

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

It is sometimes exactly the things which we wish to avoid or which are distasteful in some way, which have the most to teach us--if we will just listen and reflect for a moment or two upon their messages, character, and actions. Just as fear is in and of itself a normal healthy human emotion, violence appears within our world also from time to time with insights and truths to communicate. Until these insights and truths have been communicated, the fear or violence cannot go away; once the insights or truths have been communicated, however, the fear or violence generally does in fact go away.

Within this month's brief essays, I hope you will find inspiration toward the maturity and strength necessary for each encounter with fear or violence to ultimately empower you, rather than to weaken or wound you in any way whatsoever. In this way, life and love can again be triumphant.

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

Religious Violence

I was recently confronted by a graduate-level student intent upon converting me to his theology. I was available to serving others' personal and spiritual growth, but it became clear that growth was not his intention, as one ideology after another was presented and then reviled.

From the beginning, his comments about other beliefs had been vicious. He was filled with hatred for religious or spiritual diversity; I was astonished and suggested a larger conception of God than the smallness recommended by human theology. There was no opportunity to suggest a practice of love between people of differing belief.

In the end, my experience was that I had been viciously assaulted by one completely ignorant of my life experience, aptitudes, perspectives, opinions, characteristics, sensitivities, and language. That he would attack me within my own space was outrageous. Nevertheless, I remained committed to unconditional love and divine wisdom, even with

this intolerant person.

In retrospect, I was clearly dealing with a religious extremist and a religious terrorist--one who constructs and maintains a system of theology which uses fear to manipulate while ignoring what fear wishes to communicate.

Communication is exactly what wasn't happening, however, and in the end--like Jesus's cleansing of the temple, during which he physically and violently drove out the self-serving money-changers and vendors--I calmly informed my guest that nothing good was being accomplished and that he must now leave.

Did I give up and in some way fail? I don't think so. I think what happened is that I finally understood that his religious violence--the violence of his intolerance--could no longer be tolerated. What I found equally astonishing afterwards, however, was how easily other Christians were willing to overlook the destructiveness of religious extremism simply because the perpetrator was Christian and not Muslim, Jewish, or something else.

Love and wisdom must prevail if we are to find adequate space and freedom to relate to God, who for unknown reasons chooses to reveal God's self to various persons in very different ways. Yes, I do believe there are as many ways to create a positive and empowering relationship with the Divine as there are people and that God is the only one wise enough to say which way is the best way for which particular individual. Those who claim exclusive right to speak for God are putting God into a box and themselves upon God's throne (which is just another form of idolatry: the substitution of a fraud for the genuineness of the Divine).

If in the stillness of our hearts we can listen for the whispers that guide us toward love and wisdom and act upon those whispers, the God who loves us and is far greater and wiser than human theology will ever be, will joyfully be with us and teach us whatever we need to know.

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Emotional Violence

Many systems of thought, morality, and societal organization have sought to repress emotions, to dismiss them as inconvenient, primitive, or undesirable. Others have venerated their emotions, making them unaccountable to any other concern within their lives (i.e. "I couldn't do that! It would make me unhappy!"). These are the polarized perspectives on emotions, the perspectives that like the north and south poles of the earth define the two extremes. As is the case with the climates of the earth, however, it is very difficult for genuine life to survive at the poles and the majority of life resides somewhere in between, even especially at the equator or mid-point between the extremes.

Similarly, in photography, a polarized picture is one that has been altered so that it is composed of only black and white, all shades of gray having been removed. It is the shades of gray, however, which give depth and form to a photo, allowing it to appear three-dimensional and real rather than flat and perhaps even confusing.

Emotional violence is what happens when one argues with what is, insisting that it should be something else, instead of relating to whatever it is in a loving and wise manner. If, as Elaine de Beauport says within her book The Three Faces of Mind: Developing Your Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Intelligences, emotions are simply the mind's ability or inability to meet its needs, then our emotions are signposts which point to legitimate needs asking to be met. Emotional violence, therefore, is acting upon those emotions in adversarial or destructive ways.

Love and wisdom advocate responding to emotions intelligently. We can use our emotions to learn about our needs, perhaps even discovering thereby in which direction our lives need to go. We need not be victimized by our emotions, but we also need not repress them or label them "wrong." If God is truly wiser than humanity and created us with a capacity for various emotions of varying intensity, they must have possibilities for being very good. As is the case with most other things, however, we're still discovering and learning what those are.

There are many levels and many contexts within which emotional violence can occur. A theology which tells us we can never get angry, disagrees with Jesus's railing upon the self-serving religiosity of the pharisees. A philosophy which

tells us we can never be afraid, disagrees with any basic discernment of possible danger. A sociology which insists that we all feel the same emotion and that the emotion be happiness or contentment, encourages us to lie to ourselves about alternating desirable and undesirable events within our lives.

Losses need to be mourned; when they are not, it is violence. Accomplishments need to be celebrated; when they are not, it is violence. Tears and laughter are tools the mind uses to satisfy certain needs of expression; when they are repressed, it is violence.

On the flip side of emotional violence, however, is emotional life--the empowerment of each memory and experience by a deeper, more integrated, and more holistic presence of our true spiritual selves; our souls. By wisdom and love, we move from violence to being present in whatever happiness, sadness, anticipation, or regret the particular moment or event inspires. Within such experiences, we may find deeper understandings of each other, more empowered commitments to inclusive community, and more passion within our prayers. We may even increase our abilities to love and our abilities to be wise. We may find that when tragedy of any kind strikes, we are less alone than we imagined.

The uncomfortable and enduring truth is that emotional violence is something of which we are all capable and that the only thing standing between ourselves and such intentional or unintentional abuse of each other is our own vigilance. A long-standing witticism regarding interpersonal relationship is that we have two eyes and two ears but only one mouth, recommending that we look and listen at least twice as much as we speak. This is especially true in relating to emotions--our own and those of others too.

Once again we are left with the task of being vigilant, of looking and listening both to what is around us as well as what is within us, to seeing where the healing touch of love and wisdom is most needed. To the extent that we work together and love one another truly, no challenge is insurmountable. I have often heard the lament that God should intervene in human affairs to prevent us from doing evil to one another, but I continue to believe that God has placed the answer within us--that we are God's response to the problems present within our world, if we will just work together in wisdom and in love.

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

Psychological Violence

My comments within this brief essay are not those of a professional psychologist, who I'm sure would have a different and perhaps more clinical definition of what constitutes psychological violence. Nevertheless, there are a number of important things to note, which are perhaps often overlooked but easily within sight.

For perhaps the greater part of human history, the very notion of psychological violence was dismissed. Without any bruises, broken bones, or bleeding, it was difficult to confirm that any violence at all had even happened. Because it is invisible, there are still plenty of people who insist that psychological violence is not real.

None of this, however, is the least bit comforting to those who have been victimized by psychological violence and who may even be striving to define themselves as something other than the results of what happened to them. Such persons may be striving to define themselves as beautiful and creative individuals, yet find themselves responding badly to the recurrence of certain challenges or circumstances. The greater reason for giving some thought to possibilities of psychological violence, however, is that any one of us can become a victim of such invisible destructiveness at any point in time. Once again, all that stands between ourselves and such crippling occurrences is our own loving vigilance.

Sometimes psychological violence is more subtle, defining life or possibility for us in ways that are literally suffocating, locking us into tiny cages of limited experience that leave the light of God within us covered by an oppressive bushel basket. If the violence goes so far as to deprive us of faith in God, of faith in each other, and perhaps even of faith in ourselves, what deeper wounding can there be? I can only pray that the power of love may yet be sufficient to heal even wounds as deep as those.

"Regardless of anyone else's actions, attitudes, appreciation, or lack thereof, what I must answer within every moment is 'What sort of person will I show myself to be?'"

-- Sister Who

Sometimes psychological violence can insist that nothing more exists than what already is, giving life nowhere else to go, no new seeds through which to manifest, and no star beyond the reach of the currently most powerful telescope.

On the other hand, it is specifically because of the psychological violence of tyrants that a deeper appreciation for life and its possibilities has risen to the forefront of many peoples' minds. It is specifically because of the discouragement that some antiquated systems of societal government heap upon their citizenry that new and better laws and revisions are constantly being enacted. It is specifically because we are learning to think in new ways, to speak with new words, and to integrate things we previously imagined to be mutually exclusive, that the world can be considered to be improving.

It is also because timeless principles within traditions of the past are being rediscovered, updated, and effectively implemented, that certain forms of psychological violence are beginning to fade. It is because we are learning to hold certain things more loosely, allowing them to grow and evolve as needed rather than strangling the life out of them by holding them too tightly, that we need not anticipate only a future of mutual annihilation. In those moments when we learn to appropriately love each aspect of the world within which we live, new paradigms take root by which life can indeed go on and leave psychological violence behind.

Conversely, when we begin to understand psychological violence enough to merge it with love and understanding, it may even become a tool by which we do violence to systems of thought, to assumptions, and to conceptions of each other which cannot serve the ongoing nurturance of love and wisdom and the blossoming of beauty.

When we finally remember the time before any obsession with monetary currency, times when we valued each other and collaborated more than competed, and times when people mattered more than possessions, psychological violence will begin to crumble beneath the weight of our love for one another. It will not matter whether there is profit within a particular activity or exchange, but rather whether there is providence--that blessedness that makes every day a beautiful miracle and an interconnected paradise within which every human spirit can thrive.

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

Sacred Violence

There seems to be an ongoing pattern of birth, death, and regeneration throughout the entire created universe which is mostly beyond human comprehension and results in horribly negative and judgmental conclusions, if principles of human reasoning are considered to be all-inclusive requirements. That this pattern is present virtually everywhere suggests that it may actually be in some sense sacred and to therefore be respected, but in a way equal to the divine gift of freedom of choice. We are participants and not merely victims of the larger forces all around us.

Solomon observed that "there is a time for every purpose," up to and including a time for war and a time to die; our times within this life on earth are not infinite.

The sacredness within all of this may be the creation of space and opportunity within which new life can unfold. A forest fire is a terribly violent thing, but certain seeds will not sprout without such an occurrence. Within the world of wild animals, the death of prey within the jaws of a predator is horribly violent and tragic, but necessary to prevent overpopulation. In our meek attempts to understand such occurrences, perhaps it is more important to consider how a creature lived than to obsess about how it died. Even so, the sacred violence of the natural world remains a terribly difficult thing for humanity to comprehend.

Perhaps it is our awareness, however, which has the ability to make all of it sacred. It is because we recognize that a beautiful life has ended and mourn that loss, that the life in question is made to be more valuable than simply the sum of the calendar dates within which it unfolded. By awareness and inspiration, our souls touch upon a timelessness that the mere inhabitation of a physical form cannot begin to fully describe. By the dreams and aspirations of the lives which live, however briefly, the whole of human understanding can be greatly expanded.

Perhaps it is specifically the limitations of physical and temporal forms, against which sacred violence moves. In so doing, the soul and the spirit are invited to stretch new wings and the mind to both remember and envision transcendent beauty which words can never fully describe. May love and wisdom guide us to similar regeneration and expansion of who and what we are.

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

On a Personal Note

It has been a wonderful but confusing month. Spiritually, experiences have been empowering. Emotionally and psychologically, some experiences have been somewhat draining while others have been positively inspiring. Financially, life has been the usual roller-coaster, but it seems that's the experience of many of late. I continue to insist, however, that if we all work together, we will get through whatever challenges confront us. It is our interconnectedness, our love, and our wisdom which are most essential to rediscover during such transitional times as the present one appears to be. Bartering seems to be a skill experiencing revival, inviting a remembrance of skills of meaningful conversation.

With regard to the Metaphysical Fair at the Denver Merchandise Mart which occurred last weekend, within which my portable chapel was a prominent inclusion, the three days were both exhausting and inspiring. It was at times perplexing to certain people that I was there to simply provide a place of peace within the intense turbulence of so many new resources, possibilities, and opportunities. Many helpful conversations occurred, as people took the time to consider symbols and metaphors which could empower their lives with new insight. The energy with which the interior of the chapel was blessed was also significant. One parent even commented that her young daughter was hyperactive everywhere throughout the building, but actually stood in one spot without moving for five whole minutes when they came to the chapel.

Next Saturday, four more episodes of my television series "Sister Who's Perspective" will be created, in collaboration with three special guests. Positive comments continue to filter back to me and one guest recorded in January commented that she was recently recognized by a viewer of one the shows in which she was featured. Clearly, people are watching and the work must go on.

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

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