

CENSORING OUR REALITY

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I realize as I write this that there will (probably) be few readers for this article. I know you like variety in these blogs, and that a few stories would be more welcome. However, I tend to go where my interest goes, and right now, in this political season, I am wondering how we will ever make headway against the lobbyists, corporations, and entrenched interests. And I don't see a quick fix for solving our problems, but rather one that works from the bottom up, one person at a time. I am sure this may seem abstract, but I don't see it that way. It involves not with how to change others, but with how to change ourselves.

Philosophers, psychiatrists, and especially Buddhists talk about labels and labeling all the time. Labels here refer to that thin film of thought that coats our true senses, a prophylactic against actually feeling life, just as it is. Labels are a self-imposed mental filter between each of us and true reality.

These mental labels or filters are such an in-grown habit that long ago we ceased being aware that they even exist, the Buddhists would say innumerable lifetimes ago. And there is also the 'First Thought, Second Thought' concept to consider.

The Tibetan Buddhists make a big deal about the initial sense experience or "first thought" in each moment, and the reflections and subsequent thoughts that follow. That first thought is pure experience and ideally we should let our minds rest in that. It is just crystal clear physical sense.

It is the thoughts that can follow a sense experience, our reflections, criticisms, comments, approval, disapproval, etc., that we add on – labels – that are the problem. In other words, our fog of mental obscurations does not come from the initial sense experience itself, but rather from our own reaction to that experience, our projections and editorial comments on what we perceive, the "pale cast of thought" as Shakespeare notes.

It would seem that modern (and probably ancient as well) awareness is so well insulated from the true nature of the mind, that we see everything "through a glass darkly." Concepts and labels are laid on so thick that we are seldom able to even touch ourselves, much less reach others. We each really are like the "boy in the bubble." The remarkable thing is that we have virtually no awareness that we have wrapped ourselves into a cocoon of labels and concepts from which we have yet to awaken.

This web we weave around our senses with labels and concepts is tangled beyond recognition of the precious mind within. It is almost like we each are wearing a beehive of projected thoughts for a helmet from lifetime to lifetime. We are not only not aware of this, but not even aware that we are unaware.

And it is not just a label or two that we poster ourselves with, but a constant rain of babble that we paste over our mind until we are like one of those hollow papier-mâché figures that kids make, layer glued on sticky layer.

And if something really gets our attention, like an insult or some faint praise, we endlessly label and re-label that thought until it is a monument of obfuscation on our mental horizon. And we do this all the time.

This goes on (and has been going on) infinitely forever. To stop this accumulation, we first have to verify for ourselves that it exists, which is not all that easy to do because through our labeling we have made an airtight case in which we are entombed and don't even know it. We have lost all fresh air from the senses long ago, and have not so much as a keyhole to peek out through. The true reality outside our projections is something we almost have to take on faith.

As for what can be done to remove these obscurations, we have to deconstruct this cocoon label by label, like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks. It's not just going to happen spontaneously, ever, and no one can do it for us. We each have to remove our own obscurations individually. And there are not all that many roadmaps out there on how to do this, and few guides.

The key to deconstructing what obscures us is greater awareness, awareness first of the problem itself and then awareness that shows us how to remove these obscurations. For me, meditation techniques have generated that increased awareness and there are various awareness-methods that make it possible to deconstruct and dissolve the layers of accumulated labels and what-not that have piled up.

Why do you think I keep talking about mind-training? It is because these awareness techniques work and we need them. It is obvious our political leaders can't see to make the changes the world needs. That leaves the rest of us to do what we can. The first step is to develop enough awareness to see the problems clearly, so that we can respond to them appropriately.

Am I the Lone Ranger here? I hope not.