

Have We Forgotten Lulled to Sleep

We've heard the saying "deer in headlights." The phrase suggests that we get mesmerized to the point that we're no longer in control of ourselves or our faculties as we're consumed by something external. Sometimes it can be likened to the proverbial "kids in a candy shop" where something captivates our attention to the exclusion of everything else. Frank Clarks said that "a habit is something you can do without thinking - which is why most of us have so many of them." Simply put, sometimes we just don't think to think, and so not thinking becomes habit.

Then there's the "shiny object" that becomes something hypnotic. At other times it's just the relentless monotony of our lives where things just keep moseying along in just the same way they've always moseyed along; creating some hypnotic kind of cadence that lulls us to sleep. Sometimes it's just pure choice, where we're tired of it all and we just check ourselves out. Maybe the most tragic form of this mental malaise was articulated by Richard Stearns when he wrote that "some people probably are becoming numb to tragedies. What we call 'compassion fatigue' may be setting in." However or whatever, it happens; we become lulled to sleep in the living of life.

It's both odd and dangerous that we can totally forget critical things, important things, things that are absolutely central to our existence. It's not so much that we forget them as it is that we give ourselves permission to forget them. We become emotionally and intellectually lazy, letting our memories atrophy and our minds go flabby. Fundamentally, we drift into a sort of cognitive numbness that engenders an apathy of the most dangerous kind; the danger lying in the disturbing fact that we're numb to the numbness as well.

Letting Ourselves be Put to Sleep

To get lulled to sleep, we give something permission to do that to us. To say that we're not somehow complicit or that we had no hand in the deed is at best denial, and at worst an outright lie. I think it's important to establish that we're not just an assorted collection of victims upon which life has covertly worked its evil and dubious intent. Rather, if we've been lulled to sleep, we were part of the whole sleepy-time process.

Most of the time when we're lulled to sleep, we end up there because of the things that we're not doing. Most of the stuff that we're not doing is because we've chosen to do other things instead. Let's face it, we like things easy. We say we prefer challenges and that we like to "step up the plate" and "get our hands dirty." We like to look life squarely in the face and shout the proverbial "bring it on" with some sort of bombastic chivalry which is really more smoke and drama than anything else. Yeah, we're bold and we're brave and we want wade into the fast rip currents of life and swim upstream. That's the idea anyway.

Yet, all of that stuff demands boldness and energy. There's sacrifice in living that kind of life. It takes a toll on us and it doesn't necessarily insure any recognizable kind of victory. It doesn't come with a money-back guarantee that states that once we're bloodied and exhausted that the life of sacrifice we've chosen will hand us a golden, diamond studded trophy that makes all our sacrifices worthwhile. Sacrifice often results in a price paid with no return other than the satisfaction of having given ourselves over to something bigger than us. And in this life, that sounds heroic and all, but it's often not what we're looking for.

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So, we become passive. We let our attention slip. We compromise our dreams and our hopes until they're so pathetically anemic that they can't get up off the floor of our minds. We while away our time listening to the musings of a world that speaks so that it can hear itself talk and pat itself on the back for what it heard itself say. We go along for the ride and we whittle away our values so that they more cleanly fit with the world around us. We come to the point where we think that the lyrics aren't really all that bad, and that while the script was filled with expletives, it did outline some interesting cultural agendas. We figure that people are going to do some destructive stuff anyway, so our best hope is that they'll do them in moderation. And in doing all of this we wade ever deeper into the slimy cesspool of compromise. And here in these putrid places, we're lulled to sleep.

Rigorous Living to Offset Sleep

We would be wise to choose to live life in a manner that's rigorously attentive. That demands maintaining a mental sharpness. It means learning and maturing which involves the aggressive action of immersing ourselves in intellectual and academically stimulating pursuits. It means never ceasing to ask the hard questions even though they might result in hard answers. Rigorous living means taking nothing lightly and taking nothing for granted out of a studied understanding of preciousness of life and the immense opportunities we have within it. It's about being wise, vigilant, accountable and responsible despite the less than favorable places that exercising those attributes might put you.

Rigorous living means just that, living. Living should not be confused with the existing which is fundamentally the abandonment of living. It means that we view the opportunity of life as something to be seized rather than letting it seize us. It's refusing to be passive but likewise refusing to be arrogant or demanding. It's living with steeled purpose and intent. Angela Monet said, "Those who danced were thought to be quite insane by those who could not hear the music." Listen to the music and dance even though most of the world around us is entirely tone deaf. Dance until you can't dance, and then go do it again.

It Takes Energy

Doing all of that takes tremendous effort and energy. There's nothing easy about it and there's no short-cut to this kind of place. We will get expended in the process of doing it all; sometimes expended to the point that we question the rightness, or at least the value of it all. But one thing is for certain . . . it will never lull us to sleep or create a space for that to happen. Rigorous living never involves a nodding off where we become numb to life. Living life with attention and intentionality means that we remain sharp and entirely coherent which is the enemy of slumber. Rigorous living never gives the sandman of life a place to tip-toe up behind us and sprinkle a dash of his golden grains on sleepy eyes. Rather, such living maintains vigilance that is never lulled to a passive sleep.

Lulled to sleep; to some degree we probably have been. And to a large degree we need to shake ourselves awake, wipe our eyes clean of slumber and commit to vigilance.