

A LARGER VIEW

*A Commentary On How Current Events Reflect—
Or Not—Our Spiritual Search*

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A Price For Freedom

--Better pay a price for freedom than have it curtailed—It looks like Nadya Suleman, the mother of the octuplets, could have only made her choice in a free society. To the mind of most she chose wrongly. She's using food stamps, three of her children have disabilities and collect some social security disability payments, and given the prognosis for octuplets in general, possibly more. As a person it may well be that she's selfish, stubborn, short-sighted, obsessed and unrealistic (if so she's far from alone) and all this adds up to the fact that since public monies are bound to be involved we are all affected. One can make a case for the fact that she is no different than the Wall Street companies and bankers who after a series of bad judgments required public money not to fail. It does look like nothing but a variation of the same theme. Regardless, I'd rather live in a society where freedom leads to mistakes we all pay for, rather than in one where it may be so curtailed our choices are no longer ours and we no longer have the freedom to make any.

The Minutiae of Progress

--Sometimes progress may be more than slow and hard to notice, but it's there—Last Monday a Chinese delegation led by Ambassador Li Baodong appeared before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. It was a first. It told the council that people in China could voice their opinions and that the government opposes torture. In a statement before the proceedings the Chinese emphasized that human rights are related to economic growth and went on to say that the standard of living has improved, so have the judicial system and political participation. Many argue with the delegation's presentation to the council and point to many facts painting a dismal picture of human rights in China. And yet the very fact they would agree to make this historic appearance before the UN body and answer their questions is, at the very least, worth notice. Progress is slow, comes by the millimeter, and is not always in a straight line. What matters is that it comes. One must say the Chinese delegation sent to Geneva is a good sign. Later that week the Chinese government barred foreigners from traveling to regions with large Tibetan populations, given the approaching 50th anniversary of Tibet's failed rebellion. There will surely be other news items somehow restricting people's freedom. And yet none will undo the tiny progress represented by the agreement to answer the questions of the UN Human Rights Council.

More Than Worldly Success

--Couldn't the Oscars be more than the epitome of worldly success?--The Oscar hubbub is behind us and the winners have been declared. Despite the goodwill and graciousness of those who didn't get Oscars, the event seems to be saying: We have one winner and four losers in each category. The whole thing has become so institutionalized not only in the movie industry, but in general culture that we are losing our objectivity, and what the presentation was meant to mean, can mean, does mean and how it could be reformed to be more meaningful. Does the performance of one actor over that of the others really deserve the special treatment conferred by winning an Oscar? It's hard to see the distinction this year as it was in past years.

Several years ago the announcement from the stage was far more blatant, as the presenter would announce, "And the winner is." Now the phrase is, "The award goes to". No matter, the thinking behind it is the same. And despite the talk that being nominated is award enough, the idea still is winning the statue.

As they stand the Oscars are the epitome of worldly success—Couldn't they be a lot more and enrich us all rather than just those who stand to monetarily benefit?

How to Begin Our Conversation

--Racism is defined differently by whites and by blacks. We ought to factor in that difference if we want to begin a meaningful conversation--Because February is Black History month, there has recently been a few stories about the state of race relations, and as part of that emphasis our Attorney General made a provocative statement about us being cowards when it comes to discussing race. This provoked discussion, although not the substantive one we need nor the one he hoped for. One fact came out, as it does year after year, that African-Americans view the state of racism differently than whites. For

blacks, the picture is far less perfect. Why is this a surprise? Why do our polls not seem to integrate that, as much as the experiencing of it, African-Americans and whites define racism in different terms? Words that remain triggers for blacks, for example, are not so for whites. Perceptions too are at variance. For many whites the fact that our current President is black means prejudice has been overcome. For blacks, it tends to instead stand as a bridge to truer equality. There are also deep generational differences. African-Americans old enough to have heard MLK or march, or be involved in civil rights, do not have the same perception of race relations than their younger cohorts. It's a bit like the dichotomy of seeing the glass half-empty or half-full.

Call it compassion, honesty, equality... it comes down to the same thing: All of us ought to be more sensitive to the definitions of others racial groups and factor in their perceptions if we want to be able to understand each other and engage in the needed meaningful conversation about race.

Why Not Forgiveness?

--Why not take a higher road and apply forgiveness to politics, specifically to George Bush--Several on Capitol Hill want to investigate the Bush Presidency. Senator Leahy, chair of the Judiciary Committee, calls it a truth and reconciliation commission but then explains it in a way that makes one wonder if prosecution is a possibility. He and others say we must know the truth. Indeed so. But hasn't there been several books, commissions, articles and programs documenting the misuse of power, the excesses, the errors of the past administration? Is another likely to uncover anything of significance? Absent any proof there was some malfeasance or some intent to harm instead of the erroneous mindsets, stubbornness, bad judgments, wrong deductions and mistaken ideas that seem to have prevailed, it's difficult to see how the nation can benefit. A few egos would be stroked, a few politicians would gloat, others would say I told you so. Still would the nation move forward? There is the argument that what happened need to be prevented from happening again. An investigation, no matter its label, may not be the way, legislation may be more fitting. Besides, at a time when resources are scarce, the idea of an investigation does seem misplaced.

Taking a higher road may be more constructive, applying forgiveness to politics may be more useful in the end than any kind of investigation. Mistakes were made. Directly or not, we all paid and are paying for them. Regardless, let us now forgive. Let us not forget lest the offense be repeated, but let us forgive. Let us open our hearts, understand that making mistakes is a common denominator, that forgiveness heals far more than an investigation--one which whether or not it starts out with good motives is very likely to be politicized and hence become divisive.

Website of Interest: www.aldaily.com

Some aggregator sites are so useful and practical. This one offers articles from almost all magazines covering arts, letters and the humanities. The articles touch on politics, government, and the host of issues associated with them. They are literate, thoughtful

articles, going way beyond what we often settle for in contemporary culture. On the left side is a list of magazines, blogs and columnists that are also worthy of note. Some may even want to make this their home page.

To Ponder On

“The fact that I can plant a seed and it becomes a flower, share a bit of knowledge and it becomes another's, smile at someone and receive a smile in return, are to me continual spiritual exercises.”

Leo Buscaglia

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