

Freedom's View

A Commentary on Government from Atop the Capitol

Vol. 1 "All the other alternative facts you need to know" No. 12



Page 1

WHEN THE MESS IN WASHINGTON HAS YOU BREAKING OUT IN HIVES . . .

ANNOYING UPSTAIRS NEIGHBOR TOLD TO KEEP NOISE DOWN

February 16, 2017

WASHINGTON, DC ~ *Armed Freedom*

Shortly before the Inauguration, repairs to the Capitol Dome were finished and the surrounding scaffolding was removed. It wasn't long before I heard the familiar noise of workmen who were futzing with that same scaffolding, but this time it was coming from *inside the dome*. Since I couldn't tell from where I stand what was going on, I asked Will Rogers down in Statuary Hall to look into it.

"Well, Freedom," Will drawled, "it appears as though a whole bunch of the new President's supporters down here have definitely met a person they didn't like: you, Freedom! There's a lot of cussin' comin' from Members of Congress who're eggin' on the workmen to finish rectin' some scaffolding. Don't 'zactly know why they're puttin' it up, though."

Later that night, I discovered why. Someone, apparently standing atop that scaffolding with a broom, was banging on the domed ceiling's fresco, probably defacing its *E. Pluribus Unum* banner as he did. "Hey, Lady! Keep the damn noise down, would ya? We've got a country to run here and with your constant stomping around up there, we can't even hear ourselves scheme! Knock it off, already!"

House Speaker McConnell's voice is one I'd recognize anywhere, but he had a point. *I have* been stamping my feet trying to rouse the old "do-nothing Congress" to action. When it comes to taking *truly* patriotic action, this new one's not any better. Only recently have *a few* Republicans down there seen fit to at least *question* Mr. Trump's coziness with old Vlad-the-Impaler-of-Ukraine-But-Wait-There's-More-To-Come Putin. No wonder I'm breaking out in itchy, disgusting hives! Not for the first time, either.



PHOTO: Library of Congress

PHOTO: In 1913, workmen restoring my face really took this early selfie!

Back in 1913, just a day before the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson, I saw 8,000 women suffragists from around the country and the world march "in a spirit of protest against the present political organization of society, from which women are excluded." That made me proud, of course. But I broke out in hives when hundreds of men, sometimes joined by the DC police,

jeered and harassed the marchers, sending some 200 of them to local hospitals for treatment of their injuries. Until National Guard troops cleared a path for the marchers to continue, those bang-on-the-ceiling-to-shut-the-broads-up guys were having their way. Talk about hives!



PHOTO: Workers remove my harness after a brief helicopter ride.

In the decades that followed, there were the lynchings of hundreds of African American men, the Depression, Viet Nam, urban race riots, three assassinations, and Watergate - all of which took their toll on me. Eighty years after that women's march, a helicopter lowered me so that workers could use everything but Bondo and Botox to remove the hives and smooth me out.

My hives are back in full bloom now: time to pay a visit to Levo Cetirizini, to get his advice on *avoiding* them.

LEVO CETIRIZINI'S ADVICE TO THE BATTLE-WORN

Since he's a mendicant friar, Levo Cetirizini isn't always here in DC. When he is, he lives at the Franciscan Monastery just four miles north of me. On a clear Spring day, I can just make out the gardens in bloom.



Levo and I go back awhile and, hearing he was in town, I paid him a visit. An avuncular Italian, Levo enjoys telling good stories, and so do his Brothers who hear them, as you can see by their reactions below.



In fact, Levo is so laid back you wouldn't at first realize that he has a deep passion for restorative and distributive justice. More readily apparent is his wonderful pastoral sensibility. That's what I wanted in my visit with him.

Like his fellow Franciscan Brother, Richard Rohr in New Mexico, Levo is a "beyond the birdbath" Franciscan. It's not that he doesn't love nature. He does, but he goes far beyond the

Hallmark Card depictions of Assisi's Francis, even asserting that The Big Bang was, in fact, the *first* Incarnation of a God he believes is *nothing but* self-emptying love. Perhaps because of his own practice of contemplative meditation, Levo lives out that kind of love in *who he is* and *what he does*. That's why I trust him.

He invited me to walk through the monastery's lovely gardens over there on the right as we talked. "Levo, this past month has been so crazy that, as you can see, my stress is getting to me and showing up on my skin again. I haven't been so scared about my country since I came here in the midst of the Civil War. I want to find a way to deal with it without turning off the news or moving to Canada. When Mitch McConnell was yelling at me the other night, I gave him back some lip and he told me, "Take a pill, Nasty!" But I don't want pills either. Have any ideas to help me out?"

"Really! He called you 'Nasty?'"

"Well, not that word itself, but that sure describes the tone of his pique. You'd think with that cherubic face of his, he'd be more, oh I don't know, 'Kentucky Gentleman-ish?'"

"Yeah, you'd think sipping on bourbon whiskey like that would mellow him more," Levo deadpanned, his eyes twinkling. "But seriously, Freedom, it sounds like maybe you're so close to him, and all the political goings on you've been

talking about, that there's no longer any daylight between the daily news and your epidermis! I think we need to figure out a way for you to beat a hasty retreat, my good friend."



"Retreat! You know I can't do that, Levo. *I'm Armed Freedom!*"

Levo threw back his head laughing and replied, "Don't tell me you don't know the Marine's definition of 'retreat', Freedom. It's 'a strategic withdrawal to a position of greater advantage.' Most of us lose our truest identity when we don't retreat like that from time to time. And I'd hate for you to lose your essential freedom, Freedom.

"What I have in mind are some ways for you to get very far away from it all - further even than Canada - but without logging any frequent flyer miles. Some call it 'guided meditation,' others 'contemplation.' But it doesn't matter much what you call it: it's a way of quieting the mind so that our deeper, truer self can come into our awareness and breathe. Our community calls the practice 'centering prayer' and that truer self the 'Image of God' that all people are born with. I like that image, but 'God-talk' just isn't required!"

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE . . .

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE WITH LEVO CETIRIZINI

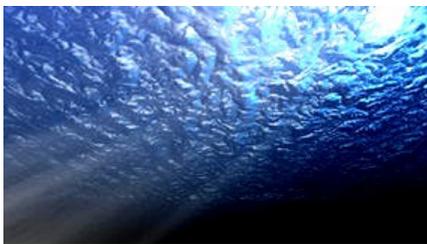
"Okay, Levo. I'm desperate. Let's give it a try. What do I do first?"

"We're just making a start today. And there's no one way, Freedom. But are you partial to scuba diving or electronics? Do you get anxious around computers? Afraid you'll drown if you're underwater?"

"Ummm, these questions of yours are making me anxious, Levo. Is this some sort of 'extreme vetting?'" I asked, my breathing already becoming shallow and more rapid.

Levo laughed that reassuring laugh of his and told me he just wanted to invite me to imagine something and didn't want it to be uncomfortable. "As long as it was clear, I could see sunlight and breathe, I think I might enjoy being underwater."

"Like this?" he asked, showing me a photograph of exactly that scene.



"Yeah! That's beautiful . . . peaceful even. What's next, Levo?"

"Nothing much, Freedom. But, if you want, just let your eyes close." Then, speaking very slowly and softly, he began: "Imagine yourself having a scuba tank of air and letting

yourself sink comfortably, down, down, down into the clear, warm water, slowly breathing in and out. Keep looking up at the reassuring sunlight . . . and notice how peaceful it is . . . deep, deep, down here . . . in the calm, warm, caressing water . . . safe, at rest, and deeply peaceful. Sometimes when you look up, you notice the wind and waves rippling the water's surface . . . sometimes into quite a froth, even. But you're down deep where the water is calm, safe, peaceful. If you want to get further away from all that agitation above, just let yourself slowly sink down, down, down until you're once again peaceful, at rest, calm. It's good to be here. When you come here in the future, you can stay as long as you wish. For now, take 5 seconds on the clock, yet all the time in the world you'll need, and gather your peace and calm. In a moment, I'll count up from 1 to 5 and, when we get to 1, we'll have risen to the surface like a cork . . . with all the peace that you've experienced down here, and also all the energy you'll need . . . for whatever you must face in your above-the-surface day."

I arrived at the surface, yawned, and it was just as Levo had said: I was calm yet also energized! "I hope you don't preach that same way, Levo: your congregation wouldn't hear a word!" I snarked. We laughed and he said, "Now let's look at some electronics. It's a different way to get distance from what's distressing - like old Mitch wielding his broom!"

"We've got five senses to take in information. All of our senses have different aspects. Since you're quite visual, let's take the sense of sight. What we see can be in-focus or fuzzy, it can be moving or still, it can be so close that we're practically *in* it, or it can be more distant, like a picture in a frame or on a TV screen that's large or small, black and white or in living color. Now here's the thing, when you *re*-member something, you'll be seeing a picture of it *re*-presented in your mind in some of these same aspects. Next, imagine you're in a TV recording studio. You've got a console like this to play



with all those aspects. You can adjust them to suit you. *Do this when you*

are thinking of what distresses you. Keep making adjustments until what you see is no longer so distressing. If you want, play old steam calliope music just to lighten up the mood!"

"Oh, man, this is really great, Levo. I just put Mitch on that broom, dressed in drag as a witch. He's orbiting the inside of the Capitol Dome now, and I hear him singing:

"There is no taste like My Old Kentucky Fried:

So crispy, so crunchy: *my way!*

Big breasts of white with the legs an' thighs just right:

I keep lickin' my fingers all day!"

"*You've got it, Freedom!* Next, you can have old Mitch sing the Chorus!"