

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE ON DAILY LIFE

Cutting through the California quagmire

SOME MIGHT JUSTIFIABLY call it the California quagmire. Others might find less complimentary terms. But no matter how you slice it, the most populous state finds itself in an ongoing pickle. Both last week's editorial, "California, hit the reset button" (Feb. 19), and this week's front-page article, "California, once a dream state, strives to get back its groove" (Feb. 23), articulate ongoing challenges in a state previously considered golden. While a budget agreement was reached after months of deliberation, finger-pointing continues to divide along partisan lines.

Sadly, despite signs of reform, few promise immediate and enduring peace. After all, not many months will lapse before the process begins again, and unresolved problems still lie beneath the surface. Dan Wood's article identified "a perfect storm" of state problems "from drought to high taxes, from overcrowded classrooms to overflowing prisons," not to mention a crumbling infrastructure, immigration enforcement, gangs, and traffic congestion.

While average citizens might not be invited into the legislative chambers or the governor's mansion, no one need feel sidelined. Everyone can participate in local, state, and national government through prayer. Not so much the kind of prayer that asks God to come down and fix a surfeit of problems, but the kind that cuts through problems to see the true nature of God's governance and state of affairs. Historically, this mode of prayer has proved enormously successful. One need only open the pages of the Bible to find numerous examples, but few are as poignant as that of Joseph. Here's how the story goes:

Out of jealousy, Joseph's brothers sell him into Egypt. He refuses to be angry, and soon enough begins to climb the ladder out of his plight. Then the tides turn, and he lands in jail because of lies told by his employer's wife. He declines to affix blame. Even though his prospects for a future seem pretty bleak, Joseph never stops praying or acknowledging that God is in control of his and everyone else's lives.

As a result, he soon finds himself in a position to interpret a dream

for Egypt's ruler. Joseph's wisdom is clearly evident, so the ruler sets him up to guide that nation through years of abundant growth followed by a severe famine. Joseph even stores up enough provisions so that, during the years of blight, he can support those who travel to Egypt to obtain food, including his own brothers. Joseph shows them that they shouldn't feel guilty for what they did. He needed to be right where he was in order to do God's work.

Where are the Josephs of our day? Today, many rely on God for solutions and discover He's worthy of that trust. They've found that their own state of affairs, along with those of their local, state, and national governments, are well served by single-minded prayer such as Joseph's.

God's infinitely good plan includes everyone.

Three things stand out when considering what his prayer might have sounded like. First, he trusted that God's will would be done and no one or nothing could overturn it. Second, he understood that this will is innately good, therefore needn't be feared or questioned. And third, he knew that God's plan is universal; it includes everyone. These powerful convictions can guide one through any stormy condition.

Mary Baker Eddy, who started this newspaper 100 years ago, learned that she, too, could rely on God for solutions. She wrote: "God gives you His spiritual ideas, and in turn, they give you daily supplies. Never ask for tomorrow: it is enough that divine Love is an ever-present help; and if you wait, never doubting, you will have all you need every moment" ("Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896," p. 307). The "you" she uses can include the collective citizenry within a state, along with individuals. God's infinitely good plan includes everyone, as Joseph's experience illustrated.

The object of prayer isn't so much to change an intransigent set of circumstances as it is to lift thought above the quagmire to see that God is in control, that He can impart right ideas to everyone, and that we can listen for His guidance every step of the way. When one achieves this height through prayer, it becomes evident that no quagmire exists - just fresh and boundless opportunities.



'The Linguists': Raiders of the Lost Tongues

"The Linguists" is a film about the adventures of two guys named Dave and Greg. But it's not quite your typical buddy movie. These guys hit the road with microphones and cameras - and between them, knowledge of 25 different languages. The Indiana Joneses of linguistics, they travel the world on a quest to record all they can of the world's vanishing tongues.

The film, the work of producer-directors Seth Kramer, Daniel A. Miller, and Jeremy Newberger of Ironbound Films, was a hit at the Sundance Film Festival last year. Just this week it's been airing nationally over PBS. "The Linguists" follows K. David Harrison of Swarthmore College and Gregory Anderson of the Living Tongues Institute to Siberia, India, and Bolivia, with a detour to Arizona to visit some native Americans.

The world has 7,000 languages, half of them in danger of disappearing, according to the film. One of them vanishes, on average, every couple of weeks. But each of them is "a way of seeing the world." And wouldn't we want to preserve a language whose word for "sun" means "the eye of the sky"?

One of the most striking lessons of the film is how political language can be. On Harrison and Anderson's map of the geography of endangered languages, the hot spots tends to be place where colonizers (the Spanish in Bolivia, the Russians in Siberia) have suppressed indigenous languages. In some places a language gets banned; in other places it is merely belittled.

At one point early on, the film gives a concise description of how a language is lost: Young children from some indigenous group arrive at boarding school to be educated in the national language (often English) and choose not to use their native tongue. Then when they

grow up, they don't teach it to their children. Language is lost by a negative process, something that doesn't happen.

To capture language from native speakers, the linguists use a technique called "elicitation." One of them sits down with one of the native speakers, points to his own nose and says "nose," and thereby "elicits" the word for nose, and then repeats the process with eye, ear, teeth, and so on. Then they move to numbers and colors.

Compared with the way words are gathered for a great dictionary, this process might sound like a form of drive-by ethnography. But it brings forth some different ways of seeing the world.

Counting and numbers would seem to be pretty straightforward. But words for numbers sometimes suggest the mathematical concepts behind them.

Take 93, for instance. The English word means "nine groups of ten, three." But one of the groups Harrison and Anderson study gets at the same number with a word meaning "four twenties, twelve, one." It combines base 12 numbering with base 20 - a very different mathematical concept from our base 10.

The act of studying something changes it. The two globe-trotting linguists sometimes find that their recording of a language may give it the "literature" it never had.

One man they met, who turns out to be the most fluent speaker they find of a Siberian language called Chulym, tells how he was discouraged from speaking it as a child.

Though initially reluctant to admit how much of it he knew, at the end he has a moment of realization: "I have always loved the Chulym language."

Who knew that linguists could make for such a hot adventure movie? Maybe the next breakout hit at Sundance will feature copy editors.



verbalenergy
BY RUTH WALKER

Sudoku

Difficulty: ★☆☆☆☆

3			2					
	9		3	1				
5		6		7		4		
2		9	1					8
1	6						7	
		5		4				
			2		7	1		9
	1		3	6	4			
	4				9			2

Row →

Three-by-three square →

4	3	2	8	1	6	7	5	9
5	6	9	3	7	4	8	1	2
1	7	8	9	5	2	4	6	3
3	4	7	2	8	5	6	9	1
2	1	6	7	4	9	3	8	5
9	8	5	1	6	3	2	7	4
7	9	1	4	3	8	5	2	6
8	5	3	6	2	1	9	4	7
6	2	4	5	9	7	1	3	8

Column ↑

How to do Sudoku

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row, and three-by-three square. See example above. For strategies, go to csmonitor.com/sudoku.

By Ben Arnoldv

The Christian Science Monitor

The solution to this Sudoku appears on page 16.