

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

All too often, ideas and components of life and the world within which we live are presented to us in an "either...or..." competitive sort of way, rather than as being potentially collaborative. If difficulties were viewed, for example, as equivalent to the gravel along the edge of the road, warning us that our vehicle has veered too far toward one side or the other, we could listen to the difficult voices of our difficulties and steer our vehicle back toward safe passage. Knowing which way to steer, however, requires knowing about the variety of materials of which the entire roadway is constructed.

My hope is that you will find bits of food for thought here, for your particular road of life, no matter how unique yours may be. The common goal we nonetheless share is safe, productive, and joyful passage.

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

Ministerial Specialties

I have often heard it said that "the doctor knows best." Perhaps fifty percent of the time (according to an Australian physician), however, doctors really don't know the cause of their patients' symptoms and are simply making their best guess.

The same could be said of professional ministers, to whom the general public has long turned for insight into relationship with what might be called "Divine Mystery." People come seeking answers and the best the minister can do is address the question from an understanding shaped by a combination of professional training and experience.

The actual complete truths of both the human body and the human soul are still well beyond the reach of current human understanding, especially because there are as many variations of each as there are individual examples. What works for one person, rarely works in exactly the same way for someone else. A competent and trustworthy doctor or minister, therefore, knows either how to adapt the general principle to the specific individual in need or

when to humbly acknowledge that no answer is in fact available.

As one possible answer to this dilemma within ministerial contexts, I offer the following compass. The four basic points equating to north, south, east, and west are four different orientations to ministry that ministers commonly use--and that individual ministers may use at various times, changing from one orientation to another, as circumstances and needs suggest.

The first is a predominant concern for the particular spiritual community being a social organization. In this mode, the concern is for the group being a recognizable social entity of positive influence and presence.

The second is a predominant concern for the presentation or maintenance of a standard or basis of basic morality. In this mode, the concern is for, first, teaching discernment between that which is good and that which is bad and, second, enforcing compliance.

The third is a predominant concern for the maintenance of a religious system; that is, a (generally heirarchical) system of administration concerned for the maintenance of standard beliefs, rituals, behaviors, and organization. In this mode, the concern is for satisfying those of higher rank within the overall administration, cultivating potential future leaders within those of lower rank, and maintaining congruence between the general membership's practices and the communal creeds.

The fourth is a predominant concern for facilitating divine relationship. In this mode the concern is for creating genuinely effective communal and individual practices of prayer, worship, guidance, and spiritually oriented living.

Essential to addressing any of these, of course, is awareness of which need is being experienced and thus which ministerial mode is most likely to be helpful. Remember, however, that while we are seeking the Divine within and around us, the Divine--in all of its frequently perplexing diversity--is also eager to be found.

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

Spiritual Predispositions

I don't know why people perceive things in as many ways as they do, but attempting to force others to perceive things as I do, only leads to frustration. Perhaps if we were meant to perceive everything in exactly the same way, we would all be physical incarnations of a single mind--physically separate but mentally as unified as the Borg humanoids within the world of Star Trek.

We are not, however, mentally interconnected examples of a single Borg mind. Even those groups within human history which seemed to be so, struggled with frequent examples of non-conformists and were unable to sustain themselves very long, because of the enduring presence of human diversity. Within a great many individuals is something mysterious that responds to commands not to deviate, with curiosity that is innocent, persistent, foolish, courageous, and even down-right stubborn.

What I encourage you to consider at this moment, is the predisposition of this curiosity within yourself. Whatever produces a sense of awe, wonder, and reverence, draws us beyond ourselves and provides a much larger universe in which to learn and grow--offering even more love and wisdom than we ever imagined to be available.

For some, the fascination is concerned with how material things fit together or interact. The balance, harmony, and interdependence consistent from a single electron orbiting the nucleus of an atom to the regular circumnavigation of the planet Jupiter (over a thousand times larger than the earth) around the sun, might inspire the most educated scientist on earth to humbly whisper (as if in prayer) the simple word "wow."

For some, the fascination is concerned with invisible influences, the most obvious of which is wind, followed closely by coincidence, probability, synchronicity, and intuition or various kinds of psychic or empathic perception. Divine Mystery whispers knowledge which has no obvious source and is therefore legitimately questioned but only foolishly dismissed, as new possibilities arise.

For some, the fascination is concerned with interpretation and meaning, including linguistic or symbolic translation. Human life experience--past, present, and probably future also--is filled with symbols, sounds, and letters to represent common understandings which are also constantly evolving. With each new experience, still more new symbols, sounds, and letters must be created and

taught, so that internal, external, and societal communication and collaboration can continue. Along with the rest of the spectrum of such experiences, are what some call "experiences of God," which have occurred within any, every, and no particular system of religion or spirituality.

For some, the fascination is concerned with patterns of historical or thematic recurrence--as if contemporary forms of life are simply repeating failures and accomplishments which have been spiraling around humanity for perhaps literally thousands of years. Will we make the same mistakes as others before us when the opportunity arrives to make better choices? Only time will tell.

Why such diversity of predispositions? Specifically because there is so much to see, that none of us could do it all, working all by ourselves. Ideally, each of these predispositions (and a thousand others as well) can be complimentary in relation to the others, allowing everyone to work together as we assemble a giant jigsaw puzzle with literally zillions of pieces. As more and more of the completed picture comes into view, the pace of the work begins to accelerate, but we are still a very long ways from completion. Like a distant horizon, which recedes as we advance, the universe expands with each new valley we cross and ridge we climb.

To see it all, however, will require a positive integration of everything we individually see. We are not more or less special because of whether or not our names are included within history books; we are special because we see what we see. We can take whatever predisposition we may have--tall, short, conservative, liberal, traditional, innovative--and hold it up like a personal telescope to see whatever there is to see.

Like a good telescope, however, the curiosity which predisposes us to look must be supported by a clean and ready lense--whichever one we have found to be individually effective. My telescope may never show you the same things that I see, but this is no evidence that anything I saw was a mere illusion. You may never be able to find the words to describe your perception or experience, but nothing you saw or felt was for that reason any less real.

What remains for us after perceiving and experiencing, is the interweaving of those perceptions and experiences, toward the creation of ever greater and ever more divine humanity.

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

Emotional Availability

Having grown up within a working class environment within which nothing was ever particularly easy, I am from time to time amazed at the inability of those from more equipped circumstances to deal with adversity or to tolerate imperfection. I first noticed this while I was in college, making very temporary friendships with young adults from comfortable suburban communities. While I could see within them an interest in being genuinely compassionate toward others' struggles, I could also see that their understanding of certain problems and of struggle in general, was very superficial at best. Ultimately, even though they wanted to be, they did not have the ability to be genuinely emotionally available.

The same accusation, however, can be made the other way. When I encountered a man who was very concerned about some particular daily reports of investment activity, specifically because such things have never been a part of my life, I had great difficulty generating a genuine emotional response to a report of financial loss. Simply changing the numbers within certain columns of a financial report, didn't seem to me to have had any more actual effect upon life than losing a round of play within a card game.

What is of greatest concern within both situations, is the degree to which we had prepared ourselves to love unconditionally, even when we didn't understand. Included within such preparation is the development of self-discipline, the resolution of fear, the removal of resentments, the dispersion of anger, the establishment of kindness, the embrace of humility, the banishment of narcissism, the dismissal of arrogance, the conditioning of confidence, the displacement of insecurity, the accumulation of knowledge, and the presence of adequate practice. Failure to adequately practice any performance beforehand, is an engraved invitation to anxiety when the moment to appear onstage finally arrives.

*"(Ideally,) inspiration is Divine Spirit
expressing itself within us;
our aspirations are
our expressions of Divine Spirit
toward the world around us."*

-- Sister Who

We are not born with emotional availability any more than (as Leo Buscaglia noted in his book "Love") we are "born knowing how to love." Both of these come from investing time and energy into the non-physical parts of ourselves and of each other. That babies and small children have strong feelings for parents (at least initially) is so common that it is assumed to be universal, but to label this emotional attachment as "love" invites gross misunderstandings within later interactions. The difference between feeling emotional attachment and knowing how to love is comparable to the difference between being able to press down a piano key to make a sound and being able to actually play a tune or perhaps even a complex musical composition.

Effective emotional availability requires understanding and understanding requires genuine communication--which begins with listening. It is by listening that a musician first determines whether or not the instrument is even appropriately tuned. It is by listening that a statesman gains an understanding of the needs, values, and goals of his (or her) constituency. The politician who fails to listen, will fail to understand and will never be able to govern with true effectiveness.

Going even one step further, however, emotional availability is also about finding my way past whatever emotional wounds I have suffered, toward regaining the abilities to forgive and then to once again love even the most undeserving and broken person who has entered my life. With all of the current obsession with drugs to enhance sexual performance, it is disappointing to me that the inability to emotionally, mentally, and spiritually love is not recognized as being a serious problem.

Just to be clear, being able to love emotionally, mentally, and spiritually is not a matter of romantic involvement, but rather of being able to affirm and (as opportunity and resources allow) support the value, existence, and positive development of another's life. Emotional availability identifies one as being ready, willing, and able to participate in such life-oriented collaboration, by which both individuals and communities can not only survive but also thrive.

In thriving as individuals, we create thriving communities. In finding communities emotionally available, especially during difficulties, we can find them to be truly safe places to fully live.

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

Societal Expertise

I recently objected to a allegedly-non-profit organization's failure to demonstrate inclusivity within planning for a fund-raising event and basically had the door slammed in my face. I was informed that if I wanted inclusiveness to occur, I would have to organize and facilitate that inclusion myself, regardless of the fact that the organization's name projects (an obviously false) commitment to inclusiveness. What the administrators failed to understand was that my concern was not primarily for my own inclusion, but rather that a general invitation be made for participation by individuals of whatever description.

The issue within such societal situations is that of responsibility or--to use a more academic term--culpability. If an invitation is made and individuals fail to respond, responsibility for the individuals' exclusion has shifted to the individuals themselves. If the invitation is with-held, responsibility for the exclusion remains with the organizers of the particular event.

Similarly, if a particular societal freedom is available but not utilized, the responsibility for this failure rests upon those who failed to act. If a particular societal freedom is not available, however, the responsibility rests upon those who with-hold that particular societal freedom. If public libraries are available but not utilized, for example, the responsibility for resulting ignorance rests upon the individuals. If, conversely, governmental censorship denies access to truthful information, societal tyranny and oppression exists, even if the expression of that tyranny is not physically violent. Psychological violence (such as dis-empowering censorship) is in fact sometimes more viciously destructive to communities and individuals than any public flogging, guillotine, or firing squad.

Societal expertise, conversely, is about facilitating relationships and distribution of resources in ways that empower individuals and their communities to be inclusive, mutually respectful, compassionate, and demonstrative of principles of justice. All of these can be practiced by both individuals and communities.

It is by practicing such virtues within our daily lives, that we show ourselves to have genuine societal expertise--even if the societal entities with which we must deal, fail to respond with similar expertise.

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

On a Personal Note

This tiny column is so pitifully inadequate to describe events of the past month. Sigh.

As I type this article, I am still reeling from the unexpected death of the best friend I had while fighting my way through my graduate school masters program. Dean was a man of amazing integrity and determination, in spite of abundant legitimate reasons to be otherwise. He never lied about any pain or disability he experienced, but he also neither did he allow these to limit his dreams, his involvement in life, or his positive contribution to the lives of others. He is possibly also the reason I survived my graduate school masters program at all. He was undoubtedly the most dedicated congregational minister I've ever met and I shall miss our deep conversations and his support of this ministry. How tragic that his life ended so prematurely. There is a significant emptiness, in the wake of Dean's departure.

On a different note, circumstances occurred with astonishing speed during the past month, that allowed for the creation of an interfaith work that has been titled "God Space Sanctuary: Nurturing the relationship between human and Divine without dogma or discrimination" (which can be found online at www.GodSpaceSanctuary.org). Non-profit corporate status has already been granted by the State of Colorado. The application for federal tax-exempt and full "501(c)(3)" status is ready, but a new \$400 processing fee must accompany the application. It has been announced, however, that once the responsible people have successfully created a way to submit the form electronically, using the Internet, the fee will drop to half that amount. The question, of course, is how soon that will occur. This work overlaps, but is distinct from that of Sister Who.

In other news, two video production sessions occurred during the past month, generating eleven new episodes to edit. I think I have too much work to do, so I'd best get to it.

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

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