

What is Truth?

The *Bible* recounts that one of the questions that Pontius Pilate asked Jesus during his trial was “what is Truth?” The scripture goes on to say that Jesus merely remained silent, and did not answer the question.

With many divergent versions of what the truth is—each held fervently and passionately—many aspirants are confused. In our webinar today, our objectives will be to explore the different types of truth, the role of proof in determining what is true, the effects of labeling and attribution on determining what is true, and looking inside to your wellspring of truth.

To explore this topic, I will excerpt from two of the articles in *Religions, Cults, and Terrorism: What the Heck Are We Doing?*

Types of Truth

Excerpted from *Religions, Cults, and Terrorism:
What the Heck Are We Doing?*

[There are seven different varieties of truth that we experience at different times in our lives, in response to different triggers.]

Sensory truth ~ [This is what your senses detect in the environment around you.]

However, what is apparent and clear to healthy intact sense organs can be deceived by alterations of consciousness during drug use or [occurring in serious] mental illness (hallucination), through misinterpretation of stimuli [to form incorrect beliefs] (delusion), or through misdirection of attention or inherent limitations of the sensory apparatus [that create erroneous perceptions] (illusion).

Cognitive truth ~ this comprises the model of the world that you construct inwardly. It includes the nature of your Self, and your relationship with other people, [and can also include beliefs about God]. It is your internalization of what you learn from others. Cognitive truth is a subjective model of reality that is each person's unique map of the world around him or her, and the world within; it changes with new experiences.

[Cognitive truth] can be marred by analogical representations (symbol, parable, or myth) subject to multiple interpretations, representation of the individual by the class (stereotyping), emotional distortion (prejudice, scape-goating, or displacement reactions), and fanciful learning not corresponding to objective fact (fables, folk tales, superstitions), and failure of memory (forgetting).

Representational or symbolic truth ~ The proofs of symbolic logic, mathematics, and geometry are representational truths. They are a lawful manipulation within certain parameters (game, set, universe of numbers) and certain rules—the results of this manipulation are uniform and unvarying. Relationships between objects, forces, people, the social economic, political, and cultural environment, or the workings of the objective universe can all be modeled by this means. The closer the original formulation of the mathematical model fits the observed data, the closer it may be said to approximate the laws that govern the world of matter, the world of the mind, the world of man, and the world of pure knowledge.

It is subject to the limitations of verification of a hypothesis, which must be done via observation (bringing in sensory distortion), researcher bias (bringing in cognitive distortion), limitations in the technology or ability to observe the phenomenon, and following a wrong rule (miscalculation, logical fallacy).

Emotional truth ~ this is the experienced meaning or reaction to a life event (experience), a situation, an environment (milieu), another person, a stimuli, a memory, or a cognition (idea, belief, thought). This truth is ever changing, many-faceted; it has many threads of association and meaning. It is what we feel in the present moment, in the here and now.

It is subject to the distortions imposed by psychological defenses (repression, intellectualization, rationalization, fantasy, projection, denial), the fact that much of this material is not available to consciousness (subliminal or unconscious), and to the inherent limitation of language to describe to others the exact nature of what we experience emotionally.

Legal or formal truth ~ this is the one-to-one correspondence between a statement and its occurrence. When your behavior matches your stated intention, when objective witnesses confirm an accusation, or when multiple observers witness an event and attest that it occurred, it is said to be formally true. Formal truth is based on the construction of our laws, our consensus reality.

It is subject to distortion via different interpretations of an event or the application of a law, the implied ramifications of a rule or law that might vary between individuals, or the individual involved in presenting evidence may present only one aspect of what actually took place (impression management). Formal truth is what we use to determine whether someone is lying, or deceiving us; or when what is observed or obtained does not match what was stated or promised.

Spiritual or moral truth ~ this is your inner criteria of what are correct attitudes and behavior towards mankind, other species, and the world around you, and your correct relationship with the unseen worlds of the Spirit. Much of this material is learned, and internalized, by exposure to parental training, to teachings of schools and religious institutions, and to influential or charismatic people through the media, books, or personal contact.

This moral truth can be said to comprise the sense of conscience, or *Dharma*. Spontaneous insight, spiritual revelation, intuitive understanding, and the contemplation of the inner structures or laws of the Inner Man, which culminate in illumination or wisdom, may form some portion of this truth.

Violation of this truth results in subjective distress in the form of guilt, despair, and feelings of alienation or existential loneliness. It is subject to the distortions inherent in learning, and in determining an emotional or subjective truth.

Absolute or metaphysical truth ~ this is the horizon concept, or conception of the Divine—it is the greatest concept that you can conceive. This conception may be the universe, a universal Mind, a Divinity within man (a Higher Self), the Presence of God or gods in a spiritual Paradise, or an Absolute Source of Life, spirit, and consciousness.

You can learn this conception by exposure to philosophy, metaphysics, or religion, or it may arise through internal revelation or experience—through mystic visions, meditation, or dreams).

This model can be relatively stable throughout a lifetime; you elaborate it through additional learning and experience. However, exposure to conceptions of other people or other cultures through education or indoctrination can radically alter this 'world view,' resulting in a new *Absolute truth*.

Metaphysical truths are the purported operation of so-called 'inner laws' that impact upon our lives and destinies, and upon the workings of the universe. These laws are subsumed in an individual's global conception of Absolute truth; they are seen as subsidiary operations of natural or Supernatural agencies that work to produce the disparate phenomena of the external and internal universe(s).

In psychosis or severe mental illness, grave distortions can occur in the conception of Absolute Truth, throwing an individual into a frightening and chaotic inner world. Also, misinterpretation of abstract ideas can result in a distorted conception of Absolute Truth, creating a highly idiosyncratic or personalized version of the conception of the Ultimate Ground of All Things.

Each of our 'truths' is subject to inherent or imposed distortions. Each of these is limited in its ability to determine the exact nature of the world without or the world within. It is important to understand that each of these ways of knowing truth has a realm germane to its functioning, a field in which it operates best.

Sensory truth is the truth according to our sense organs. It is what we perceive.

Cognitive truth is the truth according to our intellect. It is what we think or opine.

Representational and formal truth is the truth according to our rational mind. It is the proofs of logic; the demonstrations of Reason.

Emotional truth is the truth according to our emotions. It encompasses the world of our meanings, feelings, and experiences.

Moral truth is the truth according to our higher emotionality. It is the truth of our spirit; it makes up the conscience, the inner principles by which we govern our lives.

Absolute truth is the truth according to our intuition. It reveals the inner and outer horizons of our world.

Truths change as man changes. The tenacity of our adherence to a belief or structure does not make it truer; it simply is a statement of our conviction or faith.

Our laws, religions, science, and philosophies are all changing; their truths today may not be their truths tomorrow. As we unfold our spiritual vision within, our old ring-pass-not horizons dissolve into grander vistas of the Sublime.

Perhaps the contemplation of our truths must bring another in its stead, a growing humility at what we do not know, and a growing awareness of the limitations for the instruments by which we do know.



Contemplating the Aspects of Truth

Can you identify an example from your experience of

- A sensory truth?
- A cognitive truth?
- An emotional truth?
- A representational truth?
- A formal truth?
- A moral or spiritual truth?
- An Absolute or metaphysical truth?

Have you ever held a belief that something was true in one of these categories of truth, only to later discover that what you believed was not correct? What made you change your mind?

Do you have any truths that you learned as a child that you still hold? If so, what are they? What are some examples of beliefs that you did change from the ones you held during your childhood?

The Role of Proof in Discovering Truth

Proof is the way you determine something is true. Criteria for proof vary between the types of proof. Two people may view the same proof: one will believe it, the other will not.

Methods of Proof

Excerpted from *Religions, Cults, and Terrorism:
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There are several different types of proof based on how information is processed. Each of these methods of proof has its strengths, but each has its drawbacks.

Sensory verification (facts) – this is used for objects in the environment that can be seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched. Depending on environmental conditions, they are subject to misperception, distortion, or illusion.

Rational proof – this uses deductive logic to analyze verbal arguments and their conclusions. Examines facts, inferences, or assumptions derived from those facts, and the conclusions derived from those inferences. If arguments are based on incorrect facts, inferences, or assumptions, the conclusions are also false.

Experiential proof – this uses the memory of past experience to support a contention or belief. Due to variability of the accuracy of the senses, those misperceptions may yield memory traces that capture only selected aspects of the event. Experiential proof may be also biased by the inferences drawn or the judgments made about what occurred—these effectively create a filter which screens out some data of the experience.

Metavisional proof – this uses the evidence of the eye of the mind (focal point of attention) and the so-called third eye (direct perception mediated by the wave of consciousness of the attentional principle) to validate the experiences of the inner world of the bands of the mind. Since this perception is influenced by the activity of the astral senses and astral brain (the faculty of imagination and visualization) and the varying ability of individuals to “see” and “hear” within, varying degrees of distortion may be introduced into this type of perception.



Authoritarian proof – uses faith based on a tenacious conviction that (1) an individual is a Master or Savior, or has the Absolute Truth, (2) that a certain doctrine is infallibly true, (3) a selected scripture is the inspired, revealed word of God, (4) that your judgments about religious doctrines and worldly affects are wholly true and accurate, (5) that your beliefs are not to be questioned, (6) that others holding other viewpoints are in error and (are likely deluded or deceived), and (7) others must believe as you do or be subject to your criticism, judgment, censure, wrath, and outright personal rejection.

Authoritarian proof is commonly seen in religious and political arenas. These unquestionable beliefs may often be shown to have logical flaws and may be sometimes based on outright conjecture. Unfortunately, the ferocity with which individuals adhere to these beliefs seldom allows them to be debated or challenged, or seriously analyzed.

Mental faith is rooted in the ego. Deeper than mental faith is spiritual faith, which is based on remembrance of the Divine and/or a spiritual teacher.

In spiritual faith, dialog is established with this teacher through questioning and inward prayer. The teacher is highly idealized, even divinized, and all manner of miraculous events are attributed to the teacher. Like mental faith, spiritual faith is not open to scrutiny.

Empirical proof – this creates a hypothesis and then subjects it to testing. It uses statistical analysis to arrive at criteria for assessing whether the assumptions raised in the hypothesis can be supported. These are subject to errors such as bias by the experimenter, errors introduced by testing protocols, and incorrect selection of a statistical method or wrong conclusions drawn from the data or statistical measures.

Gnostic proof – this is an intuitive conviction that something is true, mediated by mandalic reasoning or “correspondence.” Here you know because you are one with the object of knowledge. This type of knowing finds parallels between symbolic elements on different Planes of consciousness. Assumed meanings are read into each symbol, and a system of meaning is elaborated from this symbolic array used in intuitive systems such as astrology, Kabala, Tarot, numerology, Masonry, and other mystery schools.

Widely varying meanings can be read into these symbolic templates. This leads to the assumption of a relative viewpoint about subjective truth, because as spiritual growth continues, new insights are gained.

In people’s day-to-day lives, they rely upon sensory proof and experiential proof to guide their decisions. The academic and scientific community relies upon rational and empirical proof. Religious groups look to authoritarian proof to reify the doctrines and practices of their faith; mystics alternately use metavisual and Gnostic proof as their means to arrive at truth.

There is not one best method of truth seeking. Sensory proof is fully adequate to find your missing cell phone—you know it when you see it.

Rational proof excels when you are doing mathematical equations, or doing analysis of a philosophical theorem.

Experiential proof—your touchstone of wisdom and self-knowledge—is what you use to determine whether it is appropriate to trust, whether it is right to make a commitment, or whether it is time to say goodbye, based on what you have experienced before.

You use metavisual proof when you meditate and are able to verify the stable landmarks on in your vehicles of consciousness and on the Great Continuum of Consciousness.

Authoritarian proof is the bedrock of religious doctrine and law; it plays a role in guiding decision making in ecclesiastical and legal arenas.

Empirical proof is used in science to validate hypotheses by determining whether an experiment has yielded a statistically significant result to warrant supporting that hypothesis.

Gnostic proof underlies your intuitive knowledge of the spiritual worlds and allows you to understand the symbolic language of the Superconscious mind.

We recommend that aspirants become familiar with each type of proof, and apply that type of proof, as it is appropriate in its area of special expertise.

We further suggest that aspirants also will benefit from becoming familiar with the limitations of each of these types of proof, so that they might draw their conclusions with the requisite humility and provisional acceptance.

The Effects of Labeling and Attribution in Discerning Truth

In the process of learning, many times the information we receive from others is “labeled” or described by others as being true. We may simply accept this assessment and believe it; other times we may question it, or outright reject it.

If we believe that someone is an authority or expert, we may “attribute” to him or her presumed credibility—that is, that because he or she is an expert, what he or she says is true.

Since the knowledge of an expert or authority is based on deep study, or long experience with a topic, we may often value their opinion more highly than other's opinions. These individuals often earn our trust, deference, and respect based on their perceived expertise—however, we often do not examine the basis on which they make their claims.



Have you ever relied on the claims of an expert, only to find what they were saying was not true? How did this make you feel?

If you rejected the advice of an expert, how did you come to your current formulation of truth in that area?

What sources do you rely upon as true?

Who do you regard as an expert? On what basis do you make this decision?

To what or to whom do you attribute truth?

What Do You Know Is True?

One of the things that we teach in the Mudrashram® Master Course in Meditation and the Accelerated Meditation program is the Truth Process.

In this webinar, we are going to apply it to examine several types of truth. You will need a piece of paper. Try to list at least three or four truths for each area—you can expand on this more.

- What cognitive truths make up your world picture?
- What are some of your core emotional truths?
- What are your moral truths that inform your core values?
- What are your spiritual truths?
- What do you conceive are the important metaphysical truths that influence your life?
- What do you conceive of as Absolute Truth?

The discovery of truth is ongoing and continual throughout your life. You are ever refining your truths. As you grow in wisdom and understanding, your truths change with you.

And as for telling you what Truth is, we will remain silent like Jesus before Pilate, and show to you the mirror in which you discover your truth for yourself.



Thank you for attending our webinar today!

