

A Year After the Meltdown  
The Benefits of Ice Water

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WE ARE WEARY. We are weary of the two faraway wars that have gone on for much too long, with nothing remotely like real victory in sight. We are weary of the wealthy and their blob-like, unchecked growth. We are weary that they have obscenely devoured so much of the national treasure, and that the only thing that has trickled down upon the rest of us in the past quarter century is rainwater, and stagnant incomes.

We are bone-tired of the endless political bickering; the rancor of a nation that now seems to use its air only to accuse and its hands to point fingers. And we are, God knows, so very weary from our fear. Frayed, slumped in some old, worn chair, we sit, quietly angry that we gave in to this fear like an unchecked fever – as if a few thousand medieval fanatics could actually bring down the strongest nation on earth. We are worn out by wasted adrenaline. This dumb fear has ruled us and made us muddled, edgy and reactive, obscuring our collective vision and sending us off on wild goose chases one day and then into private corners of uncertainty the next.

Now here we are, at the end of this decade of economic alchemy and delirium, worn down by delusions or our very appetites. Either we wondered who that dark-haired person getting on the plane with us was and what might be their intent, or we hopped (or increasingly, waddled) into cars the size of tanks and didn't much give a damn one way or the other.

When we didn't fret we gorged -- mammoth houses, larger SUVs, endless electronic toys, super-sized meals -- and all we have to show for this grand gorging is a massive pile of debt and a silk lifeline, courtesy of China.

But this being America, we sure shout but we don't stand around for too long wailing. We may curse at the television or mutter in private, but then we get up and do something. Few of us are inclined to be waiting for deliverance at the interstate bus terminals, holding our breath with fingers crossed, lined up for a magical vehicle that will take us to some secure high ground.

That's not our way. That's not who we are. We're not big on magic or taking cover.

Still, we got hit bitterly hard. Many millions lost their jobs and their houses. But this awful mess may have been just the hard slap we needed. Where we were drunk with acquisitions, fantasy investments, massive debt, fakery of all kinds, we can now get sober.

There can be a gritty advantage to being in the gutter. There damn well better be. It's our one last hope; that from drunkenness comes sobriety, and from weariness a new-found sense of resolve. With a year that in retrospect looks more like cold ice water than anything else, maybe we can finally get some of our national consciousness back -- the kind of clear-headedness necessary to know what to do with the shovel when it's handed to you.

Shovels we need. After seven long decades rebuilding a large part of the world, it is surely time to rebuild at home. Because if it is now like 1946 again in massively high

debt and unemployment, it must be 1946 in another way -- that the warriors return to their own shores and join the rest of us in reconstructing the nation.

October 2009