

Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Distinctions of Joy

In speaking with a friend not long ago, it came to light that as much as we are happy to support and encourage each other within times of difficulty, and as much as the shared experience of struggle seems to deepen and strengthen relationships more than the shared experience of happiness, we nevertheless form unbalanced perceptions of each other if all we ever share are times of struggle.

Yet joy is a curious and frequently illusive thing to share, being more recognized in retrospect than at the time of its occurrence, since it is not so much characterized by laughter, as by a deeper feeling of being valued, of being in love with life, and of being in a place or circumstance in which what is most needed, is wondrously given.

Joy is the moment of release, after a period of imprisonment. Joy is the moment when healing puts an end to some sort of pain. Joy is the moment when an adversarial question is banished by an answer which satisfies all concerns.

Because of Time itself, however, joy is not a season in which one can live, anymore than we can stop and live forever within a single moment.

Without its counterpart of sadness, joy is like a painting with no contrast: flat and uninspiring.

Joy is sometimes light and fluttering in the wind, in some ways like a butterfly.

At other times, joy is the power of the sun, pushing back the darkness of the night and vanquishing the drifted snow with its warmth.

Sometimes interrupted by pain, joy is what always follows when pain fades again and like the flame of a candle, is only increased by being shared with others.

Over the last couple of months or so, my experiences of joy have been mysterious and challenging, when I contemplate them within the larger picture of recent life experiences.

Some twenty-five years or so after receiving my drivers license, I had my first accident at the

end of December when my car struck a patch of "black ice" and slid from the road, requiring thousands of dollars of repairs. A week or so after that accident, my mechanic sold me a small jeep-type vehicle very similar to one I owned until last year in August, so that I would have something to drive while my other car was being repaired. Just one week ago, however, this second vehicle was involved in a four-car pile-up, when the fourth car involved failed to stop (although the preceding three cars, including myself, had already done so). The fourth car hit with such force that in addition to whatever else is going on within my life, I must now allow for three visits to a chiropractor each week, probably for the next couple of month. I must take time away from other activities to nurture and encourage physical healing.

Where joy becomes part of this story, is that the repairs to the car damaged at the end of December, were completed this past weekend. I'd virtually forgotten what it was like to ride in a car with a good heater and a working radio, even though it was only five weeks or so since the first of the two accidents. Perhaps it is silly, but I was absolutely thrilled to have a car with the power to get home in forty-five minutes instead of an hour and a half. I was thrilled to, for the first time in five weeks, not be shivering with cold on the long drive to work in the morning. I was thrilled to once again be surrounded by music, as I traveled along.

The little jeep is fun and I am thankful for it, but it does in all honesty have a number of limitations. Perhaps it was just the reminder I needed, to be thankful for basic things like being warm and being able to spend less time in traffic, commuting from my day-job to my home in the mountains.

That too, however, is in the process of changing. I am living in anticipation of future

joy, as I look for a new place closer to my day-job so that I will no longer be spending two to three hours each day driving to and from work. Although I needed to release my home to another owner without receiving any proceeds and in spite of the enormous amount of work I've done rebuilding my current home's structure, I am allowed to continue living here rent-free until such time as the home is either sold again to someone else or until I find a new place to live, whichever comes first.

On a lesser note, I was reminded a few nights ago to be thankful for simple things, when I arrived home and found the door lock frozen, such that for a time I was unable to even enter my house. Now, when I arrive home, place the key in the lock, and am actually able to turn the key and come in out of the cold, I remember to give thanks and as much as possible to refrain from taking anything for granted.

We do need such reminders from time to time, since it seems the human race is a most forgetful species, paying little heed to how dependent we are upon the blessed cooperation of other things--locks that work, cars that run, computers that crash as little as possible. All of life is so very interconnected, even with things considered by many not to be alive at all, yet we are almost continually distracted by this or that task and go about more blind than aware to what surrounds us and may need our blessing, our love, or even our gifts.

I suppose what is most fascinating about joy, is that it is a gift which we can give to each other, even when we are not experiencing it ourselves. I may be completely depressed about this or that lingering challenge, but if I nevertheless perform actions which lighten someone's load, lessen someone's struggle, or heal someone's pain, suddenly they are able to experience a moment of joy quite different from the emotion which I was feeling at the time.

Like a mischievous (in a good way) angel who sneaks around doing good things through each one of us without necessarily informing us beforehand, joy catches us by surprise and reminds us that whatever heaviness we may feel, is not all there is within each blessed moment of life. May you be surprised by moments of joy today and remember to share it with those whom you love.

Recommended Viewing

Not long ago, prompted by intuition I suppose, I purchased a copy of the new movie "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen." Somehow I'd gotten the impression that it was a futuristic story and indeed the first few moments seem to suggest this--at least until the viewer is informed that the time is 1899.

The first challenge, therefore, is recognizing that the intensity and occasionally frightening transitions of our present and future, may be more like those of our past than we thought. In all such cases, success within such transitions comes from the discovery of new resources within ourselves and those around us. In all such cases, we must also be willing to make new friends with those we might have once considered to be enemies.

The overall tone of the movie is dark and perhaps a bit foreboding, inspiring me to watch more closely, gleaning every detail I could from the very complex moments of each scene, as the disparate characters stumbled through finding ways to work together productively. As with any great work, the more the characters learn about each other, the more they learn about themselves.

A very conscious characteristic of this movie, which sets it apart from nearly all others, is that its complex and interwoven characters, events, and verbal expressions are drawn from more than a dozen major works of Victorian literature. In discussing the movie with a young man one afternoon, for example, the reason he did not understand a particular character, is that he had never read the book, "The Picture of Dorian Grey."

There is very little these days, which encourages us to re-acquaint ourselves with literature and history of previous times in order to understand what we are currently viewing within the present, and thereby find treasures of understanding which have been waiting for over a hundred years to be rediscovered and valued.

To move forward, we must sometimes look back and be careful not to leave many valuable tools of understanding behind. It is the moment-by-moment discovery, that we are more equipped to deal with our future than we ever realized, but also that the future will not be the good thing it can be, without the use of such tools of understanding.

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

When the Golden Rule is Broken

There are perhaps more than a dozen ways in which the so-called "Golden Rule" has been phrased, though all forms have the same pattern.

*What you sow, you reap.
Garbage in, garbage out.
You get out of something what you put into it.
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

But what happens when I sow good seed and yet find there is nothing good to reap? Perhaps what I have reaped is the discovery that I have been "casting pearls before swine." It simply does not matter how much effort one puts into teaching pigs how to fly. The simple and obvious fact is that they have not been given the wings necessary for them to do any such thing.

Or perhaps, as in the parable attributed to Jesus within the biblical gospels, I have scattered the seed in the wrong place. The four combinations described within the biblical parable include seed which when scattered, fell first upon a path of dirt too hard to penetrate and was quickly eaten by passing birds, second upon thin ground which was not deep enough for healthy roots, third among thorn bushes which choked the seedlings to death as quickly as they sprouted, and fourth upon good soil from which a bountiful harvest was ultimately gathered.

What is not taken into account within this story, is the good and worthy farmer who for whatever reason does not have access to the good soil. He (or she) works hard, does everything right, but is not rewarded. What of the farmer who inherits, or through a trusting nature acquires, soil too poor to ever produce the harvest the farmer has in fact earned, by the countless hours of labor and love given to the particular field? Without lying to the next potential owner, the farmer cannot even sell the particular field to someone else.

Yet if the Divine is real and good and just, there must be an answer to the dilemma somewhere. So why does it take so long to find that answer? Why does every forward step always take so much longer to accomplish than we want it to? Where is divine justice, when love, generosity, and hard work are consistently answered by apathy, disregard, or even hatred? As one book title I saw many years ago phrased it, "Where is God When it Hurts?"

The simple but not necessarily comforting

response might be, "Exactly where God has always been," but where exactly is that? Where, when it really matters, can we succeed in finding God?

If God is ultimately dependent upon humanity for all manifestation of the divine within life on earth, I question the notion of divine wisdom. Humanity has proven itself time and time again, to be far too unreliable for such an essential thing as the manifestation of divine presence.

Then again, specific individuals within humanity have often so far exceeded the norm, as to be a complete shock to anyone who contends that humanity is worthless and therefore deserves to be completely terminated. At the least likely moment, time and time again, someone steps forward, does something right, and gives all of us a reason to believe that not only should the human race go on, but that God is absolutely real and currently being demonstrated through this particular individual.

Perhaps that is ultimately what the Golden Rule is all about. It is not so much a recipe for forcing good things to happen within one's life, but rather a plea to let the Divine be demonstrated to others through each one of us. If it is a recipe, it is a perhaps very simplistic recipe for how to demonstrate divine love to others rather than a means of influencing or perhaps even of controlling others' actions toward us.

Perhaps another "golden rule" is to beware of allowing expectations to control me, since having expectations and being disappointed by them generally leads to anger, resentment, hostility, and further problems. If I can keep my focus upon giving my best, nurturing others in whatever ways I can, and allowing them the freedom to have their own desirable or undesirable reactions, I can go on giving my best to every person and situation and spend less time struggling mentally and emotionally with "what didn't happen." But this is no small task, requiring self-discipline and internal focus which are generally not encouraged by the chaotic world in which we live.

Perhaps the greatest "golden rule" to which we may aspire, is simply to always live and give and work within the aura of divine love and wisdom, a more precious thing than the soft yellow metal which has become the measure of far too many things within our societies and world. The mining and refining of gold is not a simple process. The mining and refining of what is truly valuable within the human spirit is an even more daunting, if less obvious, challenge. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Remembering to Dance

For twenty-five years, since receiving my first drivers' license: no major mishaps. Then a patch of "black ice" threw my car into the ditch. Just over a month later, while waiting for a bus to finish loading its passengers and move ahead again, I found myself in the midst of a four-car pile-up. Now, in spite of no obvious injuries at the time, each day is filled with a random array of headaches, painful joints, and periods of inexplicable exhaustion. Additionally, my current top priority is finding a new home for myself, closer to my office day-job.

It would be easy to forget to dance and I often do.

It is most important to dance, however, when I least feel like doing so. It is most important to remember that no matter how bad things might get or already are, they are not all there is to life. It is most important to set aside the weight of worry for just a moment, to do a light step or two during which I can finally catch my breath, before pressing onward against the challenge of being a truly good and worthy person within even the most unsupportive of times.

Being a good and worthy person--to use a common phrase, "it's a tough job but someone's got to do it."

Perhaps it will make no sense to anyone around you--dance anyway. Like taking a deep breath of fresh air before singing that particularly high and powerful note, what follows will be much more empowered and beautiful than it otherwise would be.

A big part of daring to dance is that it moves me in the direction of being or becoming truly comfortable within my own body. I am amazed at how many people seem to be so very uncomfortable being themselves and living within

their own bodies; individuals who try to hide some aspect of themselves or to say only the most perfect things within each moment.

Learning to dance is not just about memorizing a sequence of steps, any more than learning to cook is about following a recipe. Within each moment there are fluctuations and subtle distinctions to which one must respond. Moving around a dance floor, for example, it is advisable to avoid colliding with other couples. If the band has completed the particular piece of dance music, it is advisable to pause and listen for what the tempo and style of the next dance will be. Sometimes the pause may even be longer than expected, while waiting for the musicians to arrange the appropriate score on their music stands. Since they are the ones providing the music to which I will be dancing, my actions will have to wait for theirs. If I do not like their actions, I can choose to sit down until the next dance, leave the building, or dance in a way which fails to harmonize with what the musicians are doing.

What distinguishes one dancer from another, are the ways in which the dancer harmoniously weaves his or her individual style into the movements of the dance, giving an emotional or perhaps even spiritual life to the movements, which a simple robotic execution of the movements would not have.

What distinguishes one person from another within even the most superficially homogenous societal interactions, are the ways in which we remember to weave into each movement our own unique style and perspective, giving to the moment something of our emotion and spirit--giving the light of the divine spark within each of us to the moment at hand, and thereby leaving the world a better place than we found it. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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--S.W.