

Some Aspirin for Our Blues

How're you feeling these days? Everything merry and bright? Sunshine on your shoulder and roses at your feet?

If so, good for you. I mean that. Often I feel that way myself, walking on air and kissing the breeze with my smiles. When appropriate, and if you're able, please spread some of that joy to your fellow citizens. Heaven knows our battered old country could use some cheer and goodwill right now.

But how about the rest of you readers? Anyone feeling a little low? Anyone stricken with sorrow or angst, but can't figure out how you hit the skids?

Sometimes I feel that way, too, and this afternoon and evening were one of those times. And now it's 9:15 p.m., and the long day wanes, as Anthony Burgess titled his Malayan trilogy, a title, I suspect, he lifted from Tennyson's "Ulysses." A sheet of paper sits on my desk—my daily "to-do" list, almost as fresh as when I wrote it this morning. The cloud that drifted into the house around noon today and cast its shadows over me brought not only physical lethargy, but a dullness of mind and spirit that wanted to rally but couldn't quite stagger up that hill.

"In a real dark night of the soul it's always three o'clock in the morning, day after day," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in his essay, "[Pasting It Together](#)." But that's a description of depression, and a different beast altogether. Here I'm talking about depression's distant cousin, melancholy, which pays many of us a visit from time to time and which my trusty online dictionary defines as "a feeling of pensive sadness, typically with no obvious cause."

Right on target, especially those words "no obvious cause." The origins of melancholy, at least in my case, are nearly always as elusive as those of the Chinese flu. If asked what

produced my low state of mind and spirit, I would have shrugged with dreary indifference.

Unlike depression, however, which can require serious medical treatment, or the sadness of grief, which often only time can mend, melancholy can be more immediately treated. Here are some home remedies that work for me when gloom puts its fist to my door.

Get Some Sleep

I'm not renowned for hugging the pillows for the seven to nine hours of slumber recommended by experts, and aging has further shortened those nightly excursions, but the length of time my eyes are closed doesn't matter. Instead, here's where that old saw of reassurance kicks into play: "Things will look better in the morning." Many times when I've gone to sleep with Mistress Melancholy, she magically vanishes in the night, and I wake a happy man, sipping with enormous pleasure my first cup of coffee and thanking God for another day on earth.

Recognize Your Sadness for What It Is

Melancholy is a mood, and like all moods, it comes and goes like the tides. Absorbing that lesson took me years—as I've written before, I'm a slow learner—but when the black dog now makes its appearance, I have the presence of mind to realize that eventually it will trot out the door once again. Some people I know, even those past the age of 50, assign too much weight to this passing sadness, wallow in what they believe is depression, and are surprised when within a day or two, or even a week, the spring returns to their step and life looks good again. Identifying melancholy as temporary, like a headache or a cold, helps disperse it that much more quickly.

Stop Taking the World's Dreary News as Reality in Toto

Though I can't be certain, my blues may have stemmed from a weekend of editing an interview with Elizabeth Spalding, director of the newly opened Victims of Communism Museum in Washington, D.C. while simultaneously watching [Mr. Jones](#), a film which, despite the horrors it depicts about media mendacity and Stalin's deliberate starvation of several million Ukrainians, I highly recommend. The bleak news and commentary of our time can take a similar toll. Doom scrollers, beware: you are adding bricks to the load you already carry.

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Notes on waking, written just after 5 a.m.: My bout with melancholy occurred on a Sunday. Perhaps the sentiments of Kris Kristofferson's "Sunday Mornin' Coming Down" with its tagline "There's something in a Sunday makes your body feel alone" had as much to do with my mood as anything.

Whatever the case, this morning I woke after five hours of sleep feeling as if someone had taken a cloth and wiped clean the whiteboard of my mind. As I poured my first cup of coffee, I found myself singing show tunes from *Mary Poppins* and *South Pacific*. (Roaring might be a better description than singing, but no worries, dear reader: I live alone and am separated from my neighbors by an acre of lawn, so there was no damage done.)

As mysteriously as it had arrived, my melancholy had disappeared.

Bring on the day!

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