

## THE GEOMETRY OF COMPASSION

*Honoring David Breaux and Karim Abou Najm*

My name is Carlos Puente. I am an emeritus professor from UC Davis, where I served for 35 years. As a person that often went downtown for lunch, I saw the “compassion fellow,” David Breaux, many times in the streets of Davis. As Karim Abou Najm is the son of a colleague and dear friend of mine, I write these reflections with a very heavy heart.

Hoping to contribute to our university community and to the city of Davis at large, I would like to share what I wrote to David Breaux when I tried to answer his important question: what is compassion? I wrote in his notebook two formulas that I explained for almost twenty years at a first year seminar class of mine at UC Davis, Chaos, Complexity and Christianity. These equations are  $1 + 1 = 1$  and  $0 + 0 = 00$ , the first one written vertically and the second drawn horizontally.

What I shall try to do here is to explain why such are not so silly formulas, as they allow us to contemplate some key traits about Love and community that may be useful, not only to those students graduating soon into the world, but also to others that have been affected by the tragic passing of David and Karim.

The first thing to say is that when true Love operates,  $1 + 1$  is never equal to 2. Instead, it is surely a one, a larger one that reflects the union and unity of those involved, something that could be remembered by stacking an index finger vertically onto the other, nail with nail.

If you think about it, such an unstable dictum of oneness is not so arbitrary for it is a known maxim about marriage, ‘the two shall become one,’ and such certainly serves as a reminder of how things should be, for if our Loving relations add to two, it is because such unions are unhealthy and fractured, thus needing amends. Of course, achieving this formula,  $1 + 1 = 1$ , is not trivial, as it requires, and married people know it, a great degree of unselfishness and constant adaptation, which requires putting the other person, the beloved spouse, first.

Clearly and in the Loving togetherness of geometry, the same formula applies to our true friendships. As we learned at a beautiful memorial for Karim,  $1 + 1 = 1$  happened to him and his best friend Aman Ganapathy in very special ways: in their daily conversations that lasted at least two hours, in the thoughtful gifts they shared, and surely in the magic of the larger one that resulted when they dreamt to change the world together.

There is no space between two that Love each other, I have argued in my seminar class. This is something that we are summoned to do following the most famous of commands, that is, ‘Love one another’ and such represents, I think, the only way we may build the happy and fulfilled communities we would like our sons and daughters to live in. Without a doubt, Love is the glue that takes us to our best destination, where the obvious generalization of the formula yields unity and union, that is,  $1 + 1 + \dots + 1 = 1$ . Once again, this is to be visualized vertically, and its positive

flow (as seen on plus signs that are also crosses reflecting the pain in not succeeding) is the only one that allows us to dream together, to reconcile and perfect our families, cities, countries and the world at large.

The other formula,  $0 + 0 = \infty$ , is something that I am sure you are understanding by yourselves, joining the index and thumb fingers of both hands and bringing the two hands together, arriving at the familiar shape of the infinity symbol. Of course, nothing plus nothing is nothing, and such applies to spendable resources, like money, but the zeroes that this equation speaks about and join are not 'nothings' but two unassuming people, folks with compassion, comrades fully open to one another and committed to the core, like Karim and Aman or King David and Jonathan, that is, two really unselfish friends, which the two partners in marriage should also be. The point is that those two zeroes (or more) in their individual humility, together experience the spark of a deep connection, hence defining the geometric infinity that enlightens life.

A person experiencing the blissful state of zero constantly is one who lives in a selfless and giving manner, a fully committed and happy individual mindful of others, a little, but strong person, as reflected by the notion of a "saint," that is, somebody so surrendered to help others, like our Davis' pacifist David, who's halo on top of his head, signifies an entry of the equation. This, of course, is the image of an unusual individual, but such a concept also represents a suitable symbol to depict our call to Love everybody, 'being perfect', something that reflects our most profound vocation as human beings.

Clearly, this notion is not trivial either, but it opens the door for us to be connected with one another, for when two or more of such agree, the divine in their midst always provides beyond limit, giving rise to the infinity on the right hand side of the formula. Two or more, apparently powerless, apparently nobodies, but saints, by fulfilling their zero power in their lives, actually become very powerful, and such is encouraging, as this happens not individually but in shared goodness.

As is well known, although is not so obvious, any number, except possibly zero, raised to the power of zero is equal to one (this is now straight calculus!) and hence a saintly person, fully surrendered to goodness and empowered by apparent nothingness, as is devoid of selfishness and full of Love, possesses an inner unity and peace that allows him or her to be a committed link, a faithful 1, in the  $1 + 1 = 1$  formula and a faithful 0 in the  $0 + 0 = \infty$  formula. This explains why, at the end, zero and one are the two related sides of the same coin, something that allows us to appreciate what is needed for Love to work. For without the zero in us, there is no true unity and without inner unity, it is not possible to build a true and Loving relationship and much less a community.

Of course, and I'll repeat it one more time, all of these ideas are easy to visualize but difficult to achieve, for their implementation, requiring constant reminders, recognizing misdeeds, extending forgiveness and asking for forgiveness, are often hampered by the ego that gets in the way. Of course, Love represents a constant and beautiful journey and how wrong it is when we take it for granted thinking that we have it all figured out. However, although such may be the

case, these expressions, these formulas containing equal signs and pluses linking 0, 1 and infinity, turn out to show us the way, for they also show us, logically, that there is no other possible way. Inner peace happens only in our humble commitment to do good to all we encounter, in the sharing of our lives with due compassion, and in the delicious spark of infinity that comes to us while being surprised by the spirit of Love.

Before summarizing these words by a poem-song, I would like to share yet another equation that helped my students appreciate the dynamics of Love. Such is  $1 = 0.999\dots$ , with infinitely many nines. You see, the flow on the spiral 6 reflects nature's division, like the shape and motion of a ferocious hurricane, whose inward movement towards its center corresponds to a turbulent entity that may be used to depict our unabated selfishness. The other spiral, on the other hand, the 9, positive by convention, and traveling unnaturally outwards, turns out then to properly illustrate our saintly Love. So, if you like to have unity within you, the solution is indeed to become a saint: just start anew with a 'zero period,' from scratch, and then just love, love, love and continue loving. And if somehow this chain fails, make your amends and just repeat the algorithm, growing more nines...

Here is my poem-song "Geometry." I hope those graduating will take it with them as they go to conquer the world. My sincere congratulations to them!

Davis, May 31, 2023

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## GEOMETRY

*Two formulas about compassion:*

$$\begin{array}{l} | \\ + \\ | \\ || \\ | \end{array} \quad 0 + 0 = \infty$$

A riddle I bring along,  
asking you which is your view:  
is zero plus zero, nothing  
and the sum of ones, two?

If brothers enhance their deed  
truly heeding saintly call,  
what they ask, oh love concedes:  
adding 'nothings' garners all.

And if peers truly attune,  
choosing union as their song,  
in the forging of their tune,  
space among them is all gone.

The plus portrays the essence  
also seen in the times sign,  
geometry shows recompense  
that leads us to the sublime.

The question forever parting  
in love, I ask you anew  
is zero plus zero, nothing  
and the sum of ones, two?

**One plus one, oh larger one  
zero plus zero, a brilliant whole,  
one plus one, oh clear unity  
zero plus zero, real community.**

Two little saints do not add naught,  
but the unending embrace of all,  
a real friendship does not ring two  
but faithful balance, rapture anew.


Zero plus zero does not yield nil  
but the eternal conducting drill,  
one plus one is never oh two  
oneness of love, actions in view.

The zero power, oh grand design  
one needs the zero for solid clan,  
nines in a dance, row all along  
loyal inflection, compassion lifelong.

**One plus one, oh larger one  
zero plus zero, a brilliant whole,  
one plus one, oh clear unity  
zero plus zero, real community.**

***Oh David Breaux  
brother of love,  
Karim Abou Najm  
I am forever your fan.***

*(November 1997/May 2023)*


$$= 1 = 0.999\dots$$