

The Tipping Point

There are times when I watch the evening news on the television that I feel that our world is on a downward path. Few 'good news' stories are reported as the programmes are dominated by reports of turmoil, hardship and suffering across the globe. This is true of all the news channels from CNN, Fox, BBC, Al Jazeera to Pearl. Indeed, the messages are so negative that one could be forgiven for feeling somewhat depressed when it is time to turn off the remote control.

What I believe is of greatest concern is that our world is heading toward a tipping point, that is, a point when a new situation might lead to an irreversible event. There are many examples in our world today of potential tipping points.

The world economic climate looks decidedly gloomy. The economic crisis of a few years ago has shown little sign of recovery. Many countries are still experiencing hardships with high levels of unemployment, surging inflation and little growth in business opportunities. This is particularly the case in the world's largest economy, the United States, where the injection of enormous sums of money over the past two years has had seemingly little effect. More and more Americans are unable to pay the mortgage on their homes even with interest rates at 0%. The forecast for the USA over the next few years is not looking good.

China has experienced rapid growth at the time that the USA has been in decline. The country's relentless drive to build more factories, houses, roads and railways has created millions of new jobs and assisted many who were living in poverty to enjoy a better standard of living. This development has also boosted the Australian economy where all available iron ore, copper, coal and alumina are being shipped to the China for processing. Both countries are enjoying strong currency rates and healthy monetary surpluses.

This is certainly not the case in Europe. The countries that adopted a single currency, the Euro, are experiencing severe pressures on their currency. The relatively strong economies of Germany and France have needed to prop-up the faltering economies of Greece, Ireland, Portugal and potentially Spain and Italy. Public opinion in Germany and France is very much against having to spend any more of their money to save the economies of these faltering nations.

So what about the tipping point I referred to? What could be the situation that leads to an irreversible event? I believe that we need to look no further than Greece. The country is on the verge of bankruptcy, that is, it does not have money

to pay the salaries and pensions of government workers nor does it have the money to pay the interest on loans it has borrowed. It would appear that Greece will simply run out of money in the near future. The collapse of the Greek economy would be a disaster not only for that country and its people but also for the world economy in general.

A Greek tipping point would lead to other European countries following suit and most likely herald another global economic crisis. Financial markets around the world would collapse once more. The United States and Europe would enter another recession with rising unemployment and falling standards of living for millions of people. As the world's largest economy the USA would experience falling imports and exports of goods as consumers stop buying and businesses stop spending. This would have a major impact on China as countries around the world would not have the money to purchase its manufactured goods. Hundreds of factories in Guangdong will be forced to close and their workforces compelled to return to rural villages in distant provinces. As for prosperous Australia, its raw materials would no longer be required by Chinese manufacturers. It is important for you to understand that events in one small part of the world can have a significant global impact. The concept of the tipping point is very real indeed.

So what has this got to do with us as Hong Kong citizens or as students at this College? The concept of a tipping point does not only apply to nations and world economies. It can also apply to human beings. There are many people in the community who believe that their lives are on a downward path and see no way out of their difficulties. Some may have lost their jobs or had heavy financial losses in property developments or on the stock market. Others might have experienced a marriage breakdown or have serious health issues. In the case of the male population in particular many men suffer from mental health issues often related to stress and anxiety. In isolation each of these conditions is manageable and treatable. The danger of the tipping point is that some new problem might just push people over the edge.

As students and teachers we need to understand that there might be people around us, in our families and at school, who could be experiencing problems and who possibly believe that their lives are going downhill. If that is the case for you then I encourage you to seek help immediately. Please take the time to speak to the school social workers or the Guidance Mistress or the Chaplain. If we know of anybody in such circumstances it is critical that we try our best to lend a hand. This might mean showing support or giving positive reinforcement and encouragement. People close to the tipping point are often lonely and feel terribly

isolated. By displaying genuine concern we might prevent someone we care about from tipping over the edge.

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