

T.F.S.

Three, five, and seven

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#213

“There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting.”----- Buddha

“Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.”----- Winston Churchill

WHEN WE SEEK THE TRUTH

As Mason's we have been taught to seek the truth. However each of us seeks the truth using our personal perspective. Our perspective is our conceptual framework which is made up of the words and concepts we use to evaluate a situation and is based on our past experiences and the culture in which we live. Perspective is also subject to confirmation bias which causes us to be sensitive to some aspects of a situation and insensitive to others. Confirmation bias involves remembering the things that support a position that we have taken and omission of the facts that do not support our position. Therefore, the truth about a physical reality is almost impossible for one observer to discern. The following story, Point Of View by A. Averchenko(1) illustrates this dilemma:

Point Of View

“Men are comic,” she said, smiling dreamily. Not knowing whether this indicated praise or blame, I answered noncommittally: “Quite true.”

“Really, my husband's a regular Othello. Sometimes I'm sorry I married him.” I looked helplessly at her, “Until you explain--” I began.

“Oh, I forgot that you hadn't heard. About three weeks ago, I was walking home with my husband through the square. I had a large black hat on, which suits me awfully well, and my cheeks were quite flushed from walking. As we passed under a street light, a dark haired fellow standing nearby glanced at me and suddenly took my husband, Alexander, by his sleeve.”

“Would you oblige me with a light,' he says. Alexander pulled his arm away, stooped

down and quicker than lightning, and banged him on the head with a brick. He fell like a log. It was awful!"

"Why what on earth made your husband get jealous all of a sudden?" She shrugged her shoulders. "I told you men are very comic."

Bidding her farewell, I went out, and at the corner came across her husband. "Hello, old chap," I said. "They tell me you've been breaking people's heads." He burst out laughing. "So, you've been talking with my wife. It was jolly lucky that brick came so pat into my hand. Otherwise, just think: I had about 1500 rubles in my pocket, and my wife was wearing her diamond earrings."

"Do you think he wanted to rob you?"

"A man accosts you in a deserted spot, asks for a light and gets hold of your arm. What more do you want?"

Perplexed, I left him and walked on.

"There's no catching you today," I heard a voice from behind.

I looked around and saw a friend I hadn't set eyes on for three weeks.

"Lord!" I exclaimed. "What on earth happened to you?"

He smiled faintly and asked in turn: "Do you know whether any lunatics have been at large lately? I was attacked by one three weeks ago. I left the hospital only today."

With sudden interest, I asked: "Three weeks ago? Were you sitting in the square?"

"Yes, I was. The most absurd thing. I was sitting in the square, dying for a smoke. No matches! After ten minutes or so, a gentleman passes with some old hag. He was smoking. I go up to him, touch him on the sleeve and ask in a polite manner: "Can you oblige me with a light?" And what do you think? The madman stoops down, picks up something, and the next moment I am lying on the ground with a broken head, unconscious. You probably read about it in the newspapers."

I looked at him and asked earnestly: "Do you really believe that you met up with a lunatic?" "I am sure of it."

Anyhow, afterwards I was eagerly digging in the old back numbers of the local paper. At last I found what I was looking for: A short note in the accident column.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRINK

"Yesterday morning, the keepers of the square found on a bench a young man whose papers show him to be of good family. He had evidently fallen to the ground while in a state of extreme

intoxication, and had broken his head on a nearby brick. The distress of the drunken man's parents is indescribable.

What “really” happened? Who is telling the “truth” here? Did you believe that the story told by one of the people was truer than the others? Why or why not? What is the “truth” here? Is there a singular truth in this story? If so, how would you find out?

This story illustrates that observers have different perspectives which lead to different conclusions. Therefore no one individual can see all aspects of a situation. That is especially true if the observers were frightened by what was happening. When we seek the truth, we want to talk to all the observers or read all the information we can about the situation. However we must remember their perspectives are biased (for example with confirmation bias) and most likely based on observer's tendency to base their conclusions on the selection of key words to describe the situation as it occurred. The reality of the husband used the words, " afraid for his money ", " accosted", " deserted" "1500 rubles" and "wife's diamond earrings". His wife's reality concentrated on "black hat", "married" and "pale dark-haired fellow". A perspective can be either helpful or useless but is true to the person who believes them even though it may lead to a false conclusion. A person's perspective can also change with time and the new information.

Reference

- (1) Averchenko, Arkady "Point of View" quoted in Symbolic Interactionism ---by Joel Charon PhD

Live By: "If you are out to describe the truth, leave elegance to the tailor". --Albert Einstein

"The truth is rarely pure and never simple."---- Oscar Wilde

Read more: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/truth.html#ixzz1jk6tRbtO>

If you have any comments, suggestions, or questions, please send them to

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The Education Videos by our education committee can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/glmned>

The latest Masonic Monday Question, and some of the past questions, can be viewed at www.Lodgebuilder.org and at www.mn-masons.org