

Dear Darling,

I feel like I'm going, to use a child friendly word, fluffing crazy! Every time I sit down to get work done, I think, "Does this really matter? Am I really doing anything that's really, truly important in the world? Am I simply a hamster running in its wheel? Will anyone remember what I did?" It's office work. I shouldn't be overthinking this BS. And yet, every day, I find myself thinking it. And then, every time I watch the news, I think to myself "Goodness, I'm not doing enough. I can't do enough. No matter how much work I do, no matter what I think, or what I say, or who I support, the world will still be shit. We will still have a disgusting president who looks, to be frank, like a piece of molding babybel cheese, and who feels, to be frank, even less than said molding piece of babybel cheese. We will still have a system leading us to oligarchy. I can't do anything useful." And then, when I try to watch a show, for example, the Great British Baking Show, I think, "Wow, I like macarons." And then I think, "Is that the only moment of truth in the unending abyss of my own mind and ever changing emotion and sense of self? That I like fluffing MACARONS?????" Is this what an existential crisis is? To believe that nothing matters? You don't matter? What you do doesn't matter? Nothing matters. So why bother? Why even think about macarons? It doesn't matter. Nobody will care when I'm dead that I liked macarons. So why persist? Why keep moving? Why keeping spinning the wheel, so to speak, if perhaps the wheel, however indirectly, helps spin the wheel of the American oligarchy, and thus, the moldy babybel man? Why keep moving if nothing I do matters?

Going crazy over here,
Lover of Macarons

Hello, dearest Lover of Macarons,

I'll get the obvious out of the way first: Macarons rule, you have good taste for enjoying them, and that's not nothing! OK,

now that that's settled, holy moly you are not going crazy, or at least not any crazier than your baseline. Our world is sliding into fascism at an overwhelming pace, it seems like everyone in town is struggling to hold it together in some way or another, and the news is just one awful thing after another. The truth is, you'd be crazy to NOT have some kind of response to this moment in time! And with so much going on all of the time, and so much of it being mostly out of our control, it seems quite logical to get swept away in the thought storm of "Why does it matter?" And that's exactly what they want you to think. You know who I'm talking about: the Macaron Haters (OK OK, I'm actually talking about all of those who hold positions of power without regard for the will of the people, but bear with me...) They want us to be overwhelmed, they want us to feel helpless and ineffective, they want us to develop a hard, waxy, uncaring shell like the Babybel Man and all of the rest of them. There's a name for this tactic they're using to overwhelm us all, it's called the "shock doctrine", there's a whole book written about it if you're interested. Essentially, moldy-ass Macaron Haters use moments of social rupture (like natural disasters, wars, recessions, etc.) as an opportunity to introduce a ton of policies, structures, programs, etc. that benefit the interests of those Macaron Haters. This tactic specifically relies on us being too overwhelmed to track what's happening to us in real time. And sadly, it works! It's so so hard for our little nervous systems to process everything that's happening and all of the seen and unseen implications and impacts, how could we NOT feel defeated before we even start?

One way that I have found for handling this is by adjusting my metaphorical scope a little bit. If I tune into everything that's happening everywhere all the time, I'm going to overload my system and shut down. But if I dial it in a little bit (say, from the national level to the local level), I can more clearly see the areas where I can actually have an impact. That's not to say that I shut everything that isn't the Willamette Valley completely out of my awareness, but I do try to filter how much news from "out there" I take in. Truth is, I (a humble anonymous advice columnist) am not likely to have an impact on what the Supreme Court of Anti-Macaronists decides and how that's going to negatively impact millions of

baked goods enthusiasts. But I might be able to have an impact on how those effects are felt right here in my community. Along similar lines, I suspect that many of the people who choose to read a magazine called "Dissonant Times" are likely dreaming in some way of a world without Moldy Babybel Men and without Supreme Courts of Anti-Macaronists, and if/when that world arrives, it will be the community connections that we've baked locally that will help us build the structures we want to see, structures that are accepting of Macarons, and also Knafeh, and Concha, and Baklava, and Syrnyky, and Frybread, and... you get the point. What I'm trying to say is, we don't each have to take on the responsibility of saving the world at large. It's totally fine to just work on caring for our neighbors, our friends and families, or just ourselves if that's all we can manage. It's also totally okay to need help from the community from time to time, that's what a community is for! Wherever you're at, my suggestion is to focus your efforts on the things you can change, start small, and build from there.

The other thing I'll say is that, if you're feeling stuck and unsure of what to do, follow your interests! You love macarons, and I bet you're not the only one out there who feels that way. So let's brainstorm what can we do with Macarons that feeds back into the community (and maybe even builds more community along the way). One idea that comes to mind right off the bat is hosting a fundraiser macaron bake-off, to show off your (and your neighbors') skills in making the most delicious macarons the Willamette Valley's ever seen. Or if you're more interested in the consumption side than the production side, you could host a fundraiser macaron eating contest! (I actually really hope somebody takes this idea and runs with it). If public events aren't your thing, you could find a way to get macarons into the hands of people who don't normally have access to macarons, maybe run a macaron distro of some sort? My point is, the things we are interested in are worthy of being celebrated (as long as they don't infringe on others' autonomy), and many of those interests can, with a little creativity, be pursued in ways that serve the greater good. Find your calling, seek out your fellow maniacarons, and start baking up some ideas of how to share your love with the rest of us!

Anyways, I hope this was helpful, and not just some seriously under-baked advice. Feel free to reach back out and let me know, I love hearing updates from people who've listened to my ramblings here. And please invite me to the macaron-eating contest when it happens!

With all my love,

Darling Tonia