

## Are you a victim or conscious creator of your life?

Have you met people who are ever willing to offer their acidic opinions on: the state of the world- their neighborhood, corruption, uncooperative employees, the ineptitude of the government, unreasonable boss, etc, etc. They go something like:

- What is the country coming to? We live in a rubbish dump. We live in a jungle with jungles. In front of our house our neighbours have rented their house to some working girls. The whole day there is a noise and disturbance. Cars honk, doors shut, bells ring, music blares. Or,
- With archaic labour laws, the situation in factories is hopeless. Management loses their spine because of it. Employees just don't want to work, they take advantage of the laws, and we are helpless....The labour department never prosecutes a Union for contravening an agreement, yet they would come down heavily on the management. Or,
- Who does he think he is? He is getting too big for his boots. He can't be bothered to replying to my mails now, and his work is useless. I can't stand his attitude....
- My boss is a nightmare to work with. I just didn't like the way he took advantage of the situation. How dare he behave with me like this...

You get the drift.

### Negative thoughts create a negative reality

Negative expressions come from negative thoughts. Chronic complainers are a pain for everyone near them. They are exhausting to be around, and after a while people want to keep them at a distance. But most importantly, they are depleting their own vigor, leaving little energy for moving forward towards their own constructive goals.

Before we speak out our negative thoughts, they have been circulating in our head for a while, so we have already repeated it several times to ourselves. For many people, complaining in their mind is a habit. But the more we do this, the more we are filling our own world with negative emotions and thoughts. It is Swami Vivekanand who said: *'We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far'*.

And you will notice, whiners have plenty to cry about. It is as though life is eager to give them what they think most about. The more we grumble, the more we find to grumble about. The more we focus on what is defective, the more defects we will find- leading to more unhappiness and frustration. Its an endless cycle. We become a chronic victim of life.

### Getting into the driver's seat and taking charge of our thinking

Since our thoughts create our energies and are responsible for our peace of mind, how can we change a negative thinking pattern? Can we *dissolve* negative thoughts and *choose* good thoughts?

The first step is to become aware of our mind chatter- ie become conscious of *what* we are thinking, and *when* we are thinking negative thoughts. They are so subtle that they flit in and out, so much so that



while we are disturbed by them, we often do not 'hear' them. But if we quieten our mind and pause, we can 'catch' them. Since we barely realise they are there, we do not challenge them or say 'Enough! I have better things to do' or 'I am grossly exaggerating the situation'.

Once we become more observant of our thoughts, the second step is not to beat ourselves for having them. Instead, give yourself a pat on the back for pinning them down. Say to yourself:

'Good job, for recognizing my own thoughts are creating my problems! This is a great first step towards changing the pattern which is troubling me.' Or 'This awareness is tremendously empowering for me'.

The third step is reframing, which is a way of reversing the way we look at something and, thus, changing our understanding of it. Thus a stressful or traumatic situation can be reframed into a challenge to be bravely overcome, or indeed, a learning opportunity. Reframing can change 'a day-where-everything-has-gone-wrong' to 'mild-problems-which-pop-up-from-time-to-time'.

### **Don't believe all your thoughts**

In its state of agitation, the mind has a tendency to exaggerate and 'awefulize' the situation. The difficult colleague is 'always' unreasonable, the nightmare boss is a 'demon' out to get you. An effective part of reframing involves examining the truth and accuracy (or lack thereof) of these thoughts. Is it really precise to say that the boss/ colleague has no job but to make your life miserable? Surely they have some positive aspects-such as their ability to plan, get things off the ground, their communication skills. Why not look at the whole picture instead of obsessing only about the negative? Challenge every negative thought, and see if you can adopt thoughts that fit your situation but reflect a more positive outlook.

### **Ascribe positive intentions to the other person**

When we are angry with another person, we jump to conclusions 'He hasn't answered my mail because this is a too small a priority for him. He obviously doesn't care a hoot about what happens to the project, and in any case he would like to show me down'. But this is all guess-work, isn't it. What are some other ways to interpret the same set of events?

Why not send loving thoughts to the person, and instead assume positive intentions into your guesswork; "I'm sure he has been busy, and hasn't had time to reply to my mail. He means well, and would like to see the project succeed. Let me send him a gentle reminder tomorrow. '

Thus reframing negative thoughts about a person or a situation shifts energies and leads to more constructive results.



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