

To what extent are we committed to objective Truth?

During the cold Polish winter of 1942, Mordechai Podchlebnik together with other Jewish prisoners, was forced to carry the bodies of murdered Jews and Gypsies out of gas vans and into a mass grave. Outside the third van that arrived that day, Mordechai found the bodies of his wife and his two small children [7 year old son and 4 year old daughter], that had been tossed out of the vehicle. Mordechai wanted to die. He lay beside his dead wife and awaited the shot from the S.S. soldier that would end his life. The soldier, who didn't want to lose a worker, forced him, with the help of whip lashes, to get up and continue with the slave labor¹. This occurred in the Chelmno concentration camp. Later, Podchlebnik succeeded in a daring escape attempt and managed to survive the long journey back to his village. He testified before the Jewish council on the horrors he had been thru, but [at first] the council members refused to believe him and even threatened to turn him in to the gestapo².

Jan Karski was gifted with an extraordinary memory, which he used in gathering intelligence for the Polish resistance. The desperate request of Jewish leaders to tell the world about the crimes being perpetrated on the Polish Jews touched him, and in 1942 Karski risked his life and infiltrated the Warsaw ghetto [after the war he was named as righteous among the nations and received an honorary citizenship from Israel]³. In November of 1942, Karski escaped to Britain and later to the US and met with many leaders, including President Roosevelt, and told them what he had witnessed happening to the Polish Jewry⁴. In spite of his detailed testimony, many wouldn't believe him, and

¹ "Michal Podchlebnik Chelmno Survivor Testimony", Holocaust Research Project, <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/survivor/podchlebnik.html>

² "Mordechai Podchlebnik – Chelmno", United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1004200>

³ "Jan Karski", Yad Vashem, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/karski.html>

⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Jan Karski", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Karski

claimed his testimony was exaggerated, while others remained indifferent to it. The reaction of Felix Frankfurter, a Jewish judge in the US Supreme Court, to Karski's testimony, portrays man's difficulty in accepting the Truth:

"I did not say this young man is lying. I said I am unable to believe him"⁵.

Every person needs to ask himself/herself:

To what extent is objective Truth a value of high priority to me?

To what extent am I committed to strive for the Truth?

How much am I willing to risk and suffer in order to uphold this value?

The definition of the concept of "Truth", is a wide subject covering many books, and it is not the place of this short article to delve into this subject. In this article, when I refer to 'Objective Truth', I refer to fact-based Truth, without [or with a minimal amount of] subjective human interpretation. The more an opinion is based upon information that reflects the objective reality, the closer it will be to the objective Truth. Here it is useful to refer to Popper's statement, that information is admissible when it is certain enough for practical needs- when the information is close enough to objective reality⁶.

As limited physical beings, we cannot attain full knowledge of the whole Truth, but we can strive to reach as close as possible to the Truth. The more complicated a subject with many unknown or unclear details, thoughts and feelings, the harder it is to reach an agreement concerning the objective Truth on the matter. We are far from perfect and all of us err. We cannot expect to reach the objective Truth on many subjects [if any], but we can use this moral definition to evaluate our commitment to the search for Truth:

⁵ Nissan Tzur, "The man who told the world about the Holocaust- and wasn't believed", The first News, July 13, 2018, [https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/the-man-who-told-the-holocaust---and-wasnt-believed-1109](https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/the-man-who-told-the-world-about-the-holocaust---and-wasnt-believed-1109)

⁶ Popper Karl, "Objective Knowledge", Clarendon Press, 1972

Our honest aspiration, effort and will to know the objective Truth, even if this Truth is contrary to our current beliefs, and causes us discomfort, cognitive-psychological suffering, and even if this Truth is completely contrary to our subjective and egoistic interests. The honest, real aspiration, effort and will to reach the objective absolute Truth. This aspiration is counted as part of a person's value, value system and his level of commitment to the Truth. We should be so committed to the objective Truth, that even if for instance we work our entire lives on a certain theory, and then suddenly discover new information that could disprove this theory, we won't run away and avoid this new reality, but rather we will confront the difficulty and pain of disproving our life's work, in order to uphold the ideal of the Truth.

Why must we be committed to the objective Truth and why is it important? This subject is a deep and broad one as well, I will only touch upon it briefly. The basic processes of life, including the processes of DNA replication, contain sub-processes of testing for mistakes [or quality testing (QA)], which include self-correcting codes. One such code was also discovered in the equations of quantum super symmetry⁷. An error-testing process is essential in a large variety of different systems. Likewise, in our personal journeys throughout our lives, with our many choices, beliefs and opinions, we also need a self-examining and self-correcting process, which will alert us if we are traveling in the wrong or sub-optimal direction. Our own system of information processing (objective as well as subjective information) works by examining and canceling-out ['refuting'] errors⁸. The more we are honest with ourselves during this process and the more we are committed to the objective Truth, the more effective our error testing process [system] will be. If we don't allow ourselves to be open to new information and if we don't learn to research and analyze information in a more objective manner, we are bound to repeat the same personal

⁷ Rachel Kaufman, In "The Universe According to Jim Gates", <https://www.sigmapisigma.org/sigmapisigma/congress/2016/jim-gates>

⁸ Popper Karl, "Objective Knowledge", Clarendon Press, 1972

and collective [historic] mistakes [errors]. In many cases, repeating the same mistakes, while amplifying and replicating these errors, can lead to catastrophic results.

When we are committed to seeking the Truth, and are open to new information, even if it is 'uncomfortable', inconvenient or contradicts our current views, we allow ourselves to learn new things and to fulfil our potentialities. In martial arts there is a concept, originating from Japanese Zen, called 'beginner's mind'⁹. The main idea of beginner's mind is to maintain a level of humility and be open to learning new things. Even if a person practices a martial art for many years, he should not shy away from wearing a white belt again, and studying under a different teacher or method. This open-minded approach allows a person from any 'stature', degree and age, to correct or erase irrelevant or erroneous information, to absorb new information and evolve. Apart from personal gain from this approach, and especially in our current culture, where he who shouts "I! ME! ..." the loudest, receives more "likes", it is very worthwhile to uphold and illuminate the value of humility.

The emotional-psychological barrier is possibly the greatest obstacle to the aspiration for knowledge of the objective Truth. People have a tendency to feel that their significant beliefs are connected directly to their self-identity [ego]. Therefore, when they encounter information that negates their opinions, they rush to reject it and to fight for the integrity of their opinions, as if they were fighting for their own self-integrity and identity. We need to let go of this feeling and remember that we are much more than our opinions, and that our uniqueness will be preserved even if we change them. Another reason for our close-mindedness and refusal to see signs that negate our opinions, is the uncomfortable feeling that occurs when we admit that we are wrong. When we admit we are wrong, it registers on a certain level as a failure. Hence if we allow are consciousness to accept a piece of information that negates our opinion, we might find ourselves changing our opinion and

⁹ Shunryu Suzuki, "Zen mind, Beginner's mind", Dailyzen, <https://www.dailyzen.com/journal/zen-mind-beginners-mind>

thus admitting that we have failed to view reality clearly. The more the subject matter is closer to our hearts and lives, and the more effort and time we expend on building our opinion on the subject, the greater will the perceived threat to our feeling of self-worth be [causing us to experience a cognitive dissonance¹⁰]. We often shield ourselves from the uncomfortable feeling that the new piece of information brings, by using 'logical gymnastics', which include various forms of logical fallacies [such as 'strawman', 'ad hominem' etc.¹¹], or by ignoring and running away from the new information [by using repression and other forms of psychological defense mechanisms¹²], without being aware of it. You could say that our 'mental immune system' is activated against any conceptual 'virus' that could undermine our current belief system, thereby creating a cognitive dissonance [that destabilizes our inner harmony/equilibrium]. Our first response to the 'objectionable' information is that of defense- an almost instinctual response; but we are intelligent beings and we must recognize this and be aware of it- and after the initial reaction, stop and address the new information in an honest and objective manner. In addition to our personal psychological difficulties, an admission of a mistake or failure can lower our perceived worth or our standing amongst our friends, our society and social group. There are dire consequences related to how we are perceived by others on our ability to survive. Being a social animal, most of us are very dependent on each other for various different things, and on many occasions our very survival can depend on help and cooperation with others, so the way we are perceived by others is of major physical and psychological importance.

¹⁰ "Cognitive Dissonance", Psychology Today, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/cognitive-dissonance>

¹¹ "List of fallacies", Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fallacies

¹² Susan Krauss Whitbourne, "The Essential Guide to Defense Mechanisms", Psychology Today, Oct 22, 2011, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201110/the-essential-guide-defense-mechanisms>

The social foundation of human beings is a source of many phenomena related to our perception of reality and our behavior. One of these is 'groupthink', where group members align their opinions according to the consensus of the group¹³. The members of the group undergo social conditioning and are 'programed', using positive and negative feedback, to think in certain patterns. The 'programming' can be affected without deliberate intent, similar to the process of evolution, or it can be guided by the group's dominant members, or those who 'pull the strings' from behind the scenes. Groupthink is a detriment to knowledge of the objective Truth because it suppresses free, independent and critical thinking, promotes fixed patterns of thought, stifles information and ideas that are contrary to those patterns, and because the group's ideas are often directed by those that have power and control ['the shepherds'], which direct the group ['the herd'] towards their interests.

We can see an example of groupthink, with opposing points of view, between people that tend to believe "normative", mainstream theories propagated by "authoritative" figures, and people who are 'anti-establishment' that tend to believe "conspiracy theories". What usually happens is that the people who tend to believe in mainstream theories will also tend to accept mainstream manipulations and lies from authoritative figures, while the people that are anti-establishment will tend to accept unsubstantiated theories that don't contain solid evidence, if those theories are viewed as 'anti-establishment'. Furthermore, if a group member expresses points of view that are not in line with the group's main narrative, they will often find themselves attacked [ad hominem], and at times thrown out of the group. We need to have a place for a "self-correcting code", for nuance, for shades of gray, and room for a wider point of view. Every group, every person should strive for balance, refrain from falling into groupthink patterns, and analyze each idea or theory on its own merit in an objective way.

¹³ "Groupthink", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupthink>

When we adopt a thought pattern or an opinion on a subject, we develop a tendency to accept information that confirms that opinion [confirmation bias¹⁴], while rejecting information that negates the opinion. For example, a person who strongly believes in the political ideology of a political group would enjoy and gladly accept information that confirms this belief, but would be annoyed and quick to reject information that refutes it. This cognitive bias, which causes a degree of blindness to the objective Truth, is enhanced in our modern information era by social media platforms [such as Facebook], that are purposely programmed to display more of the same content that a user enjoys and is interested in, thus creating personal and group 'filter bubbles'^{15 16}. The 'filter bubble' phenomenon increases subjectivity and group think, enhances the tendency for extremism, and distances people from the broad view of reality- from the objective and absolute Truth.

We have seen that coping with certain information can cause us hardship and pain for psychological and social reasons. A common way to cope with the difficulty [and the cognitive dissonance] is to lie to ourselves and others. Is this a positive and effective way that we ought to adopt?

I strongly believe the answer is no. Lying could be the easiest way in the short term, but it isn't a true solution, because a lie spreads like a virus, and even a small lie can lead to many more lies. With time, this leads us to live in a greater state of illusion, and to not really know ourselves, others and the true reality. Furthermore, other people do not really know us: A lie, similar to a virus, causes interpersonal separation- 'social distancing'.

¹⁴ "Confirmation bias", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias

¹⁵ "Filter bubble", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filter_bubble

¹⁶ Ted, "Eli Pariser: Beware online "filter bubbles" ", https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles

Apart from the reasons not to lie, there is a practical- survivalist advantage in seeking the Truth: clear perception of reality, and us in it, can in many instances be the difference between life and death. In addition to the practical reasons for telling the Truth and seeking the Truth, there is a moral-ideological reason: The Truth is one of the building-blocks of the universe and a basic source of existence itself, and according to various beliefs and religions, the Truth is an eternal ideal, which connects between the sublime-the metaphysical and the universe wherein we live.

So what can be done in order to overcome the psychological obstacles, for the sake of seeking and knowing the Truth?

First of all reduce the size and importance of the ego.

We need to understand that our personal biology, physiology and psychology, which we were born with, all had major effect on our world view, and that we could have easily been born different, which would have caused us to think differently. Furthermore, the environment that we were raised in [environmental struggles, education, culture etc.], influenced and molded us, and brought us to believe in what we believe. We, as living beings, are greater than the sum of our parts, our opinions and beliefs. Our body will eventually start to fall apart and we will lose much of our abilities. But even if we lose our ability to think logically, our opinions, sanity, or even our memory, the basic, singular inner part of us- the soul/will/source, will remain.

In order to deepen our understanding of the idea that we are all built from an elemental and original form, and that our beliefs and opinions are relative and dynamic, it is worthwhile to perform a simple exercise of the imagination. Imagine being born in a very different environment and having gone thru a different upbringing. If for instance, you are secular, imagine being born in a religious family [or vice versa], or if you are religious imagine being born under a different religion. According to statistics, it is safe to assume that you would have continued on the same path according to your religious or secular upbringing,

and your entire belief system and opinions would be very different from what they are now. This means that most of our opinions and beliefs, which we deem so important and feel so connected to, were created circumstantially, and could have been very different if the 'dice roll' of our lives would have shown slightly different numbers than it did. So should we be so strict in judging opinions of people who were born in a different environment than we were? And should we be so confident in judging our own beliefs and opinions as "correct"? The more we exercise our imagination and ponder how our point of view would be different had we been in someone else's place/'shoes' [if we were born with their physical and psychological attributes, in their environment and family, and if we went thru the life experiences they went thru], the more we cultivate a wider, balanced and objective point of view. Using this exercise we can approach the awareness and understanding that we all originate from the same source, and that while each one of us is unique, we are at our core- all one.¹⁷

Next, we need to remember that an error is not necessarily a failure. If our previous opinion was based on knowledge we had at the time, and our opinion was built in an honest and serious manner, there is no failure in re-assessing our opinions once we realize that our previous information wasn't credible or complete. On the contrary, if after re-evaluating we admit we are wrong about the previous opinion, this is a great victory, for unlike others who let their egos, discomfort and fear of cognitive dissonance prevent themselves from assessing reality objectively, we succeed in overcoming our human weaknesses and choose the Truth. If we are honest and serious during this process, there is no good reason for others to mock us when we say we have changed our opinion. Those

¹⁷ Lao-tzu, "Toa Te Ching", <https://sacred-texts.com/tao/taote.htm>

that mock probably do it out of stupidity/ignorance, or from an egoistic psychology interest of feeling superior to others [see the psychological theory of Adler¹⁸ ¹⁹].

At this point I would like to temper my statements a bit. It would be impractical and inefficient if we all walked around totally lacking confidence, while constantly casting doubt on all that we know and believe. We have to find balance between our beliefs and our skepticism, and we can even schedule specific times for reflecting and re-evaluating our opinions and beliefs, which we can also do for assessing our paths in life. Moreover, even if we receive new information that undermines or disproves our opinion or theory concerning a certain phenomenon, we don't have to adopt an alternative explanation or theory right away. We can acknowledge that we don't know the explanation for that phenomenon and continue to search for the Truth. The basic thing we need to do is to use our critical thinking, evaluate our opinion, and ask ourselves:

Do I believe this because it is more convenient and feels better [helps me psychologically]?

Do I believe this because it fits or is part of a thought pattern that I've adopted?

Have I recognized logical faults or doubts about this opinion, but suppressed them because I don't want to admit I was wrong?

Do I believe this because I see myself as part of a group, where this opinion is popular?

Is my confidence about this opinion/idea/theory justified?

Have I examined opposing opinions seriously and objectively? And-

Have I honestly tried to refute this opinion?

¹⁸ Riley Hoffman, "Alfred Adler's Theories of Individual Psychology and Adlerian Therapy", May 17, 2020, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/alfred-adler.html>

¹⁹ "The Psychology of Alfred Adler: Superiority, Inferiority and Courage", Academy of Ideas, November 29, 2017, <https://academyofideas.com/2017/11/psychology-of-adler-superiority-inferiority-courage/>

The current worldwide situation is an example of the struggle for Truth. There is a lot of information pointing to power-hungry individuals, organizations [groups] and governments that have and still are committing foul play, but we still don't have enough factual evidence in order to prove it and see the whole Truth. There are many interest groups that are spreading misinformation, disinformation and propaganda, while alongside them, there are people who are being used to spread false information unbeknownst to them. I think that in this grave matter concerning the health of billions of people [and affecting other important aspects of our lives (political, economical, ethical etc.)], there are many people in various key positions that have come to realize the manipulation and lies that are being spread [like a virus] around the world, but are reluctant to admit it. Some of those people refuse to admit because of their inflated egos [they are unwilling to change their opinions and admit they were wrong], and many others are not giving public testimonies because they fear for their career, livelihood, and public image. Concerns for one's livelihood and career are valid, but from an ethical standpoint, and especially considering the severity of the issue and that human lives are at stake, the excuse of safeguarding one's livelihood cannot be accepted, nor the excuse of 'I am just following orders'. Concerns for one's livelihood and career ambitions are reasons and excuses [rationalizations] for many immoral things that people allow themselves to do. This article opened with the account of innocent people who were forced to undergo torture and atrocities. On the other side of the equation, the people who committed the torture, crimes and murders, were raised and educated in a 'modern' country, with a rich and age-old culture. It is important to point out that in similar cases, concerns for one's career was one of the reasons that 'ordinary people' [such as the German citizens who were drafted for a reserve police force] followed orders and did not refuse to murder innocent Jewish men, women and children during the holocaust²⁰.

²⁰ Browning, Christopher R. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1998

I hope that at least some of the people that have refrained from speaking out and relating their new found knowledge and opinions concerning the ongoing world crisis, will find the courage, the strength and the belief in the importance of the Truth, will voice their opinions and will fight for the Truth and the future of the human race. Furthermore, I hope that our inalienable rights and our freedom of speech will not be taken away from us, because the freedom to voice different opinions is essential to the quest for Truth. Without freedom there is no Truth, without Truth there will be no freedom, without Truth and freedom there will be no justice, and without justice there will be no peace- not inside groups and countries, nor between the different groups and countries of our world.

It is important to remember the words of wise men from the past, such as Solzhenitsyn and Frankl, who asserted that the human tendency to accept lies [without critical thinking and scrutiny] reinforces the capability of dictators [and other power-hungry individuals] to destroy both society and state.

If you take away anything from this article, I hope it will be this:

Love the absolute Truth, and be willing to re-examine your opinions and beliefs when you receive new or contradictory information, even if it is inconvenient and uncomfortable; because the objective Truth is more important and essential than our temporary comforts and egoistic needs, and because by doing so, we are building a better and more truthful world.

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