

sister who's perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue 245, November 2019, copyright

Overview

I've been complimented for being positive and derided for being negative, but such descriptions puzzle me; my intention is to be constructively holistic--to see all there is to see, to understand as deeply as I am able, and to apply all of this as wisely as possible.

My hope is that the thoughts and feelings described within the essays of this newsletter will be empowering to each reader in ways that are similarly holistic.

Opposing the Methods of Oppression

A debate has long raged of whether or to what extent "the ends justifies the means." I encourage both humility and caution when engaging one's self in this debate, however, because there is nearly always the possibility that pertinent information has thus far gone unmentioned. Considering the ways that the effects of any presence or action increase outward through time like ripples across the surface of a pond, there may never be a final word or effect of anything one says or does.

I try to remember this within everything that I give to life, as I strive to keep giving, no matter how much my own life and sufferings are trivialized and ignored by others. While I may wonder whether, in the event my life were terminated by misfortune of some kind, certain persons would even come to my funeral, what continues to matter most to me is demonstrating not what they have done to me, but rather what sort of person I truly am.

In regarding virtually everything as being in some way alive, my life is described by a wide diversity of relationships. It is not just "stuff," but rather beings of different form and nature that teach me about being temporarily their steward and caretaker, while they make various empowering contributions to my daily life experience--at least for a while. Like most other human beings, I would prefer those

times to be longer than they ever are, but life's beauty remains fragile and fleeting.

Consequently, quite central to opposing oppression, is seizing every opportunity for growth and improvement. Deterioration is virtually inseparable from neglect and poor stewardship, but one must not presume such to be intentional. I have experienced loss at many points because wise stewardship lead me to release that which my resources were inadequate to maintain.

Yet I remember and continue to love each and every one. Drawing from the words of John Denver's song, that "some say love is holding on and some say letting go," I strive to avoid narcissistic choices and instead to consider what is the best possible place or service of the particular thing. I strive to also accept that as persons of an atypical nature, they may choose to sacrifice themselves for me at some point, because they believe in the value of my life, growth, and contribution even more than I do--which is also love.

So opposing oppression is a matter of creating more space for both the pain and the power of love within equally one's own life and the lives of others. Limited human thinking more often wants to separate one from the other--to have the power of love without the pain--but that would leave the experience always shallow and incomplete. I cannot recommend pain and discomfort, but I am equally unable to encourage remaining superficial, incomplete, or ignorant.

For oppression to be vanquished, wisdom and love must prevail. Hypocrisy, greed, and narcissism rather than humans behaving adversarially, are the true enemies. Sharing whatever one can--as wisely as possible--is merely an obvious place to begin.

Accepting that not every sharing will be successful as intended, is a risk every living thing accepts, in order to give love a chance.

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

Refusing the Voice of Violence

It is hardly original to note that not all languages use words. Additionally, what is too often overlooked, are the ways that actions convey more than words could ever encompass. What is problematic about such languages, however, is that translation is never particularly precise.

The easiest response is virtually always a violent one, unless one is truly dead to all of the reasons life has for embracing struggle and persevering against all odds. I recall seeing a bumper-sticker on an automobile a number of years ago, that asked, "If war is the answer, what was the question?" Yet another display replied, "War doesn't determine who's right; only who's left."

A primary problem with refusing violence, however, is that doing so may result in some degree of loss. Sometimes I'm sufficiently strong to endure this, but not always. Even when I am not, however, I may still choose the loss, specifically because of the ways that essential meaning or personal integrity would otherwise be intolerably compromised.

In a perhaps indirect way, acting with neglect instead of open violence, often has effects that are every bit as damaging. If one is aware, for example, that someone is suffering or perhaps feeling overwhelmed by struggles for basic survival and one does absolutely nothing to address the challenges that person is facing, one risks projecting the message that the one suffering is in some way worthless or unlovable. Within larger considerations of human relationships, if any one is worthless, then all are potentially so--including one's self.

So refusing active or passive forms of violence is actually and simultaneously an affirmation of unconditional and inclusive love. In keeping with the witticism that "Your actions are so loud that I can't hear your words," genuine love must refuse being unresponsive to suffering and need within the surrounding world. As noted by Howard Thurman, one of the most profound and pioneering ministers of the twentieth century, "There is no moral justification for having

food and a surfeit of creature comforts at one's disposal while numberless people all over the world in every country are without the necessities to survive."

Within my own life, this area of concern repeatedly raises its head within my doctoral studies, because I am virtually surrounded by people who crow incessantly about "social justice issues," but virtually go out of their way to ignore the manifestations of these that I personally experience. As tempted as I may be to blow the whistle on hypocrisy wherever I see it, doing so more often terminates communication between myself and the persons involved--which does nothing to resolve the problem itself. In that this is the sin which the biblical Jesus most often decried, however, much more attention seems absolutely warranted.

In every conceivable manifestation, the voice of violence that is therein embodied, creates needs for subsequent healing. If that voice could at least be silenced, it would equate to the maxim, "first do no harm." To simultaneously avoid neglect, one can at least remain present--perhaps like the father within the story I was told many years ago, whose son was jailed for irresponsible and unsafe operation of a vehicle, who instead of simply paying the fine and releasing his son from the consequences of his actions, chose to sit within the jail cell next to his son until they could appear before the judge and determine a wiser response in the morning.

Having the father's greater emotional stability, experience, and wisdom directly available, offered the son within the story a greater empowerment than he would have otherwise had. A greater honesty would also be present, confirming that while actions could not be undone, wrong actions need never be the final ones. Nonetheless, either way, a loss and a cost were unavoidable.

Yet in refusing the voice of violence, one may be able to transform brokenness into empowering growth. Nothing will return what has been lost, but what is equally true is that nothing will negate whatever growth has been thereby gained.

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Denying Definition-by-Ignorance

More often than most are willing to admit, our world and its citizens are bullied into conformity by agendas adversarial to any form of truth. If any idea, person, place, or thing is never measured, observed, or in any way quantified, then the truth of its being can never be known. What fills that particular void, therefore, is pure ignorance.

Knowing nothing of a particular person or situation's true character, abandons positive formation to the whims of environmental defaults. In the same way that my computer program will always automatically select the less-readable font of Times New Roman until I change the setting to Arial, and failing to provide strong leadership and loving guidance to my dogs would encourage the development of innumerable bad habits, neglecting proactive engagement with the circumstances of my life would allow for only the most undesirable and impotent results.

Why do bad things happen? In many instances, it is because those involved are not willing to do the work of creating a better alternative. Denying opportunity to many of the results of living with ignorance, requires both conscious choice and effective action.

In spite of the fact that success is never guaranteed, the chances of failure sky-rocket when no effort or attention is invested. No one is born already knowing everything that would be helpful to the particular subsequent life experience. From a certain perspective, learning may be life's most essential activity.

What many seem to overlook is how tiring self-education can be--especially if there is also an absence of communal support. The current epidemic of narcissism is thus among the primary adversaries of all that is beautiful

and worthy about the human species. What humanity has been able to create and build, by collaborative effort infused with love, is virtually miraculous--but this happens only by intention and never by accident.

I believe now would be a very good time for such transformations to resurface and reshape the collective future of the Earth. So I continue to speak and act in whatever ways are within reach, striving to be part of the solution rather than enabling the problem further--no matter how many laugh at how antiquated or out of fashion my ways of being may seem. Superficiality may be the current fad, but I've never been one to follow fashion trends anyway.

The nemesis of ignorance, for anyone who hasn't noticed, is not education but rather meaning. The effects of meaning are not only knowledge, wisdom, and some degree of understanding, but also a sort of motivating passion that might very well prove to be unstoppable. As the Grand Banshee played by Whoopi Goldberg within the movie, *The Magical Legend of the Leprechauns*, noted, "You can't stop people from doing what they really want to do."

Mere education does not accomplish this if it fails to impart true meaning within all that it presents. The question with which the current generation is thus presented, is "What do you really want to do?" If life has in fact lost all meaning, it is questionable whether anything else can ever fill the void.

Obviously for me, life has absolutely not lost its meaning and I am not content to let lazy default settings push me in directions it would not be wise for me to go. Without the support of a family or community, however, it remains to be seen, how long I can resist. I can only hope that I and the individuals who occasionally send encouraging notes, are of sufficient number to grant humanity some positive alternatives.

So for now we live within shadows, doing all that we can to bring light--never knowing when the night will give way to dawn, but persisting in faith that it will. At that point, of course, there will be important work to do.

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

*"If I want to be around
for the happy ending,
I have to somehow
get through the muck
between here and there."*

-- Sister Who

Leading with Light

The first disappointment with which a commitment to proactivity must contend, is that sometimes no one will immediately follow. That does not mean that such leadership should cease. A trail forged through a raw wilderness can be discovered by a generation yet to be born, who will embrace a journey requiring more courage than is currently available.

Such courage requires knowledge, vision, and wisdom. It is not the absence of fear, but the remembrance of what transcends any such limiting emotion. Pretense is gone and only truth has the strength to stand.

Such light cannot shine, however, if one's shadows have been allowed to remain dark, rather than being seen and integrated. The mirror that exposes every detail of one's true face, equally serves the telescope that brings the wonders of the distant universe to the place where one stands--and nothing is ever the same as it previously was; everything is transformed. This is the difference that a carefully focused light can make.

Yet this is precisely what makes light so difficult to embrace: inescapable and ongoing truth within all affected identities and (thus also) relationships. Additionally included is facing the possibility that I myself may not have been as valued as it seemed, to persons in my past. An unknown author has given the advice, "Rather than mourn that it's gone, give thanks that it ever happened," but this fails to wrestle with the ways that one's self-definition is negatively affected.

Any time that non-corporeal adversary rears its head, however, I strive to remind myself that this is another opportunity for a new beginning--no matter one's age. If I am to remain true to leading with light, embracing any genuine and positive future possibility is a habit that must be thoroughly woven into my basic character. Metaphorically, no matter how many years of darkness and drought may have occurred, sowing good seed when spring arrives, remains absolutely essential--no matter what season it otherwise is.

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

On a Personal Note

For anyone who wishes to be a direct partner in the accomplishment of my doctoral degree, an ongoing need is the purchase of specific books relevant to the work. The small disability income I receive each month is never really adequate and the financial aid disbursements from the school are sporadic at best, so just having good texts to cite is a significant challenge. Anyone wishing to be supportive in this way is welcome to contact me and I will provide the title, author, and other relevant information for the particular books on my list.

On a different note, the countdown has begun: I submitted the specified thirty-day notice for my current apartment and have been told to expect a larger and in many ways better one by December 1. The catch is that the new place is almost three hundred miles away and I may be faced with doing the move all alone--which is not the first time, but is never easy. I've set aside some funds for moving costs, but do not know at this point whether they are enough.

Both I and my dogs are going hungry a bit this month, as I attempt to stretch various resources almost to their breaking point, trying to decide whether to relinquish resources designated for future challenges or convert them into cash for immediate needs. Sigh. Without my canine support team, I'm uncertain I would survive the current time..

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