As Shakespeare said, the world is neither "good or bad, but thinking makes it so"

Psychologists have spent decades studying how our core beliefs about ourselves shape our actions and how we feel about our lives. For example, if we believe our future is gloomy, we're more likely to be depressed.

Depression and feelings of depression are different from feeling sad. Depression is a mental illness that can affect mood, thoughts and behavior. What distinguishes a mental illness, such as depression, from normal feelings such as sadness, is that mental illnesses cause ongoing stress. It can also severely interfere with a person's ability to function. Most mental illnesses can be treated with medication and therapy.

If we have a "growth mindset," then we're more likely to feel happy and put effort into what we do. A growth mindset is a view that we can develop our minds and skills with effort and practice. This mindset encourages confidence in our ability to shape our lives. Until recently, psychologists have not focused on how the beliefs we have about the world we live in can also affect our lives.
Our beliefs about the world can affect our lives in powerful ways, according to new research done by Jeremy Clifton and his research team at the University of Pennsylvania. They call these beliefs "primal world beliefs," or "primals" for short. A report of their findings was recently published in the academic journal Psychological Assessment.

**Beliefs About The World**

Clifton’s work is the first attempt to record every primal world belief that people hold. Over the past five years, his team analyzed more than 80,000 tweets. They also studied the literature, religious writings and historical texts of cultures around the world. They researched movies and speeches of the last 100 years that have had a major influence on people, and observed hundreds of people. Their focus was on determining significant primal beliefs about the world.

The team discovered that people can have 26 primals. These include the beliefs that the world is good, safe, growing in positive ways and worth exploring.

These beliefs are automatic and deeply felt, and remain the same over time. They also cluster together. If we think the world is not fair, we're more likely to also believe it's threatening, but if we see the world as good, then we're likely to believe it's a fun and exciting place.

What most surprised the researchers was that these beliefs could predict our joys and sorrows. When we believe the world is safe, we are more likely to be more trusting, to have a growth mindset and to be happier. When we view the world as unsafe, we are more likely to feel sad and less trusting of others.

The most important primal belief discovered from the research is the view of the world as a good place, according to Clifton. People who view the world in a positive way tend to have deeper friendships and feel happy with life.

This information suggests that people who are unhappy and see the world as a bad place, might find it helpful to change the way they look at the world.

**Changing Outlooks**

Clifton mentioned cognitive behavioral therapy as a treatment for depression. Someone with depression might struggle with feelings of sadness and hopelessness about life. Cognitive therapy helps people identify and change thinking this way. One approach is to focus on the good things that happen in the world each day.

Our primal world beliefs can also predict our politics. According to Clifton, Republicans and Democrats are equal in their belief that the world is safe, but Republicans believe the world is a just place. They also believe the world is getting worse, according to Clifton. This belief can lead to resistance to change, the study reported. Liberals tend to think that the world is not as just, but they do believe the world is getting better. Democrats are more welcoming to change, according to Clifton.

This new research can help us understand others. When we are having a conflict with someone, the tension could be emerging from two very different stories we are telling ourselves about the world. If we think that the world is safe, but our friend doesn't, then that may explain why we're constantly fighting about whether to go outside and explore. If we think the world is not fair, we
might be quick to resent our sibling for not doing their share of the chores. We each see the world in different ways and that can cause conflicts and miscommunication.

**Primals Inventory**

To ease those stresses, Clifton recommends that people figure out their primals and the primals of loved ones. This can be accomplished by taking a free scientifically validated Primals Inventory. "The main takeaway for now," Clifton said, is that primals are "a path to empathy."

Though our beliefs live in our minds and we aren't always aware of them, they shape our lives in dramatic ways. As William Shakespeare wrote, the world is neither "good nor bad, but thinking makes it so."