

## Reality, or Just My Point of View?

by Lisa Hoffman

It was one of my favorite positions: in front of an audience. I was delivering a Fearless Facilitation workshop and having a wonderful time. Although the agenda now called for a partner exercise, and the group needed to practice what we were discussing, I really wanted to remain at the head of the room. After all, I was "on" and they were learning and laughing, so would it be so bad if I simply kept talking?

My point of view was about to be hijacked by my hungry ghost -- my craving for attention. In Buddhism, a hungry ghost is a being with a pinpoint for a mouth, a long pencil thin neck and a huge belly that is always empty. Because a hungry ghost is never satisfied, desire and longing defines its life. When it does manage to eat, it experiences only a burning sensation in its throat and stomach. We are all hungry ghosts when we become our craving for food, sex, attention, things, love. And have you ever noticed that even what you get what you think you want, you aren't satisfied for very long?

I noticed my hungry ghost swoop into that Fearless Facilitation workshop because of Right View and Right Thought. They are the wisdom points on the Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path, a roadmap for life that is compassion, awareness and remembering that we are all connected. This path is enfolded in the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha's first teachings after his enlightenment. They are: the truth of suffering, which is caused by attachment or craving, and that a way to relate differently to this suffering is to practice The Eightfold Noble Path.

This practice helped me see my hungry ghost hovering nearby, ready to derail the workshop and the lovely connection I had with my participants. Right View simply means that how we relate to people and the world around us does not cause harm. What's critical is *noticing* our point of view rather than being its unconscious victim. Right Thought is the thinking that arises from our perspective. My hungry ghost point of view and thinking held that I should continue as the focal point, since I had *so much* more to say that was brilliant and important.

But another point of view arose and asked: what was this moment calling for? What did my brave workshop participants need? What would my going on and on cause? The answer to the latter was obvious: disconnection, boredom and resentment. I would cause suffering. The answer to the first two questions was equally obvious: they needed to engage with each other, and learn through practicing the skills we had been discussing. I breathed a sigh of relief as my hungry ghost flew away and I stepped off my stage.

It is challenging to notice my point of view, because it masquerades as reality. It's my perspective, therefore it must be so. It's easy to forget that point of view is affected by mood, time of day, sleep deprivation, and so many other factors. Point of view arises and it passes away, immediately replaced by another. The first step to cultivating Right View is to become aware of how I'm seeing things, and then notice how my thinking is affected. That gives me a chance to affect the actions I might take before they cause damage. Or at least embarrassment!

A regular meditation practice has helped me develop the skill and spaciousness to notice when I am making my viewpoint the reality for everyone. Meditation simply means to quiet down and notice what is happening within and without, and that is exactly what was called for

when my hungry ghost showed up. Most of my coaching clients decide to develop this kind of awareness to improve their day-to-day work and personal lives.

I worked with a woman last year who had been treated poorly by the nonprofit that employed her. During the tenure of an interim executive director, a promised review, raise and promotion had been put off over a period of months when she was without a direct supervisor and putting in 60+ hour weeks. She felt taken for granted and began interviewing with other organizations. She was so anxious that she couldn't sleep and found it hard to think about anything other than work. When a director was hired, her anxiety increased exponentially because she just knew things could only get worse. When I suggested that the values and priorities might actually change at her nonprofit, she bristled. She couldn't imagine new leadership creating a different culture.

But that is exactly what happened. The new executive director recognized her value. Within weeks he asked for and accepted a department reorganization plan she created that included her promotion. She requested and negotiated the long-delayed raise, which was retroactive to an acceptable date. When we talked about this happy turn of events, she said, "I just could not believe anything would make a difference, even a new CEO. I was really stuck in my past experience, and that became my reality." We agreed that opening to the possibility of positive change with a new executive director didn't mean it would happen, but that point of view could have made the transition much easier. At least she would have gotten some sleep!

Right View is a portal to the present moment -- what is unfolding in front of me. Wrong View is my idea about how that moment should be or is. It's easy to see how point of view informs thinking and thinking informs action. Right View and Right Thought usually lead to action that is skillful. And sometimes skillful action is as simple as knowing when to stop talking.

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