

sister who's perspective

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Overview

From a certain perspective, the current time contains a vast amount of darkness, discouragement, and despair, but these conditions are not inherently bad--especially if one utilizes them to make points of light, breakthroughs, and moments of inspiration all the more obvious. Among the magical capacities inherent within humanity, are the possibilities of positively transforming even the most unlikely raw materials.

The Unavoidable Wrong Direction

From one view, humanity has long been obsessed with controlling everything. From a contrasting view, however, innumerable concerns have remained stubbornly beyond control, requiring various accommodations. I respect the latter enough to refrain from embracing the former, but between these two is an enormous amount of space.

For virtually every time that a wise choice created positive options, I have seen wise choices punished--simply because they were unconventional. For every time my faith has moved mountains, I've had disappointment and betrayal so forcefully shoved down my throat that I couldn't breathe. In defiance of the times that pop psychology has been empowering to others, I've experienced negative consequences and victim-blaming if following the method precisely, produced allegedly impossible results.

It's as if my canoe were caught in a dangerous current and no amount of skillful paddling could prevent disaster. The only choice which could prevent the problem, is the choice to refrain from participation--but that would mean not living at all. When the only direction one *can* go is the wrong direction, the higher perspective from which it would all make sense, may be out of reach.

At the heart of such experiences is the

question, "What sort of person will you show yourself to be?" Certain theological systems call this "a time of testing." As with certain engineering tests, however, the experience of failure may be unavoidable, specifically because the test is designed to measure *at what level* failure occurs and how much is possible even within adverse circumstances.

Phrased another way, it's not about getting answers right; it's about learning what questions one is able to address. If one wishes to guide a team, it is more important to learn how a team functions and responds, than to simply note which goals were or were not attained. As I learned early in my study of foreign languages, until one understands how native speakers think, one cannot fully understand the words they employ.

A primary problem is "standing too close" to the experience to integrate or benefit from any such higher perspective. Additionally, while direct engagement may make dysfunctional dynamics obvious, society itself may be "standing too close" to respond with wisdom or compassion. For all essential purposes, one may thus be alone within the test, experiencing its inherent loss and pain.

Yet the test is sometimes *designed* to expose the absence of love, so that the goal of re-integrating love may be established. If those around remain fixated on superficial effects rather than underlying dynamics, however, the time of testing may be extended--prolonging opportunities to rediscover the healing power of unconditional love. Yet it cannot be taught without any experience, because love that lacks true empathy and is no more than an intellectual construct, does not have the power to heal.

Yet if such love is rediscovered, specifically because of experiencing the wrong direction, it launches a debate over whether any direction is ever truly wrong.

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

The Inescapable Ongoing Dilemma

I'm reasonably certain that I'm not the only one who has experienced seasons of life--sometimes lasting years--that feel like a nightmare that refuses to end. Only because I have endured such periods many times in the past, am I able to compare "before" and "after" mental/emotional perceptions and recognize that I have been changed by these experiences--but often in ways that are difficult to define, even years later. What I draw most from these recollections within current struggles, is the belief or faith that a higher perspective exists which understands precisely how I am being changed and thus what resulting effects the particular struggles and/or pain will produce.

Imagine being a lump of clay in the hands of a master potter, being kneaded, pressed, formed, reformed, compressed, and stretched, until one wants to cry out, "Enough already!" Yet the potter knows better than the clay, just how much and what kind of personal investment is required, if the clay is to be transformed into an expression of enduring beauty and exceptional craftsmanship. It's easy to speak of past difficulties as if they were brief, but any honest recollection must remember wondering during such times, whether they would actually ever come to an end.

Is this where my road will end? Will I die during the winter and never again see spring? Are the best times of my life all located within the years already past?

On one hand, it is important to personal growth and self-awareness to wrestle with such questions. Conversely, these must never be the rationale by which one ceases to try. Until the last breath has passed, no legitimate determination can be made.

Life unfolds within a universe of literally infinite possibility and being fully alive means embracing those possibilities within each and every moment one is given to live. Physical death can come whenever it will, but needs no help from any of us. Those who whine about avoiding "drama" in life, however, ultimately avoid their own growth.

What is more to be avoided than "drama"

is stagnation--whether that expresses itself as passivity and conservatism or as constant activity and excessive risk-taking. In contemplating what it is that makes hedonism so objectionable, I ultimately concluded that it is all of the experience without any meaning. With no past or future but only present experience, no ongoing relationship or interconnection is possible--essentially, there is no love.

Comparing life to a movie is problematic, because one cannot "fast forward" through the scary or unpleasant parts. If one views such times as teachers, then it makes sense that the teacher cannot leave until the lesson has been learned. Yet most never pause to look their adversity in the eye, asking what message(s) it wants to convey.

Prior to that, however, emotion must be processed, in one way or another. Loss be grieved; injustice must be named and, if possible, addressed; and accomplishment must be celebrated. After such experience, however, the job is not finished until all related contemplation and reflection have been done as well.

When such seasons of life are in process, however, their pace may seem intolerably slow. Indeed, no moment is so quick as the one I want to last and no moment is so long as the one I want to pass. Going one step further, without a future to envision, the memories of the past and the circumstances of the present would provide only limitations.

Yet as much as others wish to avoid all contact with whatever dilemma I may be presently experiencing, I cannot. It is with me every moment--and then suddenly it is not, but rather has somehow flown away. No problem has any more ability to last forever than any moment of joy, which equally passes quickly into the memories and time.

The ongoing and inescapable dilemma of life is ultimately that successive moments must be created and that they are completely neither beyond nor under one's control. The remedy for this dilemma--and for every dilemma, actually--is the love that can only be found within each other.

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

The Essential Unattained Hope

The title of this essay may be redundant, since a hope that *is* attained is a blessing and no longer only a hope. Yet it is vital to remember that hope is inseparable from what is--for now--out of reach. Phrased another way, hope is the stand-in or proxy for what one does not yet have--and it is essential that something occupy that role within the larger picture of one's life.

If a particular hope is achieved, therefore, a wise practice ensuring mental health is to promptly create a subsequent one. Central to being alive is the dynamic of growth; that is, of having somewhere further to go or of having something more to become. Thus in a very real sense, the one who has truly lost all hope, has ceased to truly live.

What might make this a bit confusing for many is that although hope is essential, it is not always reasonable. Perhaps it is tied to humanity's ongoing struggle to redefine--over and over--what is or is not possible. In considering what was formerly impossible but is no longer so, the possibility is created that virtually everything that is considered to be impossible now, may someday not be.

The lingering question, of course, is "when?" to which the obvious but not necessarily helpful answer is, "when all of the necessary resources converge." The reason I describe this as "not necessarily helpful," is because of how achieving solidarity and convergence can be quite exasperating and very much like "herding cats." Somehow the individual cats must all be persuaded that there is a reward for moving in the direction requested.

Be that as it may, having hope of any sort could be described as a way to feel inspired

or energized, as if more endurance and strength were somehow available to meet whatever challenges one encounters. In some cases, it might provide a reason to try harder, just when giving up seems to be the only available option. At other times, having or not having hope may have a profound effect upon *what* one is willing to try.

As exhausting as it may sometimes be, the core principle is to always have a dream, a goal, or a motivation that allows one to stay committed to the process of becoming. One should expect to encounter set-backs from time to time, but must always remember that these are not the measure of the larger work of one's life; they are simply events along the way. As has often been said, it is not the number of times one falls that determines one's eventual success, but rather the number of times one gets up and continues.

Hope is the substantive force--whether consciously or unconsciously recognized--that empowers one to get up after falling and continue onward. It is inherent in virtually all adversity, to claim greater power, strength, and success than is ever truly possessed--as if it fears that the falseness of its words will be discovered. The miracle within every ugly lump of clay, however, is that in some undiscovered way, it can be transformed.

On one hand, I very much wish the last four years of my life had gone much better than they did. On the other, however--without feeling any smugness, arrogance, or pride--I am very thankful that in spite of times of extreme grief and tears, I have not given up; my journey continues and nothing about my past disallows or prevents my future from encompassing greater realities than anything in my past was able to imagine. No matter how often I am ignored and no matter how many times I've been marginalized, my reality and my abilities to transform whatever I encounter, are just as real as ever.

I may even be legitimately angry at times at what has not transpired, but it becomes a sort of sweet revenge when this becomes the energy by which greater works are done.

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

"The purpose of gratitude is not so much to control one's daily reality as it is to improve one's relationship with whatever that happens to be."

-- Sister Who

The Imposed Self-sabotaging Ideology

Being able to recognize when a belief structure will do more harm than good is a valuable skill, but serves only to exacerbate the mental and emotional pain when one's societal environment will allow no other ideology to be openly expressed. As grateful as I may be that certain ideologies passed into public disfavor before I ever reached adulthood, there are plenty of damaging relational patterns still standing in line, waiting patiently to be addressed. This does not mean, however, that no further damage is being done while they wait.

I recall reading of a political protest (I think it was somewhere in eastern Europe) in which the protestors encountered the police dressed in riot gear, holding large mirrors in ways that the police were looking mostly at themselves. Words ascribed to Jesus within the Christian Bible assert that "you shall know the truth and the truth will make you free" and--for the most part--I continue to find this claim to be, well, true. The strategy this recommends when dealing with oppressive ideologies is thus that one should expose deeper, perhaps more complex, and often overlooked truths of the ideology itself.

If one has not closely examined what one is promoting or if one is not continuously engaged in self-reflection, one can so easily fall into embodying the observation, "we have found the enemy and it is ourselves." I hasten to add, however, that this witticism has also often been used to support the sadly common practice of victim-blaming. It is very important to reach for objectivity during times of self-reflection, noting as accurately as possible, both what one has or has not contributed to a situation as well as what has or has not been contributed by which specific others--because each and every incident is a convergence of innumerable variables.

Among those variables, thankfully, are one's own creative contributions. I persist in believing that infusions of love and wisdom can be miraculously transforming.

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

On a Personal Note

I have moved my place of residence a great many times during my life, but I can recall no moving experiences more difficult than the recent relocation from Longmont to Loveland, within the state of Colorado. As much as I know that I can make positive contributions everywhere I go, I also know that my strength and resources are not infinite. My desire is to devote much more of my time and energy to writing, but struggles related to basic survival seem to be a nearly constant distraction of late.

Unfortunately, while certain challenges have thankfully been left behind, I'm not sure the overall configuration of circumstances is significantly better. What persists as the most empowering option, is re-establishing my own sense of home and ministerial space, such as I previously had within the northwestern part of the Denver-metro area.

There is, actually, just such a possibility within a rural area of central Colorado, if sufficient funds can be raised. My intuition during times of deep and intense prayer continues to insist that manifestation is not far off, but my material realities conversely remain overwhelmingly adversarial. I am trying to respect that divine measures of time are quite distinct from those of humanity, but for an autistic who perceives each moment as a distinct and individual detail, the waiting often feels nearly overwhelming.

Nonetheless, may one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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