

When Your Tool Is a Hammer

Negativity works. That is the problem with it.

There is an old allegory: when your tool is a hammer, the world is made of nails. If pounding is the only way you know to join two things, then screws are lost to you, and rivets, and glue, and every other way of making something hold. You are not stupid. You are equipped with one tool, and the tool is working, and so you never look for another.

Negativity is that hammer. I want to be careful here, because the usual sermon about negativity is that it is unpleasant and you should stop. That is not what I am saying, and it would not be true anyway. Negativity is effective. It supplies energy. It gets people out of bed and through the quarter and around the danger. It warns you. It has kept you safe more than once. It is an untruth with a genuinely useful result, which is exactly why it is so hard to put down.

What it cannot do is let you expand into the fullness of who you are. Driven by fear, you will do the work, but you will not make the new connection, the odd one, the one that comes from somewhere other than threat. Fear is a narrow frame. It was handed to us as a safe one — often by people who loved us and were themselves frightened. Parents, teachers, bosses, spouses, all of them throwing scenarios at us in the name of care, conditioning us to stay alert. It is not even a personal failing. Staying alert to risk is why the species is here.

So the question is not how to be positive. The question is how the hammer gets set down.

Start where it actually lives, which is below the thinking. Most of this is subconscious, which means by definition you are not aware of it — but it registers as a vibration you can feel. You know it best in the morning, in that minute after waking and before the mind engages: a low angst, something wrong, something undone, a sense of impending doom with no content attached. That is the thing itself, before the mind has dressed it in today's reasons. Later it will attach to your inbox and look like a legitimate concern.

It is also held physically. If you have chronic pain in the neck, the hips, the low back — that is very often where the angst is stored. The body has been carrying it while you were busy being reasonable.

“*Awareness plus experience equals release.*

TIM DAVIS

So the first move is simply awareness, and I will make a large claim about it. Awareness alone does about eighty percent of the work of relieving chronic negativity. Not analysis. Not root-

causing your childhood. Just noticing, cleanly, what you are vibrating at. The catch is that it is not a one-time awareness. It is continual, because the source keeps surfacing, and each surfacing is another opportunity.

That is why the second half matters as much as the first. You have to let the thing be experienced. Not expressed — experienced. Expression is what we do instead: we vent it, we forward it, we say the sharp thing at dinner, we go for a run to burn it off. All of that discharges the pressure without draining the tank, so the tank refills by Thursday. Experience is different. Experience is staying in your seat while it moves through your chest and declining to do anything with it at all.

Think of it as dye in water. What you are is water — inherently clear, inherently divine. The accumulated pain, the old scars, the samskaras, are dye that makes the clearest part of you look tainted. So when a hard day arrives and it all comes up at once, and your body actually hurts from the storehouse of it, the temptation is to read that as a setback. It is the opposite. That is the dye draining. That is the release of the very thing you have been asking to be free of, and it arrived on a day you happened to have room for it.

It is not your job to handle it. It is your job to be with it. The universe will do the cleansing; your work is to be still while it happens. And this is why we begin every one of these sittings in silence — because you will need somewhere to stand while it burns, and the mind cannot offer that. The mind has intelligence. The heart has wisdom. Intelligence jumps from column to column looking for the argument that makes it stop. Wisdom just holds you while it passes.

As your awareness grows, this comes up faster and harder, not slower and softer. People find that discouraging and I think it is the best news in the practice. It does not get less intense. You discover how much of you there is — how much will, how much power, how much love is available to stand in the fire and let it be released.

Even the deepest example we have starts with a request that the cup be passed, and then a decision to stand in it anyway. Whatever is rising in you today is not a sign the work is failing. It is the work. Can you sit with it for five minutes without expressing it, explaining it, or fixing it?

THE PRACTICE

Feel it without expressing it and without explaining it. Experience is not the same as expression, and it is the part that actually drains the tank.