



**THE BLOG** 09/06/2016 07:47 pm ET | Updated 2 days ago

# No News Is Good News: Why We All Need To Go To the Desert Until This Campaign Is Over



By Marty Kaplan



REPRODUÇÃO/TWITTER

I just spent a happy week at a place it's possible to detach from the news.

If you want to, you can find a newspaper there. You don't want to. Believe me.

It's in the high desert, where cellular service is spotty, and it's not in the U.S., so the crazy high roaming charges are a potent deterrent to staying connected. There are some scattered Wi-Fi hotspots, and an Internet Center outfitted with a handful of aging PCs, and the men's locker room has a TV that I suppose could carry cable news, though it always seemed to be tuned to a soccer game.

Sometimes you come across a guest who's managed to keep current with the news, and if you're not cautious, a casual chat may tell you more than you want about what's happening in the world, but the natural info flow heads in the opposite direction. You go for a hike before breakfast, get a massage in the afternoon, do yoga or Pilates, linger over a mango, learn to meditate or salsa, read a book in a hammock, and, fairly effortlessly, you find yourself in a buzz-free bubble, doing a digital detox, going on news fast, which is exactly what I had in mind.

No Trump. No Clinton. No polls. No tweets. No wars. No disasters. No — as I later learned — Anthony Weiner or Colin Kaepernick. Instead, the boulders casting shadows on the mountains, the turkey buzzards riding the thermals, the smell of chaparral.

“

**“I kept off Twitter and Facebook, and I sidestepped sauna conversations that veered toward jeopardizing how blissfully out of it I was..”**

I admit: I cheated. Sometimes I checked my email, to be sure that my electronic unavailability wasn't screwing up something at work (it wasn't), or that some personal emergency wasn't ticking in my voicemail (ditto). But I was fairly successful at stepping out of the media maelstrom, and though I did message some beauty shots to some friends, I kept off Twitter and Facebook, and I sidestepped sauna conversations that veered toward jeopardizing how blissfully out of it I was.

Two things surprised me: How determined so many other people I met were to achieve a similar disengagement. And how nauseating it's been to catch up since I got back.

Time and again, the Americans I met there told me how sick they were of the presidential campaign, how disgusted and depressed, how frustrated and scared. At a meal, where half a dozen people new to one another might find themselves sharing a table, it was common to hear, “I'm so glad no one mentioned Trump.” Or: “I love the *New York Times*, but I'm so happy I'm not reading it.” It was as though the civic virtue of being knowledgeable about current events had been dethroned by the mental-hygiene imperative of decontamination. What was taken for granted in the outside world as a responsibility of civilian life — the obligation to be well informed — was reconceived in the desert as a pathology in need of healing. The more you know, the less you are.

But back in Los Angeles, re-immersing in the public flow, I could feel the insidious return of the knots in my trapezoids that a masseur's hands had melted. Trump's trip to Mexico, Clinton's emails, Wikileaks, the tightening polls: What therapy, other than isolation or denial, could reach deep enough to penetrate psychic trigger points like those?

A wise friend I reconnected with when I returned wrote me this on Labor Day: “Worrying mightily about Hillary, but comforting myself that tomorrow she'll re-emerge from self-imposed exile (while fundraising) and hopefully take better control of the press about her. I'm waiting for this week's polls after Trump's wild and stupid ride last week. Do you have any insight that will offer comfort to an already exhausted observer of this circus?”

“The catching up I've done,” I wrote back, “has felt like squirts of venom into my bloodstream — poisonous, paralyzing and scary as hell. The only antidote I can offer is my view that no media you will encounter between now and Election Day will lead you to believe anything other than that it will be a nail-biter. The purpose of media is (sigh) not to inform you, but to grab and hold your attention, and the surest way to lose your attention is to deprive the narrative of suspense. The more exhausted and uncertain you are, the better it is for the BREAKING NEWS! biz. You've probably seen it already, but today's *New York Times* Upshot makes it look like the chances of a Trump win are small. With Trump behind on Labor Day, each day makes it historically more unlikely that that'll change. That doesn't stop me from wanting to throw up or despair several times a day, but having just spent a week free of toxins, I'm hoping that my next wave of revulsion will be a little less overwhelming than before.”

He mentioned something he was working on, a substantial piece of writing. Maybe your absorption in that process, I wrote, more hopeful than I actually am, “can serve as a baffle between you and the hissing and rattling relentlessly emanating from the ominous buzzy beyond.”

I wish I knew how to slay those snakes — how to restore digital balance to my daily life, how to modulate the intake of fear and factoids that my psyche is hooked on. Observing Shabbat is, of course, an option for one day out of seven; clearly those ancients knew something about overload. And twisting an on-off spigot for a week's vacation can make for a perfect late-