

THE OBSTACLE

"We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are." – Anaïs Nin

No matter who we are, no matter how we see and think, no matter where we may be in our life's journey, each of us sees the world not through a clear, unobstructed lens, but through a "filter." It's a filter made up of the accumulated impact of the lessons, beliefs and experiences life has offered us. Indelibly lodged in our consciousness (the *unconscious* part of our consciousness), these experiences effectively create a cloud between us and the world. We can't "see" the cloud, so we don't believe it's there. We experience the *impact* of the cloud (stress, struggle, anxiety, etc.), yet misidentify its cause. This is why two people given identical information often arrive at very different conclusions about it, each having come to see through the unique lens of their own experience. No one is "wrong," just different. Not surprisingly, each one believes *they* see the situation "clearly," as "reality." Of course! It "matches" *their* unique filter.

But just as you may not be able to understand how someone else's lessons and experiences brought them to see things the way they do, you *miss* the fact that *you* are seeing life through the lens of *your* lessons and experiences, too. As in the park, you *know* the image is *false*, but in real life, you "*know*" the image is *real*. What's going on?

It's about the unconscious mind. As an evolutionary adaptation, a key role of the unconscious is to protect us from danger. We have a biological need to feel a sense of safety, and the unconscious mind is there to help. To the unconscious, it's *repetition*, not *validity*, that determines truth. Repeatedly experiencing images that represent danger program us to "seek safety without thinking," should the need arise. This worked well (at the dawn of humanity) if the danger happened to be a tiger, but it's far less effective when the danger is an [oft-repeated] thought. By adopting repeated messages as truth, unconsciously, we become habituated in our thinking, with all our lessons now etched into the unconscious mind. Each time we encounter one of these ideas, we respond without conscious thought, following the terms of the lesson. And we don't "know" this is happening. Deceived in this way, we notice only the shadow cast by our behavior: life is difficult. And we wonder why.

Looking more deeply into the detail, evolution has wired us for two different biases, both in the interest of our safety. Again, these biases worked *for* us when the dangers were in the natural world. As we became less connected to nature and more connected to thoughts and ideas, however, these same biases now work *against* us.

- We have a bias towards *certainty*. The more we *believe we know*, the safer we feel. It's an illusion, but an evolutionary adaptation nonetheless. In today's world, it's why we pretend we know when we don't, why we're afraid of not knowing or of making mistakes.
- We have a bias towards the *negative*. We have a keen sense for what's wrong, because we don't want to miss anything dangerous. In today's world, we tend to favor what's wrong over what's possible, thereby *limiting* what's possible. ("Thoughts" don't carry the danger value of a tiger, yet our unconscious minds can't tell the difference.)

Evolution didn't count on the kinds of thoughts we'd be exposed to repeatedly. No matter; we believe them anyway. We hear them 24/7, so we must be "thinking them" – when in fact they're "thinking us." Our inherent biases toward certainty and negativity simply add to our predisposition to believe all that's lodged in the unconscious ... and believe it, of course, without awareness. This "belief without thinking" serves to perpetuate blindness to how our thinking creates our reality.

There's a problem here, although we're generally too busy to consider deeper reflection. Chances are good that the thoughts in your head – the ones you think you're thinking – belong to someone else. Starting early, lessons from others create our thought framework, which eventually becomes a "*prevailing viewpoint*" – a largely unconscious, habituated way we learn to see life. Not surprisingly, this way of seeing depends heavily on the outside world (because that's where it came from). By unconsciously accepting it as our own, however, we rely on it unknowingly to create the well-being and happiness we work so hard to achieve. Our happiness doesn't live "out there," however, but inside us – the one place we never learned to look. But until we stop and discover the power of our conscious thought, which we usually don't, we live someone else's life, not our own. *Un-reality*.

Although we all learn differently, our lessons and experiences have much in common, so we're often led to similar "worldviews," prevailing frameworks of thought that unconsciously guide our lives. Here are some of the many *viewpoints* of "reality" common in our world today:

Science is intended to help us explain what can be rationally known about our world. As a viewpoint, it posits: "If I separate a thing from its environment, measure it, repeat it, predict it and control it, then I know it's true." (Humanness *isn't* these things, but that doesn't stop us from seeing in such mechanistic terms.)

Religion is intended to help us make sense of what *can't* be known rationally. It shows up as a range of viewpoints. At one end, "I have devoted my faith to what is written; I need not look further." At the other, "I have personal faith in what I can't know for sure, a place I find comfort and strength in a chaotic world."

Being "right" is a defensive strategy, adopted to protect a weak sense of self. As a viewpoint, it declares, "I'm always certain. I'm certain I'm *right*. I'll prove it by showing you that you're *wrong*."

Victimness is also a defensive strategy, blaming others for what's seen as hopeless. As a viewpoint, it cries, "I'm always certain, too. I'm certain I'm *wrong*. I'll prove it by showing how bad my life is, and how 'they' made it so."

Tribalism is the home of "pretend thinking." As a viewpoint: "I don't have the courage to think for myself so I'll adopt the ideas of others, then defend them as if I *had* experienced it all personally."

They're all just viewpoints. Each is a thought framework that shows up as truth to the one who holds it. Yet none has an independent truth of its own – beyond what we give it. All are developed by someone else. Each may have its role, but "substitute for your own consciousness" isn't a good one. When you live via the thinking of *others* (science, religion, politics, media or personal history), well-intended or not, you abdicate responsibility for *your own* reality, consciously or not.

You may be able to see that by adopting one of these viewpoints, (all claiming to be truthful, mind you), you *create* a reality to match your view. (A victim sees what's wrong, everywhere. This "makes" the world wrong.) It's just the unconscious, doing its job. Yet there's a path beyond the limitation this creates. It involves getting to know your thinking, its biases, its old lessons and how they impact you, then purposefully choosing a new viewpoint – perhaps ***curiosity*** – allowing your conscious presence to free you from a distorted view.

***"And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane
by those who could not hear the music." – Nietzsche***