

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

Too many speculations and preconceived ideas seem in many ways to have taken the place of insightful dialogue, wisdom, and truly humane response. Yet within all language is the potential not only to define terms, but to endlessly redefine terms as new information and understanding becomes available. My intent every month is be thought-provoking, yet it is equally imperative that the ideas contained herein, inspire active response.

Substance in Being a Friend

Ideally, relationships are symbiotic: each providing something the other needs but cannot produce in isolation. To endure, the actions of giving and receiving must both go both ways. The most difficult relationships to maintain, consequently, are those within which one or the other is unable to act.

The need may not be physical, but must nonetheless be real—even if it is not fully understood. There must be something that is completed by the presence of the other, either cognitively or intuitively. Parasites are always optional and that's what results when symbiosis ceases to be the primary dynamic.

That being said, there are nonetheless times when the early witticism holds true: "Life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need." The dynamic of being symbiotic or parasitic may thus be determined by the timing of observation. A parent caring for an infant nonetheless has a sense of purpose that guides daily action, but only for a limited season.

I have often wished that I could remain friends with particular others, long after the contexts of our most significant encounters has faded. Yet it remains relentlessly true that we are creatures of time, unable to hold onto any moment longer than the particular moment actually lasts. As much as I disagree

with this reality, I try to believe there may be wisdom within the impermanence.

Yet that leaves the question of whether any moment is rendered less real simply by being impermanent. Souvenirs grant a representative permanence, but are never actually that of which one is reminded. The substance one may find within both being and having a friend is thus both temporally and relationally defined.

The invitation within every moment, I insist, is making the memory substantive by fully engaging with whatever life has to teach or reveal there. This is how one's life experience becomes rich and full—integrating both the seen and the unseen that are truly present. One could even ask whether they are less so, simply because someone else present at the time overlooked them.

The measure of truth, therefore, is not so much what was or was not there, but rather how much was perceived. The opportunity is that one can choose to place mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, or relational substance within any such moment. One can genuinely be a co-creator of one's own universe.

Specifically because true friendship is a symbiotic relationship, however, one cannot be the only creator. Lives overlap and that which exists within the ways and degrees of relational connection, must unavoidably be shared. Thus substance is never "owned" by only one of those so involved.

Ultimately, in true friendship, there is no pretense but rather only honesty. Any lack of actual substance becomes immediately obvious and conspicuous, leaving participants to either withdraw or engage in a most peculiar game of relational chess—attempting postures and illusions that are unable to support the weight or respond to the demands of any and all relational challenges.

True relationship, however, is ever and always empowering to both persons.

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

Substance in Being Family

The card numbered 2 within The Tarot of Sister Who, is named "Home" and attempts to bring substance to the idea of such by weaving together some of the basic methods that individuals may use within their attempts to be supportive of one another. I recall the wonderful ritual within the time-worn movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," within which the CEO of the savings and loan's wife gives to the new homeowners bread as a prayer against hunger--recognizing that love, symbolized by red within the Tarot photo, is not a color that conceals but rather that is populated by many points of contrast that are brought into greater focus by the background context. What appears upon the field of love throughout the unfolding of life are innumerable elements that must be addressed and resolved in whatever ways are possible.

There is a very real sense in which those who identify as members of a home, must be the guardian angels and protectors of each other--shielding each other from adversity that no member in isolation would be able to overcome. A principle challenge, of course, is if or when realities of home and family are painfully absent. Unfortunately, invisible pain is for that reason no less real.

I remain inspired by the words of the chorus within Pat Humphries' song, "Swimming to the Other Side," that recognize within the spectrum of human experience, that some live "in power and some in pain." I find a greater commitment to inclusivity within awareness of both, rather than only one or the other. It is an opportunity more than a burden that we can give warmth and protection from suffering to one another.

On a similar note, one of the early witticisms I composed was that "Life is a collaborative effort: we all turns being the one in need." It may be a blessing if my current life experience is not so described, but one can be reasonably certain--without despairing--that such times will come. The spectrum of life experience being what it is and in light of the drive toward wholeness, both joy and sadness must be included and constructively integrated. Knowing only one

or the other would presumably result in an incomplete sense of personhood and a lack of significant maturity at best.

Within having a sense of home and a sense of family is an invitation toward greater maturity; to live not only one's length and breadth but also one's depth. So many pass through the moments of their lives without ever doing so, blissfully unaware of the tragedy they embody. One does not extend to another whatever is needed, because the particular individual is deserving, but simply because s/he is family.

In discovering the depth of relationships and understanding, one transcends all that one thus far knows of the self and becomes more than has ever been imagined. The full truth of hope, wisdom, and love is revealed not within pleasant moments of life, be they many or few, but within times when reality and substance are tested and given chances to prove how strong they really are. That being said, one must sometimes witness events that require the strength of many rather than that of only one--and if one's trust is betrayed, there is no shame in recognizing one's personal limitations, if one has truly done one's very best.

Innumerable moments have unfolded of a single individual being the last surviving member of a particular biological family--but this does not matter if the definition of that word has been given a broader meaning. If, conversely, one holds one's self apart, it harkens to the time-worn quote, "We have found the enemy and it is ourselves." Within welcoming inclusive and empowering definitions instead of exclusive and limiting ones, humanity finds its ability to individually and collectively transcend all of its previous forms and expressions.

No oppressive circumstance lasts forever; they all come to an end and give way to better forms and expressions thereafter. The real question is who one will be and how one will respond when that time finally arrives, for those who have managed to survive. One cannot, however, become evil in an attempt to survive evil and still remain good.

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

Substance in Being a Community

I long ago altered my speech to reflect that certain marginalized populations have failed to ever behave as true communities. I find the distinction very important, but am forced to conclude equally that many do not understand what community or family actually is. That being said, the definition of these terms in practice, is probably more broad and diverse than is recommendable.

For family or community to be a helpful term, a distinction must be made between that which is included or excluded, that also recognizes what is or is not actually present within observable relationships. It is similar to my complaint that some individuals whom I've met wish to be known as generous without ever giving anything away. Further, as noted within a recent online post, one is not truly generous if one gives only to those who are able to give in return--which in truth is no more than loaning positive energy to those who will not default on the loan.

There is nonetheless an expectation that a symbiotic relationship exists; that the group one supports will similarly be supportive in time of need. This is not concerned with any personal generosity, however, but with truly being the community one claims. Neglecting such relationships, conversely, although often unnoticed, is ultimately self-sabotaging.

Among the ways that I often wrestle with self-doubt is the awareness that in spite of the consistency with which I recommend symbiotic, communal, and familial forms of relationship, these are conspicuously absent from my daily life experience. Are such recommendations consequently hypocritical or in any way inaccurate? All of my

contemplation insists that they are not.

Some have suggested that I'm simply "ahead of my time." As complimentary as that may be from one perspective, these words are from another view quite daunting--leaving me with the task of reconciling who and what I am with the world within which I must live. The substance of community may consequently--at least for me--be far more spiritual than physical or social in nature.

Is spiritual community less real? Perhaps that depends upon how real one considers spiritual entities to be. Having experienced love from unlikely sources and in unlikely ways, like the essence within the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, I would not hesitate to insist upon such immaterial reality.

Yet the vulnerability of that is that its reality is compromised every time a choice is made to refrain from doing it. Even the reality of love is compromised each time it is allowed to remain unexpressed. While they certainly had not "cornered the market" on such, what remains distinctive about the first generation of Christians is found within Aristides' report to Emperor Hadrian, "Behold how they love one another."

My wish is that the same could be said of at least every person of any sort of faith or spirituality within the current time. For me, this is and remains the true definition of community: that one helps those in need simply because one can. As phrased by an early witticism, "Life is a collaborative effort; we all take turns being the one in need."

All of which is why being and maintaining true community is so important. It must be remembered, however, that this includes accountability as much as generosity. In a similar way, true freedom is inseparable from self-discipline guided by wisdom and love.

Ignorance cannot create true community; only love can do that. The love capable of such, is that which takes the time to listen and to feel what the other is feeling. It is not safe, comfortable, or convenient.

Yet it is the love which allows the best that each can be, to come out into the light and transcend one's physical and spiritual form.

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

"In the absence of engaged, active, and mutually supportive community, bullies, despots, and tyrants thrive."

-- Sister Who

Substance in Being Alive

By observation, it would seem that most people imagine physical reality to be all there is--which I find absolutely baffling, because all of my greatest moments within life have been saturated with emotions, thoughts, and spiritually oriented perceptions that defy all explanation. I am reminded again of the quote from an old movie about Bernadette of Lourdes: "For those who believe, no explanation is necessary; for those who do not, no explanation will suffice." I concede, however, that speaking of substance that is intangible veers into contemplation of various intellectually challenging oxymorons.

"How can both be simultaneously true" is a profoundly open-ended question, for those who dare to wrestle with it. I suppose an equal question is when one will finish the task of discovering possibilities. One never knows whether or not there might be one more that has not yet been imagined and considered.

In a similar way, each new day embodies the question of how it can be creatively used to constructively expand the dimensions of self and world. The substance of this may be quite invisible, but the effects of thoughts, words, and actions may echo into eternity. If one is able to steer these in positive ways, positive effects of one's presence may be similarly enduring in ways that defy their lack of material substance and insist upon the reality of spiritual substance instead.

Hopefully in most cases, the discussion has moved beyond whether or not human individuality and community include realities that are far more than merely physical. The lingering question, however, is what will be done with that. In contrast to various kinds of creativity, negligence rarely offers any recommendable possibility.

Consequently, giving substance to the basic quality of being alive, begins with engaging circumstances and resources as constructively as one is able. Allowing choice-by-default instead of intention to name one's beliefs, actions, and creations, leaves a huge amount of good undone.

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

On a Personal Note

It has been a strange month containing lots of speculation about my physical health, but definitive answers remain conspicuously absent. Living within the mountains of Colorado, there is also the challenge of to what extent medical resources are even available. All appearances at this point suggest that I should expect to commute back and forth to the Denver-metro area in ways that are complicated by the current health crisis (which, curiously like the AIDS/HIV epidemic--that after forty years and 32 million deaths has still not ended--includes the possibility of being biological warfare that escaped from military/governmental control).

Suffice to say, it's a very peculiar time to be living, which is also far too defined by fear rather than knowledge, unconditional love, or belief of any respectable sort. All of this obviously makes this unconventional ministry all the more important, but both opportunity and relevant resources seem to be equally scarce. Nonetheless, I persist in whatever ways I am able, most especially in the area of composing new modern morality plays to distribute through pending video recordings.

Through it all, I am repeatedly reminded that what matters is not so much how or when one dies, as how one lives while there is still time to do so. "What sort of person will you show yourself to be," is a question that never seems particularly far away.

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

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