

Dear friends and family, Hope you are all well and enjoying the weekend. Happy Valentine's day. Hope your life is filled with love, peace and joy. Certainly if there is love in the heart the rest follows!

Here in Washington we are experiencing the coldest days of the year so far. But the sun is shining and there is not two feet of snow on the streets, so it is not too bad. We are staying home with Prashant. He is developing into quite a character. I cannot still believe how much he has grown in just eight months. He has kept us busy for sure, but no complaints.

One of the bad habits I have developed during the sleep-deprived, scatter-brained state of the past several months is to read and watch a lot of politics. Now that he is sleeping better I will probably do less of it but you will see a lot of political thoughts in this message. Hope you find them useful rather than annoying. Politics is certainly painful sometimes but much does hang in the balance in November.

I have also been reading our good friend Susan's "The Beauty of What Remains", a deeply honest, humbling as well as inspiring book about her search for her father's life story and her efforts to bring his broken family together.

Grateful for your friendship and looking forward to seeing you and hearing from you,

Sankar

PS: More about life here on my blog. Also I have uploaded more pictures on flickr. Both can be reached through nature-lover.net. To see Prashant pictures you need to be sign up for flickr (free) and I will have to add you as a friend.

Random Thoughts (111)

2/14/2016

1. (12/18) I spent a lot of time learning about the transitory nature of life and trying to understand what is real. Now that I have a family that I love very much, I wish life were not so fragile! Not so much for myself but so that I can be there for them.

2. (12/18) Malls are built to confuse and frustrate men. They scramble our brain's gps system (see article below). Tyson's corner is one of the more confusing ones. People kept checking with the directories and mall maps. Probably built before the time of the pedestrian friendly town center style malls. I got lost in the big box buildings and the highways surrounding it. At least glad wasn't driving!

3. (12/17) A TRIBUTE TO AMERICAN WOMEN
(My Indian sisters, know that I love and admire you all, very much! I am talking about America here, that is all)

White, black, yellow or brown, American women are assertive and passionate about justice and fairness. I don't think it would be an understatement to say that they have been the engine behind whatever progress has been made in the US in social justice, environmental protection and reducing inequality.

4. (12/25) After the San Bernardino attacks we were all a little more anxious. I have experienced a bit of that anxiety when I was living in Columbia Heights, before it became so gentrified. When living there I often wondered what it would be like, to live in a place where deadly gunbattles happen all the time and bombs and missiles can rain down from the sky randomly, destroying everything you have. It would make one very desperate indeed, and act in irrational and destructive ways. It is easy to be peaceful and calm when life is secure. Could one be mindful and non-violent under these circumstances? Certainly. But no one should be expected to.

5. (12/25) I was reading an interview with Elon Musk, founder of Tesla as well as SpaceX, the private spaceship company. (You can read it here: [Elon Musk puts his case for a multi-planet civilisation — Ross Andersen — Aeon Essays](#)). He talks about finding people who would be willing to take a one way trip to Mars in order to build a colony there, similar to the pioneers who settled America. Regardless of what we now know about the atrocities committed against the Native Americans, if you

put yourself in the shoes of the pioneers you realize that it was, in many ways, a rather courageous voyage. They left behind everything they knew and their entire life up to that point and moved to an unknown land to start a new life.



Elon Musk puts his case for a multi-plan
civilisation ...

Elon Musk argues that we must put a million people on
to ensure that humanity has a future

6. (2/7/2016) To Bern or Not To Bern....that is the question facing many Democrats. I love Bernie, and even if his plans may sound farfetched, I would like him to try. I wouldn't be upset if Hillary were elected, either. But I do not want there to be even a 1% chance that a Republican becomes President. All of them will undo the progress made in the last 7 years, especially the candidates not named Kasich. The big question for me is, Is Bernie more electable than Hillary? Will his popularity and populism overcome the attacks that are sure to start if he becomes the nominee? Will moderate Democrats and independents be more inclined to support Hillary in big numbers? I am not convinced by his answers to these questions yet. Hopefully there will be better research done on them so that we can make an informed decision.

7. (2/8/2016) I have made a sort of playpen for Prashant by arranging boxes around a room. They are tall enough to prevent him from climbing over them but not too tall that it feels like a wall trapping him. In other words, it creates an illusion of freedom of movement, at least more so than his crib and his other, store bought playpen. It reminded me that all of us live in a sort of illusory world of freedom. Politically and socially, we have freedom, but they are limited by how much money or influence we have. No matter what the system, the dominant members of society will always create a world according to their ideas and expect others to follow. In life itself we think we are free but are in fact trapped by our inherent habits, tendencies and desires arising from our nature and nurture.

8. (2/13/2016) There is much group-think and thought-policing going on during this democratic primary cycle. People are getting emotionally attached to a particular candidate or approach. It is good to be clear-eyed about the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. I like Bernie Sanders for his integrity and passion and speaking out on behalf of the weaker parts of society but I do not think that Hillary is a monster who is completely beholden to corporate interests. If we really want a democracy we need to be able to see the viewpoint of other democrats, let alone people who are not democrats. Saying that you are a corporate stooge if you

criticize Sanders or that you are letting down women if you don't support Hillary is not helpful.

Having said that, here are some issues I have with both of them. With Bernie he has not made a convincing argument that he can win a general election or that his plans are workable. Now, if Cruz or Trump or even Bush is the Republican nominee, it may become much easier for him to win and thus make this issue irrelevant. And that is looking more likely, but still it is not something we can take our chances on. As for his plans, he makes a great case as to why we need universal healthcare and free college etc., and he also makes a good argument about the need for a mass movement. But he has not been convincing about the way he will pay for it or what plans he has to expand his movement beyond liberals. His argument is, more or less, "Trust me, it is all going to work out." If it is true, as it appears, that many working class Reagan-democrats will support Sanders, what concrete plans has he made to reach out to them? Maybe he does but I haven't heard of it? Will they still stand with him after the Republican propaganda machine has gone on all cylinders against him, calling him a communist and worse? People need a better argument even before they can take a candidate seriously.

Hillary definitely has the experience needed and has shown that she has the capacity to run a good campaign, fight through tremendous difficulties and have the intelligence and capacity to deal with complex issues. But she needs to be more open and less

calculating. Her attacks on Bernie have been somewhat oblique, although she seems to be learning and changing as the campaign proceeds. I think she can make a good argument that she has thought through the issues better and has the experience to get things done. She does not need to attack Bernie on his support for Obama or say that he will dismantle Obamacare, although it is a legitimate question as to how he is going to implement medicare for all.

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humble for you are made of Earth. Be noble for you are made of stars. -Serbian proverb