

# *The Not So Big Life*

## Chapter Six: Learning to See Through the Obstacles

### **Your Turn: Being with Fear Differently**

*As you read through my description of working with and changing my own conditioned patterns you may be wondering how to create the same kinds of circumstances in your own life. Here's how to create the conditions that can lead to understanding, and so to change.*

- 1. Observe yourself carefully as you engage in a situation where the fear normally arises.*
- 2. As you are experiencing it, see if you can identify the hidden belief behind the fear. It's often quite obvious at such times.*
- 3. In naming the belief, allow yourself to feel completely whatever arises both mentally and physically, while knowing that the response is simply the product of a conditioned pattern, and not reality.*

*In this way you are simultaneously experiencing your normal response and maintaining objectivity, which makes it possible for you to move through the block that created the hidden belief in the first place. If you engage this approach, the perfect circumstances to help you refute the hidden belief will present themselves, and you'll be able to grow beyond the limitations of the unwanted conditioned pattern.*

### **Exercise: Developing a Watcher**

This exercise is designed to help you see yourself more objectively, without all the conditioned patterns obscuring what's going on in your life.

Earlier in the chapter, you read about the clinical observation of a researcher, while watching the actions of a chimp in its interactions with another animal. Now it is your turn to try out the technique on yourself. To begin, select some routine activity from your day, and simply observe what happens. Make a mental note of the thoughts that go through your head, without evaluating them. Be aware of how your body feels, and whether there are any parts of the routine that cause you to speed up or slow down. Anything that occurs is there to be observed by your watcher.

After you have finished the activity, write down what occurred, including all the thought streams you can remember. Now you are ready to explore the data you've collected to see what they tell you about your conditioned patterns and your hidden beliefs.

*Question 1:* Did you have few thoughts or many? Did you observe a common theme to the thoughts you had? Did you notice any pattern to where thought streams began and where they ended? How did each of the thought streams make you feel?

*Question 2:* What observations did you make about how your body felt while doing this activity? Did you feel tense or relaxed, tired or invigorated? Were there any aches or pains? If so, are these common complaints for you, or do they only happen when you are engaged in this activity? Were there any other physical responses?

*Question 3:* What emotions did you feel, if any, while doing the activity? Were you angry or joyful, bored or excited? Did you find yourself wishing you were doing something else, or that the task would go more rapidly? Did you notice any internal turbulence or self-congratulation about how you were performing the task?

Once you have practiced using your watcher on routine activities that don't have a lot of charge for you, try using the technique in a more difficult situation, like when you are upset, or when things are chaotic at work. You can use the same set of questions, but now you'll find there's more to report.

You don't have to do anything more than this for now. It's the observing that is important and that will allow things to begin to shift. What you will start to see is that from the higher vantage point of a more objective observer, you can automatically build in some space between your normal response to a situation—whether that be a thought stream, or an emotional or physical reaction—and recognize that that response is not you. You can experience it, but you don't have to make it your identity.

Over time you'll notice both everyday nervous habits, like my paper shuffling, and you'll notice bigger reactions such as angry outbursts, or sudden tears. Both types of behavior are flags that there's a hidden belief behind the scenes, and a conditioned pattern at play. It is through this process of observation that the patterns that have been running you without your awareness will become more obvious. Once you can see them, you can train yourself to pause before you over-react, you can try alternative responses, and you can start to explore their roots. But without the awareness of their existence brought by the watcher, they'll continue to run you, and continue to shape your life experience.

In everything I present from here on out, it's important to understand that our personalities are easily threatened by perceived challenges to their control, and they will surreptitiously use anything and everything at their disposal to undermine our efforts to see ourselves more clearly. This may seem surprising, but as we discussed in

Chapter 4, the personality, for all its charm, is in fact the obstacle to understanding and not the savior it believes itself to be. For the personality to maintain its existence, it has to keep you convinced of the validity of your hidden beliefs, so it's going to start squawking any time now. But if you keep observing rather than evaluating, the personality runs out of material, and falls silent. It's in this stillness that something new can emerge, but it won't be you that makes it happen; your life circumstances change as you learn to get out of the way. Developing objectivity is a big part of that process. The watcher is your partner in seeing through the obstacles to the calmer, more contented you that you've always known was there.