

Groundhog Day Lesson

Today is Groundhog Day, a popular tradition celebrated in the U.S. and Canada on Feb. 2. It derives from the Pennsylvania Dutch superstition that if a groundhog emerging from its burrow on this day sees a shadow due to clear weather, it will retreat to its den and winter will persist for six more weeks; if it does not, due to cloudiness, spring season will arrive early.



So, depending on where you are in the country today, you may be happy or sad with this furry fellow's forecast.

Tamim Ansary, in a column for *Encarta.msn.com* entitled *The Secret Truth Behind Groundhog Day*, offered some interesting observations about the groundhog:

I have often envied hibernating animals. I used to think of joining them and picture myself in a cozy den with socks toasting by the fire, a stash of videos, a pike of good books, and the delicious rhythm of going to bed early, sleeping late, and taking long naps.

The thing is, hibernation is not like sleeping; it's a lot more like being dead. When you fall asleep, your body slows down and your temperature drops a little, but everything stays within the normal zone. When animals hibernate, their systems come close to shutting down. Take the groundhog for example. During hibernation, the groundhog breathes about once every four minutes, its heart beats four times a minute, and its body temperature drops from a normal of about 99 degrees (about the same as ours) to about 36 degrees – just above freezing. Actually, since the groundhog hibernates about eight months of the year, nearly frozen and nearly dead is a groundhog's normal state!

Think that's impressive? When bats hibernate, their breathing slows down so much it can only be detected with instruments. No wonder bats are associated with stories of the undead! The great thing about being almost dead is that you need almost nothing!

Ansary's observations – who knew? – are scientific, I suppose, but they seem surreal to us humans.

As Christians, however, we could learn a few things from groundhogs and bats – learning to shut down all unnecessary systems, conserving our energies for only the most vital of functions, learning to live on the lean – entering a state in which we are fully alive, but have need of almost nothing.

(more)

In fact, the Apostle Paul had something to say on the subject: *I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little* (Philippians 4:12 NLT).

Paul had learned that everywhere and in all things – and in reference to everything that occurs – important lessons can be gained. It requires as much grace to keep the heart right in prosperity as it does in adversity, and perhaps more. Adversity, of itself, does something to keep the mind in a right state; prosperity does nothing.

And that's your groundhog lesson for today.

– Beecher Hunter