



Singapore 549102
<http://www/cfsm.org.sg>

What is truth?

Recently an old classmate circulated to all of us (on the Class Mailing list) via e-mail broadcast, a dramatic photograph titled "one second before the Tsunami". It showed a huge black wall of water bearing down on some houses in a quiet housing estate. Most of our classmates most probably looked at it and accepted it. However, one was quick to voice scepticism and pointed out that the houses did not have boundary fences, and the cars parked in the drive ways looked American. Also there was a letter box on the roadside by a drive way. I supported him immediately and philosophized that we should always take everything we see or read on the Internet with a large pinch of salt.



The Internet is making us cavalier with the truth nowadays. Normally sane and rational people would pass on, even broadcast, dubious information they receive on the Internet to their friends without thinking. Some even felt that they are doing you a favour 'to keep you well informed'.

Take a recent example where a health notice was widely circulated "Do not have cold drinks with your food" It reasoned that the cold drinks will coagulate the fats from other foods ingested, harden the oils making it impossible to digest, and that cold fats are more active in passing the toxins to your body. Anyone with primary education will tell you that within a few minutes all drinks and food you ingest will take on the core temperature of the body, 37 degrees or thereabouts. Also it is a basic law in physics that any material/element will be more inert more inactive when cold, never more volatile. Yet people pass this misinformation on, and even believe in it, without even passing it through their brains.

Then there was another, widely circulated which made it to the newspapers, which claimed that one could be infected with AIDS from eating hamburgers - with meat patties which are cooked 'rare'. It claims that you get it from the blood.

There is this recent one, about why we must not eat fruits after food such as rice...because?? because, according to this guy who created this picturesque informational warning, starch digest slower while fruits digest faster, and after digesting it cannot pass into the intestines because the earlier ingested rice is blocking its way. Due to this the fruit will further ferment in your stomach and cause you sicknesses.

With just a little thought, everyone will realise that after being chewed and after some minutes of churning and kneading in the stomach, and mixing with the gastric juices, the food becomes a

homogenous mass, which looks like, well... vomit. This 'blocking' argument is simply illogical unscientific nonsense. Yet many supposedly educated people read these, believe these to be good advice and passed them on, and propagating and perpetuating falsehoods.

Who wrote these? Most were simply written in bad English, easily identified as questionable. Some were quite well done with references and snazzy pictures. There are others who would write to propound, or discount, a financial theory. These guys at least have an intention, an "agenda" to attain their own self serving aims, eg. they may have short sold on some shares, or currency, and hoped that by passing on unfounded rumours as information, their position will improve. Who know what could be the intentions of those who created some of these "hare-brained food theories"? It is clear however that those people who blindly passed on these "articles" are irresponsible rumour mongers.

When I was in my twenties, Louis, a good friend would come round regularly with some ideas or theories, claimed that he read them in a book and was therefore right and the truth. I used to rebut him point blank, asking as to who was the author and if he was an authority on that subject or " a taxi driver giving advice on international finance". He was flabbergasted at my attitude towards his sincerely held beliefs because he had read it. To his credit, he still considers me as his friend today, and I must testify that nowadays he is older and wiser.

Story with a moral

There was this Emperor who neglected his duties for a life of debauchery and left all the affairs of State to his Prime Minister. Of course the Prime Minister started to misuse his power and became very corrupt. When he heard rumours that some of the more righteous Ministers were planning to bring his misdeeds to the attention of the Emperor he decided to pre-empt them

During a sitting of the Emperor in Court he pushed through as usual all his agenda with no opposition, and then asked the assistant to bring forward an animal which he presented to the Emperor as a horse – "a special horse from a distant land". The drunk and very disinterested Emperor was still lucid enough to point out that it did not look like a horse. The Prime Minister insisted that the animal in front of them was a horse and a very fast one at that. Then he turned to the other Ministers and sought their confirmation and assertion that what he said was right, and that it was a horse.

It was an open challenge to all the Ministers present to see who dared to openly contradict him. He started with the most sycophantic, and progressed up to those whom he believed to be more independent minded. Everyone could see that it was a deer, but no one dared contradict the Prime Minister. Satisfied that there was no opposition strong enough, he then went on to greater depths of corruption and abuse of power.

Off course the Country soon came to grief, and the Emperor lost his "Mandate from Heaven", was overthrown, and executed.

This story had since gone down in Chinese education as "pointing to a deer and saying that it is a horse."

I was taught this lesson as a child. Therefore I was more sensitive, and I have in my life time (60+ years) saw this enacted, not once but a few times, at different levels of company, societal, and country level politics. As a result, "Is it true?" rang loud in my head every time somebody tried to feed me with some information. You could say that I was trained to be cynical, and to question what I hear, and what I read. The CFSM was also partly responsible for honing this sensitivity in me.

Regardless if it was uttered by Presidents, Prime Ministers, Attorney Generals, or Heads of Police, Heads of Research, etc. they could still be untruths. As responsible adults we have always to be vigilant, to be discerning, questioning, and if important, testing for the truth.

Those of my generation know that nearly everyone in authority, especially those who have authority vested in them, are prone to falsify or at least massage statistics and figures to make themselves look good. The Communist countries used to lead in this. North Korea, Zimbabwe, and other dictatorships still do, and even if their figures defies belief, to the extent calling "the deer as a horse" no one inside those countries dared to openly contradict them.

The worst danger is that after a while, those in authority start to believe their own lies, acquiring the arrogance of dictatorships of self righteousness.

Self righteous dictators believing in their own lies did not become so overnight. They develop slowly because the people they lied to could not be bothered to question, to call the lies, or were too apathetic to do anything about it.

If the majority of people in a country do not question, the time will come, as the liars become more powerful, when the people could claim with some legitimacy, that they are too frightened, too intimidated, to say that it is "not a horse."

"Sanctify yourself in truth" Biblical prophets, and Christian Saints hectored us.

"Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that he 'has come into the world to bear witness to the truth'."

Will you?

..... article by.....Mark