

Solutions for a Better Tomorrow

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Abstract: We create the contours of our life based on our thoughts, beliefs, and behavior. Behavior based on distorted beliefs and misconceptions are at the root of our personal and global problems. The first step in solving our problems, therefore, is to ascertain which of our beliefs are true and which don't align with reality. If, for example, we believe the natural world is here for humankind to exploit rather than nurture, the consequences are severe and increasingly evident: pollution, soil erosion and erratic weather. Examining beliefs takes courage and persistence; most beliefs are deep seated, and many are below our everyday awareness. This article examines several areas needing both deep introspection and a radical change in behavior.

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The statement, "we create our own reality," may seem trite; nevertheless, it accurately reflects the responsibility we all share for whatever life brings. In fact, modern life has brought us many challenges: inequality breeding conflict, excessive debt leading to financial turmoil and a degraded ecosystem resulting in depleted resources and severe weather. Since these problems are our own creation, we are responsible for solving them. We must examine everything we think, say, and do. For it is our thoughts that sway our beliefs, and our beliefs impact our behavior. Behavior based on faulty beliefs must be changed if we are to solve our problems.

False beliefs are detrimental both personally and globally. In fact, many psychologists maintain most people don't know why they think what they think or do what they do. Is it any wonder we have so many problems? That is why we must delve deeply into our beliefs. Are they true? How certain are we? Do they contain distortions or misconceptions? Can we be sure about anything when we see only a partial picture of reality? As an example, at one time most people thought the world was flat and it would have been hard to convince them otherwise. Adopting a different opinion would have been heresy and led to ridicule

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if not contempt. Anyone who accepts “unconventional thinking” is subject to scorn; it is easier to go along with the crowd than think for oneself. However, as philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1969) observed, “All truth passes through three stages. First it is ridiculed. Second it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.” Where do your beliefs fall on the spectrum from patently false to undeniably true? For most of us they fall somewhere in the middle.

Unexamined beliefs can lead to a state of fear so we must determine if those fears are true or illusory. Specifically, are they based on what happened in the past or what might happen in the future? Focusing on the past has little impact on what’s happening today; the future is unknowable and the past no longer relevant. How much faith should we put in that which is unknowable, irrelevant, and easily changeable? Is death, for example, truly the end of life and really to be feared? While many believe that life is a fleeting experience—fully conscious one moment, nonexistent the next, others have had profound experiences (past life connections and near-death experiences, etc.) that radically challenge these beliefs.

Is this another case of “the world is flat” syndrome where most people accept majority thinking without critical analysis? Believing life is finite and the finality of death is inescapable is likely to lead to thoughts or behaviors with unintended or unfavorable consequences.

Here is another common belief to examine. Is our technology the savior we think it is? Is it really the answer to our problems or are our difficulties more internal than external? If the former, we may be spending too much time with our high-tech gadgets. They can be helpful in certain circumstances, but they encourage the belief that technology will magically solve our most pressing problems. Many people expect technology to eradicate the pandemic and climate change, not understanding they are generated and perpetuated by faulty beliefs and destructive behavior. We must take personal responsibility to nurture the ecosystem, share our bounty and live within our means before looking for external, technological solutions.

In addition, there is a compelling case to be made that technology has impaired physical and mental health. According to a report in the *New York Times* (May 10, 2022), feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness began to increase about the time of the iPhone’s 2007 debut. General use of Facebook began in late 2006; by 2009 about one-third of Americans were using it. Use of digital technology — social media, video games, text messaging or other online activities — has contributed to a reduction in exercise and sleep,

two activities essential to our well-being. That is why many experts believe technology plays a significant role in the deterioration of our physical and mental health.

Another question to ask ourselves: Is the part of our personality that craves superiority and control (our ego) creating the world we want? Many behavioral difficulties result from either an enlarged or diminished ego; balance is necessary for optimal life experiences. To paraphrase the Pathwork (www.pathwork.org), a profound psycho-spiritual body of wisdom, ego connotes fragmentation. It is that part of the human personality that thinks, acts, discriminates and decides. Yet the average state of the human mind - brain, intellect and will, is only a small piece of total consciousness. Because the ego is more easily accessible than other facets of our personality, it is the part with which we usually identify. We believe that ego's dictates are wise, even infallible. As the ego's view is limited, however, following it often results in fear and suffering. The ego is temporarily disconnected from the wisdom of our Soul (the true essence of our being); as such its instructions can be distorted. As a result, the ego's view that everything is separate and autonomous triggers self-will, pride and fear. These erroneous beliefs lead to selfish, short-sighted behavior. Wouldn't a world where people cooperated and shared resources be more harmonious and productive? Such a world is unlikely when our ego, with its insistence on dominance, is in charge. As we shift the ego's status from ruler of our life to its rightful place as a willing servant, life becomes more fulfilling. Experienced psychological practitioners can help redirect the ego to its rightful but limited role.

Our common tendency is to wait until problems become almost insurmountable before acting. Until then we assume others will handle all incoming threats. When this fails to happen, we are forced to pay attention and deal with the dangers that lurk. Thus crises, such as we are now experiencing, are not new to human history. They arise when people's thinking is badly out of balance and requires a major shift. It can be an unsettling experience, but it helps us to move to the next stage of mental and spiritual growth. To overcome our difficulties no one can be a spectator; all must contribute their skills and talents. Everyone would do well to ask themselves what effort they can contribute to bring today's imbalances to equilibrium.

It is important to understand that the human personality has many parts; all emanate from our Soul. At our core, we are eternal Souls, connected to all that exists. In our temporary physical bodies, we forget our innate connections and act in selfish, short-sighted ways. We are all in this together; what we do for another we do for ourselves. If we dismiss the plight of others, we also suffer. Creating an unsustainable world—ignoring the needs of nature, living beyond our means, allowing inequality to spread—comes at a

high price. A crisis ensues, meant to wake us up and shake us up. We come to realize we must take personal responsibility for fixing what we created. Things must be brought back to a sustainable balance.

People need to examine where their beliefs are leading them. It soon becomes obvious a different direction is called for. First, reducing consumption and concentrating on reusing and recycling products to minimize waste. Next, sharing the earth's bounty more equitably. As many studies suggest, more things do not bring us lasting happiness. Real fulfillment comes from connecting to the part of us that is eternal. If, instead, we identify solely with the transitory body, life is unfulfilling. The ego is immature and temporal; the Soul is wise and eternal. It provides insights and intuitive understandings that the ego, operating from a limited and unaware perspective, cannot. Here are some important differences between the ego and the Soul:

When the ego sees an attack, the Soul sees a chance to emanate love and generosity.

When the ego sees disease, the Soul has compassion for the hard lessons being learned.

When the ego observes a stressful situation, the Soul sees a reason for meaningful life changes.

When the ego feels unworthy, the Soul sees the need for greater self-love.

When the ego provokes prideful feelings, the Soul sees an opportunity to practice humility.

When the ego arouses anger, the Soul understands that forgiveness is in order.

When the ego sees danger, the Soul sees a chance to reimagine life.

Reframe your thinking. Feel into your heart and listen for inspiration from your Soul. With patience and stillness, you will receive what you need.

Engaging in negative thinking and a pessimistic view of life won't create what we want. It merely draws us to people with inflated egos who dwell on fearful outcomes. Negative thinking is a reaction to a world in constant motion and with an unknowable future. It leads to short-term, immature behavior. All negative beliefs, including the ego's need for dominance, the human personality's fearful outlook, our reliance on the latest technology

to solve personal problems, lead us astray. These distractions override our spiritual awareness. We must prioritize our spiritual essence over our temporary physical experience. To quote Nelson Mandela (1992), “I never lose, either I win, or I learn.” This is true Soul wisdom. It recognizes the positive aspect of seemingly negative experiences. It is good to be mindful that as an integral part of our Soul, we are safe, loved, and eternal. All events are temporary. Even the most negative ones can make us stronger. It is always our choice; do you choose to adopt a positive or negative attitude. Life follows accordingly.

Each of us has created our own reality and we are responsible for changing it. We cannot wait for this world to be altered; we must have the courage of our convictions. Imagine how your Soul would respond to any situation: with love, forgiveness, humility and generosity as appropriate. Ask for inspiration and guidance. Learn to understand life from your Soul’s perspective, not your ego’s. Focus on your positive beliefs and intentions not on those of others. When your ego says, “This person is attacking me,” your Soul counsels, “Give this person more love and attention.” Listen to your Soul!

We are living through a period of great transformation. We must all become agents for the changes we want to see. Aligning our thoughts and beliefs with a positive view of life is a good place to start. As Gus Speth (2013), a Rhodes scholar, Law professor and co-founder of the respected environmental organization, Natural Resources Defense Council, so poignantly stated, “The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation.” Changing our behavior is the second step. This is the “doing” part of the “think, say and do” equation. The Natural Step, a decades old sustainability organization, developed a concrete action plan to aid the environment. This is where everyone can have an immediate impact. The four system conditions developed by “The Natural Step” are paraphrased below (see TheNaturalStep.org for more details).

Limit substances removed from the earth to those which can be efficiently regenerated.

Limit persistent man-made substances, such as plastics; create only biodegradable material.

Minimize waste from old, obsolete products. Renew, reuse, recycle; empty the landfills.

Meet people’s basic needs so they can rise above their understandable focus on survival and join with others to take personal responsibility for the planet.

As people's needs are met, the planet will rebalance and heal. Before long, a critical mass of citizens, passionate about creating a better life, will surface and practical solutions will follow. A peaceful, sustainable future will then be ours to enjoy.

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