

BWWAAAAAHP!

Thus rang Mr. Heinrich's red air horn while I was sitting in AP Calculus BC at Lubbock High School.

"Y'know guys I need this to stay present, to stay awake guys: the airhorn and the mathematics."

My mind was fuzzy too and had meandered for a long time. But Mr. Heinrich blew the air horn and it felt like I had woken up. I always was a spacy kid, and I dreamt a lot.

*In the time before and after class my mind would fall back into a dream. This time, a new one had appeared: I was back in Roswell when math was my worst subject and I was in bed peering into my books, where I was scouring the cliffs of Everest, being amongst demigods, conversing with the philosophers who I aimed to emulate. I thought everything belonged where it should be...*

Sometime after, I woke up, the obscuring cloud had diffused and I awoke into a world of color where black and white were one among many other tones. As I sat in this class I began to see the beauty in such things: I had always considered math to be drab and algorithmic where it was the same technique everytime and no other ways. It felt like my liberty was restricted and I was forced into a box of thinking but the box was now open.

*Sometimes I'd return back home and I'd sit in my bed and I would begin dreaming again. I would be sitting there during my middle school year and I was at the dinner table with my mom and dad fighting. My sister sat there too. I wanted to run away, but my heroes, the demigods, the philosophers had disappeared and I simply looked into my screen, and then I fell through the screen, falling, falling, falling. A cliff's edge, I tried to reach for it but as I reached out I touched nothing and I kept falling. Sometimes I would wake up from the dream, feeling that the conflict I had experienced was all my fault...*

As I sat there the next day in class I was fully awake. Mr Heinrich was talking about Gabriel's horn, in my eyes an analogy for limitless potential but finite time. He was exploring the paradox in all of its intricacies, creating an orchestra of reasoning about how everything was connected.. The room was colorful. There was nothing else to me but this moment, he talked of fractals, and it made me think of how every moment has infinite depth even in the simplicity of the breath. Mr. Heinrich had even sold many of his possessions to experience presence through his dedication to math and it profoundly resonated in my search for meaning. Everything was connected.

*When I came home I fell asleep and I began dreaming again. This time, I sat in a new dream where I couldn't see anything; I was in a thin miasmic haze where I didn't know who I was. No*

*edges, no paths, I tried to run away but the haze was still expanding and swirling around me. It felt like it was years that I sat in this haze, searching for the light. As I felt the outside world collapsing in, I turned the only way I could - inwards. I started meditating and searching for meaning where it seemed there was none. I wished to begin again...*

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I woke up around 2 years ago again sitting in my Calculus III class with my current advisor Alvaro Pampano. I always remember this time in my life because it was the era where I experienced some of the most pain I ever felt. I felt tormented by my past and had finally become conscious of these things and for a while it was very overwhelming to deal with. Something people don't mention in your journey with mindfulness is that the start is always difficult, and math was the way that I coped with this.

In Pampano's class, as we delved into curvature, I saw math as more than a set of rigid rules. It became a way to understand the flow of the world, the way surfaces bend and curves connect. Suddenly, it was alive again. I saw the vivid images of how we might describe these things, in the abstract and in real life. There are so many ways we can do that too: there is not one way to do things. Math was beautiful because though there exists the canonical way, there is always a different way to arrive at some facet of truth. But you have to be here. It will not come easy to you, and at times the truth can seem even farther than it was before.

Through my math classes, I've experienced all the highs and lows. Failing and acing exams, not understanding and feeling like clarity would never come, and then having those moments of clarity where it all made sense. I remember all the hours of time that I spent trying to understand something, and in some sense I struggled a lot. But the struggle is what absorbs me and makes me lose myself in the moment.

I took this even further and viewed it in the context of my life. I had always had a difficult time caring about myself, but then I would think back to those dreams I had all those years ago about me as a child, knowing all the ups and downs that child would experience through their life, I would ponder: was it all for nothing?

I began to understand that the haze would eventually dispel. It was time to focus. As I sat in the haze all those years ago I did my best to clear it. I tried to see who I was or where I would be in the future and mathematics was the way I could see the light. Math allowed me to become the best version of myself, but I still couldn't clearly see who that was.

When I looked for myself, I didn't find me. I still can't find myself to this day. But, I began to be okay with that. You don't need to know who you are. All you can do is acknowledge that neither

the past nor the future actually exist. Maybe there is no meaning , but you always have your interface with the real world. All you can give to others is your mind, which makes it all the more important to be here right now. Math and meditation bleed over into each other: they make me sharper and make me more present. Sometimes I still look back at the moment in my life where I was dreaming and I wonder how life could have been if I was always awake, if I had given certain things my all, like it was the last time I would ever do that thing, If I had tried harder in school, if I had given my friendships and other relationships the energy and attention they needed.

But in those moments where I make these considerations I feel my eyes closing and the dream washing over my mind. Sometimes I catch it earlier, sometimes it takes a while, but I've grown comfortable in the fact that I will wake up. Mathematics is more to me than just something I do for a living or something I am interested in. It has been the apparatus through which my life has changed, it has been the reason why there is no boundary between the meditation practice and real life. It is the reason I wake up and I am grateful for life no matter what. Whenever things are tough, when you truly feel low and begin to slip into the dream, remember: you can always begin again.