

Quote for the Bulletin:

1. "The trouble with the world is not that people know too little, but that they know so many things that ain't so." — Mark Twain

Read by the Service Leader

2. There is a Taoist story of an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically.

"Who Knows," the farmer replied. The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses.

"How wonderful," the neighbors exclaimed.

"Who Knows," replied the old man. The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. "Who Knows," answered the farmer. The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out.

"Who Knows," said the farmer.

Read By Harold James --- from Alice in Wonderland.

Alice in Wonderland

There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!' (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.

In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down a very deep well.

Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end!

End of Reading

Thank you Harold—be sure to check Harold out as the evil plant in Little Shop of Horrors now playing at the San Miguel Theater.

It struck me late in the preparation of this talk that I wanted to tell a group as brilliant as this one what 'the truth' is. Please forgive my lack of humility on this subject.

Sermon Begins---

Going "down the rabbit hole" is to enter a period of chaos or confusion. –

I am going to speak today about our inner story—our truth—and how our story predetermines the choices and decisions that we make on a daily basis.

Another way of saying that is **asking**—do we have the ability to make **conscious** free-will type decisions or are our decisions **pre-determined by our programming?**

I am positing here that most of our decisions are automatically made by our **unchallenged cultural world-view. Our programming—our story.**

We make choices all day long without thinking much about where these choices came from..

What we eat when we feel emotional? Who do we vote for? What issues we feel passionate about? Even- who do we fall in love with?

On the other hand... what if we did challenged our **own story** and metaphorically went down that rabbit hole?

How would the world change?

I was recently at a party with a group of friends. One of the people at the party was a person who identified herself as a scientist.

We began a conversation about climate change. She claimed not to be a denier but when I suggested that our children and grandchildren's lives were going to be significantly impacted by climate change **she said no...** and that **we have lots of time to fix it.**

My research on the subject suggests that she is seriously wrong and that by mid-century we will be in big trouble and that our continued slow response to the climate change problem will make it almost impossible to address the problem later. The great majority of scientists who publish in scientific journals agree with me on this.

But for the sake of the party I let it go.

But that question does raise some other questions.

**Who has the truth? And is only there one truth?
And like the Taoist that John read about---are we
capable of always even seeing the unfolding truth?**

If I am right about climate change... why is our society not addressing it in a far more serious way? --
What is it about our personal programming that keeps us from seeing climate change as a clear and present danger?

If I am wrong--- why am I so sure that I am right on this subject?

Of course I would like to believe I am right because I am agreeing with an overwhelming number of scientists who believe like I do... **and I really wish I am wrong.**

The way people answer this question about climate change may depend on a large variety of cultural possibilities.

1. a person raised in a **religious home**—one where there is a strong cosmological myth about the universe being created by an all powerful God may well believe that God will save us.

This savior mythology is very deep inside of many of us. Even if we deny the existence of an all-powerful GOD. The myth is supported by strong parental figures in our lives. It begins simply with the teachings of biblical fairy tales to our children. We teach our children these myths and then expect them not to affect their lifetime decision-making. -We don't understand how the programming works.

2. Another person who was raised in a home where science was worshipped may well believe that science will save us. After all we read daily about the major breakthroughs in Science.

That person learned that science has always found solutions to our problems and that it will eventually find a solution to the climate change problem as well. These science believers don't always consider that often every new scientific solution brings new un-anticipated problems.

Think about the problems that certain chemicals or the availability of cheap energy have created.

But these people hold on to the idea of science as savior.

3. And a third person maybe was raised in a home where strong political leadership was taught as the solution to our problems.. This person believes that a strong leader will save us.

Good political leadership will solve all our problems. A strong leader will fix everything. Generals or benevolent dictators are examples of a strong political leader that will fix this problem. People seem to turn to these leaders whenever their story is threatened. It is certainly happening in many countries today.

People with any of the above 3 stories might not take the threat of climate change seriously because they believe God, science or a better political leader will solve our problems.

**As Alfred E Neuman once said.... What me worry?
—let God, or Science or the President worry.**

I guess to be fair some of us could have been raised to be **alarmists** or conspiracy theorists or optimists and quickly want to believe the worst or best about every coming event. They would see support for their beliefs in everything that happens.

AND just maybe we need to come to the REALIZATION that our basic human responsibility is to break out of our story and be open to a greater truth or wisdom... And start trying to face our reality...

The Catholic philosopher -TEILHARD DE JARDIN— writes a lot about how we humans need to learn to be more responsible if we are going to survive as a species.

BUT how does one overcome their cultural programming to do that. This is not a simple task....

Especially because our stories are easily manipulated by things like false news that pump up our emotional response and keep us from facing things clearly. And just to be clear this manipulation of our stories is being done all the time.

Here is one recent example. There are many.

Recently a tabloid newspaper with right wing leanings ran a story about the thoughts of a retired NOAA meteorologist THAT became fodder for climate change deniers. The writer claimed in the article that data for a very important climate change report that dealt with a **CLIMATE CHANGE- HEATING PAUSE** – was prepared by NOAA without proper vetting.

This article quickly put climate change deniers on the attack. They yelled—that scientists are falsifying the data. The article quickly went viral. It was all over social media.

WHAT WE know IS that the AUTHOR was a NOAA senior employee. But what was not reported was that this author had NO OTHER scientists collaborate his writing and that the author was never involved in the data development and couldn't have known whether the data was good or bad.

And further that the article was heavily challenged by a large group of scientists who totally supported the original study.

So why he wrote the article is anyones guess...

AN INTERESTING GENERAL POINT ABOUT FALSE NEWS IS that often people simply do not remember where they get their news..... Is the news from a scientific journal or a sensationalist tabloid. Or maybe a friend who shared it on Facebook.

And if the article supported the person's story- regardless of the source of that news, they will believe THAT news without challenge...

And even pass it on. Share it... AND ONCE OUT THERE IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO REFUTE IT.... When does a rebuttal ever get the same coverage as the original story.

That point reminds me of a Jewish teaching story in which---

A man comes to his rabbi and confesses that he has slandered him with mis-truths. He asks the rabbi for forgiveness... The rabbi thinks for a minute and says yes but I want you to do two things for me.

1. I want you to take a feather pillow up that hill on a windy day and cut it open and allow the feathers to fly.
2. And when you have done that---- I would like you to wait a short time and then pick up all the feathers.

So we must become far more responsible in our processing of news. And be more careful in passing on news that is questionable.

We need to develop methods of challenging news stories and digging deeper for the truth. The technology industry also needs to help control the monster they created. And they are aware of the problem.

So again The critical issue here then-- maybe is not simply 'the truth.' But rather is how we relate to the news as reported on the various media sources and how based on our cultural world-view decide to believe it or not because it supports or doesn't support our story.

My reading of the story on climate-change is that the writer's arguments was not supported or critically reviewed by any other source and that it was reported on a tabloid newspaper with a strong bias. These were simple facts to check and should have raised alarm. At a minimum some caution should have been exercised.

But that story still went viral and those feathers will never be collected. Clearly it is difficult to search for the real story. It takes time. And it is not always clear.

It reminds me in certain ways of the famous film- the Rashomon Morality Story where there are three actors and a crime is committed. Each of the 3 actors, playing a victim, a perpetrator and a witness tell their version of the story and it is left to the audience to decide whom to believe. Or maybe simply which story fits their own story.

And Playwright-- Anna Devere Smith takes the Rashomon idea to a deeper place in her theater pieces where she interviews hundreds of witnesses to an event like the Watts Riots and then tells the story through their words. She acts out each witness's story. It is like watching a tennis match. Every time you think you know what happened you learn another piece of the story. Again the question comes down to what is the truth? And I can assure you that what really happen is very difficult to know... So we tend to believe whatever supports our story.

There is a psychological and philosophical argument between how the human being reacts to encountered events.

Determinism or Free Will.

To be brief here.. **The 'Determinist'** argument simply says that all events in the world are the result of some previous event, or events. And that all of our responses to those events are preprogrammed in us based on our upbringing experiences.

The 'Free Will' argument says simply that human beings have the capacity for self-determination.

I like to add the word **'conscious' to free will** **to** differentiate it from what many simply call free will -- which is really their determinism masquerading as free will.

A person who is exercising conscious free will is really present and open to the world around them. They are disciplined in their search for what is really happening. They are at least attempting to look beyond their story.

People often learn this because the universe gangs up on them and forces them to look more closely at their lives or a teacher appears that opens up new windows for them.

Let's look at a couple of movie stories to illustrate the way this happens.

In the movie "**Groundhog Day**" Bill Murray plays the part of a selfish arrogant weatherman who has to go to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania to report on the groundhog-day ritual. There he gets trapped in a time warp and repetitively relives each day with a clear memory of the previous days activities which allows him to learn from his previous days mistakes and by trial and error become a different person.

It is the repetition experience that allows the Murray character to move from a place of determinist to a place of conscious free will. The repetition allows him to more clearly see **who he is** and in essence is given the chance to grow and become a different person. **In essence he gains wisdom by learning from his repetitive experience.**

Joseph Campbell teaches that by taking **the journey of the hero** one learns to self-actualize and make independent decisions based on the higher level of consciousness achieved. The Journey of the Hero is a process that includes **leaving home, taking a adventure, finding ordeals and teachers along the path and eventually returning home as a self-actualizing person.**

Campbell refers to mystics like Jesus and Buddha as examples of people who have taken that journey. **He also suggests we can all take that journey. We can all become heroes.**

So in Groundhog Day—in essence --- the repetitive learning experience that Bill Murray has is an awakening similar to what is achieved in the journey of the hero. He is forced to look at himself in a new confusing light. He is given an opportunity to make different choices. And we are hopeful in the end that he truly has reached a higher level of wisdom and compassion.

In psychological/historical talk we might say that Bill Murray jumped out of circular time and into Linear time.... He changed. He stopped making the same mistakes over again.

And in another move... the Matrix

... Morpheus, a wise mentor/teacher, is searching for a hero to help save the human race from the machines that have imprisoned them. The humans are living in pods where their heat is used to provide energy for the machines. -The humans are **heavily programmed** to believe that they are living normal everyday lives in order to continue producing the energy the machines need for their survival.

Morpheus springs Neo, our hero, from the pods and introduces him to his programmed condition. After explaining to Neo his programmed fictional existence – he offers him the opportunity to experience an un-programmed reality. Morpheus then gives Neo the following option.

“After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland, and I show you **how deep the rabbit hole goes**. Remember: all I'm offering is the truth.”

Morpheus has woken NEO out of his programmed existence and provided him with a picture of the world as it is.

OK—so **I am positing that most of us humans live in a programmed world.** We don't question our worldview unless we are woken up to something similar to the journey of the hero ---towards a search for wisdom.

Our story or world-view determines most of our daily decision-makings. ---We believe that we are exercising free-will but that is an illusion.

The journey is to wake up from that illusion.

As you understand our predicament you have the option of doing nothing or going down- down the rabbit hole to take the journey of the hero and becoming a self-actualizing person who is searching for a greater truth.

In fact many of the teachings of our mystics are designed to help us along the path. For example many ideas in Buddhism are practices that lead towards greater wisdom, through mindfulness. One is taught through practices to detach from their old stories and become mindful of the world around them.

Practices of this kind are designed to move people towards **conscious free will** but even then- there is a catch.

As people become more present---Their conscious free will seems more designed towards making healthy life-sustaining choices-- so that the conscious free will even there also maybe an illusion. It is possible that with knowledge choice is reduced.

So what are some examples of programming that keep us from making the best possible decisions...

1. The ism's in our lives.
2. Where we live
3. What our cultural understandings are? Did we travel?
4. Did we grow up in a multi-cultural community?

One exercise that can expose this in us is to identify the **unexamined assumptions in our life.**

Unexamined assumption are examples of how our world view daily effects our decision making.

What are a few examples of unexamined assumptions in your life? How many of these examples can you identify with?

"The world is full of unlimited resources for our use."

- "Technology/science will solve all our problems."
- "More is better."
- "It's human nature to compete."
- "More weapons means more security."
- "It's too late to do anything."
- "It's not my problem."

And my personal favorite-- Money Has Value.

Our actions based on these unexamined assumptions produce both personal and global outcomes---

We need to become aware of how our story impacts everything in our life and challenge those unexamined assumptions in order to seriously address the problems of our planet. -

It is part of that journey of the hero.

So when Alice goes down the rabbit hole--- she begins to wake up to the understanding that her truths may not be true.

When Neo decides to take the Red Pill everything for him changes. He must now face the world with a new outlook. A new wisdom.

And when the weatherman in Groundhog Day has a chance to relive each day he eventually learns to change.

In each case—these teachings encourage a willingness to take the journey for a search for a greater **truth**. There is nothing wrong with changing your story as long as you are constantly challenging the assumptions in the world around you.

I might add that one of our biggest problems is that too many people think they know the truth instead of seriously searching for it...

After all -- Going down that rabbit hole is really scary. We don't know what we are going to find.
but it is the journey we all need to be taking.. (to create a future for our children and grandchildren.)

STOP or continue.

And so what are some of the ways that we learn to search for truth.

1. People who have experienced programs like 12 step programs—where they inventory their life experiences and decide to make amends for their mis-deeds--- often come out of that experience with an understanding as to how their deeds impact the world. They grow.
2. Some people do the same through psychotherapy or spiritual retreat.
3. Any multi-cultural type exposure helps teach people that we are not separate. We learn each others stories and that changes us.
Put a face on someone and the fear and prejudice disappears.
4. Being willing to fact check news articles without accepting them at face value is critically important... Using tools on the Internet like snopes.com can really serve us there.
5. And probably most importantly--- instead of challenging someone's else's worldview in an **argumentative** manner--- try to understand and listen. Ask people about their story. Even if they don't want to listen to you. You might learn something.

And by doing these type things-- maybe we can go down that rabbit hole together... and create a better world.

Thank you.