

# **SELF-IMAGE**

## **Short Version**

P.Ribes, sj.

### **THE UNKNOWN BANK-ACCOUNT**

#### **Intent of this Story**

- ✓ *The importance and influence of Self-image on our entire life.*
- ✓ *Mistaken self-perception leads us to false and harmful thinking, feeling and behavior.*
- ✓ *We act not what we are, but what we think we are.*

### **THE STORY**

Mr. Brown, a multimillionaire loved Jimmy, his grand-son very dearly. Without informing him, just with the thought of giving him a surprise, he opened in his name a large bank-account. He intended to hand him over the pass-book on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Unfortunately, Mr. Brown died unexpectedly of a heart attack. All his children were generously provided in his last will. No mention was made therein of Jimmy's bank account. No one ever knew of the intended surprise waiting Jimmy on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. That account remained forever locked, unused and forgotten.

In the passing of time Jimmy, unfortunately, did not do well in life. He thought himself to be a poor and destitute man when actually speaking, he was a millionaire

He indulged in self-pity. For ever, he hated his cousins for being rich. Every time he remembered his grandfather cursed him for not making him a sharer in his fortune. He acted very nasty towards his relations and could never say a civilian word to them.

His family members and relatives disliked him. Actually they despised him and avoided him for his uncouthness and incivility.

After many years of frustration and resentments, forgotten by all the family, he died alone in a Home for the Destitute.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION.**

1. What effects had the ignorance of his rich bank account on Jimmy?
  - First:** On the way he saw himself.....**In his thinking?**
  - Secondly:** On the way he felt about himself.....**In his feeling and emotions?**
  - Thirdly,** On the way he dealt with people.....**In his behavior?**
2. What is meant by self-image? How does it influence us in our thinking, feeling and behavior?
3. How do we come to have a self-image?

4. Can we discover our true self - our real value, our riches, our worth and treasures? How?
5. In what way can we help others to improve their self-image?
6. Why did Jimmy despise himself and others as well?
7. How is it that others do not respect us as we deserve and that we do not respect others as they deserve?
8. Can we make ourselves respected and valued by others? How?
9. In the light of Jimmy's story can you account for any feelings of insecurity, touchiness, lack of respect for others, resentments, discouragement, anxieties,, unsatisfactory personal relationships, aggressiveness etc, we may feel within ourselves?
10. Any other insights or lessons you learnt from the story?

### **IDEAS FOR AN INPUT;**

### **MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF THE 'SELF-IMAGE'**

#### **1) Real self v/s imaginary self:**

**My real self** is what in reality, objectively I AM. Jimmy in reality was a wealthy man. My real self is the sum total of all the qualities, talents, abilities and strengths, I really have or possess; (whether I am aware of them or not, it does not make any difference)

**My imaginary self**, or the image I have of myself, may differ from my real self. It's not what I really am and have, but what I perceive – rightly or wrongly- of me Jimmy saw and perceived himself being poor and destitute. He was not aware of the treasure he actually had.

#### **2) It's not the real self, but our imaginary self ( the image we have of ourselves) that conditions and controls our thoughts, feelings, actions, reactions and behavior.**

For instance, if at night there is a coiled rope on the ground, but I perceive (I see) a snake:

- I'll **think** that there is a snake.
- I'll **feel** frightened as if there was a real snake.
- I'll **act** or behave, as the snake was real.
  - \* I may **run away**, (We call it 'flight reaction') or
  - \* I may **hit it and try to kill it**. (We call it 'fight reaction')

#### **3) Expressing this in a sketchy way and applying it to ourselves we affirm:**

### **3. Expressing this in a sketchy way** **Applying it to ourselves - we may affirm:**

What I perceive of myself -  
**Conditions:**

**MY THOUGHTS ABOUT MYSELF:**

My thoughts about myself -

**Conditions**

**MY FEELINGS ABOUT MYSELF**

My feelings of myself

**Condition.**

**MY ACTIONS AND REACTIONS**

My actions and reactions.

**Condition.**

**MY BEHAVIOUR**

**My behavior**

**Condition**

**MY PERSONALITY & CHARACTER.**

**4) Applying this process to Jimmy's case:**

- i. He perceived himself as a poor person and uncared by the family.
- ii. He thought himself to be poor and unwanted,
- iii. He felt wretched and despicable like a pauper and destitute. He hated his cousins and relations for no fault of theirs.
- iv. He acted nastily, angrily and impolitely towards his family members.
- v. His character and personality was that of a disgruntled and frustrated and spiteful person.

**5) Illustrations and Examples of Daily Life: For instance:**

- a) A brainy boy who never had a chance of a good education may think himself to be useless and dull and himself for it.
- b) A girl who is not a good singer but whom jokingly everybody says she is a good singer, may think herself to be a good singer and thus making a fool of herself
- c) An outcaste, judging by the way he is regarded and treated by society, may take it for granted that he is inferior to others when actually he may be better than others.

**It is a fact that we shall always think, feel and act according to our self-perception, that is, according to the image we have of ourselves.**

**6) Experience tells us that most people have poor and defective Self-Images,**

- It is practically impossible for anyone of us to perceive all our potential, talents and abilities. Most of us are aware only of a minute part of them. The larger part of our strengths remains forever unknown to us. What we know of our strengths and good qualities is only the tip of an iceberg.
- This will explain why our “self-image” is inferior to our “real self” That’s why most of us think and feel poorly of ourselves, and consequently our behavior is unsatisfactory.

- On the contrary, all of us are very conscious of our negative points, failures and shortcomings.
- We brood over them, and magnify them. The net and sad result of it all is that our self-image is further diminished and spoilt
- Any real and lasting change in our behavior, character and personality has to take place in the area of our self-perception.
- Any attempted changes in our character and behavior will not last, they will be only apparent and of short duration.
- Any forced improvements whatever will not touch the core of our personality. They will be sort of patchwork, rescue operations, not real transformation.
- **Without discovering our true worth, our wealth and qualities, nothing nor anyone will ever change our character for the better.**
- Only if Jimmy would have discovered that he was a rich man, it might have helped him to change his behavior.

7) **Any lasting real change in our character and behavior has to go through these steps:**

First: Better Perception..... Self discovery  
 Second: Better Thinking ..... Better "Self-Image"  
 Third: Better Feeling ..... Improved emotional life  
 Fourth: Better Behavior ..... Improved Character

**Final Outcome will be: BETTER PERSONALITY AND HAPPIER LIFE.**