



## ***The Original Invitation from This I Believe***

This invites you to make a very great contribution: nothing less than a statement of your personal beliefs, of the values which rule your thought and action. Your essay should be about three minutes in length when read loud, written in a style as you yourself speak, and total no more than 500 words.

We know this is a tough job. What we want is so intimate that no one can write it for you. You must write it yourself, in the language most natural to you. We ask you to write in your own words and then record in your own voice. You may even find that it takes a request like this for you to reveal some of your own beliefs to yourself. If you set them down they may become of untold meaning to others.

We would like you to tell not only what you believe, but how you reached your beliefs, and if they have grown, what made them grow. This necessarily must be highly personal. That is what we anticipate and want.

It may help you in formulating your credo if we tell you also what we do not want. We do not want a sermon, religious or lay; we do not want editorializing or sectarianism or 'finger-pointing.' We do not even want your views on the American way of life, or democracy or free enterprise. These are important but for another occasion. We want to know what you live by. And we want it in terms of 'I,' not the editorial 'We.'

Although this program is designed to express beliefs, it is not a religious program and is not concerned with any religious form whatever. Most of our guests express belief in a Supreme Being, and set forth the importance to them of that belief. However, that is your decision, since it is your belief which we solicit.

But we do ask you to confine yourself to affirmatives: This means refraining from saying what you do not believe. Your beliefs may well have grown in clarity to you by a process of elimination and rejection, but for our part, we must avoid negative statements lest we become a medium for the criticism of beliefs, which is the very opposite of our purpose.

We are sure the statement we ask from you can have wide and lasting influence. Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent. Your belief, simply and sincerely spoken, is sure to stimulate and help those who hear it. We are confident it will enrich them. May we have your contribution?

*Adapted from the invitation sent to essayists featured in the original 'This I Believe' series.  
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## ***This I Believe* Essay Writing Suggestions**

Writing your own statement of personal belief can be a powerful tool for self-reflection. It can also be a wonderful thing to share with family, friends, and colleagues. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggestions:

**Tell a story about you:** Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events that have shaped your core values. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be real. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

**Be brief:** Your statement should be between 500 and 600 words. That’s about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.

**Name your belief:** If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief.

**Be positive:** Write about what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.

**Be personal:** Make your essay about you; speak in the first person. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we.” Tell a story from your own life; this is not an opinion piece about social ideals. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

In introducing the original series, host Edward R. Murrow said, “Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent.” We would argue that the need is as great now as it was 65 years ago.



## ***Old Creeds In A New World***

Dag Hammarskjöld - New York, New York

*United Nations' Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld gleaned his belief in the value of public service from his family's line of soldiers, government officials, scholars and clergymen. Hammarskjöld said willing fulfillment of duty was an expression of love.*

The world in which I grew up was dominated by principles and ideals of a time far from ours and, as it may seem, far removed from the problems facing a man of the middle of the twentieth century. However, my way has not meant a departure from those ideals. On the contrary, I have been led to an understanding of their validity also for our world of today. Thus, a never abandoned effort frankly and squarely to build up a personal belief in the light of experience and honest thinking has led me to recognize and endorse, unreservedly, those very beliefs which once were handed down to me.

From generations of soldiers and government officials on my father's side I inherited a belief that no life was more satisfactory than one of selfless service to your country—or humanity. This service required likewise the courage to stand up unflinchingly for your convictions.

From scholars and clergymen on my mother's side I inherited a belief that, in the very radical sense of the Gospels, all men were equals as children of God, and should be met and treated by us as our masters in God.

Faith is a state of the mind and the soul. The language of religion is a set of formulas which register a basic spiritual experience. I was late in understanding what this meant. When I finally reached that point, the beliefs in which I was once brought up were recognized by me as mine in their own right and by my free choice. I feel that I can endorse those convictions without any compromise with the demands of that intellectual honesty which is the very key to maturity of mind.

The two ideals which dominated my childhood world met me fully harmonized and adjusted to the demands of our world of today in the ethics of Albert Schweitzer, where the ideal of service is supported by and supports the basic attitude to man set forth in the Gospels. In his work I also found a key for modern man to the world of the Gospels.

But the explanation of how man should live a life of active social service in full harmony with himself as a member of the community of the spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom "self-surrender" had been the way to self-realization, and who in "singleness of mind" and "inwardness" had found strength to say yes to every fate and demand life had in store for them when they followed the call of duty. "Love," that much misused and misinterpreted word, for them meant simply an overflowing of the strength with which they felt themselves filled when living in true self-oblivion. And this love found natural expressions in an unhesitant fulfillment of duty and in an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brought them personally of toil, suffering—or happiness.

I know that their discoveries about the laws of inner life and of action have not lost their significance.

*Swedish economist and diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld was the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, serving from 1953 – 1961. He worked to ease tensions between Israel and Arab nations, and to defuse the Suez crisis. Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in Zambia in 1961.*