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happiness sharing as a way to peace

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§1 Survivor's Guilt

-- take time to smell the roses --
love not only yourself, but also your life

We who enjoy comfort and privilege live in danger of feeling guilty about enjoying life while the world is overly populated with unhappiness and outright misery.

How can I enjoy myself while other human beings are not enjoying themselves? This disposition is blatant fraud. It improves nothing about the world. If I race to the worst at the bottom, that detracts from, and denies, the good at the top. Worthy enjoyment acknowledges that which is good. I must experience happiness in order to share it.

How can I be innocent while escaping the suffering experienced by others? Guilt actually does attach to enjoyment that causes the suffering of others. Luxury obtained through exploitation is indeed guilt. Intelligently ending overconsumption does alleviate suffering. On the other hand, smelling the roses is appreciating existence, not exploiting it. Being awake to pleasant experiences sustains my strength as I alleviate suffering of others; I am not helping you enjoy your life if I hate mine. I do not ask who owns the roses before I enjoy the smell.

§ 2 Power of One -- Power of Me!

It's up to ~~the government~~ me.

Racism, religious intolerance, public slaughtering (capital punishment), female genital mutilation, and ritual human sacrifice are blemishes on human society. Somebody had to think them up before they became institutional practices. Somewhere, something went wrong: well-adjusted individuals will not pass racist laws; the enlightened faithful will not condone human sacrifice under any name. These sins have to be removed the same way they came about: one conscience at a time.

Let me illustrate with my experience of Switzerland. My friends and I sometimes left items on the train--clothing, cameras, umbrellas. We reported each instance to the SBB railroad, and selected the station where we would pick up the found items. We did not regularly lock our bicycles; the locks could be popped off very easily. I knew that this condition was not the result of laws against stealing, because I had grown up in a country with laws against stealing which had very different results. Obviously Swiss people return private property because the individual Swiss are honorable people. From that personal honor emerges a collective conscience even capable of democratic taxation, humane distribution of wealth, and universal healthcare. Through personal honor, the Swiss are able to carry out nurturing, constructive relationships and to enjoy a peaceful and healthy society. This is my direct personal experience.

In general, government does not create good or bad people. The opposite is true: good people create successful government. When individual people have a constructive mindset, they combine their good intentions. Government reflects the quality of the people--even in non-democratic states.

Herein lies relief from the litany of sins that opened this article. We shape our society when we first obtain the light for ourselves, and then lovingly propagate that light to those around us. Laws against stealing do not end theft. Public policies do not end graft. Laws enforcing religious practices do not create faith. Instead, individual people discern beneficial behavior and implement it. Growing out of that process, public laws articulate the practices on which the individual people agree. It is not the laws themselves, but rather the individual people who formulate and embrace those laws, that advance us together into a happy future.

Therefore, let us not condemn the people or institutions of our government. Let us not anticipate that government can cure social ills. Instead, let us carry out good behavior in a way that persuades others to do the same. We will eradicate poverty when we individually overcome greed. The government cannot do that for us; nobody can leave it to his neighbor to be modest. People mimic good models as readily as any other, and with far more pleasure. Good government is the result of the example we set and inspire in each other. You and I are the creators of shared happiness. The question is not "why can't [the government] ...?" The question is "what shall I ...?"

§3 Nuclear Weapons Again

but a different lesson this time

The social sins listed in §2 above have not ended the human species. Nuclear and biological weapons do pose that threat. Therefore I regard it a crime against humanity to invent, manufacture, develop, test, possess, or use any of those weapons. It saddens me that some of my friends are not motivated by the same conviction. What shall I do now?

Here is the problem: developing godlike character includes -- indeed, requires -- loving all of God's children, including the ones who have perpetrated all of the sins including tolerating nuclear weapons. Writing the articles v01-n01§1 (kindness in the face of not getting my own way) and v01-n03§3 (personal redemption) has significantly increased my capacity for this kind of love.

It is not enough to say that I will hate the sin and love the sinner. Loving the atomic bomb maker as a sinner is a distorted application of self-righteousness. I trust my moral compass, but it is not the universal standard for identifying sins or sinners. Indeed, identifying sins and sinners is not for me. It is divisive, futile and useless.

Unredeemed, I quoted Jeremiah 17:5 "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." Today I build bridges instead. Writing about personal redemption has changed my view of non-pacifists whose votes cancel out mine. Those very people are my beloved neighbors.