

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Opinion | Thoughts on Faith, Culture And Mother Earth

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O ye, who see perplexities over your heads, beneath your feet, and to the right and left of you; you will be an eternal enigma unto yourselves until ye become humble and joyful as children. Then will ye find Me, and having found Me in yourselves, you will rule over worlds, and looking out from the great world within to the little world without, you will bless everything that is, and find all is well with time and with you. KRISHNA. [Included as an epigram in 'A Letter to a Hindu', by Leo Nikolevich Tolstoy]

When I think of the faith that my father introduced me to; the numerous prayers that he instilled in his native German, and the significance that this early awareness of God and virtue had for me, along with the words that Jesus brought forth, spoken, not only to

those listening then, but the hundreds of generations who thereafter read them as the fundamental truth of what Christianity was meant to embody as a belief, I find myself estranged from the culture that now pervades our land and the civilization that we are, perhaps, the most significant part of.

With the exception of the current level of technology, we live in a cultural landscape that has many symbols and echoes that have been seen and heard in the past. We exaggerate the significance of what we believe is progress. The treadmill that defines our lives, regulated by the technological innovations that are ever accelerating the pace required to acquire and maintain the increasingly questionable benefits of leisure time and freedom from mundane tasks that initially heralded their advent are, with ever greater clarity, revealing themselves to be the task masters of nothing more than a newer form of slavery.

If the world seems confusing; if demagogues find it easy to peddle their self-interest shrouded in promises that appeal to a citizenry wholly unprepared both through a faulty educational system and the misguided orthodoxies that value more the preservation of their own hierarchical organization, how will it ever come to pass that the vast majority will ever be capable of determining for themselves the truth that is fundamental to all those great faiths that exist to serve our spiritual needs?

Our commonality as a species should be our great strength. The various cultures that display our historical heritage are not inherently antagonisms that require war to determine the rightfulness of one over another. They are the timeless accumulation of knowledge and experience that resulted in successful adaptation to differing environments and chanced interactions with one another.

Our vastly prolific capacity for communication is fast becoming a quagmire of unfounded opinions, not the path to clarity, understanding, or a destination that holds the answer to the myriad questions that our ever-expanding body of knowledge seeks to unveil. The answers to the fundamental questions of our existence, are found within; the difficulty of that search have, in all cultures and at all times, been compounded by the pecking order that pervades all political systems, and all organized faiths.

The first step towards our true freedom requires us to question everything that we harbor within. With each succeeding step it is necessary to question everything thereafter encountered. Eventually we begin to see the fundamental commonality that exists not only with all other humans, but all life forms. We (life) are all related, and our co-existence on this planet is the consequence of events that have taken place over millions of years. Contrary to a still widely held misconception, this planet does not belong to us, rather we belong to it. With that truth, it is of the essence to accept and abide by the maxim: "first,

to do no harm." This should be the fundamental principle of not only bioethics and medicine, but all endeavors and human behaviors. The premise here being that, as we consider our options for further technological innovations, it is better to do nothing than to risk doing more harm than good. The disciplines of politics, economics and science are flawed without this aphorism, and the consequences are everywhere evident in our lives.

Arguably the best guides to truth, as either a spiritual or temporal phenomenon, can be found among those referred to as the great mystics of every faith now practiced on earth. Christians should at the very minimum include Meister Eckhardt in their reading.

Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom of God Is within You' is also an incredibly significant work. God, however, chooses no preference among the many cultures; it is only the folly of a belief in some misguided "exceptionalism" of one's society over others that leads us to such an erroneous view. Correctly understood, love is mankind's greatest achievement as a species. Jesus's entire existence was a testament to this truth. This Easter, I again thank my father for the prayers he taught me so long ago.

To successfully employ my faith, that is to say, to not only believe, but to follow Christ's example requires that I redirect my goals so that I first do no lasting harm to our planet; that wondrous creation which God made us a part of. When political and economic actors threaten the very basis of life, then we need to question their power and any assumed rights that they utilize to justify their hegemony over not only our lives, but all life. Jesus showed us that self-sacrifice is necessary. Should we not at least sacrifice the quest for unnecessary comforts and conveniences in order to preserve the beauty and ever-more fragile balance that makes life's existence on this planet even possible? Let us together tread lightly correcting our errors as we discover them. Demonizing others to justify fabricated fears not only harms them and isolates us, it is the seed of endless wars. Let us stop planting those thoughts in our children, or their harvest and our precious earth will increasingly become a graveyard for many species, and perhaps our own.

Love thyself, love thy neighbor, love our mother earth. Embrace the adage: "Live simply so that all life forms may simply live". Rejoice in Easter, and re-affirm our love for earth today, tomorrow, and every day thereafter!

All that exists is One. People only call this One by different names. THE VEDAS

God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him. I JOHN iv. 16.

God is one whole; we are the parts. EXPOSITION OF THE TEACHING OF THE VEDAS BY VIVEKANANDA.

[The preceding (3) entries were included as post-scripts by M. K. Gandhi in his introduction to 'A Letter to a Hindu', 19th November, 1909]

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