

Overcoming Social Anxiety



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Let's say you're socially anxious. Okay so, what happens when you're socially anxious? *You go to a party your heart's beating. Why? The party is a monster.*

Why? Because it's judging you, and it's judging you *it's putting you low down the dominance hierarchy* because ***that's what a negative judgment is,*** and that interferes with your sexual success, and that means that you're being harshly evaluated by nature itself.

Right? So *you are confronting the dragon of chaos* when you go into the social situation. And so what do you do?

You're like this. Right? *You're hunched over and that's low dominance.* I'm no threat. It's like well that's not going to get you very far. You know, but that's a logical thing to do and in the face of a tyrant.



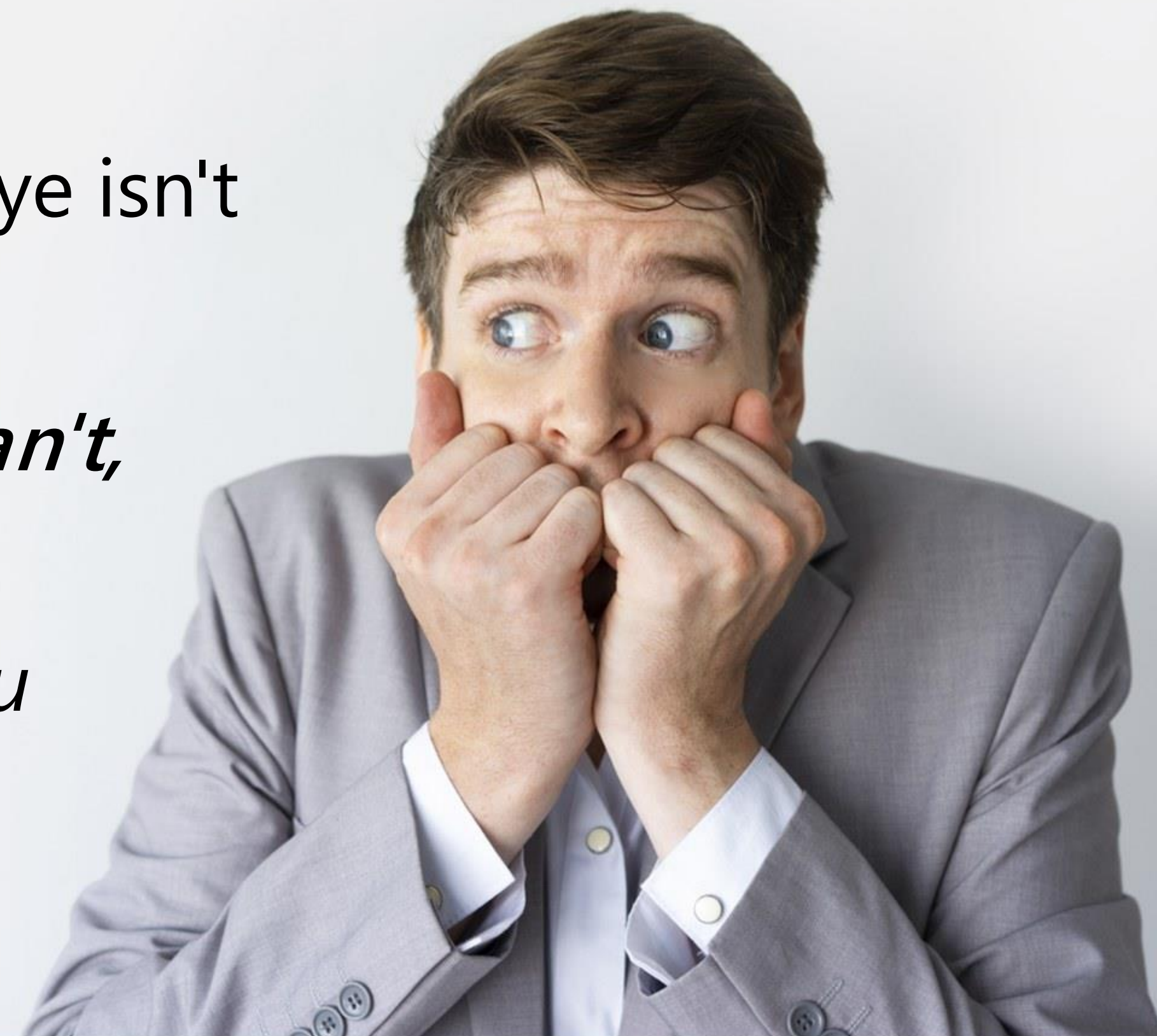
So, I'm no threat, you know, you look at the King and you're dead. *I'm no threat, I'm hunched over.* And then what's happening internally?

What are people thinking about me? What are people thinking about me? Am I looking stupid? Am I looking foolish? Geez, I'm awkward? I hate being here. Man, I'm sweating too much.

It's all internalized. Right? *It's all self focused,* the eye isn't working. What do you tell people?

Don't stop thinking about yourself, because you can't, it's like don't think of a white elephant.

White elephant, white elephant, white elephant, *you can't tell someone to stop thinking about something because they get caught in a loop.*



What you do with socially anxious people is you say, *"look at other people."* Look at them, Right?

Why? *Because if you look at them, you can tell what they're thinking.* Unless you're terribly socialized, and some people are, some people have no social skills.

And so, the reason they can't go to a party is because they don't even know how to introduce themselves like they're just, no one ever taught them how to behave and so they're really good candidates for behavior therapy.

Because you walk them through the process of how you actually manifest the procedures that are associated with social acceptability.



But *most people aren't like that* they have the ability so if they're really introverted and high in neuroticism, they can usually talk quite well to someone one-on-one.

Why? *Because they look at them*, well if I look at you, it's another thing to do *if you're ever speaking to a group of people, never speak to the group of people.*

That doesn't exist, **you talk to individuals**, and then they *reflect for you the entire group* because *they're all entrained so you look at one person.*

They broadcast to you what everyone's thinking, and you know how to talk to one person. **So it's easy.**



So, as soon as you focus on the person, not you, you *push your attention outward*, use your eye, *you push your attention outward*, and you start watching, well then, **all your automatic mechanisms kick in and you stop being awkward.**

Because if we're talking, and I'm looking here, I don't know what you're gonna do next and I'm gonna put disjunctions into the like they're like bad chords in the melody of our conversation.

And the reason is, I'm not paying attention. So, **that's why the eye is the thing at the top of the pyramid.** It's like, the thing that enables you to win the set of all possible dominance hierarchies is the eye. Pay attention.

Pay attention. That's the critical issue!



That's why the Egyptians worshipped Horus. That's why Horus was the thing that rescued Osiris from the depths. **It's the capacity to pay attention.** What do you pay attention to most?

What your right hemisphere signals as anomalous, it attracts your attention? It's like this isn't going quite right. I'm not looking at that. **Wrong!**

That's what you look at, that's what you look at, *what's not going right*, because that's, see, **that's the terrible monster that might eat you**, but it's also the place you get all the information.



That's why it's useful to have discussions with your enemies
because they will tell you things you do not know. And that's such
a great thing *because if you don't know them well, you're not very
smart. Are you?*

You know there may be a time when you go somewhere that's the
thing you need to know. And maybe your enemy will tell you why
you're such a fool, you know, and a bunch of other things that
aren't true too.

Even one thing that's accurate. It's like yeah, thanks
very much, man, maybe I'll do some work on that and
I won't have to carry that forward so and then that's
part of the reason again why the terrible predator, *it's
always the terrible predator that has the gold.*



It's like, *it's the person who delivers the message you do not want to hear*, so it's rough, it's rough. But it doesn't matter life is rough.

To move forward, you know, *I've dealt with lots of people who have anxiety disorders*, you know, and one thing about people who have anxiety disorders is they are not mysterious to me.

It's no problem for me to understand why people have anxiety disorders or why they're depressed or why they have substance abuse problems *the mystery to me is always why people don't have all of those things at once.*



Because *everybody has a reason to be anxious*, in fact, we have the ultimate reason to be anxious because *we know that we're vulnerable and we know that we're going to die* and how you cannot be anxious under those circumstances is a great mystery, it's a massive mystery.

And the same thing applies with regards to depression, and then, the same thing applies to some degree with regards to drug and alcohol abuse. As I said last week, there's plenty of reasons to drown your consciousness in alcohol. That's for sure.

We could refer to the aforementioned anxiety and depression, not least, and the *sorts of drugs that people are prone to take are chemicals that take the affective edge off the tragedy of life.*



Back to back to the issue of fear, *Abraham is self-conscious*, that's what this commentary says, but the thing is as *he moves forward despite that he's self-conscious* and *he knows the danger, but he moves forward despite that*.

And that's actually the appropriate response in the face of actual non-naive understanding of what constitutes life, like if you're naive and you move forward, it's like well, what the hell do you know?

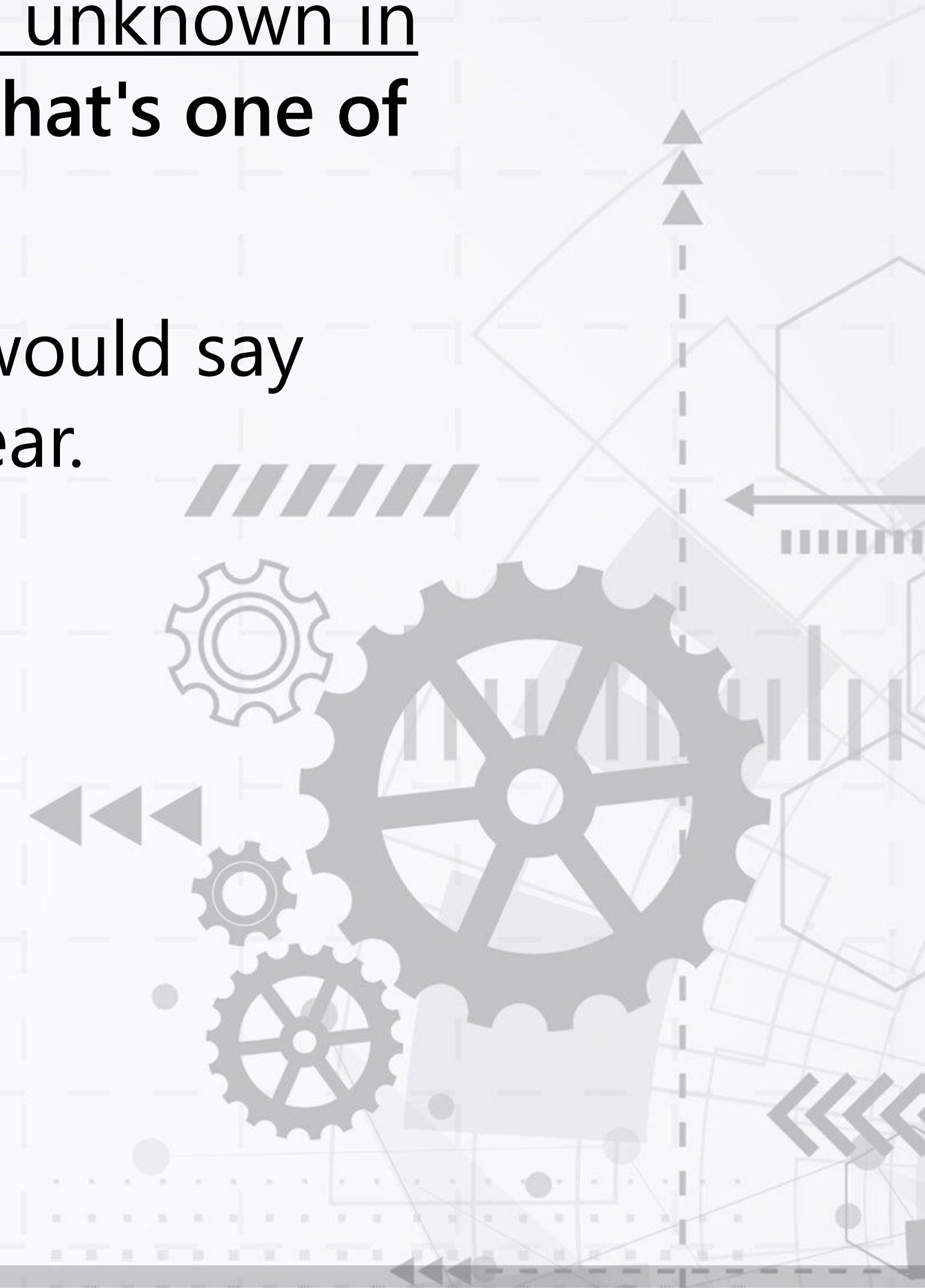
There's no courage in naivety *because you don't know what there is to stop you*, you don't know what dangers you might apprehend, *but to be aware of what it is that your problem is so to be alert*, existentially let's say, or *to be fully self-conscious means that you're perfectly aware of your limitations and how you might be hurt*.



And then to make the decision to move forward into the unknown in the land of the stranger anyway, **that's the I would say, that's one of the secrets to a good life.**

And I can say that really without fear of contradiction, I would say because the clinical literature on this is very very very clear.

What you do with people who are afraid and to some degree depressed, but certainly anxious is, *you lay out what they're anxious about* first of all, *in detail*. What is it that you're afraid of what might happen? And *then you decompose it into small problems, hypothetically manageable problems.*



And then you have the person expose themselves to the thing that they're afraid of and *what happens isn't that they get less afraid*, that isn't what the clinical literature indicates exactly.

What happens instead is they get braver, and that's not the same thing, right? Because if you get less afraid It's like well the world isn't as dangerous as I thought it was you know, silly me.

If you get braver, that's not what happens. What happens is yeah, the damn world's just as dangerous as I thought or maybe if it's even more dangerous than I thought, but it turns out that there's something in me that responds to taking that on as a voluntary challenge, and grows and thrives as a consequence.



There's no doubt about this even the psychophysiological findings are quite clear. If you impose a stressor on two groups of people and on one group the stressor is imposed involuntarily and on the other group, the stressor is picked up voluntarily. The people who pick up the stress or voluntarily use a whole different psychophysiological system to deal with it.

They use the system that's associated with approach and challenge and not the system that's associated with defensive aggression and withdrawal.

And the system that is associated with challenge is much more associated with positive emotion and much less associated with negative emotion it's also much less hard on you.



Because the defensive posturing system, the prey animal system. Man, *when that thing kicks in it's all systems are go for you*, you know.

The pedal is pushed down to the metal and the brakes are on. You're using future resources that you could be storing for future time right now in the present to ready yourself for emergency.

So, there's nothing simple or trivial at all about the idea of being called to move forthrightly forward into the strange and the unknown. And there's a real adventure that's associated with that, right?



*So, that's an exciting thing which is part of the reason why people travel, and then also to see yourself as the sort of creature that can do that, is willing to do that, on a habitual basis is also **the right kind of tonic for, I hate this word, for your self-esteem.***

You know, because the *self-esteem has nothing to do with feeling good about yourself*, as I already mentioned. There isn't necessarily reason why a priori you should just feel good about yourself.

But, if you can view yourself acting in a courageous and forthright manner and encountering the world and trying to improve your lot.



And taking risks, you know, in a non-naive way, well *then you have something that you can comfort yourself with at night* when you're wondering what the whole damn point of your futile and miserable life.

And so, and that's necessary because it's often the case that you wake up at 4:00 in the morning, or at least sometimes the case that you wake up at 4:00 in the morning, when things haven't been going that well.

And wonder just what the hell the point is of your futile and miserable life.



You have to have something real to set against that, it can't be just rationalizations about how you know you're a valuable person among others even though that's true, that's not good enough.

You need something that's more realistic to set it against that and *observing courage in yourself is definitely one of the things that can help you sleep soundly at night when things are destabilized a little bit around you.*



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