

Chilblains, Resolutions, and Head Muscle Exercises

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 08 January 2014 21:52 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 January 2014 19:58

A new year, and already there's all sorts of bad habits being dragged right into the middle of things. Again. Talk about chilblains and the winter of discontent...

For example, resolutions or no, there's the expectation that things make sense every once in a while, if only to keep the Universe somewhat honest, and to keep exercising the head muscles, too, in the rare event something comes along requiring any brain power.

This is like insisting on a periodic win in 3-Card Monte, I know. It's a hard habit to break, having the expectations of logic, fairness, meaning...

But, every year, there's *Realitus Interruptus Annoyus*, in which pesky facts emerge that drag yards and scads of mud and muck across *that nice, clean floor* of my mind. So much for the nice, clean slate provided by those first few arbitrary, and always promising, seconds of the New Year, too.

But, like crash-dieters crossing their fingers and booking themselves on a cheese-and-chocolate factory tour regardless, I bought a couple of lottery tickets anyway -- even though I know the chances of winning are in the odds ballpark of getting blasted by lightning, while in a phone booth, while it plummets off a bridge at mid-span, to the arms of a flying, superhero wallaby, or some such.

(I should probably stop here a sec and explain that a *phone booth*, or *telephone booth*, was once a metal-and-glass communication kiosk in which one entered, closed a two-panel folding door behind oneself, and then deposited monetary tokens into a slot, in order to call someone located elsewhere. These were abundant beyond belief, and were all but self-replicating, populating every 24 feet of ground space on the planetary crust -- or so it once seemed.)

But, enough of far-fetched realities: Let's talk about lotteries.

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(I know, I know: Same thing.)

See, my hope-and-faith muscles require a periodic workout, just to keep a trickle of blood flow going, so nothing rots and falls off (or out) while I'm ambling around.

(I suppose I could place one of those "Honk if something falls off" bumper stickers on my butt, but few people carry any sort of horn on the sidewalk. Even fewer people would notice anything falling off, or would take time and effort to honk if they did, being wrapped up in their own urgent doings and assorted brouhaha.)

My solution, as an American, is to attempt to achieve immediate, maximum results with the absolute minimum output of energy, attention, and investment of time or money. (To hear Republicans talk, this is the underlying thesis of all writing done by all the Founding Fathers put together, and in one handy capsule, no bigger than your standard-issue cyanide pill.)

Therefore, I exercise my rights as a citizen to pay my money and do something absurdly stupid -- to do what I normally call paying my *Math Tax*, the tax levied against those unable to clearly calculate the chances of their winning anything.

It costs me only about 12 seconds of absent-minded motor skills to do, and only a dollar a whack, so it meets the national criteria for up-front costs. Already, I consider this arrangement a bargain. Figure the odds, right?

I mean, the hope-and-faith muscle requires a trickle charge of activity every once in a while, and it sure hasn't gotten a decent workout in this country since I was ten and JFK was allowed to temporarily warm the seat cushions in the Oval Office -- although the space program was therapeutic for a while, until it was determined we no longer wanted to be a country of manufacturers and no longer had any need for pure science or the sort of aimless R&D that would have tickled Einstein's curiosity and fancy.

The lottery presented itself as a sleepwalker's alternative to getting no sleep at all. And until recently, it pretty much played by the rules: It took my money and never once came close to

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providing any return on the investment. Any winning number sequences were as close to my ticket numbers as overnight trips to Callisto, Phobos or any of Venus's 63 or so scattered moons.

I was a loser, but I was content. It has always been so. One makes allowances, strikes a balance, girds one's loins, adjusts one's breechclout, and goes forward, into the hellion mists of time.

(Damn shame the lottery ship, if it has docked at all, has done so while I'm at the airport, following flights of fancy. I would have happier friends and relatives if it were otherwise. Much happier. Plus, there would be the start of two new self-sustaining charities around the country: one pairing returning vets with abandoned pets, and providing ample opportunities for reintegration and happiness. Such is life, as we so often say, sighing.)

But, the lottery had to jump its tracks lately and foul our bargain: *It started getting close. Really close.*

Number theory will tell you that any number has an equal potential to pop up in random draws in which all numbers in that series are represented on each draw. Experience as a slot-machine player will tell you the opposite, that you are always one pull of the arm away from your next whisper-close, three-reel extravaganza -- one in which you can always clearly see the wanted and needed and lusted-after combination in a neighboring window or reel or display.

Close, but no cigar for you. And, not being big on cigars, it was no problem. The arrangement was fine: I did my under-15 second act of contrition at the moneylender's booth, and my hope-and-faith muscle was weakly stimulated, at the level of an amazingly weak, listless cup of coffee. Fair enough.

Recently, however, there has been an alarming reversal of the norm on one ticket, and then a plunge back into polar ice cap water, after a quick dip in the superheated volcanic swimming pool. Here's the thing:

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Ticket one: A six-place ticket, with the winning sequence and my own ticket's sequence noted:

Winner: 08 12 34 52 58 07

Mine: 06 14 35 51 58 03

Now, even armed with the conscious continuum of number theory at one end, and purposefully rigged close-calls in order to generate more plays at the other, this sort of scenario will do more than exercise your head muscles. It may cause you to exercise many other muscles, not the least of which is the Curse Control Center, or various nerve centers of fight-and-flight responses.

(By the way: Winning one matching number in a series of six provides no prize; this is in total keeping with the general insurance-industry and actuarial profession's obsession toward preventing any payable, covered situations, ever. As they say: *Read the fine print.* □ *Your mileage may vary.*)

The other ticket, a four-place ticket, takes the red, orange, and white heat from the close call and dunks it into the heart-stopping, absolute zero of this icy grip's run:

Winner: 01 02 05 73

Mine: Numbers from 06 to 72 only.

I mean, fun's fun, but this is the sort of closed-eyes, crossed-finger, Kamikaze shaving one tries not to do with a freshly stropped, well-honed, wetstone-fresh, bone-handled straight razor.

One gets used to being a loser by a clear, concise margin of a set number of country miles

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and-or a certain number of very large ancestral barns. Really Close Calls provide a little too much overheated activity for the hope-and-faith muscles to tolerate -- at least for this older-model brain meat.

I mean, it's like taking an ancient ragtop Corvair, or a Falcon with a column shifter, setting it up in a race with a Ferrari, stomping on the go-pedal, and expecting to hold the lead the whole length of the dragstrip. Not going to happen.

At some point, if you warm up the circuits to that bright a rosy color, they start throwing off the Dizzying Heat of Actual Winning Expectations -- which are, of course, virtually lethal to a confirmed loser just shambling around, taking his muscles out for some air.

* * * * *

But, then: I guess I shouldn't be surprised that this arrangement has stopped making sense. A lot of things have stopped making sense. More than I'd care to list. A lot more.

I mean, I really try not to go there -- to Hope-and-Faith Land -- anymore with actual expectations. Like wearing a white suit around a lasagna lunch while changing the oil in your car between Chianti pours, I find you're only going to be really, really disappointed by how things turn out.

Still, I can't help but roll things around, trying to find some common thread that might tie things together and, in so doing, provide some insight on treatment -- either for the expectations, or for the painfully illogical situations, and underpinnings, themselves. Or both.

For example, on the surface, I'd expect there to be about an even political split in the science community. Apparently not -- only 6 percent of scientists self-report as Republicans. That guess may have been appropriate in Ike's time, but not in the post-global rubble of Reaganism and in the uber-polarized, semi-post-prehensile years of Bush The Junior.

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We're still a little too busy with CPR on the body-economic right at the moment, following the fractures of the *Bush II Years* (aka *Bush II: Revenge of the Neanderthals*) near meltdown and implosion by unregulated, self-propelled greed-heads of the entire planetary financial scheme known as the Mandatory Participation Monetary System.

And, yeah, we're still too busy putting our faith behind the party who believes that being venomously anti-science is the perfect qualification to sit on the House Science Committee.

I mean, down that road lies madness. For example, I'm still trying to bend my head around the fact that 47 or 48 percent of voters actually wanted -- some frothily, rabidly so -- a vulture capitalist and destruction-ist profiteer as President, with a science-denier and superstition exalter as Veep.

How it is that Teabaggers came to lie about having problems signing up for health insurance...

How it is we came to have Teabaggers at all -- and how anyone can not know this was all an astroturf set-up from the get-go, with billionaires stirring up the (to them) rabble, having regular people work against their own best interests and protest *on behalf of the billionaires*...

How it came to be that voodoo economics, magic underwear, single-digit IQs, verifiable lies, unfathomable stupidity, and unspeakable incompetence came to be praised, sought, and well-rewarded in the party of Lincoln, well...

Madness, as I say.

Clearly, from the heart rate I just clocked right now, I need a new workout regimen, especially given the political and socio-economic reigns and regimes we've been experiencing the last few decades.

I can almost hear my junior high and high school phys-ed instructors: *No pain, no gain*. I can

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almost hear my drill instructors from boot camp, too, although I would prefer not to hear them anymore, either.

To modernize, though, an update on that observation: *To be curt, Burt -- If it don't hurt, you ain't doin'diddly-dirt, Squirt.*

Back to pondering my replacement exercises, then, for the hope-and-faith muscles: Off to the idea hut, logic-sweat lodge, and to my little pert yurt on the prairie.

The search continues.

Teabaggers "shading the truth" on insurance signups? Non-Shocking Euphemisms 101: <http://www.politico.com/blogs/media/2014/01/ft-worth-startelegrams-obamacare-mea-culpa-180798.html?hp=r4>

Stop Making Sense -- the infuriating kind:

www.nationalmemo.com/5-anti-science-congressmen-on-the-house-science-committee/

and:

<http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/meet-the-house-gop-s-anti-science-committee>

and:

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<http://www.thenation.com/blog/171215/turns-out-romney-47-percent-candidate>

Stop Making Sense -- the pleasing kind: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUmVH58Eng8>

Bonus for making it this far: Not all the utter dolts of the world are members of the GOP -- shocking, I know: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25618683>