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* INTRODUCTION

Your beliefs and values are highly interconnected. They influence your choice of friends, lifestyle, interests and well being. Because your unconscious is the creator of your beliefs and values, you have no control over them unless you're aware of them.

So what can you do to ensure you enjoy the life you want and deserve?

To start, you can discover which beliefs and values are running your life. Then, you can take control so that you keep only the ones that help you lead a happy, fulfilled life.

Essentially, *you need to know yourself.* This requires a careful examination of your values and beliefs.

★ WHAT'S A BELIEF?

Beliefs are the assumptions we make about ourselves and others. They tell us how things really are and how we expect them to be. A belief is taken from your experiences. Each one is usually created on an unconscious level and they're mostly formed during your childhood.

For example, if as a child, you saw your parents constantly quarreling, you might believe that men and women cannot harmonize. This could prove disastrous for your relationships as an adult. History is likely to repeat itself and you wouldn't know why.

As you can see, beliefs are formed by recurring experiences and your reactions to them and a *belief system is a network of beliefs related to each other.*

"Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.

Do not believe in anything simply because

it is spoken and rumored by many.

Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books.

Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.

Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations.

But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."

- The Buddha

*** HOW NEGATIVE BELIEFS MANIFEST**

Your reality is based on your beliefs. Your behavior stems from these beliefs, which may be positive or negative.

If you've ever come across an ill-treated dog, you'll notice that it behaves as though it's scared of people. Or it might be aggressive. Through its unfortunate experiences, the dog believes that people in general are cruel. The human brain works in the same way on an unconscious level.

A child bullied at school may come to believe that people generally aren't kind. He may manifest this belief in aggressive behavior. When people react in an aggressive way, his assumption will become reinforced. This may happen so intensely that he won't even notice when someone is nice to him and will continue to act in a hostile manner.

Your regular use of certain words such as "can't," "couldn't," "could," "should," and "shouldn't" may point to a limiting belief of which you're unaware. These words are often key indicators of our assumptions and expectations.

Notice when you express these negatives. Have you heard someone you know articulate similar ideas?

When you have these thoughts, you may be adopting the assumptions of others, particularly those close to you. To help counter these limiting beliefs, it's important to cultivate an awareness of when they arise for you.

With this awareness, you can grow in acceptance of yourself as you truly are, negative thoughts included. And from acceptance, you can clearheadedly decide how and when to take action so that you can have the thoughts you want, which will help you have the life you deserve!

"He can who thinks he can, and he can't who thinks he can't.

This is an inexorable, indisputable law."

- Henry Ford

★ THE THIN LINE BETWEEN SELF BLAME AND SELF AWARENESS

When you notice yourself behaving in a negative way because of your beliefs, your first reaction will probably be to blame yourself and think you're a "bad" person. This attitude will create a destructive belief system which will drive you to appear "good" to others.

To understand this concept, all you have to do is look at the world around you. There is ugliness as well as beauty. Both are required for the seamless functioning of the universe. So how can one be good and the other bad?

Be aware of your negative behavior, but avoid branding yourself as a negative person because of it. Your action is what's destructive, not you.

Simply use your behavior to your advantage by becoming aware of it. Awareness is a huge step toward changing your beliefs.

* USE YOUR HUMANITY TO UNDERSTAND THE SELF

Because we're intrinsically able to see things as they really are, we can appreciate the fact that we're alive. We can be grateful for everything, from the air we breathe to the relationships we have. All these, even if some relationships seem challenging, are meant to help us.

If, on your path of self-discovery, you find that you're blaming yourself, take a deep breath and remember that these are just thoughts. They're not the totality of who you are. And they're not necessarily true.

Self blame can lead to depression, instead, choose to love yourself!

Try these suggestions for cultivating gratitude and learning to love yourself:

- 1. **Pray or Meditate.** Prayer or Meditation, in addition to its other benefits, can help you expand the time between thought and action. This allows you to more clearly see things as they are. And when you see yourselves as you actually are, you're primed to make the changes you want in your life.
 - ★ Even fifteen minutes a day will help you enormously. There's no need to sit for an hour if you don't feel called to do so. You may be surprised with all of the ways in which meditation can benefit your life, with even just a little time commitment.
 - ★ The most important thing is to pray or meditate consistently. Regardless of what you decide to try, set a regular time for your practice and do it daily, or at least five to six days a week.
 - ★ If you're not sure where to start, there are many good books available at almost any bookstore or library. Alternately, and perhaps even better, many metropolitan areas offer meditation classes. There, you can learn from another practitioner, which gives you the opportunity to ask questions.
 - ★ You don't need any particular religious belief to pray or meditate, either. Christians and Buddhists alike have all found specific prayer or meditation practices that suit them.
- 2. **Get some exercise.** In addition to stimulating your endorphin production, which makes you happier naturally, you'll like your body (and yourself)

more as your efforts pay off. That's enough to make anyone feel grateful!

- 3. **Engage in self-nurturing behavior.** Try making a list of simple things that you love to do. This could be taking hot baths, walking in nature, or even just sipping a cup of hot tea.
 - ★ When you're feeling down, lonely, or lost, return to your list. Ask yourself what on this list might feel good to you right now. If you're not sure, just pick one and do it.
 - ★ Do at least one of these daily. Relax and savor the experience.
- 4. **Take a walk.** Getting outside can be one of the most beneficial activities you can do for yourself. If there's a natural setting nearby, even a city park, this could be a great place to start your walk.
- 5. **Call a friend.** If you don't like talking on the phone, see if you can get together for an hour.
 - ★ If you're feeling down, thinking about your troubles isn't doing you any good right now, instead, call a friend. This is a healthy form of escapism and will support your relationships.

With these practices, you will learn to accept your innate beliefs and values.

To connect with your highest self, start each day with one of them.

Throughout the day, remember to bring yourself back to that feeling of centeredness, whatever goes on outside of you.

*** HOW MARISA TRANSFORMED HER NEGATIVE BELIEF**

Marisa follows a highly demanding spiritual path. To her spiritual mentors and guru ("guru" literally means "teacher"), she is an open book. Her thoughts show up in her aura to those who can see.

When Marisa became aware of her ego and the many ways in which it manifested, she struggled with self-blame. However, since she is inherently optimistic and has developed self-esteem, it's easier for her to make the distinction between self-blame and self-awareness.

In Marisa's case, her loneliness and insecurity manifested itself as a cry for recognition. She was beaten and traumatized by her mother until she was 15 years old. Her feelings of being unwanted encouraged her to be rebellious and seek attention.

When she became a successful model and author, she began to feel superior to others. She had no idea that she harbored feelings of inferiority deep down. The more she was complimented, the more proud she became.

When she became a spiritual aspirant many years later, she was shocked to discover that her pride had been fueled by her loneliness and insecurity. She also discovered that this would lead her far from her spiritual goal of oneness with others and the universe.

With the help of her guru, she could dig deep into herself. Many doubts occurred to her on her journey of revelation. How could she be lonely? She loved living alone with her three dogs. How could she be insecure? After all, she was good-looking and talented.

It took her years of spiritual practice to find and acknowledge the core belief behind her behavior: "I am unlovable and unwanted." When she did, she was ashamed of herself and determined to mend her ways.

She finally realized that there was no longer any need to look for external recognition. She fought the feeling of being unwanted because she was a born fighter. Another in her place could have reacted differently and yielded to the feeling of being unwanted.

So you can see from this story how strongly our different core beliefs can affect us. *Regardless of what yours are right now, if you examine them, you can learn to change them.*

"You can have anything you want if you will give up the belief that you can't have it."

- Dr. Robert Anthony

★ NEGATIVE PLEASURE

You may have noticed people who wallow in their misery. They seem to enjoy being unhappy. Such a state can only come from putting the blame on someone or something else. By blaming others, the miserable person becomes "good" or "virtuous" and the other becomes "bad." If it weren't for that other person, they could have succeeded.

This kind of attitude usually stems from early childhood experiences. Maybe as a child, you reached out to touch a rose in your garden and your mother hit you on your hand so the thorns wouldn't injure you. As a result, your original creative impulse was distorted or partially blocked.

Watch what you say the next time you're asked why you didn't do something and you'll get a clue about the truth. *Once you realize that you yourself have created this non-productive pleasure, you can change it.*

As another positive result of consciously modifying these aspects of yourself, you also get to change the world. All of the people around you, whose behavior and beliefs you inevitably affect, will have different experiences with you when you take responsibility for yourself.

By loving yourself and being honest about your responsibility to change, you pave the way for a better future for all of humanity. And that's in addition to all the good you do for your own life!

"We would rather be ruined than changed; we would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment, and let our illusions die."

- W.H. Auden

* TWO EFFECTIVE WAYS TO CHANGE YOUR NEGATIVE BELIEFS

One method for changing beliefs is the *Emotional Freedom Technique* created by Gary Craig. This is a blend of acupressure and affirmations.

While using your fingertips to tap acupuncture points along meridians on your body, you also repeat affirmations as you focus on the issue to be resolved.

EFT is said to yield speedy and permanent results. It's painless, doesn't require faith, and has zero side effects.

Another way to change a disempowering belief is to dig deep within, find your core belief, and reason your way out of it. In this process, you may find it helpful to consult a counselor, support group, or spiritual mentor. Often, the emotions that can arise are challenging to encounter alone.

"Know yourself. Don't accept your dog's admiration as conclusive evidence that you are wonderful."

- Ann Landers

★ WHAT ARE VALUES?

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *value* as "the worth, desirability or utility of a thing, or the qualities on which these depend." *Values are the moral codes we live by.* They're the standards we set for ourselves and others. They determine our interactions with everyone.

Adherence to values is critical for a clear conscience. For example, if one of your principles is honesty, you'll try to be honest. Abiding by your values will liberate you from the shame that you can experience if you don't live by them.

All of your actions are based on your values. Therefore, your principles affect your choice of friends, partners, the products you buy, your interests, and the way you spend your leisure time.

Everyone has values. Even those who seem to act in a socially unacceptable way have principles. It's just that they have a different set of values.

When we see someone behaving in a way that's morally reprehensible, we must examine ourselves. Are we prone to the same mistakes?

Check out the *World Values Survey* website and discover the values held by people in various countries: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/. Seeing others' values may also help you in identifying your own.

*** HOW ARE VALUES CREATED?**

Values are mostly formed in our childhood, when we learn from the conduct of our parents and others close to us. As we get older, we create some of our values ourselves by learning to make moral judgments and by developing empathy.

From birth to age seven, values are primarily subconsciously imprinted. This is the time when you largely learn from your parents.

The modeling period between the ages of eight and 13 is a time when you consciously and unconsciously copy your friends. You form some of your core values when you're around ten years old.

In the socialization period between 14 and 21 years, you pick up the values that affect your relationships.

Remember, though, that regardless of when your principles were formed, you can always change them. Read on for more suggestions.

"To see what is right and not to do it is want of courage."

- Confucius

* IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES

It's important to identify your personal values if you want to ensure you're living by them.

Examples of values are:

- ★ Courage
- ★ Calmness
- ★ Loyalty
- ★ Generosity
- ★ Cheerfulness
- **★** Fidelity
- **★** Compassion
- ★ Honesty
- ★ Patience
- **★** Freedom
- Self-awareness
- ★ Kindness
- ★ Patriotism
- ★ Faithfulness
- ★ Integrity
- ★ Open-mindedness
- ★ Adherence to the tenets of your religion
- ★ Healthy living

Pick the values that you believe you actually have, not the ones you'd like to have. After you've picked out a few, the next step is to list your values according to importance.

Those that top your list are the ones that have the most effect on your life. These are probably your "ends" values, or the ones that matter most.

Values are of two kinds - *ends* values and *means* values. To get to an end value, you need to fulfill a means value. Money and freedom are both values, but freedom is an end and money is the means.

In other words, to have freedom you need money. If you want freedom from a 9 to 5 routine, you need enough money to live comfortably.

Next, consider how your values are playing out in your life. Are you living by them? If not, why not? What's stopping you?

Answering these questions honestly will help you to apply these guiding principles to all areas of your life.

"If we are to go forward, we must go back and rediscover those precious values that all reality hinges on moral foundations and that all reality has spiritual control."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

*** VALUES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF LOVE**

By self love, we mean the kind that comes from being true to yourself and living in ways that are don't betray your principles.

Each time you take an action that is in accordance with your values, acknowledge it. For example, say that one of your values is diligence. If you work hard one day, all day long, rather than chatting excessively with your associates or surfing the internet, give yourself kudos.

Praising yourself mentally like this does the same thing for you that complimenting another does for them. Think of how your loved ones react when you tell them how well they've done. Your inner self responds likewise when you offer yourself praise.

By consistently giving yourself this kind of positive reinforcement, you strengthen your belief in yourself. You know that whatever arises, you'll live in accordance with your values. And knowing this, you'll grow in love for yourself.

Only by possessing true self love can you give it to others. Like everyone else, you too are a manifestation of the Creator. All you need to do is realize this and live it!

"To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance."

- Oscar Wilde

★ VALUES AND BELIEFS CHANGE AS YOU GET OLDER

You may have noticed this in your life. Your idea of having fun (a value that's good to have!) could be very different today than when you were a teenager. Today, you may find curling up with a good book more enjoyable than going to a party where everyone gets drunk.

Or perhaps you were shy when you were younger and are just coming out of your shell. Maybe as a kid, you spent most of your time reading, but now the highlight of your week is a dinner party or a chance to go out and hear your favorite musical act with friends.

Likewise, you can elect to purposely change your values. Humans adapt no matter what. This is part of the reason our species still exists. Fortunately, we have a choice in how to adapt. And our beliefs and values are fundamental parts of this choice.

For many years, scientists believed that once we reached a certain age, change was no longer possible. We were stuck with the personality we developed as young people. However, today we know that neuroplasticity, or the ability of our brains to adapt, carries on into the last years of our lives. **We can always change.**

As you adapt, you can choose to ignore your inner processes and let your fate go the way of the wind. Alternately, *you can consciously evolve, and choose your destiny.*

* CONCLUSION

It's never too late to decide on a new path for yourself. Regardless of where you are in your life, you can take some simple actions today. If you find that you're not living by your values as much as you'd like, *change just takes practice!*

On the other hand, if you truly like the way you live your life, now may be a great time to cultivate gratitude for the person you are and the life you have. Self-love can always be expanded and deepened.

Regardless, awareness is crucial to continuing on your path of intentional evolution. Try some of the suggestions here to learn more about who you are and what you want. And remember, this may change over time. If you did some of this work when you were younger, but haven't in a while, maybe it's time for another honest self-assessment.

As you live increasingly by your principles, *you'll find your joy in living becomes magnified.* You'll expand on many levels, and will have more to give to others.

Determine what you want in your life, what values you want to live by, and go for it! Nothing can stop you from making the most of who you are. May you live your life by your beliefs and values, and find peace and pleasure in every day.