

Elephant and The Rope

There is a story about a man who, as he was passing some elephants, suddenly stopped, confused by the fact that these huge creatures were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away from their bonds but for some reason, they did not.

He saw a trainer nearby and asked why these animals just stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well," the trainer said, "when they are very young and much smaller we use the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free."

The man was amazed. These animals could at any time break free from their bonds but because they believed they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were.

Like the elephants, how many of us go through life hanging onto a belief that we cannot do something, simply because we failed at it once before? I think every one of us can relate to this story and the feeling of having failed at something or another over the years. Over time, we can begin to think that we are not capable of doing a particular thing and we accept this as the truth and limit ourselves to a very confined world. We think to ourselves 'ah I tried that before and it didn't work out, what is the point in trying it again and wasting my time, I don't want to look like a fool!' And this is how we start to shrink and contract and settle for a life that is 'safe' and 'less than exciting'. However, if we could look at all the so-called 'failures' in our lives as just stepping stones along our path and decide to respond in a way that is positive, saying 'ah well, at least I tried, now I know what doesn't work so it makes my next attempt clearer!' Treat it like a process of elimination, gathering momentum and staying focused on what we would like to achieve, trying this way and that until we succeed!