

Perceptions can cloud reality

Perception is the ability to see, hear or become aware through the senses, the way it is regarded, understood or interpreted. All perceptions are personal and subjective. Each one of us have different perceptions about different things and have the right to be different since each of us have different conditioning and different experiences.

Perception is the lens through which we view reality - ourselves, others and the world around us. However the lens often gets confused with what is being viewed through it. To give a personal example, i was flying back from Delhi when the pilot announced through the P.A System that the weather ahead was very bad and asked all of us to fasten the seat belt and remain seated. No wonder, very soon the aircraft went through a turbulence that shook and jolted the plane for quite a long time so much so that most of us seated thought that the flight was going to crash somewhere into the land far below. The air hostess did not get up from their seats though they were supposed to serve dinner then. Amidst such a chaos and frenzied screaming there was a man sitting on the adjacent aisle from my side who thought that people were just over reacting and patiently waited for his dinner !! Just next to me was a man whose perceptions did not match my reality of the situation. More accurately they were perceptions of my reality than reality itself. The lens through which i viewed this turbulence led me to believe that we were in danger when actually we weren't.

Reality is the true state of things. How our reality appears to us says a lot about our perceptions. Unfortunately the perception that my flight would crash produced a physiological reaction in my body that made me very uncomfortable and suggested that something was terribly wrong. Emotionally i interpreted this feeling negatively and experienced a lot of anxiety. We often don't realize how our perceptions can cloud reality. The pilot came on the wire now and then instilling a lot of confidence that this turbulence is momentary and that he is in control but i perceived as though the captain and the crew were sweating it out inside the cockpit !! As the saying goes that this too shall pass, the weather also cleared we had a sumptuous dinner and our flight landed safely in Chennai.

Perception is very deceptive. We assume that what we see or hear is actually what exists in the world. But in order for the information to be picked up by the senses our brain must first interpret that data such as turning wavelength into

colour. The visible and a colour range of Violet through Red. light corresponds to a wavelength range of 400 - 700 nanometers, nm That's not the only processing that occurs. The picture coming in is often incomplete which means that the brain in order to make sense out of ambiguous sensory input must fill in the details. This is just to show that there is so much of colour the brain adds from the data received. In the same way one could imagine how people view optical illusions to larger judgments of other people, events and ideas, based not on objective information but according to a predetermined state of mind.

The beliefs that you have in the beginning of the journey defines the journey. Our lives are a reflection of our beliefs. You are what you are because of our belief system. It becomes more complicated when you realize that not only do our beliefs shape what we perceive - like altering the lens in the camera - but our perceptions also shape the lens. That's why traditional yoga, places so much emphasis on purifying the mind as described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. In one verse this text points toward emotions such as happiness, friendliness and compassion as tools to for shaping the lens of our perception. At the heart of it all, though things are more complicated than simply seeing or listening, as Aldous Huxley pointed out when he said, " There are things known and there are things unknown and in between are the doors of perception.

The perception of the observer depends upon the observer's own assumptions and perceptions. That is not to say different things but different aspects of things. The Hindu's view of a cow in no way corresponds to a meat packer elsewhere, pigs are kept in zoo at Istanbul !! We build our own reality. Even colours are product of the mind. Vincent van gogh the famous Dutch painter told his brother that he could see 27 shades of grey !! But we see no more than what we want to see. Our stereo typed notions block clear vision and crowd out imagination. For a minute assume Ustad Bismilla Khan, a Bharat Ratna recipient incognito playing Shehnai in raag Bhairavi at Egmores station around 8.30 pm when hundreds would walk past most of us would assume that he is a street musician playing for handouts and just walk past without listening to the music!! Only children who have the awareness that they are listening to extraordinary music would remain, the others would buzz off to board their train !!

Some ways to put perceptions to our advantage:

You can lessen pain remarkably by changing the way you look at it. Researchers at Oxford University discovered a way of using inverted binoculars to reduce pain and swelling in wounds. When you look at a wound with the wrong end of the binoculars, your perception of the wound makes it seem much smaller. It's the perception that acts as a pain killer and diminishes pain. According to the researchers even basic bodily sensations are modulated by your perceptions.

Seeing is believing. People trust what they see. When you dress up very well, good body language, walk and talk confidently, people admire you. This has many implications. One is how people see us is important. It influences your job opportunities, the ability in getting a prized business, the positions you are offered, the pay scale, how you are treated, the type of friends you attract, the type of life partner you attract. Perception is everything. People come to hasty conclusions when they start interacting with you. They don't see the Real You. Each person will have a different perception about you.

Finally, on the flip side we should not be carried away by those who wear good clothes, talk very sweetly, carry themselves very well, come by good car, for all we know he might be a scoundrel inside !! An interviewer judges a person in the first 30 seconds and a prospective groom sees a prospective bridegroom for a few minutes to take a life term decision. Both could be terribly wrong. We have to know more about the selection process and it would be ideal to consult more people, take more time and take appropriate decisions. We are where we are and what we are because of the decisions we have taken until now.