

The Point of Balance

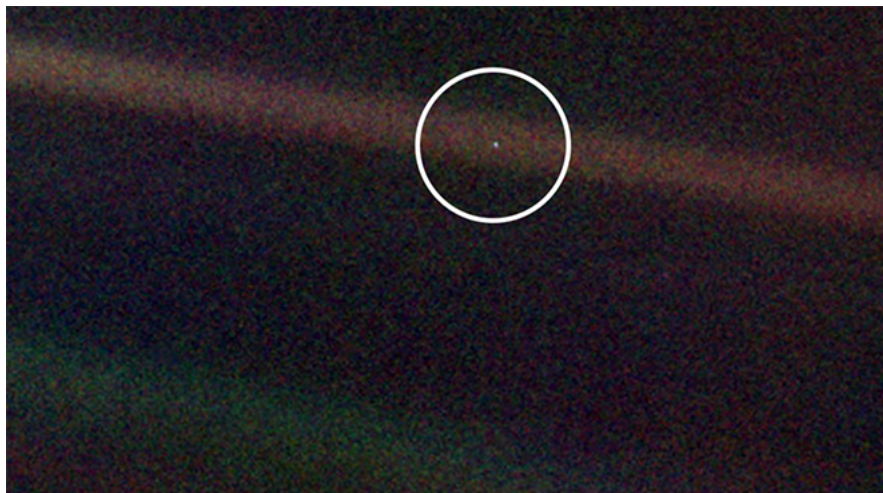
Sanford Baran: Here in the U.S. it's been a fairly quiet week with not much really happening!

All kidding aside, apart from the national election, which has been all-consuming for many, I thought I would do a scan of the universe and see if anything else of note was going on.

As you might be aware, the universe is believed to be expanding—and has been since the Big Bang. I was curious—how much did the universe expand this last week? So, using what is known as the *Hubble Constant* I did a quick back-of-the-envelope calculation and estimated that the outer reaches of the universe expanded by 110 billion miles in all directions, just last week. Not bad for a measly seven days' worth of work. And to my knowledge the universe didn't break a sweat. Sounds like expanding the universe is a lot easier than counting ballots!

We tend to think that the affairs of humankind are so important and significant. But compared to everything else happening within the immensity of the cosmos, planet earth and human beings are barely an afterthought.

Carl Sagan in his book, "A Pale Blue Dot," refers to an image captured by Voyager 1—a space probe launched in the 1970s to study the outer solar system. This particular image was taken on February 14, 1990 when the probe was about four billion miles away from us. Mind you, at that distance, the probe was still within our solar system and Earth appears as a tiny point of light, a crescent only about a tenth of a pixel in size.



Voyager 1 image of planet Earth (dot inside the circle) from four billion miles away (photo courtesy of ALAMY)

Sagan writes, “It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever known.”

Another interesting astronomy fact pointed out in a recent *The New York Times* headline: “Looking for Another Earth? Here Are 300 Million, Maybe.” The article describes the NASA Kepler spacecraft mission, which launched in 2009 and was in operation for about nine years with a mission to discover Earth-size planets orbiting other stars in our galaxy. It turns out that a new analysis of data from the mission conservatively estimates that the number of habitable exoplanets thought to exist just in the Milky Way is somewhere around 300 million!

These exoplanets, nick-named “Eta Earths,” are orbiting similar suns to ours in the “goldilocks” habitable zone, where it is warm enough for the surface of those orbs to retain liquid water.

I like the description of these Eta Earths as “goldilocks planets.” Just like planet Earth, *not too hot, not too cold... just right*—in other words, a balanced state of affairs.

One of the hallmarks of life everywhere is the presence of *balance*. You could say that balance is an intrinsic aspect of life itself, part of its DNA.

I took the liberty to slightly expand the dictionary definition of the word balance and it reads as follows: “Balance is the condition in which different elements and factors are present in the correct proportions—providing the means for stability, equilibrium, equanimity and steadiness—all pre-requisites for life to thrive.” We see abundant evidence of that here on earth and there is no reason to doubt that it also is the case for those 300 million other Eta Earths in the Milky Way. I am certain that balance is intrinsically present throughout all of the cosmos.

And it’s clear, at least to some, that when balance is missing, particularly on the part of human beings, it simply is not sustainable over the long haul—ultimately wreaking havoc and threatening the very existence of life itself here on the only home we’ve ever known. We obviously have a critical role to play in how this all unfolds.

Here are a few words that aptly describe what is required, from a 1952 talk entitled, “The Central Way,” given by Lloyd Arthur Meeker, whose spiritual penname was Uranda.

“We are interested in the Central pattern, the correct pattern, the one which avoids all extremes, and takes into consideration all factors and remains centered with respect to purpose.”

And these are some words from, “The Song Celestial,” otherwise known as, *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Sir Edwin Arnold.

*In sorrows not dejected, and in joys
Not overjoyed; dwelling outside the stress
Of passion, fear, and anger; fixed in calms
Of lofty contemplation*

This is sound advice that anyone can bring into their lives immediately: simply let go of the extremes. “But life would be so boring and uninteresting without the highs and lows.” Really? What a sad state indeed. And how self-centered!

When we notice extremes popping up in our own experience, perhaps in our thoughts or feelings, it is a sure sign that something is out of balance within us. We can try to correct these patterns, maybe suppress them, keep them in check so that no one will notice. But what is actually required is a yielding, a yielding to that which is already balanced and centered within. We can’t fabricate or externally force a state of balance. We can, however, be one with it.

Incidentally, balance doesn’t necessarily mean 50-50. And conversely 50-50 doesn’t necessarily mean balance as evidenced by the almost split-down-the-middle U.S. electorate, which is in a highly unstable state these days. “Balance is the condition in which different elements and factors are present in the correct proportions...” The specific proportions will vary depending upon the circumstances. They will quite naturally take the correct shape based on the needs of the whole and also as those concerned bring a demeanor of balance to the matters at hand.

Amid the ups and downs of this crazy U.S. election, we have each been presented with a golden opportunity to yield to that point of balance within. I observe circumstances as they are without judgement or reaction, staying above the fray, remaining centered with respect to purpose, finding middle ground in spite of wanting to take sides. These are the skills and qualities of character that get the job done. It is vital to be a point of balance and equanimity in the face of division, partisanship and discord. We are constantly presented with opportunities to demonstrate our effectiveness in letting this be so.

I think a real proving ground in all of this is working together with others. This is where the rubber meets the road. As there begins to be balance in individuals, this opens up opportunities for people to effectively work together.

This brings up the notion of *agreement*. Agreement is generally thought to involve sharing the same opinions or having a like-mindedness with respect to policies or ideas. This is a mistake. Agreeing on policies or ideas is not a bad thing, although it can often lead to tunnel vision and partisanship. But I think of agreement as something much deeper, where the shared experience is based in participation in the Central Way. As this is present in group configurations, the *process* of working together becomes just as important if not more important than the end result. And the quality of decision-making and governance increases dramatically as a wider, more balanced, range of factors, thoughts and viewpoints are taken into account. It's astonishing what can begin to move, to expand and integrate, on the basis of individuals working together in real agreement.

Over the last two years I've had opportunity to be on the Board of Directors of Boulder's community radio station, KGNU, where I also volunteer as a DJ. KGNU is characterized by a fierce attitude of independence, serving a very politically progressive town, Boulder, Colorado. I can definitely say that it's been an excellent proving ground for me to maintain my centering while being part of a governing mechanism where those involved tend to have very strong opinions. Not always fun.

What have I needed to do? Something I've been trying to develop in myself is the art of seeking out and encouraging middle ground. Not that middle ground itself is necessarily the ideal solution or even a good solution. But to yield to the point of balance within—which allows a transcendence of differing opinions, divergent sentiments. As I've said, the end solution is never the point—it's the experience of agreement between those involved that really matters.

Here's an example of what I've run into. We've been debating two particular issues on and off over the last number of months where there has been a wide divergence of sentiment across various stakeholders. People had made attempts to try to find middle ground, but to no avail. Here was opportunity for all parties to yield to the point of balance. But the emphasis was on issues, not on agreement.

Anyway, in lieu of finding middle ground, the Board will be taking a vote next month, which in my mind is a substitute pattern, bringing these issues to a superficial point of closure.

I'm sure that in doing this there will be an experience of winners and losers, depending on which side you were on.

This brings up an interesting point. In my view, voting on the part of individuals not yielding to the point of balance produces nothing of real value. Mind you, it's better than any of the alternatives related to group governance given the current state of humankind. But as there are those who do dwell in the place of balance, then the processes of voting and elections become quite important tools for collective function.

I have to say it's been fascinating being on the Board—totally different from what I initially expected. Two years ago, my impression of serving on a non-profit Board was that it would give me some real power and influence to push my pet projects or ideas. But actually, it doesn't work that way at all. Importantly, there is the notion of *staying in one's own lane*; that is to say, being keenly aware of what the Board is and is not supposed to be doing. It's the Board's job to represent the vision of the station and articulate its strategic goals. It's not to get down into the trenches and making operational decisions or figure out how the vision actually gets implemented. That's the job of the salaried staff and the many KGNU volunteers who are managed by the staff. As far as the Board is concerned it is very much hands off—quite different from the usual human approach of getting in there and busily trying to get your great ideas accomplished. Nevertheless, what the Board does is vital—setting the tone, spirit and direction of the station.

But of course, there is a larger job at hand. We, those who gather for our teleconferences or those on our mailing list, are an interesting lot. We are an assemblage of volunteers drawn together on the basis of spirit. We really are not an organization. We don't have a board of directors or a set of bylaws. But nevertheless, our participation and work together is very much about governance, spiritual governance.

And what is ours to do in all of this? In my mind it very much relates to setting the tone, spirit and direction within the larger whole. We, too, need to stay in our own lane, vibrationally speaking, allowing spirit to get the job done, not the puffed-up human ego. Our way is The Central Way. Our concern is not so much about giving talks or building great things, humanly speaking, but rather in the way we carry ourselves through our demeanor, poise and presence.

Our leadership is rightly vibrational, not getting caught up in the fray but graciously setting an example, by yielding to that which is already balanced. And the nature and quality of our collective action and stewardship is agreement, agreement with true purpose.

So, there is much to do, starting with ourselves. And as we each reside in the point of balance, we are in position to work together with many others in our worlds, in spiritual governance, allowing the true design to be known on this beautiful “goldilocks” planet.

November 8, 2020

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Pre-Service Music

Sonata in E, K. 380: Andante commodo

Composed by Domenico Scarlatti and performed by Yuja Wang