

## The Fruits of Open-Mindedness

“Where there is an open mind, there will always be a frontier.”

– Charles F. Kettering, American engineer, inventor of the electric starter

A large fruit tree grew atop a mountain range – on a craggy outcropping overlooking a drop of several hundred feet. An odd place for a tree to grow perhaps, but this was no ordinary tree. Unlike others fruit trees, this tree produced six distinct varieties of fruits each appearing on the branches two months apart. Six reclusive tribes lived in the mountains and each relished the fruit of the tree. Once a year, members of each tribe would make the arduous journey to the top of the craggy outcropping and gather up the yield. Two months later, the next tribe would make the same journey – each unaware of the other and each unaware of the other fruits.

Consider the possibilities for both conflict and discovery inherent in this situation: six tribes, each with a belief about the tree based upon the reality of the fruit brought forth.

Let’s follow the path of conflict and see where it leads. Tribal leaders come together to discuss a unified existence. As food is often scarce and conditions inhospitable, it is in the best interest of everyone to work together. All goes well until the topic of the fruit tree comes up. Leaders are surprised and dismayed to discover that each tribe has laid claim to the tree. Moreover, each has a different opinion as to what fruit graces the branches of the tree.

Emotions rise, tempers flare and before long the assembly breaks up – each tribe suspicious of the other and each vowing to defend ownership of tree to the point of war if necessary.

The path of discovery leads us to a different destination. Again, the six tribal leaders come together to discuss mutual survival and unification of the groups. When the topic of the tree enters the discussion, each leader is predictably surprised and dismayed by the claims and beliefs of the others. However, being wise leaders, each chooses to remain open-minded and in doing so makes an amazing discovery – the multi-faceted nature of the tree. To confirm the new information, a group representing all six tribes visits the outcropping once every two months. Over the course of 12 months, the truth is revealed: the belief held by each tribe was accurate, though amounted to only a fraction of the overall truth of the amazing fruit tree.

It is the height of ignorance to assume that others are close-minded simply because they do not accept the opinions that you so willingly profess to be true. One of the biggest issues we face as human beings is our belief that we alone have ownership of the truth – that our opinion is not an opinion at all but an incontrovertible fact. When we become “locked” into a particular way of thinking or being, we close ourselves off to much of the wisdom, knowledge and insight available to us. Looking at new ideas and possibilities is vital to our personal growth. The greater our level of self-esteem, the more willing we become to consider other points of view.

I am not suggesting that you abandon your convictions and beliefs and become like the rudderless ship. Just because an idea is new or contrary to you doesn't mean you must agree with it in order to be open-minded. Despite what some people might think, being able to think critically is a vital ingredient of open-mindedness – allowing you to form well rounded and considered views. That said, here are some suggestions for becoming more open-minded:

- Do you prefer to be right rather than happy? I'm not suggesting that you agree with someone simply to keep the peace or when you firmly believe a person is wrong. I am suggesting that you bring awareness to what may be a tendency to force your view upon others.
- Recognize that people hold certain beliefs for different reasons – perhaps they are older, younger, born in another country, raised in different culture?
- Become a good listener. Really try to hear what others are saying to you.
- Try repeating back what you think you've heard to avoid misunderstandings. Respectfully ask questions and seek clarity when you do not understand another person's view.
- Before deciding the idea has no merit, be willing to do a little research.
- Spend time with people who share a different opinion – especially people from other cultures. This will allow you to see things from a different vantage point.

American author, E.B. White put it well when he wrote, “The world is full of people who have never, since childhood, met an open doorway with an open mind.”

While learning to be open-minded, remember that it's fine to hold onto some beliefs and stand up for what you believe. As with the story of the tree, perhaps we each hold a piece of the overall truth. Only by opening our minds to new information can we embrace the greater truth and in doing so, share in the bounty of the harvest.