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Chapter 1



STEP ONE

ACCEPTANCE

WHERE OUR CONFUSION BEGINS

To have a harmonious relationship with someone, it is essential that we accept them as they are and for them to accept us in the same way. This harmonious relationship also requires each person to accept responsibility for their own human imperfections, such as fears and insecurities, in a way that is self-caring and self-compassionate, so as to avoid blaming the other for their vulnerabilities. This therefore, implies that each person in this harmonious relationship also has a harmonious relationship with themselves. This further implies that they Accept and Care for their own humanness, which in turn, is their foundation that enables them to have a harmonious relationship with one another.


This formula for a harmonious relationship with ourselves and with others seems like it should be simple and straight forward, so why is that not the case? Why, instead, do we have so much pain, suffering and conflict in our lives? The answer is, we *don't* accept ourselves as we are and therefore we don't accept those around us as they are. This may seem like a simple statement, but it has enormous implications that influence all human interaction.

The opposite of Self-Acceptance is negative self-judgment or self-rejection. Self-judgement/rejection causes us to treat ourselves in ways that are harsh and unforgiving. As a result of our usually unconscious self-rejection, we assume that we are being judged and rejected by those around us, causing us to be afraid to just be ourselves or to be defensive.

Self-judgments are often so ingrained in our mind's conditioning that we have little real Awareness of it and what it is doing to us. More than anything else, self-rejection blocks us in our efforts to effectively and constructively work through and overcome the problems in our lives and the associated emotional pain that comes with it.

In an unconscious attempt to deal with the pain of this inner-conflict, we often lash out at others, blaming them for our emotional pain and we don't know how to stop ourselves, despite the damage it causes our relationships. We can also feel powerless in the face of being mistreated by others, like we somehow think we deserve this mistreatment. When we do catch ourselves being emotional or irrational, we think that there must be something wrong with us. We judge ourselves and are ashamed of our humanness. Our self-rejection and subsequent feelings of helplessness can be so all-pervading that we shut down and feel that everything is hopeless. On the other hand, many of us have come to realise how our self-rejection is causing havoc in our lives, but are struggling to make a difference with our attempts to change these self-defeating habitual mindsets. Self-rejection causes negative life-patterns to stay on repeat.

In my personal and professional experience, all destructive judgement stems from one fundamental belief, or in other words, *misbelief*, that becomes imbedded in our minds from an early age. This misbelief is:

 **I am unworthy because I am human.**

By the term 'human', I mean 'not perfect'. For children in particular, the standard of perfect behaviour is measured by others such as parents, extended family, older siblings, teachers, social pressure from peers or the media, or any other form of perceived authority. Furthermore, there are invariably many different versions of what this perfect standard is, depending on who is giving out the discipline, or the pressure to conform. This standard can even change from moment to moment with one individual disciplinarian, depending on his or her changing moods. When we were children, we were often unable to live

up to these standards. Sometimes this was because we weren't given the appropriate guidance and mentoring and sometimes it was because we simply lacked ability in that area. Sometimes the standards set for us were actually impossible to reach, such as with the powerful, repetitive and unrealistic images portrayed to us through social media.

We are born into this world powerless and helpless. We remain acutely vulnerable throughout our childhood because we are so dependent on our adult carers for not only our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, but for our very survival. We also dependent on our carers for our identity and our fundamental belief in our worthiness. For our successful development into adulthood, it is essential that we feel we belong and that we feel loved unconditionally. When we don't receive this vital loving attention and guidance, we may be adversely affected in very complex and profound ways for the rest of our lives.

During our childhood, when we failed to live up to the standards set for us by our carers, as well as social media, many of us suffered abuse, ridicule and rejection. We were deemed unworthy of love. As a result, we frequently felt sad, afraid, ashamed, abandoned, angry and so on.

Often the problem was a lack of active mentoring by our carers, who were, for whatever reason, pre-occupied and/or absent and not in tune with our essential needs. We felt unworthy of love in this situation as well – not important to our carers. We perhaps didn't get the appropriate mentoring that enabled us to feel capable of pushing through life's challenges and therefore gain resilience. Feelings of abandonment, loneliness and depression would be particularly strong as a result of this experience.

Another problem many of us faced in childhood was too much involvement from our carers. As children, we need room to be ourselves – to develop our own identities according to our own unique potential. When our carers are overbearing and inappropriately controlling, it can result in us feeling inadequate, incapable and even helpless. We tend to remain dependent on others, overly compliant to the demands of others and unAware of what is uniquely and essentially important for our own needs. Our creativity and self-confidence can become stifled. Our sense of what love is can become highly distorted. There is always an

underlying dread that we will be deemed unworthy of love and even abandoned if we dare to think and act for ourselves.

Another situation we can encounter as children is a home environment that is chaotic and even dangerous, which often involves parents who can't control their anger and/or have alcohol or drug addictions. We may not have known what to expect from one moment to the next. Ongoing fear and anxiety causing what's known as random conditioning is often the result. One minute we may be stroked and the next we may be beaten, without knowing why. At other times, we may be inappropriately left alone to fend for ourselves at a young age for extended periods of time, adding to our fear and anxiety. With this sort of unpredictability, our primal defences have to be on all the time. We need love like everyone else, but we become afraid of it as well. Love, in this situation, becomes a confusing nightmare as we are exposed to various forms of abuse and abandonment. We can feel afraid, anxious, worthless, defective, ashamed, angry and end up acting out in self-destructive ways.

Alternatively, we may have had a character/personality that was sensitive or difficult for our parents to understand and to manage. In other words, children often display strong personality traits and emotional dispositions seemingly from birth. We are not necessarily a blank slate before we start. Nevertheless, the weight of responsibility is on parents and other significant carers to equip themselves with the skills for the task of parenthood. It is the parents' responsibility to constructively work with their child's challenging traits, in order to help the child learn how to manage them. It is also an opportunity for the parents to identify their child's unique strengths in order to help the child reach his or her highest potential.

Children are children. They cannot be expected to successfully parent themselves. Of course, as parents, we were once children. We are also human, with our own childhood wounds. We are all still growing up, such is the dilemma of being human. We are born into a human world that has been conditioned by human minds that, in turn, condition us.

As children, we can become deeply conditioned and confused by our

childhood experiences, as a result of our vulnerable, undeveloped minds and resultant deep dependency. Without even realising it, we often conclude that we must be fundamentally wrong in some way to be treated the way we were. In many ways we conclude that we don't deserve love. We take on the beliefs/misbeliefs of our main carers, not knowing anything else. Our self-worth can also be deeply distorted by random traumas that are beyond the control of our carers.

Love can be repeatedly withdrawn from us when we are children, often simply for being childish. As children, we are placed in an impossible dilemma. Being children means that we have little capacity to control our cravings and emotions. We simply can't help ourselves. We are doomed to fail when we are expected to be "good little adults" by well-meaning but confused carers. We have no escape when our carers are unaware of how to Care for our needs, or are so emotionally damaged themselves that they are abusive and physically violent.

As children, we are on a rapid learning and developmental path, but we can't yet discern the quality of what we are learning. We are just unconsciously soaking it all up. This is the root of childhood conditioning, both positive and negative. The pervasive misbelief that we are unworthy simply because we are human becomes deeply embedded into our minds and profoundly distorts the ways we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

As powerless, vulnerable children, we are so dependent on our carers that we are compelled to try to conform to their confusion no matter how impossible this may be to achieve. In the face of this dilemma, we feel so powerless and unworthy that we are compelled to believe negative judgments about ourselves, even though in our hearts it doesn't feel right. When we take our misbeliefs about ourselves into adulthood, no matter how we try to hide this deep confusion from the world around us, it nevertheless pervades and distorts every part of our lives. This self-rejection, this lack of genuine love for ourselves, I have observed, is the root cause of our suffering.

Naturally, all children need guidance and discipline. This is how we learn to constructively manage our own emotions and needs. All discipline, however robust it may need to be at times, must be guided by

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Unconditional Love and instil in us a fundamental belief in our worthiness as a human being. Otherwise it contains elements of destructiveness.

We can try to do better than our parents, but we are all still growing up, just like them, and still struggle with our own childhood conditioning. We need this vital life-blood of Unconditional Love while growing up, but we can only be brought up by humans.

When we were children, we may not have had an appropriate example of Self-Care to relate to, so we grew to regard self-rejection as a normal way to think. As a result, negative subconscious thought-patterns gain a hold in the early stages of childhood development and grow into distorted beliefs that then control how we think, feel and act. This is why our emotional problems tend to stay on a repetitive loop.

As a result of our confusion, we think that being mistreated by others is the cause of our suffering, as it was when we were children. However, as adults, our minds now belong to ourselves. We are in control of how we manage our own lives. We are in charge of our own worth. Therefore, it is now our own self-rejection, emerging out of our own misbeliefs, that makes us so emotionally vulnerable to the perceived or actual mistreatment from others.

As a result of self-rejection, our perceptions of reality become distorted in complex ways. For example, we either take offence at things that are not meant to be offensive, or we don't know how to set appropriate boundaries to protect ourselves when we actually need to. Self-rejection continues to create a distorted reality for us throughout our lives until we become Aware of these self-defeating beliefs and change them. Until then, we may think that life is against us, but in actual fact it is our own negatively programmed/conditioned minds that are causing our suffering.

This fundamental insight can be so difficult to comprehend and accept at first. We have been so conditioned to blame others and life in general, for our emotional suffering. On the surface it appears so convincing that someone else or something else is the cause. We think that if only they would act/behave in the way we think they should, everything would be fine. Sometimes the other person's behaviour

certainly *is* destructive. More often than not though, we have misread the situation. More often than not we are over-reacting to someone's minor human imperfections. More often than not, people don't intend to hurt us, they are just a bit unskilful at times, just like you and I. When we are faced with genuinely destructive behaviour from another, it is still up to us to take decisive action to protect ourselves. Thinking that we are a victim and lashing out at others or ourselves, or avoiding life's challenges altogether, is self-defeating. We are caught in habitual confusions that keep us powerless to control our own happiness and wellbeing.

The problem lies in our confused reactions to other people's humanness and underneath that, to the ways we react to and reject our own humanness. When we do find ourselves in abusive situations, it is often because our confusion and resulting poor relationship with ourselves has impaired our ability to effectively read the warning signs that were there early on.

Therefore, conditional love, in its many forms, from the 'normal' variables of childhood that even diligent parents can't always control, to serious abuse at the hands of emotionally damaged parents or others that we encounter in our childhood, is where the confusion starts for us all. We all then pass our confusion down the line from generation to generation. No one escapes the dilemma of being human. Coming to terms with our own humanness is one of the real challenges of emotional healing and personal development. Therefore, we can't be perfect and be human at the same time. We somehow have to live with and work with this reality of our humanness.

To be self-Aware is to be able to Accept and take Care of our own humanness. It is to become our own Aware parents of our own human selves. As parents, as humans, we are going to make mistakes. It is essential therefore, to openly and compassionately Accept our mistakes, face them and learn from them. This then becomes a constructive example for our children. They then learn to Accept and Care for their own humanness. Therefore, our mistakes, if approached in the right way, become an opportunity to learn, grow and actually break free of our confusions that cause us to be ashamed of being human, which is

something that we can't avoid being. So how do we gain this vital Self-Awareness?

THE KEY THAT FREES US FROM SUFFERING

An adult, with a healthy self-esteem, can shield his or herself from emotional suffering, or at least quickly recover, regardless of the negativity of the situation. Those with a healthy self-esteem carry a strong belief in their own self-worth. They are not dependent on others to give them permission to feel worthy. They do not need validation from others before they can feel good about themselves. They already know they are worthy, even when they make human mistakes, which we human beings inevitably do. Because of this strong belief in their essential worthiness, people who have a healthy self-esteem are not so prone to self-rejection and as a result, are less likely to be condemning of others. Those with a healthy self-esteem are psychologically protected by their own Self-Acceptance, so here we find an essential key that will free us from suffering.

If we hadn't first learnt to reject ourselves, acute emotional vulnerability in adulthood would not be there in the first place. Without this prior self-rejection, which can be so imbedded in our minds that it is beyond our Awareness, the condemnation from another would have little impact. We would simply know that the person doing the condemning is perhaps having a bad day and is obviously confused. We would know that no matter what mistakes we may happen to make, we do not deserve to be mistreated. We would know that we do not deserve to be condemned as unworthy, such is the real power of Self-Acceptance.

We can't ultimately have control over the behaviour of another, unless they choose to side with us with their own free will. Even when we force someone to comply with coercion, their hearts are still against us, resulting in conflict and rebellion, or at least a loveless relationship. There are so many other things in this world that we are powerless over. Nonetheless, Self-Acceptance is a power that is always within our grasp. With the power of Self-Acceptance, and Acceptance in general, we can constructively work with all that we experience, whether it is our own mind or the world around us.

When we are actively Accepting that it is okay to be human, it makes it so much easier to look honestly and compassionately at our humanness. It is easier to look squarely at our own fears and insecurities without being beaten back by self-rejection. With this ability to constructively self-reflect, we are then in a position to learn from our mistakes and build a better life for ourselves. Self-Acceptance opens our hearts to ourselves. It initiates a conscious relationship with ourselves. We are then naturally more motivated to actively Care for ourselves.

I was once very sensitive to criticism, due to the bullying I was subjected to by an older sibling and at school and due to also having a sensitive character. My parents did not have the Awareness and parental skills to know how to protect me and/or equip me with the strength of resilience. As a result, I would be very defensive and reactive, making me vulnerable to even more bullying. In my mid twenties, while I was in my early stages of healing and growing, I was working as a tradesman in a workshop setting. When I started my trade it was as though management was giving some of the other tradesmen bonuses every week just to give me a hard time, triggering the recurring nightmares of my old school days. However, as I was learning to increasingly Accept myself, my reactions began to change. One day, in response to the usual jibes I was subjected to, I said something a bit different and I observed them laughing with me instead of at me. Suddenly the whole ‘feeling like a powerless victim’ dynamic broke apart and the light of a new insight struck me. It dawned on me that the way I felt about myself could make a huge difference to how I reacted to the world and how the world reacted back to me. In those same workshop settings, I also learnt that Accepting and owning my mistakes enabled me to retain the power over my own life, again, thanks to Self-Acceptance. “Yes, I did stuff up there. I realise I need to do it this way instead. Thanks, Sam, for letting me know.” I learned to respond that way regardless of how they spoke to me. When I Accepted compassionate ownership of my own humanness, it would defuse the negativity in the situation and I would regain my own personal power. I was able to no longer care about the put downs, because I knew it said more about the state of the other person’s mind than it did about me. I would be free to get on with the job in a state of

peace. Further more, my workmates felt less inclined to put me down because my positive response subverted/disarmed the whole put-down dynamic. More importantly, I could see that deep down, they felt more at ease with me and enjoyed my company more. By ignoring their jibes and treating myself with respect, but also treating them with respect, I was able to attract a better, kinder part of their character. Therefore, through the power of Self-Acceptance, I was happy, the bosses were happy and the other guys were happy. By the time I left that career, virtually no one was giving me a hard time and when someone did try to bully me, I had enough Self-Acceptance/respect/confidence to deal with the situation assertively, decisively and effectively without the need for aggression. Of course, I didn't always get it right, but it was good enough to ensure that my life in that trade ran smoothly enough. My work as a tradesman ended up supporting me while I was attending university, as a part of my exploring my own potential.

Self-Acceptance is far more powerful than most people realise. Those who already have it as a result of their upbringing usually take it for granted because it has always been there. Over the years, I have spoken to many such people who have this inherited healthy self-esteem, which also comes with a robust resilience. Few have been able to explain to me how they do it, because Self-Acceptance is normal for them. Those of us who don't have those positive traits, don't realise how deep Self-Acceptance has to go to make a real difference, because we don't realise how ingrained our self-rejection has become. For those of us who are plagued with suffering, self-rejection is the 'normal' way our minds operate.

As adults, we have in our potential the power of reasoning and the capacity of consciousness to know what *feels* right and to trust that feeling. Ultimately, the only thing that feels right is Unconditional Love, along with all its qualities, such as Self-Acceptance. Unfortunately, as a result of our accumulated confusion, for many of us, our ability to access this important adult capacity of being truly consciously Aware of what we are feeling and what those feelings mean, becomes profoundly impaired. We become so confused that we think we have to reject ourselves instead of love ourselves, regardless of how painful our self-

rejection feels. Our confusion causes us to struggle to even know what Love actually is. We become shut off from our own higher knowing/potential. We don't realise that we are being controlled by the negative conditioning that is so imbedded in our own minds. In this state of vulnerability, our limited survival instincts are inclined to condemn and attack ourselves and others as a misguided form of 'defence', not realising that this self-inflicted hurt that we feel can instead be effectively cared for and healed by our own higher Awareness.

Self-Acceptance initiates the process that will lift us out of these blind, unnecessary fight-or-flight reactions. Self-Acceptance, lived in a consistent, dedicated way, inevitably dismantles and overcomes self-rejection and all of its negative consequences. Therefore, the Self-Acceptance that I am talking about here needs to be taken to fundamental levels. It needs to be a radical form of Self-Acceptance, or at least it will seem radical for those of us who are stuck in repeated cycles of suffering.

Unconditional Self-Acceptance is the remedy for self-rejection and inappropriate judgements from others. ✓

A profound degree of Self-Acceptance is the key that frees us from suffering, whether our suffering comes in the form of depression, stress, anxiety, grief, shame, anger, trauma – in fact any form of mental/emotional suffering – but there are many obstacles along the way on our quest to be free and almost all of them are inside our own minds. This is why it can be so hard at first to see the true nature of these obstacles and why it can be even harder to change them.

Don't be discouraged though. The fact that the obstacles are inside your own mind actually makes the situation easier, providing your healing journey is approached in the right way. It is made easier, because you don't have to waste your time trying to control or change other people or the world in general. Your task suddenly becomes far less complicated. To find peace, happiness and fulfilment, you only have to look within yourself. Furthermore, the unlimited power that you need in order to make those changes is within you also and here you will find another important key that will set you free from your suffering.

Furthermore, you will also gain the Awareness and power to know how to identify and change the circumstances around you when they do need to be changed.

The more we truly Accept ourselves, the more we learn how to Love ourselves unconditionally. The more we love ourselves unconditionally, the more we heal ourselves. The more we heal ourselves, the more Aware and empowered we become, thanks to our healing process and the more we are able to act in a way that is for our highest good.



Exercise 1

Opening the Door to Love And Healing

Here is a contemplation exercise that will help you better comprehend the importance of Self-Acceptance and how Self-Acceptance leads you to Unconditional Love (Fill in the blanks with the right gender for you to make it more personal).

Imagine yourself as a newborn baby laying on a bed with you, as your adult self, looking down at this delicate, vulnerable and precious being. Now as you are looking down at this beautiful little being, can you say in your heart that there is anything about this baby that is unworthy of Love? Can this baby do anything that makes it truly unworthy of Love? For instance, may frequently wake you up during the night by crying. may also dirty nappy a number of times per day. Neither of these experiences is very pleasant to have to deal with as the carer of this baby. Is the baby still worthy of Unconditional Love even when acts this way? Some people actually get angry at this unconscious behaviour of a new born baby. Is the problem with the baby or the carer?