



Insight and Inspiration,  
Innovation and Vision  
For the Developing and  
Evolving Self

# INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SELF DEVELOPMENT

## Letter for Insight and Inspiration

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### Beliefs (Part I)

#### INTRODUCTION

In our letters, we have been discussing some aspects of belief. Last month (January 2018) we explored the relationship between the past, belief, and the future that is created by the self-fulfilling prophesy. We saw how beliefs create expectations for the future which creates behavior in anticipation of the future event and how that very behavior brings about our expected future.

As we continue to explore beliefs we will understand how our beliefs create our life. We will see how they are part of the self-fulfilling prophesy. Our goal is to be able to consciously use our beliefs to create the life we want.

**Point of Empowerment:** *When we know how beliefs operate in our lives, we can consciously, with awareness, choose the beliefs we want to hold. As we change our beliefs our life changes.*

#### IMPORTANCE OF BELIEF

Beliefs determine our behavior, the behavior we create our lives with and use to fulfill our needs and desires. (Here we are defining behavior as thinking, feeling, and acting.) For example:

- I believe that I am a good person, I like myself (have good self-esteem), and do good. My good deeds create goodness in my life. As I observe my behavior, my good deeds, my belief about myself as a good person is confirmed.
- As I believe that my boss is worthless and useless, I mistreat him or her. He or she retaliates and mistreats me. I create conflict in my life. Also, my belief that my boss is worthless and useless is confirmed.
- There is part of me (a childish part) that believes that others should give me what I want all the time. Even though I know that this is not possible, I feel very frustrated when I don't get my way. The people in my life do not react positively when they hear about my frustration. I have created antagonism between the people in my life and myself. In my frustration I become more demanding about getting my way, and the whole cycle repeats itself.

We see how beliefs determine our behavior and we also see how beliefs tend to be reinforced by the experiences we have in life, the experiences we create for ourselves through the self-fulfilling prophesy.

**Point of Empowerment:** *In areas of your life that you like, continue with the beliefs you have, being aware of how those beliefs influence your thoughts, feelings, and actions. If you are dissatisfied with aspects of your life, discover and change the beliefs that govern those aspects.*

#### CATEGORIES OF BELIEF

There are various types of belief. Some beliefs are more important, fundamental, and influential than others. The examples below tend to be all or nothing, black or white, which is sometimes the way we think. At other times we can see "shades of gray."

**Point of Empowerment:** *Learning about the categories of belief creates a foundation of understanding that can make changing beliefs easier.*

#### INTRODUCTION

#### IMPORTANCE OF BELIEF

#### CATEGORIES OF BELIEF

Opinions

Beliefs About Cause and  
Effect

Beliefs About the Nature of  
Reality

Beliefs About Ourselves

Beliefs About Our Values

Beliefs about what is  
possible for us

#### CONCLUSION

## Opinions

Opinions are “the personal spin” that we give to things that we perceive. We need to have opinions as they give us “character”, are part of our uniqueness, and part of the fun of “being me.” Yet we should not hold onto our opinions too tightly as they need to grow and evolve as we grow and evolve. Rigid opinions prevent our growth and evolvment. Opinions usually take this form: I think X is better than Y. X and Y are political parties, baseball teams, clothing items, types of furniture, beers, vacation destinations, styles of parenting. . . The list goes on forever.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Hold your opinions lightly so you can change them as necessary to accommodate your growth.*

## Beliefs About Cause and Effect

Beliefs about cause and effect take the form: If I do x—y happens or if x happens, I think, feel, and do y. These beliefs range in importance from being trivial to being crucial and operate in a way that is invisible to us. We tend to think that our beliefs about cause and effect are “the facts of life.” These are beliefs not facts, because there are alternative ways of dealing with “cause and effect,” which come from other beliefs.

- If it is cold, I dress warmly. If I dress warmly I won’t get sick. I believe that dressing warmly prevents getting sick. Or, I believe that a healthy immune system prevents illness. I get plenty of rest to boost my immune system.
- When I receive affection from people I love I feel happy. I believe that affection causes happiness. Or, when I receive affection from other people I feel anxious as I mistrust affection. I believe that affection causes anxiety and reject it when it comes my way.
- When I eat too much ice cream I feel guilty. Based on my experience, eating too much causes me guilt. Or, when I eat too much ice cream I am happy because I am comfortable being overweight. Eating too much causes feeling comfortable. It lessens my anxiety.
- When I am selfish I feel guilty and therefore unhappy. Selfishness causes unhappiness. Or, when I am selfish I am happy because I believe that the only way to get what I need is to be selfish. Selfishness causes happiness.
- If I do the right thing in life, I will be rewarded. I believe that doing the right thing causes getting what you want. Or, if I do the right thing in life, others will see me as weak and take advantage of me. I believe that doing the right thing causes you to lose out.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Beliefs about cause and effect influence our behavior in everything we do. They determine our motivation for acting and tend to be fixed as we see cause and effect as “the way life is,” with no room for interpretation.*

## Beliefs About the Nature of Reality

Beliefs about the nature of reality are about how I, other people, and the world work. They guide and determine our approach to ourselves and the world.

- The world is a mean place. It is dog eat dog. Therefore, I am defensive and aggressive in my behavior.
- The world is a supportive place that you can count on much of the time. Therefore, I am relaxed and focus on the most effective ways to accomplish my goals.
- People want to control you. It is either control or be controlled. Therefore, I behave in controlling ways even though this provokes power struggles with others.
- People are generally reasonable and willing to listen to what I have to say. Therefore, I express myself effectively and constructively.
- To get love, I must please others, putting my needs second. Therefore, I focus on what others need and neglect my own.
- To get love, give love. Therefore, I behave in loving ways and am open to receiving love from others.

**Point of Empowerment:** *These beliefs start to form in early childhood. They tend to be fixed as they operate in ways that are transparent to us.*

## Beliefs About Ourselves

Beliefs about ourselves compose our self-image. These beliefs determine how we feel about ourselves and what we think, feel, and do. These examples are somewhat black and white, all or nothing, which is unrealistic, though we may think this way. They illustrate how beliefs compose our self-image.

I am (I believe myself to be): a good communicator, a poor dancer, a logical (or illogical) thinker, a loving (or unloving) spouse, an effective (or an ineffective) parent, lovable (or unlovable).

Let's see how this works.

- If I am a good communicator: the thoughts and feelings that I express are clear. I act with self-confidence as I communicate with others. As others respond positively, my self-image as a good communicator is reinforced.
- As a poor dancer I become very self-conscious and anxious on the dance floor. This causes me to be awkward in my movements. I then continue to see myself as a poor dancer.
- If I am an effective parent: I learn what I need to know about parenting and effectively put that knowledge into action. I learn from my mistakes, understanding that no parent is perfect. My self-image as an effective parent is reinforced.
- If I am lovable I treat others with love and know that they will treat me with love. As I receive love from others, my self-image as lovable is reinforced.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Whether our self-image is positive or negative, we act in ways that are in accordance with those beliefs. We interpret the feedback we get from others in ways that reinforces our self-image.*

### Beliefs About Our Values

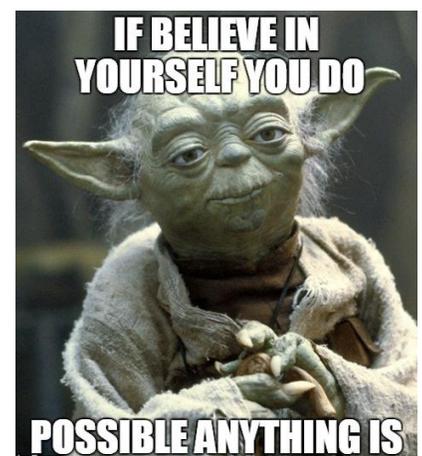
Our values are beliefs about what is important to us and what matters in our lives. When we value something, we give it our attention and devote our time and energy to it. In the reverse direction, what we pay attention to and devote our time and energy to, shows us what we value. What we value is a component of our self-definition, our identity—who we believe ourselves to be. Our values are also connected to our self-esteem.

- I value my work, therefore I spend many hours of the week at work and give it a lot of my attention. When I do well at my work I feel good about myself, my self-esteem goes up.
- I value honesty. I define myself as an honest person. When I am honest I feel good about myself, my self-esteem goes up. When I am dishonest I feel badly about myself, my self-esteem goes down.
- I value feeling safe and secure. As I believe that the world is a dangerous place, I act defensively and aggressively at times. I do not take risks, even though I feel frustrated with myself because I know that I miss out on much that life has to offer.

### Beliefs About What Is Possible for Us

Our belief in what is possible for us is future oriented. As we look toward the future we ask: "What can I have or do and who can I become?" If we think something is possible we will act to create it. If we don't think it is possible we will not attempt any action. There is also "maybe it is possible, maybe not." With maybe, we may attempt to create something and act "halfheartedly," not making our best effort. We may or may not get what we want. For example:

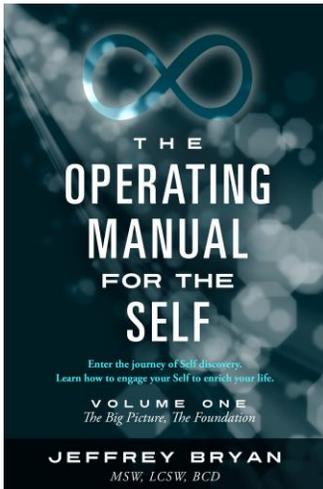
- I believe that it is possible for me to go out this weekend since I am off from work. I therefore make plans with friends.
- I believe that it is possible for me to win this tennis match. I put my best effort into the game.
- I don't believe that it is possible for me to win this tennis match. I don't put forth my best effort.



- I believe that I could find the girl/guy of my dreams. I therefore go on dates with optimism and hope.
- I don't believe that it is possible for me to find a rewarding career. Therefore, I approach each job I have with pessimism and a lack of enthusiasm, guaranteeing my lack of fulfillment. Each unrewarding job experience confirms my belief that I will not find a rewarding career.

## CONCLUSION

We have taken another step in our exploration of beliefs. Hopefully we have demonstrated how important beliefs are. In future letters we will explore other characteristics of beliefs and describe how to identify and change our beliefs.



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*Our beliefs determine the effectiveness of our ego functioning. See the chapter in the manual about the ego to understand how this works.*

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