



SPIRITUAL

BLIND SPOTS

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Spiritual Blind Spots

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Chapter One – INTRODUCTION TO BLIND SPOTS

HOW INTELLIGENT PEOPLE DO STUPID STUFF & FAIL TO RECOGNIZE IT

Have you ever wondered why certain people can be so unaware of their clumsy behavior in social situations? Or how about those people who are consistently unsuccessful in close relationships but have no clue why this happens. And what about those who seem blind and deaf about a few of their habits that make others uncomfortable. Even when friends offer gentle advice about these issues, they seem unable to grasp what they mean.

Remember that old saying that life is difficult but will be more difficult if you are stupid? The sad truth is that many knowledgeable and well-educated people have blind spots that cause them to act ignorantly in specific areas. Some are unaware of being too opinionated, narrow-minded, overbearing, or argumentative. They don't seem to recognize when they need to moderate their style or edit out comments that will upset

others. The problem is that intelligent people often have blind spots that disable their ability to recognize when their beliefs, behavior, lack of tact are harmful to their best interests.

What exactly are these blind spots? A simple way to define them is to describe them as *essential knowledge and abilities that we do not know that we don't know*. This lack of awareness can sometimes be the empty part of our character that must be filled to achieve maturity and honor our spiritual potential.

The public often falsely views some of these blind spots as a simple excess of confidence and ego that prevents us from recognizing that we are too critical, opinionated, or insensitive. However, describing the problem of blind spots in this way bypasses the real issue, which is *being unaware of our lack of specific knowledge and skills*.

Individuals with blind spots often fail to understand the significance of them even after friends and counselors carefully explain the details and harm they cause.

Thus, many of the difficulties caused by blind spots are never corrected. Friends learn to tolerate these traits as minor idiosyncrasies while others strain to endure them. Some put these people on their "avoid if possible" list.

Naturally, these habits can compromise our potential for success. Our social life can become restricted and difficult. Many potential connections are never developed, and meaningful relationships can be compromised. Anything that impairs our relationships with others will also complicate our connection to the divine. Life will continue for those with blind spots in their character, but it will be uncomfortable for reasons that often remain mysterious to those who possess them.

Recognizing our blind spots

Blind spots occur in the best of us. It is erroneous to assume the more intelligent we are, the more we will detect and eliminate every questionable habit. In fact, being knowledgeable and clever enables us to invent strong excuses to continue our

unique ways of viewing and responding to our experiences.

For instance, as adults, we are all biased to assume we are appropriate in our behavior. While we may be aware that we seem to cause some discomfort to a few specific individuals, our blind spots will deflect attention away from any fault in our behavior. We tell ourselves that others are being too sensitive and demanding. Or we assume the problem is that society has made up silly rules. It can't be our fault!

Blind spots come with their own "bodyguards" (our automatic subconscious defenses) which will protect them. These bodyguards are quick to justify our behavior or shift blame for any difficulties onto someone or something else. None of this distress is our fault, and neither is it our responsibility to fix it. The case is closed!

These rationalizations produce a stalemate instead of resolution! Blaming parents and nursing grievances are never more than a bandage for a gaping wound. They do not provide enduring relief to personal

problems. Those who persist in taking this path succeed only in shifting responsibility to enemies and other forces who will do nothing to help them. These “solutions” merely add more confusion to an already dysfunctional situation.

The bodyguards of our blind spots often use our old, unpardonable traumatic experiences as a virtual license to be excessively suspicious and wanting to avoid close relationships. Or they claim their demanding parents left them with too many self-doubts and no confidence. The insecurity and lack of support as a child made them hesitant and insecure. All their problems seem outside of their control.

These destructive practices often continue for an entire lifetime. This is because we fail to fix them due to one or more of these four reasons.

1. We fail to acknowledge or own the fact that we have blind spots. Even after they are carefully explained to us, we will deny their presence in us.

2. We recognize our blind spots as problematic, but we have constructed a fire-proof rationalization that they are not our fault, and that we are helpless to change them.
3. We accept the fact of what others call blind spots, but we view them as habits that protect us from more serious difficulties. We claim that our strong fears protect us from deception. Our hostility prevents us from being exploited. We want to keep them.
4. We view all so-called blind spots as an excess of ego instead of a lack of sensitivity, self-control, understanding, and tact. Unfortunately, being less angry, less aggressive, or less anxious does not completely solve the underlying problems that keep resurrecting our dysfunctional habits.

The signs that we have significant blind spots in our awareness

The key to recognizing our blind spots is to notice the subtle signs that people are irritated, disappointed, or bored when we speak or act in specific ways. Their window of tolerance will not always close until we have used up their quota for annoying activities. Only then will they demonstrate the signs of their impatience and frustration. When these types of responses become a pattern that frequently recurs (and it not due to a single exceptionally demanding person) we must ask ourselves how and why we are annoying or boring others. For example, are we guilty of being condescending, elitist, insensitive, or narrow minded?

Recognizing our blind spots can be difficult. Long before people tell us to our face that we need to shut up or go away, there are sure signs that we are interfering with our best interests.

- We consistently fail to develop friendships or closeness with some of our associates or co-workers.

- Our opinions and suggestions are often met with silence or mild rejection.
- We are made to feel unwelcome in certain groups.
- We tend to talk too much, dominate discussions, or often ignore others and their opinions.
- We regularly bore others with our stories, ideas, and plans that might not interest them. We often act as if others need our approval to believe what they believe.
- We seem alert and enthusiastic only when we are talking and revert to boredom as soon as others speak.
- We refuse to reform our introverted style, rarely making eye contact with those we address. We radiate our sense of insecurity and uncertainty.

- Our general demeanor is condescending or cynical even when we are desperate for a friendly reception.
- We seem unable to agree with people because we like to challenge everyone's opinions and beliefs. This is how we prefer to demonstrate our individuality and get attention. We automatically stereotype others and project our assumptions without taking notice of their actual qualities and intelligence.
- We are nearly unable to offer opinions about any topic because we are terrified of being criticized and rejected.
- We are secretly jealous of those who seem better than us in appearance, intelligence, poise, or experience. This attitude automatically is reflected in our manner of speech and behavior.

- Every time someone suggests that we have a significant blind spot in us, we rush to defend it and rationalize why our beliefs and behavior are entirely appropriate.

Blind spots also have a profound impact on our spiritual life

Blind spots can influence how we view and respond to all aspects of life. This can include how we relate to our spiritual life by distorting how we regard the nature of spirit and develop our connections to divine love, wisdom, and purpose.

For instance, if our blind spot prevents us from recognizing our worth, we will be unlikely to sense the divine elements already present in us or how they have been involved in our well-being since birth. If our blind spot is excessive confidence in ourselves, we may never develop the humility to accept divine guidance or cooperate with divine order.

Sometimes our blind spot causes us to make safety and security to be our top priority. Such individuals tend to seek the easiest way to accomplish everything while avoiding any sacrifice or work. They will search for the most effortless way to develop our connections with our spiritual life. This passive orientation makes them vulnerable to accepting simple platitudes as great wisdom and being empty as the perfect way to cultivate our relationship with the divine. They will waste much time in shallow activities such as:

- Believing that faith in God is the chief way to attune to spirit instead of developing an enlightened character and lifestyle.
- Practicing mindless devotion and surrender to God as a complete way to enlightenment instead of working to collaborate with our divine plan.
- Relying too much on merely “releasing” our anger and fear instead

of overcoming them with forgiveness, tolerance, and courage.

- Mastering the stories in the Bible or other sacred texts without applying them.
- Concentrating on eliminating selfishness, greed, cruelty instead of working to build kindness, charity, and humility.

There is another level of blind spots that is difficult to detect or cure

Ordinary blind spots are usually easily detected if you observe people under a variety of situations. Eventually this will reveal that, in special circumstances, they are insecure, defiant, too assertive, arrogant, defensive, or fawning. However, there is a special set of blind spots that are more difficult to detect. These are major limiting beliefs. They require a study of the entire breadth of their life to recognize strange patterns of limitations that can restrict success and fulfillment in key areas.

These major limiting beliefs seem to fall into a few areas such as these.

- I will never truly be successful. Something will always prevent me from reaching my goals.
- No one will ever truly respect or love me. I will always be surrounded by those who will see me as insignificant.
- I can never recover from my illness. I will always be sickly and never enjoy robust energy or health.
- I will always see myself as weak and unworthy in many areas, and so will others, because I am a flawed person and can never improve.

Many will see no earthly reasons for such beliefs, but a closer examination of their life experiences will reveal that these mysterious restrictions seem to control the outcomes in their life. They can recount how opportunities continually eluded them, how they almost seemed to achieve what they

wanted only to lose everything at the last moments. In general, these people are convinced they are doomed to repeat these experiences.

However, a detailed scrutiny of their character will demonstrate significant evidence of persistent self-sabotage in how they relate poorly to good opportunities and overreact to signs of rejection and failure. Because of the lack of effective skills in coping with loss, failure, rejection, embarrassment, and disaster, they develop their defensive abilities far more than their proactive skills for coping with the same challenges.

There is often a history of suffering in early experiences from events that seemed to restrict their health, happiness, success, confidence, and other aspects of self-expression. In their youth they leaped to a stunningly narrow conclusion that one bad insult or failure marked the beginning of irreparable damage to their well-being and destiny. These would never be overcome. Their immature mind and judgment did them far more damage than their actual life

experience. However, they did not know this, and so they went ahead and made a law for themselves that a major failure or loss would become permanent pattern for them.

The consequences of these choices are a steady inhibition to being confident, optimistic, cheerful, and ambitious. Thereafter, good opportunities are frequently missed, friends are held at arm's length, excellent advice is rejected, and they are lost in a fog of hesitancy and frustration of their own making. The constant experience of failure, disappointment, and lack of success reinforces the power of these inhibitions.

What can be done to reverse these limitations?

Subsequent chapters will provide more detail about what can be done to recognize and reverse the impact of blind spots and limiting beliefs. For the moment, only the broad principles of these methods can be listed here.

- We must be willing to challenge our assumptions about our helplessness and lack of opportunities. Beware of assuming our feelings can be trusted to reveal the accuracy or usefulness of any idea, assumption, or person. Our standard beliefs should not be our first choice in any question about better answers and solutions.
- We must be willing to admit that we have been mistaken about the power of old traumas and enemies to wound us and condemn us to permanent frustration. Much healing and growth requires proactive thinking—not defensive reactions.
- We must be ready to work hard to impose new beliefs and habits over our old, inferior beliefs and habits. Bad ideas and destructive attitudes will not just float away on their own. We must push them out with their positive counterparts.

- We must be willing to accept the fact that we are essentially a good person with a strong potential for being productive and successful in many lines of activity. Poor habits are real, but not part of our divine design for wholeness.
- The full activity of our capacity for dedication, determination, and devotion to a more effective and fulfilling life will be necessary to accomplish these reforms. Using only faith and wishful thinking will do very little!

Conclusion

Many need to understand how immature beliefs and habits formed in their youthful years can cripple our success and happiness for the rest of our life. One of the many challenges of our life is the tremendous work of revising and repairing these early versions of our standard beliefs and habits. While no one tells us to do this, the seven-year-old must make many

revisions of beliefs formed at the age of four. Likewise, the seventeen-year-old must change many ideas formed in earlier years of experiences. By the time we are in our forties, many revisions are needed. This ability to modify and update our beliefs must never stop.

Instead of assuming our old experiences damaged us and awful trends in our culture restrict us, we need to be aware of how often *our* blind spots in *our* awareness and sensitivity keep us miserable. Our inability to dispel or overcome a sense of personal failure or limitation may well be more of a handicap than any external restriction. Our current culture encourages us to resort to the blame game to attack our parents, oppressors, and corruption in our community for our difficulties. However, these accusations are often unfair or just a cheap way to distract us from our own inadequacies.

Of course, there are problems and deficiencies in mass consciousness, our culture, and our leaders, but we often can do little about them. And grumbling and

protesting doesn't seem to help despite its popularity. Let us, instead, focus on the one thing that we can control and change—ourselves. Let us look for these blind spots in our awareness and skillset that handicap our life. Work to release the full genius and joy in us to contribute to solving the world's problem, one person at a time.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. While there are many powerful influences in my life, I am the one who has the greatest control and authority to redirect my beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. I am the agent of change and improvement in my life.
2. Demanding major changes in others and society will be ineffective for most of our distress. The efforts we make to improve our outlook and lifestyle will be more productive.
3. It is useful to consider how often we are getting in the way of our own success and comfort by blaming others instead of accepting responsibility to manage ourselves.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSUMING EVERYONE SHOULD THINK AND ACT LIKE US

The blind spot of assuming everyone thinks and acts as we do or should is a common and often unrecognized problem. While it is pleasing to find we have much in common with others, it can be a mistake to assume we are the only ones with appropriate views and habits.

Unfortunately, we may not understand our error. The fact that others can successfully apply different beliefs and methods to cope with life's problems can come as a shock. Believing our ideas and ways are so fantastic that everyone should think as we will severely limit our opportunities, relationships, and success. Our limited views will likely cause us to reject too many good people and their lifestyles only because they differ from ours. This bias can lead to distrust and alienation, reducing much of our potential for harmony and productivity.

Nothing is wrong with having well-defined beliefs and practices, but trouble begins when we assume we always have the best answers. Sometimes, we may know more than others, but the reverse is also true. After all, we trust the judgment of doctors, plumbers, and lawyers when needed. We should be able to respect the views and habits of others unless they are severely dysfunctional or ignorant and uninformed.

The difficulty in warning people about this blind spot is that most people believe they do not have any. This is why they are called blind spots. Many fail to recognize them even when there is considerable evidence for it.

Fortunately, all blind spots leave signs of their presence in our behavior and body language. Here are a few of them.

- We often tend to bond with others more strongly because they dislike what we dislike. We will probably not befriend someone who differs strongly from our preferences in people, lifestyles, politics, and music.
- We automatically assume that others who do not think and act like us are somehow inferior.

- We get uncomfortable when our standards and beliefs are challenged but find it acceptable to criticize the ideas and habits of others.
- We are uninterested in most new views and methods because we believe the those we already have are good enough. We can be traditional and rigid in many of our beliefs and ways.
- We may often make too much of petty differences while overlooking the central themes. Perhaps we tend to specialize in searching for a way to be offended or in discovering microaggressions in those who hold substantially different views.

Blind spots also affect our spiritual life

The tendency to assume our ways of thinking are or should be universal can strongly impact our spiritual life. This habit is often denied by people who eagerly practice stunning degrees of self-deception about their relationship with God. Common ways this can occur include:

- We assume God likes what we prefer and disapproves of what we criticize. This broad view comforts various marginal behaviors, dulls our sense of ethics, and reduces our aspirations. This conviction also allows us to excuse our bad temper and impatience because we believe we are using them to support what God wants and reject what God hates.
- We presume our favored way of establishing a connection to the life of spirit is adequate. For instance, some believe they fulfill all their spiritual responsibilities by attending a worship service, doing a visualization, performing a breathing exercise, or mumbling their manta.
- We allow the dark fears of our personality to assume our God disapproves of us as much as we do. Therefore, we must constantly struggle with our sins. The self-rejection and guilt we practice are signs of our spiritual aspirations.
- We assume our God is the only valid God. The gods of other religions are for misguided pagans who fail to appreciate our superior heroes and prophets and their teachings.

Impact of this blind spot on society

The binding force behind all forms of tribalism arises from those who automatically assume most "good" people will think, look, and act like us. This puts them squarely responsible for contributing significantly to developing and maintaining many forms of racism, misogyny, elitism, and other forms of bigotry.

Each of these groups tends to believe in the superiority of their ideals and behavior. They can be persuaded to be less demanding and more moderate, but they usually remain convinced of their preferences. Many fully accept that good people come in all sizes, colors, genders, religions, and classes and still believe they are specially endowed with wisdom. They also can praise equality as a genuine virtue even as they acknowledge that we are not equal in our intelligence, abilities, and many other strengths.

The blind spot of believing everyone should think and feel as we do can contribute to these difficulties in society.

- Ignoring the many other common societal factors such as shared struggles, effort, suffering, goals, victories, and satisfaction in personal achievement.
- Automatically assuming our differences make us not only incompatible but also enemies.
- The automatic assumption that academic degrees are required for important positions because they are more important than experience or common sense

What are the core issues behind this blind spot?

The lack of curiosity and tunnel vision are two of the most common causes for assuming that everyone should think and act like us. Without a reasonable amount of curiosity, we will likely accept the first explanation that comes to mind—often derived from mass consciousness or tradition. Once we have any kind of answer, additional possibilities are rarely considered.

Tunnel vision is often the simple and restricted view that many prefer. If we look no further than what has been our personal experience and assumptions, we will severely limit our exposure to ideas and lifestyles in

the real world. Consequently, there will be fewer possibilities and new ideas to absorb. We will also tend to generalize from our limited experiences and assume we now understand all people and their traditions.

Our overconfident ego can quickly fill in all the empty spaces in our worldview and understanding. What we do not know will be regarded as unknowable or not worth knowing. Ordinary people and situations will be viewed through a projection of our beliefs and stereotypes. As a result, most of what we notice will reflect and confirm our views. The rest will be rejected or ignored. Unless we recognize this distortion of reality with a fierce commitment to intellectual honesty and thoroughness, we may sink deeper into intense self-absorption.

How can we heal this blind spot?

Pursuing effectiveness and excellence in our lives will be challenging if we are blinded by the assumption that what we already know is correct and complete. Better methods and plans will often be overlooked because we falsely believe we already have better solutions.

The basic principle for healing blind spots is the conviction that familiar traditions must not become the enemy of innovation and progress. Likewise, our desire to disprove alternate views must not stop us from discovering what is valuable and effective. Great ideas come in all sizes, colors, and ages, just like people. We must be open to welcoming new views and methods for ourselves.

We can increase our ability to recognize better ideas by challenging some of our preferred beliefs. We might start by reviewing some of the concepts and policies we may have rejected too quickly. Or we might ask ourselves if we have missed something that might lead to improvement or greater efficiency. Other times, we must speculate whether we have the right priorities for our daily tasks. These are the types of challenges that can stir up better solutions and answers.

Beware that we do not allow a single point of difference to destroy a valuable friendship or partnership. We should be able to agree to disagree about specific policies or people to preserve good working relationships with others.

Finally, we realize that others may make absurd assumptions about us. Let us correct them if necessary, and then follow with being more tolerant of them in hopes that they will return the favor.

Commentary

People vary widely in their specific beliefs and types of behavior. We will make huge mistakes about others unless we deal with these differences with common sense and tolerance. We must study the value of their preferences and behavior from the perspective of their obligations, abilities, and role in life, not ours. Analyzing others on this basis will help us establish harmonious relationships.

These recommendations do not mean we must become permissive or indifferent about everyone and what they do. Of course, we all need to follow the basic principles of decency, accountability, integrity, and productivity, *but we must also know when our beliefs and standards are only for personal use*. These choices are a highly personal matter, but once we make them, it will do much to calm our agitation and improve our ability to respect and work with others.

Points to ponder

1. Can we conceive that many good people can have beliefs that differ from ours? Must they think like us about all situations vital to us?
2. Do we truly want to choose our friends by insisting they reject the same people and policies we dislike?
3. Are we more devoted to defending our current beliefs than seeking to refine and add to our understanding?

CHAPTER 3

PROJECTING OUR ASSUMPTIONS ON TO OTHERS

Certain people have a strange belief that they can read the minds of others and accurately evaluate their degree of honesty and maturity. They assume they can understand a person's character by a brief glance of them.

Yet, these individuals are neither psychic nor accurate because they foolishly base their judgments on superficial factors and their small horde of stereotypes. Sometimes their study of others consists of the briefest observations or only a hearsay story about questionable behavior. They tend to make too much of momentary lapses of behavior that do not reflect the usual demeanor of individuals.

The habit of leaping to conclusions is a hallmark of those who too readily project their assumptions onto others. For example, when they encounter people who are cautious and hesitant, they will assume these are indecisive or ignorant individuals instead of being thoughtful because of past experiences of being deceived. If they meet strongly opinionated people, they will likely view them as biased instead of knowledgeable. Consequently, a significant amount of miscommunication occurs that will be difficult to repair.

Projecting our assumptions about people can cause significant problems beyond being a simple idiosyncrasy. There is a strong possibility that the relationships they develop with people and situations will be based more on what they assume instead of actual conditions and behavior.

The most common version of this blind spot of projecting our beliefs onto others is in intimate family situations. Many parents never completely grasp the fact that their adult children are no longer the simple children they used to be. Others are disappointed about the older person their spouse has become instead of the mature and stable person that is present.

The problem inherent in these examples is that we may be reacting to what we assume are accurate assessments of people and situations. Yet, what we see is partially made up from our projections and

assumptions. In other words, we often respond to what we expect instead of what is real.

Discerning the authentic qualities of people can be difficult. Part of this problem is that most people try to display their best behavior when involved in public activities. One way to bypass these efforts to hide genuine habits and qualities is to observe individuals when they are not motivated to maintain their public image. The actual character will be apparent when the individual is involved in unofficial duties or is tired and stressed. These unguarded moments will reveal much more than we gain by jumping to conclusions because we know their skin color, gender, age, or politics.

What are the signs that we are projecting assumptions?

Remember that blind spots operate to divert us from recognizing our bad habits and immature qualities. This minor deception allows us to be confident when we project our habitual expectations and stereotypes. By doing this, we can continue to believe we are in our usual comfort zone and accurate in our opinions of others.

Still, we will have the recurring problem of seeing mainly what we expect to see in people and situations. We struggle to fit the fragments of our observations into a box of labels formed by our prejudices and stereotypes. Of course, most will deny any such accusations and instead think of themselves as modest but perceptive observers of life. This is how blind spots work to distort or block awareness.

These are the signs that we are projecting our beliefs onto events and people instead of seeing what is genuinely there.

- We tend to make too much of appearances and style instead of substance and merit. Thus, we can be manipulated by those we consider charming and attractive.
- We assume everyone is as kind and trustworthy as we are, and then we are bitterly disappointed by some people.
- We assume everyone is as nasty and devious as we are, and then are surprised that some people are not that way at all.
- We find it difficult to see the differences between opinion and fact. We might even assume that everything is subjective to a

personalized point of view. Everyone's opinion is questionable except, of course, our own.

- We hide our mental laziness by presuming what we don't know is either unknowable or is information irrelevant to us. New ideas are unimportant and views contrary to ours are almost always automatically wrong.
- Anyone who appears or acts like those who have betrayed or wounded us in our past is regarded as someone we will never fully trust.
- Anyone who criticizes us is regarded as judgmental rather than someone who might be honest and correct about their observations.
- We have an extreme reaction to others with the same bad habits that we deny having. If we are arrogant, opinionated, hesitant, and uncertain, we will think poorly of others who act like us, usually without recognizing why we have become so intense about it.
- We fail to recognize the kindness and sincerity of people who appear outwardly plain and straightforward.
- We refuse to treat our children as the grown adults they have become and still see them sometimes as undeveloped teenagers.
- We find it difficult to relate comfortably with other immediate members of our family who have changed so much from when we first knew them.
- It is stressful when we must interact with those who are smarter and more talented than we are.

The signs of our spiritual blind spots

Our habit of projecting our beliefs onto others does not stop with those around us. It also continues with how we perceive and interpret all things divine, including the nature and laws of God. Here is a short list of how this blind spot can distort our spiritual life.

- We assume connecting to the divine should be as effortless as everything else in life should be. Thus, we prefer to believe the primary way to encounter the sacred is to turn off our personalities and make our minds as empty as a used soup can.
- Since our God is a God of Love, we assume that we would never be asked to do something we don't want to do.
- We need not feel guilty about anything because our love and commitment to God means all our sins are forgiven.
- Once we feel the bliss, see the Light, or sense the electricity in our head and spine, we can claim to be enlightened.
- Most evil is just an illusion, which means it doesn't need to affect us after recognizing it is a hoax. Naturally, we never act with evil intentions.
- Efforts to be helpful to others are just an ego trip, and it is not necessary as part of our spiritual life. Our spiritual work should concentrate on being absorbed into the divine.
- What we think is our truth. It does not require any further justification. The beliefs of others are irrelevant.
- We are reluctant to recognize any good qualities in those we judge as inferior.
- We sometimes evaluate others using a standard that is the equivalent of judging a squirrel for how loud it can quack and a duck for how fast it can climb a tree. This is how we justify our low opinions of the talented people we dislike.

How the collective influence of this blind spot impacts society

Large numbers of people who happily project their assumptions and prejudices on others can have a significant impact on society. Here are some signs of how our culture and narratives in mass consciousness are affected by this habit of projecting our assumptions and then acting as if they are real.

- We can make too much of appearances, race, religion, and gender. Many prejudices exist around these issues, and they are easy to incorporate into how we evaluate individuals before we get to know them.
- Recognizing unusual talents and abilities in others can be blocked by our prejudices that specific types of people are unlikely to be gifted.
- In an effort to compensate of these prejudices, some will view specific groups as needing special protections and indulgences to thrive in society.
- Personal issues due to lack of responsibility, indolence, and poor choices are overlooked in favor of the usual narrative about oppression and prejudice.
- Our low expectations of specific types can smother the life and potential of large groups of people.

The core problems behind these excessive projections

People who tend to be eager to project their assumptions onto others often have significant deficiencies in their ability to recognize, discern, and evaluate what they see and hear. In addition, their naïve confidence allows them to fill in their considerable gaps of understanding with speculations. These are the qualities and abilities that are too weak.

- We have not adequately developed our powers of observation or discernment to be effective in evaluating most people or society.
- We lack critical thinking skills and are too easily convinced by the propaganda of those who want us to accept their dogma and narratives.
- We assume we are adept at mind-reading, which allows us to skip the hard work of thoughtfully examining the significance of what people think and do or fail to do. Of course, what is occurring is that we are projecting our favorite stereotypes instead of reading minds. These projections are a convenient and self-serving

solution that falsely validates our beliefs. This habit makes it exceedingly difficult to admit we might be wrong.

How do we heal these problems?

We must practice searching for the second and third correct answers to questions about people and situations. This type of inquiry begins with our usual quick assumptions as our first answers but then continues with pondering additional thoughts of other possibilities and explanations.

In addition, we need to challenge our knowledge by questioning what we truly know and how we know it is true. We may have overlooked significant facts or how some of our assumptions have arrived without evidence. Be ready to discover that some people we distrust may be acceptable and vice versa.

We can also conduct a search to broaden the list of personality characteristics we admire. Are we making too much of being kind, gentle, and polite and not enough about intelligence, creativity, and productivity? Does “being nice” compensate for being ignorant, dishonest, and self-indulgent? Maybe we are the ones with tunnel vision that examines only the virtues we deem essential. Perhaps we have ignored that integrity, competence, and good works can compensate for a minor lack of charm or social graces.

Commentary

Ultimately, we need to understand the difference between our assumptions and facts. Much of what we know is based on subjective observations and judgments. However, we can demand that we have some solid evidence before we leap to our conclusions. We do not want to build a life based on our stereotypes and assumptions.

We can do better than this. An accurate assessment of life is usually more enriching than disappointing as we drop false beliefs and learn to embrace what is authentic, dependable, and fulfilling.

Points to ponder

1. If we are so clever and insightful, why have we been duped by those who are experts at deceiving us? Please think of how those people we assumed to be as kind and honest as we are, betrayed us in the end.

2. The danger in projecting our beliefs is readily illustrated in those who automatically assume everyone is as nasty and dishonest or as kind and helpful as they are. Recall how they generated problems in all their relationships.
3. Think about the idealists you know who failed to think through their wishful thinking and then suffered great disappointments. We may need to consider that some of our assumptions are blinding us to the reality we need to recognize.

Chapter 4:

THE BLIND SPOT: LIVING IN THE PAST

Sorting out our past experiences is a task everyone must master. Some do this well, extracting valuable lessons and insights from what happened to them. Others speed through their memories as if trying to escape them and quickly leap into the future. Still, others passively allow current events to pull them into the future. These passive observers rarely closely examine what happens to them other than being angry or depressed about their worst experiences.

A separate group travels through life guided mainly by what they see in their rear-view mirror. Old failures and losses remain to color their current mood and mindset in dark grays and browns. Relationships that fail are likely to be viewed as betrayals that permanently restrict their ability to trust. Lists of what we hoped to gain but never achieved grow and then congeal into well-defined disappointments. As these painful episodes accumulate, many expect their future to duplicate their past difficulties and discouragement.

This sad scenario describes individuals who live in the past. They anticipate a future that will duplicate their old hardships. This viewpoint tends to preserve unpleasant experiences and turn them into something worse than they were initially. Concentrating on the wounds of our lives will magnify their power to disappoint and grow into depression. Resentments are transformed into grievances, and regrets can evolve into victimhood.

The signs that we tend to live in our past

Blind spots are clever in diverting us from acknowledging our poor behavior and habits. They do this by quickly distracting us and nudging us to accuse others of causing our unpleasant experiences. Self-examination after traumatic experiences is often short-circuited by our habit of obsessing on our distress instead of wondering why we were so helpless in confronting our challenges. As more instances of suffering develop, we will identify more with our traumas than our successes. For many, our new motto will become *I hurt, therefore I am*.

Other people are more interested in moving on than in hoarding disappointments. They expect to learn and grow from all experiences,

especially the painful ones. They focus on adding to our knowledge and skills and modifying our outlook. They intend to learn how to manage our struggles more successfully. The goal is to live a fulfilling and successful life instead of one dominated by constant pain and retreat.

Here are the general signs that we live in our past too much.

- When we experience new disappointments or anxiety, we quickly match them with solid memories of our past failures, defeats, and losses. It is as if we want to add our old pain to the new ones to remind us of our continual our bad luck.
- Our hopes and dreams of good times rarely occur because we are convinced they are unlikely to happen.
- Positive expectations are regarded as undesirable because they are just a setup for more disappointment.
- We measure the value of fresh opportunities and people more by how they might put us at risk of danger and distress than any potential benefits.
- We view cheerful and optimistic people as naïve and thoughtless.
- When good ideas or plans are presented, we immediately consider how they might be flawed and not help us.
- We think of ourselves as persistent victims of bad luck and bad people.

What are the signs that living in our past affects our spiritual life

Chronic discouragement and pessimism will profoundly impact how we regard the abstract and spiritual aspects of life. Staying focused on our record of distress and disappointment will sabotage our efforts to attain good results.

- Many of our spiritual pursuits are motivated by our desire to escape the residue of horrible experiences by an immediate leap into endless peace and love. Exploring other aspects of our spiritual potential is uncommon.

- We mix our misery with the fear that our lack of success might be due to God's punishment for our mistakes and sins. As we add our self-rejection to our regular distress, we move further from the contentment and peace we seek from the divine.
- Blaming the devil for unpleasant experiences becomes an all-purpose justification for our failure to live a successful and happy life. This shift to blaming external forces for our suffering adds to our estrangement from the life of spirit.
- The lure of our painful past keeps pulling us back to an earthbound state and mindset. This will severely limit our freedom to cultivate our spiritual potential for courage, confidence, and hope.
- As we become more obsessed with our painful past, the entire concept of spiritual possibilities becomes more remote and unlikely. Stories in scriptures about great miracles are viewed as fantasies.

How this blind spot can affect society

Large numbers of people focused on their painful past will harm society. The lack of a constructive orientation to life will slow down the evolution of society in these ways.

- We fail to recognize or appreciate how much society and its institutions have evolved, reformed, and eliminated most of the old problems. This is especially significant in the discussions of racism.
- We assume that many government, religion, or education reforms are still needed when some have already been overdone. For example, they are dumbing down the curricula in K-12 education, decriminalizing shoplifting, and opening the border to noncitizens.
- We are too ready to accept new reforms that are unnecessary or undermine our society's core strengths and its noble values.
- The resolution of old prejudice is delayed by those who seem to believe we are living in the early twentieth century or before.

What are the core problems of those who become stuck in the past?

- The primary reason we can become stuck in our past is our lack of interest or inability to resolve the many conflicts and failures in our life. We tend to gulp our experiences, like a python snake that swallows the whole animal they catch—hide or feathers intact. The fundamental assumption is that we can digest all the parts and sort them out later. Yes, this is a crude analogy, but it describes the utter lack of effort to understand what happened and how we managed these events.
- Many only seek to examine why their adversaries are so mean and selfish. This results to fixing the blame for the problem but not the problem itself.
- We mistakenly believe that revisiting and reliving our pain and suffering is a legitimate way to "understand" and heal our distressful experiences. Instead of learning something constructive from our challenges, we only agonize over them. Our real motive for reviewing painful memories is to:
 - feel sorry for ourself
 - find someone or something to blame
 - search for what is wrong with our enemies or society
 - reinforce the belief that we are helpless
 - justify our continued hostility and selfishness.
- Many mistakenly choose to manage their distress mainly by developing their defensive skills of stubbornness, intimidation, and shifting responsibility for problems to others. They install comfort and safety as their chief priority in life and become casual opportunists instead of having a well-defined sense of purpose with clear goals and a flexible plan to achieve them.

A second core issue in living in the past is the misdirection of our imagination. Unless we discipline the use of our imagination, it will likely turn against us and begin to obsess over our record of fear, doubt, worry, and disappointment. The effort will magnify our distress and nudge us to expect more of the same. Just as some people are guided mainly by their reactions to outer events, our imagination can lead the way in projecting our negative expectations of our future. This action amounts to laying a curse on our whole future. It must be stopped!

What can we do to fix the problem of living in the past?

Living in our past and emphasizing the worst parts of it can cripple our capacity for hope, confidence, and the ability to recognize opportunities. Establishing an outlook dominated by doubt, discouragement, and indifference creates a significant barrier to a successful and fulfilling life. We need to unchain ourselves from our strong associations with our painful past. Otherwise, our world will likely shrink to one shaped by our fears, anger, and helplessness.

Unfortunately, our blind spots have bodyguards that will protect them from any effort to reform their habits. They will try to excuse our bad habits by claiming our problems are too severe to be overcome by positive thinking nonsense. If this belief fails, the bodyguards will claim that other methods will be too difficult or require too much time. These excuses will enable us to return to our misery and the belief that nothing can be done to change our enslavement to our painful past. We must beware that this devious and morbid thinking only protects our bad habits and returns us to the cheap comfort of the familiar misery we know instead of the liberation we need.

Aside from rejecting these irrational assumptions, we must also work on unpacking the messages in current and old experiences. While these events caused us distress, they also *informed us where we were deficient* in self-control, patience, tolerance, and awareness of our noble purpose in living.

Suppose we can recognize the lessons in our traumatic experiences (e.g., a need for more effective skills in managing our problems, self-confidence, and stamina). In we do, we can begin flushing out our distress and move on as more competent and assertive individuals.

Of course, some people have little interest in looking for the lessons in their experiences. Instead, they learn how to use their distress in two significant ways. First, to validate their well-worn grievances and justify their resentment toward their perceived enemies. Second, to manipulate others to be more generous and supportive of them. Unfortunately, this motivation also incentivizes us to cling to our pain. Healing the problems of our past requires working to comprehend them rather than weaponizing them to procure unique benefits.

These methods can help us become more mindful of the present

- Try a new perspective on our experiences. View our past as a prologue for our future and a rehearsal for more extraordinary experiences. If we use the present to focus mainly on our past distress, we unwittingly will be *rehearsing for a future that will be similar*. However, if we use the present to wonder what we can do to build a better future, we can prepare ourselves to become more skillful and successful.
- Practice compartmentalization by temporarily setting aside our past without trying to change it. Learn to “park” these remembrances like we would park a car for a few hours while going to work or shopping. We might ignore them for a few hours or a whole afternoon. Tell our critical nature that there is no danger that we will forget these memories. If a flash of a memory of failure or anger appears during this time, we can tell ourselves we have “been there and done that,” so we don’t need another useless review or reliving of our painful past. Then, enjoy our day as if it is new, shiny, and enjoyable. Build up a few experiences that are free of old attitudes and expectations.
- Later, we might use our imagination to reinvent ourselves briefly as a successful person who enjoys life and is enthusiastic about our days and the weeks ahead. Allow ourselves to take a mini vacation from our painful past. This will allow us to build up some constructive experiences free from the dark shadow of past events. Tell your friends we are not ignoring our history. We are simply taking some time off from worshipping it in our habitual gloom and regret. (Yes, our desperate clinging to our old traumas rises to call it a form of worship—in despair, not devotion.)
- Remember that we usually greet each new day with many new investments in ourselves. We take a quick bath or shower, pay attention to our grooming, and dress in clean clothes. We also can duplicate this process at the psychological level by “dressing” ourselves in new expectations that today can be better than yesterday. This should include banishing our inner grump from taking complete control of our lives.
- Begin investigating our past experiences by trying to discover their deeper meaning instead of judging them as outrageous insults. The key questions that help this process include wondering why we were so vulnerable to being upset. Are we too sensitive,

irritable, or intolerant? Do we understand that retreating into sulking is not helping?

- Look for how we have developed helpful insights, skills, or attitude changes precisely because of some distressful experiences. Did we become more patient, humble, or less self-centered because of them? Did we become more sensitive to the needs of others? Were we embarrassed by how we responded in such a destructive manner? Just what was our constructive takeaway from these events?
- Have we learned that we must acquire the ability to live with the many imperfect people who inhabit our world? No, we do not have to accept criminals and genuinely nasty people as friends, but we must overcome our tendency to allow annoying people and events to ruin our day and destroy our peace of mind.
- Have we been unrealistic about expecting others to treat us like a prince or princess? Is our sense of entitlement continually setting us up to be disappointed? Just who needs to change?
- Try treating our painful past like a nightmare we could manage. The traditional method is to imagine a new outcome in the scenario in which our difficulties were resolved in a manner favorable to us, ending with our victory and sense of accomplishment. This is also a way to begin managing our painful past. While we cannot change the past, we can alter our feelings and interpretations about it.
- Work on becoming more flexible and resilient. Begin this by being mindful of the many different and successful ways to cope with challenges and difficulties. It is absurd to assume the only way to manage an annoyance is to become outraged. Instead, appreciate that other solutions are available. The more choices we have, the more successful we will be.

Commentary

We are not expected to forget our traumas or escape their impact. However, we are expected to grow through them. We can do this by comprehending their significance and moving on with the knowledge and skills we have learned from them.

This is a process that requires more than studying good ideas. We must search for why we were so badly hurt by our experiences and demand that we develop better skills to manage these struggles. Just as we cannot learn to swim without getting into the water, we will not learn to cope with problems unless we engage what challenges us. Acquiring more patience, tolerance, and persistence is not developed by fighting against what annoys us. It grows by managing our distressful experiences with skill, forbearance, and gentleness.

As we begin to comprehend the value of our experiences, we can harvest their wisdom and add it to our base of knowledge, skills, and confidence. Let us keep looking for the lessons inherent in our experiences. They will eventually liberate us from our misery.

Points to ponder

1. Every day is a new day with good possibilities. Don't strangle it with our pessimistic expectations and old resentments even before we engage in it.
2. Can we substitute tolerance for blame for a few of our grievances? Might the relief we feel be worth continuing with this attitude?
3. Impose a new rule for ourselves. Think of a successful experience for every unpleasant memory that spontaneously appears. This will help balance our tendency to concentrate on the negative.

CHAPTER 5

BLIND SPOT: GRIEVANCE-BASED MINDSET

One of the most common blind spots in intelligent people is allowing the memories of failure and loss to overwhelm their strengths and abilities. This trait is often seen in goal-oriented people who expect to have their skills and efforts rewarded. Confronting disappointment strikes them as more challenging than the average person. It is not just a matter of missed opportunities for them. Instead, they often turn their resentment to specific situations or people who they believe betrayed them and caused their misfortune. Questions about their abilities and mindset are rarely considered.

Many individuals who cling to these resentments and deep frustration fail to recognize how this habit can profoundly harm our well-being. Eventually, this anger and sense of betrayal can solidify into grievances that tightly organize our outrage around key memories of enemies and hardships. Continually brooding on this distress will strengthen these hostile judgments until it tears a hole in our confidence and self-esteem. This concentration on personal distress eventually will internalize it by moving it from an external event to being a significant part of our wounded identity. This is how we unwittingly magnify the damage to themselves.

The signs that we have significant grievances

People who hoard their grievances about past disloyalty and other injuries often act as if their significant losses are a perverse treasure that must be preserved. They would, of course, find this statement absurd, but when others suggest they are making too much of their suffering, they often strongly protest that their injuries were massive and life changing. They will claim the deep injuries they have suffered cannot be tossed away with a wave of forced understanding and false acceptance.

The impact of the events that led to the grievances have altered how they view themselves and what happens to them. Their locus of power is now more outside themselves than before. Consequently, their thoughts often drift back to lingering on how outer events have permanently damaged their ability to assert themselves and be happy.

The distinguishing characteristics of the grievance-oriented person are:

- They assume that bad experiences are far more powerful and significant than favorable events. There is usually little interest in exploring why they have this imbalance.
- Poor results or difficulty is routinely expected for no reason.
- Old insults and injuries tend to be hoarded as if they need them to justify the continually aggrieved status of the innocent victim.
- There is far greater knowledge about what is wrong with people and situations than what is right. This paradox arouses little curiosity in them.
- Insight into the profound degree of their negativity is usually absent. They assume they are merely being realistic and rational about how life is complicated and unfair. The fact that they are lacking in self-control, patience, tolerance, or flexibility is rarely considered.
- Making the original offenders return with sincere apologies and compensation is often presumed to be the only realistic solution to ending their grievances.
- Grievance holders are experts in being judgmental and playing the blame game. They can shift responsibility for problems onto others at lightning speed.
- There are strong tendencies to become dependent and needy for emotional support and comfort. They usually deny this fact.
- Reliving memories of old wounds and losses too often creates a hard core of bitterness. There is little recognition that this fixation slowly adds extra resentment to their already negative memories.

Signs of that grievances can affect our spiritual life

Suppose our mindset is chronically oriented to blaming our problems on repugnant people and destructive situations. In that case, we will have

significant difficulties in our relationship with higher human and spiritual potentials. Our unrecognized tendency to avoid accepting even partial responsibility for many of our failures and disasters will undermine our ability to cooperate with the higher power of the Deity.

Here are the signs that our habit of focusing too much on our grievances is harming our spiritual life.

- We believe that either God doesn't care about us or that God and divine law are severely limiting us and causing significant distress. A truly loving God would have never permitted bad things to happen to us and would have already punished those who caused us pain.
- There is only a tepid belief in redemption or the value of redemptive activities. Harmful events cause permanent pain and suffering. Genuine relief is usually impossible.
- Every day we remember or relive painful past events. We combine this with a strong mindfulness of our inability to overcome them. There is a total failure to recognize that these activities are the perverse equivalent of *worshipping our misery*. We only substitute despair for traditional devotion as a way to remember them.
- Spiritual goals are often highly idealistic and considered only as remote possibilities. Achievable spiritual lifestyle changes tend to be neglected in favor of trying to be "one with the all" or other otherworldly goals that have little impact on our earthly existence.

How those who have this blind spot can affect society

Large groups of people who tend to rely on blaming others as their preferred way to cope with many of their troubles will also have a powerful impact on society. When large segments of the population use the same faulty methods for coping with conflicts and injustice, specific problems will occur in society.

- Progress in resolving problems will be slowed or halted as attention is diverted from any success achieved into agonizing over the past and more blaming of those who allegedly caused this mess.

- There is nonstop complaining as the designated troublemakers are permanently vilified. We are constantly reminded of old and new injustices, and more misery is squeezed from these events.
- Any progress made in resolving these issues is rarely whispered for fear it will offend the victims of injustice.
- Constructive discussion about many social issues seldom occurs because judgments and opinions are frozen in harsh accusations and finger-pointing. The extremists on each side of any issue crowd out any who are reasonable and capable of resolving these problems.
- Opportunists arise who appeal to the aggrieved to act as their rescuer from past and current grievances. They feed on the accumulated distress to inflame these issues and make a good living off the misery of others.

What are the core issues behind being stuck in grievances?

Grievance-oriented people become specialists in using the blame mode to respond to difficulties and challenges. Our anger is weaponized in this manner to repel adversity, prevent further harm to us, and punish our enemies. Using our capacity to blame others to protect ourselves from further injury creates a powerful incentive to *preserve* our anger instead of resolving it.

Grievances can grow to become the psychological equivalent of a black hole that continues to suck the peace and joy out of us. The reward for blaming others for all our distress leads to the exhilaration of righteous indignation and the benefits of innocent victimhood. Unfortunately, the net result of this activity is permanent hostility in us and the misery this brings. Keeping our grievances causes many long-term problems that outweigh the brief benefits they seem to bring.

The continuous effort to blame others and situations for all our problems disables our ability to heal old conflicts. This occurs because we view them as entirely due to the misbehavior of others. *As long as we can sustain the blame, we never have to say we are sorry.* Neither do we need to consider the role we played in contributing to our problems by *our* narrow thinking, unrealistic expectations, and stubbornness.

This mistaken belief will abort all attempts to heal these old issues.

What grievance-oriented people can do to relieve their distress

Those who sincerely want to reform their habits of nursing grievances need to study the horrible consequences of behaving in this manner. Grievances can become the equivalent of an emotional cancer that will destroy our humanity. Large chunks of our life can be consumed with poisonous hatred and blame that spreads to fill in the empty spaces in ourselves. Making our emotional wounds the centerpiece of our life will impair our healthy relationships and ability to be productive. This is how many transform the experience of disappointment into the status of perpetually aggrieved victims.

There is an obvious absurdity in the perspective of the grievance-centered person. Viewing ourselves as wounded and the habit of nurturing our grievances keeps us bonded to the last thing we want—our traumatic past. This is what we earnestly wish to escape. The belief that external agents have caused the bulk of our suffering is comforting, but it also nullifies whatever we might do to help ourselves correct or repair this damage to ourselves.

Before taking back control of our life, we must radically change how we view our experiences. First, we must take back the power of self-determination by abandoning the conviction that other people and forces have caused the bulk of our misery. This leaves us as the helpless puppet of our adversaries. We must stop volunteering our submission to this arrangement by declaring we will determine our destiny from now on.

Second, we must give up the assumption that any injury done to us by others also requires them to fix all the damage. Using blame to dump responsibility on others takes away our accountability to repair our injuries and heal our self-esteem, regardless of who or what caused our suffering. It is absurd to sulk in silence when we could be working to rebuild our confidence and productivity. Once we decide to “own” our problems, we can effectively heal them.

A direct assault on reducing our grievances will likely arouse their bodyguards to attack us with all the fury we invested in our long period of resentment. It is better to work first on side issues of our grievances before approaching the core situation.

For this reason, it may be helpful to try using a different mindset and perspective to view all our experiences. This technique requires us to briefly experiment with a new identity to view our daily activities in a fresh manner. This change requires us to construct an alter-ego in which we imagine we are different people with many desirable strengths and qualities we might lack. We could pick an outstanding person known from real life, movies, or TV who is strong, resourceful, and charismatic. We imagine we can “borrow” these resources to think and act as they do as we engage in the details of our life. Most of all, we can review painful memories from the perspective of this formidable person.

Once we squeeze outside the confining shell of our old, fixed judgments of resentment and victimhood, we can experience a more constructive view of life than we have had. This does not mean creating a fantasy, but instead, we are trying to reproduce what a powerful, mature person would do about the setbacks we have experienced. Indeed, a mature person would view our past as memories we must allow to pass from us *as something real but dead*. The only authentic power of our past is in *what we give to it by our belief that it is the prime controlling authority of our life*.

In contrast, the mature person would concentrate entirely on trying to thrive in the present so we can build a better future. There is no need to persist with constant pessimism or feeling helpless. This shift of attitude can be valid because we can change how we embrace our potential for confidence, strengths, and the ability to create a new and healthier approach to life. This is the first significant change we must establish because it is the gateway to all other significant improvements.

The alter-ego experience can show us how healthy people deal with difficulties without coming to a complete stop, leaving us empty and victimized. The strong person would be plotting their comeback before the blood dried on the original disaster. We need to sense this courage and optimism once more to get us started on the inner changes we need for healing. The idea is to use the seed of our imagination to summon our inner strengths (actual or potential) that we have neglected. At worst, it can give us an edge of hope that we did not have before.

The chronic grievance-oriented person can also promote their healing by frequently remembering their positive memories. They can do this by recalling successful experiences in which their talents and efforts were productive and led to genuine progress. If we neglect to give as much attention to our successes as our failures, we will quickly add to our

suffering and imbalances. We must establish a more favorable perspective to the score we keep on ourselves.

In addition, we can make a rule to catch ourselves doing too much mental time-tripping into our painful past. Each return to failure and disappointment energizes our suffering and adds to our despair. We need to remind ourselves that reliving an experience will not make it better. If it was terrible the first time, the second, third, or umpteenth time will probably be just as bad. We must stop this horrible exercise. Beware! This idea may contradict what some experts encourage. Use your common sense to decide what is right.

We can also use our imagination to do a do-over of our traumatic experiences. In this do-over, we summon our creativity, charm, confidence, and goodwill to create a better ending in which we end up with an outcome that is comfortable and reasonable. The idea is to erase some grief and disappointment in this manner.

Finally, make it a rule to expect at least one positive experience per day. Each time we do, we can begin to recognize that we can create positive experiences. We may even learn that being in a state of gloom tends to attract experiences that match our mood. If we neglect to control our perspective, we will attract situations that match our apathy, pessimism, and resentment. We may accidentally summon the type of events and situations we claim to want to avoid. It is time to test what we can do to become surrounded by a better class of events.

Give your humanity the possibility of taking in a breath of freedom and peace. Enjoy being alive in a vast universe welcoming you into an abundance-filled life. You might be surprised at what can happen.

Commentary

When extremely distressful events occur, some individuals commemorate them by folding them in many layers of anguish. By embalming these memories in enough anger and regret, they become the millstones that define us and justify the woundedness and limitations we feel about ourselves.

These millstones become the well-polished grievances that we weaponize to justify our lack of accomplishment and joy. By becoming part of our core values and beliefs, we doom ourselves to permanent limitations that obstruct our highest good.

Once we recognize how we have created a Frankenstein monster from our emotional wounds, we can be motivated to rise above the self-made way we sabotage our well-being. This is the first and most essential step in recovering our humanity from the grave burden of grievances.

Ponder on these possibilities

1. Life is more enriching than the sum total of my memories of pain, suffering, and failures. Better attitudes and convictions are available, and I need to give them time to surface in my new awareness.
2. Everyone experiences mistakes, failures, and losses. Many of our abilities are acquired by trial and error. No mistakes or failures mean little learning. The secret is to learn to confront setbacks and commit to trying again with more significant effort, skill, and creativity. This is just as necessary for learning to walk as it is to get essential relationships right or succeed at work.
3. Our moods are magnetic. Apathy attracts more nothing. Fear attracts what we don't want. Resentment does the same. But the cheerful anticipation of something good also attracts what we want. Use your magnetism correctly to summon what will be favorable for you. Be kind to yourself in your expectations. – 2,697—

Chapter 6 NEW

BLIND SPOT: BEING HABITUALLY CONTRARY

Contrarians are a distinct group of people who frequently doubt the value or correctness of ideas and methods. They act as if their role on earth is to judge the worth of everything. They are especially devoted to detecting deception and dishonesty. While they appear to be intelligent individuals, they act more like they are stuck in perpetual intellectual rebellion, determined to challenge the authority of anyone and the usefulness of any suggestion.

It is the act of challenge that is important to them, not the substance of the argument. When presented with an answer to their questions or doubts, the habitual contrarian will immediately begin to wonder why this response is flawed or impossible to use. When they are informed that they are factually incorrect they continue their challenge using a different approach.

Most contrarians watch carefully how their comments are received to avoid going too far and losing the respect of others. Their goal is to create hesitancy, blur the facts, and add confusion to any discussion.

One of the signs that someone truly is a contrarian is how they rush to defend other contrarians who are being attacked. If they hear that someone is accused of bias or bigotry, they will automatically sympathize with them and may offer a defense for their views. They seem unable to accept the opinions of others.

These people seem to specialize in discovering hidden flaws and weaknesses in the views of others. Their actual interest, however, is mainly to challenge the authority and certitude of anyone who offers an opinion about anything. Wherever possible, they will try to foster doubt or at least reduce enthusiasm for the comments they hear.

Unfortunately, many do not stop at disagreeing with others; they proceed to being disagreeable. They interfere with creating effective plans by promoting suspicion and hesitancy. Stimulating controversy and intellectual dissention is automatic for them as they leap over facts, logic, and common sense to protest about allegedly faulty motives and methods. They enjoy stirring up controversy and disagreement.

Contrarians often pass for quite normal people who have ordinary lives and pleasant relationships with most people. However, they can become quite different in situations where they sniff the possibility that dogmatism and arrogance are present. They seem unusually challenged by anyone who is knowledgeable, confident, and authoritative. These qualities act as catnip to their eagerness to question those who declare clear distinctions between right and wrong or helpful and unhelpful.

On closer examination, contrarians are usually people with modest experience and intelligence but an expertise for creating confusion and uncertainty. If tested, they will reveal they know little about what is right, effective, or efficient beyond the usual platitudes. Instead, they specialize in criticizing what is offered. For example, they will declare that projects will be too expensive, ineffective, or difficult. Methods proposed will be condemned as inadequate or too complex. The timeline for completion will be impossible.

Words of approval will rarely be heard without cumbersome conditions being added to proposed solutions.

Contrarians are the great troublemakers in society

The general perspective of contrarians often appears to be noble and wise because they seem genuinely concerned about the unfairness and injustices in society. Discovering examples of people suffering from various wrongs is exhilarating for them, as this provides new opportunities to express their special talents of condemnation of harmful ideas and people. Consequently, they like to pose as the rescuer of victims of exploitation, oppression, and injustice. Their real impact, however, is usually to increase resentment and divisiveness instead of helping anyone.

People with these distorted views of life often find each other and gather as organized groups to seek to legitimize their discontent and animosity. The linchpin of these movements is the assumption that *fighting injustice is the best way to promote justice*. They often become prominent activists in organizations that claim to oppose racism, misogyny, and bias against transgenders. They view their role as rescuers of the oppressed and their work is to expose and highlight abuse, not necessarily bring healing to anyone.

The blind spot of being a contrarian means they will obsess on what they can criticize. This focus of attention often results in neglecting what is good and helpful except as a distant goal. This irrational outlook and behavior often receives popular approval because this seems so appropriate to all contrarians. Even after the obvious impact of these groups is to increase conflict and alienation, contrarians will approve. They view these results as a validation of their beliefs.

This mistaken orientation and beliefs about problems is difficult to explain to committed contrarians. However, the bankruptcy of concentrating on the alleged problem is illustrated by the work of gardeners. If we are trying to cultivate the best flowers, fruit, and vegetables, would we want to give all our attention to fighting weeds, bugs, and mold that can harm our plants? Or should our focus be to nurture everything that will promote healthy growth, such as appropriate amounts of water, fertilizer, weeding, and pruning? Which should be our priority? Yes, we need to do both, but which direction deserves our primary concern?

Consider how contrarians view the problem of racism. Shall we just be an anti-racist who condemns white people for oppressing colored people and demand that they make all the changes to correct this problem? Or shall we encourage everyone to practice respect and tolerance for all people? Must we highlight differences in skin color and culture and bigoted behavior? Or should we stress how we need to help each other with our common needs, struggles, and rewards we all share? Do anti-racists even think in terms of promoting tolerance and respect? Inquiring minds wonder about this.

We cannot reach goals we never define

When contrarians are asked about what they prefer and will champion, they launch again into detail about what they dislike. When asked again they want, they usually reply in terms of, “*Well, not that!*” and continue to talk about what they condemn.

It is important to catch the abuse of logic in this situation. Describing what is desirable in contrarian terms (I do not want this or that) means their concept of what is right is simply *the opposite of what is wrong or undesirable*. They may assume that they are truly clear about what they desire, but it is often stated in terms of generalities such as justice, fairness, equity, and kindness. Pragmatic details of what these terms mean in practical application are often totally lacking.

When the focus of our attention is on what we do not want, it means we have no well-defined objectives. Unfortunately, we cannot achieve goals that are not clearly described. This error in logic is like getting into a taxi and then telling the driver *don't take me to the garbage dump*. The taxi driver will comply by not moving! Yet, this deranged approach seems to satisfy those obsessed with what is wrong and are failing to think through the consequences of their dysfunctional thinking.

Signs that we may be a contrarian

While contrarians are being described in literal terms, the common variety is far more modest in how they express themselves. Here are some of the habits they often display.

- The initial response to suggestions or opinions is to wonder what is wrong with them. Most often, this inquiry is appropriately polite.
- Contrarians leap on what they assume are inconsistencies or double standards. They tend to assume these discoveries will be sufficient to neutralize or spread serious doubt about everything that has been discussed.
- Instead of promoting harmony and respect for others, contrarians are obsessed with detecting microaggressions and other faults. Once one is found, they will assume this single bad mark will be more significant than any constructive aspects already considered.
- Contrarians champion diversity and will fight for equity but mainly because they know it challenges those in authority and disrupts the status quo. Harmony and cooperation are not important goals for them although they will imply that they are.
- Contrarians dislike any attempt to impose rules on them, yet they love to stick it to others with special demands and regulations. Contrarians like to fight intolerance by creating guidelines about words that are forbidden and which labels are now preferred. Then, they assume this superficial change is a crucial contribution to the cause of justice and fairness.

- Instances of helpfulness and collaboration are often overlooked, and examples of redemptive action are ignored. Instead, they seem more interested in exposing and punishing the wrongdoers.
- Attempts to describe effective answers and solutions are often feeble and vague or will include an abundance of comments about what not to do.
- There is an amazing lack of curiosity about their own deficiency of knowledge or skills. Instead, they deflect any attention about their qualifications and, instead, concentrate on what is wrong with society and why other people are insensitive and abusive.

Signs of contrariness affecting our spiritual practices

Those who love to challenge authority will also have difficulty relating to the power and plans of our Creator. Any higher power will seem oppressive to a contrarian. Consequently, divine authority will often seem to threaten their beliefs. These are signs of how these threats are perceived.

- Contrarians are often in a perpetual fight with God's will and laws. Their concern is how God seems to oppose our comfort and interfere with what we want.
- Most of the problems we have are blamed on the neglect or abuse by others or God's indifference to our well-being.
- Contrarians, despite their casual atheism, have no problem calling on the wrath of God to punish bad people and create havoc for others. Their vindictiveness is apparent.
- Worrying about our spiritual destiny occasionally occurs. However, this concern is usually overrun by the assumption that we are nearly always the innocent victim of others or the apparent indifference God has about our well-being.

How those who have this blind spot can affect society

Individual contrarians can occasionally be a minor annoyance, but their collective effort to challenge traditional values and methods can

profoundly impact society. For instance, consider their support of these trends.

- The effort to challenge the authority of law enforcement has contributed to the movement to defund the police, decriminalize shoplifting, and abolish bail. All these “reforms” have had destructive consequences that disprove the validity of their assumptions that aggressive law enforcement causes crime and destroys the lives of the innocent.
- The concept of restorative justice seeks to eliminate prison time for convicted criminals in favor of efforts to help people establish noncriminal occupations and lifestyles. There is minimal evidence that this works well.
- Social advancement in K-12 education. Many challenge the traditional view that basic knowledge and skills must be mastered before students are promoted to the next grade. Instead, emotional comfort and confidence are considered more important. Academic failure would irreparably damage the self-esteem of students. Unfortunately, the goal of education is not about becoming a confident, well-adjusted moron.
- The current lack of patriotism stems in part from the frequent condemnation of this country for the history of slavery and other instances of governmental corruption and mismanagement. Somehow, the fact that many of these problems have been eliminated or substantially reduced is ignored. Redemptive change does not seem to exist for these people as they are blinded by their zeal to challenge authority and traditions by focusing mainly on what they can condemn.

What are the real issues behind the problem of contrariness?

Contrarians unconsciously equate being *agreeable and cooperative* with the humiliating act of being submissive and compliant with others. The aggressive effort to challenge the authority and ideas of others serves to bolster their ego and power to intimidate others. Forcing people to stop and defend their beliefs and opinions is perceived as victory by contrarians. They have been recognized! This has been their goal from the beginning.

Underneath their frustration, contrarian individuals feel ignored or excessively controlled by others. Therefore, they object to trivial details just to make their presence known. They assume this is how they can establish their identity and authority. Unfortunately, this habit often puts them at war with reality and alienates them from others.

At a more subtle level, contrarians often fear clear rules, practical goals, and accountability. Their unconscious motive is to blur the boundaries of any policy or solution so endless discussions and negotiations are necessary. At a deeper level, they seek to create uproars that will distract people into being absorbed in petty issues. The resulting chaos distracts everyone, making it easier to control them. They do this by stirring up latent resentment about old injustices that have already, for the most part, been resolved. By inflaming these historical resentments, they sow more distrust and conflict and sabotage effective solutions. Contrarians consider this result to be a win for their side.

However, the constant effort to object, complain, and criticize buries contrarians in negativity that follows them everywhere. It will continue until they make major changes in their priorities and obsession with trying to challenge everything.

What can we do to heal the contrarian habit?

There are many parts to an effective plan to reform a major dysfunctional habit. The core of this habit lies in the dominant mindset and general perspective about our life and the world we live in. Specific techniques such as the practice of gratitude will be ineffective until we include the effort to upgrade the quality of our collective views, intentions, priorities, and attitudes. Otherwise, the general contempt for authority and desire to create an uproar will keep neutralizing our efforts. Here are the specific methods that can be helpful in reducing our habitual contrarian tendencies.

- Become proactive! Stop defining what we want or need in contrarian terms, i.e., what we do not want or will not tolerate. Instead, our objective should be to concentrate on the details of what we can do to promote constructive communication, trust, and cooperation. Keep such plans practical, specific, and open to modification.

- Make a deliberate effort to find something to approve and praise in the ideas and opinions we encounter. Stop specializing exclusively on what we view as wrong or defective.
- Make it a rule that you cannot criticize the ideas of others more than five times each day. This includes your silent thoughts. There is already enough protesting and complaining in the world, and most if it has not helped much.
- Set aside time to reflect on where you need to work on being more constructive in how you think, set healthy priorities, and are positive in your attitudes. Constant fault-finding is not a suitable approach.

Commentary

Many intelligent people frustrate themselves because they know far less about what is right than what is wrong. This can become a major theme of their mindset and lifestyle, causing them to become too concerned about fighting what is wrong and inferior. As a result, they will fail to seek and embrace what is helpful. Everyone should be wary of what is undesirable, but this concern should not be the dominant theme of our life.

If you want to kill off the good possibilities in life, all you need to do is assume that every new idea or opportunity is flawed, too complex, or too troublesome to develop. However, if you want to expand your thinking and success, we must greet new possibilities with active interest in learning more about the advantages and benefits that are possible, not why they won't work.

The gift packages we never open will also never bring us joy. Likewise, the new possibilities we reject will never bring us success.

Ponder On These Points

1. The universe is larger than we are. It has its own purpose and laws of operation. Our life will be better if we cooperate with it instead of opposing it. Get real!
2. Cooperation and collaboration are often essential if we want to lead a successful and fulfilling life. Constant disagreement is not

the way to happiness. It only reveals our pettiness and small-mindedness.

3. We gain sympathy and respect by being able to express praise and acceptance for others. Our rejection and criticism will only attract the same to us.

CHAPTER 7

THE BLIND SPOT OF BEING UNABLE TO TRUST

Our ability to trust when adequate proof is not available is an essential capacity. Many parts of our life and social interaction depend on our ability to accept ideas, people, situations, and opportunities even when we do not know all the details about them. If our capacity to believe is impaired, all our significant relationships will be weakened.

Distrust is an attitude that alienates us from life. It can undermine healthy connections with people, our work, and our capacity to be productive. Distrust acts like a dark fog that descends on parts of our life, disrupting communication and cooperation that we need to be successful in life.

People who tend to be distrustful are not overtly paranoid or neurotically inhibited. They see themselves as cautious, thoughtful, and able to weigh all crucial factors and possibilities to determine risks. Their problem is that they often take their risk-assessment process too far because they are overly concerned about safety and security.

Many individuals trace the onset of their excessive distrust to traumatic losses and failures they have experienced. Their reactions to these have led them to conclude that much of the world is misleading and hostile. The need for security has become an all-important to them, and, as a result, they have begun to shut down their involvement in what is happening around them. Unfortunately, prioritizing safety in our lifestyle also leads to isolation and alienation from people and situations that could support our well-being.

While distrust obviously impacts our relationships with people, it can also damage how we relate to our body, career, abilities, the past, future, and many other connections.

People with poor relationships often forget that our most important connection is with ourselves. Distrust can lead to a prolonged decline in self-confidence as we begin to regard ourselves as weak and inadequate. This deterioration in our ability to respect our worth can eventually damage our foundation for happiness and success.

Describing the characteristics of a distrustful person can be challenging because they will claim they are just being realistic about the dangers and deceit in people and society. They will complain about how often they have been ignored, betrayed, or opposed by those they trusted. Unfortunately, instead of cutting losses and moving on from these examples, they develop fixed judgments about how most people will behave this way if they get a chance. By generalizing from a small number of these episodes, they assume that many individuals are unworthy of our attention and interaction until they prove reliable. Further discussions about these convictions are politely ignored.

And thus, the door is closed on this crucial topic. New rules are made to protect their security and prevent further damage. Unfortunately, these rules often become a prison of self-imposed restrictions that harm them far more than they help protect them from disappointment.

How the habit of distrust tends to grow in us

The egos of distrustful people are delicate. They quickly become upset at any hint of being ignored or rejected. Instead of challenging many perceived threats to their comfort, they prefer to retreat into what they assume will be a safe state. This tendency to avoid rather than manage what makes them uncomfortable quickly evolves into an undeclared war against everyone and everything that arouses their skepticism.

Little by little, the habit of distrust becomes fully integrated into their character as a permanent part of their mindset. They fail to view their past embarrassments as part of their learning experiences and instead regard them as a series of disasters. In this way, they allow old frustrations to become fixed annoyances that keep their anxieties simmering.

Although bold actions and persistence could bring better results, these behaviors are considered too risky. By default, distrustful people often lose out to those more assertive than deserving.

The blind spot of being distrustful can generate vast problems in our well-being and lifestyle. The long-term consequences of chronic distrust will be a series of disappointments, missed opportunities, and a lack of productivity. Many struggles will be lost because they are abandoned too soon. Relationships with potential friends and supporters may never develop. Significant fears and regrets from the past may never be confronted or resolved. The damage that distrust can cause is massive.

What are the signs that we are too distrustful?

Distrustful people seem to have a blank spot where flexibility, courage, and creative communication skills should exist. Instead of discussing differences with others, their standard methods are to back off and complain or make angry *silent* demands without attempting practical actions. The unresolved issues are left in limbo or in the hands of those more resilient and able to approach these problems with common sense and better self-control.

Here are some of the common beliefs of those who are too distrustful.

- It is assumed that nearly everyone is probably seeking to take advantage of us, and we usually know who will likely attempt it next.
- We demand that people prove their integrity and loyalty to us before we can fully trust them. Until we are assured about these issues, we will remain neutral and detached. This rule is merely a realistic approach to life.
- We expect everyone to be sincere, fair, and honest about their relationship with us. Anything less will not be tolerated.
- I don't care how popular various claims or beliefs are. I must see proof of their validity before I will accept them.
- When people ignore me, it is a sign I cannot trust them.
- People who are too upbeat and comfortable in crowds of strangers are naïve and don't seem to care about their safety.
- No, I am not lonely. I merely like to be by myself and safe.

The signs that our spiritual life is affected by distrust

Many cannot conceive that we can shut out the divine in our life, but they forget how our free will is always involved in our relationship with a higher power. This means we can decide when we do not trust God to help us and, thus, turn away from this source of comfort and assistance.

Here are the common secret thoughts of those who distrust God and the divine plans for us.

- We presume God will act as a benevolent parent, care for our personal needs, and prevent significant harm to our well-being. When this fails to occur, we are justified in being indignant and alienated.
- God knows how to punish people when they deserve it, and I often wonder when this will happen to a long list of people I know.
- God can be callous, especially when our sincere prayers remain unanswered. We tend to ignore the possibility that we are neglecting our need to learn how to act with greater skill and assertiveness so we can solve our own problems.
- We can acknowledge that God may exist but still leave us unloved and unsupported. We may feel betrayed and bitter about this result.

The impact of distrustful people on society

Individuals with a limited ability to trust can often make loyal and good friends once we get to know them. However, their collective impact on society can be harmful. Look for evidence of this in these activities.

- Many assume that government officials and bureaucrats will ignore our legitimate needs and rights in favor of their own convenience and comfort. Integrity and a sincere work ethic is becoming rare.
- Distrust in government, religion, and academia often manifests as apathy. While many continue to complain, others are abandoning their effort to demand accountability and excellence in these institutions. Consequently, power is shifting to radicals and opportunists whose only talent seems to be winning popularity and advancing their careers.
- Distrustful people prefer life's concrete and tangible aspects over the invisible qualities such as ideals and great ideas. They often relate poorly to the substance of principles and universal laws such as how we reap what we sow. They see the universe as dead, leaving them with the assumption that their personal will is the only

legitimate authority. These false beliefs limit their awareness of our collective worth and the higher powers that guide us. Defects like these prevent them from being fully engaged in their community and society in general.

The core issues behind being too distrustful

There is a seriously wounded or weak person inside all excessively distrustful individuals. This trait leaves them vulnerable to all kinds of authentic as well as false threats. The residue of old unresolved conflicts often contaminates their memories and associations, transforming them into cynics.

Our problematic and disturbing experiences seem to demand our full attention while regular events are accepted as ordinary. When we evaluate situations in this manner, we will generate an unbalanced view of life that emphasizes the betrayal of our expectations and encourages more cynicism. This is how we unwittingly strengthen our habit of distrustfulness.

Another issue behind distrustfulness lies in how an accumulation of failures can lead to doubting our judgment and ability to cope with life's challenges. Distrust of others can sometimes be appropriate, but it is a colossal error to stop trusting *our judgment and ability to care for our needs*. We must be able to trust ourselves to have a successful life. Our knowledge and skills may be weak in some areas, but we must be able to use what we have. If we cannot do this, failure will be a frequent result.

Finally, one of the habits that will sustain distrust is our neglect to notice how often we send a strong signal that we want to be left alone. Our body language and the tone of our speech send this signal. Indirectly, we are "telling" people that we want privacy, not company, silence, not advice. Most people readily recognize this signal and obey it. If we do not like this, we need to change our signal.

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What can we do about our tendency to be too distrustful?

Many changes can improve our ability to be more trusting and less focused on our anxieties and safety. The best solution may vary for specific individuals because there are many reasons for our wariness about fully accepting claims and people. However, there are some fundamental ideas that will be helpful for anyone who has difficulty trusting themselves, others, and our future.

We must fully commit to overcoming our resistance to being more outgoing and accepting. Knowing how to be more trusting will be nearly useless unless we are dedicated to significant change in our beliefs and habits. Yes, this will take us out of our comfort zone, so prepare to make these changes.

- We must turn off the subtle "go away" signals and signs we carry in our demeanor. We may not realize this, but there is evidence that it is present. For some, it is glaringly apparent.
- Turn down the way we automatically anticipate rejection. People will not trust and accept us fully until we begin to trust them. We must earn their acceptance and trust. Stop waiting for others to initiate all the correct moves before we are comfortable with them.
- Make a deliberate effort to learn more about the skills of effective communication and negotiation. Begin with being able to have a simple friendly conversation with strangers. Learn how to promote and preserve our dignity tactfully. This skillset is essential for rebuilding our capacity to trust ourselves, our judgment, and our choice of behavior.
- Recovering our ability to trust eventually depends on how well and how often we actively seek to express our confidence and assert ourselves. Silence is often interpreted as either disinterest or passive agreement. Others will take over and assume control unless we speak up to indicate our preferences or what we strongly dislike.

- Consider the possibility of asking a higher power to guide and strengthen us in times of need. We must appreciate that we are never alone in our times of stress, even when we fail to sense this Presence. While this idea may seem just a pleasant cliché, we also must acknowledge that sometimes we experience a burst of strength or a sudden knowing of what to do in a crisis. This is how we can experience connections to a higher power. This support is possible for everyone. However, we need to do our part in activating these contacts by turning up our curiosity and willing to trust about finding better answers and solutions. The magic of trust never ceases if we direct it to the right places.

Commentary

The value of being able to wield the intelligent use of trust is enormous. If we can trust our views and judgment, we will find it easier to express them in ways that contribute to our success. We need confidence and the ability to accept the right opportunities, relate well to our friends and co-workers, and fend off the nonsense and rude people who cross our paths. When we add our innate spiritual strengths to these qualities, we reinforce our capacity to thrive.

Ponder on these points

1. Have we repelled people and opportunities by being too aloof and quiet? Are we acting as if we want to be ignored?
2. Waiting for our rewards and gifts to come to us effortlessly doesn't work very well. Think about where and how we can actively reach out to the abundance we have been neglecting.
3. Remember that difficult events and mistakes are also learning experiences. While they are distressful, they also help us to understand more about what works (and what doesn't) to lead us to greater harmony and fulfillment.

Chapter 8

BLIND SPOT: WE ASSUME WE ARE ENTITLED TO SPECIAL RIGHTS

One of the most subtle blind spots is found in people who believe they are entitled to special treatment and privileges, including immunity from criticism. Entitled individuals believe whatever is convenient for them is also permissible. They will claim authority they do not have and invent justifications for their demands and behavior as needed.

Entitled people at their worst have contempt for rules and standards except for their own. Comments about responsibilities are regarded as meaningless. They often assume their old and often exaggerated difficulties and deprivations provide them with a license to receive extra privileges from ordinary situations and people. They insist they are only seeking what every respectable person wants. Consequently, they become equal opportunity takers and users.

While these descriptions of the entitled highlight their most obvious hallmarks, the common variety of the entitled person is not overtly obnoxious and demanding. Instead, they appear to have solid self-confidence, high self-esteem, and a positive approach to life. Unsurprisingly, many of these types are clever enough to back off when their bluff is challenged. However, most will push their demands again when the situation is more favorable for them.

Some entitled people are aggressive and will become angry when their demands are rebuffed. A few will respond with an uproar and claim they are being victimized if they fail to receive what they demand. Other types of entitled people are more clever and become experts in the use of emotional blackmail to get what they want.

Many entitled people are aware they have a significant problem with their public relations. They often make dramatic efforts to demonstrate a special type of kindness and generosity to some conspicuously pathetic individuals, pets, or those who are overtly ill. This is carefully designed to make others view them as compassionate so they will tolerate their more disgusting behavior in other areas. This act is surprisingly successful for those who are unable to recognize blatant opportunism and toxic selfishness the entitled so effortlessly demonstrate. .

If we only view their character superficially, the entitled person may seem strong and optimistic instead of sociopathic. However, a closer investigation will usually reveal strong undercurrents of anxiety and self-doubt about coping with challenges to their habits and lifestyle.

Although entitled people tend to exhaust the patience and generosity of others, many of them are surprisingly successful in their careers and relationships. Some become experts in exploiting people and situations to expand their success. Unfortunately, they tend to leave many bruised and disappointed people who can demonstrate the mark of footprints on their backs in the wake of their experience.

The common characteristic of the entitled person

Entitled people exist in a wide range of types and styles. Some are merely pushy con artists who quickly wear out their welcome in most gatherings. A few are noted for their continual effort to exploit situations and people. These types eventually have no close friends other than a few weak and needy people who have become a hostage to those who use them.

Most entitled people are far smoother in their relationships and are well-accepted. Many of these succeed well in their careers precisely because they know how to develop good connections with others and finesse minor differences and objections. Since many of the entitled are experts in the art of manipulation, a few have become useful in negotiating differences and generating agreements.

Here are some of the basic characteristics of the entitled person.

- They blithely exempt themselves from many rules and expectations that have become inconvenient for them.
- They claim assorted rights and privileges whenever it becomes suitable.
- If they are criticized, they often retaliate with shallow excuses such as, “*All criticism is self-criticism*” in an effort to imply the critic is only projecting their own flaws instead of detecting genuine faults in the others.

- The entitled often assume their exaggerated memories of being exploited gives them a perfect license to continue their own exploitations.
- Entitled people tend to judge others by how charitable and generous they are and how easily they will agree to cooperate with them. Those who resist them are viewed as cold and insensitive.
- Many entitled can selectively turn off their conscience and common sense. This act helps them to deny the consequences of their bold claims and their indifference to the needs of others.
- There is mild to moderate contempt for humble, obedient people who automatically follow popular traditions. They cannot stand genuinely strong, smart, and confident people who are resistant to their manipulation.
- Entitled people are very judgmental and righteous about their opinions. However, they are very disturbed when a similar harsh judgment is directed to them.

The characteristics of the spiritually entitled

Entitled people tend to strongly judge spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. Sometimes they act as if they are in competition with God's plan. This includes strong disparagement of many religious concepts about integrity, accountability, and humility. The standard views of entitled people tend to be wildly diverse. Some are atheistic, and others use religion as a cover for their demands and manipulations.

Here are some of the common signs that the blind spot of entitlement is having an impact on their spiritual life.

- Some entitled people are strongly anti-religious and materialistic. They do not want God or anyone else declaring what we must do or not do. This belief extends to being confident that there are no universal laws that govern the consequences of our behaviors.
- Others will act in the opposite way and become hyper-religious in demanding strict obedience to their carefully selected spiritual practices. They love to point out the sins of others to elevate their ego and use religious teachings to justify their nefarious behaviors.

- Many entitled firmly believe their religion is the only true outlet for God. This belief is used to inflate their conviction of their superior status. Naturally, they are eager to regard followers of other religions as ignorant pagans. Further discussion is futile.
- Entitled people are prone to accept simplistic religious ideas and practices with shortcuts to every proper goal. Common beliefs include these simple-minded ideas.
 - All we need to do is believe in God. Meaningful reforms in our character or good works are not necessary.
 - God is a God of Love who has already forgiven all our sins. No further action is needed.
 - We are all horrible sinners. We can do nothing to mitigate this. Frequent guilt is considered a healthy spiritual mindset. Begging for forgiveness is the primary act that brings redemption.
 - Preparing for our life after death is our primary work on earth, and therefore, my lack of material success is irrelevant.
 - The intellect is a primary barrier to the spiritual life because it allows us to interfere with God's will and be skeptical. Basic ignorance and lack of skill are unimportant. Any criticism we hear about ourselves is merely proof of the judgmentalism of the accuser.
 - Those who insist that we must earn the respect and material goods we want by honest, hard work are ignorant bigots who are only seeking to withhold the good life from others.
 - Blaming the devil for most problems becomes a very convenient way to avoid personal responsibility.

The impact of group entitlement on society

The blind spot of assuming we deserve special privileges also has a large impact on society. This is because the collective demands of hundreds of thousands of entitled people can become a powerful force that will influence leaders and politicians to respond to their demands.

Thus, we see certain groups who claim a need for special rights and benefits. Some of these groups are deserving, but others are clearly opportunists. Politicians and bureaucrats, being what they are, can be bullied or seduced into establishing regulations that provide these special privileges.

The initial success in achieving extra benefits tends to attract more groups to claim similar rights. However, like many privileges, they soon become sought after by those who might not be qualified.

This is where the cloud of exploitation and opportunism gathers. For instance, those who are stuck in poverty, do poorly in academia, and are low achievers in the work force will claim the only significant reason for these problems are the privileged people who neglect and abuse them. What is left out of most discussions about these issues are the many other reasons why specific people fail to do well in academia, careers, general health, and other areas.

The issue of entitlement can blossom into a serious problem in our culture unless we untangle the multiple reasons for success or failure in any endeavor. Surely, failure can be caused by many influences, not just a single origin in oppression. It is always easy to point the finger of blame at those who, supposedly, interfere with our welfare. However, this does not eliminate the importance of personal choice, ambition, self-control, and responsibility.

Likewise, the cure for these differences cannot be a matter of granting extra privileges, lowering standards, decriminalization misdemeanors, and exemptions from the usual rules for social behavior.

As ever, the ultimate cure for the blind spot of expecting extra rights and special advantages is personal growth in accountability, self-reliance, self-discipline, and hard work. These qualities are not well regarded by the entitled, but they prove to be the true antidote to their exaggerated claims for special rights and privileges.

What are the core issues in entitlement?

There are many core issues that lie behind the blind spot of entitlement. The basic problem is that the entitled like to assume that they have a special right to take shortcuts to success in life. This tendency to cut corners on their way to winning often means they will stress style over

substance and confidence over talent. They will try to push ahead by substituting charm, bribes, and intimidation for the knowledge, ability, and hard work needed for enduring progress.

Some would summarize the entitled person as one who has ambition without effort or morality and enthusiasm without talent or humility. Thus, you see many who claim to be doing God's will to cover the most blatant acts of exploitation and greed. A close examination of their character usually reveals that they are guided more by their wants and desires than any higher power. The rest is just a matter of self-serving rationalizations. This is how they bypass their limited conscience and self-restraint.

From a more philosophical perspective, the core problem of the entitled is their ignorance and unwillingness to apply the laws of karma and right human relationships. Without these insights and abilities, there is little to restrain the overconfidence and arrogance that allows the entitled individual to thrive.

If there is one major virtue that, if strengthened, would produce major reforms in the entitled person, this virtue would be humility. Without it, we cannot properly recognize and embrace our proper place in the universe and role in life. We are not designed to be totally independent individuals. We are all part of a collective whole. Our behavior affects others and vice versa. This fact obliges us to be sensitive and responsible for how we conduct ourselves.

Humility also reminds us that we have an obligation to act as the divine creations that we are. Of course, we have free will to do as we wish, including denying divine authority and order. However, we do not have the power to control the consequences of our actions or lack of them. If we want a successful life, we need to learn to be considerate, cooperative, and accountable for our actions.

What can we do to repair the blind spot of entitlement?

There is one change that entitled people must embrace before they can overcome the blind spot of entitlement. This is to begin viewing their habits and behavior with greater awareness and sensitivity. An honest acknowledgement of the dire consequences of their entitled behavior will be the strongest incentive for essential reforms.

Both short-term and long-term observations are essential. Our bloated expectations and assumptions will produce a trail of annoyance in ourselves and others that cannot be ignored. Old friends, of course, have long ago learned to tolerate the arrogance of entitled people.

The rest of the victims will have a long list of annoyances about those who have acted selfishly and ignored the feelings and preferences of many. Most people do not tolerate the obvious lack of respect the entitled often demonstrate. It is essential to recognize this. This realization will help motivate the removal of the carefully assembled armor of self-serving rationalizations the entitled have used as a license to exploit others.

The entitled person needs to stop and realize how rude and insensitive they have been. And no, claiming that we did not know how sensitive others are is not an adequate excuse for these behaviors. Ignorance of the obvious is a sign of our self-serving excuses, not a flaw in the gullibility of others.

The full force of healing qualities can be engaged if the entitled can expand their awareness and sensitivity. This can be achieved in these ways.

- Greater respect for the beliefs, rights, and needs of others.
- More patience and self-control to restrain the impulse to criticize or ignore others.
- The humility to recognize we are not a prince or princess with privileges the ordinary person does not have.
- A greater awareness of the consequences of our behavior and a stronger sense of responsibility. Placing ourself in the shoes of our victims to experience their distress will be a good place to start.

Perhaps humility is the most challenging part of this list of qualities to cultivate. The traditional concept of humility will seem bizarre to them because this trait is the exact opposite of the dominant quality in their personality. Entitled people genuinely believe they are extra special and deserving and that most others are stupid and inhibited.

The right kind of humility should not be confused with self-rejection and groveling. Instead, authentic humility helps us to recognize how we are

members of humanity who automatically share many benefits and obligations. In most cases, we share many of the same values, problems, needs, struggles and rewards. Genuine humility helps us to build a harmonious relationship with large groups. We are still special, not in the old selfish manner, but as unique human beings full of rich potential.

Commentary

What often appears to be a cheerful and confident person can be an arrogant and self-absorbed individual who tries to succeed by being polite and charming with overtones of intimidation. Entitled people have little awareness of how pushy and rude they can be, or if they do, they rationalize that these are the habits of all successful people. They see the world as divided between smart people, like themselves, who take advantage of all opportunities and shortcuts, versus others who are simply naïve, lazy, and unimaginative.

Ultimately, entitled people need to realize that they are not nearly as clever or wise as they have assumed. They have been using others to achieve what they want instead of being more self-reliant and responsible.

As their perspective and sense of identity become more inclusive, it is easier to acquire the ability to be humble, modest, and respectful to others. This change will help to reduce the simplistic and self-serving beliefs about our relationships and connection to the divine.

Ponder on these points

1. What makes us think that we will be immune to the consequences of how badly we treat others? Can we genuinely assume everyone will continue to indulge us whenever we are needy and demanding?
2. Have we noticed how others who are rude and intimidating are rarely happy and content except for short periods?
3. Befriending people mainly for what favors they can do for us is a poor way to select our close relationships. What are the crucial qualities that we want in a friend or associate? Are we also ready to express them to others?