



## **Our Minds Can Adapt To Anything**

It may surprise you to know that the ability to adapt and exist in difficult circumstances is a basic human survival skill. The human mind is a fabulous tool. It has amazing coping skills to allow us to exist and survive under adverse circumstances.

Animals have this skill as well. A good example of this is what happens to circus elephants. Let me share with you a story about elephants I have heard many times:

A man once went to the circus with his young daughter. He was surprised when he saw a group of eight elephants and found that each was tethered by only a small rope attached to a ring on an iron leg shackle. Each of the small ropes was tied to a much larger rope that was staked to the ground. The ropes and stakes were no match for the size and strength of the elephant. Any one of them could have easily walked away to explore the nearby shopping mall. The man couldn't help but wonder why they didn't break free, so he questioned the trainer.

He discovered that when they are very young, elephants are chained by the leg to immovable stakes. For several weeks, they struggle to free themselves. Little by little, they come to the realization that they can't move about freely when they are tied by the right rear leg. The elephants at the circus didn't roam around because they believed they couldn't. Being six tons, they could have easily broken free, however the tethers in their minds were stronger than any chain or rope.



The same type of coping mechanism is at work with prisoners of war. If held in captivity long enough, they begin to perceive their world in the context of prison life and thoughts of escape or going back to a regular life fade away. They cope with daily life, torture, and constant abuse by becoming immune to the horror of it. Eventually it becomes their new “reality” and they don’t consciously think of it anymore. They settle into acceptance.

This is also true to a much lesser degree in our own daily life. If you hear others frequently tell you what you “can’t” do, you become convinced and adapt to those limits. Though external sources may affect your ideas of who you are, the worst and most resistant source of criticism comes from within – from the ingrained belief systems we have acquired and developed in our own minds.