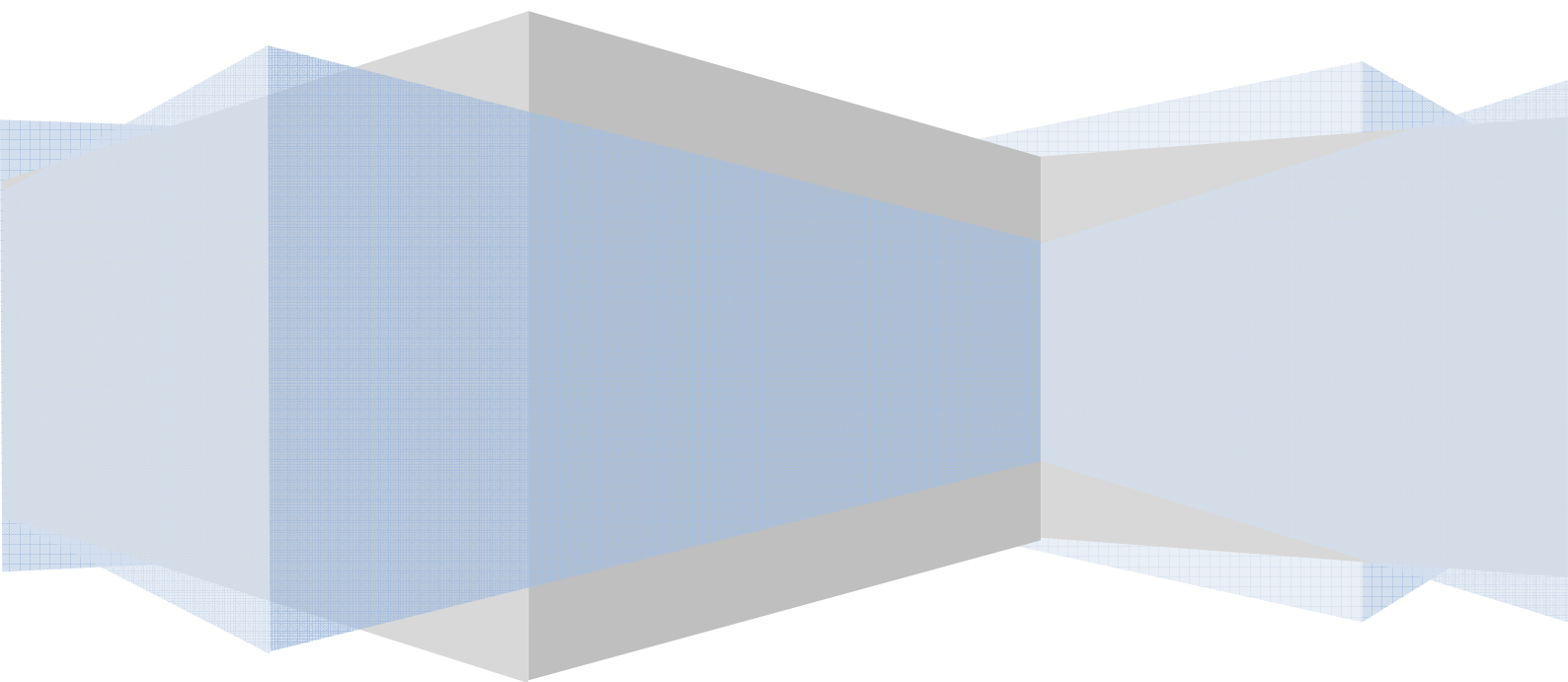


A ROOM WITH A RIGHT VIEW

The importance of perception

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A ROOM WITH A RIGHT VIEW

Almost everyone seems to enjoy a good view. Guests at a holiday hotel generally prefer to stay in a room with a view of the sea or a lake rather than one at the back overlooking the kitchens; and if two houses with otherwise equal facilities were on the market, the one with the better outlook would sell first or command a higher price. As a general rule, we all place value on a view, wanting to enjoy what there is to see.

Gazing upon a wonderful vista can arouse all manner of positive emotions, which can range from wonder and awe to deep appreciation and inspiration. Other views, even if not particularly spectacular, may nevertheless uplift us. All this is part of daily life.

What defines a good view depends on a number of factors, perception being the most fundamental. Perception requires three main components: the first is the *objects* of sight – the scenery; second are the *organs* of sight – eyes, optical nerves and brain; and, third, is the observing *consciousness*, which is coloured by habitual thought patterns or conditioning. Perception – the act of seeing, together with the interpretation of what is seen – will always govern whether we regard objects and views as attractive, dull or ugly. For example, person A, whilst remaining oblivious to the rest of the

environment, may find the sight of a restored steam locomotive the most marvellous sight, whereas B may hardly notice the engine at all, but will be thoroughly enchanted by the surrounding countryside.

If we observe our internal reactions when we look at an object, a person or the environment, we may notice that our temperament can be affected, even if only in a small way. In regarding a view as beautiful, we may be uplifted and feel revitalised, but in seeing ugliness we may be repulsed and our mood can take a dip. For optimum happiness, well-being and enjoyment of life, might it not be beneficial if everything we saw aroused positive feelings within us? As not all of us may have the wherewithal or opportunity for living and working in what might normally be regarded as attractive surroundings, that might seem an unattainable ideal. But then we may be forgetting something: that *how* we see is largely a matter of choice.

In some philosophical schools of thought, and in Buddhism in particular, it is considered an essential ingredient of long-term human happiness to have what is termed *right view*. Right view is a correction of our habitual way of seeing things; rather like putting on a pair of spectacles after a lifetime of defective vision, with right view, everything suddenly becomes clear. This is not a matter of cultivating a miraculous, high-powered sense of sight that enables us to see through walls, but of remedying our perception by *altering the way we interpret* what we see.

We can begin by correcting any tendency to negative trains of thought that may have crept into our daily life. For example, instead of describing a grey and wet day in terms such as, “Isn’t it a miserable day?” we can stop and change that way of thinking. It only takes a moment’s reflection to realise that the neither the weather nor the day can be miserable. The weather, rain or shine, simply is what it is.

Part of the process of correcting our impaired view is to stop judging and to see people, objects and circumstances *as they are*. Instead of interpreting something as being favourable or unfavourable, we can start to see that everything is as it is, without trying to qualify it in any way. This is not a case of having to abandon enjoyment of, say, beauty – on the contrary, we feel better when we appreciate our environment – but to avoid comparing X as being more beautiful than Y. We learn to raise the value in our perception so that we appreciate *all* that we see, and, on those occasions when what we see is not uplifting, we simply accept it as it is. Seeing in this way helps the mind to reach a state of equanimity or equilibrium; when the mind is steady and unvacillating, it allows the consciousness to become clearer and more settled. This is just the beginning of developing *right view*.

The next stage is to see that nothing is separate – that everything is part of us and we are part of everything. At first, this may seem nothing but a theory that we can, perhaps, understand intellectually, but may not really

appreciate. However, over time, our consciousness will shift and a new reality will dawn. As this new, magical reality grows, we increasingly enjoy a state of consciousness in which total confidence and fearlessness naturally and spontaneously arise. There is no fear because we know, without any shadow of doubt, that there can be no loss. When we realise we are inseparable from the totality of everything, we know that there is no need to grasp at anything. There is no sense of “me and the rest of the world” because the world, and indeed the universe, is actually part of us.

This dawning reality comes in glimpses that may be few and far between to begin with. Over time, a greater sense of ease and wonder unfolds and becomes more constant. As the clarity of our consciousness grows, the changing circumstances of daily living can no longer throw us off balance. Instead, life becomes an unfolding drama or play that we observe and take part in at will. When we enjoy this level of stability, we truly have moved into “a room with a view” – the best view in the house.

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Andrew Marshall is the author of a number of articles that are published on www.joyousness.org and www.fierlyheart.org. The articles may be copied for private use provided they are copied in their entirety and that no charge whatsoever is made for them

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