

Daily Meditation 4/27/2023

Chimps & Us, Stadiums, Sports and Wars continued

Good morning.

This morning we continue our meditations on chimpanzees and the image, the metaphor that Brian Swimme shared with us a couple days ago, about how, when you fill a stadium with humans, we cheer and clap and get all excited. We don't make war. Whereas if you fill the stadium with chimpanzees, they would make war because, while they have a lot going for them, they have real limits when it comes to creating larger communities, other than their primary tribe.

And I think this really puts into stark relief the point that Brian is making: that humans have this capacity for expansion, expansion of love and compassion and shared joy and celebration. Of course it too carries the shadow that chimpanzees have. And that is war.

And of course, because we can expand for celebration, and caring, we can also expand for making war. At least the chimpanzees are limited, but in a stadium of 50,000, that that limitation would be only something negative.

So it remains interesting, then, to explore further with Carl Safina, who's done some very wonderful reporting on chimpanzees, and the latest information we hold about chimpanzees -- we've been learning a lot because we've been very stupid for a long time about animals in general. And we're learning a lot.

So notice, he says in the article that the chimpanzees may hold "clues to the genesis of human irrationality, of group hysteria and of political strongmen". So, their preference is for peace, but they do have a penchant for war, such as us who are again, sharing 99% of the same DNA as chimpanzees. But he emphasizes that "the deeper nature of chimpanzees includes tender, empathetic concern for others, and courageous altruism."

So we share some of that too. But he points out that chimpanzees are really not our ancestors. The last species ancestral to chimpanzees and humans, a species that we shared in common in our ancestry, that species is extinct. So "chimpanzees, and humans are contemporaries. They are complete chimpanzees, not half-baked humans. They are human-like, but are not human." Our species is the closest living relative of the chimpanzee, and of the bonobo.

So chimpanzees and we carry what he calls a "bizarre" attitude that is one of potential violence among all the animals that have deeply embedded family network systems. And there are no limits to the aggressiveness of chimpanzees once they enter into war.

And yet, for the most part, life for chimps is peaceful, most of the time; in fact, 99% of their natural lives are spent in peace... 99%. The problem is the males, what he calls the male ambitions. It is the males, those who choose to fight, to score in a hierarchical system. They can really cause havoc, kill many other males out of competition and ambition. And that's why the males are half as plentiful as the females: that two males die for every one female in the chimpanzee tribe.

But as he ends: "for the vast majority of their lives and times, the chimpanzees connect amicably and quell their worst impulses. They tap into their better nature 99% of the time."

The obvious question is: how about us humans? What percent of the time do we tap into our better nature?

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.