

The Difference Between a Rat and a Human

Why Therapy Works: Using Our Minds to Change Our Brains

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A wise man once asked me if I knew the difference between a rat and a human being. "There are many differences," I said, "whiskers, fur, tails," all of which were true but left him unimpressed. Here is the story he told me.

If you take a hungry rat and put it on a platform surrounded by five tunnels and you've hidden the cheese down the third tunnel, the rat will explore each tunnel until it finds the cheese. Rats have excellent spatial memory, so if you put the same rat in the same place a few days later, it will immediately go down the third tunnel looking for cheese. But, say, after a few days of this, you move the cheese to the fifth tunnel. The rat will continue to go down the third tunnel a number of times looking for the cheese even though it isn't there.

So here is the difference between a rat and a human being. Eventually the rat will start exploring the other tunnels to find the cheese. Humans, on the other hand, will go down the third tunnel forever because they believe that's where the cheese should be.

When we get trapped in patterns that are reinforced by beliefs, theories, and "good ideas," it is clear that our **brains** are not serving us and that our **minds** are not our friends.