

Dear friends, Hope all are well! It has been a while since I wrote this. Life has been quite busy with preparations for the arrival of our son. Any day now I will be writing you about how that feels but for now I hope you enjoy reading these random thoughts. I write more about the goings-on here on my blog and post photos on flickr, both of which can be reached through my website nature-lover.net.

Look forward to hearing from you, Sankar

Random Thoughts (109)

6/1/2015

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1. (3/15) Last night I happened to drive around Northwest DC near Chevy Chase circle. It was around 11. The air was 56 degrees, but it felt much warmer due to the very cold weather we have been experiencing lately. Because the zipcar had less than a quarter tank of fuel, I needed to fill it up before returning. I drove north on Connecticut Avenue from military road looking for gas stations. The traffic was light at this hour and the road was dark. Tchaikovsky's symphony number seven was playing on WETA. The solemn and sublime notes seemed a good setting for the elegant houses on this tree-lined stretch of the Avenue. I found myself, for a moment, feeling really happy and satisfied with life. The world and life on earth were wonderful.

Yet very soon I started to think about all the less affluent parts of the city where life is not so wonderful. How does one live and enjoy what is, in and of itself, quite blameless and beautiful without feeling guilty? The answer also came quickly. Many of us think that we deserve to live such a life, and at the same time either explicitly or implicitly think that some others do not. That somehow those who could not attain certain status in life did so because they just didn't try. Even worse, that some people by their nature are simply inferior and less human, even. During the past US elections I came across this line in an article about inequality in America. "I asked my

Republican neighbor, don't you want the children of the man who mows your lawn to have a better life? He told me, 'they will mow the lawn of my children.' " Why, in my own community when I was growing up in India we didn't think too much about the poor people. I remember when I was very young there used to be a group of "untouchables" living in a nearby neighborhood. We didn't venture there that much. The conditions in which they lived were filthy and miserable. Somehow we were led to believe that is just how things were. Later in my teenage years I started questioning whether indeed things needed to be that way. But extrapolating from that experience it is not hard to see why the rich are able to enjoy their lifestyle without worrying too much. In general all the problems we are having in the US today, starting with the violence and all the way up to the dysfunction in the Congress especially the so called tea party caucus, is really arising from people living in their own small worlds both physically and mentally. I have no doubt the situation would improve as people mature spiritually and learn more about their fellow men.

2. (4/8) As life gets more busy I am learning what it really means to take life one day at a time. Before, I would be rushing about trying to resolve any difficulty that arose. Now I am more relaxed about it. I am trying to adopt the attitude of, let us do the best we can today and then pick it up again tomorrow. Basically, whatever problem arises is approached with a bit more detachment and even interest as just another problem to be solved.

3. (5/6) The U.S is going through an upheaval that might be as big as any during its history, albeit more peacefully, thanks to the grace of God. There is a clash between social conservatism and liberalism; between the old economy of farms, oil, coal and steel and the new economy of the internet, clean energy and infotainment; between the earlier immigrants and later arrivals. It is up to us to make sure this is a smooth transition.

4. (5/15) As I get older and more self-aware, I see more clearly the various layers of ego, emotional and mental states. Our being is complex web of memories, impulses and thought processes interacting with the ego. It takes much introspection, practice and courage to delve into the nature of our self and to try and understand the meaning of our fleeting existence on this little blue planet. Even when you understand it, it takes much hard

work to rise above the base instincts and ego driven thinking. There are moments when my body and mind are in harmony with my belief in the oneness of humanity and feels love for all beings. Yet there are many other moments when it is painfully clear how far I have to go before I can break free of the shackles of ego, emotions and mental formations. Sometimes I feel like it is all just a battle between testosterone and oxytocin!

5. (5/16) One of the most beautiful poems that I have come across is W. S. Merwin's

"Night Plums." I found it on one of Takoma Park's street corner poetry posts and keep coming back to it. Each time I read it I feel a new inspiration and gain a new appreciation for its beauty. Recently during DC's environmental filmfest I saw a movie about the poet and his life. He lives in Hawaii on a large ranch where every day he plants a new tree and has now developed an entire mini-forest. That makes me love this poem even more. Every word looks like it is carefully chosen and in the right place. The beauty is as natural as that of a flower and the poem is as soothing as a flowing stream. The words are there to sincerely express the poet's feelings and thoughts, and no more, yet they also have a lyrical and poetic rhythm. But beyond simply giving you the pleasure of poetry it elevates your mind above its mundane worries and takes it to a place in your heart that you wish you return to more often, a place of pure, innocent and wild beauty. Perhaps that is what the poet is saying, literally! Well, here is the poem for you to read. I am eager to hear what you know or think about it.

#### THE NIGHT PLUMS

Years afterward in the dark  
in the middle of winter I saw them again  
the wild sloes on the terraces  
flowering in the small hours  
after a season of hard cold and the turning  
of the night and of the year and of years  
when almost all whom I had known there  
in other days had gone  
and the stones of the barnyard were buried  
in sleep and the animals were no more.

I watched the white blossoms open  
in their own hour, naked and luminous,  
greeting the darkness in silence  
with their ancient fragrance.

6. (5/16) All religions talk about our duty to care for others, especially those who need help. I think implicit in that is that we should care for all living beings, all of nature. Hinduism is no exception. Yet often I find people in the name of religion spend vast amount of resources on worship and much less on helping others. To put it in the form of a metaphorical question: Would the God who created all these plants and gave them beautiful flowers so that they can continue their species want us to take away their flowers in order to worship God?

7. (5/27) As I get older and contemplate life more the more I think that compassion and love for all beings is really the ultimate goal. As they say, God is Love and Love is God. I believe this truth underlies all faith traditions and in one way or other every human being has the potential to reach it. Some traditions emphasize it more than others, but no matter what they emphasize, ultimately they all will lead to it. Whatever violence exists in the world is a result of individual human beings and societies inability to understand it. Even the Buddha's followers sometimes condone violence.

8. (5/30) Trying to calm the mind through deliberate effort is like trying to stop the waves in water using one's hand. One only ends up making more waves. One simply has to carry on or focus on something else and the waves will slow down over time.

9. (5/31) Trying to understand the true nature of self and life through intellectual enquiry alone is like trying to paint a self-portrait without a mirror. You can get an idea but not the whole picture.

10. (6/1) One could use logic to support or refute anything. Logic without humanity and compassion is useless at best and dangerous at its worst.