

Core Beliefs: Our Personal Fiction

by Lynne Forrest

We all have them. Both positive and negative, these deeply rooted convictions, commonly called core beliefs, originate in childhood and become the lens through which we view ourselves and the world around us. These basic, but often erroneous notions rule and limit us until we bring them into consciousness and begin to challenge them. Based on our early interpretation of messages received from older siblings and the adults who matter to us most, these life impressions are deeply ingrained and actually become part of the fabric of who we perceive ourselves to be. Core Beliefs often consist of pre-verbal decisions formed beneath the level of our conscious mind. In other words, core beliefs are the unconscious programming from which we operate as if they were true.

Because it never occurs to us to examine, much less challenge these unconscious beliefs, they simply become convictions and preconceptions that we continue to validate and live out in our day-to-day existence. When they are positive, they can provide a solid base or foundation that serves to affirm and support us throughout life. Having, for instance, a core belief that tells us we are smart or able to deal well with controversy provides self-confidence and facilitates our being able to go forward in life. But the life affirming core beliefs are not the ones we are primarily concerned with here because they aren't the ones that cause us trouble. It's the negative and self-limiting programming that throws up obstacles for us in life -- that create those issues that deter and restrict positive life flow, causing us to think poorly of ourselves and distrust others. The life-negating imprints are the ones to which the term "core belief" is herein applied. These pain-causing beliefs about ourselves are the ones that need to be brought to the surface of awareness and addressed.

The bad news is that our core beliefs are most likely not going to simply disappear, no matter how much we wish it -- no matter how hard we work to eliminate them. These erroneous ideas about ourselves have become as much a part of us as our very skin and there's a good chance that they may always be a part of the fabric of our personality. The good news is that even though we may not rid ourselves completely of these pain-producing beliefs we can learn to recognize when they are "running the show" and become more and more adept at dissipating their negative impact. And we can grow in our ability to love, honor and respect ourselves in spite of them. By making them conscious we can learn how they work. We can learn to discern what triggers them and then make different choices about how to respond, so that rather than reacting out of these beliefs we can choose healthier alternatives. We may even be able to learn to circumvent them altogether at times. In essence, it's all about getting to know these internal beliefs intimately. By becoming familiar with what our core beliefs are and how they affect us, we grow to better understand ourselves with them, which allows us more self-acceptance. This, in turn, enables us to learn more efficient ways of discharging their negative energy, allowing a freedom previously unknown.

Our challenge is to consistently bring these destructive self-determinations into consciousness so we can choose how much power to give them in the moment. We do this by growing a habit of "suspecting our core beliefs first". Whenever we find ourselves having painful feelings, we begin by asking ourselves what we are telling ourselves, because we learn that our uncomfortable feelings are self-created -- not externally caused. This means we must let go of the idea that outside people or events "make us" feel.

Giving up the victim notion that others are in charge of our feeling lives is the first link in a chain of steps that lead us to freedom from core beliefs. By understanding that our feelings originate out of what we tell ourselves, (rather than coming from what someone else says or does) we put ourselves in charge rather than living our lives "at the mercy of" outside circumstances.

Let's look at an example of typical victim mentality: Paul is driving to work one morning when a car pulls out directly in front of him. Immediately he gets angry and reacts by laying on his car horn and cussing and yelling at the other driver. He holds the other driver responsible for his anger and goes through the rest of the morning out of sorts because of that "stupid driver's crazy stunt".

Our habit is to lay blame for our feelings. I'm not implying that the other driver isn't responsible for his driving choices. I am saying, however, that the other driver did not create Paul's feelings – Paul did. His anger came from what he told himself about the situation, not from what the other driver did or did not do. To be able to make this distinction removes us from living life blown about like a leaf in the wind. When we understand that we are in total charge of our feelings we move to a whole new level of mastery over life. We are free then to choose how we are going to feel and respond. Our happiness is no longer dictated by someone else's words or behavior. In other words we are no longer a victim.

Another example might make it even more clear – Recently I attended a follow up meeting for a training seminar. The professional in charge, upon entering the room, spoke to all of us present; "Instead of meeting here tonight, let's have our meeting down the street at the coffee shop." The response of those present varied depending on what each one "heard". For instance, Betty, a depressive type woman in her mid fifties, responded with apathy. She later admitted that she had felt a bit hopeless because she told herself that the professional didn't want to deal with her. Another seminar member, Rob, a young A-personality type, admitted he felt angry because he thought the facilitator was saying she expected to be paid for what he considered a "social visit". And me? I was excited when I heard her words because I told myself that the facilitator was feeling so positive about our progress that she didn't see a need for a lot of intense follow up and simply wanted to celebrate! The point is that the same words were said to everybody there, but the reactions were diverse. Why? Because what was said was not what caused us to have the feelings we each had. Our diverse feelings came from our own individual internal dialogue. Our leader's words simply triggered each person's self-talk. In other words, our feeling response was generated from what we told ourselves. This is how internal programming works.

From where does this internal dialogue come? The things we tell ourselves in any given moment are, most often, a reflection of old core beliefs. We go through life unconsciously repeating these core beliefs, like a negative mantra.... Over and over we repeat them thus reinforcing them, until they manifest themselves in non-productive, yet familiar, life themes. They formulate themselves into narrow, very limited storylines that we buy into as the definition of who we believe ourselves to be. We live out these core beliefs ... this fictionalized version or story of who we are. Unfortunately these ideas are often based on lies told (or insinuated) to us about ourselves, which we bought into because those who told us were family members or voices of authority who we trusted knew us best.

Through a process of exploring the "what, where and how" of our core beliefs, we can come to "know" that they are not true. This does not mean, however, that we stop believing these ancient fallacies, for it is possible to believe something and yet know that it is not true. As a matter of fact, I often tell clients that "just because you believe it doesn't make it so". What we know and what we believe can be totally opposed. For example, we can believe that we are worthless, yet know logically that this is simply not the truth. Unfortunately, what we unconsciously believe will rule every time. That said makes it true that "because you believe, it is so". These unconscious internal untruths must be brought into consciousness where they can be re-decided. Until we become aware of it and challenge it's veracity, we will continue to act as if it is true. As long as these negative beliefs about ourselves operate beneath the surface of our consciousness, they will go on limiting and ruling our lives, making us miserable. Only by coming to "know" them can we redirect their energy -- which means choosing not to act on them as if they were true. Consciousness is the healing agent. This is the pathway to personal freedom.