

## Week Two – Truthfulness

This second week, we focus on **truth**, or the quality of embodying it by exhibiting **truthfulness**. As we can note from Week One – our internal dialogue reveals that we talk to ourselves about a world that really does not exist. We make judgments about others and ourselves; we create false assumptions and wild expectations about events and circumstances. During our breath awareness meditation, perhaps that was the first time in a long time that we simply experienced our senses and thoughts “as they are” rather than clouded and muddled with a tinge of judgment etc. **The goal for Week Two is to identify, define, and live our truth.**

LIFE AS “IT IS” or is it?

We have heard the phrase(s) “you say tomato, I say tomato” or “I say potato, you say potato.” So which way do you say it? The lesson that we see within these simple phrases is that the words themselves, written down, do not mean anything other than what they are: either potatoes or tomatoes. Rather, the difference, or lesson, we note is in the pronunciation of the words. This is a very important consideration because as we move forward, we should contemplate the relevance of what we consider to be truth, or the true facts surrounding something. If we are to live our lives truthfully, to honor and represent truth, it is important that we consider the subjective nature of truth in the first place.

The lesson we gleaned from above is that, although we were talking about the same object, we referred to it with a different vocal intonation – we experienced the true reality of *potato/tomato* with differing perspectives. While it does not seem like much, I remember as a child having a heated argument over this very issue – who is right in their understanding of the linguistic nature of those two words? The very assumption of what is our truth, what we know and define it as, could be argued as the basis of all conflicts in the course of human history. In all seriousness, what is the correct pronunciation? We associate and identify with little truths that are subjective in nature. As we will learn, these subjective truths can create deceptive realities.

### OUR CAVES

Plato, the Greek philosopher, devised an allegory that can be applied to many levels of our human condition: the allegory of the cave. In this allegory, Plato describes prisoners who are shackled in a cave who only have the reflection of a fire on a wall of the cave in which to see. They are to spend their entire lives in this cave and, as time passes and memory fades, they assume the shadows they see against the wall to be creatures and figures, alive and real. He then proposes the question of what should happen if one of the prisoners was to escape and find the truth for his self. How would he react? How would he explain to the other prisoners what he saw, should he go back?

Like the prisoners in Plato’s cave, we are unknowing trapped in a world that is based on perceptions, some true and others not. It is important, moving forward, that the truth can be elusive. False truths can seem so real and tangible.

JOURNAL Day 1: Think of a time someone told you a truth that, at first, you found very hard to believe. Right down the memory. Try and relive the disbelief – think of how you felt after acknowledging and living your new understanding. Right it all down.

The fact of the matter is that we are all living in our caves. What I mean by that is that, as mentioned during the introduction to the series, our lives are the unique combination of our family and social influences coupled with our choices and experiences. If we grew up in the southeastern United States, we very well might say “*tomato*” with a good twang to it. We also might consider macaroni and cheese to be a vegetable. Another cultural icon in the United States (to give more color to our examples here) is the famous *submarine*. You know, that delicious *hoagie* of fresh bread, cold cuts, cheese and fixings. Or maybe you know the sub sandwich as a *hero* or *grinder*? This is just another example of how we associate a subjective truth (using cultural language) to modify the real truth.

JOURNAL Day 2: Think of a time when you were met with disbelief. While you knew something to be true, what was it like trying to explain that truth to others? What types of reactions happened? How did the situation become resolved?

## THE TRUTH IS BLIND

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Lady Justice has been depicted as wearing a blindfold rendering her oblivious to the external. In a way, the blindfold causes her to be introspective, to use reason or logic, rather than be at the mercy of her senses – which might lead her to be subjective. The symbolism of her objectivity serves to not only remind the courts and state representatives to seek objective truth, but us laymen as well. How can we pass good judgment on our decisions if we operate in a distorted reality? Another story to illustrate.

There was a farmer who, every night, needed to walk his harvest to the market. The road from his property to the market had fork, the left path 2 hours longer than the right. One evening, a young man was walking from the market towards the farmer’s property and at the fork in the road he saw the farmer on his way to the market. Like he always did, the farmer started turning right. Confused, the young man asked why the farmer would walk 2 hours longer than needed. The farmer replied, “Young man, there is a 10 foot long snake that lives along that path. I warn you to stay away, lest you been taken for its next meal.” Having just come from that way, the young man replied, “But sir, that’s just a discarded rope.” The farmer was blind to the real truth in that he allowed a moment in time to dictate his future, causing more burden and harm.

## OPENING EYES

The above story illustrates how even our senses can deceive us into a false reality, not just our minds alone. The farmer, only walking the roads at night, saw a rope one evening and mistook it for a snake. The dark silhouette, the shadows from branches casting patterns; it was easy for the farmer to make an obvious mistake. The immediate instinctual response was just as it should have been: a reaction that warned us of possible harm. However, the problem of the snake did not immediately resolve itself. He believed his senses and worried not to check if it was a real snake or not. Because of it, up until he met the young man, he lived in a reality based on a false fear, otherwise he would have continued living that way, walking 2 extra hours to the markets.

To fully express and live the quality of truth, we need to continually inquire – Is what I am experiencing true? Personal experienced realization is the only way to know the truth 100%. We can learn from role models or authorities of a particular topic, we can watch and deduce the cause and effects but the only way to know is through our personal experience, the immediate realization we have that comes from understanding. At first, it might be questionable – however, think of an architect, engineer and foreman; the architect, through learning at school from others, is able to create wonderfully designed buildings – but he cannot build them; an engineer can measure and calculate build structure and integrity – only through deduction of mathematical calculations. The foreman – through firsthand experience – knows how to build the actual building. For us to build a life that is successful, we will need to correctly perceive the reality around us so that we can avoid limiting illusions.

Journal Day 3: Reflect and write about a moment of truth that redefined your life. This could be a fact about the world, or an emotional/ mental realization.

*Example: “By learning more about the data that came back from the Higgs-Boson studies, I was able to advance my understanding of theoretical particle physics by years.”(Etc...) OR “When I finally learned that real communication skills, I was able to understand how miscommunications arise and better word my dialogues with others to create deeper connections”*

## THE TRUTH HURTS

From our journaling so far, we have learned that our families and communities influence who we are. Our perceptions of reality and life are shaped by these influences. We have learned that our mind, based on these filtered perceptions, creates an inner dialogue that ranges from positive to negative.

During this week, we have learned that truth can be subjective, as well as objective. Truth, in both forms, can hurt and be harmful. Let’s take a moment now to consider the difference between **subjective** and **objective truth** to determine how we can practice truthfulness without being harmful.

Subjective truth relates to the perspective of the subject at hand. Thinking about our linguistic issue earlier – the right way to say either *potato* or *tomato* really depends on where you are. Similarly, our perceptions of circumstances and situations are subjectively true to us. With the national spotlight on the racial tension between African Americans and law enforcement organizations, it could be argued that both parties are indeed true in their own perspectives. Crime data does show higher likelihoods among African American populations in certain settings, like urban areas. Aggressive police tactics in these areas can seem to target minorities, because they do...the data suggests they should. As we see, truths can hurt. It can cause, in this example, a seeming hypocrisy. The subjective truth allows us to be right and continue to support our biased perspectives.

Objective truth, on the other hand, is not biased. We attempt to find this type of truth by removing, as much as we can, the emotions, feelings, ideas etc. behind its source. Biased, subjective truths are but parts and parcels of the whole truth. Being objective with our truth, or seeking the truth, we have to acknowledge that we will be met with facts that may go against our preferences. We have to set aside our fears of being wrong or facing a reality that does not conform to erroneous beliefs.

Journal Day 4: Identifying Subjective vs Objective Truths. Listen to the news, either on the radio or TV. Compare conservative vs. liberal news outlets. Who is telling the truth? Think about when you told a story, or had recalled a business situation. Did you tell the whole story, as it was observed, or did you modify the story with your own perspectives or motives?

## FINDING THE TRUTH

Every thing that exists has a purpose, function, and form; a motive; a state of being. The sun, moon, water, air, trees; they all fulfill functions that aid in their own survival and support those around. The sun is a mixture of gases that are constantly being compressed through magnetic and gravitational forces – it provides radiation that assists life. The moon pulls at the oceans causing tidal movements that in turn cause weather patterns on Earth. Water, air and trees each function in accord with its properties. By careful analysis, we can discover the truth about the world and the various functions things operate.

Moment to moment, we can find more of the objective truth by modifying our **Breath Awareness meditation**. Instead of internalizing too much of your attention, you will focus on the present moment and all that it encompasses. Perhaps you start observing the breath, and then move to observe the sights, sounds and senses. Notice how these sensations change from moment to moment. What feelings come up? What emotions are you observing? Do these feelings and emotions change your perception? Did you have any expectations prior to the situation happenings? If other people are involved, can you put yourself into their shoes and experience what they may be feeling or thinking? By taking the time to slowly process a situation, we are more inclined to have a clearer, more objective reality.

Journal Day 5: Take a moment to think about an interaction today involving someone you care about (spouse, child, boss, colleague). What was the interaction about? (Theme) What position did you have beforehand? After? What was the perspective of the other person (put yourself in their shoes)? Between you and the other person, what is the real truth of the situation?

#### CUTTING THROUGH THE ILLUSION

The mystics say that our lives are illusionary; that we must seek to know the truth of our existence to be removed completely from suffering. And, as we can see, false perspectives can certainly cause pain and suffering. We can begin to remedy the situation by seeking out truth – observing what is really happening, without the colors of expectation or preferences. Understanding the difference between subjective and objective truth, we can be more aware to the false illusions that can be created through biased interpretations and perceptions. By practicing awareness mindfully, we can begin reducing the amount of false reality we perceive. EXAMPLE?

Be aware that as you discover more and more truth, those around you will still be acting and reacting according to their own perceptions and motives. Be mindful during your communications, as everyone will be trying to tell you *their* truths. By knowing that all are speaking from their own perception of truth, you can glimpse into new realities by piercing their perceptions.

Journal Day 6: Listen to those around you. As you converse throughout the day, take note of what people say, how they say it, and what the subject of their conversations are. See if you can really understand from their perspective or truth.

#### HARMLESSNESS vs. TRUTHFULNESS

As we think about expressing and living our own truth, we will at some point encounter the need to share a truth with someone that may cause harm, or hurt. (Usually it's emotional anguish) Moving forward, we will also see that all of our 10 Moral and Ethical Principles found in the Building Personal Power Series interrelate with one another. The pursuit of truth is one of the noblest qualities individuals can possess. With patience and practice in our meditations and journals we will be able to appropriately respond to the world around us harmoniously.

Speaking the truth to others (and when people tell us the truth) can cause a lot of emotional discomfort. To minimize this, it is essential to practice the Nonviolent Communication empathetic listening and speaking skills. (See [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org) for more information) We should already be aware of the technique for internal awareness (InnerSpeak®). To recap NVC speaking skills we 1) state our unbiased observation 2) note

our emotions 3) state our needs 4) make requests/ actions. The NVC model allows us to remove blame or any associative wording that makes others feel attacked or cornered. (Example: "I felt really hurt when I heard you say 'I don't want to see you' because I need closeness in our relationship.") By taking the time to introspect, mindfully observe, and identify the truth and our relationship to that truth with regard to our expectations and feelings, we can communicate clearly to others in a more nonviolent, truthful way.

Journal Day 7: Harmless Truth – Communicating Compassionately; in your journal, practice writing out truthful statements that do not cast blame yet truly reflect your preferences.

Bonus Journal: think of a time you did not communicate a truth out of fear for the repercussions. Write a dialogue that tells the truth in a nonviolent way using the NVC model.

**Congratulations! We are now done with Week Two – Truthfulness. By now, we should be able to:**

- **Recognize some false perceptions we had, or still have, that caused pain.**
- **Clearly reframe those perceptions to accurately reflect the facts and not personal preferences.**
- **Be able to communicate with others and ourselves what we truly observe, how we feel, why, and what, if anything, needs to happen.**

**Remember, I am available for email – and I appreciate helping those that have already reached out. Keep practicing your daily meditations and journals. These daily tasks provide substance to the sweet reward at the end of the series.**