

The Power of Your Belief Systems Don't Underestimate Them

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Belief systems are formed early in life by how others treat us, how we see others treat each other, and how our needs are responded to as we grow through our developmental stages. Our belief system permeates all that we do. It is the sum of assumptions, judgements, myths, and behavior patterns that are familiar to us on a moment to moment basis. Our belief systems contain all our family messages about our own personal value and worth. Our belief systems determine how we plan and make decisions, how we interpret other people's actions, how we make meaning out of any experience we have, how we solve problems, how we form relationships, how we develop our careers, how we establish our priorities. Our belief systems form the filter through which we conduct the business of our lives. If our inner child is wounded in some manner or if we experienced some trauma during our growing, then our view of the world will be skewed and distorted. The phrase "seeing is believing" is more accurately stated in the reverse: "believing is seeing" for it is what we believe that becomes the screen through which we see our world.

What makes this a most important phenomenon is that whether we are happy or miserable depends completely on how we see our world, which is based wholly on what a number of authors refer to as our core belief systems. Milton Erikson, a famous hypnotherapist, states that every person has a unique map of the world, an inner belief system that is unconscious. Erikson calls the unconscious belief system a kind of hypnotic trance out of which we operate every action for our entire lives. Thus, when M. Scott Peck (refs 10 and 11) says that mental health is based on two things: (1) the belief in a power greater than ourselves and (2) the constant struggle to know and be in touch with reality, isn't it crucial that we examine what is the reality in which we believe?

DeePak Chopra (refs. 3, 4, and 5) describes the way our initial sensory experiences get programmed. Once sensory experiences are conditioned the nervous system continues to respond in such a way that reinforces the initial interpretation of that experience. Dr. Chopra calls this a Premature (because it is made at an early stage of cognitive development), Cognitive (because it programs our senses in a certain, fixed way), Commitment (because it fixes us to that certain reality). The Premature Cognitive Commitment imprisons us in that reality. The sensory experience gets structured in such a way that it shapes the very anatomy and physiology of our nervous systems so that ultimately the nervous system serves only one function: to reinforce what has now become a core belief system. The Premature Cognitive Commitment limits our world and becomes the core belief system.

Dr. Chopra gives numerous illustrations of the above phenomena. A few of his examples will serve to imprint the visual for our own empowerment:

- a) Fish, raised in a tank in which a glass plate is placed in the middle of the tank so that only a portion of the tank can be used, will only use that portion of the tank when the glass is removed from the tank. The glass that has been removed remains a sensory barrier that, in reality, no longer exists.
- b) Flies, raised in a jar with a top on it, will remain the jar and will not fly out - even though the barrier that, in reality, no longer exists.
- c) When an elephant is young it is bound to a tree with a rope. As the elephant grows the tree can be smaller and the rope changed to string and yet the grown elephant remains bound to the twig of a tree without believing that his own power

can overcome what has become a limiting sensory experience.

- d) An autistic child (one who does not respond to his/her world) can be taught to stand up with a rope tied between two chairs. With practice the child will stand up, hold on to the rope for support and move from the one chair to the other. In time the rope can be changed to a string tied between the two chairs. Then the child can be given a string alone, tied to nothing, and will walk unaided. If the string is taken away the child will fall down.

William Faulkner in his classic book, *Light In August*, puts it a different way but with the same powerful impact: "Memory believes before knowing remembers". In my own psychotherapy/PHP practice I experience the incredible limitations an individual places on him/herself by their premature cognitive commitments. We become predictable because what we feel we become. We are the end product of our experiences and the interpretation of those experiences. Emotion is the energy our body carries. Alice Miller (refs 7, 8, and 9) states it well: "Your body will present its bill". John Bradshaw (refs 1 and 2) states that our bodies carry the pain of our wounded inner children. He emphasizes that we must realize that we can be in our head and not even know that sadness and rage is going on inside our emotional brains. Our unresolved issues will be acted out. Our belief systems will ensure that we will act to others the way that we were acted upon. Our neuronal gates can close down to the emotions just as the fish get closed down to the other side of the fish tank, the flies to the outside world, the elephant to its own strength, the autistic child to his/her ability to walk without the support of a string, and each of us to our limitless potential. If we allow ourselves to remain in the prison of our original experiences than we allow ourselves to be limited and cramped in a space that, in reality, has no walls, no doors, no barriers, no limits, but those of our own making.

It is not surprising that there are numerous modes in PHP that deal with belief systems: PE & ST over second joint of thumb (personal belief systems); PE & EM over first

joint of thumb (tribal unconscious belief systems); Self Mode 8e (beliefs about self); EM 14 (roles under stress); EM 5 1/2a (misinterpretation or assumptions about self and others); EM 3 1/2a (misunderstandings about self and others). I believe that all modes on the Self Mode are belief systems or one sort or another.

The key point of this paper is to call to mind that these belief systems are not easy to shake. All that we do is based on the reality as we see it through our own set of glasses. Ernest Holmes describes the situation:

"We are like one who, without knowing it, has put on some kind of glasses that invert everything so that in walking down the street the right side of the street might appear to be at the left, the sidewalk might appear to be up on the top of the buildings, the sun might appear to rise in the west and set in the east. Suppose we imagine someone wearing such glasses, and imagine that everything he looks at is inverted and is out of place. Even that which is true in itself assumes a false position. In reality this falseness is not the object of his perception but in his interpretation of that object. The Bible speaks of this as looking through a glass, darkly. Now he has become so accustomed to this inverted viewpoint that a true viewpoint would be shocking, it would be amazing, it would be unbelievable. Suppose, then, we change the glasses and put on a pair that reveals things more nearly as they must be. He has to reverse his whole mental reaction. The sun is now rising in the east and setting in the west etc... It will be difficult for him to readjust his mental viewpoint to this new order, even though seeing straight for the first time. It almost seems as though he must put on the old glasses that he may again be in familiar surroundings..." (ref. 6).

Any new belief system will be unfamiliar, uncomfortable and, in some instances, intolerable. Change comes from awareness, then acceptance and appreciation of how and why these belief systems got embedded. Tony Robbins suggests that a way to get to the bottom of how we act and react is to list

things that we do and like to do, things that we don't do and don't like to do. Then write down the belief system that has established that behavior. Muscle test for accuracy. It is a beginning of a most important journey - one that we cannot ignore if we are to grow beyond where we are.

References

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