

Dear friends, Hope you are enjoying the holidays, and for those of you in northern latitudes, hope you are enjoying the winter weather. I for one am definitely enjoying a little break from regular university duties.

Life has been moving along so quickly and things are happening so fast that sometimes there is no time to step back and take a breath. I hope to change that but for now I am grateful for the few moments of reflection that come my way, whether it is walking along the lake on the way to and from work or sitting in meditation at the vihara or attending services at the Church with Nicole. The true nature of life and the self is always just beneath the surface and a little contemplation brings it to the fore. It takes only the slightest of things - a fallen bird, an injury or an accident, to realize how fragile life is.

While I take life seriously I am also trying not to take myself too seriously, and have some fun along the way. I try to remember my Dad's dictum to eat well and enjoy this ephemeral life that we have been blessed with. If health is lost, everything is lost - he likes to say. If we don't enjoy life, that means our mind is not healthy at some level. So it is along those lines that I wish to you the best of health and spirits during this holiday season and the coming new year. Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy Kwanzaa and whatever else you may be celebrating. And don't forget to keep in touch! may you and your loved ones be blessed with a new year full of joy and fulfillment.

Sankar

Random Thoughts (86)

12/24/2011

1. (12/3/2011) Been going to Church with Nicole since our marriage. As someone brought up in Hinduism and whose life is centered on the principles of Advaita, as someone who is a great admirer of the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and the teachings of the Buddha, I didn't think I would be at home with the teachings of Christ. But I was so wrong. [I am sure one day I will feel at home in Islam as well, indeed love the Sufi poets, but my knowledge of Islam is still superficial]. Here are my favorite passages from Bible -- words that make tears well up in the eyes, knowing how Jesus was preaching compassion and the oneness of all creation and the idea that God lives in each living being -ideas that I value so much. The great teachers are all teaching the same message:

John 1st 14 :Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

John 2nd 4:God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Matthew 5: The Beatitudes and the sermon on the mount -- the exhortations to take care of the poor, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure of heart and to be peacemakers.

Luke 17: The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst.

2. (12/4/11) I have been concerned about the direction of the country, with all the angry partisan battles going on. But the more I meet people and the more I approach them with love in my heart the more I realize that Americans overall are a decent people and that things will be okay no matter what happens. It is definitely true that the more peace we have in our hearts the more of it will be there in the world. The fights going on in the US are more like a family fights than a war between blood enemies, though at times it feels like the latter.

3. (12/9/2011) I have always wondered what makes certain people warriors. Not just in the literal sense but also metaphorically. What makes some people relish challenges, what drives their engine, providing them with an inexhaustible source of energy to keep fighting against insurmountable odds. What I have learned is that when you have been in battle quite a bit, you develop a certain strength just as your muscles get stronger with exercise. Creatures have the wonderful capacity to adapt, and the more problems they face the more adaptations they develop. Soon you start enjoying the fights, the challenges and the problems. Each success builds up a certain craving for more rewards and the work itself becomes more enjoyable with the euphoria of triumph constantly looming in the mind's eye. Eventually you start enjoying the fight itself without any need for reward, and take a certain pleasure in solving problems, much as one enjoys a good game or a puzzle. The more difficult the problems are, the more interesting the process of solving them.

4. They say all of nature follows the Bell curve. There is the majority that lies in the middle, and the extremes on either side. As I learn more about the various groups, social and political, the more I see that pattern. Even in myself there are different tendencies coming from my various ancestors. That too reflects a pattern fundamental to nature -- the self-similarity -- patterns at the micro level are also present at the macro level. What is true within a society is true in the individual and vice versa. There is a force in us that drives us towards extremes, and a force that tries to keep us in balance. It is by moving to extremes that we progress as human beings. But if we move too fast we end up hurting ourselves. There is a force among human beings propelling it towards a higher consciousness, connecting with all of nature by encountering, experiencing and embracing new and different beings and objects, and experimenting with new ways of living. There is another force that tries to conserve what exists, that seeks comfort in the familiar and proven. But ultimately the main tension is between trying too hard and staying balanced. In this respect both liberals and conservatives are but two sides of the same coin. They represent the

tendency within us to go to extremes, while the moderates / centrists provide the balance. Both liberals and conservatives want to see their world view prevail and both think the other side is completely wrong and evil. If only each were to step into the other's shoes for a minute and try to see the world from their point of view, perhaps there would be better understanding. Because at the base all human beings have the same aspirations. If some ideas appeal to certain human beings, perhaps there is something in those ideas that would appeal to all. I firmly believe that no human being is beyond achieving reconciliation and understanding with any other human being. It is circumstances and lack of proper communication that create divisions and conflict. And certainly I do not believe that any human being is evil. Even the most seemingly selfish and exploitative human beings could be made to change their ways by the power of love.

5. I was listening to Lawrence Lessig's interview on the daily show. He was talking about starting a voucher system to create public financing for elections. That may solve part of the problem, namely that of Congressmen spending too much time fundraising and selling out their votes. But it won't solve the problem of superpacs-the shady special interest groups- spending billions in advertising in favor of certain issues and indirectly in favor of a candidate. So maybe eventually it will be back to square one. Ultimately I think the issue is about the few having too much wealth and power. When that happens they bend the system and manipulate people no matter what is done. The only way out, I believe, is for more people to become entrepreneurs and for people to support them by buying their products and services, creating a system where people support each other by creating jobs and producing goods and providing services for each other. Today's hyperlinked, hyperconnected society should make that process easier. This may already be happening. Check out this article in NY Times:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/15/opinion/worker-owners-of-america-unite.html>