

Chapter 1: Beliefs

How Can We Resolve the Challenge of Beliefs?

A Gift and a Challenge

Beliefs matter.

Our beliefs provide the underpinnings of our society. They're tools with which we've tamed the wild. They help give meaning to our lives, and define our sense of self. Our ability to believe sets us apart from all other life on this planet. We're the only animal that believes.

And we're the only animal that kills over these beliefs.

The Crusades, World Wars I & II, the Cold War, terrorism; the story of war could not be told without the story of ideological conflicts. For while our ability to believe has been one of our greatest tools, this tool has also been a double-edged sword.

As we discussed in the introduction, virtually all conflicts involve conflicts over our beliefs. We don't get upset because of what happens – we get upset

“Conflict cannot survive without your participation.”

– Wayne Dyer

because of our thoughts **about** what happens. When we think of “ideological conflicts,” we may think of democracy vs. communism, or religion vs. science. Yet the truth is that **almost all conflicts are ideological conflicts.**¹

When we feel hurt because someone forgot our birthday, we're at war over our beliefs (*“I'm upset because they should have*

remembered.”) When we feel insecure because a lover dumped us, we're at war over our beliefs (*“I'm upset because this means I'm not good enough.”*) And when we get angry because of what our government is doing, we're at war over our beliefs (*“I'm upset because our politicians should fix things, and they shouldn't get corrupted by power.”*)

Our beliefs create conflict, pain and suffering. Yet they also provide some of our most valuable tools. So how do we deal with this? How can we resolve our conflicts while keeping our beliefs?

In this chapter, we're going to delve into this question by focusing on a particular example – one which deals with some particularly valuable and firmly held beliefs, which also caused some particularly challenging conflicts.

My War with Religion

As a child, I was raised in an incredibly loving and devout Mormon family. Mormons do not have a paid clergy, and in addition to his career as a business professor, my father has spent much of his life serving as a Bishop (equivalent to a Priest or Minister) and Stake President (in charge of a dozen or so congregations.)

I, on the other hand, left the Mormon Church when I was 18, and my father and I have spent much of our lives since then struggling over seemingly irreconcilable differences in our core beliefs. And while there are lots of angry “ex-Mormon” and “anti-religion” books, this book's intention is to support the process of coming together, rather than battling apart.

In my experience, there are two traits which most define the strengths of the Mormon Church – traits which make it a particularly valuable case study in our exploration of the challenge of beliefs.

The first trait is the incredible level of loving Mormons share with their families, their community, their God, and their world.

The second is the level of faith Mormons have in their answers to their “Big Questions” – the level to which they believe in their core Truths.

These two assets are intimately linked, for in any program of personal or spiritual growth, the number one factor that determines progress is the level of commitment we bring to that program² – and absolute faith creates absolute commitment.³ From an operational standpoint, much of the Mormon Church’s powerful foundation and success comes from the level of commitment to loving that its members display, commitment which is fueled and supported by the firmness of their beliefs.

Yet as my loving father pointed out, “*with every great strength comes an equally great challenge,*” and having absolute commitment to a set of beliefs – any beliefs – creates individual and organizational challenges. In particular, while it tends to strengthen the commitment and cohesion of those who believe in the organization’s doctrines, it tends to create separation from those who do not share them, those who renounce them, or those who choose to challenge them from within. For when our most important beliefs are challenged, powerful psychological defenses naturally kick in – unconscious defenses which will go to great lengths to protect our sense of being “right” – lengths that can include anger, separation, judgment, violence, terrorism, and even war.

As an example, the level of loving and commitment shared by Mormon Church members tends to correlate to the level of pain experienced when a Mormon child chooses to leave the church. Ironically, it’s a testament to the greatest strengths of the Mormon Church that so few “ex-Mormons” have yet been able to heal the wounds they experienced in leaving it.

Much of my life has been driven by these dynamics. Despite the best efforts of my family and I, while the strength of our beliefs created closeness within our respective communities, until recently it caused deep separation and pain between us – pain from a set of ideological conflicts that seemed utterly impossible to resolve. For most of my adult life, it seemed that either the Mormon Church was right and I was wrong, or vice versa, and the stakes to being wrong in this particular debate were too huge to consider. And yet, by discovering the difference between our beliefs and our need to feel

right about those beliefs, we were able to transcend our ideological conflicts, and discover the spiritual gifts hidden deep within them. Much to my surprise, by pushing me to move from asking **The Question of Blame** (“who’s right and who’s to blame?”) to living **The Question of Love** (“do I want to be right or loving?”) the pain around this particular debate has become one of the most profound spiritual gifts of my life.

My Story

Since I turned 14, two questions have dominated much, if not most of my life, even if I wasn’t always aware of it at the time. The first was “**Am I a Mormon?**” I was raised in an incredibly loving, devout Mormon family, in a quiet, charming college town deep in the cornfields of Illinois. Growing up, my church was my tribe, my community, my extended family, my people. As an awkward, overly sensitive, socially challenged adolescent, it provided the only group where I truly felt loved and accepted. As the “minister’s son” it also provided the social approval I craved but struggled to find outside the church. While I didn’t realize it at the time, this early love provided the foundation for the rest of my life. This love was the rock that allowed me to survive and even thrive in the face of life’s challenges. This love enabled me to survive the death of my mother when I was three, and to eventually turn my greatest wounds into some of my greatest gifts. This love was like a mother’s blanket, wrapping me up and pulling me deep in to the bosom of the Mormon Church – and in a seemingly perverse twist, this love also provided the strength I needed when I chose to leave that church.

The second question, which became primary when I left “The Church” at 18, was “**Why not?**” In leaving, I came face to face with the truth that with every great strength comes an equally great challenge. The loving I felt in the Mormon Church was incredibly strong – and this strength was matched by the incredible challenge I felt in leaving it, and by the depth of the wounds this decision left in my heart, and in the hearts of my parents.

As I tearfully shared in a group healing session five years ago, “my parents didn’t even have the common decency to get mad at me!” And without their anger to feed off of, I couldn’t conceive of directing my anger and judgment at them. This seemingly left with me with a Faustian choice: either the church was to blame for all this pain – or I was. Either the church’s beliefs were right and I had left the One True Path, or they were wrong and my family was following a lie. Either the Book of Mormon (the Mormons’ book of modern scripture) was a literal historical account miraculously revealed to a modern day prophet, or it was a malicious hoax perpetrated by an uneducated young man in the 1800’s. Either the church was wrong and I had been right to leave it, or else the church was right and my leaving it was confirmation of my deepest fears – that I was a deeply flawed, selfish wretch who hadn’t been good enough to live up to the church’s standards. Either the church was wrong, or else I wasn’t worthy of love.

Talk about a high stakes question! With my 18 year old mind, I had no idea how to even approach the level of complexities – and unconscious terror – this question brought up. And so I did the only reasonable thing I could think of.

I ran away from The Question as fast as I possibly could.

Addicted to Achievement

I declared myself to be an atheist, until one day when a friend pointed out that it takes just as much faith to believe there is no God as to believe that there is one – at which point I became a devout agnostic. I found some smaller, much safer gods – science and achievement – and set to worshipping them with a vengeance. I took all my deep insecurities and fears of unworthiness, along with the gifts from my loving upbringing, and used them as fuel in my desperate quest to prove my self-worth.

With The Question lurking in the background, I had a **lot** of fuel propelling me, and after 12 years I had become the prototypical “self-made man.” From being “the one in high school that the chess team made fun of,” I’d climbed close to the top of every ladder of

worldly success I could find. I’d gotten the top degree from the top university for computer science,⁴ developed a top international reputation as a researcher in my field, cultivated some top friends, traveled to the top locations, spoke at the top conferences, competed athletically at the top levels, started a software company through the top of the Internet boom, and raised money from the top investors. I lived in a top home in a top city, drove a top car, and ate at the top restaurants. I even dated some of the top women – but strangely, I could never seem to find the love and inner peace I craved.

And then just before my 30th birthday, as the company that had bought my startup participated in a top initial public offering, everything started to come crashing down.

With our company flying high on the NASDAQ, it (briefly) looked like I could retire – and I freaked out. I’d run out of ladders to climb, and in doing so, I’d run out of ways to keep running. As long as I had ladders to climb, I’d been able to handle anything, even the six months of physical burnout when my adrenals stopped working. But when I ran out of places to run, my whole world started to fall apart – my whole **emotional** world started to fall apart. As I spiraled downwards into depression and negativity, I realized that I could no longer run, and that it was time for me to take a stand and face my deepest fears. It was time to face The Question.

Who’s To Blame?

The real question I was dealing with wasn’t just who was right and who was wrong (i.e. “*Is the Mormon Church True?*”) but “**who’s to blame for all this pain?**” A key discovery of psychology is that as children, we’ll do almost anything to protect our image of our parents as perfect protectors, which is why abused children tend to blame themselves for their abuse – and why at a deeply unconscious level, I blamed myself both for the death of my mother when I was young, and for my choice to leave the Mormon Church. However, another key discovery of psychology is that we’ll do almost anything to protect our self-image, and I desperately wanted to believe that I was a good and worthy person. So this left me in

quite a pickle. There was a **whole** lot of shame and pain, and I desperately needed to find some way to shift my self-judgments somewhere else. However, I was also incapable of blaming my parents (or of blaming God, since I refused to believe He existed). So my only remaining choices left me in a “righteous” battle with the Mormon Church – a battle over who was right and who was to blame. Either the Book of Mormon was True (and I was basically going to hell) or else the church was False (and I had been the victim of spiritual child abuse). While you may be able to see some other possibilities besides this “sucker’s choice,”⁵ given my stage of development I couldn’t yet see any other way out. No wonder that I ran so hard and so long from The Question!

Stuck between my love for myself and my deep terrors of unworthiness, it took a major cycle of depression and negativity before I was able to get up the courage to look even at the “anti-Mormon literature,” let alone any even handed discussions of The Question. I ordered Fawn Brodie’s No Man Knows My History, and almost sobbed in relief when I found that maybe there was at least some evidence I was right to leave the church. Emboldened, I quickly ordered and devoured all the major critical analyses I could find of the scientific truth claims of the Book of Mormon.^{6-orange} After reading a half dozen tomes on this topic, my suppressed terror turned into self-righteous elation. I was right and they were wrong! From the perspective of my scientific worldview, I was able to construct powerful rational arguments “against” the Mormons’ literal truth claims. I wallowed in my self-righteous vindication, and was tempted to use my new arguments to attack my family’s beliefs.

But strangely, I still couldn’t seem to find the love and inner peace I craved. I had flipped from fearing I was Wrong, to “knowing” I was Right – only to find that this was just another side of the same coin. For now I had a new dilemma. Letting go of my terrified fear of being Wrong freed me to start my healing journey, to start discovering my own sense of spirituality, and to at least start looking at the conflict with my family. However, as my spiritual path started to become the primary focus of my life, it also made this

conflict all the more important, and I saw no possible way to resolve it.

An Irresolvable Conflict

At the deepest levels of my family’s beliefs, I felt that they “knew” their church possessed the Truth and therefore my path was morally inferior. At the deepest levels of my beliefs, I felt that I “knew” their literal truth claims were wrong, and therefore their path was morally inferior. I’d made the major step of acknowledging that maybe I wasn’t to blame for all that pain – but was still caught in a seemingly irresolvable conflict that all too easily could have descended into a nasty cycle of emotional and ideological violence.

From the perspective of my mind, there was no possible way to resolve this conflict. There was no way we could find **agreement** in a way that would resolve this war. We were dealing with some of our most important, most foundational beliefs – and there was no logical way to reconcile our positions. Either I was right or I was wrong. My mind could see no other option.

However, with great courage, both my father and I started to slowly approach previously forbidden topics, and with an ironic cry of “*I will be the most humble person ever!*” I turned my beat-down-the-walls-with-my-forehead determination inwards. As I ferociously started pursuing my path of healing and growth full time, tapping in to the most powerful support resources I could find, I went on a five day retreat. The retreat itself was magical, but the real miracle came through afterwards, in the form of a dream. I wrote the following promptly after waking from this dream, and belatedly sent it to my father. Suffice it to say, it wasn’t something he was expecting. Of course, he’d also been growing and healing in ways I wasn’t expecting, either.

I Had a Dream

September 17, 2002

Foster City, California

Last night, I had an unusually vivid and detailed dream. I rarely remember my dreams when I wake up, but this one, even though it was not the last dream of the night, I remembered clearly.

I was in my old church in Illinois, attending church with my family. A lady came up to me, and said that they had always wondered about whether or not I am a Mormon. She invited me to give a talk on the stand on this question, as part of the church service. I had not prepared anything on this topic, but I looked over at my father, and asked what he thought I should do.

I could see a conflict behind his eyes, and in his face. He appeared worried about what I might say, and the effect it might have on the family, the congregation, and myself. He knew the history of how this is a question that has come between us in the past. He knew that it is one that I have experienced a good deal of hurt, rejection, guilt and anger over. On the other side was his love and trust for me, his desire to see me grow, his incredible commitment to service of our family, of putting his own needs so often behind those of his children. With both love and a bit of fear, he gave me permission, and accompanied me to the stand, where he sat next to me.

As I had not prepared anything for my talk, I frantically scrambled to put together an outline of what I would say. As I looked out in the audience, it was only half full, and mostly filled with adults. Perhaps they consisted of the people who were in our church at the time, and still remember me. They all had a great deal of curiosity for what I was going to say, and were waiting in anticipation, as the first half hour of preliminaries were worked through. I grabbed a folded program and a pencil, and started scribbling out the points I was going to talk about. The outline reflected my anger, my desire to be right rather than loving. It included some, but not all, of the arguments I had developed to soothe my insecurities, pain, anger, and guilt, for leaving the church, for the incredible pain I know this caused my parents, family, and myself. This was my chance to strike back in reaction to my self-judgments and feelings of unworthiness, selfishness, and

being morally inferior to my family. This was my chance to prove to my father, who I love and admire more than anything, that he should respect and admire my spiritual path as one that is right for me.

At the bottom of the list, I came to concluding remarks, and in a burst of inspiration, it hit me. I am not a Mormon, but I also am a Mormon. When I woke up, I quickly wrote the dream down in my journal, and my recollection of the concluding remarks. In my dream, I never got up to give the speech I had planned, but if I had, I believe it would have consisted of the following.

Talk: Am I A Mormon?

No, I am not a Mormon...and Yes, I am.

No, I am not a Mormon, in terms of active membership in the organization, in terms of believing the same words and creeds, or in terms of following the same behavioral code of conduct.

To the extent the organization says, "You have to believe these things, or you are not one of us," No, I am not a Mormon.

To the extent the organization says, "You must perform these actions and ceremonies, and conform to these behavioral codes of conduct, or you are not one of us," No, I am not a Mormon.

To the extent the organization says, "You must associate with and support the organization, through time, money and loyalty to a particular chain of authority, or you are not one of us," No, I am not a Mormon.

However, underneath these important, but surface level organizational constructs, I see Mormons embracing a deeper truth.

I see them striving for the Truth of love, connection, service, family, self-improvement, honesty, charity, integrity, veracity, awareness, discipline, courage, and growth.

I see them learning to appreciate the Truth of the unfathomable wonder, mystery, majesty, complexity, variety, beauty, and interconnection of all that is.

I see them working to live the Truth that we are all brothers and sisters, part of the great I AM, here to support each other on our respective journeys.

I see us both on the path of learning to keep our hearts open, to keep our lives centered, and to surrender to our hearts, Spirit, and the great I AM. I see us both striving to live from our hearts rather than ego, from love rather than fear, from forgiveness rather than judgment.

In these ways, YES, I am a Mormon.

So much of who I am is the result of my dedicated, wise, patient, and above all loving parents, and their untiring efforts to raise us in the path that they believed was the most effective way to serve us.

In this, YES, I am a Mormon.

I have inherited much of my three loving parents' wisdom, courage, patience, and hearts.

In this, YES, I am a Mormon.

In my mind, ego, learned conscience, and organizational loyalty, I am not a Mormon. I do not think approved Mormon thoughts, associate my identity with being an approved Mormon, act in approved Mormon ways, or offer allegiance to approved Mormon leaders.

Emotionally, I still feel pain, insecurity, anger, and self-judgment over issues of approval as to whether or not I am a Mormon. I still have strong emotional reactions against guilt, authority and notions of exclusionary truth. I still sometimes project these issues and emotions on to others, particularly Mormons.

In my mind, I have chosen to value and rely on my own insight, experience and reason as higher authorities than external sources such as tradition, scripture, and revelation. This is a mental decision, an opinion, and an arbitrary belief, which I have then built the rest of my life and belief structure on.

I believe that I choose to believe these beliefs, and that they are all mental ideas, rather than absolute truths. However, I experience in myself the strong desire to think that my core beliefs are Right and True, including my core beliefs about beliefs. While I intellectually think that knowledge of the absolute truth of these core beliefs is impossible to attain, emotionally, I still cling very strongly

to them, and sometimes judge others who don't share them with me as wrong or inferior.

In these ways, I am ME.

In my heart, I sense that these concepts, even the concepts about concepts, are but mental playthings, tools rather than essence. What I experience, deep in my core, is that what matters most is the growth of spirit and heart. It is in our acts of love that the meaning of our lives is measured. It is through loving ourselves, our fellow man, and all that is, that we develop connection to the great I AM. At the end of the day, love is all there is. And in this moment, I choose love over fear.

In these ways, I AM.

In the exercise, practice, and experience of love, I have found few if any communities as loving as the Mormons. I live in awe of the love my family has shown to me, in respect for the love they demonstrate to others, and in longing for the love my church community shared with me as I grew up. My greatest quest in life is to replicate that love in my own self, family and community, and my greatest fear is that I will fail. I have nothing but the highest admiration for the courage, commitment, and dedication with which my family and other Mormons are growing in their love and spirituality. In their love and in their lives, I recognize glimpses of the great heart truths that can never be adequately spoken.

And in these ways, it is my highest aspiration to be like a Mormon.

From a developing, aspiring and awakening heart and spirit,

Love,

Brian

Finding Love Beyond Beliefs

The breakthrough I had, which allowed this dream to come through me, came in two parts. First, I was able to get to a place where I could begin to replace The Question of Blame (i.e. "who's right and who's to blame for all this pain?") with a new question. I began to realize that the question which really matters is "**Do I want**

to be right or do I want to be Loving?” While I continue to work with this question on an almost daily basis, instead of running from this question in terror, I gladly choose to embrace it. For where **The Question of Blame** creates judgment, pain, fear, anger and perceived separation, **The Question of Love** creates forgiveness, healing, acceptance, peace and awareness of the Love that Is. It does so because it helps me see that **the greater question isn't between right and wrong, but between right and loving.**

This is not saying we have to choose between our beliefs and love, for there's a huge difference between **the truth of our beliefs**, and our **fear-based need to feel right about them.** In situations where our ideological conflicts are causing us upset, where we feel stuck between our beliefs and our pain, where we can't seem to escape from "I'm upset because..." The Question of Love points to a third way. It tells us that our emotional conflicts don't come from our beliefs, but from our unconscious need to feel right about them.

"Do you want to be right or do you want to be loving?"

– Insight Seminars

The Cause of War

Our wars come not from our beliefs, but from the ways in which we hold them.

When we're willing to release our fears of being wrong, and step in to a place of honest questioning, we find ourselves in a place of love that's big enough to embrace both our beliefs, our disagreements, and our connection. For where the Question of Blame creates separation, the Question of Love creates healing. And when I see this clearly, while I may still struggle at times with the pieces of me that yearn to feel right, sooner or later I always realize that what I really want to choose is love.

The second half of this breakthrough came when I realized that whenever my parents had been faced with the choice of whether to feel self-righteous about their beliefs, or to be loving towards me, they had always done their best to choose love. Once I was able to

reframe The Question of Blame into The Question of Love, I was able to see that their lives have been a testament to love. I was able to see that their truest testimony hasn't been in the words they've spoken about their beliefs, but in the courage with which they've chosen to demonstrate the love behind those beliefs – even when they've found that their love was in conflict with their emotional need to feel right about their truths. I was able to see that the greatest gift they've given me, indeed one of the greatest gifts I've received in my life, has been how they've steadfastly modeled what it means to be committed to Love.

The essence of my breakthrough came when I realized that our greatest love rests beyond our wars over beliefs. The essence of my breakthrough came when our love inspired me to drop out of the conflicts in my head, and into the greater truth in my heart. The essence of my breakthrough came when I realized that while my mind craves being right and fears being wrong; my heart cares about being in loving connection.

Our hearts don't care about whether or not we get to feel right about our beliefs – what our hearts care about is love, and whether or not the way we're holding our beliefs is moving us more towards our awareness of Love, or away from it.

My parent's loving testimony helped me see that while the **answers we come up with** to our Big Questions are very important; perhaps even more important is **how we hold those answers inside ourselves.** As human beings, we've spent much of our history arguing over the rules to life. With all the best intentions, we struggle to find and live the answers to questions such as "*What is the meaning of life?*" "*What is the nature of God?*" and "*How should we live our lives in order to reconnect with His (or Her) Presence?*"

When we ask these questions in our heads – as we have to, at least to start – the answers we come up with tend to be framed in terms of who's right and who's wrong. And because our mind equates being right with being worthy and safe, the unconscious stakes to these debates involve our deepest fears of unworthiness, loss of control, and blame. Again, there's nothing wrong with this,

because it's the way we're wired at the mental level. Our minds are fundamentally limited by the hardware they run on – and most of our mental hardware is structured in terms of good/bad, right/wrong, pain/pleasure, and worthy/unworthy dualities. While it may seem a bit perverse at first, our minds are programmed to seek out Truth, yet they're only capable of holding a very limited notion of that Truth which they seek.

Our minds can not hold Truth, because the greatest Truth is Love – and as wonderful and valuable as our minds are, Love is much, much, much bigger than anything they can comprehend. While our beliefs about Love are an essential precondition to our practice of Love, ultimately Love isn't something we believe in, **Love is something we live.** Love isn't a set of doctrines, **Love is the state of Being those doctrines hopefully point to.** In fact, at the highest levels, Love isn't even something we feel; **Love is a place of compassion and Peace in which we rest.**

“Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical.”

– Lao-tse

Love isn't the province of our minds, for Love is the domain of our hearts and souls. Our minds strive to be right. Our Authentic Selves don't care about right and wrong – all they care about is loving, for at our core, Love is who we most Are. As Erich Fromm explains in [The Art of Loving](#):

“Love is active penetration of the other person, in which my desire to know is stilled by union. In the act of fusion I know you, I know myself, I know everybody – and I ‘know’ nothing. I know in the only way knowledge of that which is alive is possible for man – by experience of union – not by any knowledge our thought can give.”⁷

While I was trying to use my mind to resolve my questions, I was stuck. Every time I asked “*Is the Mormon Church True?*” “*Who's to blame for all this pain?*” or “*Am I worthy of Love?*” whether at a conscious or unconscious level, all the answers that

came back were framed in terms of someone being right and someone being wrong.

But what is Love? I believe it's something bigger than our minds can grasp. However, we can use “pointers” towards it such as “togetherness,” “unity,” “connection,” and “oneness.” Love is the place where “selflessness” and “selfishness” become one. Love lives in the land of liquid paradox where I and We meet, merge, and dance until the dawn.

And while we cannot use words to truly say what Love is, we can observe that confrontational debates about right and wrong tend to create perceived separation. They create “winners” and “losers”; they create “worthy” and “unworthy”; they create “us” and “them” – and we can observe that perceived separation moves us away from our awareness of Love, rather than towards it. We can observe that while our minds are powerful, pivotal tools for our survival and success in the world, that after a point their need to be right becomes a limiting factor in our spiritual development. We can observe that the one thing we all seem to agree on is the primary importance of Love.

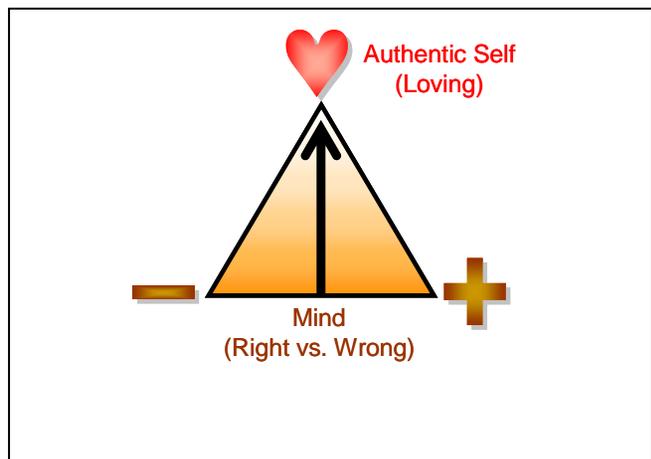
Do You Want to Be Right or Loving?

And so I ask. Do you want to be right, or do you want to be loving? Do you want to live more in your mind, or do you want to live more in your heart and soul?

Now be careful here, for the temptation is to see these choices in terms of right and wrong. Notice how our minds work! The temptation is to say “*Ahah! Well of course it's right to be loving. Bad mind, bad!*” I'm not saying that love is right, just as I'm not saying that there is no right or wrong. From the perspective of the heart, there's nothing “wrong” with wanting to be right. From the perspective of the heart, there's nothing “right” about wanting to be loving. And from the perspective of the heart, there's nothing “wrong” about the whole notion of right and wrong. As shown in the figure **The Question of Love**, the distinction here isn't between right and wrong, but between how we are when we're in our minds,

compared to how we are when we're in our Authentic Self. **Right and wrong are critically valuable tools, but they are not Truth. Love is Truth. And Love is the domain of our Authentic Self, not of our minds.**

The nature of our Authentic Self is Love. Period. From the perspective of the Authentic Self, all is Love. The miracle of Love is that it's the one place where the conflicts of this world drop away. The miracle of Love is that it's one thing the authentic spiritual paths agree on. The miracle of Love is that it's Beyond Belief.



Choosing to be loving is not “right,” but it certainly does tend to feel a whole lot better than choosing to be right! If we look at the suffering involved in Palestine and Israel, or at the suffering involved in the past conflicts between my family and myself, we can see that when we choose to be right instead of loving, we also tend to experience pain. When we choose to be right instead of loving, we create a sense of perceived separation, a sense of divine homesickness, a sense of deeply rooted suffering. When we choose to be right instead of loving (or for that matter, when we choose to be wrong instead of loving, such as when we put ourselves down in the name of false humility) we create an ache so deep that it can never be soothed by our minds, no matter how hard we try – because the only balm for this yearning is love.

Our universe provides **very** clear feedback, and while it takes great courage to consistently choose to be committed to Love, this choice is the path to everything we most want in life.

Again, I'm not saying that there is no such thing as right or wrong, merely that there's a greater Truth. If we define wisdom not as Truth, but as beliefs that better help us walk our path of waking up to Love, then one of the wisest things I have to share with you came from a talk my father heard a Mormon leader give. To crudely paraphrase this authority,

“It seems to me that we often make life too difficult. We tend to get caught up in doing all the ‘right’ things we think we are supposed to do. When what I’m beginning to realize is that the point is just to get up every day, to feel for which direction the Light is in, and then to do our best to walk more towards the Light rather than away from it.”⁸

The Love and Light of God is Real. Our hearts and minds are tools to help us feel for this Light, and walk towards it. All else is details, delights, and distractions.^{9-orange}

So, how does this help us with our original question? What have we learned that can help us resolve our religious and ideological conflicts?

We've learned a powerful tool. Namely, when we find ourselves feeling defensive about our beliefs, when we find ourselves getting upset about our ideological conflicts, or when we find ourselves needing to be right, our opportunity is to shift from asking The Question of Blame to living The Question of Love.

And in doing so, our opportunity is to release the unconscious negativity that keeps us from remembering our Authentic Self. Our opportunity is to move from “*I am upset because...*” to “*I am upset,*” and from there to “*I Am.*” Our opportunity is to choose both our beliefs and our Love, by holding those beliefs in Love instead of in fear. Our opportunity is to seek out the Love inside – the Love beyond our attachments to our beliefs.

Now, this can be easier said than done. Even if we've clearly decided that we want to choose Love, there are still some deep unconscious dynamics at play, which as adults often become the limiting factor to our personal and spiritual growth. For many of us, our adult life regularly feels like an internal war between the pieces of us that want to "choose the right," and the pieces of us that seem to want to "choose the wrong." We fight and fight against our inner temptations, but we often find that the harder we try to be good, the worse we feel. For **inner peace can not be found through war**. In order to find Love, our opportunity is to become willing to lay down our arms. Our opportunity is to learn how to love **all** of Reality.

Including the things we most judge.

In fact, **especially** the things we most judge.

Paradoxically, our inner wars are often a sign of spiritual progress. They signal that we've developed the self-discipline needed to **master our conscious mind**, and are now being called to the next stage of the "spiritual game" – a stage where our primary task becomes one of **mastering our unconscious mind**.

This transition tends to be challenging for most of us, because in this shift many of the "rules of the game" get flipped on

"What we resist, persists"

– Carl Jung

their head, as we discover that no amount of force will win our unconscious wars. For the enemy we are fighting is our perfect match – the enemy we are fighting is our self, and just like with Israel and Palestine, "**what we resist, persists**." While we have to learn how to choose right from wrong as the essential foundation of our spiritual journey, in fostering our "good side," we innocently and automatically cut off and dissociate from the pieces we judge as our "bad side" – we push them in to our unconscious, where like a small child lost in the woods, they lie waiting for us to find them, love them, and let them know that it's all going to be okay. Each and every piece of us is absolutely doing the best it knows how in its efforts to support us, but we usually don't see this. And just like with the conflict between my family and I, when our beliefs tell us

that one side of ourselves is Right, and the other is Wrong, we feel pain, we feel separation, and we feel inner conflict.

Again, our deepest beliefs are among our most powerful tools, and I'm not saying that we should give up our beliefs. My intention is simply to point towards a third way – a way that lies at the heart of every great religion, a way that involves choosing humility, forgiveness and Love over the "ego-juice" of being right. For in shifting from asking The Question of Blame to practicing The Question of Love, we can begin to heal the conflicts in our relationships with others, and in our relationships with ourselves.¹⁰⁻
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Exercise: Mental Awareness

This chapter includes a number of paragraphs that naturally tend to trigger either "rightness" or defensive energy in many people. If you care to, we can use this as an opportunity for you to learn more about how your mind works, and as a chance to support you in your learning and growth. In support of this, let's do a "check in" to see what's going on inside your mind. For the following exercise, read the directions a couple times first, then do the exercise, alternating between periods where your eyes are closed, and periods where you're writing down what you observed.

Directions: Take a minute and check inside. Close your eyes and pay attention to your thoughts. What are your thoughts saying to you right now? Can you pick out any voices that are saying things like "that's wrong!" or "yes, I'm right!" After listening for a minute, open your eyes and write down the most energetic thoughts you became aware of.

My thoughts are saying _____

Now, close your eyes again, and mentally review your experience of what you've read so far. Were there any places that "triggered" you emotionally? That caused you to feel upset or defensive? Where you felt either self-righteous or fearful? After listening for a minute, open your eyes and write down the thoughts and feelings you became aware of.

The sections that triggered me emotionally included _____

When reading those sections, I felt _____

When I recall that experience, my thoughts say _____

Thank your mind for its efforts, and for how it's serving you the best way it knows how.

Great job! Simply being aware of what is going on in our minds is an incredibly powerful tool. As Fritz Perls said, "*simple awareness is often curative.*"

Resolving the Challenge of Beliefs

Resolving the challenge of beliefs involves learning how to hold our beliefs with love rather than with pain, fear and judgment. In the words of Byron Katie, it means learning how to practice "*loving what is.*"¹¹

The Art of Loving

Love is the answer. It's the answer to the challenge of beliefs, and it's the answer to most of the other "big questions" we pose in this book. So how do we become more loving? How do we reconnect with a Love Beyond Belief?

In The Art of Loving, Erich Fromm explains that learning how to love is like learning how to master an art form, such as music or painting. To become a great artist in love, we must master the **theory of love**, the **practice of love**, and then **make love a matter of our ultimate concern**. We first learn how to love, and then devote our lives to that practice.

Teaching this art is the primary goal of the great wisdom traditions – and yet, without an understanding of both psychology **and** spirituality, it's all too easy to find ourselves waging war in the name of Love.

In my understanding of the field, spiritual psychology teaches the art of loving through **Six Primary Principles** and **Five Core Practices**. These cover both the theory and practice of love.

Then one of the goals of this book is to support your commitment to Love, by demonstrating how the practice of love is the fastest path to everything we most want in life. Love is the answer to our greatest conflicts, our greatest pain, our greatest fears, and our greatest desires. It only makes sense to choose love – not because we "should" be loving, but Love is who we most Are.

Six Primary Principles

Let's start with the theory of love. We've already touched on these six primary principles, and we'll be covering each of them in more detail through the rest of this book.

- 1) **Love. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.** At our core, Love is who we Are. Love occurs at the place where opposites meet, and so there are always two sides to Love. Love is both acceptance and discipline, masculine and feminine, physical and spiritual, and selfish and selfless. At the same time, there are at least five major stages of love, each of which comes with different sets of needs, different ways of seeing the world, and different ways of experiencing and expressing love.
- 2) **Learning. Life is a school, and our conflicts are reminders of when our school is in session.** We are here to learn how to remember Love. In each moment, we're doing the best we know how, while also being encouraged to learn how to do better. Each and every piece of our self, each and every person, and each and every group is absolutely doing the best it knows how. At the same time, pain is feedback that we're being called to learn how to do better. When we experience conflict or upset, we can choose to go in to the victim consciousness of "*I'm upset because...*" or we can choose to take 100% Personal Responsibility for our emotional reactions, and seek to learn how to use our conflicts as some of our greatest opportunities for learning, upliftment and growth.
- 3) **Morality. There is an absolute Reality, and the spiritual law of causality supports us in Remembering.** We can choose our actions, but we can't choose the consequences of those actions. Whether we call it the spiritual law of causality, the law of attraction, or the law of karma, each and every thought, feeling, and action we have matters. Every choice we make either increases or decreases our

awareness of the Love and Light that Is. Each choice adds to our shadow, or releases it. It increases the amount of peace on this planet, or decreases it. Our choices matter, and our beliefs provide us with essential maps for making loving choices. At the same time, Reality is far greater than what our minds can comprehend. We do not see the whole picture, and when we go in to judgment, we're pretending that we know more than we do. Awakening to Love requires having faith in our beliefs, and it also requires humility, for Love rests beyond the beliefs that point towards it.

- 4) **Purpose. The purpose of life is to evolve in our awareness and expression of Love.** Love is both our greatest gift and greatest challenge, our greatest opportunity and our ultimate identity. And the reason we are here is to learn how to Remember. In doing so, our evolutionary path has both a horizontal and a vertical component, which I call the Game of Life and the Game of Love. The Game of Life is about survival and success, and it's rooted in the duality of physical reality. The Game of Love is about fulfillment and purpose, which come through evolving in our awareness and expression of Love. It's rooted in the non-duality of spiritual Reality – it's rooted in Love. Interestingly, as we evolve, the way we're able to love changes in radical ways. And so do the rules by which we learn how to do so. Critically, what we have to master in one stage often becomes exactly what we have to surrender in the following ones.
- 5) **Shadow. As competent adults, our shadow usually becomes the primary challenge that keeps us from our purpose.** Our shadow is a gift that serves us the best way it knows how. At the same time, in the later stages of The Game of Love, our shadow often becomes the primary block that keeps us from evolving in our awareness and expression

of love. While who we most are is Love, our shadow makes up the clouds that hide us from our sun. As we release our shadow, we're better able to experience, express and enjoy love, along with whatever else it is that we most want out of life.

- 6) **Healing.** **Healing is the application of loving to the places that hurt.** We release our shadow not by fighting it, but by loving it. Our shadow is created through judgment and repression. It's fueled by the pain, fear and anger stored within it. And the more we fight it, the more it grows. Our shadow is not wrong or bad – but it does hurt. We heal our shadow by loving it, particularly through the Five Core Practices of acceptance, loving self-discipline, self-awareness, healing and self-forgiveness.

Five Core Practices

While we tend to assume that the unconscious part of our shadow provides a mechanism for **removing** negativity, it is actually a mechanism for **storing** negativity. In particular, through the process of repression, our shadow becomes the primary repository of our pain, judgment, anger, and fear. When we go in to “*I’m upset because...*” we’re assuming that something “out there” is causing our pain “in here.” However, in reality what’s happened is that one of our repressed wounds has been “triggered,” and it’s coming up for healing. So in dealing with our shadow, our master choice point happens when we get upset, and we choose either to go into blame and self-righteousness, or to embrace our upset as an opportunity for learning and growth. It happens when we choose between **victim consciousness** and **ownership consciousness**.

Once we choose to move out of victim consciousness and in to a place of ownership – of taking 100% Personal Responsibility for our emotional reactions – then we create the opportunity for growth and healing. This is particularly aided by the Five Core Practices of spiritual psychology. Personal responsibility for our upset creates

the opportunity for honest **self-awareness**, which is the key to releasing our repression. We heal our anger through **acceptance**, through bringing peace to our experience rather than fighting against it. We overcome our fear through **loving self-discipline**, which often means practicing courage – doing exactly what we’re afraid of, while we’re afraid of it. We release our pain through the **healing** power of love, through finding the places where we’re hurting, and applying loving to the pain. And we heal our judgment through **self-forgiveness**, through forgiving ourselves of the judgments we created against ourselves and others.

The next chapter covers the first of these practices: acceptance. In it, we’ll be exploring five power tools for releasing our anger and upset. But first, let’s conclude this chapter with two exercises to help you deepen and integrate what you’ve learned so far.

Exercise: Gifts and Challenges

This exercise will help you develop awareness of how the dynamics from this section may be playing out in your life.

Describe a painful conflict you’re in over who’s right and who’s wrong.

What is it that you cherish that you’re trying to protect? What are some of the gifts that come from your beliefs?

What are some of the costs of this conflict? What price do you pay in this situation for your mind’s desire to be right?

How valuable would it be to you, if you could learn how to retain your beliefs while letting go of your conflicts?

In this conflict, what is one way that you could choose to be loving rather than right?
