

The Energetics of Intentions

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How do I believe in my inherent value when I have spent most of my life thinking I am worthless? What can I do to believe in myself? How can I change my core beliefs?

Several times a week someone sitting before me in my office expresses these sentiments. I recognize the fact that like any practitioner, my clients are self-selecting, and I might hear these words due to the nature of population with whom I work. Still, too many people I encounter in a variety of venues walk around this earth speaking the story, to varying degrees and intensities, that they are valueless. The fact that those in my office, hungry to explore personal growth admit to me their innate worthlessness, is a rather interesting paradox. What motivates a truly worthless person to ask for assistance? For what purpose would a person with no value seek counsel on becoming empowered? On some level, a seed must be present containing a modicum of worth and value. From somewhere deep inside they must believe that they deserve to feel alive, at peace, and whole. Even if said in the negative, as in *I no longer want to feel miserable*, an inherent belief in the potential for something different, something better, must exist.

When this belief in personal valuelessness is identified, people often leap to questioning why. *Why do I feel this way? Why can't I love myself? Why can't I acknowledge other people's praise?* I find that why tends to be a rather useless question when it comes to exploring beliefs and behaviors. The question why tends to spin the wheels of the mind until they get stuck in the mud, leaving us covered in dirt, sinking deeper and deeper into the quagmire of self-deprecation.



Why do I feel worthless?

Because my mother treated me poorly and I believe she was justified.

Why do I feel unlovable?

Because I had no role models for affection and care.

Why? Because. This vicious cycle fails to assist forward

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motion, or any motion at all. If it is true, if my mother never showed me care, love and affection, then what? Neurobiologists suggest that early experiences of love and care, or the lack thereof, may influence the hard-wiring of our neural network to which we are constitutionally predisposed. Experiencing my mother's cold and detached nature patterned my neurobiology, and programmed my outlook on life, namely, making me unable to recognize any expression of love and care. I don't see it, it must not exist, and therefore, I conclude I must be unlovable. This is all well and good. This knowledge can inform the decisions I make regarding how I wish to act towards my children (and others), addressing the notion of the causality of my behaviors. Still, what can I do about my core beliefs regarding my very existence? How does this information do anything more than permit me the space to justify, rationalize, and explain my attitude? All too frequently, asking why perpetuates victimization. *I was abused, so that is why I am the way I am.* I know why, but what now?

How do we change our core beliefs, or our psycho-emotional programming? The great yogi sages allege that transcendence is possible, and that each of us can move beyond our present egocentric state of living and relating to the world and ourselves. Transcendence, then, is the recognition that we are more than our current beliefs, and that our true nature is that of love, peace, or bliss. While I recognize the potential for transcendence, I have to ask myself, is it probable? Such transcendence is more than simply reframing our thinking. Are we capable of embodying, becoming, and living our new belief systems? Can we *be* the philosophy in which we

desire to believe? Does merely *wanting* to believe in our inherent worthiness make us actually *believe* we are worthy?

In my last article I examined the nature of the energy we *ingest* in the form of breath. How we breathe has tremendous influence on our psycho-soma-emotional state. But what precedes breathing? What motivates our breath? When discussing motivation, we are speaking of intention. My patients love to tell me how they are procrastinators who are just plain unmotivated. Claiming a lack of motivation and will power, my patients label themselves as *weak* and *lazy*. Like the question why, declaring one's lack of motivation moves us further away from the true nature of things, or at least, the possibility for change. Rarely do we do anything, or in this case, refrain from doing something, out of weakness, laziness, or stupidity, as my patients are quick to attest. If, for instance, we sit on the couch and eat chocolate all day, rather than go to work, clean the house, walk around the block or cook a meal, it is not because we are unmotivated to do those things, but rather we are motivated to sit on the couch and eat chocolate. In place of the continual pathologizing of *inability*, which focuses on what we are not doing, what would happen if we embraced our behavior, while being mindful of its motivation and intention?

To counter the desire to ask why, which only leads us down the path of intellectualization and theorization, I prefer to ask *For what purpose?* For what purpose speaks to the payoffs, the benefits, and the rewards we gain from our thoughts and actions. *For what purpose do I sit on the couch? What might be the benefit or pay-*



off for eating chocolate? How do these behaviors serve me? With what frequency do we explore our drives and motives in this way? Notice how this differs from asking ourselves why. For what purpose do I meditate? versus Why do I meditate?

My latest guru embodies the form of an 84-year old woman with whom I am currently working. DJ hasn't left her room for over 2 years now. Due to her health status, getting out of bed to walk the 3 feet to her recliner is a major ordeal, leaving her tired and drained. For many, this would be enough to sour one's mood. Surprisingly, however, DJ is THE happiest and most peaceful person I have ever met.

A few months ago, DJ's son passed away unexpectedly at the young age of 50 from numerous cerebral aneurysms. As DJ grieved her loss, she would, from time to time, question God's wisdom for taking such a strong and vital man as her son, a man who had children and a wife, a man still contributing to society. In contrast, DJ would occasionally wonder what she contributed to the world. As the weeks passed, while DJ still admitted that she was unable to comprehend God's plan, she was at peace. What brought about this calm? "You can't really be sad or upset when you appreciate all the wonderful moments that you have had with someone," she told me. "Your mind just can't focus on those two different emotions at the same time." Whenever she would start to feel sorry for herself, for her loss or the loss of her grandchildren and daughter-in-law, she would stop midstream. She went on to say that as she was lying in bed, questioning her value to society, she would meditate on all of the good things people have done for her. This simple reflection quelled the rise in despair, as she was immediately filled with gratitude.

I asked DJ if this positive outlook was something that came innately to her or did it require learning. She claims was born with this perspective. What I found truly surprising was her next comment. According to DJ, she has never worried whether or not other people like her. This set my mind racing. How can that be? As DJ tells it, she is here on this earth to love. And love she does. When I mention to friends or students DJ's lack of emphasis on other's opinions of her, two reactions usually ensue. On the one hand, people sigh and immediately claim how fortunate she is not to be plagued by constant doubt and anxiety. On the other hand, some sternly admonish that if a person, such as DJ, never considers other's opinions about them then this is a formula for selfishness that leads to a lack of compassion, since we would then never think about how our words or actions impact others.

It is apparent to me that DJ holds some special core beliefs. Unlike my patients who doubt their value, DJ



regards everyone as inherently special, loveable and worthwhile. Everyone. As she mentioned to me, she has always been able to find something positive about every person she has met, although she admits to grappling a bit longer when it came to politicians. Do not confuse this with liking or getting along with everyone, or even commending or condoning a person's behaviors. A person's actions may be hurtful or without positive merits, and still their actions alone do not define their intrinsic worth.

I regard DJ's innate core beliefs as a true blessing, not only for her, but for those around her. I disagree with the conclusion that if we deemphasize the weight we ascribe to the opinions other's hold of us, that we would hence lack compassion. In DJ's case, it is quite the contrary. DJ doesn't worry if you like her or not, which liberates her mental energies, leaving her free to be present and focused on loving and caring about the individual standing before her. She doesn't fret about whether or not she is good enough, smart enough, pretty enough or worthy enough. How much time and effort do most of us spend on such musings?

What do we, who are not blessed with DJ's affirmative perspective, do? How do we change our core beliefs? We have to roll up our sleeves and put our hands in the dirt. Life is not easy. It isn't about ease. Regardless of any degree of effort, we can experience states of peace and happiness, and these need to be

cultivated. Rather than frustrate ourselves by continually asking why, DJ says we should do something. Turn our focus outward. Get up and go for a walk. Notice the beauty around us, even if we must struggle to search for it. Appreciate what we have and what is around us. Too much time is spent enumerating what is missing or who is at fault. DJ could be angry with God for taking her son. Instead, she chooses to focus on all the joy her 50 years with her son brought her. As DJ tells me, externals do not make us happy. Money won't, food can't, status doesn't. Opinions of us are just one more external. When we allow opinions to validate our very existence, we become blinded to the ultimate reality that each of us is seeking the same thing – connection, love and peace.

Depression is a uni-directional state, for we are drawn inward, unable to clearly see the world around us. We are trapped in a perpetual state of self-evaluation, anxiously besieged with doubts of our worthiness to live. In his book, **The Six Pillars of Self - Esteem**, psychologist Nathaniel Brandon wrote, "If I aim to prove that I am 'enough,' the project goes on to infinity - because the battle was already lost on the day I conceded the issue was debatable." So let's take the debate out of the equation. This was my thought when I had a patient call me a year ago while he was vacationing out of state. He was depressed, again, suicidal, in fact. His life was hell, and nothing was ever going to change, he declared. After midnight and miles away, what could I do? Debate with him about his worth wouldn't change his perspective, it would only make him dig his heels into the ground and argue his case of incompetence with more conviction. So I asked him to give me one month. In another week, he would be back in Seattle, and although I would see him upon his return, I asked him to live this month acting as if his worth and value were unquestionable. I paused for a moment, and then added, "and if that doesn't work, then we can talk about your plan for suicide." Luckily, this comment made him laugh, which was the first time during the conversation when his affect was anything but flat. He thanked me, agreed to try it, and told me that I was always able to help him see another perspective.

Acting as if is where the real work began. Whenever he began to feel depressed, I asked him to pause, breathe and reflect. What core beliefs were operating at the moment? How do those core beliefs manifest themselves in action? If he felt so utterly useless that he stayed in bed all day with the covers drawn over his head, what beliefs motivated this choice? What was the payoff for cocooning? Such behavior served him by re-affirming his belief in his valuelessness. He could look back at the day and say with conviction, *I really am a mess.*

How do we *act as if*? We begin by taking an honest and critical view at how we move through life. To paraphrase Confucius, *if you don't look where you are going, you will end up where you are headed.* When our energies are concentrated on validating our existence, we end up right where we began, feeling valueless. Next we ask ourselves how is it that we want to live? What do we want our motivations to be? Do we wish to let self-doubt and insecurity run our lives, or do we choose to be motivated by love and harmony? Once we determine how we want to live, we go about acting as if. If we wish to be open and kind, then act as if we are. If we long to live from a place of mindfulness, then act as if it is our primary motivator. Acting as if involves creativity and imagination, since we need to envision what behaviors and actions a person with these core beliefs embraces. When we act as if, we move, and our energies once again turn outward, and the emphasis on worth is not so enormous or overwhelming. We may still doubt our abilities, but we move regardless.

Is this enough to change our core beliefs? For many people, it is. Do I make it sound easy? While simple in essence, in practice it is far from easy, unless you are one of those consistently positive people, like DJ. In the current, standard medical model of research, we tend to focus on those in the middle of the bell-shaped curve, the common or average responses. What about studying the exceptional, the extraordinary, or the outliers, as they are often labeled. If we adopt DJ's practices, how might we view the world and our place in it? It might not bring happiness, but having sat in DJ's presence, I am willing to try it and see.

