

The Bath

Once I ate lunch with a woman in a sad marriage. We spoke for two hours about her fears, worries, and anger. After lunch I had a bad headache from too much food, too much talk, too much listening, and too much unhappiness. I decided to sit for a while alone in a quiet park.

As I sat, my eyes were caught by motion on the ground. It was a really small bird, an ordinary brown sparrow, taking a bath in the fine dirt near the roots of a tree.

The sparrow's little wings were flipping and flapping, flinging the earth! It stirred up puffs of dust that coated and cleaned its tiny body in the absence of water, in the absence of a washcloth or sponge, in the absence of soap, in the absence of towels, in the absence of a shower or bathtub. It used no lotions, gels, powders, or creams; no shampoo, comb, or brush; no razor, scissors, tweezers, nail clippers, or nail file; no deodorant or cologne. It had no hair dryer and no mirror to see how its feathers had turned out. It did not need electricity, an apartment of its own in a better neighborhood, a queen-sized bed, a husband or wife, a job, money, or headache pills.

As the sparrow flapped its wings, it was making a small place deeper into the delightful dust! The sparrow seemed not to notice the gray pigeons, much larger birds, scratching everywhere for food. The sparrow ignored the humans sitting glumly on bare benches in the hot afternoon sun. The small brown bird was sending up cloud after cloud of dust, taking a fine bath in the lap of luxury!

Seeing this sparrow cheered me up! My idea of the best bath is to have soap and a tubful of warm water, but perhaps there are other ways to feel clean all over.

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Questions:

1. Do you sometimes like to soak in a bathtub?
2. Do you prefer a tub bath or a shower?
3. The Scandinavian peoples sometimes take hot steam baths in small sheds outside their houses called saunas. After a hot sauna, the bather can run out into the cold snow, beating himself with a tree branch. This is good for the circulation. Steam rooms and saunas are now available all over the world.
Have you ever taken a sauna?
4. Have you ever taken a nice, long bubble bath?
5. Have you ever used bath salts?
6. A generation ago in New York City we used to have public bathhouses, but most of them are gone now. Do you usually take a bath inside your own apartment or house or do you usually take a bath outside your home in some kind of bathing facility?
7. I hear that a few hundred years ago Europeans never bathed, while the Japanese always took hot baths. What are the bathing customs in your country?
8. “In the lap of luxury” means conditions of great affluence or material comfort. What is your idea of the utmost in luxurious comfort when it comes to taking a bath? A marble bathroom? Special bath salts? A hot tub plus companionship? A Jacuzzi? A secluded bathing pool in the country?