

sister who's perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue 198, December 2015, copyright

Overview

It has often been said that we are at our best when things are at their worst, but the speaker usually forgets to add any comment about how exhausting yet how necessary this can be. Be that as it may, I remain convinced that when things seem darkest is precisely when greater honesty and vulnerability can chart a course to a more inclusive victory.

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

Transforming Loss into Rebirth

If movies and television shows were to be believed, transformation is a more or less instantaneous switch--with weeks, months, or years condensed into one or two moments of dramatic shift accompanied by a musical crescendo. For those who have survived such transformations, however, I strongly suspect that the actual experience would be more accurately measured by quantities of blood, sweat, and tears. Although I am inclined to be proactive about addressing challenges, I must immediately concede that every step is accompanied by uncertainty and doubt.

The point, however, is that one step follows another until a transformation is finally complete. Uncertainty is not at all a sufficient reason to cease trying. Future possibilities are far too important to surrender to limitations.

I've quite lost count of the losses I've experienced throughout the preceding twelve months. Each one of them hurts anew, each time they cross my mind, but they are beyond any ability to recover. They were here, now they're gone, and the best attempt I can offer myself to come to terms with the loss is merely "thank you for the memories."

My job now (or at least part of it) is to transform this raw material into something better. What transferable skills or designs are latent within the particular memories? I have

noticed here and there throughout the past few months, the shadows of past forms within design choices I am now making. It is probable that this would not be the case, had I not previously experienced and resolved particular challenges in the ways that I did.

In my humanness, however, I do complain about having to address similar challenges over and over again. What I may be failing to notice, however, is that the audience has changed and it is not so much a punishment of having to repeat an earlier painful challenge as it may be a need to live out a particular resolution where a different group of people can watch.

Most of us (myself included) are quite unaware of who is watching our lives and what interpretations they are making. In the silence, it would be easy to think that I am alone and that no one notices anything that happens to me. Friends and acquaintances insist from time to time, however, that this is not the case.

I would like to stop being angry about all that has been unjustly stolen from me, but I still feel the results of those losses each and every day. I recognize, however, that the experience of loss is specifically a component of this earthly life that will not follow me when I return to the realm of spirit--any more than my hair color, my height, or my ectomorphic body shape. The totality of who I am is far more than the current shape and constitution of my body--and this is what makes transforming loss into rebirth genuinely possible.

Life is an overpopulated concentration of distractions within which we can easily forget who we are and why we're here. It is the challenge of remembering or rediscovering these truths that is so very difficult that it requires an entire lifetime to do it.

In being born here, we lost the immediacy of heaven. In recreating the love and wisdom left behind, we transform that loss.

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

Condensing Sadness into Joy

I recall reading many years ago that coal and diamonds are the exact same material, but the latter has experienced the "benefit" (did it really feel that way while it was happening?) of extreme heat and pressure. In a similar way, a quote attributed to the very successful comedienne Carol Burnett instructs, "Tragedy plus time equals comedy." If this is true, then some of my tragedies clearly need more time to become amusing.

While that time is passing, however, it is possible to nurture the process further by responding positively to the pressures that arise from intensive self-reflection. As I also allow my illusions and misperceptions to be burned away, the truth which remains is often of greater purity than I imagined to be possible.

Just as at the heart of a pearl is a grain of sand, at the heart of joy is often a memory of sadness. While it is not necessary to destroy the pearl in order to closely examine the original grain of sand (there are other ways to look inside), a mature and respectful wisdom persists in gratefully acknowledging the sand's existence. The external sheen may be all that is superficially visible, but the wholeness of the pearl is inseparable from its story.

As that story is holistically embraced, its far-flung components begin to reveal patterns of interconnection, repetition, and evolution--each of which makes the story's reality more tightly interwoven, until the shadows of the conclusion can retrospectively be seen within the very first paragraph. It's as if the end, the middle, and the beginning have somehow all merged into a single dynamic moment that magically transports us beyond ourselves.

It's a common tendency of living things, however, to avoid pain rather than to pressure it into being more than its mostly superficial experience. If empowerment is the goal, I must instead re-engage the question or the incongruity which has presented itself, seeking a deeper understanding than the moment itself is able to fully contain. In gradually finding the strength to embrace that understanding, light enters into the darkness of ignorance and grows to displace it completely. Like diamonds, the true measure of that moment

thereafter, becomes the amount of light it reflects to every watching eye.

An additional consideration is whether the task of condensing sadness into joy is related to a past loss or one that is currently unfolding. Past wounds are much easier to condense, specifically because they are fully defined. There are no ongoing questions about how long they will last or how extensive the damages will be.

In thankfully few cases, presently unfolding losses may be analogous to facing down an approaching hurricane: without the ability to transport one's self quickly across literally hundreds of miles, one cannot get out of the way or to remove one's self from the storm's path. This is often the case for persons of lower economic strata when any sort of war unfolds across the landscape within which they live.

A final area of consideration are those wars which are invisible, individual, or perhaps ideological. Specifically because there is no obvious violence or bloodshed, it is very difficult for those affected to convince their surrounding communities that a very real problem exists. This illustrates the other side of Martin Niemoller's famous verse ("They came for the... and I said nothing because I wasn't..."), which was further illustrated within Martin Luther King's observation about remembering the silence of one's friends more than the words of one's enemies.

When I am the one who is suffering and others use the distinctions between myself and them as justifications for remaining uninvolved, the task falls to me of finding some way to condense and press this great sadness into a larger and more powerful manifestation of joy--but this is extremely difficult and many do not succeed in doing so. Even more difficult yet is remaining a person characterized by love when those same individuals find themselves in need and still call to me for help.

Though incredibly and extremely difficult to do, I remain convinced that helping even those who have refused to help me is the right thing to do. My actions must not be defined by them, but rather by the joy of fully being me.

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

Exchanging Wings for Feet

I have read of the advantages of being airborne during an earthquake, that by temporarily severing contact with the earth (whether the distance is great or small), the struggles of the earth do not dramatically affect one's own equilibrium. The earth and one's self remain in relationship to each other, but each is allowed to have its own unique (and momentarily contrasting) relationship. It is not a matter of the earth attempting to be adversarial, but rather of responding to reasons the earth's position or configuration are in need of sudden and drastic change.

There may be occasions within such times when one chooses to remain in contact in order to help others without the ability to become airborne, guiding them to places and situations that are relatively more safe than others. Additionally, there may be times when becoming airborne is not within reach of one's own abilities and lesser ways of coping must consequently be employed.

The image that came to mind as I was contemplating the title of this essay, however, was an obviously fictitious depiction of a bird running along the ground, fleeing an adversary. When the enemy succeeded in swinging a sword and chopping off the bird's feet, the bird spread its wings and flew to safety. This is where the image faded from my thoughts, however, not providing insight into how the bird was able to stop the bleeding or adapt to living completely without feet--unless by some miracle of allegory the bird was able thereafter to grow new feet.

I am among those people who insist that there are certain things without which life would

*"We must have more faith
in the ability of good
to overcome
than in the ability
of adversaries
to perpetuate defeat."*

-- Sister Who

simply be unbearable. Throughout most of my life--thankfully--notions of living without what I consider to be essential have been purely intellectual constructs and never experiential realities. Having at least mentally prepared a "plan B" scenario, however, I have often been able to engage challenges with less distraction.

In truth (on several occasions), I have adapted to extreme circumstances I would never have imagined. Obviously I survived. Of central concern to such times, is the very detailed and complex self-awareness I began crafting and building even before birth.

It is because of this self-awareness that I am able to gradually discern what is truly and persistently important during times of greatest crisis. For me at least, integrity surpasses survival and my integrity is inseparable from stewardship in relation to the things entrusted to my care. In spite of all of my best intentions, however, I have not always been able to protect or to effectively serve every resource.

I mourn the losses of such as much as I would mourn the loss of a friend or a child--not because I am too attached to things, but rather because there is a sense within which each and every thing is alive and looks to me for collaborative and empowering interrelationship. They all know that I have done my best, but that sometimes my best was not good enough to prevent tragic developments. I think that--guided by the higher wisdom and love we jointly strove to serve--they forgive me.

Specifically because life is spirit, however, I sense at times that they remain invisibly with me, offering what guidance and insight they can. In thus remaining together in spirit and persisting in efforts to strive toward the most growth and development my life is able to include, there is equally a sense that it is not merely that I spread my wings as that I participate in the spreading of our wings. In that way, every individual is simultaneously a community, but often a neglected one.

Perhaps this why those within various communities who cannot walk are sometimes carried--because they too are feathers in our collective wings, which can carry us to places and future times that our feet never could.

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

Releasing Body to Spirit

It is unfortunate and disempowering that open discussion of mortality is hampered by the irrational fear many have of death and dying, by whatever means but especially by suicide. Having experienced such ideation at various times during my life, I am familiar with and sensitive to genuinely being in such danger and I want to assure everyone that I am not currently in any such danger. That being said, I think intellectual discussion of this topic is very important to mental health. I just wish I didn't have to deal so frequently with others' hysterical overreactions to any mention of this.

The notion of releasing body to spirit, however, is in actuality quite the reverse of committing suicide. What I wish to discuss here is not releasing the spirit from the body, but rather releasing the body to the spirit so that the body becomes the servant of the spirit, rather than being narcissistically preoccupied with its own needs.

When I invite my body to be the expression and illustration of my spirit, I reach for a congruity between inner and outer health, conditioning, and discipline. I exercise my physical muscles in order retain abilities to do certain things (such as playing a musical instrument). It is equally important to exercise my spiritual muscles (i.e. discernment, intercession, etc.), but also to engage in a merging of the two by participating in rituals of whatever configuration is empowering.

I can even compose my own ritualistic configurations to serve purposes and needs which may be unfamiliar to my surrounding community. As was the case in learning to paint artistic works on canvas, if I do not allow my body the time, the freedom, and the health regimen it needs, it will not be able to engage in the creation of any kind of beauty. If I do not take time to sit in silence and listen, I may never hear what only my heart can.

It is the body, however, that provides the silence--during which the essential songs, insights, and exhortations of the spirit may reach an overwhelming crescendo and change everything I thought I knew and planned to do.

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

On a Personal Note

The past few weeks have been a cacophony of encouragements and attacks, accomplishments and losses, and inspirations and threats. It is often overwhelming and bewildering, but I persist in my efforts to make the best of whatever life sets before me, even as I long for more favorable conditions I knew in times past. That I am learning new things I have no doubt; precisely what those things are, may become visible only in retrospect, when closure finally comes to current conflicts.

The weather continues to grow colder and the house is still inadequately prepared for winter, in spite of exhausting myself daily in efforts to address as many aspects of my home environment as possible, within the current financial limitations of my life. What assistance I have found is unlikely to last until the return of spring. Once again, uncertainty is a most constant and daunting companion.

When I was diagnosed as autistic and instructed that social withdrawal is a common problem, I tried to address this with greater communal involvement. In recent months, however, it is becoming increasingly clear that I must tend to the creation of sacred space and wait for the world to come to me, rather than chasing after it. I wonder if in some ways we are living within a sort of "dark ages" during which learning, knowledge, and understanding must be cloistered and protected until a new Renaissance unfolds.

Perhaps only time will tell.

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

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