



*Changing lives...
...one mind at a time!*

What You Think Might Stink

*"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."
Aristotle*

Think you're right all the time? Most of the time? That's easy to understand. By the time we're even two or three years old, we're used to it. Think about it for a moment. For the vast majority of babies, their arrival in the home becomes the absolute center of attention for everyone in the household. The baby doesn't know it in the beginning, but their every cry and whimper is monitored and brings fresh diapers, a bottle, cuddly blankets, stuffed toys, etc. Most of all, almost any sound from the newborn will bring "Mommy" and "Daddy" running to see what they can do to pacify this tiny person in their midst. It's addictive, and even an infant can grow accustomed to the equation that "cry = bottle" or "whimper = blanket". On the other side of the ledger, "smile may equal approval", and "Ma-Ma" soon enough equals tears of joy. If baby could think, their self-talk might sound like this: *"Wow, I'm only months old, and I control my world! I can do no wrong."*

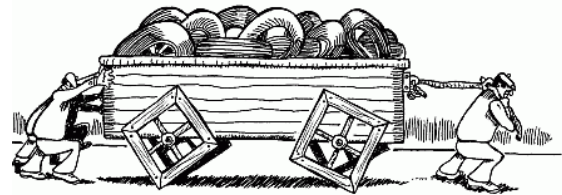
When we do grow older and become capable of independent thought, the process of "I'm-always-right" thinking continues. I need food? I get it. I'm hungry? I find something to eat. I'm cold? I find a jacket. There's no wrong. I'm always right. After all...it came from my brain. It must be correct! However, there comes a point in our lives where we should begin to learn that we are not always right. It can be a rude awakening. For some, it can be a mental trauma that they don't recover from. As part of our socialization, and depending on our receptivity and reaction to hearing that we are not always the center of the universe, the coping mechanism might take one of three forms:

1. The individual grows emotionally and begins to recognize "others" as well as "self". The self-centeredness we knew as babies and very young children begins to expand and take in others as fellow humans with their own importance...individuals who are themselves independent and who have their own needs and wants. In a classic phrase, but we learn to play well with others, and to share.

2. The individual who doesn't want to give up "being right" could simply hide their true nature until they are out in the world on their own, where they are free to bully their way over more timid souls. Only the individual will know whether their actions grow out of an insecurity, a need or feeling that they must be right in every instance, or out of some feeling of privilege to always be "right". And, only they will know whether they are aware of the impact they have on those around them...wives, children, neighbors, co-workers who are afraid to speak up for themselves. Or, perhaps they go blindly through

life, much as a bull through a china shop, breaking relationships and scaring most of those around them.

3. More insidiously, and often due to an intellectually and/or emotionally abusive environment along with their own individual sensitivity, the individual may move to the other end of the self-esteem continuum, and become guilty of "I'm always wrong" thinking. Either of these last two positions can cause painful strife and unhappiness. But, the person who berates, badgers, and flagellates themselves for perceived misdeeds, social mistakes, personal worth, or any of a thousand other erroneous "sins" may lead the most miserable existence of all.



Courtesy: Climateprogress.org

This might come as a surprise to the reader, but what we think...the ideas and thoughts that float into our stream of consciousness on a continuous basis...the ideas that spring unannounced from our own gray matter, are not always true just because we thought of them. It's very easy, and almost natural to think that they are true. Unless an individual is a sociopath, many things that might cross the mind are immediately eliminated as "untrue" (the reader may decide to interject "right" and "wrong" for true/untrue).

Law tells us what is right and wrong as far as civil and criminal matters are concerned. Culture and local social norms give even greater structure to our lives. It should be immediately obvious that simply because I "thought" of taking a \$100 dollar bill when the bank teller wasn't looking, doesn't make it right. If I imagined a purple Elephant, wearing roller blades, skating along the Santa Monica Pier, does that make it "true", simply because I thought of it? Of course not!

Equally, if I have a thought that my co-worker was conspiring to get someone fired, because I saw her flirting with the boss yesterday, is that thought "true"? Is it "true" that I always make mistakes when I'm typing? Am I really worthless? I've never accomplished anything in my life?

They may just be what they sound like: lies! Just like the crazy, but vivid dream you had last night, which is certainly not true, the marvelous creation we carry around in our skulls is busy serving up “thoughts” for your consideration every moment of your life. Some of the thoughts are pretty easily examined and eliminated as “false”. For instance, the “thought” of throwing a brick through your noisy neighbor’s front picture window for having that loud band until 1:00 AM last Saturday morning is quickly eliminated.

Satisfying though it might seem, it would certainly lead to an unpleasant conversation with the police and a judge. But, what about the thought that says you can’t ever do anything mechanical, or that you can’t learn Chemistry, or that foreign languages are too tough, or that you are too tall, fat, short, thin, old, young, poor, or unattractive? How do you handle those? Are you even aware that those thoughts are there?

There are a number of things we need to do as individuals to protect ourselves from the flood of thoughts that come at us from our ever-active brains. First: we have to recognize that the brain is very much like a fire hose, when it comes to thoughts and ideas. It will spew out thoughts faster than we can handle them. And, given its own way, the brain will lead us down a catastrophic road of worry, conspiracy, doubt, revenge, pride, anger, and even rage. The term “brainstorm” is not far off the mark, and while usually said to indicate a profound or inventive thought process, we all know that storms can also be particularly bad for us.

It’s very important not to be scared of a brain that throws stuff at us so fast that we feel helpless. Second: (and as was explained in the first article of this series), we have to decide that we are going to be in control. We are going to tell the brain what it can think about; not the other way around. As Louise Hay says, “You are the only thinker in your mind!” We get to decide what we are going to think about. There is nothing that says we must spend the weekend thinking or worrying about that Monday morning budget meeting. Catastrophizing about April 15th will only ruin the three months between now and then. Third: we must recognize that all of our thoughts are not necessarily true. We must slow things down and take control. Once we do, we have to be willing to look carefully at each thought as it’s presented to us and firmly decide whether it is true or not. As strange and odd as this might sound, we have to be willing to question and doubt our own thinking. So, critical analysis of what we are thinking about is our fourth task. Fifth: Like spring cleaning, we must be willing to throw out that which is not useful. If we’ve found after careful analysis that a thought is not true, then it has to be banished. And, we must be on guard when the brain attempts to reassert that thought later on. The brain is very good at regenerating ideas, even the ones we believed were discarded for good. It may take days or weeks to completely rid yourself of an idea, even one that has been thoroughly discredited. Sixth, and finally, having gone through the first five steps, we have to decide what we will think about instead of our regular diet of scary or negative thoughts; that which will replace the thoughts that we have banished. Nature abhors a vacuum, and if we don’t fill our brains with something good and true, then the brain will come back later with material it has conjured up from some other possibly false situation.

Determination and desire are two words that come to mind here: Desire to be happy and determine to be happy...or content...or peaceful...or untroubled...or whatever label you want to put on it. You can call it anything you like. And, it may sound silly to some, but weren’t you miserable when your brain was in control? How’s that been working out for you? Not good? Than, as simple as it may sound, change it. Be in charge. Decide whether your thoughts are true. Discard what isn’t true. Decide to be at peace. Decide what you will think about. Fill your mind with “true” things about yourself or about your world. By “true”, I’m not talking about platitudes that might be just as “untrue”. To begin saying, “I’m the greatest person the world has ever known” in an attempt to begin to bolster our belief in ourselves, may be just as untrue and just as damaging as saying, “I’m a loser”. We do need to have a mantra or truthful saying that we can begin to transpose over the untrue thoughts that we have now banished from our brain, but grandiosity isn’t necessary. You could start with something as simple as “I have a pleasant smile”, or “I am at peace with my world”, and say it to yourself many times during the day, especially when you have the feeling that those negative, scary, or simply unpleasant thoughts are coming back to consciousness thought.

Here, I might point the reader to other places on www.thegoalmind.com, where you can find time-tested material by various authors to help you in this part of your journey. Louis Hay, the creator of Hay House, has some excellent materials, including decks of positive-thought cards that you can carry with you or temporarily tape to your bathroom mirror. That way, you’ll have your true or positive thought right in front of your eyes at those times that you have the greatest ability to think about the importance of YOU.

Have you ever walked alone on a dark night with just a flashlight? Did you ever get that feeling that just beyond the beam of light there was something you didn’t want to know about? Did you whistle or hum a tune to give yourself a little more courage? I’ve done that. We live in the mountains where I’m sure hungry Coyotes sometimes watch me and the dog on our nightly walk. It’s true that the Coyotes may have more interest in our dog than they do with me, viewing her as a delicious meal, and me as a threat. Nevertheless, sometimes I get a little tickle on the back of my neck when taking the dog for her last walk before bedtime, and I’m always glad to get back to the warmth, safety, and security of our house. Well, I often feel that scary thoughts are a little like the Coyotes. If I don’t hum my “tune” of better thoughts...if I don’t have my “light” of happiness...if I don’t make good “noises” of determination, self-reliance, confidence, and purpose...if I don’t have my “goal” of being a more peaceful person, then the snapping, snarling jaws of scary thoughts will come again. I know that I don’t want that for myself, and I certainly don’t want it for you, either. Let’s get rid of our thought monsters once and for all. And, then, let’s decide what we are going to think about.

Next time, we won’t talk about Coyotes, but we will talk about another kind of beast that lurks within each of us; a beast that can hurt us and the ones around us more quickly than any other; a beast that we must gain control of, or be consumed by it. We’ll be talking about the beast of emotions, The Beast Within.