

February

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
○ Full Moon	Waitangi Day (NZ)					
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	● Last Quarter	St. Valentine's Day				
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	● New Moon Presidents' Day (USA)		Ash Wednesday			
26	27	28				
	● First Quarter					

***"You are imperfect,
permanently and
inevitably flawed.
And you are beautiful."***

—Amy Bloom



SUPERPOWER

Admit it: You secretly feel superior to the non-runners you meet. Perhaps you recognize that this attitude is arrogant, hubristic, uninformed, and unearned. Nevertheless, there it is. A confidence in your smile, perhaps, or the visible contentment you get from living in your own body.

Oh sure, we tend to live longer and suffer fewer chronic diseases than sedentary mortals. We manage stress better. We stay sharp as we age. We gain confidence. And some of us even win medals and free t-shirts.

Even so, Wonder Woman does not envy our achievements—except possibly for that most elusive of superpowers, the runner's high. The sensation is pleasant but transitory, which makes you wonder why piles of money continue to get pushed into demystifying it. First it was endorphins, then big bursts of dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin. Now cannabinoids naturally produced by the brain during intense aerobic exercise purportedly make the magic.

To this I say, who cares? The runner's high is more potent when it is mysterious. It is a training incentive. It tells the story of our workouts, the intensity of our buzz proportional to the effort that went into the miles. Once, the myth allowed us to believe that, for a few post-shower hours, those miles bought us a ticket to float with the angels on a blissful plane of existence; now, we're reassured it's just our brains' happy juice lighting up our skulls.

Perhaps scientists are searching in the wrong place. When asked to describe the runner's high, the word "euphoria" invariably pops up, which tells you nothing at all. Some people find euphoria in a box of animal crackers. Drill into the specifics that are unique to running, and the language goes gassier still. Runners call it transcendent, invincible, exultant, radiant, holistic, even spiritual. How many studies include runners who have never experienced such at all and think the whole thing is hooey?

So, describe it to yourself, how you personally have experienced the runner's high, assuming you have. It's not easy, but nor is describing an orgasm, though "euphoria" pops up a lot in those conversations as well. Perhaps neither words nor blood samples truly capture the essence of an experience. When we talk to others who have *known* the runner's high, the conversations tend to be short. There's not much to say, though you both assume it is a shared sensation. As with an orgasm, there's not much doubt about whether you've had one or not.

To put it into words, for me it is as if my muscles are humming low and cool. I feel detached from the usual body aches, but aware of them, peacefully immune to their complaining. I continue to breathe deeply even hours after a workout, but at a slower rate. It seems involuntary. I feel astonishing mental clarity even as sleepiness begins to encroach. It also puts a ridiculous look on my face. ■