

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

Seeing everyone as part of the same whole.

At first I was going to blog today about some recent key appellate decisions. One of the reasons I started this blog was to have extra motivation to read and index such opinions. At the same time, this blog has motivated me to write about and to get closer to greater strength through total calmness, so that will be my detour for today's blog entry.

Although I have far to go in reaching total calmness, I keep getting closer to it day by day, kind of like a recovering ball of intensity for whom each day of calmness is an achievement. In many ways, I had to discover calmness. Calmness did not appear to be a priority commodity as I grew up, except when public school teachers told me and other students to stay seated, still, and quiet (and often bored). In grade school, I focused on having a quick mind when my ballfield prowess often left much to be desired (although I took quickly to lacrosse, and did alright in tennis and basketball when I focused on them). My peers often played the dozens in one way or another, which was made popular by George Carlin (I send him all good karma on his departure from the planet). Playing the dozens is not calmness. Life progressed, and for years I did not feel I could let my guard down, when considering all the shysters, bigots, bullies and violent people that I was convinced surrounded me, without even needing to smoke marijuana for paranoia value. Interspersed in all this was an increased interest by many people in calmness -- something that has been highly valued for centuries in much of Asia, but which perhaps got too forsaken in plenty other parts of the world as the industrial revolution and communications revolution shrunk the globe and made many people demand more and more ever more quickly, with many willing to fulfill such demands (enter FedEx, for instance). The Beatles dabbled in calm during their time with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of transcendental meditation fame; John Lennon, though, eventually panned him as but a mere mortal, at best. George Harrison continued focusing on a spiritual journey. That journey need not be religious; as the Dalai Lama agrees, atheists, too, can reach calm. Regardless of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's strengths and weaknesses, the transcendental meditation rage reached full bloom in the 1970's, which decade finished when I was sixteen. I learned meditation through Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response book; meditation is best done regularly than dabbled into, and I dabbled, until finding the moving meditation of t'ai chi. Ironically, I met my best teacher for relaxation and peacefulness -- Jun Yasuda, whom I write more about here and in many other parts of this blog -- during a time of war in 1991, when countless people were suffering their heads being blown off and all other sorts of violence to them, their children, and others close to them, the levels of which continue today in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout the rest of the world.

One night in the middle of last week, I got a phone call from Jun-san, speaking with her for the first time in about a year. She is on the Longest Walk with Dennis Banks, and will arrive in the Washington, D.C., area around two Mondays from now. Jun-san remains calmness and peacefulness personified. I might have gone decades without meeting Jun-san, or never meeting her, which would have required me to work all the harder at reaching the levels of peace and calmness that I now feel.

Still a block to my achieving greater peace and calmness is my struggle to see and internalize everyone as part of the peaceful Buddha, without seeing some of them as carbuncles on the Buddha's backside. Maybe it would be easier to take this view if I were a Buddhist and grew up a Buddhist, neither of which apply to me, and figured out how to see all of us as interconnected without my seeing the carbuncles. Maybe it would be easier if I placed less value on joking about carbuncles and less fear about being bored when just being calm and peaceful rather than out and about in my thinking and experiencing. Now, I try all the more to see and summon the Buddha nature in others. Because it sometimes can be a challenge to do that with the driver of an eighteen wheeler tailgating me and wildly flashing headlights when already I am in the righthand lane if the highway, I also turn to doing that with people who do not come across as immediate threats to my staying alive for one more day. Then, I move to the level of trying to do it with cops and prosecutors and opposing witnesses and judges when I feel disappointed in the lack of justice being dispensed by the judge. Critically, of course, I must do that with my jurors. Of course, the trucker tailgating me and blasting the horn at me is not calm, either, and seeks peace in some way. Also seeking peace are the cop who plants evidence, the prosecutor who thinks nothing of letting a presumed innocent defendant rot in a jail cell for months until the trial goes forward, and a judge who renders a guilty verdict when reasonable doubt spills over the courtroom floors. Will these folks contribute more towards harmony if we bare our fangs at them, or if we offer them gestures of peace? Consequently, I need to go to the center of the fire and share calm with the very people who seem to urinate the most in the eyes of justice and fairness, and to do it without my getting scorched or charred in that fire. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Persuasion at 00:00