

## Perception 2.0 Carol Valentine

A few months ago I presented a Dharma talk called Perception. Consider this talk “Perception 2.0.” There is so much about Perception that there could probably be a dharma message every week about Perception, particularly in light of what we see happening on the news both in the U.S. and around the world.

So many of the disagreements, the challenges, the conflicts of life seem to revolve around people with differing perceptions. The problem with perceptions is that they are constantly changing, rearranging rather like a kaleidoscope. And, like a kaleidoscope, they aren’t real. Kaleidoscopes are a collection of pieces of paper or glass that continually rearrange themselves. Like kaleidoscopes, perceptions are made of lots of pieces of truth. How you see the whole picture is up to you, up to the way you look at the picture or look at life. So then, whose perception is “right?” Whose point of view is the one we need to look for? The answer is . . . . everyone’s view is correct, based on their own thoughts. Rev. David Fujimoto, at the Nembutsu Seminar recently, talked about our karmic instances which influence how we view and react to life. Makes sense doesn’t it? How we view life depends on who we are, where we came from, when we were born. It even depends on our birth order. No wonder there are so many disagreements in life.

Sometimes our perceptions help us to stay focused on our goals. At the same time, however, this focus may give us tunnel vision and not allow us to notice or appreciate what is around us. I found this video of a dog competition in Finland which shows us how we can move through life totally focused on a goal, but in the process we may miss some interesting things along the way. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMzXYK4zhz0> In this competition, the dogs are supposed to run straight down a short course to their handler. The course has many treats and distractions, along both sides of the course to tempt the dog. In this competition, the dog that runs the course with the fastest time is the winner, so the dogs need to disregard all those distractions along the way. The first dog does exactly what it has been trained to do: run the course without looking around. The dog is rewarded but . . . . The second dog seems most like us; at least it looks like me. The dog stops along the way, enjoying whatever he happens to find and seems to be having a great time. He obviously does not win the competition. But remember, if we think of this as a metaphor for life, life is not a competition. It can be messy, chaotic and distracting but we should enjoy it all along the way. We will all eventually get to the end so why not enjoy it along the way.

When we think of differing perceptions, differing points of views, sometimes we find examples that make us smile, like funny answers to serious test questions. Perhaps the answers are due in part to being a smart-mouth but in some cases, the answers may indeed be due to a differing perception, a different understanding of the question. **Question:** “Imagine that you lived at the time of Abraham Lincoln, what would you say to him or ask him?” **Answer:** “I’d tell him not to go to a play ever.” **And my favorite:** When our grandson Mason was 3 years old he was learning a few words in Spanish at his preschool. One day, our son-in-law Steve asked Mason if he could say “library” in Spanish. Of course, Mason said “Yes!” When asked again to say “library” in Spanish, Mason responded with all the innocence of a 3-year old, “library in Spanish.”

Sometimes differing perceptions are not so funny; they lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, broken friendships, and, sadly, broken families. We humans, we foolish beings, tend to feel like our perceptions are truth and we will defend them as if our lives

depend on those perceptions. We probably all know someone who has been angry at another person for years because of a difference of opinion, having a differing perspective. Such wasted time.

Another book, The Cow in the Parking Lot, deals with perceptions and misperceptions that spark us to become upset. The title is from a story told in the book about trying to find a parking space in a crowded parking lot. If we were to spot a car getting ready to back out of a space so we can pull in only to have a car coming from the other direction pull in ahead of us. We might flip out, saying things we don't normally say and generally feeling justified for feeling angry, carrying that anger around for many days. On the other hand, instead of a car beating us to the space, what if a cow walked into that space and laid down. What would the reaction be now? We might laugh or at least just be very puzzled but probably wouldn't start cursing and yelling at the cow. I mean, it's just a cow after all and not someone out to get us or someone who hates us. Just an example of how perceptions can change how we think and react.

Serious misperceptions can lead to wars, conflicts and terrorism. Think about what happened recently in Paris when terrorists attacked multiple locations that they perceived to embody the decadence of the west. As Monshu Kojun Ohtani wrote recently on the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, "At the root of disputes is the notion of self-righteousness, which justifies our mindset while denouncing others who argue against us. Such human tendency filled with biased views was acutely pointed out by Shinran Shonin. In the name of justice, each individual or party is apt to persist in their legitimacy; however, their insistence is never detached from their selfish desires." The terrorists feel justified in their atrocious attacks on innocent people because they so firmly believe that their perceptions are the truth. We just as firmly believe that their perceptions are not true and as talked about by other Muslims, as not reflective of the heart of Islam. When we ask what we can do as individuals to help the world, I believe that we have much to offer as Buddhists. Peace, kindness and respect are at our core and we need to continue to encourage everyone to follow those beautiful concepts. As the Monshu said at the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, "At the very least, we as Nembutsu followers must do our best to actualize a society in which all people can live in peace and harmony." The Dalai Lama echoed Monshu's words by saying, "People should work to foster peace within society."

I will end with words from a man whose wife died during the shootings in Paris. He is left to grieve the loss of his wife and is left to raise his 17-month old son on his own. In his words: "So I will not give you the privilege of hating you. You certainly sought it, but replying to hatred with anger would be giving in to the same ignorance which made you into what you are. Replying to hatred with anger would be giving in to the same ignorance which made you into what you are. You want me to be frightened, that I should look into the eyes of my fellow citizens with distrust, that I sacrifice my freedom for security. You lost. I will carry on as before. "I will not succumb to hate. There are only two of us, my son and I, but we are stronger than all the armies of the world. Every day of his life this little boy will affront you by being happy and free because you will not have his hatred either."

Doesn't that sound like Buddha's teaching? **"Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal rule."** Think peace & love.