

Perception  
Carol Valentine  
August, 2015

Recently, I have been thinking about Perception, how we come to think the way we do, especially when I encounter someone who thinks very differently from me. As I get older, I realize that everyone thinks differently than I do, because we all have different life experiences. Perception can keep us together or perception can tear us apart.

Remember those odd perception pictures we have seen? Initially they look like one picture but when looked at from a different angle, a different perspective, the pictures change. What do we see? What is real? Who is right?

What about words to songs? Sometimes the words we think we hear when we listen to songs are very funny. Remember the Beatle song "She's got a ticket to ride?" Some people heard "She's got a chicken to fry." This is an example of the misunderstanding that can happen to all of us, causing all sorts of difficulties.

Perception is an integral part of our Buddhist teachings. We are taught that there is a difference between reality and perception. Buddha told us that what we see as reality is actually an illusion. That is not an easy concept to wrap our heads around. We know that at the heart of Buddhism is the 8 Fold Path, that perception begins with Right View. Remember, this should not be confused with "MY view is right so YOURS must be wrong!"

One example of reality vs. perception is one of the basic concepts of Buddhism . . . Change. Our perception continues to see the world as "always" and "forever", "I will always be here, nothing will change." The reality, as we know of course, is that there will always be change and impermanence. Nothing stays the same, no matter how much we fight or try to ignore the change.

What we see as our "reality" is based on our personal perceptions. That started me thinking about where those perceptions come from. What I concluded is that perception is based on life, and life is based on perception. \* Let me explain.

Perception is based on life: Our perceptions come from our life experiences. Experiences such as our birth order, where you were raised (Hawaii, mainland, another country), cultural differences (deep south, German, Canadian), when you were raised (year were you born, generation you are in), what experiences you had growing up (positive memories, negative memories), what your was family like (stay-at-home mother, divorced parents, religion). I was raised in Kansas & Colorado in the 50's and 60's, part of the time by a single, divorced working mother, then with a wonderful step-father. Being part of a divorced family was very odd in the 50's. I grew up listening to music of the 50's and 60's and watching The Mickey Mouse Club on TV. Obviously I don't have the same perceptions as someone who grew up in Hawaii in the 40's; or someone who grew up in New York City in the 80's. Even my own brother and I have different perceptions although we were raised in the same house, by the same people. We need to remember these differences when we look to see what the younger generation is looking for, what motivates them. Their lives are nothing like most of our

lives. Their lives now are nothing like the lives we adults lived. Their perceptions are different and there is nothing wrong with their perceptions, they are just different, and that's ok, it is the way life must change. Rather like a glass of water . . . is it half full or half empty? Both ways are correct, but they reflect a different perspective of life.

The other part of the story is "Life is based on perception." Once our life experiences give us our perceptions, then our perceptions control how we live our lives, they control our behaviors. We are all ego-based, as Buddha knew, so we all think our own perceptions are the "right" ones. We are all self-centered beings. Rev. Takahashi wrote about it recently in the Dharma Wheel newsletter, in an article call "Amida Buddha's Eyes." He wrote that "Buddhism teaches us that we tend to have [negative] feelings, because of our self-centered viewpoint" and one result is that self-centered individuals " . . . think 'I am right. Others are wrong.'" As we know, this causes difficulties. Earlier this month, Masahiro Sasaki came to Kauai to speak to high school students at Kauai High School and members of the community at our social hall. As he spoke, Masahiro talked about perception and how that colors how we treat others. Some of the thoughts Masahiro shared:

- Respect others
- Come from your heart, your good heart.
- If we have a caring heart, we do not insist on our own way.
- If everyone only thinks of their own opinions, there is conflict.
- Be sensitive; catch other people's feelings; be the next caring generation.
- Peace in the world; create small peace in your community; don't pass on hatred.
- If you have a kind heart, those with a kind heart will gather around you; just as if you have a negative heart those with a negative heart will gather around you.

The question we might want to ask ourselves is "who do you want to gather around you?" Our perceptions dictate who we attract which in turn, can nurture our happiness. One important question is, can our perceptions change? Can we change how we think, how we respond? Absolutely we can. Buddha taught us that over 2,000 years ago and it still true. Our lives are not set in stone; we may not be able to change our physical situation but we can always change our thoughts and everything comes from our thoughts.

Remember the words of The Golden Chain. They are a reminder that everything begins with our perceptions, with our thoughts and create interdependence with everyone around us. "I will try to think pure and beautiful thoughts, to say pure and beautiful words and to do pure and beautiful deeds, knowing that on what I do now depends not only my happiness or unhappiness, but also that of others." Let our Buddhist perceptions guide our lives and allow us to be kind and gentle to all, regardless of who they are.

I will end with a final photo I found on the internet. I thought it was a great example of perceptions and how our perceptions can deceive us unless we are careful. It is a picture of Abe Lincoln, our president at the time of the Civil War, with this quote attributed to him.

“Don’t believe everything you read on the Internet, just because there’s a picture with a quote next to it.” . . . . .think about it.