

Why Enjoy Your Porridge?

An elderly GP acquaintance of mine used to instruct each new trainee who came to work at her practice that they must park their cars mid journey between domiciliary visits and take a walk in the countryside. They were, she told me, so busy rushing between appointments that the beautiful countryside often became terrain to be raced through in the least amount of time possible. So it is with life for many busy people.

Sometimes people rush as a top spins, because they believe the movement is the only thing which keeps them upright, or they rush because they confuse being busy with doing something useful.

If you rush often enough then it becomes a way of behaving even when there is nothing to rush for. What is ever gained by rushing? If something is important enough, it is worth approaching slowly, with thought and preparation. If you were the patient of one of those student GPs would you rather be seen a few minutes earlier by a flustered and irritable practitioner, or later by someone who stopped on the way to gather their thoughts?

I remember from childhood a children's storybook character called Bobby Brewster. Bobby's mother always told him to chew his food forty two times. By comparison many of the children of today eat convenience food that takes no time to cook and even less to eat.

Many of the people who come and see me for help with their distress have long since forgotten how to savour the little experiences of life: the countryside; food; taking time to enjoy the company of friends and family. Like insomnia, not savouring the small things can be both a cause and an effect of poor mental health. An important first step back towards a life worth living is learning again how to become completely absorbed by whatever presents itself to attention in the present moment: birdsong or the view of the mountains. This is what young children know how to do naturally. Remember how much more slowly time seemed to pass when you were young and living for the moment? All haste is indeed towards death.

This brings me to the topic of porridge. Two or three months ago I began having porridge for breakfast. Something solid and comforting for cold winter mornings! I'm embarrassed to confess that my preference is not for grown up porridge, but the lighter, smoother type of porridge meant for children which the manufacturers claim creates a rosy penumbra around your body. As I set my alarm clock each night I look forward to my porridge, and I awake to the anticipation of savouring it each morning. Porridge is such a simple pleasure: something I can lavish upon myself easily and daily. Like the pleasure of stopping the car mid journey and taking an impromptu walk in the countryside, savouring porridge nurtures my body and through my body, my spirit.

What simple pleasures do you take the time to savour? Where was the porridge in your day today?

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Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.