creates distance and places the object(s) viewed, upon a pedestal--where there is little room to move and from which one might fall. Love extends compliments that empower; admiration denies the ability to dance and to constructively and creatively interact. Yet one can all too easily be mistaken for the other.

Perhaps the easiest way to know the truth is to express any degree whatsoever of one's vulnerability. In response, love offers to share strength; admiration looks for other things upon which to focus--thus rendering the experience of vulnerability a solitary one, rather than recognizing such moments of honesty as opportunities to demonstrate and develop true community and perhaps even a sense of being family to one another. It has been so tedious for me throughout the last five years of particularly intense struggle, to repeatedly be asked to tolerate those who insist upon using the word "family" without ever engaging in any of the mutual support its basic definition includes.

All of which is why it no longer impresses me that throughout four synoptic gospels within the Christian Bible, the sin with which Jesus was most obsessed, was hypocrisy--that dishonest way of being specifically tied to matters of faith and belief; which not only includes no demonstration of integrity, but rather makes the absence thereof especially conspicuous and even destructive. How ironic then, that in trying to be admirable, such a person would instead provide solid reasons for exactly the opposite. It is, after all, not the superficial appearances but the substance of life, that make it what it is.

Love is a matter of substance; admiration specifically avoids anything so involved. It's as if the latter actually believes the present moment is so unimportant that it can be frivolously wasted without any negative consequence; as if time for living and opportunities to do good will never run out--but they do. When that finally happens, the only enduring value will be found within memories that were created and capacities of

love and wisdom which were increased.

In writing a book, creating a photograph, or mixing colors on canvas to form a painting, one participates in physical manifestation that--to varying degrees--defies one's mortality. Admiration, conversely, is for all essential purposes a brief experience completely dependent upon the presence of the observer. In striking contrast, love stands reverently in awe of how real and compelling it is to truly engage one's spirit with another.

Why then would anyone avoid love? The majority of responses to this question that I've heard throughout nearly three decades of this unconventional ministry defer in one way or another to the emotion of fear. As suggested to a young girl years ago in Confluence Park, however, I believe fear is a subconscious encouragement to ask a question or to wisely collect and integrate new information.

Love can do this; mere admiration cannot.

As I continue to contemplate the many facets of this topic, I find myself wondering if truly living is once again inseparable from love--suggesting that mere admiration is a step in the opposite direction. Granting an award can feel very good within the moment this occurs, but rewarding achievement with greater opportunity is a far greater form of validation. As thankful as I was when I received the R. Allene Sather award while in theological school "for demonstrating interest and ability in innovative worship," it would have meant so much more to be invited at that time to write and perform additional examples of my modern versions of morality plays (which, thankfully, can now in fact be seen within my YouTube channel on the Internet as episodes #364 and #365).

Yet even as this creativity defies mortality, it is equally subject to it. Due to ever-evolving technology, the recordings just mentioned are unacceptable to current public access television, because they were made prior to the requirement of HD (high density) video format. The opportunity within this, of course, is that a new and better performance of each of these plays may be lovingly created within the (hopefully relatively near) future.

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Distraction and Commitment

Each human life is a shore between contrasting worlds, populated by as many unique and individual moments as grains of sand on a beach. What they collectively comprise is important, but perhaps not so much as the response one gives to their individual and collective existence--seeing both their individuality and their contribution to a community which may express degrees of acknowledgement or neglect also. Those who are ignored or rejected by communities, are comparable to buried treasure that is left for members of a future generation to find.

One approach to such investigation is to be so distracted by the din of competing voices--many of which are inaudible, but still with a great amount of understanding to convey. It is not that vital meanings were never said, but rather that they may not have been heard. It may also be that although they were heard, they were inadequately understood, such that their value remained an untapped and marginalized mystery.

In contrast to such disappointing failure to fully see, are those with relentlessly stubborn commitment to wrestling with questions, learning secrets, and discerning more truly effective applications. All too often, however, as commendable as such commitment is, one may erroneously suppose that it applies only to academic or intellectual ideas. Far greater growth and development can in fact be achieved, if these same dynamics are applied--wisely, sensitively, and intelligently--to every living being one ever encounters.

On that note, I hasten to add that--at least to me--everything is alive, in one way or another. Does the fact that one does not know the language and consequently cannot effectively speak with a person from another country make that person less alive? The same obstacle may be all that stands

between ourselves and the wisdom held by animals, plants, and minerals of every sort.

Yet distraction is not a nemesis to be correctly demonized, since it sometimes serves to awaken a seeker to unknowingly being on a non-essential path and then to guide that one in a more constructive way. A professor once wisely recommended paying attention to "detours," because unexpected insights and advantages are sometimes thereby discovered. Considering how very long life has been unfolding within this vast universe, one must consider the possibility that life is wiser than one's self and may have unexpected empowerment to bestow.

Discerning when distraction disempowers and when commitment creates self-imposed blindness, is an often complicated but still very essential ability that must be learned. If one approaches life as a student who is also willing to share whatever is learned along the way, wisdom and understanding are virtually without limit. The commitment that persists throughout all such growth, nevertheless, is the need to remain (as much as possible) characterized by genuine love.

Yet even this is an area of both ongoing and continuous learning. Does love prevent all tragedies from happening? Most probably not, but whenever not, there is usually a very profound reason--the understanding of which could lead to most significant growth.

Regardless of tragedy or triumph, what persists--at least for me--is that life is most concerned with the growth of the soul. This one conclusion has withstood all extensive cross-examination I've been able to invent. I can only speculate why, but as much as the reason may be related to what follows this physical life, I find that even my present moments are empowered by a deep and abiding respect for the probability that I am never seeing all there is to see.

So I remain committed to growth, to love, and to infinite possibility, while allowing any distraction the opportunity to show me what greater wonders might unfold within the moment at hand, as my response decides.

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

*"Do not belittle
the grain of sand
that will become a pearl."*

-- Sister Who

Nice and Beautiful

I've heard but never fully believed the expression that "the perfect is sometimes the enemy of the good," because the words throw outcome and process into adversarial relationship. Striving for excellence is far more essential than the absence of its practice would suggest, but this is an active rather than passive state. What thus may be envisioned as "perfect," like the stars within a nocturnal sky, is not so much a destination to reach, as a point by which to navigate.

I contemplate the perfect not because I ever expect to embody it, but rather because I need a way to move beyond where I am. In a similar way, I strive for what is holistically, truly, and completely beautiful, not because any word or action will be the final and most perfect manifestation thereof, but rather to encourage continual growth toward distant horizons, beyond which are worlds no one has ever previously seen. It is not that what is "nice" is inadequate, but rather that settling for less because "beautiful" seems to require too much work, leaves me an inadequately developed, ignorant, and weak person.

I refuse to be a coward: shying away from the unpleasantness of breaking out of my chrysalis, fearing the vulnerability emerging into a larger world will include, and leaving the resulting life experiences un-lived. Yet I also need to forgive myself for moments when it seems I might have already done so, specifically so that the greater possibilities of the alternative path I chose, can fully and positively emerge. It may in fact be that something deep and mysterious within me recognized mortal dangers within the other way, that were less than obvious at the time.

In choosing the paths I did, therefore, I chose life's greater possibilities and beauty and declined victimizing enslavement to bullies and despots unconsciously engaged in replicating their own brokenness. They may have offered a limited definition of "nice" more suited to themselves than to me, but I can be thankful for having recognized how very toxic that could turn out to be.

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

On a Personal Note

Life remains such a strangely mixed experience, in terms of moments labeled "good" or "bad." The imperative I strive to remember throughout each day is make a point of seeing both. Failing to do so would imply embracing self-imposed blindness.

The initial move from Trinidad to Hayden, for example, was long and terrible--with one profound exception. A long-time friend and supporter of this ministry chose to meet us en route and provide a hot meal, significant gifts, and encouraging conversation. I have fondly remembered those moments and drawn strength from them, while thereafter coping as well as I can with how cold and poorly insulated our new residence is.

A limited amount of resources remain in storage within a friend's garage in Trinidad and need to be retrieved as soon as weather conditions allow, but our new home is slowly taking shape in empowering ways.

An additional significant answer to prayer is that my former lifepartner has changed his mind and agreed to release my dachshund, Dinadan, so I am expecting to make a brief trip to Montana in mid-January, whenever weather conditions recommend. The hope (both mine and Dinadan's) is that he will be allowed to live with us here, but another friend has offered shelter if bureaucratic administrators are adversarial.

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