

# MAGNOLIA MINDS: Bury your head in the sand

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There is a common belief that ostriches bury their heads in the sand because they think that if they can't see a predator, then the predator can't see them. This belief is a handy metaphor for the person who thinks if a problem is ignored it will simply go away.

Fact is, ostriches don't bury their head in the sand. Ostriches dig shallow holes in the sand, and that's where they lay their eggs. They use their beaks to turn their eggs several times a day. From a distance, it might look like they're burying their head.

I'm going to advocate, though, that there are times when it's appropriate for us to bury our heads in the sand – not as so to ignore a problem with the forlorn hope that it'll go away, but rather picking and choosing what problems we can safely ignore simply because we need to guard our own hearts.



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This is the awful reality. We are bombarded constantly with bad news. It's everywhere. There are few safe places around that we can be protected from negativity.

It seems that some people absolutely thrive on awfulness. I look at my friends' posts on Facebook, for instance, and am just brought so very low by what I read. It's not a matter of me minding others having opposing viewpoints – it's a matter of how those viewpoints are expressed. And I think: "To what end? Why are people so desperate to score points against the perceived 'other team'?"

Part of it may be the joy of a "gotcha!" moment. As in, "I'll point out how clueless other people are. That'll be helpful."

Part of it is the old “preaching to the choir” mindset. It reminds those of like opinion that they are not alone. People enjoy having their posts “liked” and having folks agree with them.

It might be that people post things to attempt to sway others to their viewpoint. There may be times when that actually worked, but I’d classify that as a miracle or exception.

Stepping outside of social media, think about other entry points into your mind and heart. Take for instance the 24-hour news cycle. You gotta fill that time with something if you’re a newscaster. Or just cable news in general. In the latter days of my mama’s life, she’d have CNN or Fox or something on the TV round the clock. I would absolutely lose my mind if I had to subject myself to that.

Then there’s the ease of acquiring information. I’m just a click away from having access to most anything on my plethora of tech devices. I am currently armed with my iPhone. I’m typing on a keyboard on my iPad. At our house, there are a half-dozen computers, laptops, tablets, etc. Am I in bondage to all this gee-whiz gadgetry? Are you? You decide.

I could go on. You get the idea.

Here’s the point. Where your mind dwells, that’s where your heart is, too. If you surround yourself with negativity, you become negative. Fill your mind with goodness, and goodness becomes a part of your life. Some people may say that they can compartmentalize, and what they take in doesn’t influence them. I don’t buy that for a nanosecond.

This I believe: constant, willful exposure to the nastier aspects of our world ultimately devalues our souls.

Look. I have a degree in journalism. I understand the virtues in being well-informed. It’s important to be curious about the world around us. But – and it’s a huge but – how much

information do you take in that you can actually take action on? If you hear about some tragedy in Hong Kong, and it makes you feel awful, what can you do about it?

Certainly you can pray. You should pray for any heartbreak in the world. You should pray that God's presence be felt. It makes sense for me, though, to protect myself from things I can't do anything about. Look at that cartoon again. See where I'm going with this?

There are plenty of things you can't control. But you can control, to a big extent, what you let come into your mind, and then into your heart. If protecting yourself means burying your head in the sand, it might not be a bad strategy for your mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Here are my thoughts. Take 'em or leave 'em:

- Restrict your intake of news. Again, this isn't about being uninformed. It's a matter of getting just enough to give you a sense of what's going on around you. But to subject yourself to the same awful story over and over can't be healthy.

- Focus on the things you can actually do something about. If you aren't happy with someone in office, say, then vote them out. In the United States, we have this really cool reset button. Vote in your guy or girl next time.

- If there are things you are exposed to that you can't do anything about - move on. Don't dwell on the "what if's?" I heard a neat term used in counseling a while back: "Catastrophizing." It's irrationally looking to the worst possible outcome of any incident or circumstance. Mama called it "borrowing trouble."

- Ask yourself: "Do I find satisfaction in learning of and exploiting someone else's failures?" If that's so, then "Why am I like that?" is a sensible next question.

Find a cause that's worth investing your life in and do it. Of course, serving God is the ultimate cause. But there may be other things that engage you. If you're passionate about animal rights, for instance, I think that's terrific. Just don't devalue people who aren't as passionate as you. This comes under the category of "guarding your heart" because you'll save yourself some frustration when you realize we all have things important to us. And those things don't necessarily have to be the same.

Restrict your "I'm right, therefore you're wrong" impulses to a minimum. Who knows? Sometimes the other person might be right.

There may be some people in your life that want to drag you down right along with them. Love them anyway. That gives you extraordinary power. But – choose, as best you can, how you interact with them.

Bottom line: Guard your heart. You can have a heart that is open and expansive and accessible. Perhaps, though, you've laid it out there to be abused. You can't control what others do to your heart. But you can control what you voluntarily put into it.