

Does Satiation Cancel Out a Craving?

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I am raised in a religious environment. My father holds on strongly to his faith as a Roman Catholic and never fails to remind us that God is the source of everything, but not of any evil nor sickness which are caused only by human sinfulness. Due to the contradiction of such a statement, my puzzled younger self asked questions which were never answered in a child-friendly way. My father is a military man and to him asking questions that either contradict or doubt anything that he believes in just won't do.

My curiosity had never left, though, and with it were more questions. My father would always answer in the same way and every time that he did, it got harder for me to believe his words – how could he possibly understand what he's saying when he couldn't even explain it to me?

"You ask me questions when you already have the authority to do so!" My father would growl with slanted eyes, his finger pointing at my tear- and snot-stained face staring angrily back at him. And although I now understand how he thinks and how his parental mechanism works, such confrontations still happen occasionally when I snap out my cool, composed self and tears fall down my face. A habit is hard to kill after all.

In addition to my father's constant reminder of how good God is, we would regularly read the Bible together around our dinner table. He himself reads it every day, and after having read the verses in the scripture reading guide, he would ask questions about the passages and we would answer in a way that we knew he would have no complaints of – summarizing. He never liked critical thinking if it came from any of us. In fact, he would dismiss it as "answering back" or "resisting," and we would have to listen to him talk for an hour or two about the fact that what he all wanted was: for us to have discipline, to ensure our bright future and our salvation because he had seen and known everything. Well, that was when we got older when corporal punishment was becoming unacceptable and preposterous. When we were much younger though, our legs got intimate with a stick of *bayabas* first, before he did the talking.

During those days, we went to church together every Sunday, the girls compelled to wear skirt or dress since it was "what women should wear" when in church. My father and I used to fight so much about that, but then again I'd still end up sitting on a church bench, wearing a dainty skirt. By the same token, we also used to recite the holy rosary every six o'clock in the evening during my last years in high school. Abiding by those rules used to annoy me, but my faith in God and his words in the Bible never faltered. For sure I had some personal issues, but I also believed in God and what

my father said about God was real. Certainly, it's hard not to believe my father's words, given they're all I'd been hearing my whole life.



I hate bus rides. I prefer boat or plane rides. But travelling by air with an enormous luggage, a *sako* bag, and two backpacks would cost us so much for the excess baggage. Taking a boat was out of the question; so it was a bus that brought me and my mother to Davao that August of 2015.

I remember how it took us eight hours to get to Davao. The roads were unpassable – either they were broken or being fixed, I was not sure. All the while I was munching on the snacks I bought for the long ride, imagining the many possible accidents we might find ourselves in: a collision with another bus or a much bigger truck, falling off a cliff, suicide bombers...

I was quite comfortable during the first couple of kilometers when someone in the bus had decided to eat an orange. The tangy, pungent smell triggered gustatory confusion and I ended up throwing everything up in the bathroom at every bus station.

Horrible as it was, I endured the long ride and made it to Davao. As I lay in bed in my aunt's house that night, I was overwhelmed with the excitement of living life afresh in a city foreign to me. I said to myself I'd start anew with an identity so different from who I had been all the years past; that I'd make a ton of new friends, that I'd be an honor student, and that everything would be so fun and ideal, my whole college life would be great. So dehydrated but so optimistic.

Three days after our arrival, my mom escorted me to my new school which was so much more secluded than I first thought. It took a 10-minute tricycle ride from the highway to reach the dormitory and all around me I saw trees – huge, glorious lushes of green atop enormous trunks. A school in the middle of a forest. There were even horses.

By contrast, my dorm looked very ordinary. Regular size with a regular lobby to welcome regular students in the entrance: left for girls, right for boys. I was assigned in a room on the second floor, the room number I already forgot. It was of regular size with two regular-sized double-decked beds. As I was the first to arrive, I had the luxury to choose the bottom deck of the bed farthest from the window and immediately arranged my stuff in the cabinet in front of it.

I was all done before two in the afternoon. We went back to my aunt's house to stay the night before my Mom left for Cagayan de Oro the next morning. I didn't cry when my mother left. I was too excited to start college. When I went back to the dorm, one of my roommates had arrived. We exchanged names and asked questions usually asked between two strangers who were going to share a room for five months. I immediately liked her when she called me by my name an hour later, even though I dropped my name only once.

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I don't especially like Math. I like it though, the way I like a bus – useful but negligible. It's just there, a passing reality, like a bus passing by the road. I want Math to just pass me by through college.

Unfortunately for me, though, I took up BS Computer Science as course. Which was a curious case since I had been planning (since kindergarten) to take up Biology as a pre-med course and later proceed to Medicine. At the moment of my high school graduation – the moment when crucial, life-changing decisions were made – the prospect of being a doctor though, suddenly became unappealing to me. The next thing I knew I was already in the queue for tuition fees, staring at the form labeled BS Computer Science – in small bold letters. Though "out of my comfort zone," the course was practical. The choice, I reckoned, was reasonable. But then again, it's hard to know what's reasonable and what's not in the middle of a panicky decision-making.

On the first semester, I only had one math subject, which should be a source of comfort to me. And yet, that subject, among many others, still managed to make me feel distressed. Such affliction made me remember the sports class in high school. How our teachers (ourselves included) didn't really care much about it. It was a fleeting matter not really worth thinking about since we all got pretty high grades without even a little bit of stress. But of course, this was different.

Suddenly I did not know what to do when 15-ft waves of academic work and math came up crashing on me while I tried to surf through it with a scrap of weather-beaten wood. I was really, really struggling with Math 17, having realized with shame on the first day of class that I didn't even know how to solve basic problems with fractions, while almost all of my classmates could answer them in unbelievable seconds.

From the first week, I knew in my heart, I was in the wrong place. But this deep knowledge I tried to cover up with futile reasoning. Maybe I would learn to love my course and manage to be happy with it in the next succeeding months. Weeks and months passed by. No matter how much I pored over the book's exercises, flipping the library-smelling pages every night, Leithold never felt like a friend. Without any warning, the first long quiz came like a shock and I panicked the whole of two hours facing an empty bluebook and a small strip of paper with curious-looking problems on it. There were no choices given.

I failed.

The second long quiz came. I failed again.

Academic never made me cry. But it did.

On the third quiz, for the third time I failed again.

Finally, I managed to pass the fourth and fifth long quizzes. It was an excruciating five months of hoping and failing and hoping still. But of course, it wasn't just Math 17. I was not just the

quizzes I failed in spectacularly. In between me and math was my life as a student, as a dormer, the whole breadth and width of my misery: the shock of a new culture, ideologies, the shifting perspective, and the consequent shift of my mental, emotional and social disposition.

While living in a dorm was not a big deal, there were days -- I must admit -- when I imagined myself inside my room with Mom just five steps away. Mom somewhere in the room ready to hug me when I woke up feeling alienated from everything; Mom in the corner of the kitchen ready to console me when I opened the fridge and found my Yakult gone without a trace. During these days, when the going got really tough, I called home. But talking on the phone felt shallow no matter how many words were spoken.

I looked forward to certain Tuesday or Friday or Sunday -- the days for Bible study and the church. I could have gone home straight to Cagayan de Oro for a 2-day weekend break, but the thought of a 16-hour round trip with motion sickness for company somehow eclipsed the distastefulness of those hard days and kept me in my dorm room yearning for my lost Yakult while counting the days ahead.

My aversion to Math was compensated for my interest in history and social science classes. Every day, a new world was introduced to me, each new world bringing forth names, and places, and values, and beliefs, and stories, and ideologies. It was mind-opening, view-changing, an experience that transformed me as a person more than I would have allowed, and deconstructed my idea of self. This contrast between how I felt for my major subject and how I felt for my non-major ones added so much confusion and feelings of displacement during that time. The thought of being an irregular student was so unacceptable for me, but the idea of shifting to another course was just too horrific to even consider. I decided broadly to finish what I started even though it felt like it would take me forever! Just thinking about four years of math made me gasp for air in open air.

The crises I was facing had a great impact on my social disposition. I was a very outgoing person in high school. It was easy for me to make instant friends. I never had grave misunderstandings or any falling out with other people and I could easily make myself comfortable with almost everyone.

But not in college. I had only one friend in college. And he was from Cagayan de Oro and he came from a different school. That he came from a different high school should not have been a problem for me to be friends with him, but I found that it was a problem.

Being friends with anyone just became so hard for me. I was shocked at this new realization, suddenly I didn't know myself.

There were classmates with whom I managed to talk for a minute at a time (out of necessity), and even that one minute was tiring and draining. Surprisingly, however, not being friends with them made me feel so much better than hanging out with them for years to come.

Inevitably, though, I made at least half a dozen of friends whom I can comfortably eat lunch with, and there were four people I got close to. One of them I didn't really have much of a connection; the other one I was really annoyed of; and the remaining two I had a falling out with by the second semester. It was an emotional roller coaster meeting all kinds of people from one end to the other end of the spectrum of human personality and relationships.

But friends like water, like buses are a necessity.

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To cope and survive I did a lot of praying, a lot of studying (both Leithold and the Bible), a lot of mass going and candle lighting. In fact, I bought a manila paper where I wrote a list of things I should do to pass my math subject: 1.) Pray, 2.) Study, 3.) Pray, 4.) Pray, and posted it on the inside of my cabinet's door. Such technique was effective. But passing Math 17 only made me feel *relief*. Not *happiness*. I got only a passing grade of 2.75. It was like saving up and sacrificing so much so I can buy a chocolate milkshake which I couldn't drink because suddenly I remember being lactose intolerant after consuming a large cup of it.

Before I left for Davao, I asked my father to buy me a brand new Bible I could bring with me. It was a bulky, blue-leather book in English – the pages, white and fresh, without a single pen marking. I placed it on one side of my bed and sometimes flipped through it mindlessly. However, I got to use it much more often when I joined a Bible study group in the middle of the semester. The organizations in the school were mostly made up of fraternities and sororities, a fact which I had no complaints about. There were school events and activities (mostly consisting of trivia nights, symposiums and forums, free meals, fun runs, and demonstrations) which made life on the campus less boring, less frightening. But these events weren't just for me; besides – thank God – I was never invited to any of them.

One day, one of my "friends" invited me to a Bible study session. Though reluctant – because, as you can guess by now, I hated my experience with the Bible study sessions conducted by my father – I decided to go. My strong religious background made the experience comfortably familiar. During that time I was in dire need of belongingness which I couldn't find at school or in my circle of "friends." The Bible study group sounded like something that could save me from drowning, a driftwood I tenaciously clung to, to survive the daunting waves.

Actually, it was the best decision I made during my stay at that university. The group helped me in a lot of ways and made me truly appreciate for the first time the words of God. In fact, it was the only activity I enjoyed on a regular basis.

On the other hand, more than I loved Tuesdays and Fridays of Bible study, I loved Sundays more. When Sunday came, I descended from the forest, gave twenty pesos for a ride to the nearest church to buy and light five candles of different colors. I would already mumble my prayers even while walking towards the church. I would be somewhere in the first row, almost in front of the

altar, sitting and praying quietly while waiting to hear Mass. The homily was my weekly wonder drug, a brief reprieve I looked forward to every week.

After the service, I treated myself to a *kwek-kwek* or two before I took a 10-minute walk to the market. I bought myself flowers. I bought myself a bunch of yellow bananas before taking the tricycle back to the dorm. Sunday was such a beautiful day. I had flowers in my room which was all by myself, my roommates being home for the weekend. The night was peaceful and quiet.

The first semester came to an end. I survived. I passed all my subjects. It was bad, but not quite. The next one, though, would be worse.

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The second semester started January. The week I was back in school I already felt suffocated and desolate. Of course I got more subjects in Math, new programming ones, and only one Humanities course. Math got more uninteresting and I felt more displaced and disconnected than ever. During the first two months I was struggling with the waves of my own confusion, but still swimming with the moral driftwood supporting my whole body. In the next three months I was already underwater, still kicking though, trying to stay afloat for as long as I could. It is all hazy now, but I remember clearly the feeling of dragging myself to the class. When not in class, I was either asleep or lying in bed doing nothing feeling nothing thinking nothing.

My faith, though, was somewhere inside me, perhaps just hiding, sleeping, growing for all I knew, becoming stronger than it ever was. God and my family became my only consolation. Mostly God because my family was light years away from me, so away from my drowning self, the same self who believed God was omnipotent. He would never leave me, never let the water fill my lungs.

In the end, I was torn between shifting courses and transferring schools. I still had no clear idea what I wanted. What's clear was what I didn't want. Computer Science.

My parents were supportive. They told me it's my choice: either I finish the semester or just stop and go home. Surprisingly, I decided to finish it. Living in a city far away from home finally felt bearable when it was clear my only option was to move out. Shifting courses would create new complications and it was not encouraged in my School.

It was fine, I said to myself, I could always go home, study in Cagayan de Oro. My mom and I already talked about my going to Xavier University and start all over again. My temperament got better as the days passed, like emerging from the water to take a much needed breath of fresh air. But soon enough, I was told Xavier won't accept transferees. I found myself 30-ft under water again.

Days passed by. Dark. Blurry. Head-achingly slow and fast at the same time.

One weekend, I was alone in our room and I decided to pray. All of a sudden I was overtaken by emotions coming from some depths I never knew existed. I cried and poured out to God all my struggles. It was a strange yet comforting experience. It calmed the raging storm inside me.

From that day onwards, I learned to accept the quick, unexpected turns my life was taking, surrendering everything to God. Eventually, I passed all of my subjects that semester and successfully transferred to Xavier to study AB English – a course close to my heart. I don't know what made XU change its mind on admitting transferees, but at that time I was glad it did. My faith had saved me from drowning and laid me on safe sands.

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Two years later, I am writing this now as an agnostic.

This is temporary.

I still hate bus rides.