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Life Becomes a Habit

by Richard Lewis

Life becomes a habit. We're born into a world of rules from our first encounter of the other, that focussed gaze into mother's eyes. Like a sailor launched onto the rolling waves we take our orders and pick up habits, routines and rituals like souvenirs. Surround ourselves with the ways and means of coping. Restricting perhaps but at least It helps us to feel secure.

We learn when safe to speak and when better to keep shtum. How to walk, talk, brush our teeth, and squeeze the tube. Get that last glob of paste, mustn't be wasteful, squeezing as much out of life as possible, we put pressure on ourselves.

"No need to be so hard on yourself John", but there it is, within, learnt in the long ago, those hard lessons. Must work harder, got to do better, don't just accept yourself, there's something wrong, you need to change. John knew that from the way his mother looked at him. Now it was how he saw himself. Those early taunts stick like vinyl, so hard to remove and change what was imprinted during childhood.

There you are now, all trussed up in the old uniform of the empire. We'll send you out into the world to see what you can do, but mind what I told you, you'll never amount to much. Filled with patterns and repeated ways of being until we can be nothing else. Like the mad marching sailor who follows orders with no time to think, just keeps on script. When things go wrong, he can always say "I was just following orders sir". One day I'll be myself, yet this is what I've become. This is me, like a leopard with his stripes there's no rewriting history.

We can always learn new behaviours but old ones die hard. That resolution to exercise more and drink less can so easily fall away, we find ourselves clinging to old ways like the sailor clings to wreckage when the ship goes down. We know where we are with habits and routines.

Perhaps being born was the best bit.