

A Second Opinion

Theories and Observations on Life
and Human Behavior

by:
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This book is dedicated to YOU.
May you find peace amidst the chaos of your mind.

Acknowledgements:

Many individuals have helped me grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually. There are far too many to list.

This book is in gratitude to those who have taught me about life and have helped me understand myself better. Thank you for all the lessons you have taught me directly and indirectly, knowingly and unknowingly.

Acknowledgement must be given to my loving mother who has always given her all, my animated sisters (there is never a dull moment with the two of you), and my compassionate and supportive partner who has seen me through everything.

I would also like to acknowledge the great philosopher Alan Watts and His Holiness the Dalai Lama for pointing me to the road to compassion and enlightenment.

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Author's Note:

This book holds observations and theories collected over years of personal experiences and studying philosophy.

Most of the information provided in this book is not original or new. In fact, some of the information has been around for thousands of years.

The chapters were created as levels, specifically arranged for the best possible understanding of all concepts presented. Each chapter is only a fraction of the discussion available on each topic and meant as introductions to the ideas presented therein.

I do not claim to be an expert on psychology, human behavior or sociology. I am merely an observer.

For this reason, I have purposely chosen to omit page numbers and chapter numbers from this book.

We, as a society, become caught up in measuring progress. We watch the clock, not enjoying what we do. We count calories, not enjoying what we eat. We count miles, not enjoying the journey.

Read, not for accomplishment but for enjoyment. Don't become caught up on progress, just do it. You will finish when you finish.

Introduction:

Most self-help books will give you a long list of things to do to change yourself into a better person.

Unfortunately, this concept makes the assumption that if it worked for the author, it will work for others as well. It also assumes that the author knows what would make *you* a better person.

No one can know your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, hopes, dreams, memories or experiences. No one else can know you or the world you live in the way you do. The only person who has that kind of access is you.

In this book, there is but one intention: awareness. When you are aware of your thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviors, you have the power of choice. You can then decide what works in your life and what does not.

We have been preprogrammed from birth with beliefs, thoughts and behaviors that we have formed into habits.

Habits get in the way of awareness because they force us to live our lives asleep in routine. If we always do what we have always done, we will always get what we have always gotten. Without awareness, we react to life based on how we usually react to life.

I'm not offering to make you a better person. I'm offering you the power of choice through awareness

and the freedom to choose without the influence of someone else's actions, behaviors and habits.

This book offers a tool to guide you in dumping the thoughts, feelings and habits that hinder awareness and cause suffering.

Through awareness, you can shatter illusions and false beliefs, reveal myths and truths and understand what makes you happy and gives your life meaning.

You are then free to be you and not someone else's idea of a better you.

Ultimately, it is your decision what you choose for your life and yourself. My only goal is to offer you a cleaner filter to see your life and decisions through.

This book is my gift to you. It is a collection of philosophies, theories and observations that I believe will alter your sense of self and the world around you.

“God has entrusted me with myself.”

-Epictetus

“The World of Beliefs”

*“The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make
Heaven of Hell, and a Hell of Heaven.” -John Milton,
Paradise Lost*

When I was a child, I was always fascinated with other people's beliefs. Why is it that we all live in the same world and yet live worlds apart? How could so many people believe so many contradicting things?

I experienced many internal conflicts with the ideas of right and wrong. One person's right was another person's wrong. A wrong in one situation was right in another. It seemed like nothing was consistent and everything was very contradictory.

As I grew older and delved deeper into philosophy, I realized that there were far more questions than there were answers.

While I can't offer any perfect answers, I can offer my views, opinions, thoughts and ideas about these

important questions. It is another perspective to consider, a different opinion to reflect on.

Our beliefs are an important aspect of our lives. In fact, they are so important that I'm willing to go so far as to say that they shape our experiences.

Most people believe that experiences shape our beliefs, but I believe that it is our beliefs that shape our experiences.

We all carry around harmful beliefs disguised as facts. Some beliefs are about the self; I'm stupid, unworthy, sick, unlucky, I'll never be happy, rich or pretty. Other beliefs are about groups of people; other societies, cultures, religions, sexes, races, etc.

Our beliefs are reinforced by our actions, behaviors and feelings. How can we know if they are true? How can we test our beliefs against reality when we view reality through our beliefs?

If we are in pain, it is because of a belief that does not coincide with reality.

Our beliefs are so commonly held and so deeply believed that we don't even realize that they are just things that we, at some point in our lives, decided to believe as facts.

We have a powerful and unknowing ability to make ourselves think that beliefs are facts. We fight for them, suffer for them and die for them.

We carry around beliefs about our families, our friends, groups of people, society and even ourselves.

Many things we see and experience in our everyday lives support our beliefs. Whether our beliefs are legitimate or false, we can always find evidence to strengthen them. This is why so many different people can hold such different and sometimes contradicting beliefs.

Not only do we need to question what we believe and why we believe it, but we must also look at why false beliefs can appear real.

The mind is selective in what it chooses to remember. So why does one mind choose to remember one thing while another mind remembers another?

Two people witnessing the same event can remember and experience different things. How is it that their minds remember and take in information differently?

Our court system does not accept eyewitness testimony as substantial evidence because they know that the information differs with each eyewitness even though they all witnessed the same event.

I once read that the mind only understands 30 percent of what it experiences a day and remembers only 10 percent of what it understood.

If you only remember such a small percentage of what you understood in any given day, it is very likely that your mind is selective about what it wants to remember.

So what would be important enough for your mind to absorb and what would be considered useless information that won't even register in the mind? Our beliefs determine the information the mind chooses to remember.

We each contain a filter within our minds. It sorts through the millions of bits of information we receive everyday and only pays attention to that which is consistent with our beliefs.

Everyone interprets information through his or her filter. Because of this reason, no one receives the full picture or the full experience. We can only have partial knowledge.

The information you receive is perceived in relation to what you believe and who you are at that given moment in time.

For instance, if I say the word apple and ask a random group of people to tell me the first thing that comes to their mind, I will get several different responses.

If you just bought an Apple computer or an Apple iPod, you might think of the company or its products.

If you are a teacher, it might remind you of the first day of school when your students bring you apples as a sign of respect.

If you study Christianity, you might think of the Adam and Eve story with the apple and think of the apple representing temptation.

If you are hungry at this moment, you might think of a big juicy red apple you wish you could eat. You might think of the apple tea you drank, or the applesauce you just fed your toddler.

However, the information will change for you at a different period. If I asked you tomorrow, you might have a different answer.

Think of a movie you watched as a child. Can you remember how different it seemed when you re-watched it years later? You saw scenes you didn't remember before. You understood things that you didn't understand then. It's almost as if you are watching the movie with different eyes.

The same thing happens with books and music. The book does not change and yet every time you read it, you discover new things.

The thing didn't change, how you relate to it changes. How you feel changes. Who you are is a different person with a different filter therefore you interpret it differently.

The interpretation is very rarely an accurate one since we cannot experience something new without comparing it to something we have experienced before.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

A group of blind men went to the zoo and visited an elephant. One blind man touched its side and said, "The elephant is like a wall." The next blind man

touched its trunk and said, "The elephant is like a snake." The next blind man touched its leg and said, "The elephant is like a column." The last blind man touched its tail and said, "The elephant is like a broom." Then the four blind men started to fight, each one believing that his opinion was the right one. Each only understood the part he had touched; none of them understood the whole.

We all create distinctions in the mind. This is due to partial knowledge. All knowledge we possess is partial knowledge. Like the pieces of the elephant, we can only know one thing at a time.

Let's say you walk over to another part of the elephant and touch its leg. So now, you know that the tail is like a broom and the leg is like a column.

Even though you have gained more knowledge, it is still partial knowledge.

Now that we've decided that the elephant is a column with a broom, we face even more questions.

Is the broom first and the column second? Is the broom hanging from the column? Is the broom there to sweep dirt off the column? Is the column protecting the broom? Is the broom more important than the column?

Each additional piece of new information comes with more questions that need answers in order for us to understand.

You might be able to say, “I see the elephant, I’m not blind. It’s big and grey.” However, big and grey are just distinctions within our minds.

You don’t “see” the elephant. You see distinctions from your mind and past experiences. Just as when you look at others and you say, “I see John, he’s mean and rude.” You don’t see John. You only see your own judgment of the distinctions.

Is any of it true? Can you really know the elephant without comparing it to something you’ve already experienced?

If you couldn’t use experiences you already had to describe the elephant, how would you describe it?

If you describe parts of it, you will describe it based on things you know, like the column and the broom. If you describe it as a whole and say it is big and grey, you are still using distinctions from previous experiences. You have seen and experienced both big and grey and that is why you can describe it. Are they still true?

The elephant is big. If the elephant were standing next to a skyscraper, would you still describe the elephant as big? Perhaps. However, why is it big?

It’s only big in relation to you. In relation to the skyscraper, it’s very small. Therefore, you are still using yourself and your experiences to describe the elephant.

Is the same true for the elephant? If the elephant cannot see color and only sees grey, then to him,

everything is grey therefore nothing is grey. The elephant does not know the distinction of grey because all he sees is grey.

The elephant may not feel big either. In relation to all the other elephants, he may feel normal.

This is where the problem lies. We can't experience something new without first comparing it to something we've already experienced.

When we meet someone new, our minds search for and isolate distinctions that we recognize in others we have known.

For some women it seems like they date the same man repeatedly but in different bodies. Are they really the same man?

Even though it is a new person with different memories and experiences, we immediately separate, label and judge. We react to them as if they are another person.

Much like the parts of the elephant, we can't see the whole. Most of the time, we don't want to see the whole. It is far easier to compare people to others we have known and move on.

We see distinctions in others because it makes it easier for us to understand them.

We hold beliefs about distinctions and when we recognize those distinctions in others, it triggers our beliefs. For example, say I watch a black man rob a liquor store and I now believe that all black men are criminals. If I come across another black man, I will

judge him, not for his own actions, but for the actions of the criminal black man. He no longer has his own identity. He now holds distinctions that are negative for me.

The filter, that narrows in on distinctions, also fuels discrimination and hate. We only see the bad or negative in others. It is what we choose to see because it is what we believe to be true. The filter reinforces false beliefs and gives them strength.

Can you think of a belief you may have about a group of people? Is it true? Can ALL members of any group be the same? If a group of people hold one similar distinction, does it make them all the same?

Our brains are designed to view one point at a time. When you look at a picture, your eyes can't look at the whole picture. They scan the picture and your brain puts it together.

We can't think two thoughts at the same time, we can't say two words at the same time and we can't look at two points at the same time.

Have you looked at a painting and noticed something you hadn't seen before? It's very likely that your eyes had not scanned to that area of the picture.

Our minds can only focus on one thing at a time; this is like the blind men and the elephant. Imagine if you touch the right leg of the elephant and then I switched the elephant with another one without your knowledge. Then you touched the right leg of that

elephant. Would you know that you touched two different elephants?

The experience feels the same for you, but not for the elephant. It is a different elephant. It may be an abused elephant that becomes violent when it is touched.

The first elephant may have felt nothing when it was touched, but the second may be experiencing extreme emotions from the touch. Even though the touch felt the same for you, it was not the same touch.

We cannot experience the whole elephant all at once. We can only experience pieces at a time that we can compare to experiences from our past. However, experiences from our past can hold information that does not fit into the current situation.

Our minds are designed to fill in the blank when information is missing. We have to work consciously to look at things as they are, without labels, judgment or comparison to the past.

Imagine for a moment that a man dressed in all black; black shoes, black pants, black jacket, and a black ski mask is walking down a deserted alley with no lights. A black car with no headlights is approaching the man but stops before he hits him. How did the driver see the man?

Try to imagine the story you just read in your mind. Read it again several times if you must and imagine it in your mind. Can you figure out how the driver saw the man?

The answer is far easier than you think. Many people I know came up with numerous intricate responses as to why the driver stopped. Some said that there was another car approaching from the other side with their headlights on. Others believed that it was the man's shoes reflecting the moonlight and one person said it was the light from the moon and stars.

It's very simple. It was day. Nowhere in the story did it say it was night. Did your mind imagine the story at night?

Our minds automatically visualize the story at night. The man is wearing a ski mask, which we associate with criminal activity that usually takes place at night. He's walking down an alley, which we associate with dark and scary because people usually get attacked in alleys and that reinforces the criminal image.

The mind automatically fills in the night because of all of these factors and information from the past.

We must be conscious of how we judge others because by hearing one piece of information about someone, our minds may fill in the rest with false information from *our* past that is not in relation to that person.

All of these factors were set in place for our ancestors to help in their survival. You only need to see a leopard once to know that you need to run for your life. You would not walk up to one thinking that maybe this one is different.

However, our natural design works against us in society. It works well in nature but not in civilization. You only need to see one poisonous cobra to know that all cobras are poisonous.

There are certain true statements that we can make about the human race as a whole but none about specific groups within humanity.

Most of the statements are social distinctions that we learn from our parents, friends, TV, teachers or others. They are not facts; our beliefs make them true in our experience.

We are not separated by color, race, religion, etc. Our minds are designed to separate, label and judge to make things easier for us to understand.

The world itself is whole. We divide parts of the world and label them in order for us to understand it better. Our mind is a separator. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean that the world is separate.

If I placed a picture on graph paper with little boxes that divide parts of the picture, does that mean the picture is not whole?

Beginning artists sometimes use this paper to help them learn how to draw. Drawing parts of the whole is far easier than trying to draw the whole all at once. We must divide to see and understand. Unfortunately, we have done it for so long and we do it so often that we forget that we were the ones that separated things.

We separate planets, stars, black holes, etc, in order to understand them. Does that mean that they are not a part of the universe as a whole?

We separate organs from the body in order to understand how the body works better. Does that mean the organs are separate from the body?

We see things in the world as separate. We see a tree, a river, a plant, etc. However, these things are not separate things.

The tree exists in relation to the sun, water and the environment in which it grows. It is not separate from any of those things.

Everything in the world is related to each other. One thing consists of another. Nothing is individual and separate; we perceive them as such.

The Earth itself would not exist without its precise location and distance from the sun. The sun would not exist without the universe or space.

Our minds create separation, distinction and division. Then we take what we have separated and judge it based on our previous experiences. After we judge it, we label it and put it away in our minds to use later when we come across something similar.

All of our lives, we have been gathering information to make our lives easier. Unfortunately, this has created an even bigger problem for us. Instead of making our lives easier, it fuels hate, violence, injustice and war, thus making things far worse.

Our filter, aside from sorting out information that reinforces our false beliefs, receives the same information as someone else might receive but interprets it differently.

Imagine if you placed red-tinted glasses on when you were a child and it made everything you saw red. Then, as you got older, you forgot that you had the glasses on. Everything was red to you but you no longer saw the red because everything was red.

That is your filter. You can change the color of your glasses but you can't take them off.

It's not a matter of getting rid of your filter or taking off your glasses, it's about being aware that you have them.

If you keep in mind that you view things differently from others, it will make communication and understanding easier. Just like when we realize that our beliefs are just that: beliefs.

Because we all have different filters or glasses on, we all hold different beliefs, opinions and truths. This can cause many problems in relationships, communication and diplomacy. However, it can have an even more powerful affect on how we view ourselves.

There are beliefs about ourselves that we all carry around that are not true.

Some people believe that they are stupid when in fact they are intelligent. Some time ago, they decided that they were stupid and their filter changed.

They now filter out intelligent decisions and only focus on the events, actions or conversations that make them feel stupid. It reinforces their belief that they are stupid.

We all do stupid things sometimes but to someone who believes that they are stupid, it's devastating. They go through life holding themselves back because of this belief. Failing at a task also reinforces that belief. We all fail, but we are only failures if we accept failure as our destiny.

We all hold limiting beliefs about ourselves.

Some blame their limitations on their sex, culture, skin color, genes, body type, etc.

There is a famous story about fleas that are placed in a jam jar. The fleas jump to the top of the jar and hit their heads on the roof of the jar. Eventually, the fleas learn to jump high enough where they don't hit their heads on the roof of the jar.

When the fleas are taken out of the jar, even though they hold the ability to jump eight to ten inches high, they only jump as high as the jam jar.

Zoo trainers train elephants in a similar way. When the elephant is young, they tie the leg of the elephant with rope. The elephant tries to move around and can only go so far before it is tugged back. Then when the elephant is grown, even though it is strong enough to break the rope, it doesn't even try because it has been conditioned to believe that it can't.

Humans have also been conditioned to believe that they are far more limited than they actually are. Some of this conditioning comes from the parents. Some parents pass on their own limitations to their children without even realizing it.

Some of the conditioning comes from society and some of it comes from the person themselves. Either way, we all have beliefs about what we are capable of doing that aren't true.

Barack Obama did not grow up believing that there were only a minimal amount of things he could accomplish in his life just because he was black. There were tens of thousands, if not millions, of children growing up in America at the same time, believing that they could never be president because they are black. Therefore, they never tried.

We don't always receive empowerment from our parents, teachers, friends or family. We must empower ourselves. We are responsible for ourselves; we are responsible for our beliefs, thoughts, feelings and actions. We may not have been when we were children, but we are no longer children.

When our beliefs change, our filter changes as well. Soon enough our thoughts change, our feelings change, our actions change and the world changes. The world changes because we change.

Someone once told me that the world is a mirror of the self. If you are feeling angry, you will encounter people and things that make you feel angry.

If you are happy, you will encounter people and things that make you feel happy. I believe this is due to our filters.

Siblings living in the same home can grow up having completely different views of the world. Some people might see the world as a cold and selfish place while other people might see the world as a place for creation and hope.

Each person acts accordingly to their belief of the world and receives feedback through the filter that reinforces their beliefs. Those who see the world as a cold and selfish place only see that. They react coldly, choosing to do things that only benefit themselves. Then when others react to their actions coldly, it reinforces their belief that the world is a cold place.

Which person's view is the correct one? All views of the world are correct if we believe them. We already understand the power of beliefs and how they can alter the way we see things.

Two people performing the same task can view the task in different ways. Imagine if you walked up to two men chipping away at a rock. You ask the first man, "What are you doing?" He answers, "Oh I'm just chipping away at this rock." Then you ask the second man the same question. He answers, "I'm building a cathedral."

What is the difference between the two men? They are both performing the same exact act, chipping at a

rock. Yet one is just performing a job and the other is filled with purpose and peace.

The first man might choose to quit that job believing it's a waste of his time and even feel resentment toward it. The second man might choose to dedicate his entire life to building because it gives him a sense of purpose.

How we choose to view our environment, our family, society, life, the world and ourselves makes a dramatic difference in who we are, how we feel and what we choose to do.

The world acts as a mirror because of our filter. Whatever emotion or deed you choose to project on to the world will be mirrored back. It's not magic, it's psychology. If I believe that the world is full of angry people, my mind will pay more attention to people who are angry. Moreover, once I see an angry person, it will confirm my belief.

If we look for the bad in others, we will find the bad. What we seek, we will find. A pickpocket will not see the saint, only his pockets.

Therefore, a corrupt person views the world as corrupt so he can justify being corrupt.

If he viewed the world and his victims as just, honest, loving and caring people, he could not bring himself to act as such.

Therefore, he views the world as a cold, selfish place full of people who stand in the way of his happiness or way of life.

Any act can be justified in the mind regardless of the savagery. Even if the person sees the act as retaliation for the same cruel act that was committed on him.

However, if we saw each other and the world from a more inclusive perspective, we could never bring ourselves to commit crimes against each other. We couldn't justify it because the perspective would leave no room for justification.

The House of 1,000 Mirrors

In a small far-away village, there was a place known as The House of 1,000 Mirrors.

A small, happy dog decided to visit. When he arrived, he bounced happily up the stairs to the doorway of the house. He looked through the doorway with his ears lifted high and his tail wagging as fast as it could.

To his great surprise, he found himself staring at 1,000 other happy little dogs with their tails wagging just as fast as his. He smiled and was answered with 1,000 great smiles just as warm and friendly. As he left the House, he thought to himself, "This is a wonderful place. I will come back and visit it often."

In this same village, an angry, little dog decided to visit the same house. He climbed the stairs and anxiously hung his head low as he looked into the door. When he saw the 1,000 unfriendly looking dogs staring back at him, he growled at them out of fear

and was horrified to see 1,000 little dogs growling back at him. He ran off thinking, "What a horrible place. I will never go back there again."

QUOTE:

*"We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves." -Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State Of Mind, and Other Aphorisms**