

What Are You Looking At?

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The great Sage of old gave us good advice. He said to look at three specific things and that knowledge of them will protect us from making wrong decisions in life.

Now, ask yourself this, how does what one sees influence what one does? After all, our choices in life are based upon what we need to do and what we want to do. What difference would it make if we paid attention to one thing and not another?

Our choices in life are defined for us by how we interpret them. Perception plays a vital role in how we view the world around us. What we see defines how we act. Given the power to alter what we see and how we see it gives us the power to expand our choices in life as well as to change the way we act.

When all we have is choice A or B, then what we can choose is rather limited. However, if with closer attention, I can also discern that there is a choice C and D, and even possibly a choice E or F, then I have exponentially expanded my choices and therefore, can choose a course of action completely outside the realms and parameters of either A or B. The more choices I have, the less predictable I become. Yet, unless I learn how to recognize yet unseen options, they will forever remain invisible to me. I therefore become limited and entrapped, not by reality or circumstance, but rather by my personal limited perception of these things.

Perception is everything. How you see a thing and interpret what you see is more important than the actual thing itself. We each have an individual sense of perception, but what does what we subjectively see objectively mean. Let me give you the classic example. If I place before you a cup half full of water, what do you see and how do you interpret it? Do you see a cup that is half empty and therefore feel depressed that it is not full, or do you see a cup that is half full and feel optimistic that it can become completely filled? There is only one cup, there is only so much water in it, therefore what does it mean? How can the same exact thing be interpreted in two entirely different ways? The answer, of course, is perception.



How you interpret what you see, therefore, defines for you what you see. There is rarely an objective value to any observation. Everything we see and experience goes through the filter of personal interpretation. This is a natural fact of human psychology. The subjective nature of human perceptions is discussed in depth in both Jungian psychological literature and in the writings of the Kabbalists. Jung refers to human perceptions as being projections. The Kabbalists refer to them as Klipot, which means husks or shells. Although using different terms, both are describing a similar reality. The human mind sees what it wants to see and it projects onto what it sees its own personal interpretations. These personal interpretations cover and surround the true object like a husk or a shell, taking its form and concealing its true inner core and reality.

Peeling away the husks and removing the projections therefore can be seen to be an action of vital importance. In psychology, we call this the process of individuation. In Kabbalah we simply call it tikkun, the act of repair. One can only guess that such activity is not an easy one. Pursuing objective perception in a subjective world goes against the flow of untrained human thinking. One so enlightened with a true understanding may have no one with whom he can share his new found revelation. After all, if only the one can see the real objective view of a thing, how can he expect to share what he sees with those who cannot see it, but who instead see something entirely different?

As we say, seeing is believing. But believing is a matter of faith, not fact. Therefore, most of our present perceptions are nothing more than projections of our subjective faiths, and not necessarily a statement of objective facts. Those who can recognize this and accept its truth have taken the first step towards a brighter, new world.

So then, what practical steps can one take to help focus on the objective and thus come to recognize the subjectivity of the subjective? The answer to this is not as difficult as we might think. In order to focus our perceptions on objective reality, we need an objective point from which to start. Although we can declare anything we want to be that point, it does make our choice to be an accurate one. We need first to explore and define parameters. Before we can decide upon where is the center, we must first know where the boundaries are.

Now we can turn back to the words of the ancient Sage, "*Akavia ben Mehalalel said, look at three things and you will not come to sin. Know from where you have come, to where you are going, and before Whom you will be judged and held accountable. From where have you come: from a putrid drop [of semen]; to where are you heading: to a place of dirt, worms and maggots; and before Whom will you will be judged and held accountable: before the King of kings, the Holy One blessed be He.*"

The Sage Akavia defines the center of objective reality as being the Creator, the Intelligent Designer and Universal Mind. In religion, we refer to this reality as G-d. His advice to us is simple; remember where we come from and where we are going. In both references, he is referring to the physical human body, whereas in the third reference, he makes reference to the inner human being, that which we call the mind/soul.

As human beings, we all come into this world the same exact way and we each exit it the same exact way. We all are born and we all die. There is no greater objective reality than this. We do not have to dwell upon where we are born or how we will die, for in the end, we are all born the same way and we all eventually die. Therefore, everything that happens in between is only of subjective relevance. Life in this world is what it is. Some have more, others have less. In the end, we all die, just as we were born; naked and alone. Nothing that anyone does can or will ever change this. This is objective reality staring each of us in the face.

When we remember where we all equally come from, we anchor ourselves in that reality. When we remember where we are all equally headed, we anchor ourselves in that reality. Knowing where we are all equally going kind of takes the edge off of our trying so extra hard to do things in this world that in the end will be of no benefit to us. When we remember that in the end we will all have to give a reckoning for how we perceived the world and what we did based on our perceptions, it gives us a moment to pause and think, to ask the necessarily question, am I really looking at this properly, am I seeing what is really there. What I do depends upon what I see. I will be judged based upon what I do; therefore I had better get my vision corrected so that I can see what is right and therefore choose to do what is right.

Sages before Akavia advised us to be deliberating, cautious and comprehensive when it comes to making decisions. They knew all too well that not everything is as it appears to be. Unless one takes the time to dig beneath the surface of a thing, one can mistake the husk and shell for the real fruit within it. I do not know of anyone who likes to eat shells and rind when they can enjoy the rich and delicious fruit within. Why then do we not apply to ideas, feelings and other things, that which we apply to food. We almost always look before we eat. Should we not also look, and look well, before we decide what to think or how to feel about any certain thing?

So, in the end, what are you looking at? Do you really know? What do you see? Not what do you think you see, but what really is there before you, objectively? Can you remove the husks and shells from your eyes and mind? Can you learn to individuate, to become a true and fulfilled human soul? This is a life-long task before each of us. In the end, we all know where we will end up. Should we then not pay proper attention to what is happening in the mean time?

Without change, something deep within us sleeps and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken.