

The pause that can refresh

I correspond with a distant cousin often. Our connection goes back to 1956 when I first met her family in Baltimore. I especially remember her kissing me goodbye – unexpectedly – as I boarded a train to return to Washington. I wasn't used to kisses at that time. It made a lasting impression – indeed she is 78 years old this year – which is why I say a *lasting* impression.

We talk about old times, people grown old, others passed away. She is in the restaurant business – hurting a lot right now – but still at it. She is by circumstance (I mean where she lives) and by business concerns a Republican. Lately she writes of losing touch with old friends and even close relations with her sisters – along political lines. She and her older sister are not on speaking terms. Like so many people today the climate of pandemic and protests and the seeming disarray of leadership at all levels of society are undercutting her once peace of mind.

What bothers me is her *extreme* unsettledness over these issues – without drawing upon the deeper resources of her nature. For I know her to be a principled, caring human being who nevertheless is susceptible to the stimulus of – for instance - the increasingly intense and mutually accusatory friction within modern media.

Of late I finally wrote her what I have found to be helpful after a long life on this planet. I said:

I spend my time reading some deep philosophers and of course great or even simple literature - both biblical and secular – because such resources try to get to the bottom of things, beneath the chatter and clamor of public life – which often aggravate rather than resolve our issues.

I try to ask myself: what is it we all, be it earth or sky, grass or robins, planets or rabbits or we humans ourselves, have in common? We all share the words “to be”. We are! We exist! And when we all realize that we are that fundamentally related - we may begin to admire each other and stop messing with nature itself since we are intimately natural ourselves. I mean that we are all so profoundly related is the fundamental political fact we need to recover – before it is too late - again!

Nor is this philosophical truth that far removed from the parables of Jesus. Don't they also direct us from our superficial, often toxic environment toward the truer, hidden regions of our hearts and minds and understanding – the things we almost instinctually know to be true? That there is a yeast within us that can turn us into palatable human beings; that there is a pearl hardly visible amid the junk jewelry we have collected over a lifetime; that the buried treasure by which we can enrich our lives waits to be discovered? A treasure residing in a conviction, in a faith that we are one with the whole of this universe, microscopic and magnificent, racial and ethnic! Even now! Only waiting for the noise to stop, a pause – that will let us BE what we really are.

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