

Mulling Day

Written by Alex Baer

Sunday, 31 January 2016 16:38

Welcome to your Day of Rest, aka A Brief Opportunity to Catch Your Breath Before You Have to Jump Back On the Hamster Wheel. Me, I prefer to call this Mulling Day -- the only 24-hour period in which the long list of *Haftas* takes a breaks, and something from the *Wanna* pile gets to slip into the mix.

The trick in life, of course, is to minimize your Haftas and maximize your Wannas -- a truth known by the ancients, which is to say, known by Trump, by Clinton, and by your boss, for example, and by any hyper-hormonal teenage spawn in your roaring, throbbing, pulsating vicinity.

Meanwhile: Here, as for you, most likely, the Wannas are always quite modest, and in the same general way the Haftas are not, and are instead brazenly, openly immodest: the demand for food, water, shelter, medical care, and basic creature comforts (think heat during winter, clean clothes, and a shower once in a while) perpetually hog the first five slots, never sleeping, always alert for openings in which to pounce and capture, while niceties such as entertainments, visits with family and friends, and maybe a movie or a nap, are always at the opposite pole of those activity lists.

Despite the mad, rampaging behemoth of one list's constant stampede, and the microscopic, darting creep of the other list's sporadic scurry, other truths remain impressed on me: The benefit of attempting to pay attention, and trying to figure out what things might mean.

Sometimes, owing to operator limitations and the lack of access to a supercomputer between my ears, this leads to moodiness and depression. Other times, I feel as Ogg must have, putting one pebble or stone into the dust and muck, and mulling over an early math operation involving a combining of items -- a count of that one chuck of rock with another.

It was a long time before Ogg pierced that seemingly impenetrable layer of a mental operation. Even longer before *one* and *one* became a new thing altogether -- a concept of *two*. Then, the mind-blowing notion that

two

might become

three

-- or volcano gods be appeased -- even

Mulling Day

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four

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Anything else was truly unthinkable for a while, for Ogg's head throbbed, and the volcanoes belched threateningly. Later on, when Ogg had been able to successfully flee the lava flows, Ogg took up this mulling-over thing with the stones again, in between ferocious bouts of tearing-and-clawing survival, not so much unlike today's version of it as to be totally unrecognizable.

Some of the beasts and monsters were more obvious in Ogg's time, to be sure, and there was no need for Ogg to remember what had happened to him on his last encounter with the Nacho Cheese machine, and run from it as through chased by howler-lizard-birds, but, all in all, things were pretty much oriented toward the same struggle: In the words of someone Ogg might have recognized as having fallen painfully out of the Ogg family tree, to *put food on his family*, and, by extension, to *put food on himself*

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As to the combinations of rocks, well.... Ogg was at the edge of a great journey of knowledge. Ogg could sense the depth of the pool in which the edges were now being skirted, but Ogg could not know the vastness of this scope of counting and combining. Ogg could not have known, or even imagined, the notion of infinity.

Ogg did what he could to know what he could know -- to achieve what was achievable in his own small world, and in his own mind, and in his own time. The rest was so mysterious, preposterous, and bottomless as to be tantamount to insanity to contemplate.

I know exactly how Ogg felt. I feel this same way every time I come within range of Republicans, wether they are the Runner kind or the Voter kind.

The more I read or know -- or think I know, as perception is reality, and the rest of that yadda-yadda -- the more unanswerable it remains.

Mulling Day

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There was a recent study showing those who follow Republicans are susceptible to authoritarian control -- these people sway easily to the same sort of "strong man" ideal or magnetism which allowed Mussolini into office.

Another study showed those responding favorably to the GOP and its clan, were responding emotionally -- primarily to threat levels of fear and anxiety which Republican candidates repeatedly use to their benefit, in attracting and maintaining a loyal voting base.

More studies have come and gone, attempting to help me make sense of a phenomenon which is nonsensical to me. I read the words, I understand the gist and interconnection of ideas, but the end result eludes me:

I am Ogg. ☐ Look -- there some rocks! ☐ Interesting, huh? ☐ What it all mean, you think?

I suppose that is most of it -- there is no thinking here, only emotional appeal and response. I try to not invoke Godwin's Law, or even Murphy's, at every turn, for risk of diluting legitimate concerns, stemming discourse and inquiry, and cutting off avenues of exploration.

Other studies have looked at brain scans, learning more about the pronounced fear responses in brains of those who identify as Republicans -- responses which do not show in those identifying as Democrats or as Independents.

But this sort of linkage alone is something out of the Dark Ages, or, maybe, updated to astrology or phrenology, perhaps, and lacks a convincing finality of answer.

Still, in personality studies, heaped with other types, patterns do become convincing, as does research which shows that conservatives are not more fearful, per se, but that more fearful people are conservative.

Also, while fear-based responses in some brain areas may be stronger in some whose brains

Mulling Day

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made them more susceptible to self-identifying as Republican, it is also true that the beliefs help shape the brain itself -- making the previously suspected, one-way path seem far more likely to be a give-and take shaping over time.

To simplify: Yes, an enlarged amygdala can make one more fearful, which may cause one to become more conservative, and one's conservatism can strengthen that same brain activity -- but it's not a closed loop, and not the entire answer.

Yet more studies have show that those who self-report as Republicans have a stronger need for team action, and for uniform, top-down leadership. The same studies have shown a stronger need for regimentation, for disciplined group activity, and other traits which feed right into the dead end of fascism, and the end-deadening conversation of bringing up that very result in Republicans.

Every little tantalizing bit leads us a bit further down the road in understanding human nature and our behaviors, but stills fails to answer basic questions -- the questions which make the hair on my body stand right straight out when I hear Republicans speaking, when I hear what passes for discussion and debate, when I learn what passes for current thinking and ideas.

You can cross-reference studies and information and research until your brow is knotted purple, and you understand exactly -- *exactly* -- how Ogg must have felt, way back at *three rocks and then two rocks more make, um....*

Fear response -- check, and quadruple-checked; fear is used, and used *hard*, by every single Republican politician lobbying at every election, every vote, on every issue.

Need to remain in a regimented group, as a tight team, acting in lockstep -- check, and double-check. Ditto, strong-man leader type with a top-down leadership mode -- triple and quadruple check...

It goes on and on like this. Tantalizing puzzle pieces, but what about the important questions, what about the whole?

Mulling Day

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The question I cannot seem to satisfactorily resolve is this: Why would anyone be, or vote for, a Republican -- ever?

That question, of course, stems from this one: ***What have Republicans ever done for the regular, everyday voter?***

Then, I suppose I should also be asking something else: Even if knew the answer to these mystical, mythic questions, would it matter? Would it change anything? Would it help me understand more than I do now?

And: ***Would knowing those answers help me accept my disbelief and horror at the direction the country seems to be very clearly demonstrating it is headed?***

Ogg, I feel for you, buddy.

*

Mulling Day is not always easy, nor is it always gut-wrenching or prone to daydreams of hurling oneself in front of a speeding bus. It just feels that way when you hit a brick wall -- an old friend of a brick wall... the one with facial and bodily impressions in it which just happen to match yours exactly.

*

Of course, it is easier to despair in highly political times. The February 1st cover of The New Yorker magazine captured one of my chameleon moods perfectly, when it showed former presidents Washington, Lincoln, the Roosevelts -- FDR and Teddy -- and Kennedy gathered around a TV set, showing an apple-cheeked Trump in full, self-important debate bellow.

Mulling Day

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Sunday, 31 January 2016 16:38

Lincoln was sad, almost despairing. Teddy was gruff and disapproving. FDR was shocked, allowing his cigarette holder to drop from his mouth. Kennedy was opening an antacid. Washington was half face-palming, trying not to look fully at the screen, appearing for all the world like a frightened viewer at a slasher movie.

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I was thinking the other day that the most recent Republican I could have voted for, for President, was Dwight Eisenhower. He'd helped build a country, protect more, and then helped rebuild others who were formerly enemies. He warned about the greatest single danger our country, and the world, may yet know (not counting climate change and Fukushima) -- the military industrial complex.

I kept seeing Ike in my mind's eye, reviewing a line of Republican candidates for President -- in fact, for all elected offices, local and national -- and slapping them squarely across the face, and some twice, forehand and backhand, and telling each, in a plain, straight, steady voice: "How dare you."

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Hell, even Richard Nixon was a liberal by today's howler-monkey standards for Republican greatness. I mean, establishing the EPA? Ending a war? Normalizing relations with China? Backing the lowering of the voting age to 18? Returning sacred lands to Native Americans and allowing them the right of tribal self-determination? Starting the war on cancer? Overseeing the Clean Air and Water Acts? The Mammal Marine Protection Act? Preventing gender bias at colleges receiving federal aid? Missile reduction treaties?

The accomplishments go on and on, You can look them up. And, when you do, remember that these were areas which would today be instant, third-rail death to Republicans... and they were carried out by someone with grave personal challenges and issues, and questionable legal precedents.

Mulling Day

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How much good do you think will come with the far greater amounts of Maximum Strength, Industrial-Level Crazy which originates with any of the current clutch of GOP candidates for President -- or for ANY elected office?

When has throwing vats of completely *Bat-Guano Crazy* at difficult problems produced desirable, honorable results?

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Politics used to be the art of compromise. Now it's all about extremes -- my way or the highway. I imagine that's the way it works after such repeated, long term wear and tear on the moral fiber of a nation turned to self-interest at the expense of public good, propelled to a me-first-and-everyone-else-last mentality. It's the push of fear, versus the pull of hope, that we've been seeing for decades.

It's a worrisome thing, the confluence of events. Taking a step back for a moment, imagine this...

A period of malaise and economic downturn. The slide in many areas of former, unparalleled greatness. Add to it, the lack of answers in the search for reasons -- the readiness to find scapegoats by those frustrated by their situation, and further frustrated by not being able to understand the source of their real and perceived losses in life. And now, strongmen rise, saying they have all the answers, that only they themselves know what is going on...

... and, to some, they appear to! □ They even name the names of their oppressors -- the groups causing all the problems, the groups draining away our resources, those who hold us back from our previous greatness!

And, well, you can take it from there. Others have.

Mulling Day

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Sunday, 31 January 2016 16:38

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What other culture treats politics like a gladiatorial spectacle and circus, taking, now, nearly three full years to complete? To the great dismay of Republicans, they prefer not to comment, as any number of perfectly sane countries manage to wrap up their doings in far less than a year.

We here? We like the sawdust and brimstone, and rampaging lunacy so much, we hardly ever put it all away, like the string of Christmas lights we keep up year round, outside, rather than go to the trouble of putting them away.

Every day is Christmas in capitalism, where it's every corporation for itself, and any women and children can have whatever lifeboat seats are left over -- if there *are* any.

*

Marco Rubio doesn't want us to be like Sweden, I see. This is Republicanism to the bone, because only *Americans* have answers for *America*. This is why we are still Number 43 in the world today -- *formerly Number One* --

because no country has anything of any possible value to teach

US

, by golly.

No, as people, it id far better we should collapse and move to the ditch at the side of the road, and die, if illness should strike, in order to make way for the Constant Political Parade, now in its full stride...

Here come the big drums! □ The busses and trucks! □ The music! □ The sparkly things!

Mulling Day

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Perhaps it is as simple as it seems. Some people vote with their fears, with their emotions. Other vote with their hopes, and with their ideas. No more complicated than that.

I suspect this will have to do as an answer, as I no longer think much more headway is possible right now, in this era. Maybe later, in the future, there will be a breakthrough in *rock-counting* and *stone-combining*.

Maybe people will come to understand that you can side with only *one* group of power at a time -- money bound together, or people banded together. But not both.

To the old adage "follow the money" I can only add: "... and watch where it goes." (This is a fancy way of saying what every good Republican Christian -- *all of them, naturally* -- are supposed to already know:
By their deeds shall they be known
.)

And there is no shortage of Republican deeds, and lack of same, out there, for the looking, for those who'd care to see. Of course, it's pretty hard to tear your eyes off the circus.

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Well, as the old joke goes: This campaign ballroom ain't so bad -- and just then, somebody in charge comes along and hollers: "*Coffee break's over -- everybody, back on your heads!*"

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Why, Ogg? Well, it's the Primary season, and I think we've all had enough coffee, and enough of this ballroom, for a lifetime.

Right now, I could damn sure use some fresh air and a movie about now. There'll be some counting to get in, but I can take care of that part.

Then, we can both rest our obsessions and think of something else for a little while -- even though it's part *Wanna*, and part *Hafta*.