

Harmonizing Rationalization and Truth

Truth is such an amorphous concept. Without a foundation of truth I recently came to realize that my mind has been free to rationalize. I guess this is the process whereby I manufactured a plausible, but incorrect reason for my or other people's behavior. It now seems clear that my engagement in rationalization has inadvertently yet inevitably led to personal and interpersonal problems. It seems amazing to me that I have been engaging in this dynamic because I was convinced of its validity. Now with this clearer understanding of rationalization I feel it might just be an inherent part of being a human being. Yeow!

Helping a person to acknowledge the damage that the process of rationalization causes is most difficult. How can the person be aware of and to assume responsibility for a behavior that was based upon the mind's inherent ability to deceive itself? How can one be aware of the mind's natural self-deception? Is it possible, if we can't help rationalizing, then, at least we might be able to learn a way of being aware of it? Learning to be aware that we are deceiving ourselves, and accepting responsibility for the affect on others in the current moment may be feasible. Yet it becomes less so when we also have to accept all the pain we have caused others during our life through the process of rationalization. This accumulated guilt seems to be too overwhelming to acknowledge. Many people believe that it would be too painful to do this. Still, while many people believe this pain makes it a prohibitive factor that too may be a rationalization for not making the attempt. It's hard to know in the moment.

What does it mean that it would be too painful to be aware that we have deceived ourselves and that we have acted in such a way that is hurtful to others? It's likely that the hurt we cause others through the practice of rationalization accumulates in a kind of mental scar tissue. The scar tissue is our denial that our behavior hurts others. Oh my goodness. If the person becomes even momentarily aware of the pain caused to others in my experience it will trigger the person to rationalize the pain by "believing" that in the long run, it will be for the best. For those not so aware at the moment the mind will protect the rationalization by shifting the responsibility for the pain to others; often the person being hurt. This is an inadvertent deceit. Is it not inadvertent because the individual is not aware of their rationalization and thus has no ability to assume responsibility for the situation? Not being able to even assume responsibility for the pain one causes it becomes a cancer on the relationship with self and others. The deception becomes so large that to acknowledge it would cause the individual to lose all sense of self-esteem, and the consequences to the ego would be devastating. With this mechanism controlling the circumstances of perception, is it not too difficult to understand why the person would feel that it is too painful to see what is really happening? There is no mechanism in place to allow a safe way for the individual to "see" what is going on.

Let me share a bit about my take on truth. What is Truth? Truth may be the freedom from self-deception, the opposite of rationalization. Truth may be the awareness of one's self-deception. Truth may be the awareness that truth is just a group's acceptance of a perception, or of a belief. Truth may be perceived as an absolute, like a fact, such as what goes up must come down. However even that truth disassembles when a rocket is fired into space where there is no up or down. Truth may be relative, to the individual, group, or culture. Different cultural groups have different sets of truths,

which by living them make them distinct from another culture. Or Truth may be the Absolute, which is beyond reason and awareness. For our concern here, Truth is the truth of the individual and how it affects one's life. In this view, truth is a set of values that one lives by. Dishonesty would then be not living by those values.

Forming a body of values consciously, or being conscious of one's group of values that were instilled through childhood, is the first step in understanding truth. What one's values are, and understanding them, is a way of answering the question, "Who am I?" The answer is, "I am the values I live." When one filters one's behavior through these values, then one is living with integrity. When one has a question whether or not to do an act, it becomes clear when the anticipated act is filtered through the value system. The ease of filtering one's behavior through one's personal truth is measured by one's willingness to be conscious and aware of the values. Being willing to consciously commit to a set of values allows an individual to effectively filter one's behavior. It becomes the right and the wrong for the individual.

It is revealing to explore the person's ability and willingness to be conscious of the values that they truly hold dear. Living by another's values, or living under the laws of society, or by the precepts of a religion, or by one's own created values, or some combination of the above, for it to be Truth, must be done with free will, which requires consciousness and choice.

A value is not lived in an isolated way; rather it is lived in relationship to other values, which comprise the individual's truth. Some values are more dominant than others, and as such, a hierarchy exists. As long as one is clear as to which set of general values has priority then there is no conflict for the individual. Conflict comes into being when the values are not clearly established, and the groups of values have not been prioritized. One may set one's self first, family second, religion third, community fourth, or in any other order. Once established one may easily behave in an honest manner, given the values and their priorities.

Part of establishing one's values, combining together with establishing their priorities, which comprises one's truth, is being aware of their consequences, both the benefits and the penalties. At the time of establishing the personal truth the benefits are usually obvious, while the penalties are more subtle. However, as time goes on, life's circumstances may manifest so that unexpectedly there develops serious impediments to the living of the personal truth. These penalties may cause the individual to reevaluate their values and their priorities. This process is rarely done by choice; rather it is done under duress, or a personal crisis.

For instance, in the practice of religious values, a Jew in Spain at the time of the inception of the Inquisition would have found that the pleasures of practicing the Jewish Faith suddenly places one's life in jeopardy. To continue to live the open life of a Jew in Spain would require one's willingness to be tortured and martyred. This serious penalty could cause one to modify one's values, so that life could be continued. One would be forced into a series of choices. One could choose to escape the Inquisition by leaving Spain and move to an area where Judaism could be practiced without fear. To make this choice, the person has to be willing to abandon one's life work, and relationships. An individual may be able to escape only alone, or with a few members of one's family, or with one's personal family, but not with one's extended family. This choice in itself could destroy an individual's personal truth. Another possibility for this person would be

to not move, and to apostate and to accept Christianity. Should one apostate, but not all the members of one's family, this could cause a complete break with one's personal truth. Having to choose between life and one's personal truth is very frightening, and precipitates an internal crisis that changes life.

What appeared to be a laudable commitment in a environment of calm and peace to Truth, to live the life of a religious Jew, shifts to a questionable commitment in an environment that threatens life, because of that very commitment. This is the very center of the conflict between living a life of rationalization or a life of Truth. By committing to a personal truth one sets oneself up for incredible vulnerability. For this reason many people cannot handle the formulation of a conscious personal truth because of the conscious or subconscious fear of the potential life threatening penalties.

With an awareness of this fear of formulating a personal truth and the vulnerability resulting from this commitment one can begin to see how the power of rationalization takes hold and grows. With a personal truth to filter decisions, rationalization has little power to manifest. Without a personal truth to assist in the decision making, it is easy to rationalize, in fact, what else can a person do, but make up, to fabricate reasons for behavior? It is so available and ultimately, safer.

We have come full circle, back to rationalization, the result of not having a personal truth within which to determine behavior. It now is not so difficult to understand why rationalization is so powerful. It prevents one from being caught in an indefensible moral dilemma that threatens life. In daily life rationalization also allows us to set goals, and to seek to achieve them by any means necessary. That is why so many people talk of the ideal and the real world. This is the reason so many people are Sunday Christians, or Saturday Jews. That is why people's business practice seems to be so excluded from any concepts of absolute religious doctrines, such as truth and honesty. By not being committed to a personal truth, one has much greater flexibility than if one chooses to live by a personal truth, which seems to limits one's future choices.

Thus, while in this exploration, rationalization initially appears to be an inherent part of being a human being it also is a choice of sorts by the individual not committing to a set of values that determines one's moral and ethical behavior. To take the discussion out of this extreme place it would be beneficial to look at the real possibility of choosing to balance the benefit of rationalization, the flexibility to make choices and the benefits of establishing a personal truth, being able, in most situations to live by a chosen set of values that minimize the need to rationalize.

Now to Harmonizing Rationalization and Truth. Does it make sense to see that the two elements may be combined together in some free wheeling ethical design? All philosophers and theologians are familiar with this challenge. I believe that it has to do with the setting of priorities of the values. Let's say I believe that I want to live a life of virtue. After many years of living and deep meditation I come to conclude that the essence of living a virtuous life is to be as nice as possible. I define nice as a caring balance between my own needs, and the needs of others with whom I choose to relate. In this way I want to always speak with kindness. If I am hurt by someone I want to learn how to reply with kindness yet with the strength of presence that I do this so that both of us will be safe in the future when interacting together. If someone takes something from me, I want to learn how to view the experience with compassion for the one taking it, yet

with the interest in learning from the person how to overcome my inattention to the threat.

It is taking me years to learn how to do this and to discipline myself so that I can choose how to respond to my setting and to the people with whom I interact. I am learning how to filter my behavior and my comments through this value of kindness. In this way I live my values. However, at times, I find that my behavior irritates certain people with whom I have chosen to relate. They feel uncomfortable in relationship to my kindness; they feel less than kind when relating to me. How then should I relate to them? If kindness is truly the value I live by then if I choose to continue to relate to them the greater kindness would be to act less-than-kind so that they would feel more comfortable with me. To do otherwise creates the opposite of why I live kindness, which is to live in harmony with others. This insight allows me to promote a mutual harmony that respects differences in lived values. This suggests that harmony is a partner value with the act of kindness and this then becomes one of the ways I can choose to behave. Harmony may then be the balance factor between one's personal truth, and rationalization. With someone that responds well to kindness, then I choose to act with kindness. To one who feels safer and less vulnerable when there is a certain degree of tension, which allows them to maintain a comfortable distance, then to act to promote a certain degree of tension brings harmony. In understanding this I come to an awareness that to live a life of kind endeavor to be kind is a way of behaving and not only necessarily a guiding light that I felt it was for years. By striving to live a life of kind endeavor allows me to grow and a gift of that growth is the awareness that harmony is a fuller way of living than just a mechanism for the realization of my intent. In years to come, by living a life of harmony, I may come into the awareness of even a greater value that allows me to live my intent in yet a greater way. I find this exciting and encouraging.

To live in harmony provides me with endless flexibility and yet comes from a distinct value to which I am totally committed. In our highly technological world, we think great thoughts and this can result in the thought's creation in the physical world. It's interesting that one can also have a great feeling and that with endeavor that too can manifest in the physical world of human relationships. The happy result is that it leads one to live in harmony not with just one's self, one's family, one's community, but also with the planet itself. It is all possible!

Let me then suggest that by being guided by harmony one can come into a greater experience of fulfillment. Should this be so, then it is a highly desirable state because one can seek personal gain and achieve it with a sense of satisfaction that one has attained the goal with the greatest sense of harmony that includes gain for those affected by one's actions. Rationalization and Truth come into balance and Harmony is achieved.

In order for this awareness to be shared, should it be of worth to explore, then it is important that one gives one's self sufficient time for the subconscious to incorporate these pathways, before any strong attempt is made to live this experience. A good idea is not necessarily livable at the moment of the suggestion. Often it takes significant time for the person to integrate the concepts in a harmonious way so that by living them, a greater sense of fulfillment is achieved. Being aware of the role of the subconscious is critical.

The subconscious is one's internal processor. Basically, new neural pathways have to be created to incorporate new ways of perception and behavior. This is a physical process, much like growing a plant, except the plant is an idea. It must have a fertile foundation to root, and it must be encouraged to grow, and during this time it must be protected and nurtured. It is vulnerable, and like a fetus it is dependent upon the relative health of its parent for its future. The subconscious takes the conscious thought and provides the system through which it can be lived. To rush it, is to damage it and to often force its abortion. When rushed, it no longer seems as appealing, and the more one pushes it into being, the less possibility it will persevere to full term. The mind will begin to view it as a poor idea, as too hard, therefore unreasonable, and in frustration, the rational mind will give the command to the subconscious to terminate the effort. Conscious awareness is critical for it to take firm footing in one's life. Given time, the subconscious can provide it reality.

What is suggested above, to understand the dynamics of Truth and Rationalization, and to come to an awareness that these two seemingly opposite dynamics come into fulfillment when they are brought into harmony, is somewhat overwhelming. In truth, it is ridiculously overwhelming in its complexity, as may be the years of endeavor that is required to live it. For some of us, as adults, it may be too late, for we may not truly be motivated to change the way we live. Generally, the way most of us live is OK. It has its benefits and distractions, but overall, we do not have the energy to recreate ourselves. However, for children, it is just the right time to begin to assist them to becoming aware of the significance of this effort. Early childhood education would be not too early a beginning point. Children spend so many years in school learning important subjects of life. Yet, there are other important aspects of life, like the one suggested in this essay that need to be part of our educational curriculum, because like learning math, it takes many years to master. Mastery of the concepts of this essay leads one to a rich and fulfilling life and is worthy of focus and effort. While many adults may find it too much effort, children would grow in a more fulfilling way with its study and practice.

To more fully understand the integration of these concepts we need to start to explore the gentle approach of thought integration, given the hold rationalization has on the mentee.