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## The Myth of Self-Improvement *By*

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Pop psychology, *You Can Do It!* books, glossy magazines all about *Self*, new age mantras, along with an endless progression of television commercials, relentlessly pound out the message that we *can* have it all. You can be happy, successful, attractive and vibrant. You can have passion in your work, all the while tapping into an effortless, endless, wellspring of energy. It sounds sooo good! Yet if we can't do it, after trying really hard, we end up feeling like a self-help failure. All of this leaves us wondering, "What's wrong with *me*?"

Sometimes the quest for self-improvement, rather than making us feel better, leaves us feeling worse. At first exhilarating, as we continue to search for self-improvement, it can increase our stress and feeds the belief we've been trying so desperately to get rid of. That awful belief - *I Can't*.

Part of the self-improvement mantra is manifestation. If I *really* believe, if I sharpen my intent I will manifest whatever I desire. When it doesn't happen in the way we expect, what gets sharpened is a personal agreement of - *Somehow I don't get it. It will never happen. I must be, in someway, defective.* Or maybe we rationalize that all the "You Can Do It!" stuff out there is just a quick way for some folks to make barrels full of money, and that for most people it just doesn't work.

One woman wrote: *I have a strong positive belief about my success as a novelist, so much so, that occasionally I wonder if I'm deluded. Meaning, the risk/reward of having gone through a lot of savings, BELIEVING it will come back in spades... spiritually and with real life security. I feel I must be financially rewarded well to keep this up... I'm concerned I'll be disappointed if my initial reward is less than a certain amount, and I don't like feeling that way. I've worked so hard, enjoyed it, but I do desire a reward for the recognition, to make up for family and friends who thought me nuts not to have a regular job while I wrote the book.*

What struck me about this letter was the comment: *I have a strong positive belief about my success ....., so much so, that occasionally I wonder if I'm deluded.* I have received many letters from people who have wholeheartedly adopted the idea of *I Can!*, gone way out on a limb - financially, physically, emotionally - and feel like if success doesn't come back to them in the way they expect it, they'll be very disappointed! At the same time they wonder, *Am I fooling myself?*

When a man tells you that he got rich through hard work, ask him whose. --  
*Don Marquis*

True compassion is more than flinging a coin at a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. -- Martin Luther King Jr.

There is a hidden fear in this pattern. A monster of sorts hiding in the closet. If what we attempt doesn't work out as expected, we are more than just disappointed. We are devastated. Devastated because adopting the strategies found in personal growth manuals is a great strategy to avoid past pain. Thinking that you have finally found something, after all this time, that will really fix that real, yet unnamed fear is intoxicating. Perhaps even a delusion. A delusion because if we adopt the idea - *I Can!* without ever changing the real beliefs we have about ourselves, then the road to disappointment is well marked.

If the pursuit of improvement rests on a bed of fear-based beliefs it will only lead to more of the same. If the journey toward a higher level of functioning is driven by an engine fueled by fear, then each turn in the road will be experienced through the same less-than outlook that initiated the trip.

Often the motive for self-improvement rests on one simple belief. *I'm not okay as I am. No one will really accept me as I am. I know this to be true because I cannot accept myself as I am.*

Buying into the myth of self-improvement is a protective story we tell ourselves that is really a thin veneer easily tearing at distress, disappointment or perceived failure. The myth of self-improvement is self-rejection because it's seed is the belief *I'm Not*. *I'm Not* is often the real belief driving us to change. A belief driven by an engine of fear.

The drive to change is inevitable. We are LIFE. LIFE is alive, moving, evolving, growing, and ever expanding. And, LIFE exists embracing opposites, cleanly and without conflict. Why can't we be in complete self-acceptance, totally comfortable with who we are, breathing out in total surrender to what is, and then with the next in-breath, being charged with the desire to create something different, - an evolution of LIFE? Why not?

Rather than toil to improve what you believe is flawed, the real task is to recognize and clean the stories you tell about how you are not enough. You can't get better than you are, but you can always take different action, believing something else. Something else that feeds you better food. Nourishes you and feels right. **Self-love is so much easier than self-improvement.**

Rather than be obsessed with improvement, try cleaning up the stories you have about how you should be. Get rid of descriptions of better, worse, right, wrong. Use the integrity of your emotions to guide you into making decisions on how to proceed. Let your engine for change be the engine of love, self-love rejecting the lie that you

are that special one who just can't, no matter how hard you try.

The ideas, practices and advice that are found in personal growth writings are often wonderful and inspiring wisdom. Use them as a gift to yourself, not because you need to be better, but because you want to experience the pleasure of LIFE in its full expression. Because you love yourself so much that you know you deserve only the best. Do it because it feels good. Devour inspiring wisdom as an expression of the affirmation of LIFE that needs no improvement but is always creating, changing and evolving as it always has. As it always will.

In 1996, after a chance meeting at the pyramid ruins in Teotihuacan, Mexico, [Ray Dodd](#) embarked on a 6-year apprenticeship with don Miguel Ruiz M.D. (author of the best-selling book, The Four Agreements). Now mentor, teacher, and author of [The Power of Belief](#), he helps both individuals and organizations forge new beliefs and agreements to affect lasting and positive change. Ray can be reached at [ray@everydaywisdom.us](mailto:ray@everydaywisdom.us) / <http://www.everydaywisdom.us/>

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