

Or this. You get home from work, running a bit late and there's a couple of students coming for dinner in an hour, and you haven't quite decided what to cook. And then for no apparent reason, you jump back on your bike and ride to the house of a valued colleague whom you haven't run into for a couple of months. He's in and in fact his three children are there from out of town and they are all about to go out for dinner. He's in good shape and introduces you to his children. And then off they go for their dinner and you speed home for yours. The next night you meet his children again at KGH, one having returned to Toronto that morning and then just now rushed back to Kingston. Your colleague never regains consciousness.

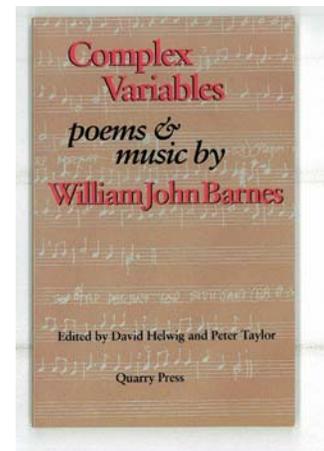


How are we to make sense of such experiences?

My colleague in that story is actually Bill Barnes, for many years my wonderful co-teacher in our Math and Poetry Course. Perhaps some of you were privileged to have Bill as a teacher, or as organist and choir-master at St. James. For most of his life he struggled with the ravages of diabetes, in and out of the hospital, and much of his poetry drew from that experience.



After he died, David Helwig and I collected his poems and music. The title was actually Bill's idea, one day musing what he would call his poems, collectively. I like how it fits with the complex numbers we worked with in our spiral recursion. I saw it archived once on Amazon in the mathematics section. I have a few copies of this book left which are free for the taking. Just ask.



Before I go on to the last question, it is perhaps time for the last joke.

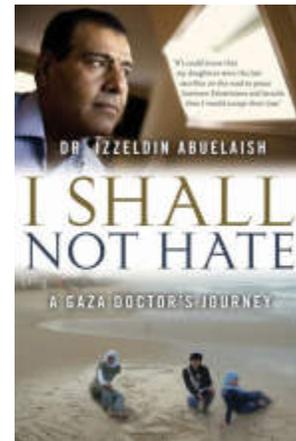
Why is there so much conflict in human affairs?

I guess the first answer is that we're simply products of our evolutionary past.

But we've slipped the bonds of evolution in both directions, first in being generous and loving and secondly in being cruel and resentful. Much of my own research work concerns the evolution of conflict and cooperation. I haven't yet done any work on *human* behaviour, but I hope to start a project this fall with a new post-doc related to competition and collaboration (actually I prefer the word "community") in undergraduate learning.

We are intelligent and we can all understand the tragedy of the commons, we can all clearly see that generosity and love is a better way for society, indeed for the world. We are also spiritual and we are able to feel within ourselves the pain of others. And there's lots of pain out there. It's huge.

But somehow we can't seem to get to where we really want to be, to where we know we really ought to be. I have just read a remarkable book on this theme: *I shall not hate*.



I have learned a lot about conflicting desires from my cousin **Candasiri**, my Father's niece, who is a senior nun in the Theravada Buddhist tradition at the Amaravati Monastery in Hertfordshire.

In her former life, Candasiri found that she was always struggling with desire—between following or repressing them. There seemed a perpetual war inside of her. She talked about this in a BBC broadcast she made in 2008 on Jesus as seen through Buddhist eyes. The Christian way, the teachings of Jesus, seemed to require that she resolve this conflict, either to surrender or to overcome, depending on the measure of her strength and will. Buddhism seemed to offer her another way, to just let it go. Through meditation she found she could simply bear witness to these desires, and allow them to pass on according to their nature. For her this involved stepping away from the world as she had known and lived it.

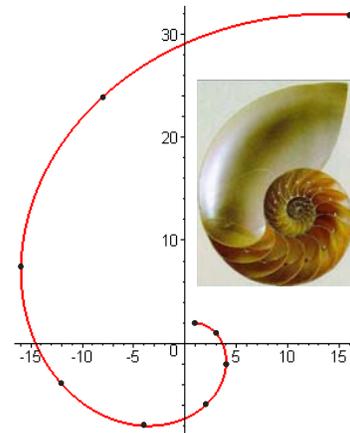


I know that the monks and nuns in Candasiri's tradition has been criticized for being so helpless, for its total dependence on the generosity of others for its very sustenance. At first glance, her way of life seems unworkable, unreal.

Candasiri's way is certainly not for most of us, it might even work against our nature. That oversize moon is not part of our nature either, nor is the 4th root of -4 , but they both give us beauty and a new way of understanding. Candasiri gives me that too—spare but larger than life, even unreal, but reflecting the sun, and echoing the sea-shell, not brightly, but quietly, gently, in a simple elegant curve.



Time to close. I return to the realization that this is my last lecture. Thank you for being here. Life can be lonely and so can death. We keep ourselves busy, our schedules full, so much to do. When we happen to cross paths with a neighbour or an acquaintance we say hi and carry on. That's mostly how we live. It's good. I am blessed to have good work, good students, good, if occasionally crazy, colleagues. I would miss lecturing—I enjoy it. You get to gather your thoughts, decide just how to organize them, honour their beauty, their fine structure, and then you get an entire class, some quite enthusiastic, to listen and respond.



For me, doing mathematics is quite analogous to being with God. They are both out there, just within reach, though you are never sure whether you are dealing with reality or with an elegant mythological world that we have inexplicably been given access to. They both do beautifully structured work which we can enjoy together. To be able to serve them both gives me a sense of wonder and humility.

As my father drew towards the end of his life he became gentle, so very different from his way when he was young, quite fierce really. So what do I say at the end?—Be gentle. Do mathematics, spend time with your God. Be joyful too. Some people suffer enormous burdens in their lives. I am sometimes overwhelmed at the realization. Be gentle. Thank you.

