

Just writing – day 11

## **21st Century New Age Disaster:**

**Just because you think you have haemorrhoids doesn't mean you have to go as far as joining a cult.**

Start point: sitting in the waiting room of the transcendental meditation clinic being asked why I came to the meeting in the first place and not having a sentence to piece together. At least not one that didn't sound like it came from their national health service looking brochures at the entrance of the quasi office space, studio-bunker with posters of Ellen, Paul McCartney and David Lynch on the walls. Those brochures with scientific charts which don't have any units on one of their axes. The ones with the graphic design used to inform people about depression with attestations from "Rogers" in high finance positions with lots and lots of responsibility. I hadn't fully thought it through myself and the reason I thought I wanted to say, I couldn't.

The man running the course was my old french teacher, Mr. S. He looked like a man who had been on a 1-month speed fuelled insomnia bender after winning a Charles Baudelaire-look-a-like contest. Eerie eyes, darker and deeper set than raccoons and the last person who you'd think, would take early retirement from his highly profitable side job running meditation courses. This should have been the first sign that I was signing up for something a little out of the ordinary. But I was convinced I had haemorrhoids and the last 6 months had been hell.

Although I was reluctant to state why I'd come along, Vanesh the electrical engineer from New Dehli pursuing his MBA was quite open about it. There were only two of us and it took about 3 sentences of waiting room chatter and 90ml of forehead perspiration before he blurted out that he wanted to understand what alpha wave frequencies he would be tapping into while meditating. He said it was so he could model them within an electric circuit to then induce back into himself whenever he wanted to meditate optimally. This was all to get over his fear of public speaking. He was a nervy guy who needed 20 minutes quiet time but probably not another way gets into his head. At least not through the DIY electrophysiological brain-computer interface he was talking about.

I can't remember too much of the introductory course since I was too busy daydreaming about Vanesh giving business seminars with his brain hooked up to a car battery and a smartphone. In the daydream, he would be breaking down the points of entry to the wellness market whilst the smartphone app he'd worked on in collaboration with his MBA classmates allowed him to transcend in between each word he said. Micro TM would be his way of creatively being able to come up with solutions whilst on the spot. Never to live in fear of not knowing what to say at the right time. However, the TM implant had an odd side effect of responding to local WiFi networks making him get emotional and homesick if the signal was too strong. Daydream over.

Anyways, Mr.S could not give the explanations Vanesh wanted. Maybe he didn't have a fear of public speaking, maybe he was just doing market research. I never saw him Vanesh Again.

I, on the other hand, fell fully into it and signed up for the Scientology-lite course. Two weeks of haemorrhoids and painful walking later - unknowingly, I found myself deep into a religious ceremony amongst IKEA furniture, strawberries, and orange peels. I was alone and Mr. S was on the floor chanting in Sanskrit. In my stressed state, my brain said something along the lines of "you are broken and you need a reboot - your "rational" thinking hasn't been working up until now, maybe those corporate hippies have a point". He handed me my mantra like a hot potato and I wasn't sure if I was saying "hail Satan" in Sanskrit or not. Every day for a week I meditated three times for 20 minutes. Twice by myself and once in a group session with the others in the evenings.

I would sit next to David, a 73-year-old brit hooked up to an oxygen tank who was having trouble recovering from post-operative pain. In a coffee break he once wheezed to me that if he was struggling to do his 20-minute afternoon meditation, he would cheat by increasing his oxygen supply from the tank when his wife wasn't looking. Every evening we would sit in a circle of Ikea Poang chairs – originally developed for Alvar Aalto's TB sanatoriums, overkill- and filled out a survey about our daily mental health and meditation. To my surprise, Mr. S would read out the results in front of everyone else and interrogate us on what we thought we were doing wrong. Group-Think - the first step into cult persuasion. Mr. S spent 4 days explaining how Vedic science debunked all modern psychiatry and cognitive neuroscience. We would never have to worry again because a greater level of consciousness was available at the small fee of signing up for another course which would extend our mantra. It took my friend Greg one Reddit forum post to realize we all had the same personalized mantra. I was quiet for the rest of the sessions because the meditation was working and although I didn't buy into the politics, I hated the ass pain.

I managed to meditate my pain away for a while before I had to see a doctor a couple of months later. Turns out I didn't have haemorrhoids. I just hadn't left my apartment for about 2 months and forgot that I did that staying in my room thing again. The physical pain every time I walked was in fact anxiety which was causing the rashes all over my body. I diagnosed myself with a 21st century new age disaster.