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## **Become Your Own Authority**

Most of us know what a stereotype is. It is an oversimplified, very general opinion about what something or someone is like. You've heard of labor saving devices? Well, stereotypes are thought-saving devices, because when you accept a stereotype, you don't have to think for yourself at all. Your idea comes to you frozen, pre-packaged, ready to use – false or true, it doesn't matter. All you have to do is thaw it out and slip it into your brain - nothing further is required.

However, do you realize how dangerous it is to have someone else do your thinking for you? The Nazis fed people stereotyped ideas of Jews and Gypsies to justify slaughtering them. Racists will tell you about what others of different race are like. Sexists will tell you what others, who are not like them, are like. Political parties rely on listeners to believe every word they say about the other party. See the pattern? It's all based on fear of "the other." Truth need not enter into the conversation.

Stereotypes are about controlling what we see and hear, creating fear, and at its very foundation is a lust for power, as well as control. Accepting over-simplifications and over-generalizations rob you of your power and others of their uniqueness. And "they" don't take it from you. You give it away when you sign on to using the labels. "They" are counting on you to not be a critical listener or thinker.

If you want to grow as a fully-fledged human being, you must become your own authority. Take the time to look beneath the surface, and be aware of labels. A label by any other name is a one-size-fits-all stereotype. Recognize them as short-cuts to your fears that others are using for their own benefit. Remember, people come in all sizes and styles, all makes and models. We want to celebrate our differences and not fear them. At the very foundation of it, we are all more alike than we are different.

So, resist stereotypes wherever you find them. Reboot your curiosity, and goal-set to meet someone who is not exactly like you, perhaps once a month – or better yet, once a week. You will find that they are humans – just like you.

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