

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

Irrational Relationship

I receive warnings from well-meaning friends and acquaintances from time to time, against giving my time and energy to those who may seem undeserving, ungrateful, or just plain undesirable--as if every action of my life is supposed to be oriented around self-empowerment or personal benefit in some way or another. Perhaps this is simply the societal pendulum swinging to a reaction against ages of insistence upon giving one's self constantly and completely for the benefit of one's community, regional populace, nation, or humanity in general.

As with most other things, both extremes suggest dangerous consequences. Many of humanity's individual and collective challenges require us to work together, if any significant progress is to be made. No real and enduring progress, however, will come from the meaningless sacrifice of individuals for "the greater good."

Once again, the best solution seems to be an integration of the best insights of all persons concerned, a solution dependent upon effective communication and ongoing dialogue between people of widely varying beliefs and opinions. The one who appears to be my enemy, is usually able to see things about myself and my actions which have somehow escaped my notice. Therefore, it is in my best interests to maintain an ongoing dialogue with those with whom I otherwise disagree.

On a more immediate level, what sense is there in helping people who "just don't seem to get it," who seem to keep revisiting the same relational and economic problems over and over again? Are such people "draining [my] energy" in a way which must be stopped or am I choosing for whatever (possibly irrational) reason to continue giving my best to those who are undeserving, ungrateful, and just plain undesirable?

Have I not been considered by others, at some time (or times) within my life to also be undeserving, ungrateful, and just plain undesirable? Where would any of us be today, if someone were not willing to be patient with our tediously slow processes of personal and spiritual growth? Where

will we be in the future if no one can be found, who is willing to continue to be patient with our sometimes tediously slow processes of personal and spiritual growth?

Yet only those who have waited and worked and remained patient will ever know whether successful progress ultimately came, when (quite unexpectedly) something new and different suddenly bursts into view. A farmer plants, waters, and cultivates fields in anticipation of a future harvest, but the precise pace of growth is never within the farmer's control. Similarly, those we love and strangers who cross our paths each day, will also grow, each at his or her own pace.

Oak trees grow very slowly. Shall we therefore rid the world of oak trees, declaring them to be inadequate producers of what we need? At least with oak trees, we know them to be trees which grow very slowly--so slowly in fact that no movement is immediately detectable. In the case of individual people, it is often impossible to tell whether they are growing at all.

Considering the myriad of differences between one person and another (not to mention the literally billions of other variations), we are unable to accurately predict which "trees" will grow slowly, which will grow quickly, which will grow tall, and which will be shorter but with widely spreading branches.

So perhaps we should simply water ALL the trees and wait patiently to see what each one will become. We might be pleasantly surprised to discover the vast assortment of treasures, which God has carefully hidden within tiny acorns, which are virtually indistinguishable from one another.

We might even be pleasantly surprised to discover a vast assortment of treasures within the tiny acorns which are each one of us.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you,"--an undiscovered kingdom, perhaps, but nevertheless a kingdom.

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

Irrational Education

I have often heard people speak of the "School of Hard-knocks," referring to understandings which have come to them from the survival of difficult events and experiences. I often tease that the most important things I learned in college, were the things I learned outside of any of the classes I attended. As a very self-motivated person, I have learned a vast amount by having established early in life, the practice of always having an interesting book of some kind lying around. I read a few pages in spare moments between all of my other activities until after a few weeks or perhaps a few months, I finish reading the entire book. Life, differences, and distinctions have always fascinated me.

Graduate school and the pursuit of a Master of Arts in Specialized Ministry academic degree have been yet another example of formal education which I chose to undertake, accompanied by the unavoidable education which accompanies confronting new people, situations, and challenges. As much as I learn by attending classes, taking notes, and writing papers, I am learning far more about relationships between diverse individuals and communities.

Is this good or bad? Hm, well, sometimes it hurts. Sometimes it really, really hurts. At other times, new horizons and new possibilities appear and the world is immediately larger and more wonderful than ever before. Sometimes I'm very afraid and don't know why or of what. No matter what I feel, however, I have a deeper knowing that I must continue moving forward, into unfamiliar, uncharted, and frequently unnerving territory.

Within each and every one of the schools mentioned above, has also been the challenge of redefining myself in ever larger ways, to meet the new challenges presented to me. Most of the time, while I'm in the midst of adapting and stretching to meet these new challenges, I don't have a clue about who I am, how to behave, or what to do next--perhaps especially in terms of being Sister Who.

The evening class I was to teach, "Rediscovering Ritual and Making it Personal," was cancelled due to lack of registrants. On Sunday, May 15th, however, only five weeks from now, Sister Who has been given the time reserved for the sermon at Cameron Church in Denver, Colorado, to share insights, metaphors, and comments relevant to a revived internal sense of divine spirit. I am honored and privileged to be thus invited to give a new perspective and appreciation for the

recognition of Pentecost within early Christian history.

Through it all, I continue to prayerfully ask, "What is it that Sister Who is supposed to do next?" It seems completely incorrect to say that Sister Who's ministry is in any sense, coming to a close. Nevertheless, numerous doors which I would imagine to be quite appropriate to Sister Who and ministers whom I (perhaps naively) would expect to understand, continue to remain unaccepting.

Perhaps we never finish growing up. An ongoing task within that challenge is the gradual shrugging off of naiveté in ways which, first, do not reduce us to being cynical and closed-minded and, second, allow us retain a certain hope, faith, and love which empower us to continue to embrace the fullness of life.

The irony which is generally available within nearly every school and church of any description, is that our best education frequently occurs outside of the classroom, our best spiritual growth occurs outside of the church, and the best examples of humanity can often be found in those places in which exemplary conduct is least expected. Once again, I am drawn to the conclusion of the extraterrestrial visitor in the movie, "Starman." "You are at your best when things are at their worst."

If only the reverse were not also frequently true, that we are often at our worst when things are at their best. When we have nearly every reason to behave in the most loving and Christ-like manner, we instead struggle to avoid being false, judgmental, selfish, hurtful, and inconsiderate. I do not like the face I see within my mirror at such times, most especially because I know better than to be such a person. I cannot help but find my attitudes and behavior at such times to be completely irrational, but perhaps it is simply a reminder that my "shadow self" is every bit as available to life as ever.

There will never be a time when remaining a person of good character, when being a light to the world, and when being a channel of divine love, will become an automatic process requiring no further self-evaluation and self-awareness. Being good, being a child of God, requires being both alive and awake, in many ways.

In the final analysis, irrational is perhaps just another way of saying that I'm too close to the situation to understand its present dynamics. It is not, however, a negation of my need to go on being a light to the world, in whatever ways I can.

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

Irrational Community

Living in a metropolitan area as I do at present, the task of commuting through an incomprehensible density of automobile traffic is a common fact of life. I try to maintain a sense of humor, whenever possible. Of late, whenever I see someone driving recklessly, I am apt to remark to myself, "Look, Ma, no brains!" or "Momma didn't raise no rocket scientist, huh?" Does the thirty seconds the person gained by nearly causing a serious accident really make a difference? Have we completely lost awareness of our shared humanity, in this dreadful competition for temporary placements within a wide river of rubber and steel racing from one building to another?

I have always maintained that the world is a shared space, most especially public streets, parks, and commercial venues. As such, we create a much better world for ourselves and everyone else, if we remember to smile and make eye contact, to see others as more than "that ##&@# who got in my way," and to understand others as more than the one who somehow owes us perfect service, in spite of whatever challenges the person may be facing.

No one has to be superhuman. In words I was told years ago, which were attributed to Mother Theresa, "simply come to a situation, see what good you can do, and do it." As phrased by my favorite quotes from the movie, "Christmas Eve," starring Loretta Young and Trevor Howard, "You can't change the world." "That's such a poor excuse for doing nothing."

Yet significant interaction is often difficult and leaves one open for verbal attack from others, which is a very irrational thing to do to someone who is nevertheless in some sense a member of one's community. Regardless, good words still need to be said. Within the community of the graduate school I am currently attending, debates between divergent points of view are common. My observation and participation within such debates has inspired the following list. The ideas are hardly original but perhaps my organization and expression of them will be helpful to someone. Perhaps someone more knowledgeable will refine them further.

The Ten Principles

of Civilized Academic Debate:

1. Always discuss the issue presented, rather than the person who presented it.
2. Maintain mutual respect at all times, so that you can expect to be respected also.

3. In the interest of maintaining open communication and ongoing dialogue, never begin a response by labeling the person or perspective as being "wrong." Instead, ask "Upon what are you basing that statement?"

4. Always assume there is someone present who has good reason for disagreeing with what you are about to say and therefore choose your words very carefully.

5. Remember to thank all participants for their contributions to the discussion and for being willing to participate in an inherently uncomfortable activity in order to pursue a common goal of increased knowledge and understanding.

6. Strive to understand (and if possible to empathize with) adversarial persons and positions so that your own perspectives and understanding may not only be refined but also increase in depth and gentle strength, avoiding any tendency toward arrogance or loveless domination of others.

7. If you are not able to participate in a calm, focused, civilized manner (due to hypersensitivity to the issue, for whatever reason), temporarily excuse yourself from the discussion. Excessive passion interferes with clear and respectful communication. Passion which is able to express itself in a calm, intelligent, and mutually respectful manner, however, allows such exchanges to be effective, productive, and life-enhancing.

8. It is usually not essential that one's own opinions be included within a particular discussion, since no individual debate is ever able to encompass every valuable statement, which could be said regarding any specific issue. Every debate is an ongoing debate.

9. Remember to practice active and effective listening skills, such as clarifying any vague or confusing terms before responding and avoiding the tendency to begin formulating a response before the speaker has finished presenting his or her statement.

10. Defend all participants' rights to speak, to be heard, and to be respected, regardless of how strongly you may disagree with their statements or opinions.

There are many other ways to more concisely present the above list, most concisely of all being simply "love one another." It is not so important which list or phrasing is used, as that some form of this basic approach of mutual respect and non-violence, is in fact put into practice. From such a beginning, we will all wind up winners.

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

Irrational Worlds

A great many problematic things, we may carry with us for years. Perhaps we are not yet ready to deal with them or do not have the circumstances and resources to do otherwise. Beyond a gentle healthy practice of self-nurturing, I trust that things happen when they do for a specific reason and find that forcing them to happen at any other time, is dangerous to any positive outcome.

The farmer waits for Spring before planting. The ice skater waits until the ice is thick before venturing onto the surface of the lake. Every mother waits until the proper moment before giving birth. Any other choice or occurrence invites death. Because we believe in life, we wait.

Because we believe in life, we also act. We speak against wrong-doing, oppression, and deceitfulness. We give to those in need, knowing that at some other point in time the ones in need may be ourselves. We forgive the mistakes, misdeeds, and expressed woundedness of others because we are also in need of such forgiveness. We use our resources and abilities to sustain and develop ourselves as the best servants of life, love, and beauty that we can be, so that we may participate in the healing of all creation.

Love is irrational but also essential, especially to life. Love prompts us to look at things which hurt and do what we can to heal them. Like a badly wounded dog which knows only its own pain and can no longer recognize its loved ones, some people have been so wounded that they snap and growl defensively at all who come near. Love must find a way to heal even them.

The world is badly wounded. Many live in great luxury at the expense of others living in poverty. Many do without while others have more

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offered gently and with love,
may be precisely
the divine 'wake-up call,'
which God wants them to hear."*

-- Sister Who

than they will ever need. There is more than enough food, but it winds up in garbage dumps rather than in the hands of those who are starving.

All of which are generalizations and rarely part of any our individual life experiences. If a hungry person were to knock on my door, I could (assuming I'm not at work or school at the time) go to my kitchen and find something for that person to eat, but how am I to help someone on the other side of the world, if I am also without any money to send to an appropriate organization, to empower that organization to act on my behalf?

What God wants me to do, God will give me the resources and opportunities to do. Demanding of me what I cannot give is a pointless and wounding exercise which completely fails to accomplish anything good. Nevertheless, I remain aware of the rest and take nothing for granted.

The dilemma which remains, is that I must coexist with a world which is poisoning, wounding, and killing itself. Environmentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, the practice of love is all too often displaced by self-interest, ignorance, disconnection, suspicion, and negation.

News flash: collectively, we can change the world, but we must begin with ourselves and must work together to address everything else.

"Love your enemies." We must learn what that means and then we must do it. Time is running out. The world in which we live is on a collision course with global community and according to the sum of our contributions, it can be either the greatest disaster of life on this planet or the final resolution of centuries of struggle. More likely, it will be something in between, as irrational and self-destructive behaviors continue to coexist with ones of love and healing.

For this, I give thanks. As long as we have at least that middle ground, we still have time and opportunity to work towards something better. We still have time and opportunity to be agents of healing and light. We still have time and opportunity to be the exception rather than the rule. We still have time to learn what it is to be children of God.

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

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