24th September 2025

Consideration

"The earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality."

Joseph Conrad, *Henry James – An Appreciation*

My wife and I recently enjoyed a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* in Edinburgh. It's a musical by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, based on a book by Joseph Stein. Set in what is now northern Ukraine around 1905 (part of Imperial Russia then) the story centres on Tevye, a milkman in the village of *Anatevka*, who attempts to hold to his Jewish traditions against outside influences. Three of his daughters wish to marry for love, rather than have marriages arranged by the village matchmaker. And, in time, an edict of the Tsar eventually evicts the Jews from their village.

The original Broadway production of the show, which opened in 1964, ran for over 3,000 performances. It won nine Tony Awards, including best musical, score, book, direction and choreography. It spawned five Broadway revivals and a highly successful 1971 film adaptation.

But I was struck by the familiar themes of the story: struggles when traditions are threatened; the role of religion in a changing world; relationships in a family; the assertiveness of young women, set against the restrictiveness of a father; the balance of responsibilities between husband and wife; how to face poverty and oppression; where we find our self-worth; the heavy-handedness of the State; the persecution of Jews. Tevye – brilliantly portrayed by the great Topal for so long – voices the thoughts of all of us as he tries to make sense of these things. And he comes back, again and again, to his mantra: "on the one hand … there again, on the other hand … but on the one hand … and on the other".

The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes has reminded us that "There is nothing new under the sun", and *Fiddler on the Roof* brought that thought to mind. But Tevye's methodology was nothing new either, and, indeed, might be something we should ponder: consideration; weighing up the arguments; balancing the possibilities; seeing both sides; figuring out how to cope with "on the one hand" and "on the other". Careful thought around issues, and decisions, and problems in a changing and pressurised world.

Thank you, Tevye, for reminding me that the need to give important things such thoughtful consideration isn't new either.

A prayer for today

Living God, remind me that there's nothing new in considering things carefully

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