

Overcoming doubts

"Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt." -- William Shakespeare

Most of us have doubts now and again -- we doubt our religion, we doubt our learning, we doubt our government, we doubt our experience.

Rare is the person who has no doubts. Sometimes doubts are healthy -- but when we're talking about **self-doubts**, doubt is like a cancer, eating us from the inside.

Few people learn to put self-doubt behind them, but those who do soon realize their doubts were pure lies.

We gain self-doubt in ordinary ways. Some of our strongest self-doubt may be rooted in a childhood memory. A dropped ball at a crucial time in a grade school softball game; a childhood "crush" gone awry; a playground bully; a laughter-inducing bad haircut; forgetting ones lines during the sixth grade play -- all of these things can make us start to doubt ourselves -- even twenty, thirty, or forty years later.

Weeks, months, or years go by -- we think about our past defeats, mulling them over in our minds. Even though our ball game has improved, our public speaking style has been perfected, and our haircut has become much, much better, our doubts remain, limiting our future and affecting our life.

A bad marriage may create lingering doubts that affect a good marriage; a layoff at a job may make us less likely to trust our new employer; a thoughtless word 20 years ago, said by a stranger, may cause us to doubt our abilities.

In *Dante's Inferno*, the entrance to Hades was marked with a sign, which read: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Many people, bound by self-doubts, take a similar path -- they abandon all hope of change -- because their doubts have put them into a living hell.

Doubts, though, are like shadows -- they lurk to confuse the reality of what life is about. Like shadows, the key to exposing doubts for what they really are is the same -- shed the true light of day on the doubt, and the basis for it, even if it was formed 20, 30 or 40 years ago.

Few of our doubts can stand up to the pure light of reality. With a little bit of light, we find that our lives are remarkably different than they were 20 years ago. We

find that our childhood experiences don't matter at all -- in fact, most of the time, they were inaccurate memories.

Most of the time, if we look at the experiences that cause self-doubt, we find that with our new-found wisdom, our doubts are exposed for the frauds they truly are. We find our assumptions at the time that the doubts were formed were flawed; we find we lacked information, or wisdom about the experience. Our gut-level reactions were often incorrect; our emotion-laden memories are often inaccurate.

How can we erase these doubts? How can we eliminate them? By confronting them.

Our doubts and our fears are anchors -- holding us to one place forever after. We must raise those anchors, freeing ourselves to sail to newer, greater destinations.

Examine your life -- write down a list of your doubts and fears. See them for what they are -- lies that you continue to tell yourself. Resolve to ignore those doubts, now that they have been exposed. Choose to act in the face of your self-doubt and fear -- after the first two or three times, they will no longer be doubts.

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