Lesson 5

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT YOURSELF?

Your perception of yourself, the self image you have is something which carries with you from your childhood. What you heard your friends and family talking about you when you were a child, what your reactions were on hearing these thoughts; has been the reason you drew a particular picture of yourself.

It might have been that your classmates made fun of you and chose to not include you in their games forcing you to stay alone. Such a behavior witnessed by you in your childhood, would definitely be a precursor to negative self esteem about yourself. This would, in the adulthood, make you stay aloof and avoid social gatherings because the negative self image you have grown up with would probably make your mind believe thoughts like these:-

- People don't talk to me by choice unless they are forced to
- I got invited because they needed to invite me
- Nobody likes me
- I don't what to talk and with whom to talk

These beliefs are what make up the "**dominant thought pattern**". This is the way people think about themselves when they have a negative image of themselves. For someone who has grown up with a negative self esteem, these are the kind of thoughts that come into the mind by themselves and in all the practical situations faced in life define the way how such a person would feel and react.

Can these Thought Patterns Be Changed?

Yes definitely! The awareness of your thoughts and feelings and belief in the CHOICE that you can really choose to believe in positive thoughts and make your behavior positive, can actually help in changing your thought patterns. You will definitely require some practice, but if you persist you can really make the new positive thoughts dominate your patters of thinking and change them from a negative patter to a positive one.

It is a fact that most of us do not choose to unlearn what we might have learnt erroneously in our childhood. It may not have been true or might have been hearsay, but we go through our lives believing all of what we learnt about ourselves at that early age.

Instead we must realize that we have been given the ability to make that change; to make conscious or careful choices, which have the capability of altering our self image i.e. the way you see and perceive yourself.

Here is a short story to help you understand how what we learn at an early age stays with us as we grow older.

Training of a Baby Elephant

During the training period, baby elephants need to be taught not to roam or go too far away from their designated posts. They are tied with a small length of rope to a wooden post planted in the ground. This small rope limits the baby elephant to an area fixed by the length of the rope. Initially the baby elephant tries to break free from the rope, but since the rope is too strong for the young elephant it is always unsuccessful. The repeated failures get ingrained in the mind and *the baby elephant "learns" that it cannot break the rope.*

When the elephant grows up and is much stronger, it can easily break the rope. However, because it has "learned" since childhood that it cannot break the rope, the adult elephant believes that it still cannot break the rope, so it does not even try!

This is a story of an elephant but it is true for almost all of us. What we learn in childhood sometimes is so deeply ingrained in our self that we are not even willing to try. We stick to a set of beliefs about ourselves and the same is usually mirrored in our self-esteem. Positive beliefs make us feel good about ourselves and raise our

self-esteem. Negative beliefs make us feel bad about ourselves and lower our self-esteem.

Positive & Negative Belief List Exercise

Instructions: Make a list of all that you believe about yourself - Both positive as well as negative.

Positive Beliefs	**Negative Beliefs**
Make you feel good and raise your self esteem	*Make you feel bad and lower your self-esteem*
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	

Where do your negative beliefs come from?

How true are they?

How important are they?

What can you do to get rid of the negative beliefs?