The Search for Meaning

Most of us learn early in our lives to create an explanation for everything that happens inside or around us. These explanations fall into categories – blaming, understanding, rationalizing, and denying/negating. This behavior prevents us from seeing possibilities beyond our habitual or instinctive Conclusions. The drive to assign definite, stable meaning to Data can lead to a “jumping to Conclusions” that hides other interpretations, and prevents us from seeing all the Data.

Making up Conclusions around Data becomes automatic, unconscious. Once unconscious, I am no longer aware I am even processing Data. I begin to treat my Conclusions as \textit{objective facts}. I treat my Conclusions as Data. No wonder disagreements about the “facts” can be so frustrating and emphatic!

Taken to an extreme, the search for meaning prompts us to collect, select or exclude elements of Data so as to confirm and uphold Conclusions already made. This behavior has had survival value in our collective evolutionary past, though is a hindrance in today’s world. Our ‘limiting beliefs’ actually prevent us from seeing possibilities and alternatives that do not support our pre-existing Conclusions.

Data vs. Conclusions

Data is about perception, about perceptually-verifiable observations only. It is distinct from Conclusions. Here are some examples of this distinction:

- \textbf{The Data are “I heard you say you would arrive at 6:00 P.M., and I saw you actually arrive at 7:00 P.M. by my watch.”}
  - One Conclusion (of many) I might make about this Data is that you arrived ‘late’. However, ‘late’ is not Data—it’s my interpretation, my Conclusion.

- \textbf{The Data are, “I heard you say the words, ‘Hey, you!’ in a loud voice.”}
  - A Conclusion about this Data could be that you were angry
  - Another Conclusion would be that you are going to hurt me
  - Or, maybe you think I’m hard of hearing!

Notice how a Conclusion is an interpretation and Evaluation I make about Data, \textit{separate and distinct} from the Data itself. When I separate Data from Conclusions, I can begin to see that these are \textit{my} Conclusions, that they come from my belief system. I can begin to take responsibility for my interpretation of events – for creating my reality through my Conclusions. I can begin to separate the event [Data] from my interpretation of it [my Conclusions]. This is very important – we can use this realization to help each other get clear on the Data, and to separate it from the Conclusion(s) made.
Conclusions vs. Emotions

Emotions are primarily based in Anger, Sadness, Happiness, Fear, Love and Shame. Each emotion has a distinct set of Feelings, or body sensations, associated with it. Emotions are body sensations triggered by and associated with conscious and/or unconscious Conclusions I make about Data that I observe - consider these examples:

- **the Data are I'm home by myself watching TV**
  - a Conclusion is that I deserve to be alone
  - the Feeling is my solar plexus and throat feels tight, and I believe I've lost something in my life - the Emotion is sadness

- **the Data are you parked in the parking space I was waiting for**
  - a Conclusion is, 'you're either unconscious or selfish, but either way, you don't care about me'
  - the Feeling is my teeth are clenched, and my adrenal glands are aching – something is being taken away from me - the Emotion is anger

- **the Data are I didn’t get the promotion I was hoping for**
  - the Conclusion is, ‘You don’t think I’m ready yet, and I can benefit from more experience’
  - the Feeling is my entire body is peaceful, relaxed – I am safe - my Emotional state is neutral – I am observing this with equanimity

Judgements

Judgement = Conclusion + Emotion. A Judgement is a Conclusion riding on the energy of a Emotion—an explanation about some Data associated with an emotionally-charged body sensation. A Conclusion with no associated Emotions remains a Conclusion. Consider these examples:

- **the Data are I didn’t get the promotion I was hoping for**
  - a Conclusion is, ‘You don’t think I’m ready yet, that I can benefit from more experience—I must not be good enough’
  - The Emotion is that I’m angry, afraid, and sad

- **the Data are I didn’t get the promotion I was hoping for**
  - a Conclusion is, ‘You don’t think I’m ready yet, that I can benefit from more experience—you’ll help me prepare’
  - The Emotion is that I’m relieved and happy

- **the Data are I didn’t get the promotion I was hoping for**
  - a Conclusion is, ‘You don’t think I’m ready yet, that I can benefit from more experience’
  - The Emotional state is neutral – I am observing this with equanimity

What does all this tell you about the role your beliefs about the world have on your Conclusions and your inner emotional experience?
Evaluation

At the heart of most Conclusions is a made-up label assigning a value to the experience along a continuum between positive and negative. There is an infinite set of scales of evaluation of how we tend to associate our experience with this model of positive and negative, as portrayed by these few examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pleasurable</td>
<td>painful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equanimity</td>
<td>upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smart</td>
<td>dumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful</td>
<td>harmful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluative labeling is usually what triggers an emotional response. However, the label is entirely made-up, with no objective reality whatsoever. As a result, Emotions are learned responses, no matter how early in our personal or evolutionary development the learning may have occurred.

This is not to say that evaluation has no usefulness – in fact, labeling is at the core of creating a system of individual and organizational Values. The opportunity is to be aware of the labeling as an activity, rather than as objective, absolute fact. As with any activity, the motivating energy can be fearful (survival) or loving (thriving and growing).

Individual vs. Universal Truths

Truth is a particular variety of Conclusion. Western thought is grounded in many concepts, one being the idea of objective vs. subjective reality. Objective reality is increasingly endangered by new concepts from the worlds of science, physiology, and psychology. Most of us have been taught to “be objective” and to “stick to the facts”. The challenge in this is that each person’s perceived reality, their “truth”, is intrinsically distinct from that of others, no matter how similar. This leads to a Conclusion that all reality is intrinsically subjective. How can this be?

This extends even to the world of “objective” science, where two different observers may perceive either a particle or a wave when they observe the same phenomenon. Quantum physics has undercut the absolute objectivism of Newtonian physics, opening up many questions about the nature of reality itself.

If reality is a by-product of the act of perception, then it is tied to viewpoint and interpretation, which are relative and subjective—not absolute or objective.
Separate Reality, Individual Truth
Whatever I perceive and/or somehow experience as real is real in my separate sphere of existence. No one else can confirm, deny or even experience my separate reality. My perception and experience of it is absolutely true for me.

- “When I eat a red-hot pepper, I feel a painful burn.”
- “When I eat a red-hot pepper, I experience pleasure and delight.”

Consensual Reality, Shared Truth
Whatever two or more individuals agree to perceive and/or experience as real is real within their shared sphere. No one else can confirm or deny a consensual reality – they can only join or stay separate from the consensus. In this way, the idea of truth becomes shared by members of the consensus. Shared perception and experience is absolutely true for those sharing it.

- “When we eat a red-hot pepper, we all feel a painful burn.”
- “When we eat a red-hot pepper, we all experience pleasure and delight.”

Consensual reality is based upon separate reality. This affirms the role and responsibility of the individual in creating his separate reality. Joining into a consensual reality is an individual choice.

Universal Truth
Does not exist. There are no absolutes. There is only perception and interpretation.

These definitions come without values or labels of any kind. It is up to each individual or group to assign meaning and value to the products of applying these concepts—in themselves, they are neutral. Not everyone will feel happy about this. Absolute relativism [versus absolutism] therefore acknowledges every event and action [Data] as neutral until some evaluation [a Conclusion] has been assigned to it! Until I say “this is true!”, there is no truth.

It follows that nothing at all, neither genocide nor loving service, profit or loss, has any objective meaning until meaning has been assigned to it by individuals and groups.

This belief is fundamental to the process of assuming Personal Responsibility and seeing infinite Possibilities, which is the core of the Planned Success™ Method.