

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

Overview

For every relational method, there are both costs and rewards. These are often encountered blindly, like flying on autopilot or instinctively leaping into the sea like lemmings. Finding alternatives can include the discovery of costs and rewards, the discovery that we will not all experience the same costs and rewards, or the discovery that our hearts compel us to proceed, even without such insights.

Similarly, bringing awareness to each moment—to both the diversity it includes and the common concerns by which all life will forever be united—allows us, as some have said, to be "co-creators with God" of the world within which we live and the world that we will ultimately give to future generations as the initial raw material or stage upon which their lives will play out.

May this month's insights empower you to play your part as magnificently as possible.

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

Relating to Superficiality

I have often noticed within the life experiences of certain people, that a particular characteristic with which they contended, did not ultimately define them, but only a part of their life experience. Their true identity, in each case, was always something more precious, some sort of inner quality, that somehow transcended their immediate experience. The visionary elderly Italian woman who died of breast cancer; the fictional wealthy widow who befriended the homeless within the movie, "Christmas Eve"; the horse waiting for his chance to make history within the movie "Secretariat" (based upon a true story)—all of these and hundreds of others, by a combination of their own efforts and collaboration with others who could see their potential, found those moments within which, by simply showing up and doing their best, the dimensions of possibility and life were dramatically expanded.

I persist in believing such opportunities are available to every living thing; that the energy of life

hidden within each moment is so incredible as to make the atomic bomb look like a firecracker, if we could see the repercussions throughout history from God's perspective.

All of which makes me a bit impatient with those who timidly restrict themselves to superficiality while the river of their opportunities to truly live, flow past and out of sight, toward some incomprehensibly vast distant ocean of untapped possibility—until I notice that the face in my mirror is among those who failed to notice a particular opportunity when it came along.

Then the scenario repeats itself. In that moment, I can choose (consciously or unconsciously) to be defined by my failure to respond to the now-missed opportunity. I can also choose to be defined by the uniquely expansive power of life within me and make whatever changes are necessary to be ready for the very next opportunity—because there will be more opportunities; there always are.

With regard to interpersonal relationships that are more superficial in nature, a most important attitude is that of compassion; that just as I occasionally fail to notice or to respond to opportunities to be extraordinary, others often face a similar struggle—not realizing who or what they could be, if they only gave it a chance.

The moment of opportunity needs that kind of permission and support, if it is to ever fulfill its God-given destiny—and it appears that no amount of overlooked moments of opportunity is enough to discourage God from providing yet one more, if our hearts are open.

Within moments of superficiality, therefore, is a seed of transition and possibility. If we can see the superficiality as not an end in itself, but rather a narrow channel to a larger ocean and then utilize that channel accordingly, the ocean is ours to travel, to explore, and to experience. May our eyes be opened, our hearts be strengthened, and our spirits find the courage to act, such that every life may become the miracle it was always intended to be.

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

Relating to Ignorance

I have noticed within a great many conversations and interactions of late, that I understand people with whom I am speaking, better than they understand themselves. This is not due to any kind of superiority, but is simply analogous to seeing a stain on the back of someone's shirt that the wearer does not realize is there. What is perfectly obvious to me, therefore, is not visible to the available perspective of two eyes on the front of the other's head.

As easy as it is for me to be impressed by the intelligence and insight of others, I am always a bit surprised somehow when others attribute these qualities to myself. I am much more aware of my questions and struggles than I am of my resources and accomplishments, simply because my resources and accomplishments do not ask anything of me, least of all any of my attention.

The questions and struggles, conversely, those areas within which I want understanding, information, and consequent ability and instead experience the absence thereof, frequently occupy my full attention as if they were the sum of my complete reality—they're not, neither for me nor for anyone else, but for a moment we may forget and think that they are.

In this sense, therefore, life is a continual battle with ignorance, both within ourselves and within others. Far too often, we know ignorance to be a bad thing and erroneously seek to hide rather than eradicate it. Instead of asking for information, we pretend not to possess the ignorance that we do. Additionally, instead of considering whether the one to whom we are speaking has a truthful answer and can be trusted to provide it, we blurt out our questions and thereby place upon them an expectation of expertise that they are unable to satisfy. Their own ignorance or, conversely, hidden agendas, however, may cause them to abuse our trust.

Part of ignorance, it must be acknowledged, is objectification—treating ourselves or others as objects, like library books that are supposed to have reliable information within them. Obviously not every book does, driving us once again to the eternal challenge of discernment.

The more we learn about our adversaries and the desires and impulses that drive them; the more we learn that every adversary is in one way or another also a member of our larger family; the more we can also learn what it is to find a sense of completeness, a sense of wholeness, and a sense

of being interconnected rather than isolated. Perhaps the most fundamental thing I have learned about isolation from the pervasive and persistent presence of it within my life, is that its very existence depends upon a very restricted perception of what myself and my life include.

There is a sense, therefore, within which dealing with ignorance is no more than the challenge of dealing with the unfinished or incomplete parts of myself. Additionally, I must concede that there are many times when I am astonished at how much violence I still have the ability to include. I wish to define myself as being a man of peace, but my words do not have any true ability to do so. It is not, after all, my words which define who and what I am, but rather the underlying realities and actions of my life.

I am not a man because I say I am a man; I am a man because I possess material, emotional, psychological, and spiritual substance that together constitutes a particular example of what a man can be. To repeat: I can say whatever I want; truth will be found within my actions and within the actual substance of my being. Being ignorant of this, does nothing to change it.

Usually completely unconsciously, many of us expect others to know themselves even better than we know ourselves. When we discover they don't, we often still expect them to be better than they usually are. The cynic might suggest we should lower our expectations, but doing so all too often places a "glass ceiling" over what we are willing to nurture and encourage them to become.

To bring out the best within ourselves and each other, we must believe both that anything is possible and that there are specific steps that must be taken to get there. When, for whatever reason, we discover someone who is unwilling to make such a journey of growth, we would do well to remember the times when we too were too weary to try; the times when we needed to rest and revive; the times when our wounds required healing before further progress would be possible.

It is not that we need to tolerate ignorance within others, but punishment of ignorance is far from the only alternative. Openness to learning may not always be present, but the love which does need to be always present is that which says, "I am willing to be patient and be with you in whatever ways I can, until you are ready. I cannot abandon what I perceive and understand, but love demands that I also do not abandon you."

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

Relating to Narcissism

Observing the behavior of people, groups, and people within groups, throughout my life, has thoroughly convinced me that the paradox of individuality within community is most essential. On one hand, we are unavoidably individuals; on the other hand, either in spite or because of being individuals, we exist within a myriad of constantly shifting relationships. The fundamental problem of narcissism is that it seeks to deny relationship.

Specifically because narcissism is such a common psychological disease within the current time, however, many individuals are left with the question of how to coexist with this disease, because there seems to be no effective way (for most of us, at least) to escape the presence of narcissism within people around us.

Perhaps this is analogous to living within Europe during the so-called "Black Plague." Most people did not have the resources to run from the plague's presence, but the challenge of adapting to a world within which so many people were becoming infected and dying was as much a problem of psychological and spiritual health as it was a problem of physical health. For most, running away was simply not an option.

Running away from problems has never been what I would recommend anyway, but I concede that discovering a way to live within the presence of a mental disease is a most difficult challenge—and narcissism is a mental disease.

All that being said, I do have sufficient humility and presence of mind to know that this essay is not an attempt to magically proclaim the recipe for resolving this complex dilemma. The best I can offer is a few thoughts, perhaps an insight or two to get your own thoughts going, and hope that somehow, together, we can at least begin to push relationships in a better direction.

One of the first things needed, when attempting to address such a complex relational dynamic, is some sort of re-establishment of

relationship itself. Within any relationship, one may also find elements of responsibility, positive or negative response, vulnerability, and self-sacrifice.

In the words of Frederick Douglass, "without struggle, there is no progress." We must be willing to struggle if we are to move beyond the short-comings of the moment—and every moment has short-comings, inadequacies, deficiencies, and dynamics that somehow create a sort of hunger for something more and thus prompt us to keep going.

I have yet to meet or even hear of a single person within all of human history, who was (or is) not hungry for something they did (or do) not have. Those with material abundance are often emotionally and spiritually bankrupt—and vice versa. The invitation and opportunity within such imbalance, is that each has opportunities to give and receive as well as pervasive interdependence between us, beckoning us toward collaboration and mutually empowering relationship. More concisely, within each other is the possibility of accomplishing our own wholeness.

The first possibility of living within the presence of narcissism, therefore, is the constant reminder of interconnection and interdependence. Narcissism makes obvious the effects of dysfunctional dynamics, if I am willing to notice these whenever and wherever they occur.

In growing up within a biological family that specifically and aggressively avoided open and honest communication (allegedly in the interest of avoiding arguments), I was reminded every day for over twenty years, of the destructive effects such censorship could produce. In words drawn from public media that are now a popular expression, "been there, done that, hated it."

The second thing I learned, partly from my own experience and partly from the Roman Catholic nuns who were my elementary school teachers, is that life needs to be oriented around serving something larger than one's self. If someone else has not learned this, however, my demonstration of inclusive service-oriented inter-relationship becomes even more important, as an attempt to balance the world within which I live and to thereby discourage it from becoming primarily defined by the mental disease of narcissism.

That said, the inability or unwillingness of another to love and to reach beyond the self, may be my teacher, but it must never become my definition. Life is always bigger than that. We need only to see and live within that greater truth.

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

*"Wars will cease
when with inclusive solidarity
soldiers refuse to fight
and people agree that conflicts
can be resolved peacefully."*

--Sister Who

Relating to Curiosity

It is entirely possible that the unknown author was being cynical when the witticism was coined, "curiosity killed the cat; satisfaction brought it back." A more persistent observation would be that cats have nevertheless always been and probably always will be, extremely curious creatures. Perhaps they're trying to set a good example for us.

While one must concede that taking any risk—which any expression of curiosity unavoidably includes—does carry with it certain possibilities of loss, it is not at all difficult to also show that no significant accomplishment has ever occurred without a certain tolerance of risk. I recall viewing a movie many years ago that presented the possibility of controlling epilepsy through proper diet, based upon research done (if I remember correctly) at Johns-Hopkins University. An elderly medical practitioner who was identified as the one who in fact did oversee the program for a number of years, made the most wonderful summary of this alternative approach: "Win, lose, or draw, I've never met any who were sorry they tried."

I have heard a number of ministerial personnel over the years remark that in dealing with end-of-life issues, people nearly always have much more regret about sins of omission rather than about sins of commission; that is, they regret what they didn't do, more than what they did.

Lest it appear that I am whole-heartedly recommending curiosity, however, please remember that truth is most often to be found somewhere between the extremes rather than within any of them. It is not that we should blindly and boldly follow whatever curiosity we ever experience, nor that we should treat its presence with suspicion and paranoia, but rather that we find within curiosity an invitation to expand our horizons, our experiences, and our possibilities and to make such expansion and empowerment available to the rest of humanity in as wise a manner as possible. Specifically because we never know who may someday build upon what we have done, it is important to create as solid of a potential foundation as possible.

Everything is possible, but the discovery of what everything includes, does not require recklessness—in thought, word, or deed. It may, however, require an openness to viewing each other as collections of undiscovered treasures.

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

On a Personal Note

I guess I set another new record, after weeks of recording, editing, and transferring video, when I ultimately submitted thirty-six new episodes at one time, to the local public access television organization a week or so ago. This does not, however, include episode #255. Specifically because I now put three episodes onto each DVD of episodes I create, #255 cannot be submitted to the local public access television organization until #256 and #257 are created. Nevertheless, for those with Internet access, even episode #255 (a discussion of nudity) can now be viewed through the website, www.YouTube.com/DenverNeVaar.

My doctoral writing is momentarily stalled, awaiting response from a particular professor, but I anticipate resolution of this within the next week.

Specifically because of Colorado's erratic but generally mild winter weather, I have been able to continue riding my motorcycle at least once every two weeks, which has significantly reduced my monthly fuel cost. When it does snow here, it's generally all melted off again within a week or so, but I also try to keep my rides under twenty minutes at a time, if possible, because it really is that cold when traveling at sixty miles per hour.

My Geo Tracker continues to run reliably, thank goodness, although more than six hundred dollars to replace both front wheel bearings, once again makes me thankful that, as my grandmother once said, I have the ability to "stretch a twenty-dollar bill further than anyone else in the family tree." I recall many years ago reading the biblical verse, "I have learned to be content within all circumstances," and I'm thankful that at least in regard to food, clothing, and shelter, that is something I seem to have genuinely learned.

Several other positive developments are in process, but announcements at this time seem premature. Suffice to say that prayers for strength, wisdom, and supportive community around this ministerial work, are very appreciated.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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