

## I am a Cat – Chapter 7a

Natsume Sōseki – 1905

I've recently started exercising. Some may scoff at the idea of a cat taking exercise, so let me just say this. Those scoffers are the same folks who, up till these past few years, had no concept of exercise and believed it their sole life's calling to only eat and sleep. I needn't remind them, I suppose, how they extolled the "noble man of leisure" and shunned all form of exertion. Any separation of their moldering haunches from their soft cushions, they held, diminished their lordly prestige. The call to exercise, the call to drink milk, the call for cold showers, the call to lose oneself among summer's misty mountains, all these idiotic calls were but scourges arrived on our holy shores from the West, numbering with pestilence, tuberculosis, and neurasthenia. Being born just last year, of course, and being still in my second year, I've no knowledge of how or when these "scourges" took root in man's mind. It was certainly well prior to my appearance in this living world, but bear in mind that a year for a cat is a decade for a human. Given that my lifespan is two-fold or three-fold shorter, and given that I still manage, in my limited days and months, to develop and live a full feline life, to equate cat years with human years is to err most egregiously. First off, consider, if you will, the depth of my insights at the tender age of one year and some months. The master's third daughter, they say, is about the same age, yet intellectually she's nowhere. All she knows is to cry and whine, wet her bed, and suckle her mother's breast. Compared to one like me, who laments the state of the world and rails against the times, she's a foolish little thing. Such being the case, it should come as no surprise that I've thought deeply on past and present health practices - the merits of exercise, the benefits of swimming in the sea, and the virtues of convalescing in milder climes. Only a dimwit human, stumbling about on too few legs, could possibly find this surprising. Humans have always been dull-witted and still are. That's why they proclaim now the merits of exercise and the benefits of swimming in the sea, going on and on about them, as though extolling some grand discovery of their modern age.

I've known as much from the day I was born. Take one trip to the seashore, and the healthful benefits of seawater are plain to see. Who knows how many fish swim in the vast sea, yet not a one is fallen ill and tended by a doctor. When a fish falls ill it can't swim. When it can't swim it dies and floats to the surface. When a fish expires they say it's upped and gone, when a bird expires they say it's dropped down dead, and when a man expires they call it passing away. Find a seasoned traveler, a man who's sailed the Indian Ocean, and ask if he's seen a fish that's upped and gone. He's sure to tell you no. What other answer is there. However far he's traveled, he'll have seen not a single fish, floating on the waves, breathe its last breath -- "Breathe its last breath" is the wrong term. For a fish, we have to say "gulp its last gulp of seawater." -- No one sees a fish, gulping its last gulp of seawater, float up onto the waves. Steam the boundless oceans, day after day and year upon year, and you'll find not a a single fish that's upped and died. One can conclude irrefutably, then, that fish are a hardy lot. And why are fish so hardy? One needn't wait on humans for an answer. It's quite simple. It's plain to see. All day every day, they gulp seawater and

swim in the sea. To fish, the benefits of swimming in the sea are self-evident. What's self-evident to fish should also be self-evident to humans. In 1750, Dr. Richard Russell promoted the Brighton seaside. A plunge into the Brighton sea, he proclaimed somewhat sensationally, could instantly and completely cure some four hundred and four maladies. His insights were better late than never. We cats too, when the time is right, will be off for Kamakura. Not just yet, though. All things have their season. Just as pre-Meiji Japanese lived and died never knowing the virtues of seaside bathing, the time is not yet ripe for cats of today to jump, headlong and naked, into the sea. Only fools, they say, rush in. In this present day, when unloved cats are flung off the Tsukiji piers, never to surface again, a rash plunge is ill-advised. Until evolution works its magic and we cats are equipped to cope with the maelstrom -- or put another way, until the general expression for an expired cat is "upped and gone" -- we're not about to swim in any sea.

Swimming in the sea will have to wait till later, but nevertheless I've decided to embark on a fitness routine. In this twentieth century, it seems, fitness marks a gentleman, and only paupers sit idle. To not partake is not by choice, but indicates rather a lack of means or lack of personal leisure. In former times, physical toil was the realm of the manservant, while in present times it's the lower class that refrains. Societal norms, just like the pupils in a cat's eyes, change from one moment to another in response to circumstances. My pupils, though, merely shrink and expand, while human values get turned on their heads. It's not a bad thing that they're turned on their heads. There are two sides to every coin and two ends to every string. The flipping of objects from black to white is testament to human versatility. Reverse the characters for "mind" and you get "idea." A charming trick. The scenery of Amanohashidate, they say, is wholly different when viewed bent down looking back through one's legs. The Shakespeare of remote antiquity holds little allure. Until the occasional reader looks back through his legs at Hamlet and declares it a god-awful work, the literary world is mired in place. It's no surprise then when the same lot who disparaged physical activity now eagerly partake, and even the ladies stroll the lane with rackets in hand. So refrain, if you will, from scoffing at the notion of a cat taking exercise. You may harbor doubts, granted, as to what sort of exercise a cat might perform. Allow me to explain. Sadly, as you know, I'm ill-equipped to handle implements. I can't swing a bat or throw a ball. Further, I've no money with which to buy such things. For these two reasons, the exercise I've chosen is free-form, requiring neither implement nor expenditure. In such case, stalking the neighborhood, or racing by with a cut of tuna in my chops, perhaps comes to mind. Where's the interest, however, in merely traversing the landscape, pitting the mechanics of one's four legs against gravity? And to do as the master does on occasion, going through the motions only rotely, is to violate the sanctity of exercise.

Simple physical motion, of course, when inspired by circumstance, is not out of the question. Racing off to nab a dried bonito or swipe a hunk of salmon is fine, but take away the all-important object of interest and all is null and void. In absence of the stimulus of reward, the next best motivation is honing some new technique. I've thought of a number of things. I could find some way to jump from the kitchen eaves to the roof, then stand on all fours on the tip-top tile, the one adorned with the plum blossom insignia. I could

tightrope walk a laundry pole -- there's little chance of success here. The bamboo is too slick, and I can't get a clawhold. I could scare the children with a surprise jump from behind -- this is one of my favorites, but often there's hell to pay after, so I can't risk it more than once or twice per month. I could have a paper bag placed over my head -- this is sheer agony, though, and not something I find amusing. Further, it demands a human partner, which makes it a non-starter. I could claw book covers -- the problem here, of course, is that discovery means a tongue-lashing from the master. The other downside is concentration of motion in only the tips of the paws. It's hardly a whole-body workout. These all constitute, as I see it, classical forms of activity. There are also contemporary forms of activity, some of which are quite intriguing. First there's mantis hunting. -- While mantis hunting might not provide the workout that chasing mice does, it also entails fewer perils. From mid summer to early autumn, there's no better activity. Here's how it works. One proceeds to the garden and seeks out a mantis. On a good day, one or two are readily found. Once a quarry is identified, one races like the wind and is on it in a flash. The quarry, taken by surprise, rears up its long neck and positions its head on high. The fun thing is that the mantis, an admirable creature, prepares to defend itself, no matter how outmatched. I announce myself with a right front paw to the outstretched neck. The neck is pliant and easily swayed to the side. The look on its face, in this moment, is priceless. "Oh me, oh my!" it seems to say.

From here, with one quick bound I circle behind and lightly claw the fellow's wings. These carefully folded wings, when clawed just so, are readily disarranged, revealing a lightly colored underlayer, fine like Yoshino paper. These fellows, even in summer, take great pains to adorn themselves in double-layered attire. At this moment, the fellow invariably twists his long neck to look behind. Once in a while one turns to confront me, but for the most part, it's just the head that turns. He seems to be waiting, watching for my next move. A prolonged standoff provides me no sport, so after some time I deliver a swat. Any sensible mantis, after one good swat, makes ready to flee. It's only the ignorant savage, hell-bent on standing his ground, who chooses fight over flight. When faced with a savage foe, I counter his advance, in no uncertain terms, with a well-timed flick, sending him airborne a ways. To those who duly retreat, however, I'm not entirely unsympathetic. I break off and dash round the trees a time or two. My mantis friend effects his escape, but only proceeds a very short distance. Aware that he's outmatched, and aware that resistance is futile, all he can do is zig and zag, helter skelter. I'm on him like glue, though, and his distress only builds, often to end in a flurry of flailing wings. The mantis's wings, following the form of its neck, are long and slender, but from what I'm told they're strictly ornamental. Like human study of the English, French, or German languages, they're of no practical use whatsoever. It follows, of course, that this final flourish of deadwood wings in no way thwarts my advance. In flailing its wings in fact, the mantis does little more than drag them about on the ground. By this point it's really quite pitiable, but I need my exercise, so what can one do. I take the liberty of rushing ahead and blocking its path.

These fellows move under inertia and aren't given to quick change of direction, so they continue, of necessity, to advance. A thwack on the nose puts them flat on the ground, wings splayed. I pin them down

with my front paw, affording myself a breather. Then I let them up. Having let them up, I pin them down again. Drawing on Kōmei's tactics of warfare, I encroach and withdraw again and again. After thirty minutes or so at this, having exhausted my quarry, I apply my jaws and give a solid shake. Then I spit them back out. This time they hit the turf and just lie there, motionless, so I bat them into the air and pin them again as they land. Once I tire of this, it's all over. I crunch them up and swallow them down. For those who've never eaten a mantis, I have to say they're not exactly tasty. Nutritionally, too, they offer less than one might hope.

After mantis hunting, there's also cicada capture. Cicadas, of course, come in various forms. Just as there are greasy humans, loquacious humans, and melancholy humans, so too, in the world of cicada are abura zemi, min-min zemi, and tsuku-tsuku zemi. Abura zemi are tenacious and best left alone. Min-min zemi are haughty and no fun at all. Only tsuku-tsuku zemi are fit for sport. They first appear in late summer. In those waning days, when autumn's breeze intrudes through light clothing and cools the skin, when a sneeze first hints at a cold, they twitch their tales en masse, swelling the air with their cries. Their cries carry so that, from my perspective, their calling in life is nothing more than raising their cry and, as luck may have it, being stalked by a cat. In early autumn I'm on them. My "cicada capture rec time" has begun. Let me state for the record that cicadas are not to be found on the ground. Some do fall to the ground, but those belong to the ants. And those that belong to the ants, lying about on the ground, are not for me. The lot I'm after are high in the branches, crying out with their "tsuku-tsuku" call.

This calls to mind a question I've been hoping to pose to men of erudition. Do these cicadas cry "oshii tsuku-tsuku," or do they cry "tsuku-tsuku oshii?" This interpretation, I believe, has no small bearing on the study of cicadas. Such questions comprise a realm where humans excel over cats, a point of great human pride. If the answer is not yet known, then let men muse for a time. In either case, my cicada capture sport carries on unimpeded. Guided by their cries, I climb up into the branches, where my quarry's absorbed in song, and lunge in for the capture. This may sound simple, but in fact it's nothing but. On my four legs, I traverse the earth at least on par, I believe, with most other beasts. And based on simple numbers, it stands to reason I move about better than two-legged men. Climbing trees, though, is hardly my forte. Setting aside monkeys, who excel in this field, even men, who are descendant from monkeys, are not an incompetent lot. It is, of course, an unnatural undertaking, in defiance of gravity, so there's no real shame in a less-than-masterful climb. Nevertheless, when it comes to cicada capture, some degree of competence is called for. Fortunately, I am endowed with sharp claws. I manage my way up the trees, but it's not as easy as it might look. To make matters worse, cicadas fly. Unlike with the mantis, a cicada taken flight is a cicada lost. There's no guarantee that my tree-climbing efforts won't go all for naught. Finally, I also risk the occasional splash of urine. I can't but think it's even aimed at my eyes. I can deal with loss of my quarry, but being doused with urine is just too much. What psychological condition, I wonder, triggers what physiological mechanism to trigger this telltale spurt of urine as the cicada takes to the air. Perhaps it's driven by angst. Or perhaps it's tactical, buying a moment of time to elude an ensuing threat. That

would number it with similar such animal actions - the squid squirting its ink, the ruffian exposing his tattoo, or my master spouting off in Latin.

This, too, is a cicada question worthy of scholarship. A doctoral thesis, if based on thorough investigation, is surely defensible. I digress, however, so let me return to the topic at hand. Where cicadas tend to concentrate -- If concentrate is the wrong word then we can say congregate. But congregate sounds too hackneyed, so let's go with concentrate. -- Where cicadas tend to concentrate is on sumac trees. The scholarly name for these trees, by the way, is "gotō." At any rate, these sumac trees are excessive in foliage. Each leaf is the size of a flat hand fan. The lush verdure grows so thick as to obscure the branches, making cicada capture all the more challenging. "I hear your voice but see you not." So goes the popular song, and I can't but think it perhaps was written for me. Having no other recourse, I lean on sound as my guide. A short way up from the ground, a sumac tree invariably forks. This affords one a breather, and a chance to scout out, from the shelter of myriad leaves, the whereabouts of one's quarry. There's a certain impetuous lot who, before I've even advanced this far, rustle their wings and beat a hasty retreat. And it's never just one or two. When it comes to blindly following suit, cicadas are no less asinine than humans. One after another, they take to the air. There are times when I work my way up to the fork, only to end up alone in a silent tree. On one such occasion, I arrived at the fork, surveyed all around, perked my ears, yet caught no sign of cicadas. Lacking the energy to start out anew, I decided some rest was in order. Securing my position among the branches, I laid in wait for the next opportunity to present itself. I must have grown drowsy at some point and drifted off into catnap land. Next thing I knew, catnap land was gone, and I'd landed with a thump on the garden flagstones. For the most part, though, my climbing excursions bear fruit. The only downside is that up in the branches I've no choice but to grasp my prey in my teeth. In general, by the time I'm down and able to release my bite, my catch is already expired.

However much I paw or claw it, there's no perceptible response. The real attraction of cicada capture lies in that moment of surprise, when through patience and stealth I've zeroed in on my quarry to find it twitching its tail in and out for all it's worth, sending up cries of "oshii" and "tsuku-tsuku." I pin it down with my front paw. Its "tsuku-tsuku" transforms to a death shriek, and its thin, transparent wings flail in all directions. The speed and splendor of this panic defies description. Indeed, in the world of cicadas there's no finer spectacle. Each time I pin down another "tsuku-tsuku" crier, it's the beauty of this artistic flourish I cherish. When I've finally had my fill of it, I take the liberty of stuffing my cheeks with the performer. In some cases, the flourish continues, even as I'm clamping my jaws.

After cicada capture, another form of physical training is pine sliding. It doesn't warrant a lengthy description, so I'll just touch on the basics. The term "pine sliding" may evoke visions of sliding down pine trees, but such is not the case. On the contrary, it's another form of tree climbing. However, while the objective of tree climbing in cicada capture is to capture a cicada, the objective in pine sliding is the climb in and of itself. This is the key differentiator. The pine tree, from days of yore, since fueling the fire to

warm Saimyōji in Tokiwa, up to this present day, is scraggy to a fault. As a consequence, there's nothing less slippery than the trunk of a pine. And there's nothing with better handholds or footholds. -- in other words, there's nothing with better clawholds. With such good clawholds, I can race up those trunks in a flash. Having raced up, I hurry back down. There are two methods of hurrying down. One is inverted descent, or descending with head toward the ground. The other is reverse descent, or descending tail first, maintaining the same orientation through climb and descent. A question for humans - which do you imagine is easiest? Most humans, having never thought deeply on the matter, likely reckon that given one's heading downward, descending head first is easiest. This is not correct. In your minds, no doubt, is the image of Yoshitsune charging down from Hiyodorigoe Pass on horseback, and if Yoshitsune can charge down head first then a cat, of course, can well enough follow suit. It's by no means so simple. In which direction do you imagine cats' claws grow? They all curve toward the rear. Like firemen's hooks, they're good for grasping and pulling, but poor for pushing off.

Imagine I've just dashed up into the top of a pine. Fundamentally, I'm a land creature, and nature does not permit her land creatures to dwell in treetops. If I tarry too long I'm bound to fall. I could simply let go, but in that case I'd fall too fast. So I need, by some means, to honor nature's laws yet mitigate their pace. In other words, I need to crawl down. It may seem there's a world of difference between falling down and crawling down, but the difference, in fact, is not so great. A slow fall is a crawl, and a fast crawl is a fall. The only difference between "fall down" and "crawl down" is an initial consonant sound. I'm not looking to fall from the top of a pine tree, so I need to slow my fall to a crawl. Put another way, I need a means of putting the brakes on my fall. As I've explained already, my claws are all backward facing, so with head up and claws out I can apply the full force of my claws to countering the force of the fall. Accordingly, the fall becomes a crawl. This is logical and self-evident. What if, on the other hand, I turn myself around, in the spirit of Yoshitsune charging down from Pine Pass. Claws become all but useless. They slip and slide, overwhelmed by gravity's pull. At this point, the planned and intended crawl is nothing but a free and fast fall. Hiyodorigoe Pass presents a conundrum. Having artfully worked through this conundrum, I find myself unique among cats. I've crafted the term "pine sliding" to describe this novel form of physical training.

I'll close with a word on the fence circuit. The master's yard is marked off by a rectangular bamboo fence. One side, running parallel to the veranda, is about fifteen meters in length. The adjacent sides to left and right are shorter, at seven or so meters. The training I refer to as "fence circuit" involves a round along the top of this fence, completed without falling. I don't always manage it, but when I do succeed, I find it most gratifying. Along the way are thick support posts, with one end charred and anchored into the earth. These posts afford an ideal resting spot. I was in top form today and gave it three goes in the course of the morning. The more rounds I attempt, the better my performance, and the better my performance, the greater my satisfaction.

After some time, I started on a fourth circuit, only to be interrupted halfway. Three crows flew down from a neighboring roof and alighted in a row on the fence top, some several paces ahead of me. Intrusive lot, dropping down and obstructing my round. They were clearly not from these parts, and as I saw things, had no right to this fence. "Clear the way," I called. The first crow regarded me with a smirk. The second crow surveyed the master's garden. The third crow cleaned his beak on the end of a bamboo upright. No doubt he'd just come from eating something. I stood in place for a full three minutes, patiently awaiting their response. A popular name for crows, they say, is Kanzaemon, and Kanzaemon fits to a tee. Wait though I did, there was no response and no sign of flight. Having no other recourse, I cautiously advanced. Kanzaemon number one extended his wings. Finally recognizing my authority, he was ready, I thought, to effect his escape. Instead, he merely shifted his posture from right-facing to left-facing. Bloody rascal! Had we been on level ground, I'd not have hesitated to dispatch this lot. Regrettably, though, on this fence-top path, that was challenging enough to begin with, I was in no position to face off against Kanzaemon. That being said, the prospect of staying put and waiting on the three to depart was equally unappealing. First and foremost, my legs can't withstand it. The other party, being winged creatures, had alighted here as matter of course. Accordingly, they were here in no hurry to move on. I was on my fourth circuit and duly worn out. This performance, which doubles as my exercise, is no less taxing than walking a tightrope. Even with no form of obstruction, my balance was already precarious. There was no easy reckoning with these three up ahead now, clad in black and blocking my path. If it came down to it, I'd have no recourse but to break my routine and jump to the ground. Perhaps it was not worth the trouble. After all, I was outnumbered, and my foes were an unfamiliar entity, flown in from parts unknown.

With their oddly tapered beaks, they looked to have sprung from Tengu's bloodline. Fellows, no doubt, of less than stellar repute. Withdrawal would be the prudent course. The greater disgrace of a fall, should I engage them here, was not worth risking. As I was thus concluding, the left-facing crow chimed, "Ho ho fool." The next one followed suit. "Ho ho fool." The final crow took pains to repeat it twice. "Ho ho fool, ho ho fool." Even I, mild-mannered though I am, couldn't let this pass. First of all, this was my yard. To be slighted here by a gaggle of crows would weigh on my good name. Granted I have no name for it to weigh on, but I do have a face, and losing face was equally unappealing. Disorder, they say, disarms a crowd. Three crows together, contrary to expectation, might perhaps prove not so potent. Mustering my resolve, I advanced as I could, with slow and deliberate steps. The crows, paying me no heed, were conversing amongst themselves. My indignation only intensified. Had the fencetop been just a bit wider, I'd have torn them to pieces. Regrettably though, however incensed I might be, I had to gage my steps. I finally neared the lead crow, almost within paw's reach. Just at that moment, as if on cue, Kanzaemon and company flew up in a flurry of beating wings. The resulting rush of air, as it suddenly brushed my face, caused me to lose my footing. I tumbled down, landing with a thump. Righting myself, I looked up from the base of the fence. The three crows, beaks together, were back where they'd been, regarding me from above. Impertinent lot. I sported a scowl, but to no effect. I arched my back and unleashed a growl, to no avail whatsoever. Show the common man an exemplary work of symbolist poetry, and he'll react with a shrug.

So it was with these crows. My displays of indignity registered not in the least. I'd been engaging them, up to this point, as I would a fellow cat. That was a mistake.

My efforts would certainly not have been lost on fellow cats, but the other party, regrettably, were crows. With a gaggle of old crows, what can one expect? Like the industrialist going to great lengths to try to intimidate master Kushami, like the silver cat presented to the poet Saigyō, or like these old crows themselves who target the bronze likeness of Saigō Takamori with their droppings, the impact is nil. Quickly grasping my changed circumstances and the futility of further engagement, I cleanly and neatly withdraw to the veranda. It's time for dinner. Exercise is well and good, but one mustn't overdo it. I'm sapped, and my limbs feel like lead. Furthermore, my fur, in the course of my exertion, had soaked up the rays of autumn's afternoon sun, and the lingering warmth is oppressive. The sweat which oozed from my pores, finding nowhere to flow, clings like oil to the base of my fur. My back feels itchy. The itchiness of clinging sweat is clearly distinct from the itchiness of milling fleas. If I could get my mouth back there I'd nip and bite, and if I could get my feet back there I'd scratch just so, but the length of my spine is beyond my reach. In situations like these, one finds the nearest human and cozies up for a rub. Either that or its back-and-forth against pine bark. Without doing one or the other, a comfortable sleep is out of the question. Human beings are a foolish lot, with indulgent pet voices -- An indulgent voice is the voice humans use vis-à-vis a cat. From my cat perspective, I should rather call it, perhaps, an indulging voice. -- Be that as it may, at any rate, human beings are a foolish lot and prone to misunderstanding. When I respond to a human being's indulging voice and cuddle up against his or her lap, it's interpreted, for the most part, as expression of fondness. Not only do they let me have my way, but at times they even assist, rubbing my ears and neck. That being said, a certain species of parasite they refer to as fleas has proliferated, of late, through my fur. Without fail now, my approaches are thwarted. I'm seized by the scruff of the neck and flung away. On account of these insects, barely visible to the eye and hardly worth the trouble to extract, I'm no longer loved. How fickle is human affection. Since when do a thousand fleas, make it two thousand even, warrant such mercenary reaction?

In the world of humans, as I understand it, love is defined by one overarching principle. -- As long as it serves one's need, one should by all means love. -- Having suddenly lost the favor of men, a helping human hand is out of the question, however intense the itch. That being the case, the only recourse that comes to mind is option two - rubbing up on pine bark. Thinking to go and do just that, I start back down from the veranda. It hits me though, that this is ill-advised, likely to render more harm than good. Allow me to explain. Pines have resin. This resin clings with the utmost tenacity. Once it's stuck to one's fur, let thunder split the air, let the Baltic Fleet be wiped from the sea, it's not coming off. Not only that, but as soon as it clings to five strands of fur, it spreads its grasp to ten. By the time one's aware of a ten-strand clump, it's already on to thirty. As a cat of refined taste, subtlety meets my favor. What I like least of all are insistent, pernicious, clingy, and unrelenting types. Endow the most beautiful cat under heaven with such character, and without hesitation I'd turn her away. All the more odious then, when it comes to pine



resin. It's no less unappealing than the mucus that flows from Kurumaya no Kuro's eyes when the cold winds blow, and how dare it venture to spoil my light gray coat. It should really be ashamed. Evidently, though, it knows no shame. As soon as I press up and rub, I just know I'll get stickied. I'll suffer the blame then, for tangling with vile company, over and above the damage done to my coat. Itchy though I am, I'll just have to persevere. It's most disheartening when neither of two solutions proves workable. Unless I come up with something, this itchy torment may well be the death of me.

As I sat back on my folded hind legs and thought and thought, something came to mind. The master occasionally saunters off to somewhere with towel and soap in hand. Thirty or forty minutes later he returns, and his anemic complexion has brightened a bit. It's tinged, I would even say, with a touch of vivacity. If such effect can be worked on a shabby-looking fellow like the master, then imagine the outcome with me. I'm handsome enough as it is and see no need to be made more dashing, but at the same time, I do have to think of my health. Were I to fall ill and part this life prematurely, at the tender age of one year and some months, the world would mourn its loss. From what I've been told, it's public baths that the master frequents, a human contrivance for the whiling away of time. If humans conceived and built it, it's no doubt second rate, but in times like this I wouldn't mind trying a soak. Even if it does nothing, I'll be none the worse and wiser. The question is whether humans, having constructed these baths for their own use, are large enough of heart to allow another species, a cat say, to join and soak in their midst. If they let in a man like the master, there's no reason they shouldn't welcome me. However, one can't be too cautious. Should I meet with rejection, I'd never live it down. The best course of action is to scope things out in advance. If all looks good, I can always come back, a washcloth between my teeth, and plunge in. Thus resolved, I wander off for the baths.