

sister who's perspective

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Overview

It surprised me a little when someone first described me as "compulsively honest" a number of years ago. Being fully truthful, however, does not require being cynical, pessimistic, or negative, as long as one remembers that the good possibilities are as available as the bad. What remains to be seen is just how much humanity can learn from this eternally challenging juxtaposition.

May this month's words empower you.

Coexisting with Oppression

"It's not as if I have any choice." How often those words seem to be heard within the current time. While each of us has our own unique experience, I'm skeptical that the situation is as black-and-white as it may seem. A more accurate description might be that the choice of the moment is between such deplorable and extreme possibilities, that no one would ever choose such things--if, that is, there were any better alternative.

Drawing insight from human history, no oppression is eternal; every single example occupies a finite amount of time. Whether one will live to see the end of a particular current oppression, is a different question. I have often said that I want to survive and participate in the rebuilding that follows, but I recognize also that there are limits to what I can sacrifice during the preceding struggle.

I suppose it may be the blessing and the curse of my experience of autism, that lying is not something I could ever do--even if my life depended upon it. Careful word choice, distraction, and strategic silence are often enough to navigate moments when lying might be the first thing that comes to most other minds, but I'm not certain whether or not these alternatives will always work.

As with most other challenges, therefore, coexisting with the darker times of life is ever

and always a very individually defined sort of thing. This by no means excludes positive communal contributions, but such support from others can never substitute for the work that only the individual can choose and do. I am reminded of one of my early witticisms at this point: "Whoever wants the muscles, must lift the weights."

At the heart of the struggle is the tension of maintaining personal principles while living within a world that opposes them--choosing as wisely as possible within each moment precisely how the adversarial circumstance might be outwitted, but simultaneously acknowledging that both failure and success are equally possible. I apologize that I no longer recall the name of the movie I viewed several months ago which advised against "giving up five minutes before the miracle happens." The essential insight within this is that infinite possibility and heart-wrenching tragedy are both simultaneously available within every moment of life, no matter how unnoticed they may be at the time.

The more common response seems to be that one becomes weary and ceases to strive for life's best possibilities, but no victory was ever won by settling for whatever an enemy offered. The latter path--in virtually every case--leads to degrees of enslavement. The inner challenge for every individual is to somehow recognize when and to what degree an oppressive circumstance must be tolerated in order to prepare for either a future coup or more effective resistance.

There is no instance in which resigning one's self to current oppression ever leads to future blessings. Such blessings may indeed come, but meeting them without one's heart, spirit, and soul, will render any subsequent victories empty and hollow at best. If one cannot live for today, then living with hope for tomorrow becomes all the more essential.

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

Coexisting with Evil

By example, "The Serenity Prayer" urges one to have "the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." What it completely fails to mention are the degrees of pain that living with serenity may include; the things that require communal collaboration in order to be constructively changed; and the myriad of times when mere understanding of any particular problem offers no insight about its resolution. Consequently, while this trite recitation may be a place to start, it is not by any means the place where life should end.

All that being said, there seems to be an unwritten but nonetheless common notion that for every problem, there is a resolution; for every deplorable circumstance, there is a way to make things better; and for every evil there is a greater force of good with which to answer. Unfortunately, actual life experience suggests that none of these are true. This does not mean, however, that it is ever appropriate to surrender to discouragement and forego any attempts to improve others' or one's own circumstances.

Future victories and growth require just the opposite. If a particular accomplishment is long in coming, does that make it less of the significant accomplishment that it is? If anything, it should be more valued, because of the higher personal cost involved.

The tedious and sometimes painful days along the way, however, are sometimes so challenging that some of those battling their particular adversarial circumstances, do not even survive. Looking on from a distance and clinging to notions of safety produced by non-involvement, however, renders all claims of genuine love and concern for the fate of the other into despicable lies. In the words of Martin Luther King, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good to do nothing,"--which is what many people do.

Yet one does not have to follow or in any way imitate such deplorable examples. The choice of being better than the evil evident within one's environment, is very real and still available to every living person. What

makes this *most* difficult, however, is desperately wanting to do something which can only be done by a community acting in collaboration--which often leaves one suspended between success and failure.

Like two evenly matched arm-wrestlers, the hands quiver over the center of the table, battling exhaustion, but moving in neither direction. As unacceptable as surrender is, having inadequate resources to decisively win, creates a waiting game which ultimately measures not strength, but rather stamina. I have unfortunately often experienced just that sort of struggle--which ended with being a victor, but a very exhausted one.

Living as one willing to defend the right and the good, therefore, means more or less having spent a good portion of my life feeling quite exhausted. What is most obnoxious is that just when such accomplishments have finally occurred, the next person I encounter will often throw some short-sighted and insensitive piece of popular psychology my direction--expecting me to patronize their delusion that "everything is fine" rather than empathizing with the struggle I have only barely overcome. Alternatively, each of us could be an oasis, within which people who have been or currently are struggling, could find a moment of rest.

The existence of evil does not in and of itself change the moral character of any individual it may encounter. Consequently, such existence does not validate responding with fear. In a perhaps backwards sort of way, encountering evil may instead be the opportunity for individuals to more fully realize their own strength and ingenuity--both of which can increase, develop, and grow throughout the course of one's life.

An important thing to remember is that although one may not have the power to transform evil into good at will, evil may nonetheless be transformed in some way by contact with one's own goodness. In walking through life as an embodiment of wisdom and love, it is inevitable that the surrounding world will be changed, but perhaps not in the ways one would personally imagine.

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

Coexisting with Aspirations

The very first point that comes to mind as I contemplate the title of this essay, is that the focus is upon the journey and not upon the destination. Even as a destination, an aspiration often remains dynamic rather than static; existing not as an unchangeable or rigid state that one has finally accomplished, but as a new way of being--of interacting with life that produces more significant works than are currently possible. It is thus not merely a question of being, but of becoming.

I often hear people speak of holding onto, losing, or striving to bring to truthful reality their individually unique dreams of what life could someday be. In participating within a recent graduate school conference, the concluding ritual the organizers facilitated was for each participant to introduce him or her self as having accomplished the specific doctoral degree envisioned. It was really a rather inspiring action to embrace--at least until someone stated a particularly grand goal and the room erupted in laughter.

The fact that a goal is difficult, however, does not make it unworthy. Is failure the more probable outcome? Every aspiration risks failure, but having more faith in the absence of accomplishment than in one's efforts being ultimately rewarded, provides no empowerment for the journey ahead.

It is probably true that all worthy goals require perseverance and unusual degrees of self-investment. The tension of coexisting with an aspiration, therefore, is first and foremost a struggle to maintain faith in what

can not yet be seen. Yet there was a time when each of us was, in fact, a being who could not yet be seen.

Having an aspiration, therefore, is in some ways equivalent to having confidence and faith in one's self. Sometimes I wonder whether I might be the only one who believes in my own existence and contributions, but opting for a greater faith in failure--simply because it is easier--ensures defeat. Those who seem to go through life always choosing the path of least resistance, are likely to be no more than a reflection of their environments rather than embodying the transformative possibilities of the human mind and heart. In words attributed to Albert Einstein, "The person who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The person who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever seen before."

Is disappointment so terrible that any such possibility might warrant declining to try? In actuality, such moments are opportunities for altering one's course in response to new information, but do not have any inherent ability to prevent any journey from continuing in one or more new directions. What slows the pace is the necessary step of processing whatever emotional response the occurrence of disappointment produces.

As if denying the very occurrence of such, the usual societal mandate is to pretend that the disappointment never actually happened, but the dishonesty inherent within such a response metaphorically creates invisible shackles around one's ankles, making all further steps painful and slow. In recognizing the disappointment for what it is--a limited and temporary obstacle--a synthesis of ingenuity, aspiration, and determination can find new opportunity to rise even higher--as long as an honest and comprehensive truth are part of the equation. All too often, one imagines disappointment to be more than it actually is.

Aspiration, conversely, recognizes that there are a thousand undiscovered ways to be and do what has never previously been or been done. Life, by its very nature, needs each one of us to embrace such possibilities.

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

*"What is most important
about love
is not merely to have it,
but rather to be
continuously involved
in circulating it--
like blood throughout
every living human body."*

-- Sister Who

Coexisting with Uncertainty

I found inspiration recently within words attributed to N. R. Hart: "And if you cannot find your way out of the darkness, I will sit there with you and show you the stars." As much as none of us cannot prevent literal or metaphorical nighttime from happening and as much as I always strive to make the best of whatever crosses my path, I have never found denying the reality of darkness to be comforting or in any way empowering. It too must somehow be accepted as real, even as I strive to find better things to do within it.

Additionally, I have quite often named the missing information which could make the essential difference between success and failure, but even being able to name the information or category did nothing to bring within my reach the essential but absent resources. Yet I also could not thereby promise or assure myself of failure. Within some--but not all--of the worst moments of my life, circumstances and developments--in spite of all probability and statistics--went miraculously right instead of wrong.

Does this prove the existence of a divine person, unpredictably intervening in the unfolding of individual human lives? Well, it proves it to me, but Godde nonetheless remains beyond my human comprehension and has apparently not offered any identical persuasion to innumerable others. Shall I require them to pretend they experienced things which they did not?

Yet my experiences remain unpredictable and past examples thus indicate only what may be possible and not what will actually happen. In the final analysis, however, I need good things to remain possible, in order to live within a world so populated by adversarial qualities and tragic events. If that were not so, the heartbreak that would unavoidably accompany any significant degree of awareness, would make life itself altogether unbearable.

Thankfully, what I have survived in the past, insists that the future can be written in ways that transcend what has been.

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

On a Personal Note

Well, in addition to embodying this most unusual ministry, I am once again now also a doctoral student, anticipating completion of a PhD academic degree within the next two years. As exciting as that may be, it is at least for now unfolding within astonishingly unsupportive circumstances--which I am striving to correct, but my efforts have not thus far been particularly rewarded. I keep insisting that there is only one of me to go around, but the demands just keep piling up and thus maintaining a feeling of being quite overwhelmed by life--at least for now.

Conversely, the encouragement and educational support I am receiving from university personnel is a hundred times greater than any I've previously ever known.

None of which excuses any neglect of this ministry. It does not ultimately matter how exhausted I am or the emotion I may be feeling--indeed, it will not even matter whether or how my efforts are rewarded, as long as I faithfully do them. While I do not wish to count the personal cost, I am aware that it is rather high--but even that matters less than doing what I was born to do, simply because of who and what I am.

If any person is in any way wiser and more loving, then my life will not have been in vain.

Meanwhile, my service dog, Bedivere, is experiencing worrisome health issues and your prayers are much appreciated.

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

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