

OVERVIEW OF BELIEF-FOCUSED CARE AND HEALING

by

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Mental health clinicians who provide counseling and therapy do so in different ways from many different philosophical perspectives. Some therapy perspectives focus primarily on the symptoms, such as intense anxiety episodes or substance abuse behaviors, with the goal of diminishing the symptoms. Some see the emotional and mental health dynamics as essentially a chemical imbalance and only use prescription drugs to treat the imbalance. Others focus on dysfunctional relationships, such as serious marital or parent-child conflicts, with the goal of increasing relationship satisfaction and healthy interactions. Others focus on intrapsychic dynamics such as unresolved complicated grief, unhealed repressed anger, guilt or aloneness, with the goal of healing the inner conflicts and wounds. Other philosophical perspectives focus on different agendas. Thus, many therapists identify themselves as eclectic therapists, meaning that they pick and choose which of these therapy perspectives, along with various strategies, techniques and/or medications will best serve their clients.

As an eclectic therapist exposed to numerous theoretical perspectives, strategies and techniques, I use a combination of approaches that I believe will best help persons with the struggles they present. There is, however, one philosophical perspective that serves as **the foundational reality** for my therapy. I call this: **Belief-Focused Care and Healing**.

The therapeutic principle thesis of **Belief-Focused Care and Healing** is that the content of one's beliefs are the primary determinants - other than one's genetic DNA - of each person's life outcomes, whether those outcomes are emotional, behavioral, intellectual, relational, spiritual and even, to a major degree, physiological.

This perspective has been embraced by numerous writers over the ages and captured in their writings.

Biblically, the wisdom handed down by the prophet **David** has been "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he" [Proverbs 23:7, KJV].

Buddha, the spiritual leader who began Buddhism, wrote, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts."

Author and Catholic theologian **John Powell** describes it this way: "What is most important, I think, is that our actions and reactions are determined by something inside us, by the way we see reality, by our attitudes" [Powell, John, The Christian Vision, Argus Communication: 1984]. In numerous other writings Father Powell refers to one's attitude as one's "vision of reality."

The wisdom from **Milton** states "The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven." [Milton, Paradise Lost].

Wayne Dyer states it this way: "All feelings and behaviors have an ancestor, known as a thought..." and "Our futures are formed by the thoughts we hold most often. We literally become what we think about, and we are all given the gift of being able to write our own story." [Dyer, You'll See It When You Believe It].

Earl Nightingale said, "What you think determines what you become."

William James wrote, "The greatest discovery of any generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude."

From **Emerson's** great mind we are enlightened with his statement "Great men are those who see that thoughts rule the world."

Even the noted golf author and teacher, **Harvey Penick**, says the same thing about playing golf: "With good players, problems are nearly always mental. A simple thing to remember but a hard thing to grasp and do is this -- if you want to change yourself, you must change how you think" [Penick, Harvey, Harvey Penick's Little Red Book, Simon & Schuster: 1992].

Caroline Myss affirms, "We create our own realities." [Anatomy of the Spirit. Harmony Books: New York, 1996].

David Swartz provided us this wisdom: "Success is determined not so much by the size of one's brain as it is by the size of one's thinking.... There is magic in thinking big." [Swartz, David J., The Magic of Thinking Big. 1959].

An **unknown author** has written, "Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we react to what happens; not by what life brings to us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes. It is a catalyst...a spark that creates extraordinary results."

Another **unknown author** put it this way, "The currents that determine our dreams and shape our lives, flow from the attitudes we nurture every day."

The great golfer and author, **Bobby Jones**, speaks about life using the metaphor of playing golf: "Golf is played mainly on a five-and-a-half inch course...the space between your ears."

Shakespeare's wisdom is noted with his pen, "There is nothing either good or bad except that thinking makes it so."

Abraham Lincoln stated it as follows: "People are about as happy as they make up their mind to be."

Norman Vincent Peale has said, "Change your thoughts and you change your world."

The Nazarene carpenter turned teacher, named **Jesus**, said it crisply, "As you think, so shall you be."

Francis Bacon said it in this manner, "The mold of our fortunes is in our own hands."

Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of highly Effective People* contributed his wisdom in these statements,

"We must look at the lens through which we see the world, as well as at the world we see, and understand that the lens itself shapes how we interpret the world... We simply assume that the way we see things is the way they really are or the way they should be. And our attitudes and behaviors grow out of those assumptions..."

"Paradigms are powerful because they create the lens through which we see the world.... If we want to change a situation, we first have to change ourselves. And to change ourselves effectively, we first have to change our perceptions."

My favorite reference that I recommend for everyone's reading is the short volume by **James Allen**, titled, As a Man Thinketh. James Allen presents this thesis very powerfully in this metaphor:

"A man's mind is like a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild. But whether cultivated or neglected, it must, and will, bring forth. If not useful seeds are put into it, then an abundance of useless weed seeds will fall into it, and will continue to produce their useless kind...."

"Every thought-seed sown or allowed to fall into the mind, and to take root there, produces its own, blossoming sooner or later into act, and bearing its own fruit of opportunity and circumstance. Good thoughts bear good fruit, bad thoughts bad...."

"Of all the beautiful truths pertaining to the soul, none is more gladdening or fruitful of divine promise and confidence than this – that man is the master of thought, the molder of character, and the maker and shaper of condition, environment, and destiny."

Many other persons undoubtedly affirm the same principle in yet different expressions. All these persons quoted here say in their own way what I affirm about the foundational reality that I identify as the therapeutic principle of **Belief-focused Care and Healing**: "A person's core beliefs, whatever they may be, are the primary determinants of that person's life outcomes -- whether those outcomes are emotional, behavioral, intellectual, relational, spiritual and even, to a major degree, physiological."

When one really thinks about this thoroughly, isn't it almost always true, "If you continue to think like you have always thought, you will always get what you have always got." If a person wants to change the outcomes that he or she is receiving in life, then ultimately, this person needs to change the way he or she thinks about living their life, be it emotionally, behaviorally, intellectually, relationally, spiritually, and even to a major degree, physically.

The dilemma that arises for almost all of us is that the vast majority of those core beliefs that are determining our life outcomes are contained in our subconscious mind. *Brain researchers have learned decades ago that the vast majority of us function daily using our conscious mind approximately 10% of the time, while our subconscious mind determines approximately 90% or more of our daily activities.*

To help one grasp this reality, reflect upon this last statement above, and read out loud this sentence in italic. Now, having read the italicized sentence out loud, do you recall having a conscious thought about each of the consonants and vowels as you read them? Or did you have a conscious thought about each syllable? Or even about each word? Or even about each phrase?

My experience has taught me, from the hundreds and hundreds of clients that I have asked to do a similar exercise, that all of these functions do surely occur but they occur from within your subconscious thinking rather than predominately from your consciousness thinking.

When we listen to someone speaking or when we are speaking to others, very rarely do we consciously focus on consonants, vowels, words, phrases. What we usually focus on consciously is "thoughts," and all the rest of the functioning occurs subconsciously. So when we begin to think about all the many ways each day we function from waking until going to sleep, it is easy to see that easily 90% or more of our "programming," so to speak, is controlled by our subconscious mind. From knowing which way to turn your key in the ignition of your car to knowing which foot to put on which floorboard peddle at what moment. For those who type well, knowing consciously which finger is touching which key for every word to knowing which "Off" and "On" switches to touch on the computer, home appliances, electronic games and how frequently to do so. And examples of this subconscious functioning can go on and on and on.

When we accept this reality about life, then it is relatively easy to expand this perception to how we have learned to live out our lives from the way we have chosen to believe – based upon what has been consciously taught by directives as well as what has been taught, mostly subconsciously, by the way others have treated us.

A brief example may explain this. Two identical twins grow up in the same family from birth to late adolescence. They both experience the same kind of domineering power and control from their father from the earliest age and throughout their youth. Yet, one girl interprets and internalized her father's behavior in such a way that she learns – probably for multiple reasons – she needs to be compliant, submissive and passive when faced with a domineering and controlling person. The other identical twin interprets and internalized her father's behavior in such a way that she learns – probably for multiple reasons – she needs to be resistant, defiant, and rebellious when faced with a domineering and controlling person. Both experience essentially the same behavior, but each identical twin thinks differently about how she will respond to it. The controlling dynamic of the difference in the twins reactions to domineering and controlling persons is determined by the way they have internalized and interpreted the father's experiences, i.e., the way they had thoughts about those experiences, which over time became repeated thoughts, and which over more time became beliefs about how each one is to react to domineering and controlling persons.

A number of decades ago a research psychiatrist, Dr. Murray Bowen, articulated a concept called "Differentiation of Self." In his work he indicated that the masses in our society rarely ever progress more than 60% on the journey [from 0% to 100%] toward the actualization of their unique individualized self, which he called their "Solid Self." He suggests that once a person exits adolescence, he or she is challenged to examine all of the "programming" that has occurred in their life, as much as possible, and then determine what beliefs, goals and behaviors he or she wants to keep as is, what needs to be changed or modified to enhance their unique self, and what needs to be discarded in order to enhance their "Solid Self."

Bowen's suggested the masses rarely progress beyond 60% on this major life journey toward their "Solid Self." This means that 40% of our population continues to allow their "childhood and youth subconscious programming" to continue controlling their lives in their daily relationships, jobs and personal inner lives.

Listed below are a number of these typical childhood/youth “programming beliefs” that bring unpleasant and unwanted outcomes to many persons with whom I have provided therapy. These **“Self-defeating Beliefs”**, as I call them, have been identified by the clients that I have worked with over the past ten years. These are listed randomly as examples.

“I am afraid to fail in most things.”

“I am uncomfortable around authority figures almost all the time.”

“I am usually afraid of criticism.”

“Angry people really frighten me.”

“I don't like being alone so I want to be with people all the time.”

“I usually cannot wait for anything and I want immediate gratification.”

“I really expect to get hurt in close, intimate relationships.”

“I almost always have difficulty completing a project from beginning to end.”

“I almost always feel compelled to please those around me.”

“I am very critical of myself – always striving for improvement, especially in my professional life.”

“I like complete control over my environment.”

“I am afraid of death, often imagining certain situations to a fatal extreme in my health.”

“I hate taking on relationship problems directly and talking them through immediately.”

“I take all my health situations, and work situations to the extreme and imagine the worst possible scenarios occurring, then worry about how I can be prepared to deal with them.”

Now reflect for a moment on alternative ways of thinking. What kind of life outcomes are most likely to emerge eventually in a person's life who consistently embraces one or more of the following healthy life scripts, or **"Healthy Life Commitments"**, as I prefer to call them?

"Everyday I welcome new challenges in my life."

"No one is a stranger to me, only a new friend I have not met yet."

"I welcome authority figures into my life, knowing I can learn from them."

"Everyday I affirm my life as a special gift abundant with unconditional love from God."

"Seeking the truth about myself wherever it may lead enables me to claim my commonness and equality with all persons."

"My commitment of 'let peace begin with me' empowers me to accept differences, negotiate conflicts and experience reconciliation with others."

"I am increasingly becoming more understanding, tolerant, patient and forgiving of others and myself."

"I am living all of my life from hour to hour being only for persons, things and our planet."

"Regularly I present myself to God for healing, renewal and growth of my mind, body and spirit."

"Increasing self-discipline is entering into my life -- easily and effortlessly."

"Meaningful and intimate relationships are increasingly entering my life and they continue to develop through healthy experiences for all."

"I am increasingly confident in my ability to complete all of my life goals responsibly."

"I am consciously making decisions trusting they lead to my personal growth and success in life."

"I am increasingly confident in my ability to take care of myself and appropriately to take care of others special to me."

"With every dose of medication, nutritional supplement and the food I eat, my body is maximizing their positive effects, minimizing their negative effects, and disposing of all toxins in healthy and life renewing ways."

These "Healthy Life Commitments" are the "useful thought-seeds" that James Allen speaks of in his book, **As A Man Thinketh**. These latter statements are ones that students of "belief-focused thinking" have written for their own life in response to their identified "self-defeating beliefs." The process may sound simple, perhaps too simple for some, yet the big struggle for most persons is crisply naming those subconscious "self-defeating beliefs," those self-talk messages that rumble around in our subconscious minds. For others the big struggle is to crisply re-write those "self-defeating beliefs" into "healthy life commitments."

This is where personal counseling and therapy takes on importance for so many persons. This is a process that is very difficult for individuals to do effectively by themselves. One has to first acquire the skill to listen to their negative self-talk chatter. For many that in itself is difficult to recognize without guidance. Next, one has to know how to listen within – to one's heart or soul or God -- for re-writing how he or she needs their life to be different in the future. For many that in itself is a difficult task without coaching and support.

Then, one needs a successful intervention technique whereby the newly "healthy life commitments" can be programmed into one's subconscious mind over-riding the old "self-defeating beliefs" programming. This successful intervention technique, which I call "Individual Intervention Process," is available with the Belief-focused Care and Healing perspective provided by this author.