

The Quest4Life Podcast Show Notes:

Season #3, Episode #32: The Labyrinth of Your Mind

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Some would say that freedom is the ability to choose or chart the course of their life, and they would be right in part.

Others would point to the Constitution, which outlines specific rights guaranteed to us by virtue of being a U.S. citizen, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, the right to keep and bear arms, the right to due process under the law, etc., and they would be right in part.

Still others would assert that freedom is the ability to think whatever thoughts they want or hold whatever beliefs they have, and they would be right in part.

The goal isn't to debate the definition of freedom or the merits of what constitutes living a free life but rather it is to discuss the prerequisite for what it means to have true freedom in lieu of living a life trapped in the labyrinth of your mind.

Doing so allows you to level-up your mindset so you can start arguing for your potential by creating a positive feedback loop instead of perpetuating a negative feedback loop rife with negative self-talk and self-limiting beliefs that undermine your dreams.

“Labyrinth” Defined

The word “labyrinth” isn't used all that often in contemporary culture. In Greek mythology, a labyrinth was an elaborate, confusing structure, or tortuous arrangement.

Another way of describing it is a labyrinth is a complicated irregular network of passages or paths in which it is difficult to find one's way.

Put simply, a labyrinth is a maze.

Negative Self-Talk

As with any complicated maze, it is challenging to find your way to the other side of it without getting lost or turned around. In many cases, you end up right back where you started.

This is what happens when you engage in negative self-talk or buy into the beliefs that limited your potential.

For context, self-talk is the stream of thoughts and dialogue in your mind. And this chatter takes a variety of forms, such as “The Inner Critic,” “The Inner Cheer-leader,” “The Inner Child,” or “The Inner Adult.”

What you have to know is that self-talk is a normal part of the human experience, as it's often linked to past experiences, core beliefs, and cognitive distortions, such as filtering out the positive and only focusing on the negative aspects of life, blaming yourself for anything bad that happens even when there is no evidence to justify the blame, and/or catastrophizing whereby your mind simply emphasizes the worst-case scenario.

This type of negative self-talk can have massive implications on your self-worth and overall perception of the world. Said differently, when you engage in self-defeating, negative self-talk, you get trapped in the labyrinth of your mind.

You get trapped in the maze of your thoughts and have little understanding or ability to find your way to the other side, which is why, in many cases, you end up right back where you started because where you started is familiar because there is “peace” in what's familiar versus what's unknown.

This approach, however, is entirely unhelpful if you desire to evolve into a better, more productive version of yourself, which is the version of yourself that supplies the world and the people you let into your world the gifts you have to offer and the potential you must realize.

Prerequisite for Freedom

The prerequisite for achieving this type of freedom is choosing that you don't want to suffer anymore. You must choose that there is no justifiable reason for the self-imposed anxiety, stress, and fear you create in your mind.

Depending on your background, including your exposure to religion, philosophy, or modern-day social media, you may advocate the perspective that “life is suffering.” In fact, the Buddha said that “all life is suffering,” but I'm not convinced that people fully grasp what he was asserting.

Most people do not understand how much they are suffering and/or what it's like not to suffer. It's as if suffering is a human being's default position. As Michael Singer, author of the NYT's best-selling book, *The Untethered Soul*, states, “Your inner sensitivities expose you to a minute-to-minute, constant situation in which you are suffering to one degree or another.”

It's an interesting state of affairs because the pattern of “normal” life includes your suffering and, in many ways, you only notice your suffering when your suffering is made worse .

As a default position, your suffering is something you battle with, which, in many ways, is the negative self-talk or self-limiting beliefs you continually perpetuate. You're trapped in the labyrinth of your mind.

Ironically, what most people do to try and find their way out of this maze is to double-down on controlling things in their external environment to try and make themselves feel better.

People think and believe that if they can control all aspects of their external environment, they will find a sense of peace, but until you address the core issue, controlling aspects of the external environment is always a moving target, but ask yourself, “What have I given my mind to?” and “What stories do I tell myself?”

For example, you may have given your mind to something like, “I want to be loved and accepted by everyone. I don’t want any- one to speak badly of me. I don’t want anything to happen that I don’t like or that causes me pain.”

For those things to happen or not to happen, people adjust to minimize the suffering that exists in their mind.

For example, I want to be loved and accepted by everyone so when I’m at work, I’m going to always go above and beyond even if it means sacrificing time outside of work. Ironically, this disallows you, in your mind, to be loved and accepted by everyone because you’re sacrificing time you would otherwise spend with people outside of work because you’re so concerned about being loved and accepted by everyone at work. And what do you do with that?

You can see how you’re trapped in the labyrinth of your mind because it is impossible to live up to the standard you’ve set for yourself to be loved and accepted by everyone.

Said differently, there is no way for you to reconcile the chatter of your mind and, as a result, you perpetuate your suffering, which runs counter to your desire to avoid anything you don’t like or that causes you pain...AND...in your pursuit of doing whatever it takes to be loved and accepted by everyone, you will fail, which leads others to speak badly of you. I don’t know about you, but that doesn’t feel like freedom.

And while you can speak freely and think what you want, believe what you want, and chart the course of your life, being trapped in the labyrinth of your mind isn’t freedom. It’s the opposite.

It’s a prison.

The solution?

Like everything, there is no one thing, no panacea that solves all of it for you. But there are ways that allow you to level-up your mindset, so you have a shot at finding your way out of the maze.

Solutions

First, you must acknowledge that your mindset IS NOT okay. You’re not a victim but rather you’ve bought into what you’ve sold yourself and it doesn’t have to be that way. Your brain hasn’t done anything wrong because your brain is built for self-preservation, but your interpretation, your mindset is “off.”

Further, suffering doesn’t have to be your default position. In fact, experiencing pain and suffering is a gift (i.e., stomachache after overeating; sore muscles after training hard).

If you find yourself trapped in the labyrinth of your mind, your mind is telling you that something is wrong. Otherwise, you wouldn't feel suffering. You would feel an over-arching sense of peace and calm because the self-defeating chatter would cease.

Once you accept that your current mindset is not okay, because your mind is communicating that things aren't okay, you can begin pressing forward into the maze.

Next, you must stop trying to control your external environment to avoid suffering and/or worrying about suffering in the future. Most people attempt to fix what's going on inside them, what's going on in their mind by trying to get better at playing the external games they've always played (i.e., seeking external validation).

We are conditioned to believe that to solve our inner problems we must change something outside of ourselves. And when we hold this faulty belief, we give ourselves bad advice and then, we reinforce this flawed belief by continually attempting to change things outside of ourselves.

You can see how the momentum of such a faulty belief creates momentum and makes it increasingly difficult for you to get out of your own way. The only way to fix your inner problems is to address your inner problems through prayer, meditation, or anything else that helps quiet your mind.

Ironically, fixing your inner problems is inversely related to fixing your external problems, which is to say that if you find your way out of the maze and begin realizing your potential, what you choose to focus on and how you interact with the things in your external environment begin to change.

Finally, and this is by no means a comprehensive list, you must learn that everything is neutral until you give it meaning.

Human beings are the only organism in the known universe that are "meaning giving creatures." And when you create meaning, you create melodrama. It becomes a movie in your mind that you replay over and over and over.

Interestingly, you're the only one creating the unique meaning you give to situations...and it's all in your mind!

No one else is trapped in the labyrinth of your mind with you. No one else gives meaning to situations the same way you do. And when you can quiet your mind, you can view your persona for what it is. You can look on the voice, the constant chatter with some measure of compassion. You can look at what you're aware of as a "witness" of sorts and choose whether you want to actively participate in the melodrama.

Doing so, however, means that you're right back where you started. You'll be right back at the start of the maze only to feel overwhelmed by the journey you won't complete unless you choose a different path that opens new and different pathways so you can get to the other side.

Make no mistake, this is crazy hard, but the first place to start is by going inward.

Final Thoughts

Consider reflecting on the concepts presented.

Ask yourself, "How is what I'm thinking about unfolding or playing itself out in my life?"

From there, consider how you're thinking about what you're thinking about.

Ask yourself, "What meaning am I giving to specific circumstances or situations and is it leading to a productive or counterproductive mindset?"

From there, ask yourself, "What choices do I need to make that will lead me to creating a productive mindset?"

Examples may include going inward, not trying to control things in your external environment, surrounding yourself with people that challenge your mindset, moving beyond people that keep you stuck, and the like.

All in, you get to choose whether you remain imprisoned in the labyrinth of your mind or you liberate yourself to achieve ultimate freedom.

As usual, it's food for thought, Fellow Questers.