

Q&A from Cultivating Ownership and Self-Belief

(Mindful Self-Discipline, S2, Ep. 5)

March 14th/15th, 2021

Q: May you provide concrete examples from your practice about ownership?

R: Once I bought something from Gumtree, and I paid before the guy delivered it to me because I was naive, and I trust human nature, I trust people. And I never saw the thing that I bought, you know, and I take ownership of that. I'm not going to be blaming him. Like, he did something dishonest, that's his choice. That's his karma, the universe will catch up with him. But I take ownership because I made a bad decision. I was naive; I allowed myself to be fooled. So that's just one quick example that came to mind.

Q: How can you help others? Specifically, family members to help them with ownership?

R: Ownership is really hard for some people. Typically, people who don't take ownership, are not into self-development. And some types of personalities, like people who are more narcissistic, just don't take ownership. And some people like to be the victims and like to blame others; there's nothing ever wrong with them, it's always the world, it's always other people. I honestly haven't found a way to make people take ownership who don't want to take ownership. At most maybe what we can say is to tell them "hey, you're not taking ownership", and they're not gonna understand, they're not going to follow, they're not going to change, but that's all we can do just put it on their face.

Q: How do you suggest managing regret?

R: I have a course on Insight Timer on letting go of regret, so I suggest you take that course. For those of you who are new to my work. I have four courses on Insight Timer, one on managing regret, one on overcoming fear of failure - which is very related to procrastination and why we don't move forward with our goals - one on meditation, and one on the virtues. So you may want to go to my profile and have a look to see if any of them can help you where you are right now.

Q: Is not taking ownership related to anxiety?

R: Interesting question. I think anxiety could be related to both extremes of this. If you don't take ownership, you may be anxious because you are afraid of things that you could actually control. If you have more control of your life you won't feel so anxious. Now on the other hand, if you want to have control over everything, even things that you can't control that will make you really anxious. So for overcoming anxiety the right balance between ownership and acceptance. Taking ownership of what you can control, accepting what you cannot control. That will allow you to live in the power of an anxiety-free life.

Q: How can we be in control of our choices if unconscious motivation is so much a part of it?

R: Excellent question. I love this question. The answer is that it's a process. Your control, your Self Mastery increases over time. The more self-awareness you have, the more you do personal work, the more options you have, the more freedom you have, right. So in the beginning, yes you make a choice and it doesn't matter because there are other motivations in you, other parts of you who are going to sabotage that. But the more you do personal work, you become aware of these other parts, you little by little are able to harmonize them or at least negotiate with them. And yeah, it all starts with awareness. And that's why awareness is one of the three pillars of Mindful Self-Discipline. So it's a process. In the beginning, it might look like, "Hey, I made a choice that I regret. I prefer I wouldn't have made that choice. I'm aware that I made that choice because of impulses that are unconscious, but I take ownership of it. I take ownership of it because it's my responsibility to get to know myself, to master my impulses, to harmonize myself so that I can live in harmony with my goals."

Q: Do you surround yourself with people who have the same understanding?

R: Yes, that is always helpful. After we've covered the three pillars, we're going to have a whole talk about people in your life.

Q: Do you think ownership and accountability are limited by one's self-awareness?

R: Great question. Well, it's very hard to take ownership of something that you are not aware of. If you're not aware of it you will tend to blame others, you will not know that you have made the choice, you will not know that you have a choice. So yes, the more self-awareness you have, the more you'll be able to take ownership.

Q: Motivation can diminish over time, so self-awareness is key?

R: If you do the work in the aspiration pillar: If you have a goal that is specific and achievable, with a deadline and everything, and that goal is linked to an aspiration that is truly meaningful for you. If you develop self-belief and ownership. If you do the work in the aspiration pillar, then your motivation will be a little bit more stable and to be stronger. But at the same time, self-discipline requires that we take action, whether or not we feel motivated. We're going to talk more about that in the action pillar.

Q: What is the difference between willpower and desire?

R: Desire is wanting something, willpower is making it happen. If you want something but you don't have the capacity, the power to make it happen, then it's just a wish. So desire is what you want, and willpower is that power, is that energy, is that capacity to make it happen. It is developed with practice.

C: There is some confusion or conflict arising from religious education about self-belief being a bad thing, although, I feel quite indignant at this idea.

R: This is a huge topic. It's a huge topic because you know how we feel about ourselves, the stories we tell ourselves, are often the result of our conditioning. Our conditioning, from our society, from our parents, from our early teachers and friends, and also from our religion or life philosophy. Some religions don't help you cultivate self-belief. Perhaps they even expect you to not have it. While in other spiritual traditions, self-belief is required, self-belief is stimulated, it's honoured. I cannot tell you to stop believing in one thing or believing another thing. You have to find out what makes sense. Yeah, I don't know what else to say about this. For me, self-belief, self-confidence, and inner strength have always been key to my

spiritual search. So I ended up feeling attracted to philosophies that emphasize that. So for instance in Buddhism and in yoga, these traditions from India, emphasize the need for willpower. They motivate you, because of the number of challenges you have to grow spiritually, if you want to awaken or become enlightened or overcome your lower desires or whatever it is, the number of obstacles you will meet is huge. So you will need to believe that you can do it, otherwise, there is no point at all. You will need to feel motivated, you need to have willpower and energy about that task. Otherwise, there's no point, there's not gonna be any progress. Now, other religions that kind of emphasize a surrender of everything, release everything, depend on another person for your salvation. If that is the way of looking at it, then yeah, there's no emphasis on self-belief there.

Q: Is lack of self-belief connected to belief should always succeed? For example, I get 85% on the exam, but I get disappointed to not get 100%.

R: So lack of self-belief could be the result of unrealistic expectations, of being too hard on yourself. So, put it in perspective, and again focus on success. Like, you focus on from zero to 85%. "I got to 85% and that requires effort, that requires intelligence and working hard, etc. So, I know that I can do this. Now I can look at that 15% that is missing and I feel like I want to get there, but by doubting myself, I'm not going to get to 100 by doubting myself." So it's not, it's not the wise way to move forward. So reflecting like this, putting things in perspective allows you to be happy and focus and feel empowered by the work you have already done, but not too cocky and still feel hungry for more if that's important for you.

Q: Do baby steps apply to making decisions too?

R: Yes they do. Sometimes we need to make a very difficult decision and we don't even know how to think about it. Let's say that it's a decision to move houses. Now, how do you even decide that? Right. It's so overwhelming to even think about that. Now you can start by thinking like, what are all the elements that are important for me in my new house. Okay, well there is the location, how quiet it is, how close it is to public transport, the size of the house, how new it is, etc etc etc. So we think of all those elements, and then you start narrowing down your search, also, how much it costs, obviously, and then narrow down your search like that. See all your options and then analyze them little by little step by step with all those elements. That's just something that comes to mind at the moment because I've been through that process a few times.

Q: How can I reward myself in the most constructive way?

R: We're going to have a whole class about habits and rewards when we're talking about the action pillar. But very quickly, find a reward that is related to your aspiration. So, if you want to be healthier or more fit, and you're choosing running as one of your goals, then you can say that if you run every day for a month, you're going to buy yourself that fancy pair of running shoes that you always want. So that is a reward that advances your goal and is not it's not against it.

C: Baby steps are not always linear, sometimes they're iterative, or backtracking, perhaps even taking a step aside to make room for something.

R: Yeah, I agree with you, they are not always linear. Sometimes the process for achieving a certain goal is linear for a while, and then it's not linear anymore. But the baby step would be the next thing you need to do. So in that sense, it's linear, like it's the next thing you need to

do. And sometimes the next thing you need to do is to stop doing what you're doing and to review what's working and what's not working.

Q: Isn't this related to Svadhyaya in yoga - self-study to release ourselves from the unconscious that separates us from our true selves?

R: So, the yoga tradition has this concept of Svadhyaya, which [is one of the five Niyamas]. Yeah, this concept that exists in yoga exists in many traditions and it's the idea that you need to get to know yourself, you need to develop self-knowledge and self-awareness. The more you do that, the more you'll be able to harmonize the different parts of yourself, know what triggers, know what you can rely on, what are your strengths, and what you should watch out for.

C: "A step backward, after making a wrong turn, is a step in the right direction." [Kurt Vonnegut]

R: Yeah, lovely quote.

Q: How do you stop blaming yourself for the past as the present results just don't justify the sacrifice made in the past?

R: So that seems to be related to regret. I suggest you do my [course on regret], there are 10 different lessons that will help you answer that question.

Q: How to get on track when lost in space, when you lose motivation for your goal?

R: I would recommend you go again to the aspiration pillar. Figure out why you're doing this, why is your goal important to you. How will your life be if you don't achieve your goal? Like how does that feel, what are the different pain points? Now, how will your life be if you achieve your goal? What are the different benefits? How would you feel? What will your typical day look like? The idea of self-discipline is that in every moment you can take a step towards your designed life, or towards your conditioned life. And every time you take a step towards your designed life, that's a plus one. And if you don't, that's a minus one. So when you think like this it will make things super clear like it's black and white, there are two different futures you can live. And you can choose that every moment. Then, we tend to feel more motivated.

Q: How do you keep track of your wins or success, a journal?

R: Yeah, I think having a success journal where every time you do something difficult, every time you do something that you can be grateful for, take notes in your success journal. Whenever you're feeling down, go back and review. That's a good idea.

Q: Can someone hypnotize themselves if they meditate for hours over time?

R: There are some overlaps between the practice of self-hypnosis and some techniques of meditation. In a way you can say that visualization and affirmations are a way to hypnotize yourself into a certain state, to create a certain state of mind and feeling. So depending on how you understand self-hypnosis, yes there are overlaps

Q: From what age could you start working with kids and youngsters on their aspirations?

R: My youngest coaching client is 16, and it's about his aspirations and how to develop self-discipline for it, and time management, etc. But, I think, from very early on you can start talking about what they're passionate about, what they want to explore in life. Maybe not so

much about who they want to be when they grow up, but what they are passionate about, what they love to think about, and to become better at, and to know more about. Is there a specific art, or craft, or sport, or area of knowledge that they love? I have a baby daughter and she's a year and a half, and my idea is when she was a little bit older to start exposing her to so many different things to see if there's something that ignites passion for her.