

## The Power of Belief

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Credo, ergo sum, “I believe, therefore, I am” is a variation of Descartes’ dictum that speaks to the force driving our humanness: our belief systems. Ordinary, to speak of a belief system implies one’s belief in and reverence to a supernatural power or powers, commonly regarded as creator, governor (and sometimes redeemer) of the universe. Hence a theological connotation is usually stated or understood. However, herein belief is viewed as a psychological system defining ourselves as people. (Sociologically, belief manifests into worldview).

Everyone is a “believer.” “Unbelievers” differ from or oppose our beliefs, do they not?

This essay has three sections: 1) belief in a general sense; 2) belief as false conviction; and 3) belief as true conviction. Three representative men shall be offered as examples of how belief operates.

1) Belief has a range of meanings: concur to a proposition; acceptance of a fact, opinion or assertion as real or true without personal knowledge; reliance upon statements or testimony; assurance without experience or certainty; and confidence in someone or something. The drift is conviction without substantiation.

We cherish, trust and give our heart to our core beliefs about ourselves, others, nature, and the universe, and God (atheist- “No!” / agnostic- “Maybe.” / theist- “Yes!”). In essence, what we believe is real, becomes our reality, and shapes our perception, hence the axiom “Perception is reality.” Likewise, what we believe, we become.

Moreover, beliefs are mental habits and ultimately rules for action, as William James articulated in *Varieties of Religions Experience*. Core beliefs are not merely mental agreements to logical propositions, but visceral tenets and “rules” we trust, have confidence in and depend upon. When we believe, we give our hearts to a statement, idea, person, place, thing, event, material or spiritual forces. The core beliefs of an atheist, agnostic or theist ultimately are expressed in their lives—especially in debates!

Furthermore, we have emotional and often passionate attachment to our cherished beliefs. What are more sacred than our beliefs? Any belief is as absolute as our stake in it. When we think about it, all of our beliefs are true—we “believe” our beliefs are truth. (A false belief is a

falsehood at best, and at worst a delusion). Consequently, our belief system is “circular,” a cybernetic closed loop, in that our beliefs become self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating—a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, unless one allows truth to amend or replace belief. This can be painful and confusing and even threatening—such as when one’s self-image is contradicted by an insensitive remark or if one’s *magnum opus* blog is disdained.

We now transition from belief in a general sense, noting that beliefs can be true, false, or mixtures of both. Belief can be affirmed or refuted by knowledge.

2) There is the narrower view that “beliefs” can be dismissed as illogical and irrational. George Santayana jars one’s belief-net security by commenting “People are usually more convinced that their opinions are precious than that they are true.”

For example, the Leading Edge International Research Group<sup>1</sup> writes belief is “Whatever an individual is willing to accept without direct verification by experience or without the support of evidence, resulting in assumption which is taken as a basis for action or non-action.” Notice they emphasize “lack of verification by experience, evidence, leading to assumption.” So, belief is essentially one’s private and personal ideology founded on supposition and emotional attachment. Belief is opposed, in this context, to empirical truth, logical reality and actual existence. Scientism and skepticism reigns. Yet, they are indeed correct: sometimes this is tragically the case. Volumes have been written on this phenomenon; Eric Hoffer’s books are representative as depicting the state of mind of “true believers.” When the Truth dove met the Belief hawk on a bridge, feathers flew.

Before moving on, we must face the fact that it takes great courage to disbelieve a false core belief, because such change threatens our identity upon which it is grounded. Thus denial vies with admitting the truth because denial is easier than change. Otherwise our cherished belief must vanish like one’s house plummeting down in a sink hole. Here again, we are what we believe.

For a moment, consider that Jiddu Krishnamurti, a most fascinating individual, had spoken and written extensively on the nature of belief. “Belief is not reality. You may believe in God, but your belief has no more reality than that of the man who does not believe in God. Your belief is the result of your background, of your religion, of your fears, and the nonbelief of the communist and others is equally the result of their conditioning. To find out what is true, the mind must be free from belief and nonbelief.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet this same wise and delightful soul also wrote “I was supremely happy, for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same. I have drunk at the clear and pure waters and my thirst was appeased. ...I have seen the Light. I have touched compassion which heals all sorrow and suffering; it is not for myself, but for the world. ...Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart can never be closed. I have drunk at the fountain of Joy and eternal Beauty. I am God-intoxicated.”<sup>3</sup> (Is not his last statement fascinating?)

A caveat must be presented: our experience of events are not always reliable—as much as we want to trust “our” experience as if experience is reality. Simply consider how witnesses have differing perceptions in court cases. Is perception reality?

Returning to Krishnamurti, does one *believe* Krishnamurti’s recorded statements and positions are right, accurate and truthful? On a deeper level, does the reader *believe in* Krishnamurti? Unless one knew him and had a personal relationship with him to judge his integrity, the only conclusive base would be the corpus of his writings and if possible, biographies from those who knew him (either in their writings or personal interviews with them).

A second case example: Kim Jong-un is “the supreme leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.” Does the reader *believe* Kim Jong-un’s statements and positions are right, accurate and truthful? Does the reader *believe in* Kim Jong-un? Propaganda aside, news clippings indicate millions do and revere him almost as an emperor or even a divine manifestation—dare we even say, an avatar?

The concern of *believing that* and *believing in* remains the issue.

The last case example is to consider “Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Galilean” as a few biblical characters described him. The very same questions can be asked. Does one *believe that* Jesus’ recorded statements and positions are right, accurate and truthful? Are the corpus of his biographical statements and actions in the gospels coherent, logical and—shall it be said—believable? Here again, Does one *believe in* Jesus, given (probably like Krishnamurti and Kim Jong-un) one has no personal historical relationship with Jesus? The difficulty connecting belief with truth with these three individuals is we have no experiential, no empirical living, flesh-and-blood relationship with them.

With the historical agreement that this Hebrew Jesus lived and was crucified (see Josephus the Jew and Tacitus the Roman) there always remains the conundrum: was he resurrected from being bled-out, cardiac-arrested, rigor-mortis and stone-cold dead?

3) This essay concludes with a series of questions vying with belief and true conviction. On what authority do we base what we believe? That is, which one(s) are held to be truth based upon empirical or logical proof, evidence, and verification?

Since there is no archeological or forensic evidence Jesus was resurrected and ascended, what is the reasonable proof? The question remains, can the life, death and resurrection of Jesus “be established to be historical fact under the rigorous standards required in a court of law ...”?<sup>4</sup>

As Krishnamurti might say, one has to find out for him and herself. His renowned saying “Truth is a pathless land” does not suggest it is an aimless search. Direction is the path. In the case of Jesus, if one adheres to logical and circumstantial argument and has courage to risk challenging a contrary core belief, the last reference below is highly recommended: the authoress, a lawyer, started writing the book *Faith on Trial* as an agnostic intending to refute the resurrection.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.trufax.org/general/beliefsystems.html>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/krishnamurti-teachings>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/jiddu-krishnamurti-quotes>

<sup>4</sup>*Faith on Trial*. Pamela Binnings Ewen, p. 4.