

AT THE CROSSROADS OF A TICKLED SOUL

Have you ever felt tired, worn out, or a little too old for your years...whatever your age? If so, it might have nothing to do with the number of candles on your birthday cake. Instead, it could be that you've just gotten a bit too settled, making your life feel a bit stale.

In physics the principle of entropy explains the natural tendency of all living things to either grow or break down. It demonstrates that there is no such thing as the status quo or staying at the same level. If you develop a muscle, it grows stronger. If you don't use it, it doesn't stay the same...it atrophies. If you use your brain for new experiences, you will grow new pathways called dendrites. If you don't, your brainpower does not stay the same...it will diminish. "Use it or lose it" is more than an idle expression.

Relationships that we pay attention to expand; those that we neglect do not stay the same...they fade. Perhaps you have had a friendship that was once strong but now is gone. No blow-up; no decision to part, just a bad case of status quo.

At various times in life, we come to a fork in the road and have to choose which path we'll take next. One is familiar, safe, and nicely paved. The other is a bit trickier. It glows with adventure, treasures, or perhaps the potential to learn and grow. But this second path is also unfamiliar, frightening, and rather bumpy. The road to the first path leads to contraction; the second path leads to expansion. Either you stay in your comfort zone and let life pass you by, or you take the risks necessary to move forward in the direction of your dreams. The choice is yours alone. So, although too much change can be stressful, too little change will literally bore you to death! To feel young and alive and in synch with your soul's desires, try seeing your next crossroads not as a dilemma or misfortune, but as an opportunity to re-examine the direction you want to take *next* in your life.

A crossroads may appear due to a normal life stage (midlife awakening?), an unexpected opportunity (great job offer abroad?), or an unwelcomed wake-up call (health crisis, divorce, or loss?). So the path that leads to a fork in the road may be quite different for each of us. But the road to change is likely to be quite the same. Like most people, you'll probably travel a few well-worn paths of *denial*, *awareness*, *exploration*, and *doubt* before reaching your desired destination.

Denial

Travelers on the path of denial entertain thoughts such as "This couldn't be happening to me," or "Things are not really that bad." It's easier to ignore signs that it's time for a change (the

queasiness in the pit of your stomach, the disquieting notions in your head, the restless sleep, and the joyless days) than to face the discomfort of change. It seems better to live with *known* negatives than to risk possible new negatives that might be even worse. The danger side of change's double-edged sword shines the brightest. Fear of the unknown is so powerful at this stage that even strong, soulful desires can be suppressed and intuition totally ignored. It's as if we are in shock—unable to see, hear, or feel what's going on around us. On this path, we pretend and profess a lot, trying to convince ourselves of what we suspect may not be true. Denial prevents any adaptive action because we hold on for dear life to ideas like "everything is fine...really...or at least as good as it *can* be."

A few years ago, I worked with a group of chemical workers who were preparing for a major conversion of all processes in their plant. In the group there were a few eager beavers who went willingly into the land of high-tech, many who went skeptically, and a few who dug their heels into the sands of resistance. As you might imagine, those stuck in denial were left behind, still mumbling their mantra of "*No way—not in my lifetime*" while others who learned new skills and prepared for the changes marched forward to success in the new computerized environment.

While the path of denial can provide a safe haven from too much change, it can also make you vulnerable if you stay on the path too long. Imagine that you are walking down some old railroad tracks, with a high-speed locomotive coming your way. You have two choices. You can stay right where you are and deny that the light in the distance is an oncoming freight train (and eventually get run over), or see the light for what it is, get off the tracks, and take another path.

Awareness

When you are ready to diverge from the path of denial, you'll probably pull off for a reality check. Here you may weigh in and come to grips with the truth about what is working in your life and what is not. There will be no more pretending that you are totally satisfied with the status quo regarding your work, your marriage, or your personal development. You'll weigh in, fess up to what you're feeling, and then decide what cargo to unload and what new equipment to pick up. As this new awareness blasts holes in the façade of denial, more light will seep in, and other truths will be illuminated. Needs not formerly met will become visible, beliefs not acted upon will come into focus, and the choices you have made will be apparent. With your passion and desires awakened, you will know what you want and you'll forge ahead to the next connecting path...that of exploration.

Exploration

On the explorer's path you may feel as though you are going around in circles. Although you've committed to moving forward, you won't be sure of the quickest route. You may find that one direction seems right at first, but later deposits you right back where you started. While frustrating, these false starts should be expected. After all, this is new territory. Just shore up your courage and check your internal compass by asking, "Is this direction taking me closer to where I want to be?" If it is, keep going. If not, just say "oops," and choose another route. Soon you will be at your destination, with one more divergence possible along the way...on the path of doubt.

Doubt

The bushes along the path of doubt are of a prickly variety. They may snag you from time to time and even scratch at your new determination. This is where you'll see the cost of change and wonder if it's worth it. You'll be tempted to turn back to more familiar, comfortable ground and avoid letting go of that last tether. You know you're close to the right path now; you can even sense its foreign nature. The prospect is exciting, but you are leery of adjustments you will have to make. The customs will be different, the mindsets a bit askew. You're not so sure you'll be able to cope in such a strange place. But then you see just up ahead, the prickly path gives way to a spacious, paved, and well-lit road. It's marked with a large, clear sign. "This way," it reads, "to a life that tickles your soul." Doubt fades into determination.

Traveler's Aid

Many things will help you to continue your progress journey. Remind yourself of your desires by posting them in view and reading them several times a day. Buoy your spirits with life-affirming habits such as yoga, meditation, and self-reflection. Schedule regular periods of renewal and commit to taking some action toward your goals every day. Give and love and enjoy life's simple pleasures.

As you proceed on your journey, you will likely benefit from support along the way. Think of people who will boost your spirits when they lag and provide direction when you need it. Identify those who have gone before you and ask them to share the lessons they have learned. Find someone who will simply listen and send your own thoughts echoing back. Find others who will ask you questions that no one else would ask...questions of survival intended to save you from yourself. Read inspiring material and enroll in skill enhancing workshops.

Before you begin your chosen course, pack the gear that will see you through such an exciting journey. You'll need provisions that fuel and things that soothe when you occasionally scrape an ankle. A mirror to see objectively and earplugs so you will be able to hear your wisdom from within. Carry nuggets of past successes to remind you of the many hills you've climbed, and don't forget to bring along a compass made of your own purpose and design. One more thing that you should bring is a flag to plant at each new summit. There you'll rest and watch it wave, and feel content with how far you've come.

1511 words.

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