

Real Versus Perceived

On the low-level thrum of negativity that colors everything you look at — and the plain, unspiritual inventory that interrupts it.

There is a kind of difficulty that does not announce itself. It is not a crisis. Nothing has gone wrong that you could point to. It is a low-level thrum underneath the day — a hum of apprehension that never rises high enough to be addressed and never drops low enough to disappear. You would not call it fear if someone asked. You would say you are busy, or tired, or that it has been a lot lately.

You can spot it by its symptoms. You look at your inbox and there is one message you cannot bring yourself to open, and you could not tell anyone why. You hear about something good happening to someone else and the sentence that arrives is *must be nice*. You start from an assumed level of things being a bit rough, and that assumption is so continuous that it stops looking like an assumption and starts looking like information.

The old texts describe this precisely. The Upanishads and the Yoga Sutras talk about the mind becoming like colored lenses that you see through. It is a good image because a lens does not feel like an opinion. It feels like the world. When the mind is carrying negativity, everything the mind is pointed at comes back tinted, and the tint arrives as fact.

“*How many things are actually having a problem right now versus your perception of negativity? So what's the real versus the perceived?*”

TIM O. DAVIS · FRIDAY TEACHING CALL

Here is the tell that it is a lens and not a report. You have had the morning where the birds are singing and everybody loves you. You have also had the morning where the whole world has clearly deteriorated overnight. Both of those mornings were observations of the same world. Nothing happened to the entire planet while you slept. If the reading changed and the world did not, then you now know something extremely useful: you are carrying it.

So what do you do with it. Not what you would expect, if your instinct is to go straight at the feeling. Going at the feeling tends to feed it, because the mind is delighted to be given a project. Instead, stop and take an inventory, and take it at a level that will feel almost insultingly plain.

Do you have something to eat. Do you have somewhere to sleep. Does the car start. Do you have work in front of you. What is the overall score of your life right now, counted in

things rather than in mood? Then the real question: **how many things are actually having a problem at this moment, versus your perception of negativity?**

I know how this sounds. It sounds like gratitude practice, and it is not, quite. Gratitude asks you to feel a certain way about your circumstances, which is another performance to fail at. This asks you to *count*. It is arithmetic. And arithmetic is one of the few things the mind cannot easily argue with, because you are using the mind's own instrument — the same instrument that builds air conditioners and solves logistics — against the mind's own coloring.

Almost always the count comes back small. Two things are genuinely unresolved. Maybe three. Meanwhile the thrum was pricing the day as though eleven things were on fire. That gap between two and eleven is not reality. It is the lens, and now you have measured it.

There is a second, harder version of the exercise if you want it. Do a ratio. For a week, notice what comes out of you — how many negative remarks per positive one, to your spouse, to your children, to whoever is nearest. Most of us discover something unflattering. And usually we can trace it, because we were around people whose ratio was the same, and we absorbed the ratio the way you absorb an accent. Nobody chose it. It got installed. Which also means it can be questioned, and questioning that core layer regularly does more good than any amount of resolve.

One last thing that matters more than the technique. It is easy to fall into these states, and falling into them is not a moral failure, so do not add a second layer of self-judgment on top of the first. Notice, count, and then break the pattern physically if you can — a walk, a run, a yoga class, ten minutes with an animal, a change of room. A pattern disruption reopens the aperture, and the world comes back looking approximately like itself.

That is the whole practice here, and it is unromantic. The thrum tells you the world is unsafe. The count tells you what is true. Do not argue with the thrum. Just check the number, and then go do the two things that are actually broken.

THE PRACTICE

Before you solve the day, count it. How many things are actually broken right now — and how many are being supplied by the lens?