

Help (How To Find Peace of Mind When Facing A Turbulent World)

Post by “Joshua” of July 19, 2022 at 8:28 PM

Ah! That dread and dismal realm of human underachievement called 'politics'!

The first thing I recommend is a corrective--a palate cleanser, if you will. If you cannot steer wide of politics, then at least allow yourself the pleasure of a temporary restorative. In their art the Greeks called this *Catharsis*. In medicine, relief. Sometimes this is as easy as reframing your perspective: say, by gazing at the forbidding immensity of space;

Quote

The stars are the apexes of what wonderful triangles! What distant and different beings in the various mansions of the universe are contemplating the same one at the same moment! Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?

Or by sitting quietly at the back door.

Quote

There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sing around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance.

Sometimes it takes a single day well spent, going slowly un-mindful of the world.

Quote

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry -- determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream? Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows. Weather this danger and you are safe, for the rest of the way is down hill. With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses. If the engine whistles, let it whistle till it is hoarse for its pains. If the bell rings, why should we run? We will consider what kind of music they are like. Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin, having a point d'appui, below freshet and frost and fire, a place where you might find a wall or a state, or set a lamp-post safely, or perhaps a gauge, not a Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future ages might know how deep a freshet of shams and appearances had gathered from time to time. If you stand right fronting and face to

face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces,
as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you
through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your
mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we
are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel
cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our
business.

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but
while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is.
Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink
deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I
cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I
have always been regretting that I was as the day I was born.

Display More

So much for the Sage of Walden Pond. But how to proceed?

Here are some ideas:

- Throttle your news intake. This is difficult, but I think essential. More copy is printed everyday than a person could possibly read, and there are no points for trying! Curate your news reading, and try to do it efficiently. I used to get the Economist delivered. If I still had a subscription, I'd get an E-reader for it. At all costs avoid the endless 24-hour-news internet click machine! People made it through two world wars with a daily newspaper. Get through it quickly, and have done with it.
- Read dispassionate reporting, dispassionately. The former is difficult to find, and the latter more difficult to do, but we can try. When I read about the end of the Roman Republic, I'm not rooting for a side; this "old news" means nothing to me. And the day is not far off when the geopolitics of 2022 won't mean much to me either. Try to situate yourself in that context. Imagine what it would be like to read about this year in 2122. BO-RING! This isn't an argument for cynicism or jadedness. This is advice meant to direct our passion to the things we care most about. Thoreau didn't care who sat in the governor's mansion, but he did care deeply about the horror of slavery, and that was where he directed his effort and attention.

- Recognize that you cannot carry the world's traumas on your shoulders, and that it's not even a reasonable thing to ask. It sometimes feels heartless to disconnect from politics, or to neglect the news, when so many people are suffering. But just knowing about it doesn't really help, does it?

Quote

The fate of the country does not depend on who you vote for at the polls--the worst man is as strong as the best at that game; it does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning.

All quotes from Henry David Thoreau