

In Defense of Sloth

I must confess that I come by my sloth honestly. I didn't imbibe it with my mother's milk, but from my father's desk. He gloried in a prominent sign there, amidst stacks of paper and seeming disarray. The words engraved themselves on my impressionable consciousness—**NEVER DO TODAY WHAT YOU CAN PUT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW!** Since then that sidekick of sloth—procrastination—has haunted me. I almost didn't get this essay in on time!

Tonight, as I sit in my yurt on a hill, looking out over the oil-slicked bay, I contemplate sloth. Even though I seem productive on the job (Attention—Regents!), I think of myself as lazy, unfocused, and downright slothful in my personal life and household habits. Perhaps that's why I'm drawn to stirring proclamations of energetic dedication like the inspiring vow of William Blake—"I shall not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand..." But with which sword might I vanquish this essay? You guessed it—Google!

To wit, from Google—let us derive a sloth-stirred—but hopefully not slow-witted—essay on sloth! Wikipedia describes mammalian sloths as exceedingly slow moving. On the ground their "speed" is usually less than a foot per minute. Sloths hang upside down from tree branches, eating leaves. Biological symbiosis with bacteria in their fur results in a green camouflage coloration. A sloth moth and other insects also inhabit their fur. Sloth partisans say that slow does not equate with lazy. True, sloths are somnolent, sleeping from 15 to 18 hours a day. Their slowness also applies to digestion. They come down to the ground, to urinate and defecate, only about once a week.

From mammals to morals, Google delves deeply into dancing-angel-hair-splitting debates about exactly what sort of sin sloth may be (capital, mortal, etc.). Interestingly, Aquinas' discussion analyzes the interwoven, symbiotic relationship of sloth to sorrow. I can relate to that. Another site classifies one source of sloth as the "wandering of the mind after unlawful things." I again plead guilty, or, as Bob Dylan once put it, "if my thought-dreams could be seen, they'd probably put my head in a guillotine."

It is the mammal—not the sin—that has inspired a respected and growing "go slow" movement in which sloths are compared to *tai chi* adepts. The Sloth Club of Japan, founded in 1999, promotes positive sloth-like traits: slowness, simplicity, nonviolence, and sustainable ecological consciousness. Keibo Oiwa, an anthropologist and environmentalist, founded the Sloth Club and wrote the influential 2001 book *Slow Is Beautiful*. Sloth Club members are into the Slow Food movement and opened Cafe Slow in Japan, which one website ironically tells us has "prompt service."

I comfort myself with Turgenev's wonderful definition of happiness—remorseless laziness! Finally, I yawn in my yurt and hope I have demonstrated a relatively effortless, even enjoyable, way to write this essay, as it embodies nothing less than sweet sloth itself!