



The Positive Approach

By Peter Shepherd

A 30-lesson home-study course to help you become more clear about your own identity, what you want in life - your life vision - and how to consciously transform your life for the better. You will learn how your beliefs shape your life experience and become aware of exactly how you are creating your reality. Each of these lessons includes a practical element that you can apply during the week, so your life can genuinely start to improve and you make real progress toward manifesting your vision.

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Introduction

'The Positive Approach' is a personal growth home-study course written by Peter Shepherd. Each lesson may be read and practiced, over hours, days or weeks as you need.

The Positive Approach is intended to help you become more clear about your own identity, what you want in life - your life vision - and how to consciously transform your life for the better. You will learn how your beliefs shape your life experience and become aware of exactly how you are creating your reality. Each of these lessons includes a practical element that you can apply during the week, so your life can genuinely start to improve and you make real progress toward manifesting your vision.

The first lessons are about finding yourself and becoming whole. One of the factors that causes fragmentation of your identity - who you think and feel you are - is invalidation, which happens when you feel made wrong by another's comments or actions.

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1. Invalidation

When you act according to the will of another person and suppress your own wishes, you have identified a part of yourself with the other person. You have let them into your mind, as your master. You have become fragmented. One of the main ways this comes about is through invalidation, or 'making wrong'. If somebody says your effort was 'not good enough' or that you 'shouldn't have done that', then you start to question yourself. You begin to introspect and ask, 'Is there something wrong with me?' When another person wrongly evaluates or misunderstands your communications or your state of mind, naturally this is upsetting. It means the other has not understood you. Your enthusiasm wanes. You may accept this false evaluation - perhaps because of the authority or dominance of the other person. If you ignore your own feelings and believe they must be right, you begin to follow their will, not your own. A part of you has identified with the other person and split from the real you. The you that is responsible for your choices.

This very commonly occurs with children, where they take on the characteristics of their parents. It is also very frequent in relationships where one partner adjusts to match the other's expectations. And of course it happens at work too. When our goals are suppressed by another - however well meant - it is eventually life destroying. Negative evaluations (personal criticisms, opinions) by another especially at times of stress can cause extreme upset.

Practical: How to handle invalidations

There are many and various ways you might have been put-down by others and as a result agreed to have less power. You need to look again at what happened and ask yourself:

1. What choices did I make? Consider:
 - a. What did I decide about myself ?
 - b. What did I decide about the other person or other people?
 - c. What did I choose to think?
 - d. How did I choose to feel? What emotion did I choose?
 - e. What did I choose to do?
 - f. How did my choices affect my behavior going forward?
2. What other choices could I have made? And what might the effect of each of those choices be?
3. What positive learning can I get from this experience?

The positive learning is basically whatever insight you have found after realizing you have chosen one direction and can revise that choice if you want.

You always have choices. If a mugger threatened you with a gun, you have the choice not to give him your wallet. He might have killed you or given up and run away. But you had the choice. You may have chosen to give him your wallet, which may have been wise. But you never have to do anything against your will. You can always choose.

Following is a list of ways you might have been invalidated in the past, or it may be happening to you now. For each question that applies to you, go through the procedure above and see what you can learn from this experience, and what part of yourself you can reintegrate.

Did anybody say you don't have a right to your opinion?

Did anybody criticize you unjustly?

Did anybody make an unfair generalization about you?

Did anybody tease you?

Did anybody make you feel insignificant?

Did anybody tell you that you shouldn't be there?

Did anybody tell you that you don't belong?

Did anybody tell you that you couldn't leave?

Did anybody force you to follow their rules?

Did anybody trick you into an agreement?

Did anybody judge you?

Did anybody make you do something you didn't like?

Did anybody decide things for you?

Did anybody take away your ability to choose?

Did anybody bypass you or take away your job?

To take an example. Perhaps my wife says I'm a useless lover. I feel invalidated, put down, and upset, naturally. And perhaps I accept what she says, that I am indeed a useless lover and now I really don't want to make love any more. I have chosen to accept what she said as the truth. Looking at it again now though, I can see that it was simply words she spoke and perhaps she had other reasons for stating that - there was certainly a breakdown in communication between us at the time. I realize now that invalidations can occur when what is said is not really meant (after all, many times before that she said I'm a great lover) but is a symptom of a more significant upset. I can repair such an upset by honest and open communication. That's positive learning for me.

2. Co-Dependence

Sometimes we put aside our true self and instead exist from the position of being effect. We may be involved in relationships and work situations we know are harming us, but we feel helpless to change them. We may have addictive relations to people and situations. We must have what is harming us, or we must do what (we really know inside) is harming us. We are co-dependent.

One may be addicted to a relationship if one feels ashamed and therefore needing to propitiate - or if one fears abandonment, being rejected or being alone and therefore forced to be independent. But these feelings are suppressed, hidden from ourselves. Co-dependence is really emotional dishonesty, because we are suppressing our true feelings and substituting those of another. We lose our integrity and are stuck on our spiritual path. It needs dealing with!

Do any of the following apply to you?

- Do you depend on somebody else's approval?
- Do somebody else's problems feel like your problems?
- Do you put aside your interests for another person's?
- Do you feel responsible for another's feelings?
- Do you feel you can't say no, or very guilty and anxious if you do?
- Do you worry how another may respond to your feelings and behavior?
- Do you fear being hurt or rejected by another?
- Do you put another's needs and wants before your own?
- Do you judge things by another person's standards?
- Are you steadfastly loyal even when shamed, neglected or abused?

If so, spot the co-dependence and take responsibility in that area - reclaim your own choices. (You can change the following questions to the present tense if appropriate.)

1. What choices did I make? Consider:
 - a. What did I decide about myself ?
 - b. What did I decide about the other person or other people?
 - c. What did I choose to think?
 - d. How did I choose to feel? What emotion did I choose?
 - e. What did I choose to do?
 - f. How did my choices affect my behavior going forward?
2. What other choices could I have made? And what might the effect of each of those choices be?

3. What positive learning can I get from this experience?

You need to look at the situation in terms of choices you have made and that you can revise, now that you are more conscious of what's going on.

By becoming conscious of our attitudes and perspectives, we can start discerning what works for us and what does not work. We can then start making choices about whether our view of life is serving us - or if it is setting us up to be victims because we are expecting life to be something which it is not.

An example. I allow my son to watch any program he wants on TV and miss my own favorites, because I'm afraid to upset him and I want him to love me. I've chosen to believe that he will only love me if I allow him to do whatever he wants. I realize now however that I'm his father, he loves me anyway, and my behavior is not actually going to increase his respect for me, in fact the opposite, and it isn't a good example to set him either [my positive learning]. I have my own right to watch my favorite programs and the TV is a resource we share, not to be dominated by one person. So now I choose to explain that to my son (assertively but calmly and with empathy, certainly not with anger or resentment) and in future we will have a better arrangement.

Empathic communication is always the answer, but remember that empathy does not necessarily require liking or agreement, it's to recognize and respect the other as an independent living being, with their own rights and responsible for their own beliefs, feelings and actions. And yourself likewise. That's what love actually is: unconditional acceptance. That quality is who you really are, your essential nature.

Co-dependence applies to perhaps a majority of people, so don't think there's anything wrong with you, so much as you've now started on a path of personal growth, so you can begin to switch these things around. Choose one of the aspects of co-dependence and start to put it right. Not all at the same time as that would be overwhelming, but choose one in which you feel you can take some positive steps toward changing your situation and your customary responses. If you can make some empowering changes, this will encourage you to tackle further areas of your life and relationships, and the snowball will be rolling. However, if it all seems too much, then get some help from a counselor, who will give you support.

3. Suppression

It's easy to blame 'devils under the bed' as the cause of all one's difficulties. Something else to blame so one can shed responsibility and be unaccountable. But what happened to being at cause?

A 'suppression' is not normally the result of any such evil entity. It is simply caused by a person who has different intentions than myself, expressed persuasively, so that I now feel suppressed, depressed and stressed.

There other person is not necessarily evilly intentioned toward you, or anything of that nature. They may be well intentioned and often are. They merely have to cross your goals and purposes without malice or forethought and for the best of reasons. As someone once said: "The path to Hell is paved with good intentions and roofed with tears." How right he was.

So what is suppression? Suppression can be defined as being forced out of one's own time and space by another's purposes and goals. One moves out of one's own identity into the time and space of another's goals and purposes in order to handle the situation being presented - instead of saying "Get stuffed" or something more diplomatic and going on with what one was intending to do in the first place. In other words one didn't maintain integrity.

There are two directions in which one might move - toward or away from. Either creates the Catch 22 situation that is suppression. One can align with the other's identity, which their goal or purpose imposes, or one can resist the goal or purpose and become another identity - but not one's true self. But there is another alternative - one could maintain one's integrity, just be oneself. This also means taking responsibility, acting on the basis of a clear sense of one's own identity, goals and purposes.

For example, a proud father wants his son to become an engineer like himself. If this is not what the son intends he either complies and makes a lousy engineer and is subject to suppression throughout his life by having to follow his father's vocation. Or he resists this persuasion and becomes something quite the opposite, such as an artist, but he doesn't do well at it this either because it was set up in opposition to his father, not as something he really wanted to do. So again that person feels continually suppressed by life. His problem is that neither way can he be himself, a Catch 22. Compliance or resistance generates constant emotional charge in the person's life that doesn't resolve. Its a locked situation. He may - and normally does - hide this situation from himself and he may have no real idea who he himself is, what he really wants to be and do in life, what his true goals and purposes are.

Practical

Notice which people in your life make you feel good and which make you feel bad. When you find yourself feeling limited or put down or depressed in somebody's presence, write down who it is and exactly what happened. And when you feel uplifted and in a good mood in somebody's presence, note down who it was and exactly what happened.

Look for specific reasons for your feelings in those situations. What is the difference between the people or situations where you feel good and the ones where you feel bad?

Isolate what is going on. What are your intentions, likes, dislikes, purposes and goals that are being suppressed. They may be being suppressed by yourself now as well, but originally they were aspects of your own identity that were effectively suppressed by another's influence. Or that suppressive influence - perhaps with the "best of intentions" but not your intentions - may be continuing into the present.

Just recognizing the truth of one's current situation will help to free it up. Work out how you can organize your life to minimize the negativity and reclaim your power.

Remember that the situations in your life where you feel at effect or a victim are something you are doing and creating by yourself. It might appear to be other people's fault, however, we are the ultimate cause of our lives.

When I was a child, parents or teachers were "always right," and I had to conform to their rules. They had all the power. So the choices left would be extreme, like running away from home or jumping from a bridge; or being unquestioningly obedient and gradually losing touch with myself; or just being thoroughly depressed. How these experiences can be resolved? The past cannot be undone but I can change my interpretation of it. From a mature, adult point of view I can show my inner child that perhaps another choice remains: to understand that my parents or teachers may have been misguided but were acting in what they thought to be my best interest, so instead of feeling resentment I now have the choice to instead feel a little more understanding and empathy. And then I have the choice to forgive them, a choice that I did not feel I had then, and to learn some valuable life lessons from the experience.

4. Criticism

In the first stage of this series we have been looking at the factors that can cause fragmentation of our identity: invalidation (feeling put-down by someone), co-dependence (where we put aside our own feelings), suppression (the opposition to one's goals and purposes by another), and in today's lesson we look more at how criticism can affect us, and how best to handle it.

A person tends to defend himself and protest, when confronted by another's criticism or complaint. Nevertheless he may afterward start to introspect - "Is it really true, what was said?" - causing him to fixate his attention inwardly on himself. Compulsive introspection is caused by a false criticism being accepted, which causes the person to look inwardly and worry about the mystery caused by this error. In a normal person this can cause diminished activity and unhappiness or illness. With a neurotic person it can push him over the edge into psychosis.

This may begin early in childhood with the 'overcautious-parent' syndrome - "What are you doing?", "Careful, careful, careful!" when you're climbing up a ladder, and such things that interfere with the natural flow of simple actions, so the person arrives at a point in life where he is inhibited from handling the world around him. Such a person has to think about everything he does, rather than just do it.

Another's criticism or complaint is rarely specific and accurate enough to be helpful. Often it is a generality or exaggeration, i.e. more than the truth ("You're always moaning" whereas I only moan sometimes); or it may be not quite true ("You don't give clear instructions" whereas I have normally been giving clear instructions but I didn't in this particular person's case).

If the criticism is completely off the mark it is less likely to cause confusion and introspection. The trouble is, criticism often has an element of truth in it, and if the criticism is rejected off-hand, the truth of things remains uninspected and unhandled.

Even if the criticism is accurate, having behaved in a certain way for some time, often all his life, a person asserts the rightness of it - he IS the behavior! - and becomes resistive to inspecting and handling the condition objectively. Further criticism just makes this worse. But unless a person is able to evaluate his own behavior objectively, which includes learning from other people's point of view, he will not be able to break free from the shackles of a limited personal identity and realize his actual unbounded Higher Self.

Practical

For each person that you know, consider if there is something which that person has suggested is wrong with your behavior or attitude?

For each criticism that you find, consider whether it's an over-generalization or exaggeration, and whether the criticism was made from a viewpoint of intolerance or negative thinking. Was the criticism based on a false assumption? Is the criticism partly true or is it true of just a specific instance? Have you ever criticized someone of the same thing?

5. Whose Responsibility?

This time we move on to look at the issue of responsibility. This is often confusing. If I make a comment to someone - even though it was kindly and sincerely meant - and they get upset or take offense, is their upset my responsibility?

Take the example of a father who needs to tell his son it is time to go to bed, and no, he can't watch the rest of the film on TV, he needs to sleep and be up in time for school. The boy is angry and resentful and reluctantly goes to bed, feeling little love for me even though my action was based on my love and care for him.

There is a principle here: another's choices and creations (which includes their emotional responses) are their responsibility, not yours or anybody else's. In the same way that jealousy is less than love, since it resents the other's freedom to choose, to be themselves. This might seem like a cold or hard-hearted view but really it is based on love and respect for the other person's freedom.

So what is your responsibility? What if you do something wrong. Take this example: I promise my son to go to the circus with him, but then I'm too busy and don't have time to go, and he is understandably upset. For me, breaking my promise has been a wrong action on my part, and I would be responsible for it.

The conventional wisdom is that I have caused my son's grief. In truth however, it is my son who causes his grief, not me. But yes, it was still be a wrong action since I promised to take him to the circus and didn't. I am responsible for doing what I think is right, according to my ethical judgment. If I do something wrong according to my own ethics, I am responsible for that. I decided my work was more important than keeping my promise - in retrospect I may realize I made a mistake, apologize to my son and learn from that experience. I am not responsible for my son's reactions though, that is his determinism, his freedom, his life.

If you do something you think is right and someone gets upset about it, even if you could have predicted that, the upset is nevertheless that person's responsibility. And if you do something you know (or later realize) is wrong and another person is upset about that, their upset is similarly their own responsibility.

Another example: if you were to withhold doing personal development because your partner has said they do not want you to change in any way, perhaps because of their personal fears and insecurities, that is your choice. But if you consider making a better life for yourself is the ethical thing to do - for the benefit of yourself and ultimately for others too - and you tell your partner that and she gets upset, it is your partner who is

responsible for the upset - it is her interpretation of your actions that creates her own upset, not your action in itself, which is a responsible action.

You can genuinely love someone whilst nevertheless doing something they don't like or agree with. You do it because you feel it is the right thing to do, though you still understand and have empathy for their different viewpoint (which causes their emotional reaction) which they have created by their own choices and belief system.

If one only did things others can easily accept then the status quo would never progress. That would truly be a trap. The solution here is better communication, leading to increased understanding of each other's viewpoint, and therefore acceptance of the differing personal realities.

There is a strong imprint in our culture to feel sad, guilty, etc. for painful emotions our actions may cause to others. There's a general misconception that you are your emotions. "I am angry" and "you make me angry". This is conditioning not truth. In terms of cause and effect, it's a viewpoint at effect. Some say that to be happy, only do what others can easily experience - it's the same lie.

The Church teaches "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you". I believe this IS true, as if you are being ethical - acting from integrity, being true to your self - then it's going to be OK for others to do the same to you. And if it isn't then you'd better re-think whether you are indeed doing the right thing. It is one definition of a 'wrong' action: that which you would not like another to do to you.

You are responsible for your choices, decisions and actions. For being true to your judgment. For communicating with honesty and integrity, developing and maintaining an open mind, and promoting understanding and empathy. For never compromising your freedoms and rights nor trampling on another's. For always acting from the primary motivation of love. That's all and quite enough.

Practical

Look at some experiences you have had and perhaps see them in a different light. Times when somebody was upset and you felt it was your fault. Separate the right and wrong actions you made from the interpretation the other made, based on which they were upset. If you made a mistake, learn from that - if their interpretation was faulty, realize that is their responsibility, their freedom.

Look at times when you were upset and you felt it was their fault. Realize that you created your emotional reaction, and that their actions were based on their own

understanding (or misunderstanding) of the situation. If they were mistaken, forgive them.

The following article is about maintaining your integrity, in particular with respect to agreements you make, and how important that is for successful relationships. It is from the site www.no-problem-marriage-counseling.com

Trust in Relationships

We all yearn for relationships in which there is trust. We want to be able to depend on others. We're looking for the ease, clarity and harmony that are inherent in trustful relationships. But, is there any one of us who wasn't let down or betrayed by someone who didn't live up to his or her agreements?

We all make agreements every day. Some seem small and insignificant: agreement about a time to meet or a promise to run an errand. Others are seen as bigger and more important: a formal contract or signing a loan. But all of them are important. Because this is the way trust is earned. Your reputation is built upon your ability to make and keep agreements.

The corner stone of every relationship is trust. And when we're not feeling safe in a relationship - we do not give our 100%. Partners who keep their agreements or re-negotiate when they can't are few. But then, so are successful couples.

If you do not keep your agreements within your marriage (or any relationship for that matter) you make your partner responsible for you.

Let's say it was your turn to do the laundry. You didn't. Your partner has to do it instead of you or has to become your "mother" and remind (nag) you so you would do it. This means becoming responsible FOR you. That's what your parents did until you were able to take responsibility for your own life.

However, in marriage, you are two grown ups that should be responsible TO each other. This means each one of you takes responsibility for keeping your agreements and stand up for your word.

Break an agreement once, and your partner might forget it. Break an agreement twice, and your partner might forgive you. Break an agreement for the third time, and your partner won't trust you again. Period.

And when there is no trust in your relationship - you don't have a relationship. Yes, your partner might still be there - physically. But he or she is not there anymore - emotionally.

And one thing you have to remember - losing trust can take a minute, building it back may take years.

I discovered early on that those people who often break agreements always end as being mediocre and having dead relationships. Most of them think that so-called small agreements can be broken because they're not important.

Well, the consequence of breaking agreements is loss of trust and respect. No matter how big or small those agreements are. And when you lose trust and respect, "mediocre" becomes your second name.

Check yourself honestly. Do you believe that being late for a meeting you agreed with your spouse won't hurt them or that your partner won't mind if you don't do the dishes as agreed? Do you tell yourself that the consequences will be small and you can handle them? Well, think again. Have a look at how your partner reacts to those broken agreements.

The other side of the story is the partner that got hurt by the broken agreement. If you are often on this side, ask yourself how come it happens to you so frequently? How do you feel being hurt and disrespected? And why do you allow it? Are you afraid to rock the boat? Do you think, "Oh, it's not such a big deal"? Do you find excuses to justify the breaking of the agreement?

If you let others (even if it is your beloved partner) walk over you, and don't protest, guess what... they will keep on walking all over you! It's that simple...

By the way, sometimes, your partner is not trying to hurt or disrespect you on purpose. Sometimes, they're just not aware or sensitive enough to realize the impact they're having. And if you don't tell them, or are not honest about how you feel when they break the agreements with you, they'll probably never change.

My personal way of living is to make few agreements and keep the ones I make. Frequently agreements are made too casually and usually with the aim of being liked, avoiding criticism or delaying the confrontation about a problem hoping there will be some miracle cure.

Some of the agreements are written, some are spoken ("I'll be in charge of taking the garbage out"), and some are unspoken ("When I speak, I am telling you the truth"). You might want to check how many agreements you have in your relationship, and does it make sense to keep all of them as agreements.

Too often trust is broken because something like 'leaving the toilet seat up', or 'not taking out the dog as promised'. Most marriages break in the end because of the garbage and the toilet seat and not because of a single extramarital affair. It happens when "enough is enough" and there's no way you can trust and respect anymore this son-of-a-bitch that not so long ago was the love of your life...

To avoid getting there, find out what your survival agreements are. These are 2-3 essential agreements that if broken could cause either one of you to step out of the relationship, right away. For some people it will be infidelity, for others substance addiction, for others emotional or physical abuse, etc. Make sure both of you are aware of and agree on these survival agreements and then... KEEP THEM!

6. Reconnecting with the Past

To the extent that we put a barrier up against the past, we cannot be integrated. Remembering things by its very nature puts attention on the past. The past may be pleasant, nostalgic or painful to recall but it doesn't govern the present - though one may feel it does!

Between you and your memories there may be a barrier created by suppressing the memory of unwanted past experiences. This reduces your ability to enjoy your present life. It denies you that resource of youthful energy, enthusiasm and wonder that somehow got lost during the years. It got lost because the energy was subsumed in creating the barrier of suppression, a barrier that became fixed and automatic, closing down the mind/body connection. When you remove this barrier, you will find it much easier to be in the here-and-now, and be pleasantly and joyfully aware in the present moment. There is a very simple and powerful way to break through this barrier of suppressed emotional charge between your conscious mind and your memories and accompanying feelings. You can regain your enthusiasm and wonder of life: you will discover it is still there, you just have to reclaim it.

Recall Exercise

You simply give yourself the direction: "Recall Something" and as quickly as you can, obtain a memory, then repeat the direction immediately. Any memory will do, whether it is from one minute ago or from years ago. But don't dwell on a period or experience; try to 'jump around', allowing whatever comes up to be OK before you quickly move on. Intend, each time, to recall something different.

After a while you will run out of 'stock memories'. You may dry up and find it hard to find a memory. You will then be aware of this barrier. You have billions if not trillions of memories. You should find memories with ease at first. When recalling becomes difficult you will know that something is going on! Your mind is being careful in case you recall something it doesn't want you to. Keep going! Give the direction "Recall something" and if no memory is found, simply repeat the direction again. Know your unconscious mind is actually answering the question and finding a memory. You just aren't aware of it.

Soon the memories will start to flow again - this is the breakthrough you're expecting. Keep giving the direction and keep the memories coming as quickly as possible. Do not dwell on any of them. The purpose of this exercise is to be able to freely recall the past, not to relive the memories in depth. This seemingly simple procedure will take you a long way in your development. When the going gets difficult, or if nothing seems to be happening, persist with the exercise until the breakthrough occurs and you feel more whole, at one with your mind, body and feelings.

7. Our Resource of Pleasure

Suppressing the painful memories of the past - bad things that have happened or that we have done - may help us avoid some unpleasantness. But it also suppresses our pleasurable resources that support our self-esteem and wellbeing. And the energy expended suppressing our past drains our present-life living. By recalling pleasant moments you can recover your lost energy and enthusiasm, and at the same time drain the energy from negative memories. Releasing wonderful new feelings and enjoyment into your present life. This lesson helps you do this.

When you re-experience positive memories you reclaim your vast resource of enthusiasm and joy. So you can enjoy it now. These experiences are left-behind golden nuggets of your life-energy that you can now reclaim. In the following exercise you recall some of the pleasant experiences of your life. By putting your attention on the positive, you increase your energy and validate your good and honest qualities. Your increased life-energy then makes bad experiences less significant. It helps release those negative experiences.

Positive Memories Exercise

Step 1. Ask yourself a question from the *Recall List* below.

Step 2. Recall such an experience and briefly run through it from beginning to end, as if it were happening in the present. For example, "I'm running along the road and..."

Step 3 . Ask yourself the next question.

If you cannot recall an incident, or you get an unpleasant memory, leave that question and go on to the next one.

Recall List

Recall a time when you enjoyed yourself.

Recall a time when you earned some money.

Recall a time when you heard some good music.

Recall a time when you mastered something.

Recall a time when you got something you wanted.

Recall a time when you enjoyed a cozy fire.

Recall a time when you rode a bicycle.

Recall a time when you played with an animal.

Recall a time when you rearranged furniture.

Recall a time when you really knew what you were talking about.

Recall a time when you gave a successful demonstration or talk.

Recall a time when you straightened out a messy environment.
 Recall a time when you felt good about the way you looked.
 Recall a time when you enjoyed talking with someone.
 Recall a time when you were acknowledged for a job well done.
 Recall a time when you kept a promise.
 Recall a time when you held somebody close.
 Recall a time when you enjoyed exercising.
 Recall a time when you drew a picture.
 Recall a time when you helped somebody.
 Recall a time when you won.
 Recall a time when you met someone you got on well with.
 Recall a time when you had a good time dancing.
 Recall a time when you felt important.
 Recall a time when you were having a good holiday.
 Recall a time when you achieved something worthwhile.
 Recall a time when you were enjoying a long walk.
 Recall a time when you enjoyed working in the garden.
 Recall a time when you had a good idea.
 Recall a time when you kissed somebody you liked.
 Recall a time when you laughed at a joke.
 Recall a time when you painted something.
 Recall a time when you felt enthusiastic.
 Recall a time when you were with a friend.
 Recall a time when you stood your ground.

Step 4. When you can recall pleasurable experiences without much difficulty, repeat the above and look for earlier incidents of the same kind . That is, you ask:

Recall a time when ...
 Recall an earlier time when ...
 Recall the earliest time when ...

If you feel complete after several passes through the list, you may continue by imagining an 'experience' in response to the questions - let your imagination run wild!

So instead of "Recall a time when... (e.g. you enjoyed yourself)," ask: "Imagine... (e.g. enjoying yourself)." Imagine yourself experiencing this in the present.

This is a fun-exercise that really does make a difference to your outlook on life and improves your self-esteem.

8. Thought - Feeling - Action

There is a simple model that I find useful to understand how the mind works. Briefly stated, it is our beliefs and considerations that drive emotions and resulting behavior. The thoughts that go through our mind in particular difficult circumstances may trigger an unpleasant or self-defeating emotional reaction, resulting in behavior that is not in one's best interest.

These thoughts derive from times when they seemed like the best solution to trying circumstances, and they may be an agreement with a dominant, authoritative or persuasive force, or derive from the conclusion to an episode in our life of success or failure. If the original circumstances were unpleasant and become painful to think about, the accompanying thoughts, decisions and purposes become suppressed too, but continue to operate subconsciously.

When brought to light, it is apparent that the thoughts are affecting current life unnecessarily. The over-generalization, exaggeration, negativity, false assumption or intolerance frequently does not stand up to rational inspection. In personal development we can learn to become aware of these thoughts and to examine them objectively. We can be more conscious of the present moment, and so act (rather than react) in a way that is more emotionally intelligent.

To "be in the moment" means to observe consciously right now, rather than being stuck in our thoughts, which are linked to time: past memories and future expectations.

The route to the beliefs is to recognize the situation or circumstance that triggers unwanted feelings and subsequent behavior, then see what the underlying thoughts are that drive that reaction. Most often these are fleeting and subconscious, since they are associated with painful experiences or because they have long been installed in the mind as seemingly safe solutions to the situations of life and have therefore become taken for granted - 'built in' as part of one's identity. Normally you can't see what you are being.

Finding the underlying thought pattern is therefore crucial to resolving our problematic reactions, and when it is seen in the light of an objective view this is a great relief, because the decision - and the beliefs surrounding it - can normally be changed quite readily.

The way it works is this: As a result of an experience, a person makes a decision or intention for the future, such as "men are selfish bastards, I can't trust them" which becomes part of their belief system. Because the experience was painful it is suppressed, along with the accompanying decision, but both remain in the mind and

continue to have influence. When the past experience is re-stimulated by similar circumstances in the present, the old decision is utilized. The tape replays subconsciously. The decision may have seemed relevant and appropriate to the original circumstances but it is probably not appropriate now - it is therefore irrational and somewhat stupid, i.e. it may contain an assumption or generalization that causes intolerance or negativity.

The current situation is interpreted according to these old beliefs and fixed ideas - we hold onto them because they we feel they serve us - and so the person creates unpleasant emotions (sadness, fear, antagonism, anger, etc), which then drive him or her to behave in an inappropriate and self-defeating way; rather than the appropriate and self-empowering way that a rational and objective interpretation would encourage.

You are not responsible for everything that happens to you (although often you may contribute to it.) But you are responsible for how you react to these events, how you experience them and move on from there. Your reaction has three facets:

- A mental reaction, how you interpret the situation, which is often a replay of old stuff you've attached to as part of your identity.
- An emotional reaction which results from your interpretation, so you feel happy, angry, sad, or frustrated.
- And a behavioral reaction: based on your feelings you act in a certain way, such as jumping for joy, getting away as soon as possible, or punching the other guy's nose.

It might seem that the circumstances caused your emotional reaction, or even that it caused your behavior. So, if your girlfriend criticizes your manners, you might get angry and leave the restaurant. Later, you may feel that your girlfriend made you angry or that you had to leave the restaurant because of her. But really it was your belief that no one has a right to question your rightness, such as the way you eat with your mouth open. "That's rude and intolerable."

So you created your own reaction with what you told yourself. It may have been instant and below the level of your consciousness but there was your voice inside telling you these things. Actually, though, you did have other choices. You could have actually listened and understood her viewpoint - you would then still have a girlfriend and have learned something useful. And your girlfriend would have renewed respect and love for you.

Your inner voice can talk you into a lot of trouble or it can create a positive outlook that changes your life experience. The secret is to stay in the moment, to stay conscious, and

spot your voice when it is replaying old tapes and talking nonsense, when it is being intolerant, exaggerating or over-reacting.

You are made of love; when your thoughts are judgmental and resisting what is, then you can recognize that is not the real you. So my advice is: if it's not love, STOP, gather yourself in the moment and reconsider.

9. Overcoming Our Fears

Fear is the opposite flow to need - accompanying any need for something is an equivalent fear of losing or not obtaining it. We may become attached to the solutions we find for obtaining our needs - needs for love and affection, control and mastery, and for self-esteem and to find and fully express one's true self. Underlying those attachments is fear. A basic principle of Buddhist doctrine is that attachment leads to suffering, and to be truly happy in life we do better to replace fear with acceptance.

What we resist persists. When a belief, feeling or physical sensation is stuck and just won't go away this is usually due to a lack of acceptance, underlined by fear. We resist and this only empowers and validates that which we don't like, or hate or fear. The most powerful antidote to fear is our natural ability to accept.

To accept a situation does not mean we are pleased with it or resigned to it, rather it is being ourselves without demanding our past and present experience to be anything other than what it is. It is an aspect of love.

So let's find something that we are not confronting - that we don't feel able to accept as it is - either in our past or current circumstances. The clue is fear - fear that a past experience will happen again or fear that we will lose something precious to us.

For example, I may fear that my partner will find another man attractive and that is reinforced by a previous experience when a lover did indeed choose another man in place of me. That's a painful memory that I don't want to recur.

What am I not confronting? That my partner - in the past and in the present too - does have a choice. Behind my lack of acceptance is one or more irrational beliefs or thought distortions. This lies or untruths cloud my viewpoint - I am not seeing clearly so how can I accept what is? So I need to look deeper and in each case spot that what my mind is telling me is not helpful - really I know better. If I look honestly and drop my ego attachment...

False assumption: They have no right to choose another!

Truth: Do I have the right to choose my partner? Er, yes.

Negative thinking: I am not good enough to keep a woman!

Truth: Who says? Me - well I can change my mind about that then. Besides my present relationship is going well, it's me that's creating this idea.

Generalization: All women are unfaithful!

Truth: And all men too? What women do I know that are faithful? Erm, lots.

Heaven's reward: It's not fair, I stayed with her for years, I deserve better!

Truth: Yes, I deserved to be loved and still do, but I wasn't going to get that from a person who wanted to move on. That's the reality. I wish her well. And now I do have a loving relationship.

Intolerance: It's not OK that I am not the person she wants as a partner!

Truth: Well, my current partner hasn't said that, quite the opposite. I'm projecting the past situation, that it wasn't OK that she left. But I realize now that it was for the best for both of us. If it happened again the same would be true.

Exaggeration: No women want me, I'm ugly and boring!

Truth: That's what I think about myself. But actually plenty of women have found me attractive, including my present partner.

Try this process and I'm sure you'll find some insights that can change your life around.

10. Letting Go

The work we do here is for personal development rather than psychotherapy. We're starting off with a state of being that is the majority of the time reasonably happy and stable, and looking to enhance our life by recovering freedom of viewpoint - to be free of cultural conditioning and also free of the fixed ideas we have created for ourselves, including unconscious ones. We will go on to spiritual issues and understanding how we envision and create our life experience.

But we recover our full spiritual awareness through learning the lessons our everyday life provides. There may be experiences or issues in our life that we can't think about without tears or anger, hard to face issues that severely interrupt what we want to do in life. What can we do to get ourselves together, to learn from these experiences and begin again to working more effectively toward our goals?

We have looked at thought-feeling-behavior patterns which get re-stimulated when given the same stimulus, i.e. by repeating circumstances. So how do we let go of these, so when given the same stimulus nothing happens?

Being aware of a re-stimulation occurring is an important step of awareness and it's half way to resolution of the issue. Two further steps are to release the resulting emotion, to accept it and let it go. You can do this by realizing that the painful feeling is an energy that you are creating, that you can experience with acceptance rather than resistance, and that you can continue to create or not. The second step is to spot what interpretation is causing you to have that painful emotion (the pain is really the resistance). What are you saying to yourself at the time of re-stimulation? What tape is being replayed in your head (or it may be a picture with attached feelings)? Is the interpretation/belief really true, or is it an exaggeration, an over-generalization, an unnecessarily negative or intolerant view? Is it actually somebody else's view that you have attached to or identified with, not truly your own?

So it is a process of letting go of the feeling and preceding thought. Becoming aware of them rather than just reacting on auto-pilot is the critical first step. Releasing the emotion and spotting the untruth are the second and third steps - and are really a process of dis-identification. Then the behavior pattern will also no longer have any roots in order to continue in place.

The Release Technique given below, devised by Lester Levenson, helps you to re-experience the painful emotion, to the point that you realize that you actually create the emotion based on your interpretation of events, and that you are not the emotion, i.e. "I create the feeling of being angry" rather than "I am angry". With acceptance of the

emotion, so that you can have it or not have it and still be content, then you can let the emotion go.

For the releasing to be permanent you also need to spot the underlying irrational thought, assumption, decision or intention, and how it has been driving your emotions. Now the emotion is cleared it will no longer be dominating your view of the situation and these thoughts will be exposed. Upon examination it becomes clear that you can change your mind about this and see things differently, so will you no longer need to feel upset in similar circumstances and have new freedom to behave in ways more aligned with your goals in life.

The Release Technique

This is the healthiest way to handle a feeling that is consuming us. We've all had the experience of being in the midst of an emotional explosion and then suddenly began to laugh at ourselves, realizing how silly or inappropriate or useless our behavior is. In other words we became conscious.

Step One: Locate. First think of some problem area in life - something that is of great urgency and concern. It may be a relationship with a loved one, a parent or child; it might be your job, health or fears; or someone else. Perhaps a situation you find yourself in or that is going on in the world. Or it might simply be the feeling that you are experiencing now.

Step Two: Identify your feeling. Determine your feeling about the problem area, or the current feeling. What word comes to mind? Is that exactly how you feel? If not define it more clearly.

Step Three: Focus. What do you really feel? Get in touch with it now. Open yourself up, become aware of the physical sensations attached to the feeling and focus on them.

Step Four: Feel your feeling. Deliberately create it. Let your feeling inhabit your entire body and mind. If the feeling is a grief feeling, you may break into tears; if it is anger, you may feel your blood begin to boil. That's good - now is the time to feel the feeling.

Step Five: Individuate. Become aware of the difference between your self - YOU - and what that self is FEELING. When the feeling is fully experienced and accepted, there will at some point be a clear sensation that your feeling is not you, so it would be possible to let go of the feeling.

If you do not feel that it is possible to let the feeling go, feel it some more. Sooner or later you will reach a point where you can truthfully answer: "Yes, I could let this feeling go".

Step Six: Learn the lesson. The most vital aspect of this procedure is the learning of life lessons. Unless you recognize what you are to learn from your negative emotions, they will not release permanently, because they will have to regenerate again until the lesson is learned once and for all. After all, the very nature of strong emotions is a message to you -- letting you know that something needs to be learned.

Step Seven: Release. When will you let this feeling go? Sooner or later you will be able to answer: "I am willing to let this feeling go now". So let the feeling go, simply release it, if you haven't done so spontaneously. It feels good to let it go - all the built-up energy that has been held in the body is released. There is a sudden decrease in physical and nervous tension. You will feel more relaxed, calm, centered, empowered.

Step Eight: Check. Do you still have any of the feeling? If some of it is still there then go through the procedure again. Often releasing is like a well - you release some and then more arises. Some of our pent-up emotions are so deep that they require a number of releases.

When you are familiar with the technique, you can distill your practice down to just a few simple commands: "Could I let this go? Am I willing to? When?" Use this whenever you are conscious of an uncomfortable feeling, and even when you are just starting to create the feeling for the first time.

Once you've learned to release you'll find that simply becoming aware of a feeling is often enough to trigger a natural, spontaneous release, and you will carry the ability over into your everyday life, resulting in a stress-free mind and body.

11. I Wish I Hadn't Done That!

We all do things we are not proud of, we wouldn't be human if we didn't. Something that affects others in a way that we would not be willing to experience ourselves. Sometimes we do something that we know at the time is wrong, but it seems like the best solution to our situation. Or maybe we are tempted to put our own interests first. Other times we may be carried away by emotions of anger or jealousy and do something out of spite we may later regret. Or we don't do something, like helping a friend in need, that we know we really should have. Alternatively we may have the best of intentions but things go wrong, we make a mistake or realize something we have done was harmful, even though we didn't mean it to be.

These sorts of actions can leave us feeling ashamed and depressed, and we can end up carrying our guilt for years, but if we want to live happy lives, we need to take responsibility for the consequences of our behavior and move on.

Feeling guilty should not be confused with taking responsibility for our past. Responsibility means that we make a concerted effort to change the behavior pattern that resulted in the wrong-doing, and the beliefs and feelings that empowered it. We need to move on by making peace with the past.

The natural tendency when we do something wrong is to try to justify our actions, to make ourselves right. Or we may say the action was not wrong, it was deserved, making the other person wrong. Both of these are avoiding the reality, by denying our own sense of right and wrong and our own responsibility for our actions. We avoid our feelings of guilt by pretending it was nothing wrong that we did, indeed it was right. We avoid our feelings of shame (feeling bad about how others perceive us) by pretending that it is the other who should be ashamed.

The problem is not the harmful action or making a mistake - that's happened and can't be undone. The problem is what we tell ourselves afterward. Whether we are honest or if we lie to ourselves. It is that lie which causes all the damage to our own integrity and to further relationships with the other we have wronged.

We need to drop our defenses, drop the lies we may have told ourselves to hide the truth, face up to the reality of our actions and their consequences - and forgive ourselves.

There is a big bonus to being realistic and truthful - we can learn the valuable lesson that the experience offers us. Indeed, it's only when we have learned that lesson that we can let go of the past error and live our life as truly ourselves in the present.

So to forgive ourselves we need to learn the lesson. Let's look at mistakes first. Mistakes are an essential part of learning. When we learn to drive a car, we crunch the gears and go backward instead of forward. But we learn and get better. Later on we may cross a red light and get stopped by the police and fined. Again, we can learn from that, to take more care when approaching crossroads. We then become a better driver. The next time you make a mistake say to yourself, "That's cool, so what can I learn from this?" Instead of feeling grotty you will feel challenged and motivated.

But what if I had crossed the red light, run into a car and injured the driver badly. That's not cool. I can say that it had only just changed to red so I didn't really do anything wrong. I can blame the other driver for not checking anyone was still crossing before they moved off. Or I can accept it was a foolish action, a combination of a mistake but also recklessness. I was wrong, I did it. I'm sorry.

But real forgiveness has nothing to do with feeling sorry or apologizing, neither of which actually changes anything. Neither can forgiveness be given by another; it has to be granted by ourselves. Unless we can truly forgive ourselves, we can never really move on and be free of the past.

What gets in the way of this forgiveness is judgment, that I am a bad person. I need to separate my inherent worth from the wrong-doing. I am basically a loving being, I know that. We all are. Actually I am not even my thoughts and feelings. I create these and sometimes through ignorance or misguidedly I create them inappropriately, and my consequent actions can result in hurt for others. Then the best I can do is to learn from that so in future I can create more truly to my nature.

I need to realize that the wrong-doing was a result of my ignorance - I did not know what I can now see to be the lesson from the experience. I just wanted to get to my destination quickly, I didn't think about the possible outcomes that could result from driving irresponsibly, I thought it was OK to cross a red light. So my basic motive wasn't bad but I was operating on false information, I was misguided.

We can't move on if we regret the past, nor if we have contempt for our selves. To feel like this implies that we view our past as meaningless and of no value, and our selves as no longer to be trusted. On the contrary, forgiving ourselves requires finding value in our experiences and in our selves. Instead of just writing off an experience as a painful episode and trying to forget it, we should try to learn from it whatever we can.

Life is a journey of learning and the most worthwhile learning is derived from our personal experiences. When things go right, because we have good information and appropriate beliefs, then our learning is reinforced by this positive feedback. When

things go wrong, because we have faulty information and inappropriate beliefs, then we and those at the effect of our actions suffer. But here we have a chance to learn something new. Much of our new learning and personal growth does therefore come about as a result painful experiences; provided we are willing and open to learn those lessons.

If we wish to grow and to use our experiences beneficially, it is vital that we focus on what we can learn, rather than to resist the reality of what occurred.

Find something you did (or failed to do) that you still feel bad about, that you regret, that makes you feel ashamed. Now begin to take meaning and value out of this experience. Ask yourself: "What has this taught me - about myself, about others and about my life?" Based on this lesson, work out what beliefs you need to change, what fixed ideas you can let go of, what assumptions you made that are no longer helpful.

Self-forgiveness recaptures the energy that you were giving away in guilt and resistance against the past. It frees you to be yourself again - a new, happier and wiser you.

12. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a way of being, thinking, feeling and acting that implies that you accept, trust and believe in yourself. When you accept yourself, you can live comfortably with both your personal strengths and weaknesses, without undue self-criticism. When you respect yourself, you acknowledge your own dignity and value as a unique human being. You treat yourself well, in much the same way that you would treat someone else who you respect. Self-trust means that your desires, beliefs, behaviors and feelings are consistent enough to give you an inner sense of continuity and coherence, despite changes and challenges in your circumstances. To believe in yourself means that you feel you deserve to succeed and - on the basis of past demonstrated competence and current resources - you have confidence that you can fulfill your deepest personal needs, aspirations and goals.

A fundamental truth about self-esteem is that it needs to come from within. When self-esteem is low, the deficiency creates a feeling of emptiness which you may try to fill by latching on - often compulsively - to something or someone that provides a temporary sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. When this becomes desperate, repetitive or automatic, you have an addiction. Frequently this attachment substitutes for healthy human relationships. It may also substitute a feeling of control or power for a more lasting sense of inner confidence and strength.

What difference does self-esteem make?

When we are high in self-esteem we feel good about ourselves. We feel in control of our life and are flexible and resourceful. We are able to make choices about how we run our life. We enjoy the challenges that life makes and are ready to take life head on. We feel powerful, creative and confident that we can 'make things happen' in our life.

We can realize our own potential by integrating all our abilities in a balanced and harmonious way. To each experience we bring our whole self and we integrate all our faculties. This 'holistic' approach describes us as existing simultaneously at the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical levels, and we bring all of these aspects to each of our experiences. For example, in meeting a new person, you bring the spiritual experience of your inner awareness, your connection with the life force that is you and your creative resources. Your mental energy brings understanding, empathy, perception and communication. Your emotional energy is expressed as feelings about what is going on and your physical energy enables you to actively participate.

As we all know, experiences can be subjectively good or bad. A good experience occurs when one has been creative - spiritual, mental, emotional and physical energies have been expressed in a balanced way - and this enhances self-esteem. You feel at ease and

are able to 'make things happen'. You express choice and create the experience and so feel in control of your destiny. You feel good!

A bad experience, in which one has suffered in some way, tends to reduce self-esteem. If you feel you have no choice, if you feel 'trampled on' or a victim, you feel uncomfortable and out of control in your life. Things 'just happen' to you (or don't). So you feel bad.

When we respond to particular circumstances we can do so from a state of creative consciousness or from a state of victim consciousness. If you operate from a state of creative consciousness you are valuing yourself for what you are, right now, and not just for what you do or have done. Your sense of worth does not depend on having a high-profile job or having expensive possessions or being clever. Self worth has nothing to do with job status or IQ or never getting things wrong. In other words you are not worth less if you can't do something or things go badly wrong. This idea of intrinsic self worth is the strength on which true self-esteem is based. Demonstrated competence and praise enhances self-esteem but this needs to be based on an underlying foundation, where incompetence and criticism does not detract from intrinsic self worth.

This view of the world is one which allows for the creative experience of choice. We are free to initiate change and so can enjoy an action-based lifestyle in which we are able to communicate our needs clearly. Such behavior then reinforces our self-esteem.

Without a sense of intrinsic self worth you have a limited world view which provides you with little or no choice. This creates a reactive lifestyle in which you are always looking for the approval of others before you can act. Such a fear-based lifestyle results in unclear communication and consequent feelings of resentment, anger and blame. Hence the victim's lack of self-esteem is reinforced.

Improving Your Self-Esteem

Maybe you know how to 'look inside', feel relaxed and resourceful, but don't know how to bring this experience into material reality. In other words you can connect with your inner self but can't so easily act upon this connection - you can imagine and be inspired but can't put this into effect.

Perhaps you can act in a fairly spontaneous way but do not feel there is any more to your life than that which appears before your eyes. In this case you are finding it difficult to connect to your real goals and aspirations.

You may be very emotionally aware and sensitive to other people's feelings. If so, you are in touch with your feelings but does this gift work for you? Can you put your emotions into perspective so that you are able to think clearly and act appropriately?

Perhaps you are very good at understanding ideas and thinking rationally but your thoughts stay in your head and you aren't able to act upon on them. Or perhaps you find it difficult to express your feelings clearly about those issues.

Proper balance of self-connection, thought, feeling and action is the key to living creatively and with full consciousness.

13. Creating Self-Esteem

How would you describe yourself? The following is a list of adjectives - virtues, vices, strengths and weaknesses - that may or may not apply to you. Very many other qualities could be added to the list.

artistic	lighthearted	responsible
sarcastic	proud	useless
incapable	depressed	beautiful
kind	responsive	extravert
shy	aggressive	timid
overbearing	manipulative	loving
boring	sensitive	emotional
sloppy	stupid	enthusiastic
modest	embarrassed	introverted
interesting	withdrawn	thoughtful
worried	afraid	creative
self-righteous	ashamed	confident
ugly	lazy	supportive
unique	tolerant	flexible
clever	angry	passive
demanding	happy	considerate
active	lovable	intelligent
inarticulate	intolerant	tactful
perceptive	uncertain	mistrusting
worthless	unattractive	talented

There are plenty more attributes. You could look at yourself in terms of how others see you, appearance, personal manner, performance at work, home life, relationships, social position, mental functioning, self-awareness and sexuality.

We are all of these some of the time of course. However, now make a list of all the qualities - from the above list or other things that come to mind - that you think you are almost never: "I am almost never..."

Now all those things which you believe you are almost always: "I am almost always..."

Which of these statements do you consider the most important, i.e. your underlying personal self-beliefs? How do you see yourself? Are your core beliefs appreciative or critical; are you high or low in self-esteem?

Look at all the critical statements you listed and imagine you were saying these things about someone else. Would you be so hard and judgmental with someone else? How would you feel if someone else described you this way?

If you recognize and are happy to be the person you have described, then fine. But ask yourself if this means keeping some area of yourself quiet, out of sight and so out of mind. If you suspect this to be true, try to look into what area that might be.

Disarming the inner critic

Take each negative statement one at a time and check it for rationality against the following list:

- Has a general rule been made from one isolated example?
- Does it pay excessive attention to only small parts of your experience?
- Is it an exaggerated description instead of an accurate one?
- Is your critic thinking in terms of black and white? E.g. does it insist that everything you do has to be brilliant or else it regards it as rubbish?
- Does your critic expect you to take responsibility for events that are actually outside your control?
- Does your critic assume the whole world revolves around you and your interests?
- Have you been mind-reading?
- Do you know for sure that other people don't like you, are unforgiving of you, or don't care about you?
- Does your critic assume that you have no responsibility or are a helpless victim?
- Is your inner critic being inappropriately emotional?

For each negative statement, see if you can contradict it with a more rational statement. E.g. "I may sometimes misunderstand, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid."

For each weakness or negative trait find an exception or a corresponding strength.

Think about people who are your friends or who you like in spite of their unfortunate habits or undesirable traits. Try adopting the same attitude to your own traits - make friends with yourself.

14. Changing Your Mind About Yourself

Should you or could you? The rationale that supports 'I should' (and 'I should not') allows us to hand over the responsibility for our lives to others. It is a childlike stance and gives the decision-making power to someone else. Believing the 'should' inhibits change, risk-taking and assertiveness. It is both comforting and severely limiting.

Whenever we question our basic beliefs we are also questioning our status quo - our safe solutions - and this can feel threatening. Personal growth is a courageous process - to provide that courage we need to recognize the benefits of opening up our options. We will reclaim our own life and be our true self - that's really the only way to be genuinely and stably happy.

The first step is to identify the inner voices that tell you that you should do this and ought to be doing that. An inner voice that nags you in this way is likely to be an internalized parent or someone who is important to you, that you give authority, in the past or currently.

Some 'shoulds' and 'oughts' make sense of course, such as legitimate rules to live by, and if violated then harm results, to yourself or others. However many 'shoulds' and 'oughts' act to undermine the strength and directness of what you think and do.

Practical

Make a list of all the things you think that you should or ought to do, should or ought not to have, should or ought not to be.

Take each listed item read it out loud and then ask yourself, "Why should I?"

Here are some typical answers to the "Why should I?" question: "Because everybody has to," "My father said I should," "What will happen to me if I don't?" "Otherwise people won't like me anymore," "Because I'm too fat/ stupid/lazy/careless etc."

The answers to "Why should I?" questions demonstrate how we can limit ourselves by holding certain beliefs. Try ending an "I should..." statement with, "because I really want to." The sentence doesn't make sense because the word 'should' implies reluctance and feelings of guilt and fear. Do we really need to burden ourselves in this way? The word 'should', however, can be replaced by the word 'could' and this restores freedom of choice. So go through your list of shoulds and rephrase each item: "If I really wanted to, I could..."

Another approach is to ask the question, "Why should I?" repeatedly until you genuinely and sincerely answer it with "Because I really want to." Or you decide to give it up because you really don't want to!

Looked at this way, somehow things seem much more possible and at the same time you no longer feel you "have to." So give yourself permission to run your own life. You don't need taped instructions from the past - right now you can make your own decisions and create your own experiences.

15. Improving Your Relationships

These factors would apply to an intimate relationship:

1. Does what you and the other are doing align?

Take a look at what is going on in a current relationship. Do it with the other person if possible. Make an honest assessment of the current situation and then work together to align these different elements:

- * What is the Actual State of affairs?
- * What is the Basic Intention of each of you regards each other?
- * What is therefore the Ideal State of affairs?
- * Therefore what Desired Objectives do you share?
- * Work out an Overall Plan to achieve those objectives.
- * What are the Daily Actions that will be needed?

2. Responsible for what?

Examine the responsibility each is taking. Work toward a full responsibility for the overall relationship and one's own reactions, but do not attempt to be responsible for everything about the other person. Their beliefs and feelings are their own responsibility. What are you willing to be responsible for regarding (other person)? What are you not willing to be responsible for regarding (other person)?"

3. Is there a competition?

Sort out any issue of competition for territory. What kind of game are you and the other playing? If it is a game, then consider it as such and enjoy it. Is there something there isn't enough of that has to be fought for? If so, reassure that there is enough to go round (love, affection, money, communication, whatever).

4. Is there something one of you needs to know?

Upsets between people usually result from a failure of communication, very often one not knowing what is in the other person's mind, and therefore not acting accordingly. Work out what you don't know and get an answer; ask the other what they need to know and provide it.

5. Is something being kept back?

With the other person, work over the following questions as long as there is still anything to find on them. With somebody who has been a long relationship, that might be a LOT. What has (other) done that was hard for you to experience? What has (other) failed to say about that? What have you done that was hard for the other to experience? What have you failed to say about that?"

6. Lost the original excitement?

Go back to when you first got together and examine what you saw in each other, what was fun and exciting. Get all the details and particularly the feelings. If the other person is available, do it at the same time with closed eyes and arrange it so you see each other first thing when you open your eyes. Transfer the feelings to the present.

7. What have you learned?

Reframe the relationship as a learning experience. Find out what specifically each of you might have to learn from each other. Perhaps one person can do some things better, one can tolerate some things more easily, one can appreciate some things more readily. What do you have to learn from each other? What have you learned from each other?

8. What do you agree about?

Find out what you both actually agree on, what you see the same way, interests you have in common, stuff you have the same feelings or same reactions to. Come to realize how much common ground you have to build on.

9. Communication withheld?

What do you want to say to the person, but for some reason can't say or aren't saying? Why not? Imagine actually saying them to the other person, then do so out loud and imagine the reply. Then go ahead and say it. Allow the other freedom to be themselves.

10. Likes and dislikes?

What do you like about the other and what don't you like? Does the other person have to be perfect for you to like them? Are you perfect? Do either of you need to be perfect or would you rather be yourselves? What is unique about you and the other?

11. What's needed and wanted?

Ask each other what is needed and wanted from the other person. Honestly inquire what the other person actually wants. Not having any argument or discussion about it, but simply find out what it is the other side would like.

12. Talking honestly?

Get together and tell each other what you really want to say about each other. Try to keep to what is personally felt, how things are perceived from either end. No "You ..." statements allowed. Continue until you each learn to respect what the other person says and begin to have more understanding of each other.

13. Secrets?

Examine what each of you keep secret from each other. Secrets tend to build and make you grow further from each other. Find out what isn't being faced up to, what isn't being

taken responsibility for. Is there anything you would never say to the other? Do you have secrets from each other? Why?

14. Is there some co-dependence?

Each person needs to look at the responsibilities they have given up or areas they have withdrawn from by being in the relationship. For example, no longer maintaining friendships "because the other wouldn't like that." What does your relationship allow you not to deal with? Is this resented?

15. Are you making yourself right?

Look for fixed ideas about what is right. How do you think this relationship is supposed to be? What principle are you operating by? What piece of logic do you use? Is one of you making him or her self right by making the other wrong in some way?

16. Are you different?

What is similar between you and the other? What is different between you and the other? What qualities does one person have that the other is lacking? How can you make the most of these differences to complement each other rather than conflict?

17. Talking about yourself?

Turn the complaints you may have about the other person around as something you are really saying about yourself. Find the parts of yourself that match it. This is a very common phenomenon, that whatever one doesn't like or doesn't accept about somebody else is really what one does like or accept about oneself. One can't really change it in the other person, but one can change it in oneself, once one finds that part of oneself.

18. Are you allowing changes to occur?

Examine your willingness to let the other person change. Sometimes the different parties in a relationship try to keep the other person the same, or keep them in accord with their ideas and expectations. If the other person suddenly changes they don't like each other so much any more. That is not very useful, so increase the tolerance of change when you can. Find the underlying qualities you like about each other, but free up any fixedness about specific required behavior and circumstances. Consider: "What changes would you allow (other) to make?"

19. And in the future?

Visualize how you would like the relationship to be in the future. Check if that is really congruent, or if it is just an abstract dream. Backtrack it toward the present. How can you make that happen?

16. Reactive or Response-able

The opposite of being reactive is being response-able, i.e. responsible. When you are being responsible, you're thinking as well as feeling: you're experiencing your feelings but also conscious of what is rational and therefore not driven by emotion to act impulsively. This is an integration of left and right brain functions. As you become free from reactive (stimulus-response) behavior then to that degree you know that you are also free to be spontaneous, because you know that will incorporate responsibility.

Responsibility also allows you to maintain your self-worth, despite anything another person might say about you. The thoughts and feelings of others no longer drag you into a pit of self-doubt. You will see all sorts of new options and choices in your dealings with other people because your perspective and your sense of reason are not being buried by emotions. Taking responsibility for your mind, puts back into your hands a good deal of control over your life.

When another or others continue to attempt to manipulate and dominate, you can then stay calm and refuse to be stampeded: then you retain the power. For example by responding non-defensively, this breaks the cycle of attack-retreat-defense-escalation. The moment you argue, apologize, explain, or try to get them to change their minds, you give them the power to withhold the understanding that you are asking them for. One can instead say, "That's an interesting point of view," or "I shall consider that as one option." It is also necessary to assert one's position in a matter-of-fact manner, without worrying about upsetting them, but without any hostility or embarrassment: "I'm happy to let you stay for a specified, limited time."

One's response to this approach may be to say, "I just don't think I can stand up to (him or her)." But instead of saying "I can't," reframe your statement in the form: "I haven't yet stood up to my parents." "Haven't yet" implies choice, whereas "don't" and "can't" imply the opposite: finality. Similarly, "I mustn't" or "I shouldn't" can be reframed as: "I could choose not to." "I should" or "I must" can be reframed: "I could choose to." There is a big difference between choosing to capitulate to another because you've considered the alternatives and decided that you're not prepared to make a change at this moment, and automatically capitulating because you feel helpless. Making a choice means taking a step toward control; knee-jerk reacting means backsliding into being controlled.

We cannot accept responsibility for everything that occurs and sometimes our choices have no bearing on a particular outcome. There is always an interaction between what some may call their fate (or their genes, environment, etc.) and their decisions. Many people are affected by the behavior of others; complete self-control is a rarity. Certainly, events sometimes overwhelm us. If my girlfriend has an affair with another man, and I feel quite miserable at this loss, it would be difficult, at least initially, to me

to choose to feel differently. It does me little good to tell myself that I have made a choice to be miserable and could just as easily be happy. To be upset is a normal and rational reaction to my girlfriend's behavior.

What I am responsible for, however, is if I choose to dwell on her behavior, to berate myself, maybe condemn her for her choice of partner, or to plague myself with thoughts of her actions for months to come - then I will have chosen to continue in a destructive pattern of behavior, to adopt the stance of victim, which will result in my continuing misery.

On the other hand, I may choose to see things differently, to apply a different meaning to what has happened, to value the experience for the positive lessons it brings me. I may not be able to change the past but I can certainly alter what it means to me. My interpretation of events is my choice and responsibility.

By understanding how easily reactive responses can take over one's behavior you will find yourself not taking personal offense when others behave in their own way; you can see that they are just dramatizing the problems and conflicts in their own heads. Enlightenment always leads to understanding, empathy and improved communication, in short, love.

17. The Why & the Lie

Most fixed ideas that we cling to - even though they don't really hold up under rational inspection - were originally made for what seemed to be sensible reasons.

These are some general questions that can be used to weed out fixed ideas:

1. "What things do you say to put others in their place?"
2. "Do you have ways of dominating others?"
3. "Are there any ideas that make you feel safer?"
4. "Are there things about which you are sure you are right?"
5. "How do you prevent anybody else from getting the upper hand?"
6. "What ideas and beliefs do you firmly consider to be true?"
7. "What ideas are constantly with you in your life?"
8. "What things in your life would you not be willing to change?"
9. "What principles do you use in dealing with other people?"
10. "What are your principles for evaluating things?"
11. "What don't you want to get involved in? Why?"
12. "What don't you like? Why?"
13. "What is an acceptable level of activity? Why?"
14. "What bothers you about others? Why?"
15. "What routines do you follow in day to day life? Why?"
16. "Is there anything you do to prove you are better?"
17. "What do you use to make people feel sorry for you?"
18. "What weaknesses have you shown to get people to do things for you?"
19. "What must people think of you for you to feel alright about yourself?"
20. "What ways do you get people to pay attention to you?"

Some of the possible "Whys" follow:

- To solve a problem?
- To solve a conflict?
- To fill a scarcity?
- To fulfill a need?
- To getting rid of something?
- To suppress?
- To cover up?
- To falsify?
- To bypass?
- To avoid?
- To make fail?

To inhibit?
To invalidate?
To destroy?
To escape?
To enforce?
To influence?
To gain admiration?
To gain recognition?
To gain an acknowledgment?
To gain sympathy?
To obtain agreement?
To increase communication?
To be able to understand?
To please someone?
To resolve confusing thoughts?
To resolve a painful feeling?
Because you couldn't grasp something?
Based on an earlier assumption?
Based on a misunderstanding?
Based on an uncertainty?
Because of an injustice?
Something that can't be faced up to?
Somebody else's evaluation?
Because of an invalidation?
A failed effort to help?
A failed attempt to control?
An effort to resist change?
As a withdrawal?
Trying to give something up?
Because of a something judged to be wrong?
Because of something held back or kept secret?
Because a justification was felt necessary?
As a game?
As a challenge?
To get revenge?
As punishment?
Because it seemed a good idea?
Because you went along with something?
Because you noticed something?
Because you accepted something?
Something Else?

If you can clearly see a truth, then it no longer sticks in the mind. A fixed idea is based on some sort of untruth, something that's not being seen clearly, some resistance. That which is resisted tends to persist, as attention sticks on it, even if subconsciously. So the next step in clearing fixed ideas is to locate the "Lie" - what was untrue that resulted in the above Why being perceived? Was it based on one of the following factors?

Wrong evaluation? A changed sequence of events? Cross orders?
 Wrong sequence? Copying another? Incorrectly included data?
 Wrong time? Admiration for the originator? An assumption?
 Omitted time? Sympathy with something? A presumption?
 An over-generalization? Thinking "always" or "never"?
 Something inaccurate? A wrong source of information?
 A misperception? A self-invalidation? A threat?
 Omitted facts? An altered importance? A wrong target?
 An added falsehood? Contrary facts? The wrong place identified?
 Something Else?

The basic idea is that if one feels confused, then one will try to find an idea that helps to clarify things, so one can then move out of the confused state. But if one chooses a wrong explanation, because one hasn't realized it has faulty logic, then the idea does not resolve the confusion. One holds on to it anyway as some sort of solution and continue to see the world through this distorted filter.

Try working through the Why and Lie lists above. Provide several examples - from your own experience or imagination - of each item in the lists. Then do this in combination, i.e. the why and then the lie. Also note that a further why and lie may undercut the first pair, i.e. these may go in chains.

Nobody said the mind wasn't complicated. That's why it sticks there - unraveling that labyrinth of lies helps you to see the underlying truth, which on the contrary is always simple and aligned with love, the nature of your being. Bon voyage!

18. Turning Problems Into Challenges

The mark of a successful individual is not whether or not they have problems, it is whether or not they have the same problems they had last year! In other words, do they understand problems? And are they solving them? Or are they just worrying and fretting and doing nothing?

Everybody has problems. Whenever we have a goal, there are barriers to achieving that goal - otherwise it would be too easy and no fun. The goal blocked by the barrier is a problem. Overcoming the barrier and attaining the goal is the game of life. This is also called problem solving. Without problems as challenges, life would be boring indeed! Problems are the essence of life. Difficulties arise when you are at the effect of a problem - when a problem has you, not when you have a problem. Then you experience stress and worry.

When a problem has you, you don't realize that you are creating it. You don't know that you, and only you, have to do something about the problem - that is, if you want to solve it. You are waiting for something to happen or someone else to solve the problem for you, or for it to fizzle out. You aren't looking clearly, facing up to the reality, seeing the truth and therefore being able to solve the problem. And it isn't fun. This is also called not taking responsibility and being at effect.

When you have a problem, you know that you made it because you wanted something - you have a goal - and there are always barriers to attaining every goal. So you have a goal opposed by a barrier - a problem! So you know you have to do something about the problem - to overcome the barriers and move forward toward the goal. And you have to do it (no one else can). And you are doing it! You are solving the problem. And it's fun! This is also called taking responsibility and being at cause.

There are always problems in life. The question is are you going to have problems or are problems going to have you? Better to let your problems become challenges, a game you can enjoy.

First you need to identify the problems in your life and there are inevitably lots of them! The following technique will help you identify some problems that you may not even be aware of, perhaps because you have just got so accustomed to them...

Practice

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are you doing in your life that you want to do?"
2. "What are you not-doing in your life that you want to do?" In other words, what do you wish you were doing and are nevertheless not doing?
3. "What are you doing in your life that you do not want to be doing?"
4. "What are you not doing in your life that you indeed do not want to do?"

Question 4 identifies those things that a person really does not want to do and therefore is not making a part of his life. For example, he does not want to work for somebody else, and in this way he limits his options.

Ask yourself these questions until you have run out of answers.

Now look at what you've got. The answers that you have written down for questions 2 and 3 are the problem areas of your life. Question 4 may also represent an unresolved problem. With this data - hopefully an increased clarity on your situation - you will be able to take action on the real underlying source of the problems.

Note: If lack of energy is a problem, realize that you can promote mental fitness by becoming physically fit, and exercise gives you more energy not less. Also, you can talk yourself into exhaustion; most people are about as tired as they make up their minds to be.

If you have practical problems, take action to resolve the problem, rather than worry and complain about things. Most problems have simple solutions: you can lose weight by eating less, you can stop smoking by simply stopping. Simple enough but not easy to do, otherwise you would have done it already.

To resolve the impasse you need to look at the counter-intention that is holding you back. I like eating and I like smoking, yes, but why? Normally the why is unmet needs, that the compulsion has become a substitute for. What is not being confronted here? Look for the real underlying problem and sort that out first. Try to gain more clarity about it, to identify your thought-distortions that have been making the problem seem more of a barrier than it actually is.

Then what is required is intentional daily effort, focused toward a goal that you genuinely feel is worthwhile. Observe yourself in the process and when you become distracted bring yourself back on task. Refocus and begin again.

When you are working toward a goal, something that you want to achieve, it helps greatly to do two things. Firstly, to get a very clear picture in your mind of where you are going, and what it will be like when you get there. Feel it with all your senses, as if you have already achieved it.

Secondly, measure your progress, not by how far you still have to go to reach that target, but instead, how far you have already come. Realize how important your first steps are. Keep doing that and you will get there.

19. Difficult Times

When painful events happen in life, such as losing a job, breakdown of a relationship, illness or when one fails at an important task, this is naturally distressing. Like the pain we feel when we fall to the ground, it is a reality of life that we need to accept, then pick ourselves up and continue a little wiser.

Because of the pain, we may be tempted to avoid the reality of life through resistance and denial. Something bad happens, and we look the other way. We pretend that we don't have a problem when we do - "It's not my problem the sales figures have collapsed," "I'm not upset she's left, good riddance." But the problem doesn't just go away, and neither do our suppressed feelings - they build up and fester inside, causing anxiety, tension, depression, and a host of stress-related problems. The emotional energy these suppressed feelings create eventually drives you to behave in ways you don't like or understand, and which you cannot control.

Another way of avoiding reality is through exaggeration. This is when you make the situation out to be worse than it is, to justify your resistance. Whenever anything mildly unpleasant happens, you start imagining all the bad possibilities of what may go wrong, as if they were real and already happening. So of course you cannot face up to this and you 'blow up' or lose your temper to relieve the pressure of the accumulated emotions. This can feel good because it puts the feeling into action - but it doesn't change the reality of the situation that you are still not confronting.

A third common way to cope with feelings is by attempting to avoid the issue altogether by attending instead to distractions - by talking, watching TV, eating, smoking, drinking, taking drugs, having sex, etc. But despite our attempts to escape them, the real issue and our feelings about it are still there - and still take their toll in the form of stress.

But there is another option for handling a feeling - you can focus on it, fully experience it, and then let go of it: release it, discharge it, as we described in lesson 10. Release requires acceptance; acceptance occurs when we no longer resist - no longer look at things in terms of black and white, no longer judge. When we tap into our capacity for unconditional love, including love for ourselves.

Whenever you are experiencing any kind of discomfort, you are resisting the fact that some person, situation, or thing is the way it is. You may be doing so unconsciously and automatically, but nonetheless, all suffering, all discomfort, all pain, comes from not allowing what is to be what it is. If you could be totally nonresistant to what is, life would flow easily and happily, without discomfort, no matter what the external circumstances.

This does not mean you can't take action in order to make things different. It just means that when faced with something that is the way it is, and cannot be changed, you do not, as a result, suffer over it.

Do what you can to create what you want, but don't become attached to the outcome; that way your level of well-being can remain the same, regardless of the outcome. Your happiness comes from inside, not from what does or does not happen around you.

When you want to change yourself or help others to change, you need to gather information, the noticeable parts of a problem, the symptoms one is uncomfortable with. This is the present state.

There will also be a desired state: an outcome that is the goal of change. There will be the resources that will help to achieve this outcome and also side effects to reaching it, for oneself and others. There will of course be the barriers and difficulties. But if it is a worrisome problem and not simply an interesting challenge, there will also be underlying reasons that create it as a problem: what does the person keep having to do that maintains the problem, and why? What is not being faced up to? These causes are inevitably to do with resistance, the denial or exaggeration of a reality, and the suppression of accompanying emotions.

The element of conflict is intrinsic to problems and the trick of solving them is to be able to spot the counter element to one's own intention, and to recognize that one does indeed have a causative contribution to the situation, otherwise it would not be intention versus counter-intention - a problem! The 'solution' to the problem is simply a realization of the structure of the problem itself. To accept and no longer resist the honest truth of the reality of the situation. To recognize the denial or exaggeration that has been going on, and the emotional attachment to an outcome. The emotional charge or confusion of the problem will then drop away, and appropriate actions may be taken.

The amount a person suffers in their life is directly related to how much they are resisting the fact that "things are the way they are," because they are not as they are "supposed to be." Attachment to things being different than they are needs to be "upgraded" to a preference. This means that when "what is" is not what you want, you do not suffer over it (get angry, sad, fearful, anxious, and so on), and your happiness and peace are therefore not controlled by forces outside of your control. You then have the clarity needed to much better be able to actually improve the situation.

Practical

As you go about your day, notice when you are feeling resistance or feel that what is happening is not acceptable to you. Then switch your viewpoint to: "I'd prefer it to be different but I can accept this as a starting point, really it's OK." See what you learn about yourself and if it actually empowers you to be both happier and more effective.

20. Self-Remembering

How do you become conscious of your Self - that is, your true or spiritual self, rather than just your inner speech and the voices in your head replayed from the past? Direct conscious effort is necessary. You become more conscious just by asking yourself, "What am I conscious of right now?" Also, "What feelings am I creating right now?" These expose that our actions, and the emotions that drive them, actually relate to self-talk, largely compulsive thinking, often just below the level of consciousness. The talk and belief system of the particular identity we are adopting.

Just asking these questions will make you temporarily conscious, but probably you will not be able to keep it going, your mind will become absorbed in something else and you will forget yourself. You must realize during your self-observation that you are present, that you are here, in the present moment. As you persist in self-remembering, your moments of consciousness as Self will become increasingly longer and you will forget your Self increasingly less.

What do you observe? Begin by watching your actions, reactions, responses and behavior. Be like 'another person' looking at your human mind in operation. At first this will be very difficult to do but as you practice, it will become progressively easier and eventually stable.

Continue by observing your posture, listening to your speech, observing how much you talk, listening to the tone of your voice, i.e. the 'way' you say something. Observe how you automatically assume certain attitudes with some people, and different attitudes with others, i.e. how you (normally) unconsciously switch identities and play different roles with different people. Watch all of your emotions, observe your mind wandering aimlessly in pure fantasy. Observe how certain words by certain people trigger reactions in you that you (normally) cannot control. Watch your defense mechanisms, your justifications, your rationalizations, your pet superstitions, your favorite criticisms, and so forth. You are now starting to become conscious of your unconsciousness, and thereby bringing it into consciousness.

Normally people erroneously assume that they are constantly one and the same person. However, as you begin to observe yourself, you find this is not true. You assume many different 'I's and each 'I' manifests itself as a role that you play corresponding to one set of conditions, i.e. you assume different roles with different people and in different circumstances. One role with your parents, another with your children, a loved one, at the corner store, at the theater, in sports, under stress, when threatened, when praised, when jilted, and so on. You seldom, if ever, notice these differences or how you pass from one role to another. The change of roles or 'personality masks' is always controlled by circumstances, rather than you self-determinedly choosing an appropriate way of

being. It is the unconsciousness or compulsion that we are trying to expose. Freely adopting appropriate ways of being, for example, to match the reality of the people you are with or the game you are playing, is a necessary social skill and all part of the fun and variety of life.

The illusion of 'oneness' or belief that you are always the same is created by always having the sensation of one physical body, the same name, the same physical habits and so forth; and also by the illusion that each identity is right. After all, you are always 'right', aren't you? And the same rightness - your safe solution to the circumstances you are in - gives the illusion of the same identity.

By self-observation, you will catch yourself lying. Lying occurs when you pretend to know something when in actuality you do not. People pretend to possess all kinds of knowledge: about themselves, about God, about life and death, about the universe, about evolution, about politics, about sex, about everything. In fact, people do not even know who or what they are. Even when he or she has no choice and is controlled in life like 'a reed in the wind', a person will lie to himself that he is self-willed, knows himself and is in control of his destiny. You imagine these things to please yourself, and shortly after you begin to believe them.

As you self-observe, you find that you identify with everything - you emotionalize 24 hours a day. Some people take pride in their irritability, anger or worry. It is extremely difficult to perceive that you actually enjoy negative emotions. Books, movies, TV and popular songs glorify negative emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, boredom, disgust, irritation, hatred, jealousy, suspicion, self-pity, sympathy, depression, etc. Many people are controlled by the expression of negative emotions. But negative emotions are purely mechanical - done without awareness or consciousness - and serve no useful purpose whatsoever. For example, it is hard to be angry or fearful when you are conscious, as to be conscious you naturally assume your true state of being, which is loving, without judgmental qualification.

Negative emotions and all habits require 'identification' or they cease to exist. Thus when you cease to identify, by self-remembering, your habits will drop away - they have been exposed. You have differentiated yourself from them. Habits cannot be stopped by willpower, they can only be erased by self-knowledge.

Religious doctrines like the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule are therefore quite impossible for the normal human being to follow. Habits of mechanicalness will always cause people to violate codes of law and moral rules. Only self-knowledge can direct you to living the 'right life' and you will not need written rules, codes or

commandments, you will function intuitively and spontaneously, naturally from Love. This is true freedom without license.

A major self-imposed problem is to identify with objects (including people) and in turn become 'possessed' by them. Since things wear out, decay and die, a person becomes bereaved whenever he loses the objects of his affection. This goes further, he begins to regard himself as a 'thing' which must eventually wear out, decay and die.

Identification with people occurs when you constantly worry what people will think about you, if you are liked or disliked, what someone else will do or say in a given situation, and so on. This can quickly become an obsession of worry, doubt, suspicion, blame, resentment and guilt feelings. Emotion of this sort is the main factor that keeps the spiritual being attached and unaware in a fixed identification with the human body-mind.

A primary cause of identification occurs when a harmful action is deliberately or accidentally committed, or a good deed omitted, and the resulting sympathy causes an identification with the victim. The compulsion to make self right, then causes a reversal of this, sometimes almost immediately, and the victim is made wrong, and the act is considered deserved. But the sympathy identification, though suppressed, continues to have effect subconsciously. One is then caught in an internal conflict of identification.

The only reason we humans aren't at peace within ourselves is because we've gotten caught up in the erroneous belief that things must be "right or wrong." This creates judgment, which creates guilt. The usual human response to guilt is projection - putting it onto the other - in an attempt to get rid of the guilt. This, of course, doesn't work, but it does start wars and keeps people from feeling peaceful. If we stop seeing things through the eyes of the right vs. wrong comparison, we stop judging and stop trying to justify our negative feelings and actions. We stop wars and feel peace.

You should know that: no-one can effect you but your own thinking; it is your own mind that keeps you in bondage; no-one can ever make you angry but your own thoughts; all anguish is self-inflicted and self-imposed; no-one can make you worry but yourself.

It is impossible to do anything to you - the actual You - at any time; it is always your beliefs and decisions that affect you. Thus only you suffer from holding grudges, hatreds, resentments or revengefulness. No-one has ever affected you but your own thoughts. No-one has caused you to be frightened, angry, hurt or happy but your own mind, because if you didn't identify in your own mind with what was said or done to you, you would not have been affected in the least. This is one of the most difficult

facets of existence to perceive, but once perceived, its worth becomes priceless. Understanding this is the way to ultimate freedom.

Practical

Go back over today's events and relive as many experiences as you can remember. Take each memory separately and see that it was your own thinking that caused you to feel hurt, happy, angry and so forth. Keep re-feeling the experience until you free everyone in the scene of responsibility for affecting you. Then reverse the process, and be sure that you yourself do not assume responsibility for another's feelings because in like manner, it was their identification in their mind with what you said or did that affected them and not you.

The Gnosis or knowledge you release (for you always knew it) will not immediately make you more comfortable or secure. In fact, it is painful at times, because you will be aware of your false identities, your facades, your defense mechanisms, your silliness, your viciousness, and your primitive self, perhaps for the first time. But persist for you are recovering a genuine identity that no-one can take away from you. Your security and comfort will gradually be found in your change from a pseudo-self to a permanent harmonious Self that is objective and unlimited in scope. This is the way to higher consciousness and higher powers of mind.

The following exercises will help you to become more self-aware and to live more consciously...

Exercise 1

This first exercise is a pleasurable and powerful life changing tool. The effects of daily stress associated with materialistic obsession (and its by-products: anxiety, isolation, frustration, fear, anger and depression) can be dissolved by this technique. It is at the same time simple and very profound. It is the smile-at-the world exercise. It increases greatly the vibratory rate of your non-physical Higher Self. Its premise is "smile at the world and the world will smile back at you."

As you go about your daily activities, from the moment you get up in the morning up to the the time that you go back to sleep, constantly imagine that you are smiling inwardly at your outer reality as you go about your daily activities. Imagine that you are smiling from the deeper recesses of your mind, originating from within your heart area, and that you are projecting that happiness and smile outward through your eyes and expression. No matter what the circumstances are.

You will find that your eyes will be constantly smiling and so will your mouth, that will often curl up to a slight smile. Keep focusing constantly on that act until it becomes automatic and second nature to you.

At the same time imagine that your heart constantly expresses a great inward smile filled with pure joy of being alive, no matter what. Notice how people will seek your presence and 'Inner Love.' After 2 weeks or so, you will notice an incredible amount of changes, not only in the way you interact with the 'outside' world, but also in how the 'world' acts and projects reality toward you. Your fears will begin to abate and an inner feeling of peace and love will emerge. Fear will stop having a grip upon you. Done for regular periods of 3 weeks at a time this exercise alone can change anyone's life dramatically at all levels.

Exercise 2

The second exercise is titled the "going in and out of movies" exercise. All you need to do is to choose a good suspenseful motion picture and go watch it, preferably on a big screen.

First, allow yourself to get immersed in the captivating story. As you forget about your identity and start becoming 'within' the plot of the scene, suddenly withdraw your awareness from the big screen (you may for the first time want to look a bit around you in the dark in order to remember 'who you are') and become the observer of reality again. Slowly reconnect to the plot, but this time, allow yourself to remain with the awareness of being yourself watching, as a spectator (observer), the reality projected in the movie. Keep this dual awareness for a moment and then let go and plunge within the movie action, forgetting your real inner self again. And then repeat the exercise over and over.

Keep on doing this mental withdrawal and then plunging in again, until you get to know intimately the feeling of withdrawing from 'reality' (aware of inner self) and diving back in it (aware of outer reality). Easy isn't it? Trust me, this simple exercise is very powerful.

As you get the knack of it try the same system as you go about your daily life. Use the same "mental trick" when engaged in your daily activities, especially the very ones that captivate you and are often associated with fear and stress. Soon, you will become aware at all times of being the 'observer' (inner self) observing the observed (reality and outer self) and become quite detached about it, enjoying your 'movie' in a much more relaxed and calm atmosphere.

Exercise 3

Set aside 5 minutes at first (keep increasing by 2-3 minutes every other day until you reach 20 minutes) and close your eyes. Turn your attention inward and, from being a 'thinking' human being, start viewing your thoughts as an independent observer in a detached remote manner, almost as if your thoughts were to be 'things' or a spectacle to watch. Watch the train of your thoughts and images, the succession of often unrelated thoughts that appear to you. Don't analyze anything.

For the next part of the exercise learn, as in the 'movies' exercise above, to switch from the perception of being 'in' your thoughts to withdrawing from them and becoming the detached totally passive observer of them. Get the feeling for the mental shift that occurs when doing so. Go within the thoughts and then withdraw to a more detached level. After a while of repeating this exercise you will notice that your thoughts become more isolated and that your inner mind starts taking a break.

Now, here is the third part of the exercise. As you watch your train of thought (visions or just thoughts), pick up one particular thought that you find interesting and "plunge into it" with full concentration. Remain focused on that thought to the exclusion of others for as long as possible. If other thoughts interfere, do not push them away, but watch them pass by as if they were foreign 'things' in your consciousness. At first you might only be able to do this for maybe 1 minute or less. Slowly increase it up to 7 minutes.

The last part of the exercise consists of deciding to blank your thoughts out. This is done by deciding to concentrate on perceptually dark nothingness. If a thought comes in, imagine throwing white light on it. Imagine that the light dissolves that thought and that the screen then goes back to nothingness. Try to maintain that state up to 5 minutes. Start with 1-2 minutes.

21. Why People Behave As They Do

In this lesson I'm going to describe the way the mind works, so as to understand why people behave the way they do. If we understand that, then we can look at our own motives and start to see where we are coming from.

Actions felt to be wrong and the need to withhold knowledge of them from others, is the source of both guilt and hostility. If one has been unable to resolve a problem satisfactorily one may feel 'forced' to commit an action one feels badly about. We can become quite disturbed if we feel we have done something cruel or unfair to another, particularly if this is something we then have to hide, and even more so if someone nearly finds out about it. We are then likely to rationalize our action, to justify it and find reasons why the act was deserved and indeed not wrong after all.

We are being judgmental of ourselves (rather than learning the lessons of our experience) and then we project that, anticipating that others will be equally judgmental.

A satisfying relationship with another person requires good communication, mutual understanding and empathy. If there is a significant drop in one of these factors, e.g. we disagree and have an argument, then an upset ensues - we aren't speaking to one another anymore. An upset occurs when there is a sudden departure from what is wanted or expected - an unwanted change or break in the relationship. Such upsets inevitably have emotional consequences; a poorer relationship causes a drop in emotional tone. People can equally have upsets with objects or situations if there is a reduction of control or understanding, e.g. I can get upset if my car breaks down or if I suddenly get ill.

Your feeling of control over situations may be disturbed if someone evaluates the circumstances differently from you, and particularly if they enforce that upon you, saying what you should or must do or not do. An invalidation of what you have done or of your capability, may equally cause disturbance.

Accompanying these factors are the decisions that have been made in the face of stressful situations and anxiety, and which have become fixed ideas and serve as defense mechanisms. It is emotional pain, or the threat of such pain, that holds distorted ideas in place. It is at times of upset or disturbance that we particularly grasp hold of our fixed ideas and beliefs in order to protect ourselves, to justify our actions (even if we secretly feel bad about them), and to make ourselves feel OK. We may feel the need to make another wrong - to manipulate, or give our own evaluations and criticisms of the other person - in order to feel more right ourselves.

When a person does something he feels to be wrong, he can either take responsibility or - and this is the norm unfortunately - he can make himself right in the situation, rationalize to justify his action so that he begins to believe it wasn't actually wrong but justified. Self right, the other wrong. It's a human need 'to be right' but not a very aware one (the aware view is not to make right or wrong). This justification provides a motive for the action and is expressed most commonly as criticism of the one who was originally wronged. It is a 'child' viewpoint as opposed to a responsible 'adult' one.

Any person is of the opinion that he is "right" in what he believes - otherwise he wouldn't believe it. But he can have all sort of misconceptions, misinterpretations, false data and delusions, and be holding fast onto them in order to be right. The fundamental considerations of his belief system, the things that have made sense of past confusions for him, are not changeable by reasoning alone because they are held in place by force - by an unwillingness or inability to confront certain things.

All defense mechanisms are forms of lying. They misrepresent the truth, both to ourselves and others. Gurdjieff was insistent that most people lie, most of the time. That they do not know they are lying makes their situation even worse. When you know you are deliberately lying, your perception of reality is probably adequate. When you identify with the lying and experience the lie as truth, when you deceive yourself, your perception has become very distorted.

Frequently, we pretend to know a truth that we cannot know. People adopt the habit of speaking about things they cannot know, as though they know all about them, e.g. of what other people's motivations and feelings are - in fact, much is imaginary. Man starts to imagine something in order to please himself, and very soon he begins to believe what he imagines, or at least some of it.

Sometimes we lie to avoid our more essential and higher natures. We may tell ourselves and others, 'Everybody does it, it doesn't mean anything', when something in us knows quite well we have not lived up to our true nature: the integrity of our loving, and causative and responsible self.

Four manifestations demonstrate to man his basic mechanicalness, when they are reactively engaged in: lying, delusion, negative emotions and compulsive talking. They happen so quickly, so habitually and so imperceptibly, that one cannot notice them, and one does not want to notice them because they are defense mechanisms.

Suppression, invalidation and not acknowledging are self-lies, used to submerge the truth, to keep it subconscious, to maintain the status quo, to avoid confronting reality or one's true feelings. They are defense mechanisms, used unconsciously, habitually,

automatically - attached to anything we don't want to emerge, to look at or know about: the unacceptable. They may be feelings that are opposed or held down by our most strongly held convictions. If a feeling or desire is triggered that is too uncomfortable, then we distance ourselves from it, we disown it - 'It wasn't me, it wasn't mine' - we identify with some other aspect of ourselves, a sub-personality that daren't have such feelings or desires.

Projection is another defense - when an unacceptable feeling or desire comes up, it is labeled 'this is what someone else feels, needs or wants', such as the person over there. It's disowned and passed to the other person, unknowingly, due to reactive, subconscious suggestions from the past, which make the feeling unacceptable for oneself.

Rationalization is substituting a plausible and acceptable rationale for the unacceptable feeling. With this protective device, a lie is covered up with a reason. The mind rationalizes away failures, finds excuses why you should not do something. We lie to ourselves, and we have the audacity to believe it!

Rationalization frequently occurs when an action is felt to be wrong, either because it is not considered acceptable by others, or because we ourselves would not like to experience the effect that we caused. We cover up our feeling by intellect: we justify our action by finding a motive. Then our behavior becomes the other's fault and instead of feeling affinity, we are now in opposition and may therefore withdraw. After this break in relations the motive may then be used to make ourselves right and the other wrong, and this 'computation' may become fixed in our mind as a way of handling people and the world - a defense mechanism used unconsciously (without inspection of the new reality) to aid survival.

In effect the lower state of being that is withdrawn to, becomes a safe solution - a way of continuing toward our original goals and survival, without having to face opposition previously encountered.

Adopting another identity, viewpoint, idealization or fixed idea for its survival value, its ability to make you right or OK and another wrong or not OK, are such safe solutions. They are a view of things that was at one time in the past, felt to be of service in survival. When the solution is used reactively, without inspection in the present time, it is unlikely to be based on the truth of a current situation, or to be fair or rational behavior, and this is extremely prevalent in all our transactions and thinking.

At any time your attention may become fixed on one of these factors: a disagreement or unacceptable reality, involving breakdowns in communication, understanding or

empathy in your relationship with another; on a current problem and 'ways to get around it'; on something you have done about which you feel shame or guilt and that you are afraid may be found out; on an evaluation someone is making affecting your free choice; on an invalidation you are receiving that affects you.

These are factors that cause compulsions and inhibitions, that prevent you from being stably in the present, living consciously. Life is serious, solid, heavy. Thinking is "them and us", based on compulsive rightness of identity - safe solutions to unresolvable problems. Games are stuck and unknowing. One is unhappy and at effect, at least in the area of one's true goals. One is stuck in fixed identities and failed purposes - one no longer knows who one is. And all of this is 'normal' for most of us.

The only way that I know of to resolve this impasse is through examining what is with ruthless honesty. Used with integrity, the tools presented in this series of articles and in more in-depth courses (for example, those that I offer with personal support including 'The New Life Course' and 'The Insight Project') can help one to see, bit by bit, the truths underlying our mental distortions. One may gain understanding, and the ability to live consciously, to be one's true self, in those areas where one had shut off one's vision.

By increasing understanding one is increasing awareness of truth, and then in life one needs to actually face that reality with equanimity and take responsibility. Without actually putting our insight into action, it soon tends to be forgotten and the body-mind programming (the habit patterns of many years) take over again. Without such integrity of application, even extensive work on ourselves can become a charade.

However, it certainly is possible to regain causation in life. One is motivated to complete cycles of action because one has recovered one's true identity and is aware of one's own goals. What were previously heavy and serious problems are now games to enjoy. One is truly happy with renewed purposes in life. Others are not enemies but either team mates or competition, who make the game more interesting and from whom one can learn - from what they do right and what they do wrong. Without fixed rightnesses, one too can learn both from things that go right and from one's mistakes. Life, love and truth become one's operating basis.

The way I see it, all experience is for learning, and when you've learned the lesson that experience offers then you can move on. Provided you have learned the lesson, and not got serious/solid/heavy about it and justified your ego - otherwise it haunts you till you have really learned the lesson (which is karma). Your actions remain to haunt you until you have learned their lesson.

One way to look at your situation is that "life is a game" and if you can see it like that, then problems disappear - you're left with challenges to meet, but not with the seriousness that causes stress and worry - you feel at cause rather than at effect. The stupidities of this world don't go away but one can see them in a different light. And you are more powerful and effective to act.

I realize how frustrating it sometimes is when you are aware of the discrepancy of what you can be and what you are being (many people of course are not aware of that or hide it from themselves). The answer for me, and the most workable answer that I am aware of, is to work on becoming more conscious in each moment of your day, to notice and revise your belief structure that causes this discrepancy. Your map of the world. It's not easy but it is a game in itself and therefore can be immensely rewarding. In particular notice when you make yourself right or another wrong, as this kind of egotistic thinking is a flag for the deeper identity issues of your belief structure.

22. False Beliefs

When our minds immediately come up with negative or irrational thoughts in response to situations, and we then respond emotionally (often inappropriately and self-defeatingly were we to look objectively at the situation), these thoughts are based on deeper-lying beliefs or assumptions about ourselves, others, and situations. While growing up we learned these beliefs from our parents, teachers and peers, as well as from other authority figures, and we may have absorbed such beliefs from the conditioning of the media - TV and films, song lyrics, and so on. You may have been told "Big boys don't cry," "Nice girls don't get angry," or learned "It's risky to trust people," "It's very hard to be alone"... the possible list is endless.

You may have developed an attitude about yourself as a result of being frequently criticized (thus "I'm worthless"), ignored (thus "My needs don't matter"), or rejected (thus "I'm not worthy of being loved.") You may then "live out" these false beliefs to the point where you act in ways that confirm them, and then others treat you accordingly. Like computers, individuals become "programmed" and the false beliefs we hold become self-fulfilling prophecies.

The most powerful false beliefs are those we adopted as a result of some painful experience. Even if true for then, such beliefs become false in the present as our situation is different now and we have the power of choice we may not have felt we had then. If we expose and re-evaluate such beliefs then the power that past traumatic experiences hold over us will immediately dissipate.

Our core beliefs are typically so basic to our thinking that we do not recognize them as beliefs at all, we just take them for granted and assume them to reflect reality. They are our map of the world. We actually absorb such beliefs into our identity.

Based on false beliefs we may make ourselves anxious by anticipating the worst, we may put ourselves down, and try to meet unreasonable expectations. For example, if you assume "I must worry about a problem before there's any chance of it being resolved" then you'll worry much more than another person who doesn't hold that assumption. If you believe "I'm nothing unless I succeed and others approve of me" then you will feel less confident and secure. Or if you believe "I must do things perfectly or there's no point in trying" then you'll get less done and be more stressed along the way.

The psychologist Nathaniel Brandon developed a technique called Sentence Completion, to help his clients uncover and communicate their true feelings, that previously were suppressed. This denial of feelings and true wishes or desires occurs because of fear that acting on them or communicating them will bring scorn or ridicule

- in short, will upset the apple cart. But to continue suppressing what one truly wants is to die inside, to lose integrity.

Practical

Try completing the following sentences, with as much honesty and frankness as you can muster. Get it all out, then in each case look for the underlying belief that drives that feeling.

I am a person who ...

One of the things I'd like people to know about me is ...

One of the things I don't want people to know about me is ...

One of the things I have to do to survive is ...

All my life, I ...

It isn't easy for me to admit ...

Sometimes I feel frustrated when ...

If I didn't care what people thought, I would ...

Ever since I was a child, I ...

If I knew I could not fail I would attempt to...

If I were to communicate all this to my (partner/friend/family/colleague) then ...

Just recognizing your own particular false beliefs is the first and most important step toward letting go of them, to de-programming yourself. Next you need to re-evaluate your deeply-held belief and see if you'd like to revise it - you can use these questions:

What is the evidence for this? Does this belief always hold true for me or just sometimes? Does this belief look at the whole picture, taking into account all of my life experience? Does this belief promote my well-being? Did I choose this belief on my own or did I adopt it because of another's influence? Was it a particular experience that lead me to adopt this belief? What new belief can I adopt to better serve me?

23. The Power of Affirmations

We frequently resolve to change our behavior for the better, to make a new start. We make affirmations: causative intentions. Here are some pointers about the limitations and potential power of affirmations...

Affirmations always work. Yes, whatever you positively think or visualize, you will focus on and therefore it will manifest.

For example: "I don't want to be poor."

Assumption: "I am poor."

Focus: "Poverty."

Result: Thinking about poverty, and being in the identity of a poor person. So the affirmation worked, but not in the way you intended.

Maybe this should be re-phrased in the positive? For example: "I want to be rich."

Assumption: "I am not rich." Who wants what they already have? Want implies not having.

Focus: Poverty.

Result: Not being rich.

So we have learned it is better to phrase in the present, not future. Don't use "want" and similar words. Perhaps this makes a better affirmation: "I am rich"? But if you are rich, then this does not work because if you are rich then of course you've already attained being rich. If you aren't rich, it is a lie. Therefore, it doesn't work. There's got to be a better way...

How about: "Suppose I am rich"? Suppose you have everything that being rich means to you. Imagine that this is happening. See yourself in that situation. Then slip into that image of yourself and see and hear and feel what it is to experience being rich.

It works now, doesn't it? It is true, it does not imply or state an undesirable state and it is in the present. At least in your imagination you are rich - you have felt what it is like to be in that wealthy identity and that is a resource you can apply. You've changed your frame of mind and your view of the world has altered for the better. When you have a positive vision that is real to you and genuinely something that you want and identify with, then creative energies naturally flow toward that vision. This is powerful stuff!

Everything in our lives is created newly every time we experience it. Even if it is something we barely notice. Yet we are not aware of making these creative affirmations. There are so many of them that we would be overwhelmed if we had to think of them all. If we wish to break down a wall with a sledge hammer, then we need

to create the wall as well as the force to knock it down. We are creating a resistant wall and at the same time creating an opposing force. This may not be the wisest way to do things!

Using this as an analogy, when we are affirming something, even when we do so focusing on ability and being honest, we are making many other affirmations at the same time without being aware of them. We create a problem and try to create a strong enough force to overcome that problem - we can;t effectively use force to discover truth but we often try! We make an affirmation but subconsciously we are also creating hidden barriers or "counter-intentions" to that affirmation.

This counter-intention is probably something which we thought in the past was a means to keep us safe, or otherwise make our lives better. It might even be a simple negative thought which we decided at a time of stress and keep thinking unconsciously. Such counter-intentions could be ideas that our parents or our culture bombarded us with as a child and then these became habitual and out of our awareness.

When you are affirming a positive intention it is therefore very helpful to recognize the counter-intentions or hidden barriers that you are creating at the same time. What is connected with your affirmation that you are opposing, or disagreeing with, suppressing or trying to forget?

It is important that you perceive the positive intention (affirmation) as an outflowing creation that meets barriers (hidden counter-intentions), rather than perceiving your affirmation to be resisting or fighting an incoming opposing force.

When these barriers are seen in a clear light, you can then just let them go, or if necessary adjust your affirmation so there is no longer this inner conflict.

It is said that when affirming you should only use positive language and not (for example) "I will not overeat" because the mind will interpret that "positively" and you get the result "I will overeat"; so, why isn't negative self-talk like "I will never succeed" interpreted by the mind as "I will succeed" - why this "double standard"?

The answer is a bit complicated but worth understanding. The right brain, which determines our feelings and hence motivation/action (that the Universe then mirrors through the power of Spirit), interprets our thoughts in terms of the underlying (subconscious) true feelings and therefore doesn't discriminate between conscious acceptance or resistance.

It doesn't listen to a "not" or "never", that's a true observation, but more significantly it interprets based on actual beliefs (at the level of feelings) that are stimulated by the concept of what is being consciously thought - it picks up on what most closely corresponds to the subconscious belief/feeling.

"I will not overeat" is an affirmation based on the feeling that you really do want to eat a lot, so that's how it's interpreted - you really have acceptance of eating even though your conscious mind (left brain) is resisting that. The feeling of wanting to eat is stimulated by the affirmation, so you're more likely to eat more. "I will eat what I want" would be more empowering, as it doesn't conflict with the inner belief and gives you the power of choice.

Whereas, "I will never succeed" may be a deeply held belief, in which case it's accepted subconsciously even though consciously you are resisting that. If you use that as an affirmation it will directly stimulate that inner feeling and as a result you will be less likely to succeed - though if your inner feeling is in fact that "I will succeed", then both "I will succeed" and "I will never succeed" will stimulate that inner feeling of confidence. Say the negative one too much, though, and your inner belief/feeling of confidence of success may start to wane, so it's good advice to stay clear of negative affirmations! But using the affirmation "I will succeed" without first bringing to consciousness and re-evaluating an inner feeling that conflicts with it, will probably not be helpful because it is not really believed.

So the key issue is whether your affirmation is in alignment or conflicting with your deeply-held belief. That's the real reason why affirmations don't necessarily help but may indeed increase inner conflict and serve to suppress the inner belief rather than resolving it. When you have uncovered the inner belief and genuinely discovered it is false - not rational/helpful/true/your own - then using an affirmation can help to keep in the place the revised belief, and that's where affirmations are indeed very helpful.

24. Look in the Mirror

It is a psychological truth that we often see in others what we don't like about ourselves. When there is an aspect of ourselves that we find unacceptable it is human nature to hide it from ourselves, even to pretend the opposite, and instead project those feelings we have about ourselves onto others. It is easier to think that a friend is lazy than to accept we are lazy ourselves. We may even assume that another person is lazy even if there is no objective evidence for that.

If you have the belief that who you are is not good enough in some way then the likelihood is you will put it off onto others, thinking they are not good enough, or feeling smug and believing you are better or smarter than they are, instead of doing the inner work you need to do and taking responsibility for it being YOUR issue. When you are willing to take responsibility for your issues, and own them, then you have the power to change them. Owning them does not mean judging them. Healing requires release of judgment.

We have much more power, in a spiritual sense, than is usually recognized. For example, if in your mind and heart you resolve an upset with a family member, e.g. you find understanding and acceptance where before you had none, that will be "picked up" by the other person and he or she will likely write or phone you, even if they hadn't for years before. They respond differently to you, not because they have changed, but because you have changed your outgoing vibration that attracts your experiences.

And negative things, too, are mirrored in this way. If you feel resentful much of the time for the hardships you have faced in life, you are likely to attract more reasons to be resentful. And you will attract other people who are resentful themselves, perhaps toward you. And you will see people being resentful even when in fact they are not.

What you focus on, even subconsciously, you create. You didn't make that person resentful, angry, argumentative or whatever, they are responsible for themselves, but you did "pull them in" to your space. Like attracts like. In this way, life acts as a mirror to what is going on inside you.

The issues you have in life are never about another person, in truth they are about yourself. Think of all the troublesome people in your life - the ones who make you miserable - and create a one-word description for each of them. It might include words like 'mean' for your friend who refuses to lend his CD's, or 'confrontational' for your antagonistic colleague at work. You may think of 'demanding' for your perfectionist squash partner and 'humorless' for that frowning assistant at the computer shop.

Once you have your list of negative characteristics, give consideration to the possibility that these traits may actually be your own qualities, which are denied and rejected. Those around us may serve as mirrors for what we won't accept. Just think about the ways in which you may be mean, and are you sometimes too confrontational? Can you also be demanding and show a lack of humor?

You can use this information to help you see yourself more objectively, to bring to the surface issues that you have previously buried.

It's important to recognize that the opposite is true as well, so repeat the above exercise with the people in your life whom you admire and create a list of your positive characteristics. People also reflect our positive aspects that we may not recognize or acknowledge in ourselves.

The beliefs and resulting feelings you have, whether conscious or suppressed and denied, map out the course of your life. This includes the relationships you find yourself attracting into your life. Can you look back at some of your most significant relationships and see patterns? Many times we attract the same type of person over and over again because of our unconscious need to work out past emotional issues. Each person serves as a mirror, a reflection of the energy we emit into the world.

To move forward we need to change the energy we put out so that we attract the people and circumstances that match our true goals, our true self, rather than the suppressed and unfinished business of childhood or the decisions we made as a result of painful past experiences. Placing blame on others only sets the stage for that situation to reappear until we acknowledge the life lesson and evolve as a person. Healing comes from taking self responsibility and changing our perception of the event or person.

Until we become spiritually and emotionally (fully) conscious, we will attract conditions that feel familiar, even if they are destructive to ourselves. The key is to recognize the lessons that the situations of our life are mirroring to us, so we can become conscious of our hidden erroneous beliefs and feelings, primarily about ourselves, and then move forward from that stage. If we grow to genuinely love and value ourselves, that will be the energy we put out into the world and it will be reflected back accordingly.

Power is recognizing that you are the source of your life - that you create in your subjective reality (your beliefs) and this is mirrored in the physical world through the power of God, of which we are each a part. The vibration and energy of God's power is Love. If our creation is not of love then it comes back and hits us in the face and from that we learn. That's Karma.

To be able to create with the vibration of unconditional love, we need to be clear in the area in our minds. If you attempt to manifest a belief that is not entirely congruent in your belief system, i.e. you have suppressed counter-beliefs and identities, then this can lead to a dissociation from reality - an upset with the world that it is not following one's wishes. One can become confused as to what is mental and subjective, and what is objective physical reality.

Effective and soundly-based techniques are needed to obtain a truly congruent and clear mind from which to create "at source" - connected and one with God. This is a tricky area as the concepts of creating reality are a high-level spiritual viewpoint and at odds with the way our culture has taught us to think. At source one simply "knows," whereas from a viewpoint within the game of life one "wishes" or "wants" or very often "needs" and "fears."

As a part of God one is responsible for all that is; as an individual person one is responsible simply for one's self and for behaving in an ethical way that does not harm the freedoms and rights of others. One is also responsible for fulfilling one's agreements and obligations - for this reason it is important to make these consciously so that one is happy to do one's part.

So we are both a Games-Maker and a Games-Player and I feel it is important to recognize these complementary but differing aspects of our being - the spiritual Higher Self and the human being (physical body-mind personality) identified with and intimately involved with the game of life.

What we can best do is live more consciously. For example, when a person does something that harms others, whether deliberately or in error, he can either take responsibility or he can make himself right in the situation, rationalize to justify his action so that it wasn't actually wrong but justified. Self right, the other wrong. It's a human need 'to be right' but not a very aware one. This justification provides a motive for the action and is expressed most commonly as criticism of the one who was originally wronged. It is a 'child' viewpoint as opposed to a responsible 'adult' one.

Criticism and gossip is nearly always a projection of suppressed guilt or shame. Therefore it very often occurs that one is criticized and that criticism is not accurate. Maybe the criticism is too generalized, maybe it is partly true and partly false, or maybe completely wrong but rather it's how the other person sees things through a fixed idea of their own (such as resulting from justifications of their own actions). But anyway, the criticism causes one to compulsively introspect and wonder - could that be true? Is there something to that? In doing so it may press a button, some insecurity or

fear, and maybe re-stimulate a past painful experience that has similarities to the present situation or in which a similar criticism was made (maybe one that in different circumstances was accurate).

So, the criticism has pressed some buttons for you and these are indeed things you can learn from. But it is important not to identify with the criticism and you need to separate that from the actual facts of the matter, i.e. what is going on for this person, his or her actions, thoughts, feelings and further actions. And what is the right thing for you to say and do in response.

If you are clear within yourself about what is right, and you are not taking on board the other person's projection as if it were your own, then you can relax and deal with it from a viewpoint of love and compassion - which is certainly not the same as to be soft or irrational. Heart and mind work together, they need each other, in order to get things done - the right things - effectively.

Often there are conflicts between people. Remember the conflict - for you - is only one if you make it so. The other has a different view from you. OK, maybe you can introduce him to a different view, maybe not. He may see it as a conflict but you don't have to. As long as you do, probably he will too. So the goal is for you to have acceptance of his different point of view - not to agree with it necessarily but to grant it the right to exist. There's room in the universe for all points of view.

If you don't feel you can have compassion for the other, consider: what threat does he pose to you? Why do you feel a lack in that area? What need corresponds to that lack? What belief underlies this and where does it come from? Can you change it to a better one?

Often we have to deal with frustration - all that love we've flowed and that's built up like a big wall because it hasn't been received. Relationships deteriorate when communication breaks down - when viewpoints are withheld because of fear about what the other will think. This is frustrating and the charge (which is always frustration of love not received) builds up and is suppressed, but is still there like a wall between you. Only realization that we create the wall can bring it down and only honest communication can restore the relationship.

Again we may feel an obligation to help another who has wounds to be healed. This is a belief that needs clearing, because it leads to a co-dependent relationship and that's good for neither you or the other. We need to be clear, that our feelings about the other person are not colored by our feelings about ourselves (projection). And also to discriminate between a loving empathy for the other person and his feelings (that are

the result of his own frustrations and distorted beliefs) and sympathy, which is usually an identification with the other that is of no help to either person. The only person who can heal another is that person him/herself. We can be of assistance if that person wants and requests it, but that's all, and if they don't want that then that's very much their right.

The suffering that is ingrained in our hearts and minds from earlier times is not actually a barrier to the resolution of our conflicting beliefs in the present. It's only still felt now because it's being continually recreated in the present, subconsciously (somehow it must represent a safe solution to us, a justification or explanation of our problems). When we finally learn the lessons of our past experience - now - and release the beliefs that are not really our own, that's the end of ties to the past, because we will no longer be recreating that stuff. It's conscious now and we don't consciously create anything that's bad for us.

25. Creating Your Reality

As touched on in the last lesson, one of the confusions we face in the human condition is to do with "level of game." There's being the Games-Maker, the creator of reality, which is a source condition, not a games condition. More commonly, life on Earth is a games condition. Game requires other-determinism, unknowns, barriers, disagreements. When you play football you are responsible for your actions and helping your team to score goals. You don't worry about the other side being upset when you score.

It's a basic principle of respect for others and the recognition of their individuality, that they are responsible for their actions and reactions - that is their freedom of choice. They are not a slave or puppet. One can consider a question like "What could I be responsible for?" and one may conclude "everything". That may ultimately be true but it is not necessarily the best approach to life, for happiness for yourself and others.

That "you create your own reality" is true but nonetheless this world we live in is indeed real! If it's raining, I might consider "This is wonderful, so good for nature and it smells lovely," whilst another person says, "How awful, I'm not going out in that, how depressing." Two realities, but subjective ones.

From your interpretation of reality you make decisions and your decisions and choices and emotional tone have enormous influence on the direction of your life and what happens. Psychic and telepathic phenomena are also a big factor, but generally act subconsciously as the society suppresses them, because they threaten the status quo game of a purely mechanical reality, based on competitive survival.

There are better games to play, that give win-win results, but still the element of fun requires unknowns and randomness, even if self-imposed. In one's own universe (inner mind) and when exteriorized from this Earth game, one can adopt more of a source viewpoint that does not have the same games conditions. As when lucid dreaming, in which you can create/do what you want. And one can 'awaken' in this game and start to influence it, to play as Games-Maker, and create a better game.

Looking at life and relationships in terms of Communication, Understanding and Empathy (CUE) is actually a spiritual viewpoint. It is like the 'love of God' - it can seem harsh but it's about the 'greatest good'. It has no room for the 'victim' identification, jealousy and those kinds of very human responses, that are based on conditioned misconceptions.

Consideration for the other person comes into play when you judge ethics, what is best overall, not just for oneself. However the other may not agree with your judgment nor

like it. That is an aspect of the unknowns and randomness of the game. You try to make it a win-win rather than competitive game by increasing the qualities of CUE.

You are responsible... for creating your own belief system and internal map of the world. For interpreting situations however you do and creating feelings based on those interpretations. For your choices, decisions and actions. For being true to your own judgment but never being judgmental of others. For communicating with honesty and integrity, developing and maintaining an open mind, and promoting understanding and empathy. For never compromising your freedoms and rights nor trampling on another's. For always acting from the primary motivation of love. That's all and quite enough.

This is something from Bill Harris about beliefs, that I feel is relevant...

People naturally believe whatever the evidence in their life tells them is true. But if you stop to think about it, everyone has different evidence (because of different experiences and levels of awareness), which is why people believe different things (sometimes totally opposite things) about the same manifestation of reality. Are they all true? Yes, they are, to the person who believes them.

Is there an ultimate reality? Yes. Does that matter to the person who believes something that is contrary to that "ultimate" reality? No. Whatever a person believes, for them, is true. I'm not talking about frivolous beliefs, such as "I believe I'm going to win the lottery," or "I can change myself into a chestnut tree," but rather deeply held beliefs about who you are, what your place is in the world, what is possible for you, and so on.

I do not think that if you "believe" a stone is not hard it will cease to be hard - though if someone believed this deeply enough they could create a hallucination of some sort in which stones were not hard, which goes along with my point that for the believer, what is believed IS true, regardless of whether or not it disagrees with any ultimate truth. Which, other than on a philosophical/intellectual level, makes "ultimate truth" somewhat irrelevant.

People believe many things about themselves, about the world, about other people, about what is possible (and so on). In many (if not most) cases, people are not even aware they believe these things, because they so much take them for granted that they never consider whether they are reasonable or resourceful beliefs (which I think is a much better way to evaluate what you believe than whether or not it is "true").

These beliefs cause a person to either 1) attract, and be attracted to, people and situations that allow them to confirm the "trueness" of what they already believe (as

when a woman who believes men are pigs keeps getting attracted to pigs); 2) cause them to filter the evidence coming to them so as to interpret what is happening as confirmation that what they believe really is true, even if it isn't (as when a person interprets "I can't go out with you tonight" as "I don't really love you," even if that isn't really what is happening); or 3) they behave in such a way that they ultimately make what they believe to be true actually come true (as when a person who thinks they can never make money makes poor financial decisions and loses their money, gets into debt, and so on).

Certain beliefs (such as "I can do anything" or "People like me") are worth having because they are resourceful, because they create the results you want in life. The fact that in a ultimate sense they may not be true (or might only be true part of the time) is, in that respect, irrelevant. If you are after results, believing these things does create direct and real results.

Here are some questions about spirituality and the answers I offered...

Q: Is there only one consciousness and do all entities need an ego?

A: I'll give my opinions and subjective experience in regards to your question. But remember the truth of your reality is inside you.

I think there's a confusion here between the spiritual being that creates its reality, and that part of the being's mind that you can label the 'ego.' From the spiritual plane, a being could simply not consider that the universe exists and it would have no reality for that being. But just by nature of having a viewpoint located here in the physical universe, identified with a body, the being has accepted the existence of the universe, as it is, including the parts of the universe unperceived from that located viewpoint.

The being's mind has created the ego, which is a personality, a face to the world, containing a system of beliefs and solutions to the problems of survival as a human being. That belief system has a map of the world that may only approximate to the reality, and be full of delusions. It is the colored glasses the person views the world through.

The reality is only an illusion (not a delusion) with respect to the Higher Self, that spiritual part of the person which remains in the spiritual plane while its viewpoint located in the physical universe is identified with a body, to experience the physical dimension and learn the lessons that offers.

I believe that the sound in the forest happens whether or not anyone perceives it. Is the clock ticking in the next room? I believe so, since when I go there the clock tells the

predicted correct time. I think this is a common error philosophers make in failing to differentiate the spiritual and physical dimensions or planes of existence.

Similarly the aliens (and life forms on other planets) are living in this same physical plane so they would perceive the same universe as us - though it may look quite different through their eyes and other senses, it would be the same objectively. We haven't found alien life forms yet because we don't have the technology to look very far. But they are perceivable from the spiritual dimension and life pervades the universe. (Some would say there is physical evidence but it's suppressed for political reasons.)

In practice, the physical and spiritual are intertwined and so all the confusions occur. Our spirituality does have a profound influence on our physical experience, due the spiritual aspect of our make-up that is retained as human beings. It provides an inner knowing of truth, if we are open to it, through intuitive connection with our Higher Self. There is interconnection between all human beings as well, due to our common spirituality. We can also have a direct influence on the physical plane by creative intention on the part of the Higher Self, itself connected and part of the energetic force (that one can consider essentially an expression of Love) that creates the physical universe and other planes.

Q: If we are all ONE, as we are told then why do we have individual souls?

A: Because it is one state of being, Love, but expressed through countless viewpoints making up All That Is. Without individual souls there would be no communication, understanding or empathy - which requires some separation. So it's go apart, come together, experiencing, interacting. If you read about Dale Askew's spiritual experiences on the trans4mind site here, he describes the need of God to express and experience. That requires us, we are God, so it's all One, at the same time we are each a unique vibration with our special qualities and memories. That's how I see it.

Q: How does our soul attach itself to a human body, and at what point, and how does it choose?

A: The spirit, the Higher Self, remains exterior to the physical universe but attaches a remote, located viewpoint to the energy field of the human body, which works (intentions are passed) via the pineal gland and the right brain's intuitive faculty, then interpreted by the left brain consciously. A connection is made soon after conception and the consciousness is identified more and more with the baby as it develops, so that after birth the experience is very much "in the body" rather than that of the Higher Self with a remote viewpoint. There is previous and ongoing communication with the

parents to determine the appropriateness of the family, and often there are arrangements for incarnation to continue ongoing relationships and learning paths.

Q: Also why a body, why not a stone or a tree?

A: Some do that, but "high vibration" spirit needs the flexibility of communication to express its qualities. Spirit learns and evolves to higher vibrations, though this can go backward or take eons.

Q: What is the point of this? If the soul is eternal and the physical plane is only a temporary visit before we go home, then what use is this experience back in the soul plane?

A: It's because the physical experience is unique, it's not etheric and dreamlike, so we have to learn to play games within fixed boundaries, to deal with a body-mind and ego, and so on. We create the reality from our spiritual level of consciousness but then at the same time as human beings we experience and play games within it, and any game requires unknowns, the duality of the "other side". Our life here offers opportunities to experience and learn about emotions in a very physical way that is just not possible otherwise. It's also the opportunity to be part of the whole creation. It's God fully experiencing Itself through playing the game of life. It's a privilege, not a prison sentence (like some feel)! When we're enlightened we realize this, and our vibration rises so that we don't need this stage in our spiritual evolution anymore, then we can move on. Most people are far way from that but more are closer to it now than since a long time. In history there have been cycles of raised and lowered vibration.

Some feel the purity of spiritual realization requires us not to be "interested in the things of the world" - that manifesting our desires is a low state of being. I feel this is mixed up, almost like a death wish, and it assumes all desires come from ego attachment. We ARE spiritual beings, we're here for the physical experience, to enjoy and learn from the game of life in a world of dualities.

Q: Also this connection, what causes it to disconnect and cause death - is it voluntary or does the soul have no control over this?

A: Normally there's no control and illness, accident or old age causes death of the body - because the being has identified so thoroughly with the body. Those rare enlightened persons who are completely in touch with their higher selves are able to leave the body and die at a time of their choosing however. In near death experiences we hear how persons are sometimes given a choice or guided about returning to the body and in these cases sometimes miraculous healing occurs.

Q: Thanks Peter, for the in depth answers, they help a lot but as with most answers they pose other questions. I can grasp the creating my own reality aspect, although I have been led to believe that we should not seek to create by ourselves but ask God or the Universe and it shall be done for us.

A: I feel that we are the creative expression of God in this world, we are part of God, through our Higher Selves. God creates through us. Yes, we can and should ask for guidance and help, and that comes from God through our Higher Selves. We (and our free will) are part of the process, not just at the receiving end.

Q: But what I don't get is how other people can see my world. If everyone's ego is creating a different "reality", how do we interact and "agree" on what we see as the world? Quantum physics says that the very nature of viewing something causes it to take on form, and that quantum matter can exist in different states at the same time, i.e matter and energy. It is the viewing that causes it to appear as matter?

A: We are observing from within the physical world, through our eyes. It is the same object and it's there whether we observe it or not. The quantum phenomena you describe is related to creation from the spiritual viewpoint. The 'zero point' of the atom is spiritual, metaphysics and physics combine. It's two sides of the same coin, both are true at once. Really, our life on Earth is about experiencing from the physical viewpoint; at the same time we give more meaning to our lives by recognizing we each have a spiritual viewpoint too, from which we create our reality 100% - but it's best to differentiate the two so as not to be confused. Though in truth the two are not really separate but aspects of the one.

Q: How then do we agree with others that we are observing the same matter, for example a cat, if we are creating our own separate illusion?

A: Communication, observation and more communication. We live in the same world, we have a shared objective reality (it's only an illusion from the spiritual viewpoint), but we see it through different colored glasses, due to our subconscious beliefs and fixed ideas. We each have different subjective realities that overlap with the objective reality (and other people's subjective realities) to a greater or lesser degree. The path of growth is to make those beliefs conscious and reassess them, and to open our minds to new ideas based on observation in the present time and other people's contributions to our map of reality. To take off the glasses. To live consciously rather than being automatons (a product of our conditioning and the safe solutions of our egos).

26. Making Your Vision a Reality

A goal is a desire made specific and with a deadline. Setting and achieving goals that fulfill your needs is essential to health and happiness. Striving toward your goals is a statement that you are taking charge of your life, rather than life taking charge of you.

Visualizing a goal is more important than knowing every detail or even any details of how you will achieve it. The first step for a painter is to visualize the end result, at least in concept; the means of achieving that result are extremely variable - different materials and styles, for example - and some of the steps may require learning new skills or may depend on ideas and inspiration that the artist knows will arrive at the appropriate time - he doesn't worry about them not being there at the beginning. However it turns out, it will express his feelings and spirit, and that is more than good enough.

Seeking visualized goals is a powerful, natural tendency - like the tendency of plants to seek the light - an insistent drive that can crack the hardest granite. If you don't have a clear image of where you want to go, this creative urge will be frustrated and you may experience your life as meaningless or directionless. Then you may visualize negative goals for yourself - you may see yourself as incompetent, ill, in pain, a failure, and your creative power will tend to make these a reality.

The first step in goal setting is to get in touch with what you really want in life. Something that is truly inspiring for you, so you know it is "right." It should be what you really, really want, regardless of "what it takes." Not what other people want or what they expect of you, and not something to please others - to inspire you it must be true to your self, something that will really motivate you.

It may be a lifetime goal or one for a year, month or week ahead. Keep it clear and simple but don't set out your goal in terms of generalities like "some" or "more" - be specific! Include tangible details of time, place, facts, figures, persons. Clarify exactly what the goal means in terms of specific changes in your life and a specific deadline for its achievement.

The goal should be achievable - maybe out of reach, for the moment, but not out of sight! It should also be something you believe in, that you feel is right, that is consistent with your values.

Then envision that situation in your mind as actually happening now. Express it as a statement of fact in the present tense, see yourself with the goal already accomplished. What are you doing? What are your surroundings? What are people saying to you? How are you feeling now that you have accomplished it? Get the feeling of that

achievement in your heart and celebrate! That feeling will then stay with you and energize all your actions toward manifesting the goal.

Here are some examples of well expressed accomplishments: "I am going on a singles club outing once a week and meeting new people I get on really well with [the goal to make 5 new genuine friends]." "I am swimming a mile three times a week and I feel stronger and more alive [the goal to get fit by swimming a mile three times a week]." "I am living comfortably within my budget for food, clothing and entertainment; now I feel financially secure and in control of my spending [the goal to live within my budget by three months time]." "Bob and I are understanding each other and really loving and trusting one another and we are having beautiful sex [the goal to improve the communication in our relationship so that our sex life is great again]."

Don't use negatives such as "I am not over-eating." Think positive! Also negative goals, or not being able to see yourself actually achieving the goal, strongly indicate the likelihood of internal conflict taking place, in which case you need to handle this, to identify the limiting beliefs and revise them.

For example, you might learn that you are afraid of how others will respond if you achieve your goal, or that you are unable or unwilling at this time to perform the necessary steps to proceed, or that the goal is really meant to please another or match somebody else. In these cases, you first need to thoroughly grasp and accept the conflicting viewpoints and feelings involved and compare them to the current reality, your actual needs, and to realize any distorted thinking taking place. Then either the goal will be clarified and the problems drop away, or you will see that the goal is not genuine and choose another goal.

You then also need to work out an action plan, covering the steps you need to take in sequence to manifest your goal. What do you need to do, change, learn, or implement, to move your life from where it is now to where you want it to be?

To plot out your path, it is best to work backward from your vision of an accomplished goal - that way you ensure you stay on track, that what you plan leads to the goal and not some place else. What has to be done to enable you to finally achieve the goal? What has to be in place? Then you just proceed backward: what needed to be done one step earlier? Work back to the first steps you need to take. The first steps need to be things that you know you can do, so you can get going. Put this in writing and share your goal with those who will support you.

As you begin to act, identify your fears, accept and release them. Identify other things you are doing, perhaps habitually, that in fact make it difficult or even impossible to

eventually achieve your goal, and stop doing those things. Identify and revise your limiting beliefs (including beliefs that you have been suppressing), and shift that energy into the love you have for your vision.

As you put your first steps into reality you will find yourself acting in ways compatible with creating your vision; ideas and resources will fall into place. Setbacks are inevitable but you can learn from them, then re-establish your vision and move on with greater confidence than before. Use all that you have learned to establish and boost your self esteem - be your own greatest supporter. With self-confidence you'll want to stretch yourself and try new things. And remember the reasons why you are doing what you are doing - this will help you do whatever it takes to reach your goal, to be patient when necessary, and to be persistent with your efforts.

It is equally important to focus also as ruthlessly and honestly as possible on the current reality. And this is key: measure your progress from where you started, not against how far you have to go. Each action in which you demonstrate your competence boosts your self-esteem; each development that you make happen boosts your morale.

By comparing your progress with the point at which you started out, you will be encouraged to continue. Goals are achieved step by step and each step needs to be validated - otherwise the goal may seem far away and it may feel you are making little progress, when really you are.

Then compare your current reality and state of progress with the final vision - the next steps will be clarified and you will be motivated to continue. This is an improvisatory process and cannot be entirely predicted at the outset. Since creating is improvisatory, the steps you planned to take and even the goal itself may be revised. Now you know yourself better you may discover that you actually want something very different from what you originally set out to get.

THE FUTURE EXISTS

FIRST IN IMAGINATION

THEN IN WILL

THEN IN REALITY

Have a great time (setting and achieving goals is the game of life).

27. Finding Out Who You Are

No doubt some times you have felt inspired to act - to make or say or do something. There is an extraordinary rush of energy and clarity that accompanies this. You feel excited, can't wait to begin and everything seems possible. But putting the vision into effect can be a sobering process. Spirit meets the resistance of materiality and the vision fades. We may fall back into habitual, limiting thought and behavior patterns and the new perspective becomes obscured. But if we can hold on to the spiritual connection and integrate it with the mental, emotional and behavioral aspects of our self, we can 'make things happen' and experience our creative potential.

As we get to know and trust our inner intuitive awareness, this produces a clarity of thought which illuminates the areas where we have created blocks - it throws light on patterns of thought and behavior which are now seen as inappropriate. It becomes easier to make decisions and act spontaneously.

On the other hand, if we lose touch with the creative source that is our inner being, we identify with negative thoughts, emotions and behavior patterns. We can't see them for what they are because we are being them. So at the other end of the spectrum we see self-conscious people with low self-esteem, hiding, either in frantic activity or in withdrawal. Imagine yourself in the following situations:

You are at a party and you don't know anyone except for the host. You have returned an article of clothing which has split along the seam. The shop assistant tells you they have a 'no returns' policy. Your doctor is evasive about answering your questions properly.

In each case, what would you do? How would you feel? What would you be thinking (underlying your emotions)? And what would be your true desire in that situation?

When our true desires inform our thinking and our feelings then we are being true to ourselves and this enhances self-esteem. When our true desires are submerged by distorted thinking and painful emotions then the resulting behavior is in conflict and our self-esteem lowers.

To Know Yourself

Try to set aside some time, each day, to fulfill solely your own needs and for your own personal enjoyment. This may include doing this course or it may be with other people, but it is *for you*. The willingness to be self-nurturing plays a vital part in the development of your 'beingness'. As you start looking at your own needs and stop playing the victim of other people's demands you will be treated with more respect because you will gain more self respect.

You are 'going inside yourself' and this requires that you break your identification with worldly links - you are going beyond your thoughts, feelings and desires. You will have found that the mind keeps on chattering and trying to stop it doesn't work, you have to become a detached observer of it, and then it starts to fade away. What you resist persists.

When we are truly being ourselves, without the barrier of mind chatter and negative emotions, it is easier to make direct connection between you, the spiritual being, and the world around you. This is an aesthetic experience, one of truth. Have you ever become totally absorbed by a project, a picture, a piece of music, a landscape? The mind becomes concentrated and still and you feel 'at one'.

A shift in awareness - an awakening - can be triggered by such things as a dream, a memory, an evocative smell, falling in love, being afraid. It is only necessary for our defenses to be down (which means we are holding no preconceived ideas) in order that we can experience something more intensely, as if for the first time, in a new moment. Can you recall such an experience of connecting, and the feeling of it?

To experience connection rather than separation, we need to break all attachments with our thoughts and desires and so learn to suspend our judgment. It is possible to connect and experience your spiritual self at any time, whatever you are doing. With Gurdjieff's technique of 'self remembering' we adopt the role of witness as we go about our everyday lives. The witness observes all your doings but is non-evaluative; it does not judge your actions (remember, you are not your actions). For example, you might eat a chocolate cake and then get annoyed with yourself for having eaten it. The witness (if and when it arrives) would note: "He is eating a cake; he is annoyed at himself for doing so". The witness is dispassionate and does not care what you do, think and feel but simply notes it.

Of course, like stopping thoughts, this is easier said than done. You might be driving down the street and the witness notes that; you feel content and that is noted; then someone cuts right in front of you causing you to slam on the brakes. You forget about witnessing and immediately identify with your emotions of anger or frustration. Only much later do you remember that you were attempting to witness! But with practice you find it is possible to 'wake up' in the middle of a drama and observe a part of yourself hooked by an emotion; to that degree you have then learned that you are not your emotions, you have differentiated your real self, the spiritual being that has intrinsic worth and cannot be judged in the same way that the inappropriate or self-defeating emotions and behaviors may be. And because you stop judging your self, you notice that the same applies to others, so you can cease judging them too.

You notice that as you dramatize various thoughts, emotions and behaviors it is as though you were different people at the time, other little personalities that come and go as appropriate, but usually reactively, according to patterns of behavior rather than consciously.

How many 'yous' are there inside you? Very many. By lunch time today you may have been thoughtful, serious, annoyed, lustful, tired, forgetful, and have had many fleeting intentions and purposes toward others or ideas about what you want or don't want. You may have been acting like some person you admire or not like another who don't want to be associated with. And many, many other ways of being. Each 'sub-personality' is all-consuming while it lasts, and some of these sub-personalities may play a major role in your make-up. Who you think you are may even actually be a sub-personality and not the real essence of you.

Gurdjieff points out that sometimes one 'you' does something for which every other 'you' must pay, maybe for the rest of your life. Our 'yous' are numerous and ephemeral and all are evaluative and judgmental, and have plenty of irrational thoughts and beliefs, harmful intentions and painful emotions attached to them. Each is actually a solution to past problems that is retained and replayed in the present. To break this ceaseless train of identifications with the technique of self remembering is to give ourselves some inner freedom.

The more you use this technique the more powerful it becomes. Each 'you' is a reflection of a link with a desire, feeling or thought - these are our links with the material world. By taking on the role of witness we can objectify these 'yous' and so break our identification with them.

When we experience our spirituality we recognize our true place in the world and we know that we have our own vital role to play. This feeling of truly belonging creates a sense of worthiness which enhances our self-esteem.

28. Body, Mind & Spirit

In order to create our reality - to make things happen in our experience of the world - we operate at all levels of our being: the spiritual, mental, emotional, physical. We do this 100% of the time whether we are aware of it or not. It is possible to improve our life experience by becoming more conscious of our creative process.

In Western culture, we are brought up to view our lives as primarily a physical manifestation: we go to work, produce things, get paid, survive, try to keep our bodies healthy, find a partner, make a family home. Talk of "creating our reality" from a spiritual viewpoint seems out of touch with reality, maybe even a bit crazy. But if you follow it through - as I will try to explain - it does all tie together. The everyday life we experience is very much affected by our spiritual nature, our creative will. Then we manifest that "will" according to the beliefs we hold, the feelings that result from those beliefs, and our resulting actions.

We can start living consciously by manifesting what we want right here and now, by putting into place our plans and dreams in the real world.

The first step is to become clear on what you want to create - to decide what you want.

The second step is to visualize, with emotion, it happening, until you get to a point where you know it already has happened and is on its way to you.

The third step is to be open for guidance, from the source of knowing that you are spiritually connected to and part of. Wait for spiritual guidance before taking action. If you take action before receiving guidance you may end up running into blocks or manifesting something other than what you really want. That's the Ego's way, when your behavior is reactive, without consciousness, and without connection with your Higher Self. Wait for God's guidance, and it will always turn out perfectly, sometimes even in a better way than you first imagined it.

Then you act, according to your intuitive knowing. You can tell if that comes from Spirit because it will have the presence of Love. That means acceptance without judgment. And without negative emotions like fear or hatred, which are resistances against what exists - that which you are creating! You may be guided to sources of information to help you act more effectively.

So then do it, the first step, the first communication. Make the plunge, and then learn from your experiences in manifesting what you want. Spirit will offer these learning opportunities (sometimes they may appear as "mistakes") as part of your ongoing connection with your true all-knowing Higher Self.

Here's an imaginary example of how a man might learn to better his situation more consciously. Perhaps he wants to improve his relationship with his daughter as the two of them are frequently arguing and fighting. He loves her very much but most of the time she is obnoxious and rebellious.

He wants to turn this around, to create a better reality from all levels of his being. Before he felt it was all her doing, none of his responsibility. But this time he consults with his Higher Self. He is simply given the guidance to communicate with his daughter in a loving way. This is probably a bit of a shock because he likes to think he is "loving" and he communicates well, but now he realizes that perhaps he has something to learn here.

This is where personal growth tools, like the 'Living Consciously' course can help, giving a person some clues how to go about making a better life for themselves. If you are guided to the Living Consciously course you'll learn that when you're trying to get on with somebody or help them, it's best not to invalidate what they say or evaluate their view of things with your own interpretation, otherwise they will immediately go into resistance or feel distant and introverted - either way, not effective communication.

Let's say the man in our example has acquired this information and wants to relate to his daughter more lovingly, according to his guidance, since he has realized that is his truth. He asks his daughter how she's got on at school today and she replies, "It's none of your business." Normally he would have ranted, "It's very much my business," and been fairly angry, but this time he doesn't invalidate her view or judge her to be wrong. He just says "OK, I understand." She looks surprised. His feeling is that he cares very much about her, so he tells her that, again according to the course guidelines but also according to his inner truth. She looks a bit taken aback and says, "Oh, yeah?" but a small breakthrough has been made. He keep going on this path and gradually his relationship improves, and she seems much happier.

There are set-backs but he learns from them, so in their own way they are valuable. Really he learns about himself, about being able to respond as himself rather than reacting according to habitual learned patterns. About how to be truly "in the moment." But it is hard at times, like when she tells him she is jealous of his relationship with her mother. Instead of recognizing that as an honest and brave thing to say, he blows up and tells her not to be ridiculous. A step backward. Looking at what happened later, he realizes that actually he is rather jealous of the mother and daughter's relationship, as they have always seemed to be much closer. That's why it was a such a button for him, her comments matched his own suppressed feelings, and they drove him to react in an unconscious way.

So what is the real issue? Insecurity in his relationship with his wife, perhaps. A belief leads to feeling a certain way, which then drives behavior, and this context then leads to further thoughts and interpretations and the situation spirals. The relationship with his daughter had deteriorated as a result of his own feelings of insecurity and jealousy of the mother-daughter closeness, something he hadn't been conscious of before.

What belief was driving his feeling of insecurity? Such things tend to be pretty suppressed; we keep them hidden away to avoid confronting issues that we have long-since decided are too difficult to face. Fortunately he had the tools of the 'Insight Project' to quickly get to the root of it. The Insight Project is an in-depth procedure utilizing biofeedback monitoring, that is recommended for earnest seekers of self-knowledge. Centerpointe's 'Holosync' program, and the accompanying advice Bill Harris gives, is also a big help along the way.

Back to my story, the crux of the matter was that the man believed that women were too emotionally unpredictable to trust. He had a couple of very painful experiences that led him to believe that, and he generalized the belief to apply to all women including his wife. Looking back now he can see that he actually created those earlier experiences too, and he found another belief that was behind that.

As he unlayered these beliefs, he found at the bottom some beautiful truths, simple as truths always are, about his basic loving nature. That is also the nature of each of us, our spirituality. Love expressed as creative will. That love becomes distorted by our mental structures and conflicts into the range of painful emotions and self-defeating behaviors that most people either experience frequently or cover up, and live within 'safe' boundaries so they're not triggered. But really we create that experience and it mirrors what's going on inside of us. On the scale of group consciousness this extends to world events.

With learning, obtained from consciously experiencing and being open to guidance from Spirit, one becomes more enlightened - then indeed magic can happen. With clarity, life becomes much more simple and open to your creative influence.

A correspondent, Saikoun, pointed out to me that the "human identity" experience that we are all so familiar with is in fact a veil, a projection, not a truth in any way. It is a habit that we acquire early in childhood. Certainly one can maximize the veil and have a "good life" experience. And certainly one can decide that the veil represents a truth and deal with the resulting limitations. However, truth is that there is no separation and you do have conscious access to how you are creating your reality in every moment. That is the whole, the "human identity" is a subset. One is only locked into that viewpoint if one chooses to be.

I'm sure she's right; I also feel that we are here to experience life at the physical level and to understand ourselves from that viewpoint too. The human experience is not something to reject or lessen, it's a great privilege. We are "the man in the heavens," there is no "up there" and "down here" - metaphysics and physics are one - we simply are all of it.

Spirit-mind-emotions-body-the world: this is a circle, a wholeness. We are all connected. Because spirit is of the nature of information, not within the boundaries of space and time, the beliefs of a few conscious beings influence the group consciousness of Mankind - or perhaps I should say group unconsciousness, since relatively little conscious will is expressed here, but the unconscious still responds. I feel the recent war has been a wake-up call on this planet and things are changing; there could be an exponential increase in the expression of our true nature, of Love, in our world. It is up to each of us to play our part.

"When we love, we are the universe and the universe lives in us"--O. Pirmez

29. Learning from Our Experience

Current events have demonstrated a tremendous desire, on the behalf of perhaps the majority of people in the world, for peace in their lives. They are no longer satisfied with the mentality of political conflict, which endangers economic progress and human rights and freedoms. But most importantly, I feel that many people are now aware that if we want peace in the world, first we need to make peace with our own lives. It is human nature that needs to change, and we are capable of making such a transformation.

Our experience in the world reflects our inner state - yes, this is a kind of magic but that is the reality, the world is miraculous. I have seen so much evidence of this when I - or a student or client - have made a genuine shift in our belief system that resolves an inner conflict, then very soon our real-world circumstances change accordingly. We mirror our internal state - our resistance/fear and acceptance/love - in our personal life experience. As a group we mirror our consciousness in world events. It is our personal responsibility to become aware of our contribution to the group consciousness, to help create a world with more opportunities for ourselves and our loved ones - which ultimately means for everyone.

So what wars do we wage inside? The purposes and goals that we hold dearly - some we may have brought into this life or felt most strongly as a child or young person - are often compromised in the face of problems that we discover in trying to achieve them, and we may forget about them (actually suppress them) and opt for safer solutions. Playing the safe game is a sad conflict with the game we really (still) want to play. We have become someone else, a substitute for our true self. Reinforcing this position are the attachments we have come to cling on to, the fears we may have of losing control of our safe space, the resistance we feel against elements of change, and the judgments we make that prevent acceptance of what is.

To better our position, to be able to open up our space and express our true desires, we first need to come to terms with our situation. Our true nature is an expression of love and that is the quality that we need first to rediscover in our consciousness.

Before we can contribute, through our consciousness, toward peace in the world we need to make peace with ourselves. Before we can love others unconditionally we need to be able to genuinely love ourselves. Before we can forgive and cease making judgments of others we need to learn how to forgive ourselves and warmly accept ourselves just as we are. So let's look at how to do that...

We all do things we are not proud of, we wouldn't be human if we didn't. Something that affects others in a way that we would not be willing to experience ourselves.

Sometimes we chose to act in a way that we know at the time is not being true to ourselves, but it seems like a solution to our situation. Or maybe we are tempted to put our own interests first. Other times we may be carried away by emotions of anger or jealousy and do something out of spite we may later regret. Or we don't do something, like helping a friend in need, that we know we really wanted to. Alternatively we may have the best of intentions but things don't go as predicted, we make a mistake or realize something we have done was harmful, even though we didn't mean it to be.

These sorts of actions can leave us feeling ashamed and depressed, and we can end up carrying our guilt for years, but if we want to live happy lives, we need to take responsibility for the consequences of our behavior and move on.

Feeling guilty should not be confused with taking responsibility for our past. Responsibility means that we make a concerted effort to change the behavior pattern that resulted in the mistaken choice, and the beliefs and feelings that empowered it. We need to move on by making peace with the past.

The natural tendency when we do something without integrity is to try to justify our actions, to make ourselves right. Or we may say the action was deserved, making the other person wrong. Both of these are avoiding the reality, by denying our own sense of truth and our own responsibility for our actions. We avoid our feelings of guilt by pretending it was not a mistake or misconceived choice that we acted on, indeed it was "right." We avoid our feelings of shame (feeling badly about how others perceive us) by pretending that it is the other who should be ashamed.

The problem is not the harmful action or making a mistake - that's happened and can't be undone. The problem is what we tell ourselves afterward. Whether we are honest or if we lie to ourselves. It is that lie which causes all the damage to our own integrity and to further relationships with the other we have wronged.

We need to drop our defenses, drop the lies we may have told ourselves to hide the truth, face up to the reality of our actions and their consequences - and forgive ourselves.

There is a big bonus to being realistic and truthful - we can learn the valuable lesson that the experience offers us. Indeed, it's only when we have learned that lesson that we can let go of the past error and live our life as truly ourselves in the present.

So to forgive ourselves we need to learn the lesson. Let's look at mistakes first. Mistakes are opportunities for learning. When we learn to drive a car, we crunch the gears and go backward instead of forward. But we learn and get better. Later on we

may cross a red light and get stopped by the police and fined. Again, we can learn from that, to take more care when approaching crossroads. We then become a better driver. The next time you make a mistake say to yourself, "That's cool, so what can I learn from this?" Instead of feeling grotty you will feel challenged and motivated.

But what if I had crossed the red light, run into a car and injured the driver badly. That's not cool. I can say that it had only just changed to red so I didn't really do anything wrong. I can blame the other driver for not checking anyone was still crossing before they moved off. Or I can accept it was a foolish action, a combination of a mistake but also recklessness. I did it and I'm sorry.

But real forgiveness has nothing to do with feeling sorry or apologizing, neither of which actually changes anything. From a higher perspective there is no right or wrong. There are choices and experience. There is cause and effect.

And neither can forgiveness be given by another; it has to be granted by ourselves. Unless we can truly forgive ourselves, we can never really move on and be free of the past.

What gets in the way of this forgiveness is judgment, that I am a bad person. I need to separate my inherent worth from my actions. I am basically a loving being, I know that. We all are. Actually I am not even my thoughts and feelings. I create these and sometimes through ignorance or misguidedly I create them inappropriately, and my consequent actions can result in hurt for others. Then the best I can do is to learn from that so in future I can create more truly to my nature.

I need to realize that my choice was a result of my ignorance - I did not know what I can now see to be the lesson from the experience. I just wanted to get to my destination quickly. I didn't think about the possible outcomes that could result from driving irresponsibly, I thought it was OK to cross a red light. So my basic motive wasn't bad but I was operating on false information, I was misguided.

We can't move on if we regret the past, nor if we have contempt for our selves. To feel like this implies that we view our past as meaningless and of no value, and our selves as no longer to be trusted. On the contrary, forgiving ourselves requires finding value in our experiences and in our selves. Instead of just writing off an experience as a painful episode and trying to forget it, we should try to learn from it whatever we can.

Life is a journey of learning and the most worthwhile learning is derived from our personal experiences. When things go as we want, because we have good information and appropriate beliefs, then our learning is reinforced by this positive feedback. When

things go astray, because we have faulty information and inappropriate beliefs, then we and those at the effect of our actions suffer. But here we have a chance to learn something new. Much of our new learning and personal growth does therefore come about as a result of painful experiences; provided we are willing and open to learn those lessons.

If we wish to grow and to use our experiences beneficially, it is vital that we focus on what we can learn, rather than to resist the reality of what occurred.

Find something you did (or failed to do) that you still feel bad about, that you regret, that makes you feel ashamed. Now begin to take meaning and value out of this experience. Ask yourself: "What has this taught me - about myself, about others and about my life?" Based on this lesson, work out what beliefs you need to change, what fixed ideas you can let go of, what assumptions you made that are no longer helpful.

Self-forgiveness recaptures the energy that you were giving away in guilt and resistance against the past. It frees you to be yourself again - a new, happier and wiser you.

If we can forgive ourselves then we can more easily forgive others. If we do not feel able to forgive others then we clearly have not learned to love ourselves. And the irony is, when we do truly love ourselves, we and others will not even need any forgiveness, because we are able to accept the past, present and future as it is, without judgment. Our creation. Discrimination - of good/bad, right/wrong, ugly/beautiful - is not part of the vocabulary of love.

30. The Positive Approach

I have taken to heart the following three quotes as the basis for my thoughts and intentions at this time, regarding personal and world events. I feel this positive approach is empowered by the love that is the nature of our being, and is effective in creating peace and happiness. The alternative - applying resistance, judgment, antagonism and hatred - is to be ruled by fear, which is to deny one's essence, and has the effect of empowering that which one opposes.

(1)

Peace Pilgrim states...

"In my work I have chosen the positive approach. I never think of myself as protesting against something, but rather as witnessing for harmonious living. Those who witness for, present solutions. Those who witness against, usually do not - they dwell on what is wrong, resorting to judgment and criticism and sometimes even name-calling. Naturally, the negative approach has a detrimental effect on the person who uses it, while the positive approach has a good effect.

"When an evil is attacked, the evil mobilizes, although it may have been weak and unorganized before, and therefore the attack gives it validity and strength. When there is no attack, but instead good influences are brought to bear upon the situation, not only does the evil tend to fade away, but the evildoer tends to be transformed. The positive approach inspires; the negative approach makes angry.

"When you make people angry, they act in accordance with their baser instincts, often violently and irrationally. When you inspire people, they act in accordance with their higher instincts, sensibly and rationally. Also, anger is transient, whereas inspiration sometimes has a life-long effect."

Behind the apparent reality of war and violence the higher reality is love and peace. The energy of love comes from all our hearts but is misdirected if we have attention on our fears, which occurs if we resist the reality of what appears to us and our own part in creating that reality. For we do indeed create our life experience. That is a high-level spiritual viewpoint, the viewpoint of God, but if we accept that we are individual lamps of God-light, to manifest God in our lives we need to recognize our causation and incorporate that knowledge into our world view and understanding of events.

(2)

"If there is light in the soul,
 There will be beauty in the person.
 If there is beauty in the person,
 There will be harmony in the house.
 If there is harmony in the house,
 There will be order in the nation.
 If there is order in the nation,
 There will be peace in the world."
 --Chinese Proverb

We all face the issue of how best to go about integrating a spiritual viewpoint into our daily lives. The everyday game of life appears very different from the view of the angels. Many things happen that we do not consciously initiate. We have friends and enemies, loves and hates. Some are on our side, others against us. The spiritual, birds-eye view however - the conscious view - is that this game of our lives is something we continuously create, in order to teach ourselves experiential lessons. We reflect our state of being in our surroundings, so they act as a mirror. This is God experiencing His/Her creation to the full. We are also engaged in raising the vibration of Earth energies towards a higher dimension, closer to our source, the creative power behind all. We are not just individual islands, our purpose really extends to a universal scale.

So we need to live our human lives but instead of making the world increasingly solid (and our fears and resistances increasingly strong) we need to step back and remember that each one of us is actually creating the reality we experience, through the power of our higher selves, at one with God. Then step back in and encompass all with our presence. Reality is lighter than we may think, and we can change our life experience by adjusting our viewpoints and beliefs to become closer to our true nature - which is in every case loving and non-judgmental.

The personal insights that I have discovered bear out the truth of this spiritual viewpoint, that we do indeed create our lives and situation, based on our beliefs. Often it is particularly the subconscious and suppressed beliefs that determine our internal conflicts and fears, and cause us to lose sight of our essential being. There are ways and means of uncovering this stuff and of realizing our essence - that is there all along - so we can knowingly create our reality in accordance with our loving nature.

Human beings in the last 2000 years have progressed little (in terms of human nature) but times are changing. Personal growth tools help us to learn faster and more effectively from our experience and so enhance the quality of the further experiences we will create. We also aspire to discover our spiritual nature and again we haven't

made a lot of progress unaided (and religion hasn't been a great help). But now better tools are available. For example, modern techniques help a person to achieve in a few years what Buddhist monks take many lifetimes learning.

(3)

"Evil (ignorance) is like a shadow - it has no real substance of its own, it is simply a lack of light. You cannot cause a shadow to disappear by trying to fight it, stamp on it, by railing against it, or any other form of emotional or physical resistance. In order to cause a shadow to disappear, you must shine light on it." --Shakti Gawain

We all have a belief system full of ideas imprinted by our culture and upbringing, and as the effect of earlier traumatic experiences, and even influences we are born with. They are here with us all the time in the present and effect our view of things and interpretation of events, so that we are not really free to be ourselves, and to know our true selves and our true goals and purposes in life.

So we need to look afresh, in the present moment, and clear away our false assumptions and fixed ideas by shining a light of objectivity and honesty. Our guidance in this process is love. We can all do this and the time is right.