

## Inspired Life Formula with Nina Lockwood

### Module 4: Access Inner Freedom

This is Nina Lockwood and welcome to the Inspired Life Formula, Module 4: Access Inner Freedom. In this module we're going to be covering the principles and the practices that will enable you to live your life based on the freedom that comes from choice: the choice YOU make about how you see the world; about which of your feelings you encourage and which thoughts you want to live your life by. We'll also examine what's keeping you from making those choices. The goal is for you to be able to choose the story that supports the life you want to live, to have inner peace to be happy and to let those qualities spread out into the world around you.

If you have a sense that your life could improve dramatically if you just weren't being triggered emotionally or hung up by thoughts of what shouldn't be or can't be, then the best place to begin making changes is by taking a look at how you interpret the things that happen in your life.

Life is a never-ending series of stories (or interpretations)

Humans are storytellers. It's part of who we are as a species. Storytelling gives us endless ways of looking at life. Stories connect us, give us meaning and context, and enable us to chart our own personal course in the world. At the same time, it's important to understand that these stories or interpretations are just that - stories and interpretations. They are not facts; they are one way - out of many ways - we make sense of the world. The more we understand that interpretations and beliefs are stories and not necessarily the truth, we get a little more objective and a little less attached to what we believe and how it makes us feel. Especially when those stories cause us to feel that we are anything less than a joyful expression of the whole of life.

The stories we live by shape our beliefs about "the way life is" or "the way life should be" and give us the framework on which our emotions are played out. So if we believe a thing to be true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, our emotions will reflect those beliefs. In earlier modules we've talked about the fact that our beliefs are often largely based on what others

have told us is true. That includes what we've been told, what we read or hear or see in the media and even the mental and emotional patterns that may be passed down to us genetically from our ancestors. In our everyday life, some of our beliefs are conscious and intentional but many of them, especially the ones that affect our self worth or our sense of possibility, are hidden in the depths of our psyche.

We also develop our beliefs as a result of our physiological and emotional reactions to people and situations around us: whether there's danger or safety, for example. In those situations, we initially experience purely physical sensations to which we then assign explanations with names and causes and those will color what we believe and how we react emotionally. If you think about it, as infants and then toddlers and then young children the sensations we express are labeled by our parents - for us they're just sensations, and they pass as easily as they appear. Here, too, it's important to be able to identify what we're feeling but the downside to that is once we name it, we give it a reality, a solidity that becomes embedded in our idea of who we are and can then take on a life of its own. Those feelings are reinforced by what we tell ourselves we should be feeling and why we can't live without them. We justify their existence, believing that those feelings are an accurate and honest response to what's happening in our lives which in turn justifies the necessity of having them and expressing them rather than letting them come and go without having to believe in them. There's a fine line between reacting with unexamined feelings because "feelings never lie" (another story) and being able to discern what your inner wisdom shows you is true for you.

However our beliefs come to be, the fact is that we (or someone else) interprets what is going on around us and within us. And that interpretation affects how we experience our future. Those beliefs also color our past and our present by setting up requirements for things we either want or don't want to have happen. So, coming or going, we are trained to see reality and experience reality within pretty narrow parameters.

We absolutely need to have a way of interpreting what happens to us, and the variety and adventure in the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, where we're going, gives us a way to appreciate the vastness of life. So the real question is not whether we should interpret what we experience,

but whether those interpretations enable us to be happier, more fulfilled, and more connected to others? Or do those stories make us feel isolated, unhappy and frustrated?

### Question the Meaning

We spend endless amounts of time and energy telling ourselves why things happen and what they mean, mostly because we feel better when we can make sense of what's going on. We are taught that having a way to interpret life will make it easier for us. Sometimes that is true but it can be equally not true. We can get in our own way and complicate our lives by trying to fit it to an interpretation that seems true. That being said, It's really important to realize that, in and of themselves, events are neither good and not bad. Shakespeare said this in his play, Hamlet: "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." No doubt you've heard some variation of this statement, and most people see the truth of it but we rarely understand the implications. I'm sure there are many situations you can remember that may have appeared bad for you but good for someone else. Or that appeared to be bad in the moment but later turned out to be a blessing.

So if nothing is good or bad in and of itself (let's call that it's worth or it's goodness or value), and the consequences of each event are also neither good nor bad that means that nothing has any meaning other than what we give it. At first that might seem like we're going to end up floating down the proverbial river of life without a paddle. But seem from another angle, this lack of or fluidity in meaning is incredibly powerful when we understand how it can change our lives.

For one thing, it means that YOU get to choose the meaning of the events that happen to you. And if you get to choose the meaning, then you get to choose how you want to react and what you want to do next. For example, let's say you've written a book and when you take it to a publisher, they reject it. You could react by feeling deflated and depressed because your old interpretation labels this as rejection or failure. Or you could realize the meaning you used to have for this kind of event is not true and you could choose a different interpretation and a new meaning and see this event as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. You could choose to be open to

whatever else wants to unfold rather than simply giving up and burying yourself in a hole. You don't have to be a victim to events - you can give them a new meaning, a new spin, so that you can create or allow something better to occur. It's important to remember that although you may not be in control of what events occur or how they unfold, you can learn to be in control of how you interpret and respond to them. Byron Katie, the well known spiritual teacher and creator of The Work, said this: Life happens for you, not to you. This is a powerful turnaround of perspective that we can play with so that we are open to the possibility that Life is gifting us with circumstances, not thwarting us by them. Is this a perspective you can see the value of?

### Life is an Illusion

Did you ever wonder about the lyrics in the children's song "Row, row row your boat"? I'm referring specifically to this one: "Merrily merrily merrily merrily, life is but a dream". What could that possibly mean? Is life a dream? Do we really live in a world of illusion? This idea has been passed down through religions, through literature, through great works of art and more recently, through the study of quantum physics. Each of us has a unique way of perceiving the world; our senses, our nervous system, our memories are different from everyone else's on the planet. We may agree that things exist and we may generally agree on the reason why or what we should do about it but our experience of "out there" is totally unique to us. It's merely a way of speaking to say that we share the same reality.

Let's say you're locked into a story that tells you what you are experiencing is "true" or ultimate: you've been fired from your job and you feel like a failure. If you're attached to this event as a reflection of truth you'll feel powerless to change the effect it has on you to limit or restrict you. But! when you realize that what appears is not real or permanent in any ultimate sense, it will no longer have the same effect on you. Why? When something is relatively true, it's transient, impermanent, like a shadow on a screen, and something else - a new opportunity, for example, is right beyond it. This is what many of our fairy tales are about. Once you see through the appearance and you realize that nothing is as it appears to be, you can stop being a slave to what appears to be and to the belief that it's the only reality there is. You are free to choose to react to that event

differently, to choose another experience, with a view of something better in mind. You can wake up to realizing the truth behind the illusion, and become a master at choosing a greater or more accurate expression of what you'd like to have, be or do.

Here's an example of how Neale Donald Walsh interprets what we often interpret as a setback or an obstacle. He believes that in the process of personal creation it's highly probably that the opposite of what we want will appear, not to stop us but to create a context in which opportunity can manifest. An apparent failure is simply the context or the setting for a new choice. He believes that oftentimes we need to have the opposite come up in order for us to see the contrast of what appeared impossible now being our springboard to what it is that we want to create. Another perspective, that of Hale Dwoskin of The Sedona Method is that when you're setting a goal, your internal resistance to this goal will automatically arise because that's what's in your way so you then have the opportunity to release it so that you can accomplish your goal. In either case, can you see how the only thing that's stopping you is your interpretation? And how you interpret what happens to you controls how you feel about it. Make a shift in one and the other will follow.

Most of us believe we're limited by what happens to us, not how we think about what happens. This is a default mechanism that's very old and very entrenched. When humans were evolving and still living from their fight or flight reptilian brains, this was a very practical way of surviving. We were really victims of our circumstances - until we learned how to adapt to them. But today, most of us have gone beyond a survival mentality and are looking for a way to thrive. And thriving requires us to pay attention to where we might be getting in our own way, so that we can make the necessary adjustments. And those adjustments will provide us with the inner freedom to enjoy life and help others do the same.

Where we almost always get in our own way is when we're in highly charged emotional situations, where we're reminded - consciously or unconsciously - of unresolved events from our past. If we're confused about what's going on or if we're feeling threatened emotionally, we forget we have a choice both in how we think and how we express ourselves. We prevent our compassion, our reason and our natural ability to discern

what's needed from guiding our actions, and we prevent ourselves from consciously selecting the outcome we want, both for ourselves and for others.

When you learn to get out of your own way, you can start asking yourself what kind of experience you want to have in life rather than how to prevent or avoid what you don't want. This is a proactive rather than reactive approach and that in itself will give you more choices. You can begin asking what you want in the moment rather than get caught up in defensive reactions as you're being swept away by habitual thoughts or feelings. Despite what you may have learned through your socialization or your therapy or any of the many theories you've been introduced to, it's not a done deal that you are locked into your beliefs. You can choose different beliefs if the ones you have are not bringing you closer to happiness and fulfillment. You can choose to let go of feelings that have been making you miserable for as long as you can remember. It's easier than you might think to change your story - or give it up altogether so that the natural feelings that are part of who you really are - peace, love, compassion, generosity of spirit can be your default. As you choose how you want to feel instead of defaulting to unexamined feelings from your past, you discover that nothing is really opposing you and that everything is here to assist you.

To that end, I'd like to share with you two different but complimentary methods of eliminating emotional and mental suffering so you can become happier and more in harmony within yourself and with the world. Both of these methods have the capability of evoking deep self awareness. The first method is called The Work and was created by Byron Katie. This is a simple process of self inquiry that allows you to question your stressful thoughts and allowing you to discover what's really going on. Questioning your stressful thoughts reduces their power to cause you pain and reveals the truth that lies beyond them.

The second is The Sedona Method, created by Lester Levenson and further developed by Hale Dwoskin. It, too, is a simple form of self inquiry in which you give yourself permission to let go of troubling thoughts and painful emotions so you can live from your real self. You make a choice to release them that will free you to make positive changes in how you deal with your world so you can change your life for the better.

In the exercises that follow, I'll explain each of these techniques in more detail and will guide you through sample exercises that you can adapt for your own circumstances. Both of these methods can be used in the heat of the moment, so to speak, as well as before or after an event that's likely to trigger difficult feelings. These tools are simple and powerful; they don't require you to relive painful memories or analyze the origins of your thoughts and feelings. They do, however, point you to the simple truth of who you and the joy to be found in living.

As with all of the modules, I highly encourage you to do your best to record your observations and experiences in your journal as well as on the feedback form provided for this module.