

Inherited and self generated limiting beliefs and thoughts are those which constrain us in some way. Just by believing them, we do not do or say the things that they inhibit, and in doing so we impoverish our lives. These beliefs may be about our identities and self worth, our rights, duties, abilities and permission to do things. We may define ourselves as one thing and not another which may create barriers to also being something else or more. For instance, we may define ourself as an accountant and not someone fit to do marketing to sell our services well, or others may define us as too artistic and so we shy away from being an accountant. We judge ourselves and others and we think that we don't deserve or we accept others' ideas of our place in an arbitrarily constructed hierarchy and world of scarcity where only competition, a killer attitude and compliance can serve us. We fail to ask the questions: who and for what. We believe our abilities are fixed and we are often bound by values, norms, laws and rules that constrain what we must and must not think, believe, be and do.

For instance, if I think 'I am stupid' then this kind of thinking implies that I am stupid all the time and all of me is stupid. It is very different from saying I did a stupid thing today. 'I am' thinking assumes permanence and can lead to generalizations. We also hold beliefs about others and the world based on our experiences and conditioning, which can also limit us, especially, if we have been trained to think that others are more capable, and deserving, but also that our colour, ethnic or cultural group or even size are superior. We often carry, at a less conscious level, and therefore, it is way more difficult to challenge, all kinds of beliefs about how the world works from laws of nature to how social reality is constructed. It is not to say that we do not need an inner critic, but it would be wise to preserve the beneficial functions of our inner critic and challenge the inner bully which is the result of our internalizing people in our life that have bullied or stamped out our creativity instead of encouraging and supporting us to be the best version of who we were meant to be. I mean after all, why would the human race be endowed with artistic and spiritual yearnings, proclivities and inclinations, and aspirations for freedom.

One significant way by which we form our beliefs is through our direct experiences, especially during our formative years. We act, something happens and then we reach conclusions that are not necessarily helpful or true. For instance, if we were bitten by a neighbour's dog when we were three then this can lead to unconscious fear of dogs or beliefs that all dogs will attack me. If, for instance, we watched a movie of a plane crash when we were six we could carry an unconscious fear of flying. It is

natural, when we are young and have few experiences, to form false and limiting conclusions. We are wired to learn and build beliefs quickly and to generalize in order to protect ourselves and survive. Of course, when forming our perceptions of life we also learn from our parents, friends, peers and teachers about how the world works and how to be and behave in it in order to fit in. Seth Godin writes ‘the tragedy is that society (your school, your boss, your government, your family) keeps drumming the genius part out. The problem is that our culture has engaged in a Faustian bargain, in which we trade our genius and artistry for apparent stability’. Education can actually become a double-edged sword as it drums in us what is acceptable and what is not, what is right and wrong, good and bad. Teachers may not be that well informed and are likely to carry many unmetabolized traumas and debilitating beliefs themselves. Seth Godin writes ‘let me be really clear. Great teachers are really wonderful. They change lives. We need them. The problem is that most schools don’t like great teachers. They’re organised to stamp them out, bore them, bureaucratize them, and make them average’. We probably have all had great teachers that inspired and guided us and teachers that made us feel invisible or tried to stamp out our creative urges. I will always remember the teacher who told me that I could improve my Greek writing and speaking, quickly, and on my own, through reading literature, when I first arrived in Greece. Her simple advice opened up a new world for me, and of course I will always remember the other ones, too.

Limiting beliefs are often based more on subconscious hopes and fears than on reality. We may also use faulty logic in order to excuse ourselves from what we perceive as our failures, and trying to understand cause and effect can be tricky sometimes for often reality can be more complex than we are aware at a given moment. More often than not limiting beliefs and thoughts are fear-driven. Fear locks beliefs in place. That is why fear, punishment, trauma, attacks on confidence and shaming are such effective tools in locking beliefs in place. We come to believe that if we act against these beliefs, we will be harmed or exiled. The thought of criticism, ridicule or rejection by others inhibits us. When we fear that we may be harmed or punished in some way by other people, we end up shutting down or seeking to appease others. For a while, I worked as a waitress at a nearby café and I remember sometimes running all the way from work to campus just to get there in time to vote against or for some issue or other. There was a lot of student political activity and involvement back in the eighties. Listening to Seth Godin took me back to all that. I worked my way through all my student years; so, I was never a full time student, but then after enough harassment episodes, and eventually, being hit by a motorcycle while walking on the pavement I

frequented the campus less and less, mostly to sit exams, and worked more and more doing many odd jobs. One of the three, yes three, guys on the motorcycle had pulled my book carrier bag, which had resulted in my losing my balance and falling on my left arm, my text books strewn on the pavement. However, I did not question my change of heart, but simply reacted to what was coming at me. Most of the people I knew back then went on to work as accountants and other related jobs, while I went on to teach English. Ironically and unexpectedly, during this awakening journey of hardships and many initiations, it has been that degree that has generated some income. To come back to Seth Godin, the first time I heard about him was through an art teacher, who read his and other marketing related books during classes. Anyway, it is amazing the way things return over and over for deeper understanding, which feels like synchronicity and small awakenings.