

# SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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## Overview

When I first encountered Neo-pagan forms of spirituality many years ago, a common idea was the integration of opposites. Consciously investing the dynamic of intention was equally prominent. Viewing apparent opposites as designed to create growth, therefore, may make sense, but has never been easy to do.

## When Duplicity is Not Hypocrisy

I'm not sure who said it first, but I still chuckle at the thought of someone exclaiming, "Eureka! I've found my life's purpose!", only to hear the reply, "You poor thing... you have only one?" In finally diagnosed and thereafter reading and hearing a diversity of experiences, observations and opinions about autism--which is why it is described as a spectrum--among the few elements that seems to be much more common is difficulty in understanding and relating to duplicity (which may be why a woman once described me as "compulsively honest"). Yet what appears to be duplicity, I discovered, is sometimes merely an indication that what is being viewed, can be understood from more than one perspective.

All too often, the understanding that is most pervasive, is that the perspectives one does not see, do not exist. Consequently, because those points of view are based on alternative understandings that are unknown by others, they might be perceived as being in some way dishonest or delusional, when they actually maintain a unique example of integrity. This is why engaging in dialogue that is both open and honest, posing clarifying questions, and truly listening without judgment are so important.

True hypocrisy is saying one thing and then acting in ways that deny the integrity of those words. Within Christian theology, this is the sin that Jesus considered the most destructive of all and addressed far more than any other, but which I was astonished to note while earning my Masters degree in Theological Studies, was

conspicuously absent throughout that school's curriculum. An entire course on the subject could have been designed to initiate discussion of hypocrisy's definition, diverse examples, and both recommendable and well-intentioned but ineffective responses.

To the best of my knowledge, no such educational attempt has ever been made. That such discussion would be invaluable to the education and training of professional ministers seems a little too obvious. It may be, however, that the reason hypocrisy is not addressed, is specifically because of how pervasive it is and of how uncomfortable such discussion would therefore be likely to be.

I persist in my belief, however, that genuine ministry is not primarily concerned with creating feelings of comfort and blissfulness, but rather with helping individuals to grow. Sometimes comfort needs to be the first step, especially for those who are in any way suffering, but as much as compassion may be the first step, it should never be the last. I've lost count of the number of times I've mentioned the following words and I don't mean to persist in repeating myself, but it remains as true as always that, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good to do nothing."

A very significant challenge that intruded upon my life within the past month, has been negligent dog ownership by certain individuals, that has created dangerous conditions on the street on which I live. It remains to be seen, however, whether the general communal response will be to overlook the danger and do nothing, or to collectively require more civilized and responsible behavior. Having already experienced an incident in which my service dog was viciously attacked by an uncontrolled animal specifically trained for dog-fighting, this is obviously a very intense concern for me.

Those who wish to think of themselves and their community as basically good, cannot do so legitimately, while doing nothing about this.

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

## When Giving is Not Generosity

From one perspective, I maintain that being a healthy individual means understanding that the world is a shared space and that symbiotic relationships are consequently essential. At the same time, however, those relationships need to be based upon clear understandings and honest communication rather than any sort of presumption--no matter how well-intentioned and uninformed action may be. Far too much of current US-American societal structures is oriented to generalized, "one-size-fits-all" responses to problems, that do not take the time to investigate relevant variables.

In spite of living in a form of poverty, for example, I tend to shy away from requesting or receiving food from "Food Banks," specifically because what I typically receive from such, is mostly items I cannot use. I don't have dietary needs that are particularly limited by allergies, but my experience of autism includes that I am unable to adequately interpret food preparation to use a kitchen stove. I also need routines that are predictable and reliable, so receiving a different combination of unfamiliar items each time a distribution is handed to me, makes my already challenging life even more so.

So I buy the same groceries each month (that include either items which do not need to be cooked or that can be prepared using precise numbers within a microwave oven) and find a reassuring familiarity in knowing what I will have for supper, because it's always the same thing. The only other restrictions to note, for anyone who's interested, is that my diet is bland because I never adapted to anything "hotter" than a bell pepper and I avoid foods that look like animals because I empathize too much with what it used to be.

Nonetheless, I often encounter individuals who seem to think I should be more like them instead of more like myself, who seem to be uninterested in taking the time to learn what my actual needs are. On one hand, I commend them for wanting to do something to help, but it does no good to give a pair of shoes to someone who has none, without first learning what size the individual wears and what sort of shoes would most empower daily life. There is no inherent value in any specific style of shoe; nothing that makes one better or worse than

another, except in relation to the activity or context within which the particular shoe is to be worn (e.g. athletic shoes for related activities, dress shoes for formal occasions, and so forth).

Another peculiarity I've encountered, are individuals who wish to be respected by others as being generous, without ever giving anything away. Considering my compulsive honesty, I'm not at all certain I would want others to think that I am something that in actuality I'm not. I might thereafter be expected to provide a resource or service I cannot.

Sometimes others seem to metaphorically "place me on a pedestal," which is a step beyond admiration that unavoidably includes various expectations--which at some point, being human and in spite of my best efforts, I am likely to disappoint. There's not much room on top of any pedestal, so any life experience there is inherently very limited. An added consideration of associated expectations is that--intentionally or unintentionally--it creates forms and degrees of manipulation that are usually unconcerned about individual integrity.

I need to free to make my own decisions--not because I'm selfish or narcissistic, but because within each moment of my life I must integrate a greater number of variables than anyone else is able to see. Ultimately, true giving is consequently inseparable from honest dialogue; from both listening and willing to be open about one's own perceptions and past experiences. On many occasions, I actually find that my thoughts and conclusions are better, when dialogue is unrestricted and more than merely my own understandings work to solve a particular problem.

Sometimes, I volunteer to help, but there really is nothing I can offer to meet the specific needs of the particular individual--although sometimes I can introduce them to someone else who *is* specifically able to help. This can be a way of creating community and laying a foundation for ongoing future relationship. It's not a new idea, but seems relevant at this point to mention, that any kindness done today could be the seed of a future solution.

True generosity, in any case, allows both persons the freedom to decline and provides space for individual integrity in diverse forms.

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

## When Being Nice is Not Loving

I sometimes joke that within the Midwestern societal environment of my childhood, "the eleventh commandment" (after the Ten Commandments of the Christian Bible), was to be polite at all costs--including at the cost of honesty. An enormous amount of interpersonal behavior was consequently more concerned with a sense of duty to satisfy and maintain a societal pattern that in many ways was actually damaging to personal and communal health. I have no feelings of ill will toward the parents who ultimately rejected me, but in discussing that relationship with someone recently, it finally occurred to me that without the pressure of the Midwestern societal norm, I'm not sure either of them would have ever chosen to have children at all; parenting never seemed to be something they actually wanted to do.

In a more agitated recent conversation, I confided that if my Roman Catholic mother had known for an absolute fact that she would give birth to a gay man, she might have chosen to have an abortion. I wasn't trying to exaggerate but rather to communicate how emphatic and extreme her rejection of me was. Yet it was all very hidden from public scrutiny, because none of my parents' rejection of me would have been considered "nice."

If that was their choice, however, the most respectful response I felt I could offer, was to stay away. I think I have sufficiently worked through this shift in relationship, however, that I don't usually feel bitter or angry as much as I strive to focus on the present and future. In a way, I suppose I have moved beyond the need to feel anything at all, in this area.

Is that nice or nasty, good or bad, or sad or happy? As has often been said, "it is what it is," but more important is investing time and energy in what I am and wish to become. As much as "nice" may not always equal "loving," the latter is clearly more important.

Love is not only inherent within every act of

*"Each person  
is more multi-dimensional  
than is ever apparent."*

*– Sister Who*

healing, but is also the power that brings all other powers into harmony. Nonetheless, there are times when loving someone points away from being nice. One example was the time I was teaching someone to ski and realized that the longer I stood there giving instructions and explanations, the longer she would sit in the snow merely listening without taking any action --so I explained myself and skied away (still watching from a distance while hidden).

All that being said, being loving and honest does not mean making no attempt to be tactful and sensitive in one's choice of words. The fundamental purpose of words and language is communication, which first requires that one have something to say and then recognizes that a myriad of ways are available to transfer the particular understanding from one mind to another. Specifically because of how laden with implications and multi-dimensional understanding words are, development of vocabulary and expression are life-long tasks for every human being.

If one does take the time to at least minimally understand those with whom one is speaking, however, the ability to be nice at all is severely compromised. Where this becomes a bit complicated for writers and artists, however, is in recognizing that those who will appreciate one's work, may be those who have not yet been born, with whom one cannot therefore have an effective dialogue. As lame as it may sound, this is where I feel compelled to "trust intuition," which at least for me is similar to notions of divine guidance.

Others might suggest a belief in the "collective unconscious" or invisible psychic energies. It could also be the spiritual reality of love, which defies complete explanation, is often unpredictable, and yet persists in being essential to all that is most beautiful and meaningful throughout life and the world within which we all live. Regardless, it is something one must trust if one wishes to participate in life in any way or to any degree whatsoever.

Among the final words of my spiritual godmother, Sister X, was the simple statement that "Love is all there is." Compromising love in order to be nice, diminishes faith and hope as well, but love can still arrive beautifully dressed.

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

## When Avoiding Conflict Brings Trouble

Considering how the action of birth is so fundamental and universal to forms of life, it is amazing that a single common element would have so many diverse metaphors and lessons hidden within it as well. Among them are the challenges of acknowledging both stability and change; of being both active and passive; and of being both an experience that all living things share while simultaneously being absolutely individual and unique within its occurrence.

A distinction also needs to be made of those times when conflict approaches and is avoided, in contrast to those times when dysfunctions create problems that otherwise would not exist.

Uniqueness is not a dysfunction, however, but rather potentially an inherent strength. New possibilities arrive with each new life that enters this world, but equally new responsibilities, requirements, and perspectives. For perhaps nine months, change and development needs to happen within an adequate, appropriate, and precisely balanced environment--then the moment arrives, often with little notice, when all of that must be left behind and avoiding the conflict between transitioning from the familiar to the unfamiliar, would prove life-threatening.

Yet life is filled with such transitions, but the intensity and multi-dimensional reality is too often overlooked. When I finished high school, college, masters-level graduate education, and within all of the geographical shifts my life has included, there was once again nowhere to go except forward. As with the metaphor of birth, however, the experience is far more equipped to be constructive and positive if communal support and involvement is available.

The contemporary world is in many ways pointed in the opposite direction, in ways which only serve a corporate, capitalistic mind-set. It is thus very legitimate to ask, whether humanity will survive its own societal constructions--which subtly sabotage the love and inclusivity, essential to every genuinely good moment that history encompasses. As hard as I've tried, I cannot think of a single recorded event that was genuinely good in isolation; all of them were defined by relationships. Love is thus most essential of all, without which we perish.

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

## On a Personal Note

I was encouraged during my first decades to view life as a story that ideally would follow a particular progression. Yet no instruction was offered, of what to do if that progression failed to occur. Perhaps no one knew.

A central challenge of my life, therefore, has been to persevere through inordinate amounts of uncertainty and unavoidable discovery that existing systems and resources were not able to address the particular challenges my life has included. On more occasions than I can count, the prevailing question seemed to be, "Why can't you be more normal?!" Yet the more times I was asked to deny the truth within me and be more like everyone else, the less ability I could find within myself to do so.

So I ponder pretty much every day, what the bizarre combination of experiences and resources I've known, will collectively create. I find myself again and again challenged by the awareness that human beings are inherently creatures of time--unable to stagnate within good memories to prevent them from fading into the past and equally unable to find anything within the stream of passing moments and faces to explain why momentary suffering is so necessary. I'm reminded of the mantra of the literary and cinematic character, Nanny McPhee, "When you need me but don't want me, I must stay; when you want me but no longer need me, I must go."

It seems that I am often the unwanted who has an important job to do. So I strive to do it.

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

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