

**THE MONKEY**

*Let me tell you a story about an experiment that was conducted with three monkeys. They were locked in a cage with ready access to bananas. However, each time one of the monkeys tried to grab one, they all received a cold shower. Eventually, they stopped trying.*

*After some time, the researchers replaced one of the monkeys with another test monkey. As soon as this new monkey made a move towards the bananas, the first two beat him up to prevent him from getting to them, and soon, he, too, abandoned any attempt at getting his favourite fruit.*

*They then replaced a second monkey from the original experiment with another subject. Of course, he headed straight for the bananas. But the two other monkeys attacked him, until he also learned to do without the bananas.*

*Finally, the last of the original monkeys was replaced. No sooner did the new arrival approach the bananas than the two other monkeys in the cage, neither of whom had ever been subjected to the cold shower, beat him until he also gave up!*

*And so, remaining in this cage were three monkeys who loved bananas but who prevented each other from eating them. They had learned they weren't allowed. Had they been able to speak, they might have explained their situation by saying that if you tried to take a banana, someone would prevent you from doing so; there was no point in trying. That's what's called conditioning.*

## YOUR BELIEFS CONDITION

## YOUR BEHAVIOUR

The expression “physical conditioning” is commonly used to describe a process of training to become physically fit. Conditioning is also a term used in the field of engineering; it means to transform something from one state to another. For example, metal is conditioned to make it stronger or more flexible. The way we live our lives is also a reflection of our conditioning; our mental and emotional conditioning lies at the root of our beliefs.

Let me explain: since you were born, you learned that certain things were good and that others were bad. Yet, there are people who consider what you think is bad, good, and vice versa; they simply have different beliefs from yours. Your beliefs condition your life, in the sense that they dictate the way you behave. And make no mistake, you also have beliefs that are comparable to those caged monkeys. You KNOW you’ll never be rich. You KNOW you’ll never take that trip you’ve dreamed about. You KNOW it’s impossible to find the perfect partner. You KNOW that when things are going well, the situation can’t possibly last. Need I go on? Now ask yourself how you came to “know” what you “know” with such certainty?

*A while ago, I was looking for a parking place in a shopping mall. A car pulled out from the middle of a row of cars. I couldn’t see anyone waiting for that spot, so I drove into it. As I started rolling up my window, a man’s head suddenly appeared in the opening. He was inches from my face, a cigarette in his mouth, his eyes wild with fury. I could tell his pulse was racing from the bulging veins in his neck. He began to yell that that was HIS place, that he’d been waiting forever, and that he would break my face if I didn’t give it to him. I’ve spared you the more colourful phrases that punctuated his diatribe.*

*I tried to quiet his aggression in the calmest tone possible, and asked him where he had been, because, as there were no cars in the lane, I didn't understand how I could have failed to see him. "Over there," he screamed. Confused, I answered, "Over where?" He answered emphatically, "Over there, in the other lane, along the wall!" I then understood that, in his mind, any new place that became available was automatically his. Wanting to keep my face intact, I told him, "I see that this place is very important for you; I'll let you have it."*

*As I backed out, I caught a glimpse of his son sitting in the back of their car. He must have been eleven or twelve. He looked at me with a wide, arrogant smile that clearly communicated his feelings of superiority. Everything about the look in his eyes said to me, "You saw how we get what we want. We don't let ourselves get pushed around by pathetic people like you." I suddenly felt very sad. Still a small boy and already he had learned how to behave like a bully. Having seen his father act the way he did, this child was now conditioned by the belief that, to get what he wants, he must assert himself—by force, if necessary. I would wager that this child wasn't known for his sensitivity at school.*

## **BREAK OUT OF YOUR CAGE**

The reason I'm telling you this story is to illustrate to what extent we're conditioned by what we learn, beneficial or otherwise. Many of the things we learn are very useful, such as knowing how to behave in public and when to say please and thank you, for example. But others aren't, and it's these that we must dare confront to improve our quality of life.

A friend of mine had a difficult childhood and felt abandoned by her parents. She became accustomed

to feeling forgotten or, worse, rejected. Until just a few years ago, whenever she felt excluded in any particular situation, she would simply clam up as a way of protecting herself. She was incapable of expressing her emotions. After a lot of personal work, she's now able to communicate her feelings, although she still sometimes comes across as aggressive, as if she held others responsible for her feelings of rejection. It's as though she were saying "*You abandoned me,*" instead of "*I feel abandoned.*"

With time, however, she's starting to understand that the problem isn't that others are actually excluding her, but that she believes she's being abandoned. She's continuing to work on letting go of this feeling that brings her nothing positive. There's an important distinction between what she *believes* is real and what *is* real, and by confronting her feeling of being abandoned—which often controls her emotions—she can choose a better way to react, which will ultimately put her back in control of her feelings. When she stops being a victim of her beliefs, she will be able to change her attitude and her behaviour.

## **CHANGE ALWAYS BEGINS WITH YOU**

If you want to change things in your life, you need to make a conscious effort to understand how much your beliefs influence your ways of being and of acting, and how they facilitate or impede the changes you desire. It's an exercise few of us are familiar with. For instance, when someone behaves in a way that displeases us, we generally tend to blame that person. We'll say things like, "*You hurt me,*" or "*You made me angry.*" We're conditioned to react automatically to different situations.

To change the way we've been conditioned, we first have to recognize that we're the only ones responsible for our reactions. It would be more accurate to say, "*You did this, and I got angry,*" or "*You did*

*this, and I felt sad.*” There’s no cause-and-effect link between someone’s behaviour and the reaction it elicits, the proof being that, under the same circumstances, another person may have an altogether different reaction. Logically, then, we might also say, “*You did this, and I’m not angry,*” or “*You did this, and I’m not sad.*”

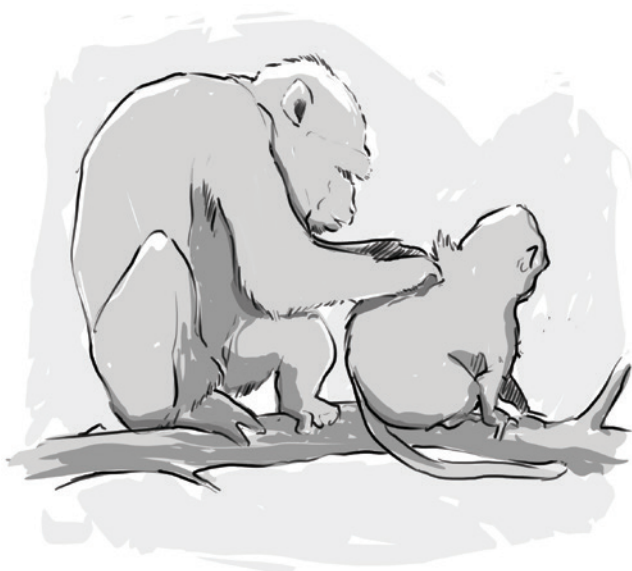
To get back to my parking story, I did find another place, of course, but I must admit I was sorely tempted to seek revenge. As I walked towards that goon’s car, I briefly flirted with the idea of taking out my key and scratching the entire length of his vehicle. He had really ticked me off, and I wanted him to pay for having been so aggressive. But I ended up doing nothing. What would I have gained if I had damaged his car? Nothing at all. I would only have instilled more hatred in his heart and given him good reason to retaliate against someone else. To behave as he did, this man must not have been a very happy person. Why add one more layer to his suffering? Since I wish people would be more tolerant, empathetic, and respectful, I make an effort to cultivate these attitudes within myself. That’s easy to say—in theory, anyway—but it’s only when we’re confronted with a situation that tests our nerves that we understand if our choices are our own or if they’re dictated by the behaviour of other people.

## **YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE**

No matter what the situation, you always have the option of choosing how to act. Note that I use the word “act” and not “react.” To act is to do something voluntarily, whereas to react is to have an attitude or behaviour in response to something that happens. When you react, your behaviour is determined by the actions of others; you aren’t in control of your life, but dependent on what’s happening around you. I think it takes a lifetime to learn how to not react.

Choosing to act rather than to react is something you do voluntarily, consciously. Then, not only do you take control of your life, but you also inspire others to do the same. Through your actions, you demonstrate that you make a clear distinction between what others do and the way you act in relation to how they behave. Is your boss making your life difficult? How could you simplify his? Is someone angry with you? How could you diffuse the situation?

You can distance yourself from acquired behaviours and beliefs that aren't helpful to you. Do you want change to happen? You alone have the power to bring it about. If you don't like the way you react in certain situations, observe how a reaction begins, be aware of what you're feeling at that moment. Then, choose how you'd like to act, and focus your efforts in that direction. It's a simple formula, but one that requires the courage to change.



## **YOU CONTROL YOUR LIFE**

Many of us feel that we are not in the driver's seat of our life, and we're convinced that we have little or no control over events. Some people, however, long for a more satisfying, more exciting, and fuller existence. If you're one of them, you probably tell yourself that there must be another way to live, a way that gives you the feeling of being seated at the controls, of being the driver rather than the passenger. There is.

The first thing to work on is reversing your negative conditioning. Don't forget, however, that you may not even be aware that this conditioning exists. You'll have to do a bit of digging to find it.



## EXERCISES

### DISCOVER THE REASONS FOR YOUR INACTION

We often talk about projects we'd like to undertake, but never do. This exercise will help you discover what's preventing you from moving forward with your projects.

First, think about a project that's important to you, but that you're not making any headway with. It could be personal, such as asking for a raise, starting a business, or exercising more; or professional, such as creating a new product, a new service, or new work methods. The project you choose has to really mean something to you and must be something you truly want to see happen.

#### *UNCOMPLETED PROJECT:*

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Now list all the reasons you aren't making any progress. For example, "*I don't have time,*" "*My boss will say no,*" "*It's too expensive.*" There are fifteen lines and you have to use them all. Why? Because that will force you to dig beneath the surface of easy reasons and excuses.

As you answer each question, keep in the forefront of your mind this project that means a lot to you—we'll call it "x."

1. I don't do "x" because:

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2. I don't do "x" because:

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3. I don't do "x" because:

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4. I don't do "x" because:

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5. I don't do "x" because:

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6. I don't do "x" because:

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7. I don't do "x" because:

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8. I don't do "x" because:

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9. I don't do "x" because:

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10. I don't do "x" because:

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11. I don't do "x" because:

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12. I don't do "x" because:

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13. I don't do "x" because:

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14. I don't do "x" because:

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15. I don't do "x" because:

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## **MAKE THE DESIRED TRANSFORMATION HAPPEN**

Take a few moments to think about the different ways you can rid yourself of undesirable behaviours and adopt new ones, and note them below.

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NOTE: Repeat this exercise for everything you want to do but aren't getting done.

