

Conversations with Myself

by Lavinia Plonka, GCFP

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“Of all the things I’ve lost, I miss my mind the most.”

-- *Mark Twain*

“I don’t mind the voices in my head. I just wish they’d reach consensus.”

--*Asheville Bumper Sticker*

I stand alone in the kitchen carrying on a lively conversation with myself.

“Hmmm, I think I’ll reheat that couscous from last night for breakfast. Oh, right! I forgot I’d better call Jeremy. He’s so needy, like the cat. What should I do about the damn cat scratching the new slipcover? God, remember that house, who was that, right, one of Mom’s friends, her house was a horror, all those cats, made our little hovel look like House Beautiful.....Mom.”

For a moment the torrent of words stops as a little clutch in my solar plexus (is it grief, nostalgia, regret, habit?) ripples through my nervous system in memory of Mom. I look up from my kitchen task of filling spice jars and realize that I have poured cayenne into the cinnamon jar because, because....

You could say I wasn't paying attention. Or that I was paying attention to the wrong thing. Or maybe my mind is slipping. Frankly, my mind is so busy chattering, I don't see how it has time to slip. I stand surveying my spice debacle. My husband Ron walks in and I hope he's in one of his oblivious states, "Wife is in the kitchen, engaged in mysterious rituals. I will bury myself in newspaper and coffee."

Instead he pauses. "That spice jar has two different colors in it. Is the bottom stuff old or something?"

Crucial moment. The mind whips through the scenarios.

Obfuscation: "Well, yes actually, I'm working on a new spice blend for Mexican hot chocolate."

Distraction: "Look, a pileated woodpecker!"

Defensive parry: "None of your business."

Admission of guilt: "Well, I spaced out and poured cinnamon into the cayenne jar."

Each potential answer is accompanied by a cascade of neurochemicals that we call emotion: anger, defensiveness, embarrassment, even fear. I fess up, we both laugh and I sigh. No wonder I never ran for President. I get caught up in the minutiae of a kitchen mistake. It's amazing I get out the door in the morning.

Buddhists call it monkey mind, the ever-present companion on our life's journey: endlessly commenting, questioning, judging, telling me who I am at the moment. According to Antonio Damasio, a neurologist and author of several books on the brain, there are myriad conversations taking place among our sensory organs, nervous system and brain, some communicating with each other, some going directly to the brain, some just rambling, that form what we call thoughts. No wonder our minds are so crowded!

When I used to live in New York City, I often encountered pedestrians talking to themselves out loud. From bag ladies to executives, conversation with oneself seemed safe, even solitary in the anonymity of the city's throngs. Of course, with the advent of Bluetooth technology, thousands of people are jabbering away as they stroll, who knows who they're really talking to?

I've often caught my inner dialogue spilling out in the most inopportune moments. In a supermarket aisle, I pick up a box of "heart healthy" cereal. "Hmm," I muse silently, "Where are the ingredients? Damn, they print it so

small!” I begin to read them out loud, “Enriched wheat, sugar, SUGAR, the second ingredient in healthy cereal? What are they thinking? Am I that stupid?” when I realize a woman is staring at me wondering the same thing about me. Yikes.

Apparently the road to enlightenment involves stilling this jabbering idiot. And every once in a while, during a meditation, or a moment of self-awareness, there is a blissful, blanketing quiet. If I hang out in it long enough, I can feel the stirrings of anxiety. My nervous system, my sensory apparatus, my cells start freaking out, clamoring for the soothing conversation that tells me what I’m seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling and sensing. Like Muzac for my mind, it’s all systems back online, smoothly folding the yoga mat as I note the cat puke in the corner, think about next month’s article and smile at the memory of a compliment someone gave me yesterday.

Moshe Feldenkrais, the creator of the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education, suggested that it’s not about “stopping” the thought that’s valuable, it’s noticing. Becoming aware and interested in my thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations is the way towards a unified self. Sounds great, but I wonder if I might miss my other selves? Like a child with her hand in the cookie jar, would my mind meander as freely knowing it will get caught? Would I miss the fun of the “woulda, shoulda, coulda” replays of failed conversations with others?

While writing this article, I've attempted to watch my thoughts. A thunderstorm is approaching, I find myself thinking of the strange weather. I run my tongue around my teeth where I accidentally bit it earlier because I wasn't paying attention. It makes me think about lunch.

I don't think I have to worry about losing my wandering mind. It's nice to know that no matter where I go, I'll always have a nice bunch of gals to talk to.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lavinia Plonka is the director of the Asheville Movement Center in Asheville, NC. A mover and a shaker dancing on the edge of the new paradigm of learning, Lavinia is an accomplished Feldenkrais® teacher, author of several books and CDs, and the instructor of the online course, “Experience the Feldenkrais Method®” on the SHIFT Network. Read more from [Lavinia on her website](#).