

#UNHARMABLE

Module 2: The Impact of Core False Beliefs

From Chapter 2 of Conscious Recovery

The key problem I encounter working with wounded, depressed, and unhappy people is a lack of connection...starting from a disconnection from themselves and then with others. This is why love often becomes so distorted and destructive. When people experience a disconnection from themselves, they feel it but do not realize the problem.

— David W. Earle

What Is Spiritual Disconnection?

"I am whole and perfect in every way." From a spiritual perspective, life's journey can be seen as an attempt to reclaim this truth. In fact, even our addictions can be a result of our attempts at restoration. Even our addictions can come out of the attempt to restore the connection to our true nature. Addictive behavior is categorically a response to the felt sense that something is out of balance, that we have forgotten our essential self, forgotten the truth of who and what we are. In our addictive behavior, we are usually looking for something outside of ourselves to help us manage something that feels disturbed or broken within. It's a solution to the problem of the fragmented self. In his book *The Four Agreements*, Don Miguel Ruiz introduces us to the concept of "the domestication of the

human”—the process whereby we receive messages about, in his words, “who we should be, what we shouldn’t be, who we (are), and who we (are) not.” That’s what I’m talking about here as spiritual disconnection. It’s the separation from our essential nature.

We come into this world as spiritual beings intuitively experiencing our oneness with Source. If you look at a very small child, you recognize this connection with the pristine self. My first book *Conscious Being* opens with the following story that illustrates this: A young couple had a toddler, and then they had a second baby. When they brought the baby home, they realized the toddler was tiptoeing and sneaking into the infant’s room at night. Because they were curious about this, they put up a baby cam to record what the toddler was doing in the room. To their surprise they discovered that the toddler was leaning over the crib and saying to the infant, “Please tell me about God. I’m beginning to forget.”

This is a powerful demonstration of the domestication of the human. We come into this world seeking the love that we know we are. We are designed to receive love, to see our love reflected back to us. But many of us don’t experience that as small children. Or we do, but it’s not enough. It’s mixed up with other conflicting messages. From a very early age, life begins to teach us the opposite of what we come here intuitively knowing. We come into this world knowing our essential nature and our oneness with Source, but very quickly “the tall people” begin to teach us otherwise. These adults, often very loving and well-meaning, begin (quite often unconsciously) teaching us about “the world.” They teach us attitudes and approaches to life like competition, fear, scarcity, and separation. I love the phrase “domestication of the human” because it calls to mind the domestication of wild animals. When we domesticate animals, we call it “breaking them,” or

"breaking their spirit." That's what happens to human beings as we enter this realm of existence. Most of us get taught all sorts of things that are a fundamental lie about who and what we genuinely are.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a psychological model that endeavors to describe the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The most important precept of attachment theory is that a baby needs to develop a loving relationship with at least one primary caregiver for the child's successful spiritual and emotional development, and for learning how to effectively normalize their emotions. In the presence of a sensitive and receptive caregiver, the infant will use the caregiver as a "safe base" from which to explore. This is not to say that anyone can parent "perfectly." For example, there are times when parents feel exhausted or preoccupied, or life distracts them with daily activities and tasks. So, even the most attentive parents can sever the attachment or connection. Because of these childhood experiences, as adults, we develop into one of these three different unhealthy attachment styles: avoidant, anxious, or anxious-avoidant. The intention is to move toward what is called secure attachment. I prefer to use the term authentic attachment.

The following are some characteristics of the four different attachment styles. Adults with avoidant attachment desire a high level of independence, often appearing to avoid attachment altogether. They view themselves as self-reliant, invulnerable to attachment feelings and not needing close relationships. They tend to suppress their feelings, dealing with rejection by distancing themselves from partners of whom they often have a poor

opinion. Adults with anxious attachment seek elevated levels of intimacy, approval and receptiveness from partners, and can easily become overly dependent. They tend to be less trusting, have less positive views about themselves than the people in their lives, and may display high levels of emotional self-expression, worry and impulsiveness in their relationships. Adults with anxious-avoidant attachment have mixed feelings about close relationships, simultaneously desiring and feeling uncomfortable with emotional closeness. They tend to mistrust their partners and can often view themselves as unworthy. Similar to avoidant attached adults, anxious-avoidant adults tend to seek less intimacy, and suppress their feelings. Conversely, authentically attached adults foster positive views of themselves, their companions and their relationships. They feel comfortable with intimacy and independence, and have an easy time balancing the two.

We all want to experience connection. When we are disconnected from our essential self, we attempt to attach to something or someone in the external realm to find peace, happiness, or simply numb out the pain of feeling the deep disconnection. It is easy to see how the unhealthy external attachment styles can lead to many forms of addictions. In the most simplistic perspective, the pain of living with these detrimental attachment styles will “need” to be relieved in some way. And for anyone who has compulsive tendencies, this often provokes and fuels addictive behavior.

Core False Beliefs

If we’re born with a solid connection to our divine nature, what happens to that connection? Most of us come into a world that teaches us about fear, separation, and competition. We learn things about ourselves and our world

that are contrary to the fundamental truth that we are whole and perfect. Adults, often well-meaning, try to prepare us for the world by teaching us to fight, to wall off our emotions, to criticize. These lessons are based on lies that I call “core false beliefs.” The deepest root of addiction is this: we learn and we appropriate core false beliefs, which break the connection with our true nature. This fragments us and pushes us to turn outward for validation, love, and peace of mind.

Let’s look at an example: Sylvia’s coworkers and acquaintances see her as an accomplished professional, a caring friend, and a loving mother. But her intimate relationships are crippled by a set of core false beliefs that sprang from a troubled childhood. They go something like this: “I am never going to succeed. Things are never going to go smoothly for me. I am never going to fix my life.” Looking through the lens of these core false beliefs, Sylvia lives in a state of relentless disconnect between how she sees herself (failed, struggling, broken) and what she yearns for (success, ease, wholeness). So, no matter how much she accomplishes, she will never truly experience her own achievement. She gets extremely high marks on her annual evaluation at work, for instance, with only one small element tagged for improvement, yet she will never see this as success. Because of her core false beliefs, all she can focus on is that one area for improvement, which she interprets as a massive failure.

Just as Sylvia’s core false beliefs trap her into seeing her life as a series of failures, they also trap her into a life of constant striving to achieve. Those false beliefs force Sylvia to hang onto the goal of success; striving for success becomes her addiction. Ashamed by her limitations, her mistakes, her perceived weakness, she’s convinced that they are her true self. She pushes them into the shadow, hiding them from others as she tries to present a

perfect image to the world. So, she works constantly at trying to be the perfect partner, the perfect employee, the perfect mother. Eventually, Sylvia turns to drugs and alcohol to find relief from the self-imposed pressure she is living with. Let me clarify one thing: The perfection Sylvia is after is not the perfection she was born into, it's not the wholeness that is her birthright. It's a distorted version of that original perfection. Sylvia tries to wrest it from outside herself instead of finding and connecting with what she essentially is.

Brilliant Strategies

Our core false beliefs, which frequently stem from generalized unresolved trauma and spiritual disconnection, may leave us feeling broken. In response, we might look for things to make that feeling go away. That is often the foundational malady of addictive behavior. I have seen it repeatedly: What is most often at the core of addictive behavior is this sense of brokenness within and the search for something outside ourselves to help us manage the resulting discomfort. Looked at in this way, addictive behavior can be seen as a strategy, even a brilliant strategy, for survival. When our sense of self is fragmented, when we see ourselves as fundamentally broken, that's a very, very painful way to live. We feel like we're surviving rather than thriving, walking around with a sense of separation, a feeling of fear, a belief that we can't reveal our true selves because there's something wrong with us. And when we discover something like gambling or sex or drugs, it can bring us relief from that terrible pain. Many clients have told me that their addiction was the most consistent relationship in their life. That's a powerful awareness.

Addictive behavior is a strategy that may work for a long time; it might succeed in protecting us from the desperation that might otherwise overwhelm us. If Sylvia suddenly lost her work or her family, for instance, then she might be overwhelmed by the sense of worthlessness that fuels her workaholism, and it might prove too much for her to bear. Her addiction to accomplishment keeps her alive, at least for now. I, myself used drugs and alcohol to numb the pain of my core false beliefs; my substance abuse kept me from killing myself or losing my sanity. For me, drugs and alcohol were a brilliant strategy that worked well—until they stopped serving me.

It's not just a matter of basic survival or avoiding suicide or insanity. Our addictive strategies can help us make sense of the world and find relief from pain and suffering. If we have a core belief that the world is not safe—if that is our lived experience, our reality—then we tend to develop strategies for making these beliefs more bearable. We might shut down emotionally, refusing to open to others. We might implement stringent physical security measures to try to protect ourselves and our families. We might become overly controlling. These things serve not only to keep us from spiraling into a state of chronic anxiety but also to validate our core false belief in the inherent danger of life.

Addiction is a Brilliant Strategy

We often hear addictive behavior described in other terms—as a disease, or as a coping mechanism. Both can seem inherently negative in connotation. They suggest that there's something wrong that needs to be fixed. “I am an addict and that's what's wrong.” In the western medical model, the problem is the disease of addiction, and it's addressed by

treating the symptoms, whether they be physical, social, or emotional. And calling addiction a “coping mechanism” suggests that a person is less able to function than “normal” people and needs the crutch of the addictive behavior to get along in life.

Both perspectives have their place in our recovery. But they are limited. They both see addiction as the problem rather than as a sign that something is out of alignment internally, on the spiritual level. They are based on a negative assessment of addictive behavior (“it’s the problem”), and this makes it difficult to see anything else. Reframing addiction as a brilliant strategy, as a self-preserving human response to a problem, removes the negative judgment from our perspective and invites us to ask ourselves a couple of key questions: “What is my addictive behavior a response to? What problem is it trying to solve?” As a brilliant strategy, addictive behavior—whether it using drugs and alcohol, gambling, sex, work, etc.—can serve to bring relief from a profound sense of uneasiness in the world, of disconnection and fragmentation. Recognizing addictive behavior as a brilliant strategy gives us clarity about what’s authentically happening inside. It tells us something about the wholeness we are truly seeking. It tells us, with terrifying clarity, where we're stuck, where we're shut down, and where we're closed off. Then we can simply ask the questions: “Is this strategy still working? Is it still serving me? Is there a better way?”

Other Brilliant Strategies

Using a substance like alcohol or drugs is only one of the brilliant strategies people use to deal with the pain of spiritual disconnection. There are many, many others. If we suffer, like Sylvia, from the core false belief that we are

fundamentally broken, then we might keep the pain of that belief at bay with the brilliant strategy of maintaining “good” behavior; following the rules and striving for success. If we see the world as chaotic, then we might numb the resulting fear by keeping our lives as ordered and tidy as possible. If we believe that we lack the inner strength or virtue to truly belong anywhere, then we might try to make things “right” by surrendering ourselves to some external power “out there,” like God, a recovery program, or a group.

One thing to be aware of is noticing if new “strategies” or addictions start to emerge once you let go of your primary addiction. This is often called “cross-addiction” because new addictions can surface as we move away from the original substance or behavior. I’ve heard it referred to as “whack-a-mole” because new addictions can pop up as we move into recovery. Remaining aware of this and practicing the tools and principles introduced in this course can assist you in deepening your recovery rather than switching to new addictions.

The Inward Journey

Whichever brilliant strategies we practice; they are most likely directed outward because we’re seeing the solution as external. It seems like most addictions come out of a victim’s perspective, in which we see life as something that happens to us. Our problems are caused by other people, by institutions like school or government, even by God—everything is caused by circumstances beyond our control, forces we can’t manage. Often this viewpoint stems from our earliest experiences, which taught us that we are powerless to change anything directly and that the only way to

get something we need is by sheer force or manipulation. Victim consciousness leaves us feeling powerless over circumstances, and other people's behavior seems to have way too much impact on our lives. This viewpoint offers us little choice. We feel trapped.

Living this way is excruciatingly painful so, of course, we're going to look outside ourselves for something to numb that pain. Our happiness depends on other people and external circumstances, so we try to manipulate those things to get what we want: "If I could just make enough money ... If my boss would just recognize me ..." or "Everything will be fine if I acknowledge that I am a total failure and rely on God."

Whatever our brilliant strategy, chances are it will initially work, sometimes even for years. If it doesn't, we'll find a different strategy. But ultimately, all outward-directed strategies end up affirming that there's something wrong with us and that something out there is going to fix us. These strategies limit our responses to life. If things do not go the way we want, we can only conclude that it's because we have done something wrong, or because we are wrong. Ultimately, our brilliant strategies stop working because they are limited. They are inadequate in that they bring only temporary relief from feelings of fragmentation. And they are limiting in that they ultimately strengthen and solidify our belief in our own powerlessness; they offer no other perspective.

Seeing addictive behavior as a brilliant strategy for minimizing pain and staying alive helps us to ask the further questions, "Is my addiction still working as a solution? Is the strategy still brilliant?" Maybe for you it is. Maybe for now there's too much going on in your life and you need to keep seeing the world as you've always seen it. Maybe you're not ready or able

at this time to look any deeper. However, I want to encourage you to investigate a little further here. Why did you sign up for this course? Has something happened in your life that caused you to question whether there might be another way? Are you tired of trying to orchestrate everything around you to maintain stability? Could it be that you're ready to sit with the discomfort of this healing work if that means finding a deeper recovery?

Our spiritual development isn't always linear. When we're challenged by something that triggers an old pattern, we might slip from a new understanding back into an earlier one. One moment we might be feeling full of confidence and trust that everything is working out, and the next moment we are back in a feeling of powerlessness. So, it might serve us to be patient with ourselves and open to what the process is wanting to reveal to us.

My invitation to you in this moment is to really go within and ask yourself: "What is the main strategy that I have been using to try to feel more whole and more connected, or to feel less pain? And is that strategy still working?" If not, are you ready to make a conscious choice to move on? Are you ready to start recognizing that you have been making choices all along? Your addiction was a choice, a brilliant strategy to keep you safe, or whole, or alive. It may be time to let it go and see what else is out there. And, more accurately, see what else is inside of you.

Shifting Consciousness

When the strategy of your addiction is no longer working, when your addictive behaviors have become maladaptive and no longer function to

bring you a sense of relief, then they become what we might call a dis-ease. Or rather, they become a side-effect, as it were, of your underlying spiritual disconnection. Not only do your addictive behaviors stop working, they begin to cause more problems, more separation. So, the very thing you've been using to try to get more connection, or at least to relieve your sense of disconnection, is now causing more separation. Now you've got a different problem on your hands, one that requires a new solution, a new way of living. When the strategy of your addiction is failing so acutely that you are desperate, you may just become willing to step out of the path you know and try a different way. That's when you can experience a shift in consciousness.

Let's take alcohol for example, because it's a very common addiction. Drinking is a solution that works well in the beginning but eventually causes separation rather than connection. When alcohol goes from being a brilliant solution to being the focus of our lives, it can cause damage to our relationships, our ability to function in the workplace, and so on. We're all familiar with what happens when the brilliant strategy of using alcohol stops working.

Let's say you have entered recovery because of the ill effects of your addiction, but you haven't looked at the causes of the addictive behavior. You might think, "I'm solving the problem of my addiction, so now I will feel better!" But when you put down the alcohol, when you let go of that addiction, what may very well happen instead is that you now start to feel the pain of the unresolved trauma, spiritual disconnection, or toxic shame that caused the addiction in the first place. Even after you've recovered physically, you might still feel awful. That's because you've let go of the solution, not the problem. Yes, you needed to let it go. But it was a solution

that played a very key role in your life, perhaps for many, many years. Recognizing this as a loss opens a doorway to some of the inner work that will bring deeper healing.

A New Way of Being

How we perceive the world is how we experience the world. When we change our perspective, the world seems to change. But this may not always be easy. Letting go of a strategy that you've been using for a long time is not always a straightforward process. So, as you work through this course, you'll be learning not only what's at the root of your addiction, but more importantly, how to use spiritual practices to move forward into a new way of being. It's one that can help you return to a sense of wholeness and peace. These disciplines include tools for nurturing your ability to be truly present and conscious, like meditation and an awareness of language. We'll also look at the importance of creating a safe place, building community, and developing authenticity. All along we'll be doing the work of uncovering and dismantling those strategies that no longer serve you and the ideas and beliefs that lie beneath them.

Perhaps you've walked around for years, maybe for as long as you can remember, with beliefs about who and what you are that leave you feeling broken and shattered. Maybe you are beginning to see that these beliefs have caused you to bury whole portions of yourself into the shadow, never to be shared with others. Perhaps you recognize that much of what you do feels out of your control because this strategy is no longer working for you, it's now trapping you. If so, you're in a place of shifting consciousness. It can be a daunting place, because you're letting go of the tried and true and are

waiting for something new, something you can't see yet. Let me reassure you: You can get through this. Beyond this seemingly fragmented self lies your essential self, which has always been there, whole and perfect, unharmed and unharmable. I want to reiterate that, underneath all the addictive behavior, you are whole and perfect in every way, right in this moment. And my invitation for you is to tap deeply into that truth and see what happens.