

Dear friends, Hope you are all well and enjoying the thanksgiving vacation. Last time I wrote it was in late summer. It seems like a world ago. Since then I have been working on my research, teaching, trained for and ran in the Marine Corps Marathon to celebrate my fiftieth (which happens today), volunteered for Hillary and mourned the results of the election with many of you. I have a few thoughts about it below but in general I am staying away from the news and trying to focus on enjoying life as it is happening every moment, and trying to love everyone around me. I have faith in our ability to get through this and emerge even stronger, because as they say in the Upanishads "Satyameva Jayate" -- Only Truth will Triumph. I am grateful that in the journey of life I have the company of some good friends who are committed to truth and fairness.

During this time I have also mourned the loss of some dear friends and relatives, making me more aware of the ephemeral nature of existence. In a way dealing with death made it a bit easier for me to deal with the results of the election. There are things beyond our everyday life that we don't see because our mind is so caught up in worries. It makes me appreciate even more the importance of loving everyone, starting with friends and family.

You can read more in my blog. I have also posted pictures from the marathon and the Parks half-marathon on my flickr page. Both can be reached through <http://nature-lover.net>

Yours, Sankar

Random Thoughts (113)
25 November 2016

1. (8/7) I can say with confidence that this summer is the first time in my life I have been able to devote so much time and concentrate so well on my research. Although I have not written up a paper yet I feel satisfied with the progress I have made and all the new concepts that I have learnt and understood. Mathematics is truly a garden of enchantment and I can see how certain people get lost in it and spend pretty much all their waking moments happily wandering around among its beautiful flowers.
2. (9/25) I attended my beloved colleague Ralph Turner's funeral service in Upper Marlboro in Prince George's county last Saturday. The service was beautiful and it was clear that his family were relieved that he has been spared more misery. Yet seeing his mortal remains were a shock to me, a sudden jolt to the consciousness. I felt strongly that he was not in that body, and that his spirit is still with us, living in all of us. Yet it was also a reminder of how evanescent life is, just a momentary ripple in the cosmic lake appearing with a gentle breeze and just as quickly disappearing. For several days last week I could not shake off that scene with his body and the feeling of the impermanence or rather the illusory nature of life. As Krishna says in the Gita, "the Atma takes up the body and then sheds it just as a human puts on a dress and then discards it." Whether you believe in the existence of something called Atma or not, sooner or later you come to the realization that this body is merely a vehicle for something higher, as momentary a form as a passing cloud.
3. (10/9) Training for the marathon gave me a great feeling of achievement in that I was able to overcome my own limitations and push myself further. Now I understand a little bit better what drives people, especially athletes, to try to achieve more and more ambitious goals. Maybe for some people it is a sense of superiority but more and more I think for most people it is about going beyond their own limitations. In a way, it seems, we are constantly trying to break free of our human condition. For me in particular running is helping me to change my own mental habits especially when it comes to keeping a calm and balanced mind during difficult times. I think I am getting a little bit better at it.
4. (11/14) America is like an adolescent that is never satisfied. It keeps running at 100 mph and then it crashes and then after brief period of sobriety starts going crazy again.
5. (11/16) Every moment I do not live in my own thoughts and feelings but rather with love for everything is a moment that I am in touch with God.

6. (11/20) The election brought out a lot of negative feelings. I felt like in this election we have already lost quite a bit simply by choosing this person of such deficient character and temperament. I had always believed that Americans would be fair and err on the side of caution and in the end stand with truth, justice and human decency. I had always thought of America as a place that was welcoming to immigrants and refugees. How could they elect someone after everything that person had done during his life and especially during the election? How could they reject a person who had worked all her life for the betterment of children and women in favor of someone who had spent his life enriching himself? Sure, she is a politician and not a saint, but it is such a tragedy that people had bought into this evil monster version of her and she is the one they considered untrustworthy and power hungry.

But one has rise above such feelings and move on. One has to wish the best for the President-elect for the sake of the country and also pray for God to guide him in the right direction. One thing became clear to me, though, is that politics as usual is a lost cause. This whole feedback loop of demonization and constant confrontation that is pursued by both sides has contributed to this state of affairs where each side believes in the worst caricature of the other. The only way to break out of this is for each of us to look in our own hearts and see how we can be more loving of each other. Hopefully that would change other people and only when people change can our politics change. It is difficult but little by little I am learning to nourish the seeds of love in me and not the thoughts and feelings arising from anger, despair and ego. I am trying, one moment and one person at a time, to only see the best in them. In a way, actually, I am going back to the person I was in my younger days when I was less involved with the affairs of the world, when I spent more time with nature and I was less aware of the shortcomings of people. Ultimately, though, one has to see that everything in this world, the good, the bad and even the very ugly, is all part of one beautiful cosmic dance.

7. (11/24) I watched the episode titled "The Pilgrims" in the PBS series "American Experience." Very inspiring and balanced, in terms of showing different perspectives on that time period. While saddened by the loss suffered by native Americans, I was heartened by the fact that not all of the settlers were hostile to them. At least in the beginning, through necessity and partly because of their moral principles the Pilgrims co-existed with the Wampanong people. What was inspiring was that they made it through persecution, exile, hunger, disease and war through sheer determination and faith in their cause: to create a community committed to each other and to God. With faith in our cause and each other, we can make it through this time of crisis in American society.

Related to this is the following passage from an opinion piece by David Brooks: "During the wars with the Indians, many European settlers were taken prisoner and held within Indian tribes. After a while, they had plenty of chances to escape and return, and yet they did not. In fact, when they were "rescued," they fled and hid from their rescuers.... I first read about this history several months ago in Sebastian Junger's excellent book "Tribe." It has haunted me since. It raises the possibility that our culture is built on some fundamental error about what makes people happy and fulfilled."

8. This is a period of transition: From a patriarchal authority based society with an industrial economy dependent on artificial products harmful to the environment to a more diverse co-operative society with an information economy that lives sustainably in harmony with nature. Transitions are always messy but it is inevitable and we have no choice but to make this. While it may seem like we have moved backwards just now this is the nature of progress in the real world. It is not always easy or smooth. We will be the better for it when this transition phase passes.