

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #49, July 2003, copyright

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

The Healthy Integration of Potential Failure

I thought for a moment of giving this essay the title, "How Much is Enough" but that seemed too vague to identify the true heart of this essay, even though the core idea is nevertheless somewhat undefinable and very dependent upon its specific context.

Let's start with some metaphorical examples and hope that the idea which they have in common becomes clear.

A safe and secure home is a worthy thing to desire and pursue. If I refuse to accept any possibility of failure, however, I will begin by building a home completely out of stone, to discourage any and all termites from attacking it, and I will equip it with a state-of-the-art security system (surveillance cameras, electric eye triggers for an alarm that sounds locally and also notifies the nearest police station, etc.). But what if there is a power failure due to a winter storm? A ten foot-high fence with dense loops of Constantine wire along the top and woven all through the fence itself should help. But what if a particularly determined thief with a good wire-cutters gets past this? A loaded twelve-gauge shotgun by the front door, locked within a more-or-less indestructible case to which only I have the key, might just be the answer. But suppose I am not able to get to the gun in time? Two or three trained attack dogs might therefore be the next addition to my answer to the problem of home security. And on it would go, perhaps following the same pattern of the so-called international arms race, until there was basically no way in or out and I was a prisoner within my own home, because to leave would make the entire system vulnerable, since I of course could not risk a paid security guard being bribed to let some criminal inside while I was gone.

With regard to a primary relationship (husband/wife, lifepartners, etc.), I could require my "significant other" (what an obnoxious term) to notify me every minute of every day of his or her whereabouts, people spoken to, content of conversations, and what response was given. I could also require precise phrasing of compliments

and look with suspicion upon any statement which did not identify exclusively myself as the exclusive object of significant other's affection. I could also require that I be consistently identified as superior to the entire human race within the perception and life-experience of this person and that they experience no happiness or success which did not somehow include me.

A safe and reliable vehicle is certainly a worthy goal, with respect to satisfying one's needs for transportation. In designing the last word in safety with regard to automobiles, I could begin with bullet-proof glass, a reinforced gas tank able to contain the explosion of whatever fuel it contained in the event of an accident, and reinforced steel bumpers on both ends as well as the sides of the vehicle, strong enough to resist even the most heavy-duty car-crusher. Seatbelts being too subject to failing to protect the occupants during this or that specific type of auto accident, occupants of the vehicle would instead be surrounded by a gelatinous substance, from their toes to the top of their heads (obviously with a breathing mask) which would absorb every conceivable vibration and impact, rendering every conceivable bodily injury a thing of the past.

Can we all agree that these examples are ridiculously excessive? Yet they do somewhat confirm that we must be prepared to some degree or another, to fail from time to time throughout our lives.

In the interest of having friendly relationships within our communities and also of enjoying a certain freedom within our homes, we risk degrees of vulnerability and trust. In the interest of not emotionally, socially, and psychologically suffocating those whom we love, we risk degrees of vulnerability and trust. In the interest of a certain efficiency of fuel consumption and movement, we design vehicles that rely nearly as much on the intelligence of the operator as they do upon their own structural and material components.

What is also at stake here, is the basic

challenge of a feeling of internal security. How do I respond to my home being burglarized, my significant other wanting more freedom or perhaps even to leave me, and my vehicle failing to protect me in the event of a severe auto accident?

The easiest option (is it really easy?) is simply never to own a home or anything else worth stealing, never to fall in love, and never to drive a vehicle anywhere. Yet this leaves us with a drastically minimized experience of life, thereby also limiting the growth of our souls.

We could also get into the negative habit of blaming, which would say that my home being burglarized was the fault of the company monitoring the expensive security system which was installed before I moved in and that they should therefore pay for the replacement of any and all objects stolen; that my significant other is responsible for my worries about fidelity as well as any actual violation of my expectations; and that the auto manufacturer should pay all of my medical bills because they failed to design a car which would completely protect me.

Certainly everyone is free to make whatever choices seem to individually best serve them. Because I choose to live life to the fullest, however, I risk having my heart broken every time I fall in love, I risk having things stolen from me by accepting ownership and responsibility for valuable things, and I risk auto accidents by driving to all sorts of places nearly every day of my life.

Because it is much more terrible to me to risk never knowing love at all, I choose to love and in that broken-heartedness is a very common experience within human life on earth, I choose to learn ways to heal more quickly each time, specifically so that I can return to the experience of love in some way at some future time.

Because it is much more terrible to me to risk never having a sense of home and of being part of a community, I choose to "build a nest" for myself from which to make my positive contribution to my immediate surroundings and if I cannot build it within one place, I will find another where I can.

Because it is much more terrible to me to risk never moving outside of my own tiny circle of immediate experience and remaining completely ignorant and unequipped to deal with the larger world in which I live, I use my vehicles to travel not only to department stores, grocery stores, and government administrative buildings, but also to distant mountaintops, back-country hiking trails,

friends' homes, educational conferences, historical sites, and natural wonders such as the Grand Canyon.

If I ask my government, my lover, my vehicle's manufacturer, or my community to provide my sense of internal security, I am asking them for something they cannot give. Ultimately, life is lived at one's own risk or not at all. We can tremble in fear of it and avoid its every unpleasantness, or we can move forward even if we are afraid, to search out and to actually grasp, greater things than we have so far known.

If we find ourselves injured in any way along the way, we empower ourselves by learning to heal more quickly and we limit ourselves by deciding too quickly to avoid any possibility of "that" ever happening again.

Even as we realize that "life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need," we also realize that the more we learn to do for ourselves, the less trapped we will be in desperate circumstances, if for whatever reason no one else is available to help us.

The healthy integration of potential failure is the recognition that ultimately life relies on a sort of faith or trust in things we cannot control, as well as upon the most universal and fundamental divine building block within the foundation of all that is-- unconditional love, always giving my best to every person and situation, with "no strings attached."

I do not require that someone else's happiness includes me, because I may not ultimately be what the other person needs, no matter how drawn to me he or she may be. I do not require that my community's greatest happiness and accomplishment include me, because I may not ultimately be what my community needs, no matter how aware I am of how my contributions could in fact benefit the community in which I live.

In both cases and many others as well, I remain willing to be guided, to be reassigned by the Divine, to a new area in which new experiences and ever greater blessings of life may occur--and if failure ultimately occurs in spite of all of my best efforts, I will strive to accept it gracefully and draw the greatest blessing from it, because even death is ultimately as much a part of life as birth is, and therefore not to be avoided when the time has (without any help from myself), in fact, come.

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

Identities and Detours

I have heard from various sources over the years, the idea that true identity originates from within and is most easily identified by becoming conscious of what motivates and inspires. The path to conscious self-identity therefore, begins with conscious self-awareness; taking the time to notice what I am feeling, what and why I believe what I do, and how and why I respond to specific situations.

If you wake up in the morning with a song running through your mind, if singing brings you more joy and peace than any other activity, and if you deeply feel every musical lyric which passes your lips, then you are a singer whether the world is ever willing to recognize you as such or not.

If you wake up in the morning with mechanical ideas running through your mind, if tinkering with a combustion engine brings you more joy and peace than any other activity, and if you have an empathic sensitivity toward oil and metal parts and their interaction, then you are a mechanical engineer of some sort, whether the world is ever willing to recognize you as such or not.

I could offer endless other examples, but the pattern would be the same. All such examples point to the perhaps unexplainable but persistent yearnings of each individual person's heart and mind, which I believe were put there by the Divine and deserve to be heard and actively nurtured. It is imperative that we teach ourselves to heed rather than silence these internal voices, that we do not repress or even kill the individually unique vision and great purpose each of us was born to fulfill.

*"The smallness
of the present moment
screams for attention
and brings great fear
and agitation.*

*The vastness of
the bigger picture, mystery,
and reality of Life
whispers
and brings great peace, power,
and Divine presence."*

--- Sister Who

The world of humanity, conversely, may offer or even seek to impose upon us, many different masks which may or may not be consistent with who we truly are. Intentions may be admirable, but the specific recommendation we individually receive may be nevertheless inappropriate. To cite a time-worn phrase, "the road to hell is often paved with good intentions."

A woman may be identified as being someone's wife, someone's lover, someone's mother, or someone's secretarial assistant, but she may also find that her heart yearns to follow in the footsteps of Madame Curie or Susan B. Anthony or Princess Diana. If she does not follow the guidance of her heart, the world will be impoverished (though it may be quite unaware of what it missed). A woman may also find that her heart yearns to be the one who nurtures the next generation's leaders. That too can be a divine calling, but it is not for anyone but God and the specific woman in question to say which it is.

A man may be identified as being someone's husband, someone's boyfriend, someone's father, or someone's administrative supervisor, but he may also find that his heart yearns to follow in the footsteps of Martin Luther, William Shakespeare, Amadeus Mozart, Christopher Columbus, Galileo, or Leonardo da Vinci. If he does not follow the guidance of his heart, the world will be impoverished (though it may be quite unaware of what it missed). A man may also find that his heart yearns to be the one who provides a reliable and quality service for others such as auto repair. That too can be a divine calling, but it is not for anyone but God and the specific man in question to say which it is.

Defining one's self is a daunting task, however, and it is at least understandable that some would ask others and the world around them to do the job for them. It is a task which requires sometimes painful self-examination and reflection, as well as a commitment to being proactive concerning each discovery and insight which is gained. It is certainly much easier to allow one's self to be defined by one's employer, the person to whom one is attracted, or the town in which one lives.

To do so, however, would leave the divine treasures hidden within the particular person's heart, completely undiscovered and unexpressed. The problems and challenges which the Divine created this person to resolve, would remain unresolved. To phrase it another way, when we leave the world a better place than we found it, it is

the Divine working through us, often in ways of which we were quite unaware at the time.

To serve such a work effectively, however, requires that we listen, that we look, and that we act upon whatever we learn, all the while remaining attentive to any other insight or discovery or circumstance which could further individually and collectively empower us. It requires that even when we are afraid, we continue to move forward; that even when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable, we do what we know to be the right thing to do; and that when we want to know who we are, we give to our own heart and mind (which is the kingdom of the divine), the final authoritative word on the subject.

Ultimately, as with the final statement of the novel I wrote and published a number of years ago, entitled Troll Steps, we reach a point of being able in response to the question, "Who are you?", to say with the story's central character, "I am myself...I am myself" and to know and understand within that moment and after the many diverse detours of life's unfolding, exactly what that statement means.

Metaphorically, I have often felt during the last month that I am walking a circus tightrope in complete darkness, not knowing whether there is even a safety net below me or how far below me the ground is.

I have spent perhaps thousands of hours agonizing over each step, knowing that just as for a circus trapeze artist a wrong step may be fatal, a wrong step at this point in my life could be fatal to the unfolding of some important future aspect of my creative contribution to the people of the world, individually and collectively.

Whether or not I have made the right

choices, will perhaps not be clear for many years to come. Nevertheless, as the page of my calendar for the month which has just passed declared, "There are a hundred ways you may choose to tell the story. How you tell the story is not nearly so important as that you do, in fact, tell the story (or sing the song or dance the dance or...)."

From another perspective, we are living the stories that others in the future will tell. Let us therefore give them something worth telling, whether we make the best choices or not (as judged by ourselves and others in retrospect).

Perhaps this is again an aspect of faith, that we walk hand in hand with the Divine, never knowing if we're getting it right or not, but also knowing that doing the right thing sometimes means doing things that don't necessarily make sense at the time.

Perhaps faith is simply that we do not let go of the hand of the Divine, simply because we're afraid or unable to understand why the Divine has chosen to act or guide in the way that it has. I disagree that faith is blind or naive, but I also know from experience that faith does not always allow us the perspective which would calm our nerves and give us confidence--for that, we may have to rely on each other instead.

Let us therefore be each others' prayer warriors, each others' guardian angels, and each others' comrades in every sense of the word, as together we dare the both exciting and perilous winding way which is the unfolding of life.

Blessings, love, and peace to each and every one of you, now and always; and may one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

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--S.W.