

The Hillside

The first time I went to the hillside it was empty but for a man with a small proportionally smaller dog than what you would imagine as a pairing for this particular individual, a sort of David and Goliath sort of situation, but looking past this absurdity both him and his dog were transfixed as if one soul by the view orthogonal to the city which the Hillside loomed over.

That morning was nothing out of the ordinary but a cold winter day with patches of thick fog cascading the city skyline and the framing of other giant heels cradling the city like a charised child. At first, it was a grand view but something one would take a photo of to show how far up they have come, nothing more and nothing less. Once you would see this enough times, passable would be the correct phrasing coming to mind to describe the view, yet the transfixed gazes of the man and the dog were telling a different story beyond this observation.

This morning, I arrived here tired and battered from the long week to do a walking meditation in the forest next to my apartment, and I eventually decided to sit on a bench diagonal to them to stare at the hillside for the next ten minutes until the meditation app was playing. The freezing cold covered my face and my body, and tears from it started to cover my eyes, which I reluctantly wiped off with a tissue that I accidentally left in my coat's pocket to clear my gaze hazed by the building tears of cold. I stared at the hillside view and allowed the experience of this particular rendering of consciousness to penetrate my mind. Often, when I meditate, things are just arising and passing in my awareness, not filtered by my ego, a feeling of emptiness with form or non-duality, as others may call it.

I glared as the clouds passed by and the fog changed shape like a shapeshifter, trees looming on layered mountain ranges, immovable, ever-present. I often think that these are moments in life when just a little out of ordinary things can be rendered by photographers or artists of capture the essence of these moments, but I deep down think they miss the point and while I admire their effort to encapsulate, the morphology of an every changing world is not something to be trapped in a bottle or on a canvas.

The mind is a tricky thing. Often, we dreamwalk through the hazy imagery of the past and vague extrapolations of future imaginary events, all the while passing by the infinite depth of consciousness and its omnipresent form. Looking at the hillside, I felt whole and boundless, the scenery replacing the illusion of the person that I imagine talks to me when I am lost in thought. I was the hillside and all of its changing intricacies in it, the little houses and tall looming buildings, the cascading fog and the dark clouds, the wind and the light, all at once.

The bell chimed on my meditation app, pulling me back to the grim present that moments ago was boundless. The man and the dog were gone, but now an elderly couple was sitting on the bench, transfixed, holding hands, and a few benches from the woman in her 30s gazing avidly joined the group of gazers captivated by the scenery.

It being a Sunday and having not to rush, I decided to stay a little while longer only to see that in ten more minutes, four more people have joined the group, all going through the same process of being mesmerized by the gazers, deciding to join the ritual for no apparent reason.

It's funny how we gather in groups when others point out something particular. It doesn't matter whether there's anything actually there to see. I've often imagined scenarios where a small group stands in a circle and stares at the ground, perhaps focusing on a crack in the pavement or a pebble, nothing special. And yet, one by one, others join in, silently, uncertain why. They've become part of the group, the ritual, driven by a quiet curiosity or the fear of missing out on something they don't fully understand. Maybe there's a secret to the moment, some meaning they're yet to grasp.

It's almost as if, in the presence of others, we suspend our skepticism and allow ourselves to believe that there must be something more—something hidden, valuable, in the act of participating. It's not the ground we're staring at, but the collective experience itself. In the act of joining, we feel a sense of belonging, of shared attention, as though this simple moment has become something sacred, something worth exploring.

But if you stop and think about it, it's less about the object of focus and more about the shared experience. We gather not because there's something extraordinary to see but because, in the shared gaze, we find meaning, connection, and a brief moment of unity in a world that often feels fractured.

As I sat there, watching the slow parade of people gather to join in the simple ritual of looking, I began to realize something. Each of us, individually and together, was participating in a shared moment of seeing, of being present. No one spoke, no one asked questions. They just watched, just as I had, without knowing why. In those silent moments, all of us were bound by something intangible yet undeniably real.

It was in the recognition that all we were doing was observing, yet in doing so, we were surrendering to something larger than ourselves. It wasn't about the view—it was about the experience of being there, in that moment. How often do we rush through our lives, missing these pauses, thinking we're too busy or too important to stop and simply be present? Yet here, on the hillside, it didn't matter who we were or where we were from. The fog rolled by, the clouds shifted, and for those few moments, we were all part of something vast, eternal, and quietly magnificent.

I stood up, ready to leave, but as I looked back at the small crowd that had gathered, I smiled. Maybe we were all just dreamwalking through life, each one of us unknowingly connected by this simple, shared ritual of being. And perhaps, in that connection, was where the true meaning of life could be found.