

Pathways

THE CHRIS DEWEY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 24 ISSUE 1

APRIL 2020

I'm not this, nor that

It's a very interesting place, this world in which we live, but nothing is permanent, except change...not me. Not you. Nothing.

So let's start with something seemingly solid, the body...is what you or I looks at in the mirror really me, or you?

Not really, no.

We age, we break, we mend, we get sick we heal. We eat food, breathe air and constantly rebuild the physical structure in which we live. The body is a very singular recycling machine that hosts life. So who is it that I see in the mirror? It certainly isn't the body I had last year, or when I was twenty, or two. So that's not me, the body is transient. It is a changing vehicle.

How about what I know?

Nope.

I'm not that either. For sure I am a collage of my experiences, but since last year I have forgotten things I once knew and I have learned things this year that I didn't previously know. Moreover, I have had new experiences...even if I just repeated what I did last year.

Ultimately, I am only what I know, right here, right now.

How about what I feel?

Not likely.

I change my feelings more times than I change my socks. Feelings are more ephemeral than ripples on a pond. The only thing constant about emotions is that they are in a constant state of flux. Just watch, you'll see. Angry one moment, then sad, happy, lonely, afraid, in love, lost, frustrated, hopeful, hungry...on and on without end until you draw your last breath. You can guarantee that you will have an emotion as you draw your last breath.

What will it be? Peace? Fear? Loss?

Love? Expectancy? Hope?

How about what I perceive?

No, not really, no.

My perceptions of life have changed for sure. Just the process of growing up and the continuing process of learning have seen to that. We learn about life, we grow. Our perceptions change. Changes in perception are a necessary step in the evolution of a life. If I still perceived the world as I did when I was a child, I would barely be able to function in the world at sixty. At sixty-plus my perceptions are changed almost daily. New vistas of awareness open, new experiences and learning draw me to deeper insights into what I think of as reality, and my world changes accordingly.

Oh...how about reality then?

Nah, not really...not ever.

Yesterday my reality was defined by what I knew, experienced and felt then...today I am not that person, I have seen new things.

Given some of the changes that we have experienced in the world in the last few months, 'reality' looks a good deal different than it did at the beginning of the year.

But this begs a really important question: What exactly is real?

What I think of as real changes moment to moment as my feelings, knowledge, perceptions and body change.

No matter what we think is real or permanent, we can, each of us, be assured that...

This too shall pass.

Such is life, such is the experience of life. The only really important questions are a) what you want to do with those experiences and b) how you wish them to define who you wish to be.

☺



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"A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge"

Thomas Carlyle



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Perceptions

Perceptions are tricky things, they are so utterly dependent upon what we think we know and how we feel at the moment of perception.

So what is a perception then?

A perception is a transitory event. Our perceptions are constantly changing because a perception connects objects (things we think are outside of us) with our sensory experiences.

A perception of reality is therefore our best fit interpretation of what our senses tell our brains is real. We process stimuli provided by our senses and then we come up with some plan of how to interact with what our senses tell us is 'out there' and 'in here'. The brain acts as a discriminating organ that draws upon previous data to make sense of incoming data streams, for example:

"Don't do that, you'll burn your fingers."

"Be careful of that person they are lying to you"

"Wow. Look at that, it is so beautiful"

"I love my job, I get to make a difference in the world."

Do you see how all our perceptions are interpretations of incoming data compared to the data we have already acquired? Each perception is compared to what we already think we know from our previous experiences. The incoming data might be a novel experience for us, but it compares to either the presence or absence of comparative data in our realm of experiences.

Equally my perceptions are strongly influenced by my feelings in the moment. I can see something stunningly beautiful and if I am feeling grateful I will see it as beautiful, if I am feeling angry I might not see it at all. If my mind is closed to new experiences, I will see beauty differently than when my mind is open.

But my perceptions of something may be completely different to someone else in the same situation.

So how reliable is a perception?

I suppose the answer to that question depends upon whether you get hijacked by your perceptions or whether you simply observe them for what they are.

Let's use the example of the perception that we believe someone has lied to us. Each of us will have a reaction to that sort of stimulus in some way.

So there's a process here:

Events cause a Sensory data input, which leads to Thoughts and Feelings about the sensations we are experiencing, which in turn lead to interpretations and a Perception about what we think is real in the moment, which then leads to a Reaction. The reaction itself becomes a stimulus that creates a new set of external and internal stimuli and sensations in response to (what was) our reaction. Those stimuli either reinforce our perception or cause us to re-evaluate...and so the cycle goes on, moment after moment, for the whole of life.

The whole process gets stored as an experience to be drawn upon the next

time we encounter a similar set of circumstances. We use the experience to learn and to create a point of comparison.

Using the idea of being lied to... We learn what we think is truth and what is not. We may learn a fear of trusting others. We may dig deeper and learn forgiveness. We may dig even deeper, because forgiveness implies that I was wronged in some way. Once I let go of the notion of having been wronged, I might learn compassion. Each of these outcomes is a potential perception about what just happened.

Each perception will change the reaction I have to a similar event in the future.

The thing of it is that we have perceptions about 'reality' without ever really stopping to evaluate them.

And...here is the gold in the concept: Stop, breathe, look...no, really look. Step beyond your own notions of right and wrong, your own sense of reality and ask..."Are there other possible perceptions here that I am missing?"

The issue here is that we believe that our perceptions are right. How could it be otherwise?

The instant that we open ourselves to the possibility that other perceptions of an event might be equally valid, we open a door to the recognition that a perception is merely that: One possible interpretation of a dataset. Better yet...we might even see that we are *deluding ourselves* into thinking that what we call a perception is the only way to see things. ☺

*"The universe is full of magical things,
patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper."*

Eden Philpotts

Looking Deeper

So clearly I am on a journey here, in this newsletter. I have something that I think I want to say about how we process what we think is real.

Taking both of the previous articles and rubbing them together, we come to the idea of looking deeper. Curiously, looking deeper brings me back to the concept of Yin and Yang and the inherent (apparent) duality in the universe.

Yin and yang are said to be opposites: Up versus down, hot versus cold, light versus dark, right versus wrong, energy versus matter and so on. In this sense of duality, without one, you cannot have its opposite. If it is light, the same phenomenon cannot be dark in the same moment...well, at least until you compare it to something else that is also 'light'.

So an example might help here: The Rockies are definitely yang with respect to the Grand Canyon, but compared to the Himalayas, the Rockies are decidedly yin and the Grand Canyon is decidedly yang compared to the Marianas Trench. Do you see?

Opposites are therefore also complementary because they represent two relevant aspects of a thing. It also means that stuff, things, phenomena are relative, not absolute. From this perspective, therefore, it can be relatively dark or relatively light (midday leads to midnight and back again). Consequently, yin exists within yang and yang exists within yin. If we can have yin within yang and yang with-

in yin, we can, therefore, split the range of possibilities an infinite number of ways.

All of which means:

- a) That yin and yang are mutually dependent. The existence of one, depends upon the existence of its opposite. If you have never experienced 'light', then you have no frame of reference for what is 'dark' either.
- b) Yin and yang are inter-transformative: Day incrementally gives way to night and night gives way to day in a harmoniously balanced cycle of change.
- c) Yin and yang are mutually consuming: In any given moment there is more light than there is dark or vice versa during the diurnal progression of night into day or day into night.

If you look at how yin and yang relate, there is a change in *quantity* as the 'amount' of yin reduces and the 'amount' of yang grows. There is also a change in *quality* as yin becomes yang and vice versa.

Yeah...so?

Remember my comment in the first article: "*This too shall pass*"?

I said right at the beginning of this newsletter that nothing is constant except change. It is just a matter of rates of change and changes in the rates of change (two different things if you think about it).

Within the concepts of yin and yang, if you drive one aspect to its extreme, it will inevitably return to its oppo-

site, because the potentiality for one already exists in the other.

Now, depending upon your perceptions of reality, this is either really comforting or disturbing.

I choose to see it as comforting.

I have told you that going through Oriental medical school was one of (if not, the) hardest thing I ever did in my life for a variety of reasons. For sure, the experience shook my foundation and caused changes within me that I could not have foreseen, but even at its hardest and darkest, there was an inexorable movement towards something softer and lighter. Such is life.

Nothing ever lasts, we get older, we learn, we grow, we live, we die. Emotions rise and fall, yin gives way to yang and vice versa.

Within all of this change is the possibility of equanimity.

It is possible to see all manner of change, such as the dual perceptions of success and failure as aspects of the same thing.

It is possible to find peace within adversity, calm within the heart of the storm.

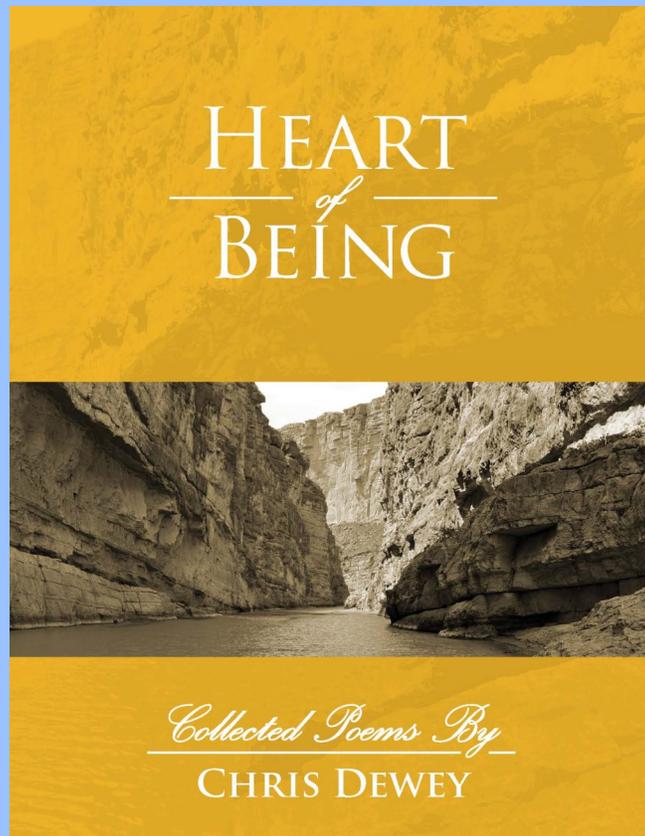
It all comes down to our perceptions of reality and what we choose to do with those perceptions.

How willing are we to look deeper than what we think we see?

What insights await those of us who look deeply into our oh so natural thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reactions? ☺

"The more we study, the more we discover our ignorance."

Percy Bysshe Shelley



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