

The Pandemic Burnout

Chaipat (Tata) Tirapongprasert - 12th Grade

Brewster Academy; Wolfeboro, NH

Standing strong with head held high,
the minotaur was trailing through
the endless labyrinth.

A compulsion to know;

A desire to understand.

He paused and pondered,

“Why am I here?”

Unlike the ambitious minotaur, I found myself cast adrift in the current of life. The class had become a stampede through an endless maze, chasing one assignment after another. Five more popped out as I tracked one down, and the hunt continued. Gawking into the abyss between two summits of homework that should have been handed in weeks ago, I began to wonder: *“Why am I here?”*

This is the question that every high school student should ponder deliberately—especially in times of the pandemic. It is too easy for us to forget our why amid the many trivial, chaotic day-to-day events. Without a strong why, we are prone to throwing ourselves into bed and unconsciously scrolling through Instagram until 2:30 AM before receding into our cocoons to wake up and relive the vicious, same-old-same-old routine.

While a made-up term like “senioritis” is a whimsical wisecrack you might joke about at the dinner table, burnout is a severe psychological syndrome that deserves proper care and recognition. Some symptoms include frustration, sadness, lack of hope, and fatigue, leading to anxiety and depression. Burnout, Sam Keen says, is nature’s way of telling you you’ve been going through the motions and your soul has departed. Bashed by a squall of responsibilities can cause a person to feel overwhelmed, as if they are not in control anymore. The emotion then accumulates over time, manifesting itself into a state of mental fatigue.

Regaining strength and pulling oneself out of such emotional turmoil is different. I have found it remedying to remind myself of what matters to me. After long hours of contemplating, I had derived a personal panoply of activities that brought me joy. My list included: tutoring, writing prose and poetry, photography, and playing the ukulele. I neglect these because of juggling three AP classes, a college-level mathematics course, and twenty-ish college essays.

“You have so many accountabilities. Recreational fun and games are a waste of time.”

Quite a sorcery performed by the brain if you ask me.

Inspired, I reached for the laptop, set the timer for three and a half hours, and began writing creatively. Unlike before, the encumbering pressure began to wave off. I began to connect with one of my long-lost passions.

Once the alarm rang, I remained still for a swift second, laying my palm flat against the keyboard, closing my eyes to savor the experience. I had given birth to my first and ever op-ed, Equality for All: Stop AAPI Racism, which reflected on my experience with racism as an international student. It was published in the October issue of my school publication, The Browser.

You need time to recover after a prolonged period of keeping your nose to the grindstone. Believe it or not, my inner drive automatically rekindles as I advocate time to pursue my side hustles. If you face a similar situation, don't forget to give yourself some time off and start doing new stuff.

Have fun exploring!