



Suffering Lies in Your Perception of the Fact and Not the Fact Itself

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Any suffering that you are experiencing in the world lies in your perception of the person, place, or thing you are experiencing and not in the person, place, or thing itself. This is one of the most fundamentally important statements you will ever encounter and it can change your life forever.

Several years ago, I did some work on a very old structure I own down the street, on the beach. Essentially, all I did was add a porch. However, doing any sort of work on structures on the beach in California is a strict "no-no," unless you have obtained a permit, which can require years of hearings and all sorts of things. The porch was falling down and it was important for me to fix it for safety's sake. Little did I know, the State of California has satellite photos and other tools employed to monitor construction taking place on the coastline. A few months ago, I received a letter from the County, upset about the porch. To make a long story short, after a series of inspections, they are now considering "red tagging" this structure and making it so people cannot even live in it. Without going into a lot of detail, when you perform work on a structure that's not up to code, you're required to bring the entire structure up to code. Since it's impossible to bring the structure up to code, I'm now faced with the prospect of potentially having to rip down the entire structure.

This is one of the worst things that's ever happened to me--on several levels. However, instead of feeling bad about this situation I've decided to change how I perceive it. Although people cannot live in this structure as a dwelling, from what I understand, there's nothing wrong with it being occupied during the day as a workplace, for example. Instead of feeling horrible about this situation, I have now realized that this is an incredible opportunity to convert a house into one of the most desirable office spaces in the world. It's like a dream come true. Instead of suffering, I'm now feeling very excited about this situation.

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- When employees of our company call in sick (and when I know they're not *really* sick) instead of feeling *angry* at them I decide to be *happy* that the company is saving money for the day.
- When a business deal doesn't work out, instead of feeling bad about this, I feel excited that I've learned lessons about business that I can apply in the future.
- When I have to sit through a really boring religious service, instead of feeling impatient, I feel fortunate that I have some time to gather my thoughts.
- When I get into a disagreement, I'm thankful that I've learned a lesson that I can apply in the future.
- When I go to a bad restaurant, I'm happy that I know to avoid it in the future.

How we perceive things and the world around us in a large part determines whether or not we are going to be happy. Our perceptions, most often, are clouded by a set of assumptions which most often are not true at all.

Imagine sitting in a dark room and something approaches you and touches you that feels like a snake. You recoil in fear, unsure of what exactly is going to occur. You might get bitten. You might die from a poisonous bite. You shudder and feel a great sense of alarm.

You may be sitting in the dark room for days, weeks, months, or even years. Despite a relatively happy existence wherein all of your needs are taken care of, you are constantly tormented by the snake. What would otherwise have been an ideal life is in a state of ruin, of sorts, due to the snake. Periodically, the snake approaches you and each time, you feel a great deal of fear and are terrified. Life is difficult because that snake wakes you up sometimes when you're sleeping. It's literally impossible for you to enjoy life when you're constantly being threatened by the snake.

Then suddenly, the lights go on and you notice that what you fear is not a snake at all but a harmless piece of rope.

The lights go out and then, each time the piece of rope comes near you in the future, you don't worry. *Your life suddenly changes and what was once a life of fear and trepidation suddenly becomes a happy life, one devoid of worries.* What you had assumed was a frightening snake, is actually a rope. Your life has largely been controlled by a sense of assumptions.

We often assume what we are experiencing is a snake; however, in actuality it's a mere piece of rope.

This is no different than many of our lives. Our lives are typically controlled by a massive number of assumptions about this or that and our happiness, in large part, is determined by the nature of these assumptions:

- We imagine people dislike us who do not.
- We imagine we don't fit in with certain people when we, in fact, do.
- We imagine we're not capable of this or that.
- We feel we may have upset someone years ago we never upset.
- We feel we're not good looking enough.
- We feel we're not smart enough.
- We feel we didn't go to a good enough school.
- We feel we don't have good enough experience.
- We feel we're not capable of this and we're not capable of that.

The vast array of assumptions that control each of our lives is incredible.

Think about where you would be now and what would have happened to you if your life wasn't controlled by various

assumptions. Every minute of every day you're making assumptions about who you are and what you can do. These assumptions are incredibly powerful and, fundamentally, they govern who you are and what you can do. Your goal needs to be to move from a position of assumptions to a place where you're seeing what is and not what you assume it is. The realization that the rope was not a snake is something that has a profound impact on our freedom and ability to be happy. How many snakes are you seeing in your life that are in fact ropes?

Assumptions are related to our perception. We perceive the world based on a set of assumptions. We need to choose assumptions that empower and don't hinder us. Most of the world is controlled by disempowering assumptions. These disempowering assumptions do us no good. We have many ideas about the people around us; we have enemies and friends in the world. One of the hardest things for any of us to do is change our assumptions about others and then change our own perception. We often strongly resist changing our ideas about others because having a negative (or positive) opinion about a person is something we *cling* to as a part of our own identity. Incredibly, having a negative feeling or belief about a person, place, or thing is something that many of us cling to when it does us no good.

One of the greatest assumptions most of us in the world have deals with our relationship with the divine, or God. We all have a different idea of who God and the divine is. Some of us imagine God as:

- Punishing
- Judgmental
- Merciful
- Helpful
- Hateful
- Beautiful
- Welcoming

Each of us has a different belief of who God is. However, my experience has been that God, like most people, responds in the form in which you perceive Him. Your perception of who God is generally shapes your personal relationship with God. For example, if you have a belief that God dislikes you, then you're going to see the world as constantly punishing you when bad things happen in your life. If you have a belief that God loves you, then you're going to see the world as constantly giving you positive reinforcement when good things happen in your life. I've studied and participated in religions on and off for most of my life. It's incredible to me the range of assumptions that people make about God and the divine and how this controls people's reality. It controls who they marry, where they live, who they socialize with and what they do for a living. The world responds to people based on the assumptions they have about God and the world around them. *Your assumptions about people, God, the world, and everything around you are what create your reality.*

In your career and life you are governing everything by a set of assumptions. I'm confident that not all of these assumptions are positive. You may be feeling bad about your situation due to the market, what happened in your last job, the conditions of your current job, your age, etc. The number of assumptions available for you to feel bad about are limitless. The job market and the world will respond to you based on the assumptions you have about them. If you change your assumptions for the better, your career and life will change. *The suffering you're experiencing lies in your perception of the facts of your existence, career, and life--and not in your existence, career, and life itself.*

The best way to change your life is to change your assumptions about the world around you. Suffering lies in the perception of the fact and not the fact itself.

THE LESSON

Your perceptions can make you either happy or unhappy. Most peoples' perceptions, however, are clouded by assumptions that frequently aren't even true. To change your life, change your assumptions about the world around you. Suffering lies in the perception of the fact, not the fact itself.