Whether you know it or not, you’ve experienced Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon. This is the term given to the experience of learning something new, and immediately thereafter, noticing this new knowledge appearing and reappearing in your everyday life. For example, maybe you can recall learning about a theory, not at all new to the scientific community but new to you, and then suddenly, it seemed that theory were appearing in the world in places you’d never before noticed even existed. It’s as if the world were suddenly updated with new content. Of course, it’s not the world that has suddenly changed; it’s you.

Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon, or “frequency illusion” as it is more commonly called, wasn’t scientifically labelled until 1995, but it reinforces the ancient proverb that “as one is, so one sees.” The idea that our individual perspectives determine our unique realities, and that we do not share one universal reality, is observable throughout any society free to express its views. Whether we disagree about politics or religion, music or movies, Twizzlers or Red Vines—all debates essentially point to the likelihood that while we may live in the same town or even the same house, we aren’t all living in the same reality, and we’re arguing because we don’t realize it or can’t acknowledge it.

This is because, of course, human perspective is limited. In one interpretation, the idea that “as one is, so one sees” can be a kind of straightjacket, implying that we are bound to ourselves, fixed to a spot, and we’ll never see the world from a perspective other than our own. At its worst, this way of thinking can atrophy into closed-mindedness. In a quote sometimes famously (and almost definitely erroneously) attributed to Mark Twain, “to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” We must jealously defend against closed-mindedness, and protect our own childlike curiosity to learn new things and acquire new tools, or we’ll soon go through our lives carrying a single blunt instrument of thought, and smashing everything with it.

Having no idea whatsoever that she did so, my grandmother delivered a similar message to me long before I’d ever heard the name Mark Twain, let alone given him credit for clever things he’d never said. As many kids do, I complained from time to time that I was “bored” and this was always her reply. “You’re bored because you’re boring.” After hearing this often enough for the sting to grow numb, I learned to embrace the challenge in her words. If I wanted things to be more interesting, I had to be more interested. If I wanted to see more than just nails, I had to stop carrying around just a hammer. It was in this way that she persuaded me to be more curious, and with curiosity came discovery, and with discovery came more questions and more exploration and, well…you get it. Curiosity is the key to an interesting life. I cannot say this vehemently enough.

Because Baader Meinhof Phenomenon does more than reinforce the timeless saying that “as one is, so one sees,” it complements it. Not only does phenomenon tell us that we’re seeing something new in the world because we’ve learned something new, it ALSO tells us that IF we learn new things, we’ll see new things in the world that we hadn’t seen before. And because we hadn’t seen them, to us, it was as if they hadn’t existed before. But now they do. SO, by learning about something, it is as if we can CALL something INTO BEING—into our individual realities—simply by learning more about it. Think of the personal power behind that possibility.

Now, this doesn’t mean that we all have the power to dictate our own realities as separate from the collective. Our realities are unique to individuals, but nevertheless coexist on common ground. Like billions of Venn diagrams overlapping with one another, we are all communicating to negotiate a shared reality that honors our individual differences. And how do we do that? By listening to each other. By being honest and gentle with one another. By understanding that the person on either side of us, however similar to us, has not, and is not, experiencing precisely the same world that we are, and only by listening to their versions, their stories, can we find the kind of common ground that is truly SHARED.

About a year and a half ago, I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to observe a brief but profound interaction at a local Starbucks. It was before dawn on a cold December morning, and I had just ordered a coffee at the counter. As I waited, I overheard a table of patrons discussing the ever-controversial holiday cup, and the iconography of this year’s version, which they all examined as they talked. This table seemed particularly divided on the intended meaning behind the image of two human figures, clearly gender-neutral, clearly holding hands. Upon realizing the table was not in consensus, one of the bolder conversationalists brought his cup to the counter. “Can I ask you a question?” he called to the barista, pointing to his cup. “This couple,” he said, “is it supposed to be a man and a woman, or two men, or two women?” Without missing a beat, she replied, “It’s whatever you see.” This, it seemed, set him aback for a second—I could almost see the hammer in his hand, but her answer made him doubt the nail he thought he saw. When he recovered his composure, he declared, “Well, I don’t like that answer.” To which she replied, “Well, then try to see something else.”

Try to see something else.

When we’re children, the world is a big place that gets bigger as we grow older and learn more—but at some point, as we mature and if we let it, this begins to slow down. The novelty of the world stops delivering itself as an onslaught of new experiences, emotions, and sensations. Very quickly, if we let ourselves, we can stop seeing the world as a place full of wonder and beauty and mystery, and instead start thinking we’ve seen it all. Very quickly, if we let ourselves, we can stop trying to see something else in the world, and instead start carrying around a hammer because we’ve decided everything looks like a nail.

So, here’s my advice. Keep acquiring new tools of thought, and carry them ALL with you. Don’t just keep learning about the things that interest you; seek out new interests that you don’t even know exist yet. Keep meeting new people, keep listening to their stories and sharing your own. Keep experiencing new things, and travelling, and taking risks. Keep pushing the boundaries of your curiosity, and you’ll see your world continue to grow bigger. Whenever you feel like you’ve seen everything, well, then, try to see something else. You’ll never be bored, and you’ll never be boring.