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1.3.

Sharpen Your Self-Image

Self-Image is all about how we see ourselves. The concept of self-image differs therefore from self-esteem and self-confidence. My self-image is wrapped up in the view I have of myself. My self-esteem on the other hand depends on whether or not I have confidence in myself. Having a positive self-image is obviously a prerequisite to believing in yourself. These concepts are closely linked.

To attain your most precious goals in life usually requires you to rethink your image of yourself and of what you think you are capable. For many of us, our understanding of what we are capable is unreasonably limited. If we hold fast to this limited vision of ourselves, we may never live our dreams.

We humans tend to exaggerate the importance of what we can touch and see. This is a consequence of the scientific and technical revolution we have gone through over the last 100 years.

Technology and the natural sciences have been linked to mankind's salvation and have even come to influence our understanding of ourselves. The result of this is that we are almost exclusively interested in the tangible, in what we can measure or weigh, even when it comes to human activity. This not only results in a narrow outlook on mankind but also in a warped view of the world. For the five senses are incapable of giving us all the information we need about the world around us.

If we listen only to our five physical senses, they may very well tell us that the world is flat and stationary. That's why it's not so strange that 400 years ago people believed the Earth to be the stationary center of the universe. But now we know that trusting their physical senses fooled the thinkers of 400 years ago. Now we know that this planet is shaped more like a

lemon than like a pancake, and that we are hurling through the universe at 600 km/s.

By taking into consideration only what we can touch and see, we greatly limit our understanding of ourselves and of the world around us. Human beings contain much that cannot be measured or appraised, qualities such as wisdom and feelings, thoughts and ideas, future plans and hopes, knowledge and attitudes.

In fact, people are very much like icebergs. Seafarers tell us about how terrifically huge most icebergs are. Yet on the average we see only about 10% of any particular iceberg. The other 90% is out-of-sight below the surface. People can be seen the same way. What we see is only a tiny part of what there is.



Also, a great deal of what's below the surface is beyond time. For example, you cannot kill a thought or an idea. An idea can live on for thousands of years.



The oldest cave paintings known to man are 30,000 years old. They tell us today what people thought and felt so long ago. There is therefore reason to be careful about what you say or write. What Jesus said 2000 years ago has influenced millions of people every day since then, and the same is true for what has been said by many other prophets, philosophers and thinkers.

This means that in certain ways we will still be around when we are no longer physically part of this world. We will be kept alive in the memories of our loved ones. Our letters will survive us – if we write any. For most letters these days are not written on paper.



My grandmother's mother lived when I was a child. She used to pick me up in her knee and tell me, "You're certainly going to grow up to be a strong man!" She also used to say, "Just a little extra willpower can help you create miracles."

This is the kind of wisdom that you can't verify scientifically, yet you know is true. I am afraid that a good deal of this wisdom has been lost during the 20th century. Partly, this is due to the scientific revolution, which changed our general view of knowledge. It tells us that if something isn't possible to confirm, then it isn't to be believed. Yet, this wisdom can be of tremendous help in many of life's passages. If we ignore it, we not only ignore ourselves but also our past generations.

There are other ways we tend to limit our self-image. From early on, we form a picture of what we are and are not capable of. This picture sets the boundaries for what we do and how we think. These limitations can easily make our daily lives unnecessarily dull and monotonous. Our preconceived notions of what life is supposed to be like at certain ages also strengthen these limitations.

Sometime after 60, you retire. These are the years for relaxing and for sitting in the park and feeding the pigeons. At 40 you're caught up in your career. You have to relegate your own interests to evenings and weekends and vacations. But what happens if a 40-year-old decides to take a year's leave-of-absence so he can do what he really wants to do and finds most fun? Others will think he's a bit crazy, although deep inside, they might envy him.



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I believe that we have a great need to break beyond the boundaries that we've set for ourselves. People are not so rigidly structured by nature. Actually, we are changing all the time. What we were incapable of yesterday we might find ourselves capable of today, if we would only try.

Have you ever felt restricted by societal conventions?

Have you ever felt the need to do anything others might find strange? Did you do it?

When is it ever good to have preconceived notions about people?

Have you ever done anything that you didn't think you would be able to do? How did it feel?

Did your parents encourage you to push beyond your limitations?

Having a limited view of ourselves complicates life, especially in the process of finding solutions to any kind of problems. Of course, a problem by definition is something that is difficult to handle. It requires more of us than do most things in our every-day life. It requires us to accomplish something above and beyond what we normally do. In other words, it demands that we do things we never thought we could. We have to dare to enter unknown territory.

If our capabilities are sharply defined, this step into the unknown will be much harder to take. The determining factor will be just how rigidly we hold onto our perceived limitations. If we hold onto them rigidly, then we will find it difficult to learn and develop. But if we dare to push the envelope, to release our grasp on our limitations, then we will find it easier to deal with unexpected and problematic situations.

It is extremely important that we do not view ourselves as finished products, but that instead we see ourselves as changeable and malleable. In this world of constant change, this is crucial.

This process of change will be much easier if we remind ourselves constantly that there is a great deal more energy in us than matter:

$$E=mc^2$$

This formula, presented to the world by Albert Einstein, can help us understand that we are much less solid and stationary than we generally think we are. In physics today, everything is viewed both as matter and as energy. This view may make our existence seem more unstable, but it also lets us see that our existence is more changeable and improvable.

Good luck with the journey of finding the true you!