



Auckland Unitarian Church

Love beyond belief

## Keeping your balance in an unbalanced world

Clay Nelson © 12 June 2022

A quick perusal of the internet tells me I should wait for one of the equinoxes, when day and night are equal, to muse on balance and absolutely not when the winter solstice is approaching, but where is the fun in that? When reality is in balance in perfect alignment with my life, where is the challenge? My experience says that when I really need to know how to keep my balance is when my world is dark, nameless, unknown, and infinite. It is my spiritual practice to find light in darkness, name the nameless, accept the unknown, and welcome the infinite.

One of the difficulties in musing on balance is it is a state of being we can't achieve through our intellect. If you have ever had vertigo, you know balance has more to do with the inner ear than what is between your ears. As a result, we all experience balance and unbalance differently. Some of us can stand on one foot while touching our nose repeatedly with alternating hands, and others are happy to walk a straight line without appearing drunk. Others can't do either of these things. Yet, our differences don't stop us from thinking everyone is like us or should be.

One indicator we universally assume means our life is out of balance if we are suffering. While it is counter-intuitive, the opposite is often true. Suffering doesn't always mean something's gone wrong; it just means you're living a life.

[Katie Romano Griffin's meditation on dancing the Tango](#) makes my point. She begins with a quote by Miguel Zotto.

Tango is a social dance, a dance of the people. What would be the point of having lessons with teachers if we all taught the same? That is the charm of Tango: with each person, you find a different character and style.

She goes on to write:

When I find myself struggling with a person or group, I sometimes consider isolating myself from them altogether. That's when I retreat to a space where I can hear tango music.

In an instant, I'm eight years old again. I can smell the hot Café Bustelo percolating in the tiny pot on my grandmother's stove while she plays cards with my grandfather and his childhood best friend from Argentina. Music starts to play while my aunts and uncle move the furniture so they can dance. In mere moments the living room becomes transformed into a space of expression, celebration, and connection.

My mother and uncle are clearly the most skilled dancers. They settle into an easy rhythm together, floating across the old terrazzo flooring, the card players occasionally pausing to watch them. Order turns to chaos as everyone takes turns practising steps on their own, and then we engage with other family members. We each bring our own skills, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses to Tango, but always we seek to balance feeling our way through the relationship of the dance with each new partner — and with respect and love for the person and the music's rhythm.

The Tango of my youth was not as inclusive as my sweet memory would lead me to believe. Still, I can smile at that memory and know that the spirit of Tango extends beyond my eight-year-old understanding to a more inclusive dance: one that makes space for a theology of a better world, on a dance floor of mutual respect, with people of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, races, and ethnicities.

When I meditate on this inclusive Tango of the people, I ask myself, "This person or group that I am struggling with: am I wrestling with a different character or style... or is something else happening here? Do we have an agreement of respect, or is one of us trying to dominate what they don't understand? Is one of us more skilled and therefore needs to meet the other partner where they are and help them move to new places? Or does one of us need to engage with other learning partners before we can even attempt to be in relationship?"

Living in an unbalanced world can become a problem when it distracts us from living our life in the moment. If we are carrying around the past,

we will not notice all that redeems it. If we are anxious about the future, we will find no peace in the present.

[David Kohlmeier's meditation on life pushing through](#) feels like a confession seeking absolution. It is the kick in the gut we all need once in a while to regain our balance:

“Did you feel that!?” No. I didn’t. I was distracted. My hand was on my partner’s belly, trying to feel a move from our soon-to-be-born second child. I had waited so long with my hand pressing on the same spot that my mind had wandered. I couldn’t even remember now what it was I was thinking about. I was angry at myself for not paying attention.

I tried to shift my focus and concentrate all my attention on the physical sensation of my hand on their belly. Nothing.

“Maybe they’re asleep?” my partner speculated.

No. I just needed to wait. And as I waited, my mind started to wander again. The latest crazy tweet came to mind. I tried to push it away.  
BUMP!

“I felt that!” I waited to see if it happened again. My mind wandered. All the paperwork and emails piling up in my office... *focus...*  
KICK!

“Wow!” But there’s that bill I forgot to pay. How many days past the deadline is....  
KICK!!!

We both laugh, and I start to cry.

I’ve been so busy during this second pregnancy I haven’t made it to any ultrasounds or even taken the time to put my hand out to feel a kick or move. I cry in gratitude for feeling this life push through my dullness. How many bumps and kicks of Precious Reality have I missed in my life because I was distracted?

I’m not so good at meditating regularly, but if there’s anything sitting in silence has taught me, it’s that silence doesn’t actually exist. Every

moment is full to the point of bursting with reality, whether or not we notice it. It's not that the news and work and the bills don't matter, because they do — and yet, are they more important than the “pure nectar of This Moment” of which Rumi speaks, waiting to bump and kick to remind us It is always there?

Speaking of bumps and kicks and life pushing through to keep us balanced, in earlier times people in Japan used bamboo and paper for lanterns with candles inside. One night, a blind man visited a friend and was offered a lantern to carry home with him.

“I do not need a lantern,” he said. “Darkness or light is all the same to me.”

“I know you do not need a lantern to find your way,” his friend replied, “but if you don't have one, someone else may run into you. So you must take it.”

The blind man started off with the lantern, and someone ran squarely into him before he had walked very far.

“Look out where you are going!” he exclaimed to the stranger. “Can't you see this lantern?”

“Your candle has burned out, brother,” replied the stranger.

Sometimes life is futile. Sometimes we're damned if we do and damned if we don't. Sometimes good luck is disguised by bad luck and vice versa. Sometimes a kick in the ass propels us forward, and sometimes it's just a plain old kick in the ass.

The absurdity of the human condition is both very painful and very laughable. It's ironic and incongruous, and poignantly imperfect. But that's also half the fun of it. Life comes at us fast, and sometimes the healthiest thing to do is laugh despite the speed.

Between the pain of life's lessons and the medicinal laughter of cultivating a good sense of humour, there is the unvanquished absurdity of life kicking us around. Sometimes all we can do is kick back with a ruthless sense of humour, not despite irony and contradiction, but because of them.

Dive in! The water is warm (and cold and safe and dangerous). But don't let that stop you from living; from dancing the Tango through the glaring futility and venomous absurdity of it all with an infectious sense of humour.

**Meditation / Conversation Starter:**

When life kicks you in the gut, how do you keep your balance?