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Reality is in the Eye of the Beholder

By Evette Gardner

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I don't like my job. It's a struggle to pay my bills. I've been having health issues. Concern for my child keeps me up at night. I'm at the center of some really malicious gossip. We all, at times, find ourselves living in situations which test our faith in the goodness of life. We don't understand how to reconcile a positive life outlook with the trying conditions we find ourselves having to deal with. We say to ourselves *if life is so wonderful, then why is this happening to me?* Not realizing that our experience in life is determined not by what happens to us, but by what we choose to take away from the circumstances we are made to act in.

Each of us makes our own reality. You've heard the sentiment expressed before I'm sure... when life gives you lemons, it's up to you to decide what to do with them. The lesson in that metaphor is simple. No matter what situation life presents you with, you have the ability to look at your life's circumstances in any manner of your choosing. And it is this internal choice, not the external conditions which merely frame the context of your life experience, which truly establishes what you go through in life. So the question then becomes how can you maintain a constructive life outlook even amid circumstances which seem to conflict with what you imagine to be ideal? How can you have a positive life experience even when the situation you are immersed in presents a serious challenge to your desires? Such a feat might seem comparable to being asked to eat feces while trying to conjure the taste of ice cream. Impossible you say? It all depends on how you look at it. Case and point...

My mother is the oldest child of seven siblings (five girls followed by two boys). She often tells the story of how when my aunt "Tiny" was born, the baby girl of the clan, my auntie Pooch (who had, up until this new arrival, been the youngest) went through a jealous phase. During one of her moments of acting out, she gave my aunt Tiny some dog turds, told her it was chocolate, and Tiny ate it. No fuss, just ate it. In her mind it was chocolate. No big deal. Somehow my Nana found out about this incident and her method of punishing her fourth child for being so vindictive was to serve it back to her just as she had given it. Nana made Pooch eat a dog turd too, only Pooch had to eat this turd having full knowledge of what it was. She ate her punishment through hysterical tears as Tiny watched, looking on as if wondering what the big deal was about being made to eat chocolate. Pooch always gets quiet when my mother tells this story (shell shock probably ☺). My aunt Tiny, who's passed on now, used to always say that she had no actual memory of this episode but just from hearing my mother tell the story she swore she could then taste those dog turds (as dog turds) which she had been tricked into eating some forty plus years in the past and it would just gross her out. Oh the funny irony. When she actually did physically eat this poop, it had to have tasted like chocolate (or at least something somewhat appetizing otherwise why didn't she spit it out). But over four decades later upon just hearing the

story of this event – she could suddenly taste those dog turds because now she knew what it was too. It's all a matter of perspective. The mind is a very powerful thing.

Now it is by no means being suggested that you stick your head in the sand and ignore the reality of whatever troubling situation you're facing. You are simply being asked to recognize that the reality of your situation is a storyline *you* make up. Reality is not something that is inflicted upon you. It's not something which is rigid and set in stone. Reality is dynamic and your experience of reality is something that is personal to you because you and you alone are the one who is creating it.

So let's walk through it. You have a situation in your life which seems to violate your vision of an ideal. The challenge then is to find some way to make peace with these upsetting conditions because you cannot ignore the situation you're in, at least not without paying a price for such negligence. So what you have to do is decide how you're going to meet your life's circumstances. But before you go charging out to conquer the world to right the wrongs you see in your reality, it is in your best interest to first understand that the source of your discontent isn't really in the world at large. Your struggle is never with the situation that tests you – that's just the setting. Your struggle is with the thoughts you keep pertaining to whatever the situation is. The transformations you seek in the world must take place within your own soul before they may manifest anywhere around you. You have to be the change you want to see in the world otherwise you will never see that change in the world. But change can seem tough because habits are sometimes very challenging to overcome (especially as they pertain to habitual thoughts). The habit of looking at a thing, one way, for so long, may seem like a difficult practice to break. Past experience is both a treasure and a curse for it can afford you wisdom or cause you blindness.

The familiarity we gain from past experiences is what allows us to grow so comfortable with our abilities that we feel okay to let go and simply enjoy the realization of our potential. It is this comfort which allows us to achieve newer and newer heights of greatness. On the flip side, the familiarity we gain from past experiences can allow us to grow *so* comfortable in our knowledge that we stop paying attention to the scene around us. We get cocky, and we stop being present. And when this is the case, our past experience then becomes an interference to our Now experience for we are in a mental state of seeing things as we've been used to seeing them instead of actively surveying the numberless other views which our at our disposal to explore.

It's all about angles and vantage points. You don't like what you're seeing, change the angle of your outlook and you will be treated to something which, though the same, is completely different. Consider Freud's famous *What's on a Man's Mind* illustration. Look one way at this image and you see the profile of a man. Look another way and you see a nude lady. Same object, but a different experience depending on how you choose to look at it.

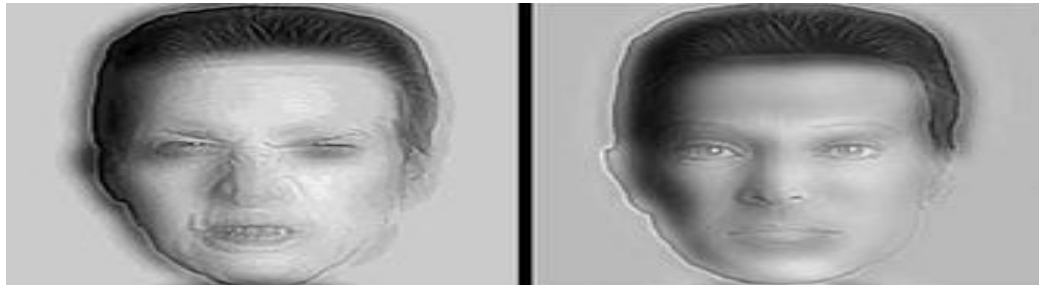
WHAT'S ON A MAN'S MIND



Another example of this is the famed *Young Lady or Old Lady* illustration. Which do you see? And if you change your angle, what then?



Try this. Look at this photo as you sit in your seat. Now get up and move six feet back from the screen.



Where the face on the left at first appears to be angry and the one on the right appears to be composed, when you move back the reverse appears to be true. The face on the left appears to be composed and the one on the right appears angry. Again, it's all about angles and vantage points. Your experience in life is this way too. But more than simply being an optical illusion, your reality takes its form from the slant you take with your thoughts instead of with your eyes. So if you want to have an evolved experience, keep your thoughts fresh. Never take anything for granted. Even with things that are familiar to you, work towards establishing the habit of looking upon those things with a mindset that is learning about them as if for the very first time. Treat each moment like a surprise. Be present with your reality.

There is tremendous freedom in being present. Where you may be bond by the past or invested in the future, and thus subject to limitation when given to either extreme, when you are wholly present everything is brand new to you. When you are wholly present you are not clouded by past prejudices, nor reliant upon future expectations. In this you are afforded the freedom to explore all kinds of different understandings with no particular attachments to any of them. This is what it means to live with an open mind. When your mind is open, you are at liberty to instantly shift your outlook regarding anything in your life until you come upon a viewpoint which offers an experience which feels positive and product to you. Without an open mind, this shift becomes prolonged, arduous and may at times even seem impossible.

Edgar Cayce said it some many years ago and it's really a good summation, "the mind is the builder." It's one of the central posts of Hermetic philosophy, "Everything is mental." All things

happen in mind. Everything you experience in life is owing to what you think about in life. Reality is in the eye of the beholder.

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