

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...

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Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

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Dear friends,

Common sense has nearly vanished altogether from American discourse, replaced during Pluto's journey through Sagittarius by divisive ideological extremism. Perhaps we might benefit from an injection of "uncommon sense" to help us remember the basics and re-affirm the values of sanity and care. This month's commentary attempts to offer a little of that and was inspired by a dear friend of mine. She knows who she is..

—Bill Herbst

WHEN WE ALL DO BETTER, WE ALL DO BETTER

The title of this commentary seems a bit nonsensical at first glance, like a tautological redundancy. Well, sure—when we all do better, we all do better. Duh! But peel away the surface and more subtle, substantive, and relevant meanings emerge.

We live in a culture where social darwinism has once again taken tight hold over the propaganda, imagery, and even the laws of our society. In America now, the rich do extremely well—thank you very much—and everyone else further down the socioeconomic ladder is not only less well-healed, but increasingly threadbare. Over the past 40 years, the intentional redistribution of wealth upwards into the hands of those at the top tier is stunning to behold. The pie is no longer cut into slices; the rich, who are economically powerful and financially savvy, gobble up the whole thing, and everyone else gets the crumbs. Not only has this occurred, but it has been applauded, approved, and mythologized into something of a religion. "Free markets," corporate expansion and control, political acquiescence. Money talks, and everyone else can take the bus.

This is a recurring theme in the 5,000-year history of empires and dominance hierarchies, and it is one side of a dualistic conflict at the heart of America. As I wrote in an earlier essay [October 2003, Newsletter #59], the July 4th, 1776, astrological chart for the U.S. reveals starkly that American ideals are dedicated, on the one hand, to individual freedom and opportunism (*I can do whatever I want*),

aggressive resource control (*I take everything I can get*), cut-throat competition and an ownership class (*predatory capitalism*), and the headlong pursuit of wealth (*money is all that finally matters*). On the other hand—and very paradoxically—our ideals also include the radical social notions of a leveled playing field (*opportunity for all, not just for the privileged few*), egalitarianism (*no one is better than anyone else*), and social justice (*everyone gets the same treatment under the law, from the poor and helpless to the rich and powerful*).

No large societies have ever succeeded with the latter set of intentions. The American revolution settled on property as its defining value; the French revolutions that followed during the 19th century imploded eventually and restored the aristocracy; the Russian and Chinese revolutions of the early- and mid-20th century gave lip service to social ideals, but both quickly devolved into totalitarian rule that bore no resemblance at all to their initiating impulses. Despite the fevered outcry against the “Red scare” in western countries ruled by wealthy capitalists and property owners, neither communism nor socialism was ever seriously attempted anywhere, much less practiced for real. They are simply too far from the civilizations we’ve created over the past five millennia. The closest anyone has come to a beneficent marriage of capitalism and socialism is probably the Scandinavian countries—Sweden, Finland, and Denmark—whose social and economic systems are routinely dismissed or derided by the powers-that-be in America.

Those on the political right, in business and corporate culture, and in the Libertarian camp have been brilliant at creating theoretical, ideological justifications asserting the efficiency, moral superiority, and even (supposedly) spiritual benefits of property-based capitalism. Those same groups have worked even harder to argue that socialism violates all those tenets, suggesting that it is economically, morally, and spiritually wrong. These arguments have been largely embraced by Americans, in part because of the myth of individual freedom to do whatever the hell one wants, regardless of the consequences to others, and in part because of the lure of The American Dream, where (supposedly) anyone can strike it rich.

God forbid that we should take away your one-in-ten-million chance of winning the lottery! The welfare state of the mid-20th century is not gone, however, it’s just that corporations are the beneficiaries now rather than individuals and families.

What I want to know is this: What the hell’s wrong with these people? Have they been body-snatched and replaced by pods from outer space? Do they not understand the simple, elegant truth that “When we all do better, we all do better”? Obviously not. It’s all “I got mine, and I want more. In fact, I want everything.”

“When we all do better, we all do better” is why we instituted a progressive income tax system in America. Putting aside for a moment the many legal and moral arguments against *any* income tax, the rationale for *progressive* taxation was simple: social equality, justice, and leveling the playing field create a better, more civilized culture. Those who reaped the greatest benefits from the way the game was played in America were expected to pay more than their proportionate share in taxes as payback, in gratitude for the opportunities our society had given them, and to offer some modest support to those who couldn’t or didn’t want to spend their lives playing at the high end of that competitive economic game—artists, single mothers, teachers, ordinary working stiffs, the old or infirm, or anyone who suffered terrible tragedies and loss.

That redistribution of wealth downwards helped hold the society together in all its diversity and hope. Ditch that—which we’ve done, since corporations and the wealthy have aggressively lobbied for and legislated ways to now pay much *less* than their fair share in taxes—and the society is eventually destroyed, reduced to a brutal feudal system of haves and have-nots.

While I may sound like a raving socialist, I’m not. Not even close. My concern is not left or right ideologies—both of which have attractions and absurdities—but rather pragmatic balance. Taken to extremes by flawed human beings liable to corruption, neither capitalism nor socialism alone work very well in real life. Both eventually distort into monstrous caricatures with dreadful consequences. If I lived in a socialist dystopia, I would lobby for the return of capitalism. It just so happens that we live in an America where predatory capitalists now run roughshod over the common interests of both present and future generations.

What is now thought of as the center in mainstream media is actually way over to one side—the side of “winner-take-all” rather than “everybody wins,” the side of competition rather than cooperation, the side of “big business and big money are all that matters” instead of “supporting life in all its infinite manifestations and meanings.”

And you know what one result of this is? War. *Endless* war. To grab all we can get, even if it means invading someone else’s country. Whatever we want, we take, and if we have kill to do it, well, so be it. Once we have what we want, we then kill to protect our booty from real or imagined enemies. And these days, of course, war is basically a business, just another market opportunity for corporations to rake in profits.

“When we all do better, we all do better” has other implications. Who exactly is “we,” for instance? Is it just you and your family, friends, and associates? Is it just Americans? No, “we all” includes the entire human species, and everyone in it. There is no “them,” only “us.” And yet, half the population of humanity lives in dire, soul-crushing poverty—roughly three billion people.

I accept that some people will always have more, while others have less; some are happy, others are miserable; some are well, others sick. Those distinctions, differences, and contrasts are all part of the extraordinary panorama of life, the indecipherable mystery of it. Metaphysical speculations aside, no one knows why such breadth of experience exists or the ultimate reasons for joy and suffering, but we do know that they are built into the core processes of life itself. That is how life unfolds on this planet.

Having admitted that, we still have some power through our hearts and minds to shape collective human experience. Economic, political, and social systems don’t happen by magic. They are created by human beings. In a world of such astounding abundance, the sad fact that half of humanity is routinely impoverished means that something is seriously wrong with the systems we’ve created and put in place. I get it that we’re not collectively wise enough to do much better at this point, but couldn’t we at least be aware of the possibility? And shouldn’t that awareness factor into our day-to-day decisions?

Then, beyond humanity alone, “we all” means every life-form on the planet and the matrix of interrelated life-systems that contribute to and make possible the amazing fertility of the earth, not to mention its beauty and majesty. *Of course* it’s mind-boggling to consider that everything is connected to everything else. *Of course* it’s difficult to make pragmatic decisions in such a huge context. But to ignore these interconnected processes in our quest for wealth, comfort, and convenience is ruinous to the garden, disrespectful to the earth’s nurturing and our responsibility for maintaining it, and destructive to the well-being of all.

We’re quickly reaching the limits of what both humanity and the earth can bear. A small but significant step forward in our spiritual evolution would be for more people to realize, remember, and act on this simple but profound truth:

When we all do better, we all do better.



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