

3 IDEAS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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All changes are based in ideas. Ideas give us new perspectives and from those new perspectives we're able to change our behaviors.

In this small report, I've put together three ideas that have influenced my life and which I believe can influence yours.

Idea #1: The Two Minds

Idea #2: How to 80/20 Your Life

Idea #3: The Prime Belief

I didn't come up with these ideas myself. If you look around hard enough, you'll see them pop up in all sorts of places, from business, to NLP, to generic self-help, to various forms of therapy.

This is just my take on them and some of the ways I've applied them. I hope you get something out of them.

Best,

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Idea #1:

The Two Minds

Close your eyes. Wait, don't close them yet. Finish reading this paragraph, then close them. OK, close your eyes and try to think about nothing for 30 seconds.

Ready? Go. (Waiting...)

Wasn't easy was it? Chances are various thoughts and images kept popping into your head.

Now, I want you to try the same exercise again, except this time I want you to pay attention to which specific thoughts and images pop up. Try to keep track of them. Notice them, note what they are, and then let them go. See if you can do that for a minute.

Ready? Go. (Waiting...)

What were they? Maybe that fight you had with your brother the other day. Or the assignment that's due tomorrow but you're reading this instead. Or maybe a movie you saw recently, or some sort of fantasy.

Chances are you were able to notice them for a little while but then you quickly find yourself getting sucked into thinking about them involuntarily.

If you've ever [meditated](#), even a little bit, you're familiar with the experience you just had.

You closed your eyes and tried to shut your mind up, even if for 30 seconds, and despite your best efforts, the spigot of thought vomit just kept pouring out.

If you've ever attended meditation retreats or been involved in some movement such as [Zen](#) like I was for a while, they talk a lot about this "mind chatter" that you suffered through.

And the thing is, that "mind chatter" never stops. It's always going on in your daily life.

A lot of these eastern philosophies aim to "quiet" that chatterbox of a mind that we have, and I suppose it's useful to put a little damper on it.

But I've actually found practicing these sorts of techniques have another benefit, a benefit psychologists are just catching on to and starting to write about here in the West.

That benefit is what I call the "Two Minds."

When you close your eyes and try to eliminate any thoughts (and fail miserably like the rest of us), obviously your mind is thinking.

But if your mind is thinking, then who is observing the mind thinking?

Whoa...

When you did the exercise and your mind kept wandering back to what you had to do at work tomorrow, who was it that was watching your mind worry about work tomorrow?

It was your mind watching your mind.

In Zen they refer to this as the "Thinking Mind" and the "Observing Mind." The two minds.

It's a common concept in Buddhism and new western therapies such as Acceptance-Commitment Therapy (ACT) are catching on to

how useful it is and how it can solve a lot of our everyday emotional problems.

I'll break down the Two Minds further and then show how they can be applied to solving many of the emotional problems we deal with in our everyday lives.

The problem with the Thinking Mind is that we don't completely control it.

Don't believe me? I'll prove it.

Whatever you do, do NOT think about a pink elephant. Don't think about a pink elephant holding a blue umbrella with his trunk. Don't think about a pink elephant once over the next two paragraphs.

OK, not only did you picture a big pink elephant with a blue umbrella, but you were *watching yourself* think about a pink elephant while you were reading the past two paragraphs.

Your Observing Mind was watching your Thinking Mind indulge in pink elephants repeatedly, despite the fact that it was telling your Thinking Mind *not* to indulge in said elephants.

The Thinking Mind is always chattering away, while you're waiting in line, while you're in bed trying to sleep, when you "tune out" of conversations with people, or when your mind wanders while reading (which I'm sure will happen at least once with me... asshole).

Our Thinking Mind is like a horny dog on a leash that keeps running after things and if we aren't used to using our Observing Mind, then our Thinking Mind drags us along with it.

If our Thinking Mind starts obsessing about reaching level 30 in Diablo or the last episode of *Mad Men*, our Observing Mind is helpless to reign it in.

The same goes for emotions. And that's actually where most of our suffering comes from – not from the negative emotions themselves, but from the fact that we're helpless from getting sucked into the negative emotions.

Most of our psychological and emotional stress happens because our Thinking Mind and Observing Mind are “fused” and we don’t recognize the difference.

People ask me all the time, “How do I stop feeling so jealous?” or “How do I stop feeling so angry?” or “How do I not get nervous in this situation anymore?”

The answer is you don't. You can't control your Thinking Mind. Those emotions pop up and will continue to pop up.

The trick is to not fuse with those emotions when they arise.

In Zen, they advise that instead of saying, “I am angry,” to say, “I feel anger.” Instead of saying, “I am nervous,” say, “I feel nervousness.” Instead of saying, “I am jealous,” you say, “I feel jealousy.”

It may seem like a subtle difference, but try it. Think of a time recently when you felt a negative emotion, a lot of anger or nervousness or insecurity.

Now, instead of thinking, “I was angry at my brother,” think instead, “I felt anger towards my brother.” You HAD anger, but you weren't controlled by the anger.

Emotions are not a choice. Behavior is.

People ask me all the time, “How do you deal with being afraid of failure?” or “How do you not worry about being rejected?”

I deal with fear and worry by dealing with fear and worry. (I know, that’s a really annoying answer.)

I feel the same fear and worry anyone else does; I just don’t identify with it. I accept it and move on despite it.

I don’t let my Thinking Mind control me. I defuse from my emotions. When I feel fear, I consciously [choose to act despite it](#). When I feel worry, I consciously choose to act despite it.

For instance, when I have to sit down and write a lot (like writing this PDF), I often get nervous. I want to write something really great because I know thousands of people are going to read it.

One result of this nervousness is [procrastination](#).

When I was younger and I was in situations where I got nervous and procrastinated (i.e., a big term paper in school), I would decide, “I can’t do it because I’m too tired,” or “I can’t focus like other people, I must have ADD or something.”

This was me being fused with my Thinking Mind. There was no separation between my emotions and [my identity](#).

I felt nervous and had a thought of “I can’t do it for X, Y or Z reason,” and I accepted it at face value. I was a slave to my Thinking Mind, tugged by its leash.

These days I’m often able to sit down and write 5,000 words or more in a single day. I still feel the same anxiety. I still hear the

same thoughts (“I need to eat first,” “I should take a nap,” “I’m not in a writing mood right now.”)

But now instead of identifying with these thoughts, I acknowledge them:

“I feel nervousness about writing today.”

“I have the thought that I need to eat first.”

“I have the thought that I need to take a nap first.”

And then I turn to my Thinking Mind and promptly tell him that it’s full of shit and that I don’t need a damn thing except to sit [my ass down and start writing](#).

We all produce excuses and negative emotions involuntarily.

Guess what? That’s NEVER going to change.

I don’t care how many positive thoughts you conjure, what kind of therapies you do, or what kind of [New Agey spiritual crap](#) you come up with – negative thoughts and emotions are natural processes of the human brain.

You can’t get away from them. None of us can.

What you CAN do is accept them. Defuse from them. And then act despite them.

When people come to me ask how to “Stop feeling angry,” or “Stop getting nervous,” this is their problem. **As soon as you try to eliminate a thought or emotion, you make it stronger.**

The more you focus on an emotion, the more powerful it becomes.

Negative emotions are like quicksand, the more you struggle to get out of them, the further into them you sink.

The trick is to accept them and then let go. This is a skill and it is a process, but it cannot be practiced *until you recognize that there are two minds and you only control one of them.*

Here are some exercises you can do that will help you separate your two minds and therefore take more control of your behaviors despite your thoughts and emotions.

1. Whenever you feel a strong emotion or thought, disidentify with it and then take possession of it.

"My boss is not an idiot. But I am having the thought that my boss is an idiot."

"I don't hate my ex-girlfriend. I am feeling hatred toward my ex-girlfriend."

"I am not lonely and depressed. I am feeling loneliness and depression."

Language is very powerful. Notice when you disidentify from these emotions and thoughts in this way it: 1) implies that they're temporary states, and not permanent conditions and 2) forces you to take responsibility for them. They're nobody's fault, they just are.

2. Thank your Thinking Mind for negative thoughts and emotions. This is a technique from ACT and it is effective. It may sound absolutely nuts, but it's effective because it FORCES you to accept your negative emotions instead of fight

them.

“Thank you Thinking Mind for feeling nervous before my date tonight. It will keep me on my toes!”

“Thank you Thinking Mind for being angry at my boss. I really appreciate how much you care.”

This is going to feel really bizarre – expressing gratitude towards negative emotions. But I think you’ll find that it diminishes the power of the thoughts and emotions over time and actually impels you to take action despite them.

3. Finally, if you find yourself in the heat of the moment, or if there’s something that’s really nagging at you, try this out.

Take something that’s bothered you recently and hold it in your mind. Maybe it’s your girlfriend nagging you. Maybe it’s being terrified of [talking to that cute girl](#) in class next to you. Maybe it’s [quitting your job](#).

Distill it into a single sentence, such as, “I feel afraid of quitting my job.” Or “I feel irritated with my girlfriend.”

Now close your eyes and imagine Bugs Bunny saying it, while chewing a carrot. Then Mickey Mouse saying it, while dancing and doing cartwheels. Pretend the Chipmunks are singing it to you in the form of a Christmas carol.

Now, turn it into an image, maybe your angry girlfriend, or

your broke ass sitting on the curb. Put that image on a television screen. Make the colors funny, give yourself a polka dotted suit. Make your girlfriend's hair into a bunch of candy canes.

Make the thought look and sound absolutely ridiculous in your mind. Take your time and play with it. Try to make yourself laugh.

After you've done this for a minute or two, stop. How do you feel?

Chances are you feel much better about it and the negative emotion isn't nearly as potent as it was before.

Separating your Observing Mind from your Thinking Mind is a habit that takes practice. But once you begin to do it, you'll feel yourself becoming less and less of a slave to your thoughts and your emotions. You'll take more control of your internal daily life and feel better about it.

In my opinion, this is the single most important step to [developing self-discipline](#) and acting despite whatever neuroses or mental hang ups you may suffer from.

Once you've differentiated your two minds, you can begin to evaluate your thoughts and feelings from an objective place and decide which ones are helpful and which ones are hurtful (which is something we'll get to in Idea #3).

Idea #2:
How to 80/20 Your Life

Back in 1906 there was an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto. One day Pareto noticed that every year 20% of the pea pods in his garden produced approximately 80% of the peas.

This got him thinking about economic output on a larger scale. Sure enough, he began to find that in various industries, societies and even companies, 80% of the production often came from the 20% most productive faction.

This became known as the Pareto Principle, or what is now often referred to as the 80/20 Principle.

The 80/20 Principle states that 80% of the output or results will come from 20% of the input or action.

The 80/20 Principle has historically been most popular in business management situations.

Businesses often found that roughly 20% of their customers brought in 80% of their sales. They found that about 20% of their sales reps closed 80% of the sales. They found that 20% of your costs lead to 80% of their expenses.

In terms of time management, they often found that 20% of their time created 80% of their productivity, and that 20% of their employees created 80% of the value.

The examples go on and on. And of course, nobody was actually there with a yardstick measuring out exactly 80% and 20% for all of these items, but the approximate 4-to-1 ratio popped up constantly. Whether it was actually 76/24 or 83/17 is irrelevant.

The 80/20 Principle became a popular management tool that was used widely to increase efficiency and effectiveness within businesses and industries.

It's still widely taught today.

But few people thought to apply the 80/20 Principle to everyday life or the ramifications it could have.

For instance:

- What are the 20% of your possessions you get the most value out of?
- What do you spend 20% of your time doing that gives you 80% of [your happiness](#)?
- Who are the 20% of people you're close to who [make you the happiest](#)?
- What are the 20% of the clothes you wear 80% of the time?
- What's the 20% of food you eat 80% of the time?

Chances are these are easy questions for you to answer. You've just never considered them before.

And once you've answered them, you can easily focus on increasing the efficiencies in your life. For instance, the 80% of people you spend time with who only add 20% of the pleasure in your life (spend less time with them). The 80% of crap you use 20% of the time ([throw it out, sell it](#)). The 80% of the clothes you wear 20% of the time (same thing).

Identifying the 20% of the food you eat 80% of the time will probably explain whether you keep a healthy diet or not and how

healthy it is. Hey, who needs to follow a diet? Just make sure to switch to where the 20% of food you eat 80% of the time is healthy.

When I first considered how the 80/20 Principle applied to my own life, I instantly realized a few things.

1. A few of my hobbies (television shows and video games) accounted for 80% of my time only brought me 20% of my fulfillment.
2. A few of my friends who I spent 80% of my time with I did not always enjoy being around (hence I was not happy in my [social life](#)).
3. 80% of what I spent my money on was not useful or healthy for my lifestyle.

Recognizing these things eventually inspired some [hefty changes in my choices and my lifestyle](#). I dropped video games and television for one. I made efforts to identify other friends to spend more time with, and I paid more attention to what I bought with my money.

And of course, the 80/20 Principle can still be applied to [productivity at work](#).

What tasks do you spend 80% of the time doing that bring in 20% of the returns (i.e., checking email over and over, writing memos, taking a long time to make basic and unimportant decisions, etc.)?

What is the 20% of your work that gets you 80% of the credit and recognition from your team or boss?

And finally, you can apply the 80/20 Principle to your emotional life and [relationships](#) as well. What are the 20% of behaviors that cause 80% of the problems in your relationships? What are 20% of the conversations that create 80% of the intimacy with your partner?

These are [important questions](#) that most of us never even consider.

It doesn't occur to us that there's an efficiency to every aspect of our life, to everything we do. And not only is there an efficiency, but we have a control and influence over that efficiency, it's something we can take responsibility for and improve.

What changes could you make in your life today based on the 80/20 Principle?

It's not necessarily a rigid rule to live by, but think of it as a tool, a lens to view aspects of your life through.

Sit down and think about it, maybe even write it out. You'll likely be surprised the realizations you come to.



Idea #3:
The Prime Belief

In the mid-19th century, a boy was born into a wealthy family. From the beginning, the boy suffered serious health issues: an eye problem that left him temporarily blinded as a child, a terrible stomach condition that forced him onto a strict diet, and back pains that would plague him throughout his life.

Despite his father's disapproval, he aspired to become a painter when he grew up. He practiced his craft but for years and years, every attempt ended in failure. Meanwhile, his brother went on to become a world-renowned novelist. As he entered adulthood, many of his health problems worsened, his relationship with his father fell apart, and the young man began to struggle with severe bouts of depression and [suicidal thoughts](#).

Desperate to fix his son's situation, the young man's father used his business connections to get the young man admitted to Harvard Medical School. Fortunately, the young man was smart. He could handle the coursework. But he never felt at home or at peace at Harvard. After touring a psychiatric facility one day, the young man mused in his diary that he felt he had more in common with the patients than the other doctors.

Dissatisfied with his medical training, the young man looked for other opportunities within academia that may have suited him. He was desperate. He was willing to try anything, even something radical and completely different.

He soon discovered an anthropological expedition to the Amazon rainforest. The young man signed on, excited to get away and start

anew, to perhaps discover something new and [interesting about the world](#) and about himself.

In those days, intercontinental travel was long, complicated and dangerous. But the young man made it to the Amazon. There he promptly contracted smallpox and nearly died alone in the jungle. He was rushed back to civilization and the expedition left him behind. Upon recovering from smallpox, his back spasms returned worse than ever. He was emaciated from the disease, stuck in a foreign land alone with no way to communicate, and continued to exist in a daily excruciating pain.

The young man managed to return home to a disappointed father, nearly 30 years old, still unemployed, [a failure at everything](#) he had ever attempted, with a body that betrayed him and wasn't likely to ever get better. Despite every advantage and opportunity he had been given in life, he had failed them all. The only constants in his life seemed to be suffering and disappointment. The man fell into a deep depression and planned to take his own life.

But first, he had an idea.

He made an agreement with himself. In his diary, he wrote that he would try an experiment. He would spend one entire year believing that he was 100% responsible for everything that occurred in his life, no matter what. During this period, he would do everything in his power to change his circumstances, no matter the outcome. If, he wrote, at the end of one year of [taking responsibility for everything in his life](#) and working to improve it, if nothing in his life had actually improved in that time, then it will be apparent that he was truly powerless to the circumstances around him. And then he would take his own life.

The young man's name was William James, the father of American psychology and one of the most influential philosophers of the past 100 years. Of course, he wasn't these things yet, but he would go on to become them in large part due to his experiment. James would later refer to his experiment as his "rebirth," and would credit it with everything that he would later accomplish.

There is a realization from which all potential personal growth emerges. This is the realization that you are responsible for everything you do in your life, no matter the external circumstances.

In 1879, fifteen years after making the deal with himself, William James gave what was perhaps his most famous lecture, titled "The Will to Believe."

In it, he argued that whether religious or atheist, capitalist or communist, everyone is forced to adopt values on some degree of faith. Even if you don't believe in faith, that is itself a value requiring faith. He went on to say that if [we all must value something](#), then we may as well orient ourselves to value what is most beneficial for us and others.

When we become responsible for our own values, we no longer have to struggle to make the world conform to our needs, rather we can adapt our own values to fit the circumstances that confront us in the world.

It's that simple choice to take responsibility for ourselves and our own values that allows us to feel in control of everything that happens to us and allows us to transform our [negative experiences into empowering experiences](#). It's completely counterintuitive, the idea that being responsible for all of the

horrible misfortunes that befall us could somehow liberate us from them, but it's true. Our responsibility for ourselves unleashes a deeper fulfillment by allowing us to construe whatever we confront into a value that fulfills our needs. Unruly kids grant us the opportunity to be a good parent and instill discipline and responsibility. A layoff at work grants us the opportunity to experiment with new career paths we had always daydreamed about. A [terrible breakup](#) gives us the chance to take an honest look at ourselves and how our behaviors affect our relationships with loved ones.

Yes, these experiences still [hurt like a motherfucker](#). But negative experiences are part of life. The question is not whether or not we have them but what we do with them.

Responsibility allows us to leverage our pain for empowerment, to transmute our suffering into strength, our loss into opportunity.

James wasn't dumb though. He knew that values require more than a simple choice to believe them. You don't just wake up one day and decide, "I'm a happy successful person!" and become it. Values must be cultivated, consciously tried and tested and steeled by experience. Values are worthless if they don't contain some sort of real-world manifestation, some tangible benefit in the form of positive experience.

We don't always control what happens to us. But we always control a) how we interpret what happens to us, and b) how we respond to what happens to us. Therefore, whether we consciously recognize it or not, we are [always responsible for our experiences](#). Choosing to not consciously interpret events in our lives is still an interpretation of the events of our lives. Choosing to not respond

to the events in our lives is still a response to the events of our lives.

Whether we like it or not, we are always taking an active role in what is occurring with ourselves. We are always interpreting the meaning of every moment and every occurrence. We are always creating values for ourselves and others. And we are always choosing our actions based on those values. Always.

Whether we realize it or not, we are already choosing our actions. We are already responsible for our negative experiences. We just aren't always conscious of it.

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