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That incredible lightness



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Ice in pursuit of social acceptance ought to end

I returned from a wonderful vacation in the sun-kissed hill town of Madikeri in Karnataka. I was expected to feel refreshed, relaxed and rejuvenated, the three R's that define a good vacation.

However, what I experienced was something entirely different. The dread of coming back to the noisy, hectic, the dusty Bengaluru roads riddled with potholes and peppered with honking horns, the endless problems of mundane life. They filled my senses even as I tried to relax. The blissful feeling of peace and the sound of silence that had accompanied my vacation were replaced by anxiety that followed each time I heard the clang of metal tools as metro rail workers burrowed construction paraphernalia deep into the earth.

This wasn't the first time I had felt this way in the past few months. With the "get ready to take on anything life may throw at me" attitude, I found myself in the dumps when I got back from vacation. I simply had to find a way to cope with the affliction. So I did what any digitally connected individual would do: I searched the internet for answers.

A thousand answers stared back at me, twinkling gleefully on the bright laptop screen. Some suggested I had what was popularly termed a 'holiday hangover'. Intrigued, I read some more, concluding that I wasn't alone. Relieved that my malady had a name, I looked to Dr. Internet for a solution. How does one get over a holiday hangover? What was the remedy?

Some sites suggested I meditate or get a new hobby, while others said I should plan another holiday, which would give me something to look forward to. None of this appealed to me. I was more frustrated than ever before.

“I have a holiday hangover,” I announced to my husband that evening.

He looked at me, amused.

“Who told you that? The Internet?” he asked, shaking his head at one of my latest Internet-diagnosed illnesses.

He sat me down, and in his usual patient manner explained, “Do you remember the time when our parents could afford just one vacation a year, during the summer? More often than not, they’d take us somewhere where they had a relative who’d house us and feed us for the duration of our stay. Then we’d return, happy, contented, and ready for the next school term, without a care in the world.”

Raising my eyebrow quizzically, I wondered what he was getting at. Well, I know him enough to realise that this was going somewhere, but it was up to me to find the answer. He wasn’t going to give it to me that easily.

He was right, though. Indeed, life was simpler back when we were kids. The days when there was very little technology to do the thinking for us, and when boredom was a temporary state of mind. We always found something to keep ourselves busy. There was joy in small things, for my husband and I both grew up in humble homes, with more have-nots than haves.

That’s when it dawned on me: we couldn’t miss what we didn’t have. There was no concept of going on a holiday because we were bored, there were no digital quacks to convince us we were afflicted with problems of the privileged, and most important, there was no time to squander on frivolous things like a holiday hangover. We were simply too busy being contented!

I felt foolish and glad at once. Surrounded by gadgets in various sizes and colours, influenced by people masquerading their extraordinary lives on social media, I understood that most of us have forgotten how to be content and to thank our maker for our families, our lives, and everything else that we usually take for granted. We’d become empty inside, filling our hollow hearts with the problems of the privileged.

I made us a steaming cup of tea that evening, pulled a chair to the patio, and turned off my smartphone. It felt strange, almost like a strong desire to scratch an irresistible itch. But I knew I’d eventually enjoy the lightness of simply being once I got past those symptoms.

The symptoms of withdrawal from the exhausting dance of social acceptance.

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