

“Are we being good ancestors?”

September 13, 2020

Dear Students,

I spent the last week learning about a school in India, called Neev Academy. I was helping them with their application for international accreditation, advising them with an outside perspective on what their strengths are, and what areas they should focus on developing as they move forward.

Normally, when I do something like this, I would go to the school in person, but because of traveling restrictions we did the whole thing by Zoom. I talked with lots of people - students, teachers, board members, parents, and more. I try to do one of these each year, because I find that learning about another school in such detail helps me reflect on our school, and I find it inspiring to see the good work that so many schools are doing around the world.

One thing that I want to pass on from Neev is one of their guiding phrases, which is from Jonas Salk, who was a medical researcher who developed one of the first vaccinations for polio.

He said that the most important thing that we can ask ourselves is: “Are we being good ancestors?”

Think about that for a bit. Who will your descendants be? What kind of a life do you think they will live, and what kind of a world will they live in - one that is better or worse than the one we have now? What can you do to make that world better for your descendants?

It seems to me that thinking of yourself as an ancestor is good guidance as you make important decisions about things like where to go to college, what subjects to study, and what career to choose. But it also helps to think about questions outside of your career, such as what kind of a parent you’ll be (if you choose to be one), or how you’ll treat the people around you.

There of course isn’t one right answer to this question. You’ve probably heard me say that before, but often my job is not to give you answers, but just to guide you in thinking about certain questions. So I hope you’ll think this week about what kind of an ancestor you want to be, and what that means for you individually.

Have a good week - only one more remaining before a break!

Sincerely,

James