I’m really not sure how to write this one, perhaps because it touches to the core of our being. When we are born, we experience the world around us as one, as an extension of self. There is no separation between self and other. Then we start to learn we are individuals in a complex world, with needs, wants and desires, some of which are met and some of which go counter to those of others in our world.

How we negotiate the transition into being a self-actualized individual in a complex world of interactions is often strongly affected by our need to find acceptance within our community. Some of us manage that transition with ease, some...not so much.

As babies we enter the world with no thought of unrealized potential, we are pure potential and because we see no separation between self and other, we are fulfilled. As we grow it is inevitable that we endure the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, which in turn inform us that we do not meet with unconditional acceptance in the world. So that is what we begin to seek, acceptance.

We learn that there are rules to playing nice in our families, our schools and eventually in society at large. Alongside the desire for acceptance is the risk of rejection and the accompanying pain that rejection brings. I’m sure that we all know what rejection feels like and how intensely painful that feeling can be. It doesn’t matter whether rejection comes in the form of not being chosen for the school team, or coming in second in the job interview or offering an unrequited love. The ego-hit and the potential soul-level hit is palatable. The more important the event is to us, the greater the potential pain. The younger we are when these events occur, the more likely we are to build a protective fortress around our hearts, which can then affect our search and desire for acceptance above all things.

Yeah...and?
Well, the point is that, more than acceptance, what we truly want to find in life is fulfillment.

Fulfillment begins with self-awareness and knowing our place in the world, and it is followed by giving service in the world. Unlike acceptance, fulfillment, however, isn’t about an emotional balance sheet. Fulfillment speaks to giving without counting the cost and knowing that we have lived a life of service to something other than ourselves, in the right way, for the right reasons. Fulfillment therefore, isn’t about quid pro quo, it is about selfless dedication, which requires spiritual fortitude, combined with a very clear sense of personal purpose. Knowing fulfillment is about knowing your soul’s journey and purpose...and living it, no matter what. Brings us back to a quote by William again...“to thine own self be true.”

The difficult part to all of this is that if we got tripped up by issues of acceptance in our world as children, then we are probably looking at fulfillment with a significant filter in place. If we have known enough rejection, the search for acceptance brings with it too greater risk, and so we become fiercely independent, well-protected against those slings and arrows. Clearly then, we create our own traps...and ensure our own isolation.

All of which makes it harder to find enduring fulfillment anywhere in life. Understand that I’m not talking about success here, nor am I really talking about acceptance...I’m talking about...
Acceptance and Fulfillment

fulfillment. I’m sure that we all know massively successful people who feel empty inside, because they lack that sense of internal fulfillment.

As a coach, I have worked with professionals who seemingly have it all...the six-figure income, the beautiful home, the social acceptance and yet by their own admission, there is something deep in the core that is ‘missing.’

Inevitably, what it comes down to is the difference between an accepted or constructed value set, versus the true core-level values.

What do I mean?
Well, it’s really quite simple actually. We build our value set to steer us through life...which is a round-about way of saying that we build a value set that will steer us clear of rocky shoals and help up negotiate the inevitable storms of life. The issue here is that if we have built a fortress of self-protection as children, then the value set that we construct will reflect our experiences of life. More than that, the values will guide our behaviours in ways that are consistent with our world-view.

Let’s take a value that I see a lot in my coaching: “Freedom.”

Someone coming from a perspective of rejection and pain will play out that particular value in a very different way. Someone has known deep levels of affirmation and love in life. Please understand that I am not judging either scenario, merely pointing out that the filter of perspective will profoundly affect the behaviours that emerge in association with the value of “Freedom.” Someone who comes from the perspective of rejection and pain will associate freedom with protection and the ability to chart a course without interference, but will also see a level of risk. Someone coming from a perspective of having known deep levels of affirmation and acceptance will see “Freedom” in a much more embracing and communal sense with less risk attached. Both people might be independent souls and accord unto others the right to choose their own path, but for very different reasons.

O.K., so if you are still with me here, let’s move on to core-level values.

Core-level values are those that emerge from moments of clarity and deep self-awareness. In consequence, core-level values are free of the filters that we create from our experiences of life.

Please understand that we all have filters...in my previous example of two people with very different experiences of ‘acceptance’ in life, both character states exist with filters in place.

We live as subjective beings, we store our memories as a function of images, language and sensory input...there is no such thing as a truly objective experience...so, yes, we all have filters in place. Our filters color our world view and our expectations.

Core-level values then, transcend our normal filtered experience, which is why they emerge in moments of deep spiritual clarity.

It doesn’t matter one iota how those moments occur, what matters, is that they do occur and that we are aware enough in the moment to see them for what they are.

For me, some of those moments have occurred when I have been deeply immersed in nature, or when an unexpected insight shattered my worldview and caused a major paradigm shift in the way I accepted what I knew as ‘real.’ Perhaps one of the deepest of such moments came when I held my son in my arms and he opened his eyes for the first time. There are other moments that have also changed the way in which I perceived my reality, but the point here is that core level values emerge in rare moments of insight and clarity.

So what is a core-level value? How is it different from our accepted (constructed) value set?

A core-level value is something that stands apart from our perceptions. It is like an unassailable Truth. So let’s take Freedom again...how might that be different as a core-level value? As a value based on our experience of life “Freedom” brings with it a set of judgements. As a core-level value, “Freedom” is completely without judgement, it simply ‘is’, for its own sake. In this sense, there is an awareness that we are all doing the very best and making the best decisions that we can in every moment of life.. When Freedom becomes a core-level value it is easier to accept that we are each on a journey of discovery.

My final point here is that fulfillment in life comes when we step beyond our accepted truths based upon the trajectory that our life took and start moving from core-level value sets.

I’m not saying that life gets any easier...I am saying that our perspective is radically altered and our options are broadened. Equally, I am not saying that it is an all-the-time kind of thing. I’m saying that the moments of clarity can act like a lighthouse in a somewhat turbulent sea...and there’s something very comforting and assuring in that...but of course that’s a judgement on my part. ☺
Here’s a topic I know only too well. It seems that we all have limiting beliefs of one kind or another. I can say that with some assurance, because we have all been conditioned by our families, churches, schools, friends, societies, cultures—the list goes on. Basically, a limiting belief is an internalized belief about how we fit into the world. A limiting belief can be a rule of how to play the game of life that was given to us by members of the society in which we grew up, or it can be an internalized interpretation of messages we received from those around us about who we are.

Here’s a silly example...but it is eloquent. I lived in Mississippi for nearly thirty years, but I have a different accent. I remember in one of my freshman advising sessions in the year I retired, a student who was just eighteen told me “You ain’t from around here are you? Where you from?” It was not a line I had not heard before...what was ironic about it, was that I had lived in Starkville for longer than this young man had been alive...and yet, to him, I was the outsider. His ear told him that I was different from others within his cultural group. Now in this moment we have a bifurcation point: either xenophobia or acceptance...depending upon our personally learned belief structures.

In this particular instance a lively discussion ensued about how I ended up leaving England and living in Mississippi and how much the young man wanted to travel to see the world. Back to the focus though...Limiting beliefs then, are the result of the messages and lessons we were taught and which we then encoded into our thought patterns when we were growing up. They are inevitable and mostly, they are outdated and erroneous.

Most of our limiting beliefs resolve down into issues of fear, esteem and worth...

Limiting beliefs around fear deal with issues of scarcity and abundance, success and failure. A good example might be “it’s hard to get ahead in the world.” In a lot of ways, fear-based limiting beliefs relate to our ability to get a slice of the pie of life rather than the size of the pie.

Here’s a good one for the entrepreneurs out there: “50% of all businesses fail in the first year.” Another limiting belief I have seen is “the market is saturated with yyy.” Over the years I have heard it about university positions, geology jobs, martial arts schools and most recently, acupuncture.

Esteem-based limiting beliefs relate to how we see ourselves in relation to the rest of the world. Self-esteem is how we admire or appreciate who we are. This one can go both ways...too much pride, too much self-deprecation. On the low-self esteem side of the equation we have limiting beliefs that impact how we see our talents, gifts and abilities. A good example of that one might be “I’m just a clumsy person.”

Low self-esteem often leads into the third area of limiting beliefs the limiting beliefs that relate to self-worth. There is something of a feedback loop here. Low self-esteem can engender low self-worth and vice-versa.

Limiting beliefs that relate to self-worth can often be phrased in terms of what we think we deserve. For instance “there’s no point asking for a raise, my boss will only say no.”

The thing of it is that limiting beliefs are things that we often don’t see because they have been with us for so long, they are a natural part of our thoughts and behaviors. For instance: Let’s say a child grows up being told s/he is not very smart. Eventually, the child internalizes the message and believes it to be true. The same will be true of another child with a similar intellectual ability who is told repeatedly that s/he is not very smart. The outcome in the second case, however, will be very different from the first. The point here, is that the basic intellectual abilities are the same in both children, but the messages that they internalize lead to self-belief structures that shapes how each child moves in the world and negotiates a path in school, business and his/her relationships and the society s/he keeps.

Learning to see limiting beliefs takes practice, because we are often blind to their existence.

Breaking through limiting beliefs can, however, be one of the most liberating things we can do for ourselves. Imagine the child in the second scenario who breaks through the limiting belief of intellectual capacity, to discover that s/he is really very clever and that the inner messages were faulty...how liberating might that be?

The thing is...once we see a limiting belief for what it is, we are confronted with the choice to continue believing it or evaluate its value in our life. So let me leave you with one last limiting belief:

“It’s really tough overcoming your life patterns...trust me, I know.”

Any thoughts about that? ☺
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