

Conscious Creation: Module 4

Step Two: Overcoming Core False Beliefs

During our early life we began making agreements. Our parents rewarded us when we did what they wanted and they punished us when we didn't. We also learned behaviors and habits in school, church, and from other adults and children on the playground. The tools of reward and punishment were often emotional and sometimes physical. The impact of other people's opinions and reactions to us became a very strong force in the habits we created. In this process we created agreements in our mind of who we should be, what we shouldn't be, who we were, and who we were not. Over time we learned to live our life based on the agreements in our own mind. We learned to live according to the agreements that came from the opinion of others. In this process of domestication, it turns out that the choices we make and the life we live is more driven by the opinions we learned from others than one we would choose on our own.

— Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*

We all want a better future. We all want peace and happiness. But the prospect of creating a better future might seem challenging, leaving us anxious and maybe even a little exasperated. Often, the urge is to rush to that better future with quick fixes that promise painless results. We jump into affirmations, we create our vision board, we work hard to manifest the perfect partner, perfect health, or the perfect job. We get all pumped up about our ability to effect this change: "I'm going to create it. I'm going to direct the movie of my life. By the power of my thoughts, I will change reality."

But beneath our thoughts are deeper realms of being—the realm of emotions and core beliefs. Step 2 of Conscious Creation holds the key to true and lasting transformation. I'm reminded of a meme I saw recently. Someone stood in front of a crowd and shouted: "Who wants change?" All the hands went up. Then they asked: "Who wants *TO* change?" All the hands went back down. In this step, we will explore the power of the change we can create internally and externally as we overcome the core false beliefs that no longer serve us.

Earlier, we saw how visualization practices brought Sasha temporary relief from her terrible insomnia. She used the calming images of her vision board and peaceful, affirming mantras to overcome her ruminations and encourage sleep. And it worked. For the first time in years,

Sasha slept deeply and peacefully. Her power to alter reality in this way was a rush, and for a while, she was on top of the world.

Then, just as quickly, it stopped working. Sasha came to see me for an initial counseling session. She looked much the same as always: dark brown hair styled in a smooth, chin-length bob; pale gray suit with white blouse and silver earrings; makeup perfectly natural. But her eyes were pleading.

She told me that she was back to getting three or four hours of sleep, tops. Instead of experiencing harmony and contentment, her nights were once again filled with the image of stacks of files, piled in a deep pool of muck. The worst thing was that the insomnia was affecting Sasha's work performance. "At client meetings I'm still well-prepared," she said. "After all, without sleep I have more time to work. But I'm just so stressed!"

She used to be able to put on a warm, friendly face with clients, an ability the firm valued. But she no longer had the energy. Not only had she been passed over for a promotion but her existing cases were now in jeopardy. One of her key clients had recently been offended by her manner: "I'm not paying \$500 an hour to be scolded." And one of the founding partners had called Sasha into his office to tell her that another client had complained about her "abrupt, impatient demeanor." The partners were "this close," he'd said, pinching his thumb and forefinger close together, to reassigning both clients. Sasha felt that her upward advancement had stalled and was threatening to go into reverse.

I learned all this in the first five minutes of our session; Sasha was nothing if not concise. I knew she had to be desperate—the Sasha I knew would do anything to avoid asking for help, even help for which she was paying. When I asked her what she hoped to gain from our work together, she became visibly defensive. Folding her arms, she leaned back and looked me in the eye.

"I can't hope for much. I should really be in the doctor's office. But she sent me here." She exhaled, and all the energy seemed to drain out of her. Then she whispered, "I just don't know what else to do."

"How does hearing yourself say all of that make you feel?" I asked. Sasha started to cry. She had tried to control her sleep every way she could, and now she had finally reached what she thought was a catastrophic failure. But I knew it was the key to transformation, opening the door to what was really holding her back—her shadow. There were deeper issues residing underneath the difficulties with sleep. We were embarking on the journey of excavating and healing these issues.

What Else Is Possible?

That which we have believed to be reality is illusion. That which we have believed to be illusion is actually reality. We come into the world as whole and perfect beings, one with source and deeply connected to our true nature. No matter how often we hear this, it can sometimes be hard to swallow, especially the “perfect” part. You might be thinking, *What? I'm not perfect. And look at my spouse, they're certainly not perfect either.* The perfection I'm talking about is before and beneath all our supposed imperfections. It's our essential self, the wholly loveable expression of spirit (or the universe, source, divine force, whatever name you choose). That deep-down perfection, that fundamental truth, can look like illusion, but it's actually reality; to be more specific, it's ultimate reality.

Many metaphysical and mystical traditions make a distinction between relative reality and ultimate reality. Relative reality is everything we experience through our senses. It's anything that depends on something else; it's anything that changes. It's what we tend to call “the real world.” Relative reality on the level of our individual personality is all of our inner infrastructure—the structures of the ego, including our ideas, beliefs, and points of view about ourselves and about life. It's what makes sense to us and works for us at any given point in our life journey. As we grow and learn, our relative reality changes. We let go of what no longer serves us and gravitate to new things that now seem more concrete and accurate. In other words, as we grow up, we develop new ways of seeing ourselves and the world. We adopt new perspectives.

Ultimate reality, on the other hand, does not change. It is beyond ego, personality, and life experience. Ultimate reality, as revealed to us in spiritual traditions and practices, is just that—ultimate. Within ultimate reality lies the truth that we are born whole and perfect and absolutely one with source. That deep perfection is the fundamental truth of who and what we are. We might call this our true nature or our transcendent selves. Let me reiterate something here that we have discussed earlier: Within ultimate reality, we are ultimately and fundamentally whole and perfect. But this perfection does not mean that we are free from limitation (in relative reality), and it doesn't mean that we don't make what appears to be mistakes. Our essential and fundamental wholeness does not mean we never feel broken or hurt. Our seeming mistakes and limitations may feel real, but they are only part of relative reality. Our brokenness, hurts, and wounded selves might also feel real. But they are only real at the level of relative reality.

We all have this essential self that is whole and perfect, and we also have the experience of being human, where things seem incomplete and imperfect. There we might feel “damaged” or “broken.” How does this happen? We are born into family systems, religious systems, community systems, and school systems that tell us we are something else, something other

than the perfection we authentically are. In the United States, our children, even those from loving homes, are given mixed messages: they must be kind and loving, they should share their toys, and they should be self-sufficient, competitive, and acquisitive. From the moment we arrive, our young brains are taking all this in, gathering and interpreting information, making connections and drawing conclusions from what we are taught and what we experience. Sometimes we have to undergo some peculiar contortions to make sense of things. In this way our essential self seems to be reshaped into something other than love.

Think about the photo filters on your phone. Vivid, dramatic, noir—each filter gives the images a different tone, a unique interpretation. Similarly, by the time we enter adulthood our primary default filters have been concretized into our unconscious, created from the data-gathering and interpreting activity of our early years. These default filters color our experiences and largely determine how we see things. This is why two people can see the identical thing in vastly different ways—they have different filters. Often we aren't aware that our filters are being activated because we're not even aware that they exist. Instead, we assume that the coloring they create is accurate, that the images are ultimate reality. So long as we remain unaware of our filters, we will feel powerless, no matter how much effort we invest in shifting things. This explains the power of the first two steps, *Making Peace with the Past* and *Overcoming Core False Beliefs*. Before we start filming a new movie, we take these two steps to look at our camera and learn how it works. In *Making Peace with the Past*, we recognize our filter as one among countless possible ways to interpret our experience, and we begin to inquire about what else is possible. In *Overcoming Core False Beliefs*, we look deeper to the reasons we originally selected our filters.

Unconscious Patterns

Thought does have power; you can change your thoughts and thereby alter reality, up to a point. But thought is not alone in this reality-changing process. Thought and action are often fueled by emotion, and emotion is associated with something deeper—the unconscious filters that color our worldview, the structural elements of our reality that I'm calling core false beliefs. Core false beliefs are certain types of belief that are grounded, not in fact, but in emotion and memory. Core false beliefs are ideas about yourself that are held deeply in the unconscious. Deeper than thought, they are your primary filters, and they have become embedded in your body and even in your energy field. These beliefs are what have produced (and written, cast, directed, and filmed) the old movie you're now trying to transform. And unless you acknowledge that producer, become aware of it and start to evaluate the way it works, you won't be able to write a new script, much less put it into production. Unless you get down to these beliefs and bring them to conscious awareness, these unconscious beliefs will be in charge, not you.

The more cognizant you are of all the layers at work in your reality-creating process, the more empowered you will become. As you work through this process, you are developing more conscious awareness of your filters. Maybe you're starting to see that the movie of your life is not real, at least not ultimately real. It is something of your own unconscious creation. You're coming to understand that you have thoughts, but you are not your thoughts, and you're opening up to the endless opportunities present in the question "What else is possible?" And maybe you're starting to recognize that you have a choice, not only about your thoughts, but also in the deeper realms of emotion, unconscious biases, and energy. You might be experiencing a shift in your body, your emotions, and the frequency at which you are vibrating.

As you do this, you may notice that certain thoughts or feelings come up and threaten to halt your progress. Thoughts of hopelessness and feelings like frustration, anger, jealousy, even fear. You may notice that you overreact more often than usual to things people say or the way they behave. Believe it or not, those so-called negative thoughts and feelings present you with a unique opportunity. (On a side note, there really is no such thing as a negative emotion.) If you are having these thoughts and feelings, they could be leading you into Step 2, Overcoming Core False Beliefs. You only have to ask the next question. It takes courage, but it's worth it.

Travis had a lot happening. On top of the trauma from his childhood, there was his sister's sudden death, not to mention the basic challenges of trying to get by in life. But in our sessions, over and over again, he focused mainly on his romantic relationships. I found it interesting that he came to counseling to work on his relationships rather than get down to the roots of his childhood trauma and the grief over losing his sister. That's so often what happens—we think our issues are in one area of our lives, but we're only looking at the tip of the iceberg. What's about to sink our proverbial ship is buried deep beneath the surface.

Usually his relationship stories went something like this: Travis meets someone and is convinced that this time, it's going to work. But no matter what he does, he can't make the person connect with him on the same level. Eventually Travis's love interest does or says something, and Travis decides that this demonstrates the person is no longer interested in him, and now Travis is trying to formulate a plan to get the person to stay.

At the time, it seemed that all Travis wanted from our work together was to brainstorm immediate solutions to these predicaments. Though he didn't realize it at first, his tendency to cling to his potential partners cried out, "Please love me, please love me!" He felt that if he could only find Mr. Right, all would be well. He could be OK; he could finally be happy. In truth, he was looking to relationships to heal the unresolved trauma in his childhood. In every partner, he was unconsciously seeking his mother and the love he hadn't received from

her. Instead of finding Mr. Right, he kept attracting—and being attracted to—people who were emotionally unavailable and only confirmed his core false belief.

In time, Travis gradually came to greater self-understanding. We looked at the way he had made sense of his unstable childhood by casting each partner as the perfect hero and himself as the villain, the loser, the unlovable one. We talked about what this pattern revealed about his attachment style, and we considered how he might practice a new pattern.

Let's take a look at what I'm referring to as attachment style. Attachment theory is a psychological model that endeavors to describe the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The most important precept of attachment theory is that a baby needs to develop a loving relationship with at least one primary caregiver for the child's successful spiritual and emotional development and for learning how to effectively normalize their emotions. In the presence of a sensitive and receptive caregiver, the infant will use the caregiver as a safe base from which to explore. This is not to say that anyone can parent perfectly. For example, there are times when parents feel exhausted or preoccupied, or life distracts them with daily activities and tasks. Even the most attentive parents can inadvertently sever the attachment or connection. Because of these childhood experiences, as adults, many of us develop one of three different detrimental attachment styles: avoidant, anxious, or anxious-avoidant. The intention is to move toward what is often called secure attachment, though I prefer to use the term authentic attachment.

The following are some characteristics of the four different attachment styles. Adults with avoidant attachment (like Sasha) desire a high level of independence, often appearing to shun intimacy altogether. They view themselves as self-reliant, invulnerable to emotional attachment and not needing close relationships. They tend to suppress their feelings, dealing with rejection by distancing themselves from partners of whom they often have a poor opinion. Adults with anxious attachment (like Travis) seek elevated levels of intimacy, approval, and receptiveness from partners, and they can easily become overly dependent. They tend to be less trusting, have less positive views about themselves than the people in their lives, and may display high levels of emotional self-expression, worry, and impulsiveness in their relationships.

Adults with anxious-avoidant attachment have mixed feelings about close relationships, simultaneously desiring and feeling uncomfortable with emotional closeness. They tend to mistrust their partners and can often view themselves as unworthy. Similar to avoidant attached adults, anxious-avoidant adults tend to seek less intimacy and suppress their feelings.

Conversely, genuinely attached adults foster optimistic views of themselves, their companions, and their relationships. They feel comfortable with intimacy and independence and have an easy time balancing the two.

On the deepest level, we all want to experience connection. When we are disconnected from our essential self, we attempt to attach to something or someone in the external realm to find peace and happiness or simply to numb the pain of feeling deep disconnection. It's easy to see how the inauthentic external attachment styles can lead to many forms of dependence. In the most simplistic perspective, the pain of living with these detrimental attachment styles will need to be relieved in some way.

One day, Travis came to our session with a new problem. Marcus, the person he'd been dating for a couple of months, had seemed perfect at first—open, caring, and captivated. But over time Marcus seemed to become less available, and now it seemed he had disappeared entirely—he hadn't responded to Travis for several days. Travis had sent texts and left a voicemail, and he had to stop himself from sending more and from trolling Marcus's online accounts looking for clues. He recited a litany of things he believed he had done wrong—all the reasons Marcus could have for ghosting him.

At first it looked like the progress Travis had made suddenly evaporated. He was asking the same old questions: "Why can't I make this work? What am I doing wrong?" But then, smiling slightly as he anticipated my next question, Travis worked to replace his panicked thoughts with others such as "What might be another reason for Marcus's silence?" and "Could it be that it has nothing to do with me?" or "Could it be that I am attracted to the wrong people, or could it be that it was Marcus who was doing things to sabotage the relationship because he was not able to be in a relationship for whatever reason?"

He was silent for a long time as he mulled over those questions. Then he sighed deeply. "It could be that there's something else happening, sure—and it probably has very little to do with me. Or it could be that Marcus is not the best partner for me. I can say that out loud, and yeah, it makes sense. But I can't really believe it. Not in my heart." He put his fist over his chest and sighed again, his head plummeting. "And that is what's keeping me from being happy. I'm so tired of it."

We sat in silence for a few moments. Then I asked, "Travis, what would happen if Marcus did leave you? Can you sit with that for a moment and tell me what it feels like?" I could tell from Travis's face that, like Sasha, he was looking into the abyss. At that moment, however, he realized that a broken heart contains within it a sacred opportunity.

The Impact of Core False Beliefs

Core false beliefs are at the root of unconscious creation. These beliefs lie deep in your unconscious or subconscious where they create the patterns that eventually limit you and keep you “small.” Core false beliefs are based on information that you received early in life. They can come through experiences of abuse or neglect that you, as a child, might have made sense of by blaming yourself. They can come through messages from your family or your community—even well-intentioned messages. Or they can be part of the core false beliefs of the larger culture, which come to us in movies, video games, schoolwork, and so on. Children learn from their environment, and their growing minds and bodies are trying to make sense of the things they see and experience. Too often though, the way children make sense of things is to cast themselves as broken or impaired in some way.

We’ve seen how Travis did this as an adult. In his story he played the villain, doing things to push his heroic romantic partners away. This story was based on a core false belief in his own unlovability. He longed for love, but love seemed impossible. He could not play the role of the beloved. Instead, he played games; he manipulated situations in desperate attempts to keep his partner close, and that manipulation pushed them away. He acted out this story repeatedly.

Sasha’s core false belief in her own unworthiness was extremely repressed. Or rather, it was camouflaged in achievement. Her life strategies had created her idea of success—in addition to being sophisticated and accomplished, she was professionally successful, someone who had made things happen in her life. This made it hard for her to admit that something was out of balance. On occasion she would ponder why she didn’t have friends or why she wasn’t close with her family. But because she had so much invested in her success and self-sufficiency, it was hard for her to see that deep down, her greatest desire was not success but connection and love. Ultimately, what she truly craved was deeper love and connection with herself.

The power of our deeply held viewpoints has several sources. For one, our core false beliefs are caricatures; they tend to create soap opera rather than nuanced drama. Caricatures are powerful because they contain a grain of truth. As caricatures, our core false beliefs take one perspective, one insight, and accentuate it, making it the focal point.

Travis’s belief was based on a key part of his early experience; it drew a conclusion from the dismissive attitudes he witnessed and experienced as a child. The conclusion that he was unloved was not necessarily entirely baseless; Travis did indeed find little love in his childhood. But the information on which that conclusion was based was very limited. It was far from the whole picture, but he continued to live as if it were.

Similarly, Sasha had built her life on the foundation of a “perfect childhood.” In order to live out that script, she drove herself to a breaking point until she finally was open to the question “What is it that’s driving me?”

Core false beliefs are also powerful because they are usually formed at a time in childhood when we are small, vulnerable, and sensitive. We do not yet have the cognitive ability to question our experience. So our experience becomes foundational to us, and we tend to attach it to the very core of our narrative—the way we describe ourselves and our world. Thus most core false beliefs attach to our identity, taking the form of “I am” or “I am not”—as in “I am worthless,” “I am stupid,” or “I am not lovable.” These foundational beliefs can affect our worldviews, as in “The world is not safe” or “There’s never enough.” The key is that because this information and these beliefs are limited, they represent a “false core”—limited experiences and perspectives that claim to be the whole truth. Our core false beliefs are biased; they direct what we feel and think, our way of being in the world, in a limited and limiting direction. And they change the frequency at which we are vibrating, which we are beginning to see is what really creates what we call reality.

Travis had been living primarily from Martyr Consciousness and Sasha from Magical Thinking. As they moved into Step 2, they were both coming to a greater conscious awareness of the patterns and attitudes that had been keeping them from a life of their dreams. They were becoming more aware of and tuned into their essential nature as whole and perfect and one with source. Often it’s something difficult that brings us up against the limits of our core false beliefs.

For Sasha, the exhaustion that pummeled her after an eighty-hour workweek became a pivot point—in a moment of clarity, she found herself questioning the insanity of her ceaseless striving, which wasn’t getting her any closer to her deepest desires. Similarly, Travis found himself exhausted by his own suffering. He had plenty of reasons to feel emotional pain, but his suffering was rooted in his unconscious attachment to his core false beliefs of being unlovable and unworthy of love.

Like Travis and Sasha, we experience something painful such as illness, bankruptcy, or divorce, and we’re led to say to ourselves, “I can’t go on like this.” That’s when we’re given the opportunity to identify those deeply held beliefs, those too-small “truths” that have kept us separate from love and connection. This is a great time to create a safe place in which to explore what’s beneath our behavior and our decisions, to identify and ultimately overcome our core false beliefs. Remember, the core false beliefs are usually not conscious, so they don’t get healed at the conscious level alone. We will need to take a deeper dive.

Five Keys for Step 2

Like in Step 1, I have identified five keys that will assist you in taking this deeper dive into the unconscious so that you can pinpoint and ultimately overcome the core false beliefs that have left you feeling limited, stuck, or broken.

Key 1: Identifying the Shadow

In Step 1, I invited you to practice becoming aware of your thoughts as separate from your core self (you are not your thoughts). Similarly, by witnessing your emotions and your body's reactions to those emotions—by noticing how you physically and emotionally respond to what's happening—you can discover the entry point to your core false beliefs. And as we previously explored, it's also important to be present with and actually feel your feelings. This process will allow them to organically pass through you rather than getting stuck within you. As a reminder, when it comes to your emotions, the only way out is through.

Travis had an experience of this when he started to look beneath his thoughts to his feelings. Up to that point, as he said, he had known intellectually that his relationship patterns were rooted in his experiences of abandonment as a child. It all made perfect sense. After all, he'd never known his father, and his mother was often absent when he was a young child. When his grandmother died, his mother disappeared altogether, and eventually so did his sister. He had experienced an inordinate amount of loss, and the abuse he suffered as a foster child added more pain and uncertainty. It made sense that as an adult he would be desperate for security and love in his relationships, yet have few skills to receive them. Understanding his anxious attachment pattern helped him recognize his desperate and manipulative behaviors when they occurred, and gradually he learned to manage his racing thoughts and gently stop himself from pursuing emotionally unavailable people and perpetuating unnecessary drama in his relationships.

Travis could even identify his false belief that he was unlovable. He could repeat affirmations that bolstered his self-esteem, and he could surround himself with people who supported and loved him. But he hadn't gone deep enough to overcome that belief from his core, his heart, his energetic field. That day in counseling, when he first recognized that this was the next step for him, he learned that he could witness his physical and emotional state, as well as his thoughts. I encouraged him to sit with his heart and his whole body during meditation and just notice what transpired.

What are we trying to reach in Step 2? It's the shadow self, the self underneath the surface, the self we are frightened to face or to express to others. It is the part of the self we are

sometimes ashamed of or the part of our self we often deny. Our shadow is a collection of attributes we've been avoiding and hiding. The things that seem unacceptable and unlovable. For some, the shadow includes intense and painful feelings such as anger, jealousy, sadness, or aggression. For others, the shadow might be fear of vulnerability, or even allowing the experience of love and intimacy. The shadow self also holds the emotional residue of unhealed trauma, responses to what seemed too painful to feel and that have been concealed deep within us ever since.

Embracing the life of your dreams requires being authentic and knowing the truth about yourself. This means having the courage to face and embrace every aspect of your shadow self, no matter how arduous that might seem. As each element of your shadow self comes into the light, you begin to integrate it into your whole being by first allowing it to be, just as it is, and accepting it. Then you can come to understand it—in the same way you would have understanding and compassion for a small, innocent child who has made a mistake.

All children need to make mistakes. This child deserves your love, no matter what. Likewise, accepting and feeling compassion for your shadow self will allow you to integrate the seemingly different aspects of yourself. It will allow you to pause the conflict of the old movie and take the action away from the villains and heroes in your previous script. Taking a clear, honest look at your shadow may not be easy. It requires humility and a great deal of courage. It requires compassion and self-love. It will be useful to avoid judging your shadow—that is how it became your shadow in the first place. Like a wayward child, the elements of your shadow need your loving attention and acceptance. Allowing another person—a trusted, nonjudgmental friend, a spiritual counselor, or a therapist—to witness these parts of yourself that you have kept carefully hidden can be an important step in your process of healing and integration.

What happened for Travis was transformational. He had formed a small meditation group with two supportive friends that met in one of their living rooms. They invited me to sit with them while Travis focused his attention on the question that came up in our session: What does abandonment feel like? As we sat in supportive silence, he intentionally recalled his romantic partners and how they had left him, a rumination that in the past would have left him devoured by flashbacks. This time, he detached himself from his thoughts. He was able to observe his thoughts without being carried away by them.

"I am not my thoughts," Travis reminded himself as he dipped his toes into the memories. Freed from attachment to his judgments, he kept watch on his emotions and his physical responses to the memories. As he remembered one particularly dramatic breakup, he noticed the physical signs of panic: racing heart, sweating, and nausea. He had always thought of these feelings as bad, but now he paused to remind himself, "I am not my feelings."

In this way he could examine these physical reactions from a little distance—“Wow, my heart is pounding fast. My stomach is rolling.” In this way they simply became physical reactions, neither bad nor good. Then he asked, “I wonder what’s underneath this reaction?” So he sat again with the memories and they became less imbued with emotion.

In a second session, Travis went even deeper. He intentionally relived a more fundamental breakup—the moment when, as a young child of six, he was taken from his mother to live in foster care. He hadn’t spent much time with this memory, and he was petrified. Again, he reminded himself, “I am not my thoughts or feelings.” As he thought back to the time of his grandmother’s death, he found that his memories were conflicted. Some were about the funeral, some about sleeping in strange beds as neighbors and then foster parents took him in. As he encountered these memories he noticed a heavy, dark emotion at his heart center, like being smothered with a heavy blanket. He felt turned inside out. I reminded him that he had the ability to stay with the experience, while also giving him permission to pull out of the process if needed.

“What is the feeling? Can you find words to describe it?” I asked.

“It’s about being in the wrong place. Being just so low, like being trash.”

“Where are you experiencing the feeling in your body?”

“It’s a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. A deep sadness.”

Then I asked him to observe himself in the scene. He saw himself as a young child, standing alone in a big empty room, a basement with a cold cement floor. This child was not a villain, not a bad or willful child who deserved to be abandoned. He was lovable. He was just a little boy, terribly hurt and alone. Finally, Travis was able to express the child’s feelings, all the grief and terrible fear that he had stowed away in his shadow self. Feeling embraced by the love and acceptance of our group, he was finally able to be that small boy, who had no doubt been dissociating at the time. He was finally able to cry and say, “It’s not fair.” No longer hidden away, that child and his feelings were witnessed and acknowledged by us, but more importantly by Travis himself, and they were on their way to becoming an integral part of his healing. Now that Travis had created a great deal of external and internal safety, it was time for him to go even deeper.

In my second book, *Conscious Recovery*, I introduced my version of a powerful therapeutic practice known as self-parenting. This is the life-changing process Travis and I worked with in our next few individual counseling sessions.

Key 2: Self-Parenting

One way to look at your core false beliefs is to pay attention to the messages you've received from the world throughout your life. We are all walking around with an inner dialogue—a specific, personal, unique way of looking at the world that started when we were born, maybe even before. One of the ways that we express our unique perspective is through our self-talk. It's the way we communicate with ourselves, especially the way we talk with the parts of ourselves that feel wounded. I imagine some of your self-talk is kind and loving, and some of it less so. Perhaps much of your self-talk is grounded in your core false beliefs.

One valuable tool in overcoming self-talk that no longer serves us is through the beneficial practice of self-parenting. In self-parenting, we discover how to talk in a loving and supportive way to those parts of ourselves that feel wounded. We learn to parent the inner child that may have experienced trauma or that may be sitting in shame, the self that feels disconnected and broken. This is the kind of parenting that we might not have received as small children, but fortunately, we can provide it to ourselves as adults. Many of us were not raised with the type of communication—in either words or actions—that would have helped us grow and thrive. It was this lack of conscious parenting, in part, that gave us our core false beliefs. When there's abuse early in life or an experience of abandonment, the core false beliefs that often result include things like "Life is not safe," "I am broken," or "I'm unworthy."

Some of us got the message that it isn't acceptable to make mistakes or it isn't acceptable to feel what some might refer to as negative emotions. As a reminder, there is no such thing as a negative emotion. Emotions are sensations that give us the opportunity to recognize that something needs our attention. They are not inherently positive or negative. Some of us got the message that certain emotions are allowed and others are unacceptable. We also may have been taught that there is a right way and a wrong way to behave: if I'm a good child, I get rewarded (or at least I don't get hurt); if I'm a bad child, I get punished. If we hold these limiting beliefs as adults, we will most likely never learn how to enrich our emotional lives, how to question things, and how to comfort ourselves.

Self-parenting is another way of overcoming ideas and constructs that no longer serve us. We do this by replacing the critical self-talk with supportive and loving self-talk to create a place of internal safety. I have found three key phrases to be incredibly simple and powerful. These are things we say to ourselves in self-parenting: (1) It's OK to feel this way, (2) You're safe now, and (3) I'm here for you. Start the self-parenting process by finding a quiet place and spending a bit of time in the silence. Then think of a time in early childhood that was challenging or painful. Really immerse yourself in the memory. Next, imagine having a conversation between your adult-self and your child-self. Start by asking "What are you feeling?" Then say the following three phrases to your child self.

It's OK to feel this way.

Simply said, many of our strategies in life can be seen as a response to the fear of feeling, the fear of being fully present. Much of our unconscious behavior is a strategy to avoid being entirely present. That's why telling ourselves "It's OK to feel this way" might feel quite foreign at first. If we have a core belief that we are unsafe, then the idea that it's safe to get in touch with what we're feeling on an emotional level might seem very challenging or even untrue. But emotional awareness is very important for those of us who are dedicating ourselves to the path of awakening, so it helps to literally give ourselves the message that it's safe to look within: "It's OK to feel this way." As we move further into our spiritual practice, we begin to thaw out, to start feeling things we may have been ignoring, avoiding, or not allowing ourselves to feel. And this deepening becomes more comfortable and less threatening. If you find yourself challenged by these feelings, you might want to start by saying "something in me feels . . ." rather than "I feel . . ." as this can assist you in getting in touch with the emotion without getting flooded or overwhelmed.

You're safe now.

Part of conscious parenting is keeping our children safe. This is not about keeping them insulated from anything and everything that might harm them; it's about teaching them to be independent and resilient in whatever circumstances they find themselves. This involves creating or finding safe places for them, places of psychological safety as well as physical safety. Unfortunately, not all of us had that kind of parenting. Early in our lives, many of us were taught—either consciously or unconsciously, sometimes covertly and sometimes very overtly—that it's not safe for us to be who and what we are. This sense of insecurity can cause a profound separation from our essential nature. So, part of self-parenting is being able to talk to ourselves as we would to our child, reassuring ourselves that all is well. When we self-parent, we can say to ourselves in times of crisis or difficulty, "You're safe. It's safe to be you right now, exactly as you are."

I'm here for you.

At the core of a lot of our anxiety is the belief that "If I let you truly see me, you will leave." The root of this core false belief may have been the result of parenting that was judgmental, abusive, or emotionally distant, or love that was conditional on our behavior. With the self-parenting phrase "I'm here for you," we're genuinely giving ourselves the parenting that maybe we didn't get growing up. We're dedicating ourselves *to* ourselves, committing ourselves to being there for ourselves as we would hope to be there for a child or a life

partner. As Tracy McMillan put it in her TEDx talk, “You enter a relationship with yourself, and then you put a ring on it. In other words, you commit to yourself fully. . . . Loving myself exactly where I am is the only way to get where I’m going.”¹

Remember, these are the three phrases you can start saying to yourself to begin a more uplifting and expansive inner dialogue: “It’s OK to feel this way,” “You’re safe now,” and “I’m here for you.” If you can practice these three statements and begin to use them any time you feel anxious, sad, or upset, you’ll find a new way of being with yourself.

Key 3: Integrating the Shadow

From that point on, things were easier for Travis. At his core, he felt lighter, less desperate. At a deeper core level, he was able to let go of the script in which his mother and his romantic partners were the heroes and Travis was the unlovable villain, for now he had an emotional connection to his shadow self, that small abandoned child. He could practice self-parenting, learning what his inner child needed to feel safe, what he needed to feel loved, what needed to be integrated into Travis’s authentic self. And he began to experience moments of liberation—times when he felt truly, profoundly, deeply lovable and loved.

Travis’s experience illustrates two important things about Step 2: First, as long we hold onto a core false belief that we are unlovable, then we will most likely end up in relationships in which we feel unloved. No matter what we do to find the perfect partner, the relationships we attract and are attracted to will always confirm our core false beliefs. Usually this operates at the unconscious level. Consciously, we will seek love, but the belief that we are unlovable will create a frequency that attracts and is attracted to the absence of love. Like a magnet, we will connect with someone who seems to confirm our core false beliefs and repel anyone who might want to genuinely share their love.

This is why it’s not only about changing our thoughts. If it were, the whole world would be successfully applying the Law of Attraction. Thought is just the top layer. Our core false beliefs and the stories they create are deeply woven into our bodies, our energy field, our vibration, and our frequency. When we release those beliefs, the underlying, ever-present frequency that we brought with us into the world is uncovered. It’s like a radio. When you listen to a song on the radio, the radio is not creating the song. It’s tuning into the station’s frequency. When you overcome core false beliefs, you’re not so much changing your frequency as tuning into a frequency that’s already present, a frequency that’s been

¹ Tracy McMillan, “The Person You Really Need to Marry,” TEDx OlympicBlvdWomen, December 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3fZuW9P_M.

concealed by your core false beliefs. We'll get more into this in Step 5, Embodying the Vision. Here in Step 2, I invite you to keep your focus on how your core false beliefs are at work in your life.

Travis's experience of Step 2 reveals another thing: Our core false beliefs tend to fall away once we begin to disidentify with them. Because our core false beliefs are false. They are not now, and never were, the truth of who we are. They are the by-product of forgetting our true identity. They are the result of the emotional wounding we experienced at the hand of others—as a result of their forgetting their true identity. Hurt and trauma thrust parts of us into the shadow, leading us to disregard the truth of our original perfection. So long as we experience ourselves as damaged in some way, and parts of us go unacknowledged and stifled, we start to believe in a story of separation, a story of brokenness, a story of scarcity that creates fear-based thinking and action.

But our authentic self has the capacity to compassionately witness our shadow and to see it lovingly for what it is—a part of who we are but not the ultimate truth of who and what we are. The simple act of shining the light of loving awareness on our shadow enables us to integrate it and allows us to experience our true nature. A profound awareness of our true nature can happen in an instant, and then we might spend the rest of our lives attempting to understand what we experienced.

For some of us, like Travis, the shadow self is a part of our inner child that has been cut off and stifled more or less violently. For others, the shadow self is something less dramatic but still significant, something we were not allowed to express as children. It is a way of being where we feel we need to suppress aspects of ourselves. It includes feelings that adults told us we needed to stop feeling or needs that were not acknowledged. When we refuse to acknowledge these supposedly darker aspects of ourselves, we live in fear that others will see them and judge us—just as we judge ourselves. And when we see those same traits in others, we judge and criticize them for displaying the very traits we deem unacceptable in ourselves. In psychological terms, this is called projection.

Quite often, we see and judge in others what we refuse to accept or even recognize in ourselves. As human beings, it's sometimes easier for us to point a finger at other people, making them wrong, rather than accept the fact that we are also capable of displaying emotions and behaviors that we deem off limits. When we are emotionally activated by somebody else's behavior, we often shut down and close off, making the other person at fault for what seemed to trigger us. What triggers us in another person is therefore an accurate indication of what we are projecting onto that person and quite possibly hiding from ourselves.

The next time you notice you have an intense reaction to somebody or something outside yourself, try to acknowledge it as the gift it truly is. It is a gift because it gives you an important insight into one of your blind spots. You can choose to remain open and accept the gift that has been offered. When you are brave enough to be curious about what lies in the shadow, you deepen your self-honesty. You accept the opportunity to be more authentic, more open-hearted, more compassionate with yourself and others. Acknowledging and integrating your shadow self helps reveal your core false belief and lessens its power over you. This deepening of your conscious awareness opens you to the vista of opportunity, preparing you to create a new movie, the life of your dreams.

Key 4: Unlearning

Experiencing ourselves as love is the most natural thing in the world. The path to remembering ourselves as love is one of dismantling or unlearning everything we have been taught that contradicts this truth. Want to discover the truth? Start by examining what is untrue. Self-realization is nothing more than coming into alignment with what we inherently are. Instead of looking for something outside ourselves to make things better, we look inward and take an honest look at the stories that keep us feeling stuck. What do I mean by stuck? Well, if you've been on a spiritual journey for any length of time, you've probably spent some time looking at your life: your relationships, your attitudes, your patterns. Where do you seem to experience the same kinds of situations in your life, the same types of relationships over and over again, the same frustrations? Have you noticed a repetitive pattern?

On a recent trip to Thailand, my husband, Will, visited an elephant sanctuary where he had the honor of being in the presence of numerous powerful and majestic elephants, many of whom had been rescued from circuses and the like. He shared a heartbreaking yet informational story with me about one of the elephants he encountered. This particular elephant had spent many years shackled, where she was required to "dance" for her food. Even though she had been free of the chains and restraints for more than five years, she still rocked back and forth come feeding time, believing she was still required to perform for her food. As sad as this story is, this can also happen to us. Because of the painful experiences of our earlier life, we can find ourselves believing we are imprisoned, even though we are now completely shackle free.

My question for you is this: What self-imposed prisons are you experiencing in your life? In what ways are you still stuck in an outdated pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving? That pattern may have originally been a strategy that seemed to support or protect you, but maybe you're beginning to feel that something about it is just not sufficient. What would it be like to expand your consciousness and open to the possibility of a different perspective?

You've looked at these stories and beliefs before—they are your core false beliefs. They are the fundamental beliefs about yourself that are getting in your way. As we've discovered, when you uncover these beliefs, you may find that they are usually some variation of "I am . . ." or "I am not . . ."—for example, "I am unlovable," "I am stupid," "I am a disaster," or "I am not worthy." If you believe there's something fundamentally broken about you, then that is the lens through which you will perceive life. You will then become attracted to relationships and situations, and you will attract relationships and situations, that seem to confirm your belief. It's self-fulfilling.

The great news is that you don't have to force yourself to unlearn your core false beliefs. You don't even necessarily have to learn a new set of beliefs (although this can be one powerful way to work with these limiting beliefs). The first step is simply recognizing that these are beliefs fixed in relative reality, not ultimate reality. They are changeable, not set in stone. Once you recognize this truth, you can begin to question your core false beliefs and ultimately overcome them. As a wise teacher once said, the first step is awareness, the second step is awareness, and the third step is awareness.

Key 5: Becoming the Observer

Overcoming our core false beliefs can happen in a moment, and it can take a lifetime. Either way, it takes courage. It's not so much about removing something false and replacing it with something true. It's about becoming more aware of and present to our beliefs and how they are activated in daily life. As we move into more conscious awareness, our core false beliefs may still be activated. But now we're able to notice those activating events and acknowledge how we feel about them. We are now 100 percent accountable for the activation that happens within. We own that feeling and then move on from there with greater awareness and less judgment. What is primarily shifting is that we are no longer identified with our core false beliefs. Our perceived shortcomings are not the ultimate truth of who we are.

In Conscious Creation, we're developing a relationship with our essential self; we're coming to recognize that nothing needs to change in the external realm for us to be free. This understanding restores to us the always-present reality of our true self, which is unharmed and unharmable. The more we develop and cultivate a relationship with our true nature, the more easily we can live beyond the old stories and points of view that are no longer serving us, or anyone else for that matter. Then we can become the ultimate observer of all that we experience in relative reality from this place of oneness with source. So, becoming the observer rather than the participant is an important step in consciously creating our lives. It allows us to open up to the infinite potential of this very moment. Once nothing needs to happen, anything is possible.

The Gifts of Meditation

Meditation is an important tool in all five steps of Conscious Creation. It helps us in the transitions and shifts to greater awareness. Transitions are in-between places. We've been comfortable in one place, and when that place starts getting less comfortable, we are pulled or beckoned into a new place. Initially, before our momentum gets strong enough to overcome our inertia, that in-between place can feel like being stuck, and being stuck is essentially a place of discomfort. It's like lying in bed after the alarm goes off. You know you need to get up and move, but if you're not fully rested your body can feel immobile, stuck in bed, and that tension between feeling tired and needing to get up is uncomfortable. So it is with the levels of conscious evolution.

This in-between place can also be frightening. After all, we don't know anything about the new place, and even though the old place is becoming uncomfortable, at least it's familiar. Better the devil you know, right? It's natural to try to evade discomfort and fear, so when we're in a place of transition, we can find ourselves drawn to avoidant behaviors, like binge-watching shows or focusing on other people's problems—anything that lets us avoid the discomfort of acknowledging the thing we need to learn in order to move into a new awareness.

Once we are ready to suspend those avoidant behaviors and make the transition, meditation is one of the spiritual tools that can be most advantageous. The meditation I'm referring to is not achieving a state of bliss or emptiness. It's mindfulness, which is not so much about emptying the mind as about witnessing the mind. As we've seen, mindful meditation can help us practice observing or being with whatever thoughts or feelings we are experiencing, without judgment. This conscious awareness makes the transition, the shift, less frightening and painful. Meditation helps us ask the next question that draws us through the transition and into greater conscious awareness.

As you are identifying and overcoming your core false beliefs, I invite you to support your practice in an environment of supportive people. Do this deeper work in a safe place where you can stay open to whatever comes without fear. If, like Travis, you have suffered the effects of trauma, I encourage you to work with a professional counselor, coach, or therapist who can assist you with the patterns that trauma has created in your life. Whatever your situation, surround yourself with people who will support your journey. Together you can create a safe and nurturing space for asking the further question, investigating the surprising answer, and living more open-heartedly—ready to receive what life has to offer.

You have the power within you to break free from lifelong beliefs and ideas that have kept you feeling stuck. You can create a new narrative for your life. You can now overcome those core false beliefs that have kept you trapped in the same old movie and rewrite the script. You can step in to a life filled with awe, wonder, joy, and curiosity. Joy is your natural state. Release what is untrue and reside in it.