

RESOURCE



DETERMINING TRUTH

A Lesson on
Perspective

Determining Truth: The Elephant In The Room

There is a well-known parable of three traveling blind men, who come across an elephant blocking their way. The three men, eager to see what this obstacle was, began to run their hands over different parts of the elephant. One man grasps at the trunk. Feeling its long bumpy exterior that coiled around his arm, the man declared, "This is obviously some sort of snake."

"Preposterous," exclaimed the second blind man, who was feeling around the leg of the animal. "This is sturdy and immovable, firmly planted in the ground so as to resist any strong wind. It must be a tree."

The third blind man laughed, scoffingly. "You are both mad," he said as he held the end of the elephant's tail, stroking the thick hairs. "Why this is nothing more than a mouse."

While amusing, the tale of the three blind men demonstrates the difference between truth and perspective.

We often confuse perception with reality.

Just as the three blind men relied on their limited sensory perception of the elephant to determine what it was, we utilize our limited observations of life to formulate a picture or perspective of truth.

This can lead to some amusing contradictions, and some not so amusing confrontations.

Some become so resolute that their perspective is the truth that they are willing to fight and contend over it. But what they are defending is not truth, it is their own perspective. Truth requires no defence. It stands on its own. All that is needed is further experience with it. I imagine that had the blind men taken the time to thoroughly inspect the elephant, they would have eventually come to the realization that they were all experiencing the same animal and could put together a fairly good depiction of it. The same is not as easily settled with truth.

Truth requires a lifetime of experience, and even then it's full circumference cannot be explored. Unlike the elephant, truth is vast and we are even more poorly equipped to understand it than the blind men. Still, the pursuit of truth does provide gems of understanding and wisdom that are beneficial. Science, which pursues the truth of the universe, has made great innovations, even though it is no closer to a full description of it than when humanity first set out to understand it. Likewise, if we choose to seek out truth in life, we will find a treasure trove of discoveries from those of the past and those of today. Perhaps the greatest gems are those found within the course of our own life.

Q. What is a perception you have that may not actually be true?

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Emotions: Truth or Perspective

Our thoughts and feelings seem real to us, so we conclude that they must be true.

While it is true that we experience feelings, we do not have to identify ourselves by our emotions. Emotions such as anxiety, fear, anger, or hatred are just reactions to our experience, which is heavily influenced by our perception. This is most common with phobias, where real emotional responses are connected to unrealistic fears. No one argues that the fear that these individuals experience is real, but such hysteria toward seemingly innocuous things, such as clowns or spiders, is merely a condition of the mind.

Another example is the puppy love that is often experienced by young teenagers. It seems absurd to adults who have a more mature understanding of love and relationships. But to the teenagers, the feelings are quite real. It is important when working with people who have seemingly absurd feelings toward things, that we do not undermine their emotions, but instead focus on where the root of these feelings lie. Similarly, when dealing with our own emotions, we must be honest about what sparks those feelings.

If we are to obtain a true perception of reality, we must be willing to be honest with ourselves. This is perhaps the most difficult part of forming true perceptions of reality.

If we want to change how we feel about something or someone, we just need to change our perception.

Because emotions are so intertwined with our perceptions, we are often unwilling to change how we perceive a thing.

We may be unwilling to forgive someone who we feel has wronged us, because the emotion of their wounding runs deep. However, these feelings are for something that occurred in the past. They are no more real than the memories that trigger them. If we are to be honest with ourselves, we must accept that the feelings moving forward are caused by us. Every time we drag up the memory and dwell on it, we in essence trigger the emotions associated with it.

In some cases, the emotions we feel after the event are worse than the emotions experienced during the event. This is because we allow the emotions to fester and grow. While someone may have wronged us and left us in the gutter, it is our choice to remain there. The truth is that the same power is given to us to claim victimhood or victory. The choice is always ours to make. Depending on which one we choose, will determine our perspective in life.

Q. What emotions are you tied to that are skewing your perspective and keeping you from the truth?

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Understanding Others' Perspective

While each of the blind men had valid experience with the elephant, their assumptions based on their experience was clearly false. In order to get a better understanding of truth, they would be wise to try and understand the perspectives of the other blind men. I don't believe that the seeking of truth is meant to be a singular job. Alone, we are susceptible to personal bias and cannot fully grasp truth. But with the help of others, we can begin to see beyond our own biases and come to greater realizations.

How we view things is one of 6.7 billion different ways of looking at things.

We want to learn to look at things from other people's perspective, because it is only then that we become effective at understanding others. We don't need to understand all 6.7 billion people, we simply need to understand the people in front of us.

We commonly mistake how we understand things for how things really are (in truth).

We need to be able to separate our own experience of life in order to listen and understand other's experience. In order to fully understand another's perspective, we need to first listen without judgement or comparison with our own perspective. Once we understand their perspective clearly, we can then compare it to our own.

Imagine you are climbing a mountain with a friend. You start on one side, while your friend takes the path on the other side of the mountain. You're able to communicate with each other via long wave radio and describe the scenery around you. However, what your friend sees is vastly different than what you see.

You see clear planes with grassy gnolls and flowered meadows, while they see a dense forest. Each of you are having a different experience with the mountain. You may argue over which direction to take in your individual paths. They might feel that your path is leading the wrong way because it differs from their own. You might feel that they are just making up their experience because yours is so vastly different. In time you both might become agitated with each other, arguing over who's right and who's wrong.

Life is very much like this scenario. Each of us are having our own unique experiences. While there may be certain principles that are universal, how they are applied in each situation may differ. It's not that one person's reality is true and the other's is not, it's that our perception of that reality differs based on the experience we are having with it.

Perception is the lens through which we view our reality.

Just because our perceptions differ, doesn't mean that we cannot benefit from the other person's perspective. In the scenario, both hikers had a different perception of the mountain based on their experience with it. Both were very real and it's only when the two perceptions of the mountain are compared that a more complete view of the mountain can be understood.

Your perspective is uniquely yours—it's just one of many. When we come together and share our unique perspectives, we can gain a greater understanding of ourselves and of the world around us.

Questions on next page...

Q. How can understanding the principle of perspective help you better relate to others?

Q. What are some things you can do to better shape your own perspective?





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