

The Power of Why



Send him mail.



“Insight for the Young and Unrestrained” is an original weekly column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found here. IYU-only RSS feed available here.

One of the most exciting things about being human is getting to figure out firsthand exactly where the limits of the my mind lie. There is no set level of knowledge any of us can aspire to attain. Even if we succeed in quantifying the sheer volume of data the average human brain can hold, there are an infinite number of permutations and combinations of information a mind can contain, as new information is always appearing. Each of us can, theoretically, continue to change the present structure of knowledge in our minds and spend each day as a slightly different person than the day before. This sustained change is possible only when we maintain the curiosity necessary to seek out answers to new questions, and the bravery to boldly ask “why” something unfamiliar happens.

“Why” is the doorway to personal growth. It allows the foreign to become familiar, and turns the overwhelming into something manageable by human thought. A tremendous amount of fear and distress come from nothing more than the perception of an unmanageable or unknowable force (or an overloading number of factors to deal with). This instinctual reaction to flee in these moments generally does a disservice, as most of the time fleeing is not an option. We can’t run, yet we feel compelled to, so we stay perpetually moving in place in the middle of a situation which will never be dealt with fully. Eventually, the stress destroys us.

Whenever the darkness approaches, I sit with it as long as necessary to really experience the painful sensations it sends through my nervous system, as well as the ghastly thoughts it brings to my mental forefront. If there is one principle I have faith in to remain true until the end of time, it’s the trust that nothing ever happens which cannot be understood. My belief in this absolute gives me a religious strength against whatever internal or external chaos erupts in my life. I’ve relied on the assurance of my ability to make sense and order from the seemingly random and destructive forces at work in the world to pull me up from

my worst moments and propel me toward growth.

It still astounds me how far I've come in making sense of and gaining mastery over thoughts and things which once controlled me. Some of them were physical in nature, but the majority were purely emotional. Activities or ideas which once turned me to shambles now have little to no effect on the balance of my fragile psyche. Some now even strengthen me. Mistakes of the past which once invoked only sadness or anger have been engineered into a sense of determination and focus. The phantoms which used to linger in the background of my thoughts are now pillars for the lofty ambitions I actively work to attain. I know the only reason I am able to transmute former weaknesses into strengths is because I was brave enough to ponder why these maladies were begrudging me, and take the necessary steps toward mending them.

It follows that one of the biggest obstacles most people face to defeating challenges in their lives is their lack of confidence in their abilities to adapt. Failure to adapt to changing circumstances stems from an insufficient understanding of their methods of change. So a person incapable of embracing and adapting to change will tend to stay within the narrowly defined limitations of those facets of reality they already understand. But if instead they could boldly approach every new situation and make it through the initially torrential nature of unfamiliar settings, they could continue to expand their working mindset for as long as they live. Getting to that level of comfort with anything requires surviving the tumultuous first steps that come with it.

Even the most degraded of human minds is a fascinating tool with far-reaching capabilities. When we begin to doubt this, we sacrifice our most pronounced strength as learning creatures. A lifetime of having been told otherwise, that we are but puny and fractionated identities, causes emotional and intellectual atrophy, and perhaps a permanent loss of our abilities to question and acquire the nature of new things. An inability to understand means that we cannot ever treat foreign concepts and people with the equality we grant to those we feel close and familiar with. It makes us judgmental and impersonal. It keeps the human race at odds with itself over superficial perceptions of difference.

I will never delude myself into thinking that absolute knowledge is attainable, or that I can continue to expand my mind until the end of time. I know I inhabit a world of stark limitations and unbreakable laws. But like a scientist, I intend to spend the duration of my life continuously checking the nature of these limitations and pushing my awareness as far as it can be stretched under the conditions of my physical design. And whenever something so foreign as to seem utterly incomprehensible enters my awareness, I will take it one bite at a time until my mind naturally sorts out a pace and method for integrating it into my working worldview. It is, for me, far better to unceasingly seek to grasp reality as it really is than to spend the entirety of my short time in the world running from every shadowed alleyway and unfamiliar fork in the road.