

FURTHER ALONG
THE ROAD
LESS TRAVELLED

*Wisdom For the Journey Towards
Spiritual Growth*

The Edited Lectures
M. SCOTT PECK



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M. Scott Peck was an internationally renowned psychiatrist, lecturer, bestselling author and influential spiritual guide. After giving up his psychiatric practice in 1983, Dr Peck devoted much of his time and financial resources to the work of the Foundation for Community Encouragement, a nonprofit organization which he and his first wife, Lily, helped found. A prolific writer, he was the author of 15 books on spirituality and self-improvement, including the multi-million copy bestseller *The Road Less Travelled* and the autobiographical *In Search of Stones*. Scott Peck died in 2005 at the age of 69.

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*To
All who have been, one way or another, my 'audience'.
Thank you for listening*

CONTENTS

Introduction

PART ONE

THE FIRST STEP: GROWING UP

- 1 Consciousness and the Problem of Pain
- 2 Blame and Forgiveness
- 3 The Issue of Death and Meaning
- 4 The Taste for Mystery

PART TWO

THE NEXT STEP: KNOWING YOUR SELF

- 5 Self-Love versus Self-Esteem
- 6 Mythology and Human Nature
- 7 Spirituality and Human Nature
- 8 Addiction: The Sacred Disease

PART THREE

THE ULTIMATE STEP: IN SEARCH OF A PERSONAL GOD

- 9 The Role of Religion in Spiritual Growth
- 10 Matter and Spirit
- 11 New Age: Symboline or Diaboline?
- 12 Sexuality and Spirituality
- Epilogue: Psychiatry's Predicament
- Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

You may remember that *The Road Less Travelled* opened with the sentence ‘Life is difficult.’ And to that great truth, I will now add another translation:

Life is complex.

Each one of us must make his own path through life. There are no self-help manuals, no formulas, no easy answers. The right road for one is the wrong road for another. Nowhere in this book will you find it said: ‘Go this way,’ ‘Make a left turn here.’ The journey of life is not paved in Tarmac; it is not brightly lit, and it has no road signs. It is a rocky path through the wilderness.

In this book, I will endeavour to put down some of the things I have learned in the past ten years which have eased my way as I groped through the wilderness. But if I tell you that when I lost my way, I found it again by following the moss growing on the north side of trees, I will almost certainly have to warn you that in the redwood forests there are many trees covered with moss on all sides.

I also caution you not to interpret the word ‘further’ in the title or anything else in this book as suggesting that the road is linear – that you take one step after another in a straightforward progression. Although ‘further’ might sound as if I’m saying, ‘Here’s where Scott Peck was, here’s where Scott Peck is now, and if you are here, then this is where you will likely be next year,’ that is not what I intend to imply. That’s not what the road is like. It is, rather, like a series of concentric circles expanding out from the core, and there is nothing simple or straightforward about it.

But we do not have to make the journey alone. We can ask help of the force in our lives that we recognize to be greater than we are. A force that we all see differently, but of whose presence most of us are aware. And as we make our way, we can help each other.

If this book aids you in any way, I hope, most of all, that it will assist you to think less simplistically. I hope you will abandon the urge to simplify everything, to look for formulas and easy answers, and begin to think multi-dimensionally, to glory in the mystery and paradoxes of life, not to be dismayed by the multitude of causes and consequences that are inherent in each experience – appreciate the fact that life is complex.

PART ONE

The First Step:
Growing Up

CHAPTER 1

Consciousness and the Problem of Pain

All my life I used to wonder what I would become when I grew up. Then, about seven years ago, I realized that I never was going to grow up – that growing is an ever ongoing process. So I asked myself, ‘Well, Scotty, what is it that you’ve become thus far?’ And as soon as I asked that question, I realized, to my absolute horror, that what I have become is an evangelist. An evangelist is the last thing on earth I ever thought I would become. And it’s probably the last thing on earth you ever wanted to encounter.

The word ‘evangelist’ carries the worst possible associations and probably brings to your mind the image of a manicured and coiffed preacher in a two-thousand-dollar suit, his gold-ringed fingers gripping a leatherette-covered Bible as he shouts at the top of his lungs: ‘Save me, Jee-sus!’

Fear not. I don’t mean to suggest that I have become that kind of evangelist. I am using the word ‘evangelist’ in its original sense – the bringer of good news. But I must warn you, I am also the bringer of bad news. I am an evangelist who brings good news and bad news.

If you are anything like me, you are into delaying gratification, so when you are asked, ‘Which do you want first, the good news or the bad news?’ you answer, ‘Well, the bad news first, please.’ So let me get the bad news over with: I don’t know anything.

It might seem odd that an evangelist, a ‘bringer of truth’, would confess so readily that he doesn’t know anything. But the real truth of the matter is that you don’t know anything either. None of us does. We dwell in a profoundly mysterious universe.

Evangelists are also supposed to bring ‘glad tidings of comfort and joy’. The other piece of bad news is that I am going to be talking about the journey through life, and in so doing I cannot avoid talking about pain. Pain is simply a part of being human and it has been so since the Garden of Eden.

The story of the Garden of Eden is, of course, a myth. But like other myths, it is an embodiment of truth. And among the many truthful things the myth of the Garden of Eden tells us is how we human beings evolved into consciousness.

When we ate the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we became conscious and having become conscious, we immediately became self-conscious. That was how God recognized that we had eaten the apple – we were suddenly modest and shy. So one of the things this myth tells us is that it is human to be shy.

I have had the opportunity, through my career as a psychiatrist and more recently as an author and lecturer, to meet a great number of wonderful, deep-thinking people, and I have never met such a person who was not basically shy. A few of them had not thought of themselves as shy, but as we talked about it, they came to realize that they were in fact shy. And the very few people I have met who were not shy were people who had been damaged in some way, who had lost some of their humanity.

It is human to be shy, and we became shy in the Garden of Eden when we became self-conscious. When this happened to us, we became conscious of ourselves as separate entities. We lost that sense

of oneness with nature, with the rest of the universe. And this loss of the sense of oneness with the rest of creation is symbolized by our banishment from Paradise.

GROWING UP PAINFULLY

When we were banished from Paradise, we were banished forever. We can never go back to Eden. You remember the story, the way is barred by cherubims and a flaming sword.

We cannot go back. We can only go forward.

To go back to Eden would be like trying to return to our mother's womb, to infancy. Since we cannot go back to the womb or infancy, we must grow up. We can only go forward through the desert of life, making our way painfully over parched and barren ground into increasingly deeper levels of consciousness.

This is an extremely important truth because a great deal of human psychopathology, including the abuse of drugs, arises out of the attempt to get back to Eden. At cocktail parties we tend to need at least that one drink to help diminish our self-consciousness, to diminish our shyness. It works, right? And if we get just the right amount of alcohol or just the right amount of pot or coke or some combination thereof, for a few minutes or a few hours we may regain temporarily that lost sense of oneness with the universe. We may recapture that deliciously warm and fuzzy sense of being one with nature once again.

Of course, the feeling never lasts very long and the price usually isn't worth it. So the myth is true. We really cannot go back to Eden. We must go forward through the desert. But that journey is hard and consciousness often painful. And so most people stop their journey as quickly as they can. They find what looks like a safe place, burrow into the sand, and stay there rather than go forward through the painful desert, which is filled with cactuses and thorns and sharp rocks.

Even if most people have been taught at one time or another that 'those things that hurt, instruct' (borrow Benjamin Franklin's phrase), the education of the desert is so painful that they discontinue as early as they can.

Senility is not just a biological disorder. It can also be a manifestation of a refusal to grow up, a psychological disorder preventable by anyone who embarks on a lifetime pattern of psychospiritual growth. Those who stop learning and growing early in their lives and stop changing and become fixed often lapse into what is sometimes called their 'second childhood'. They become whiny and demanding and self-centred. But this isn't because they have entered their second childhood. They have never left their first, and the veneer of adulthood is worn thin, revealing the emotional child that lurks underneath.

We psychotherapists know that most people who look like adults are actually emotional children walking around in adult's clothing. And we know this *not* because the people that come to us are more immature than most. On the contrary, those who come to psychotherapy with genuine intent to grow are those relative few who are called out of immaturity, who are no longer willing to tolerate their own childishness, although they may not yet see the way out. The rest of the population never manages to fully grow up, and perhaps it is for this reason that they hate so to talk about growing old.

Back in January of 1980, soon after I wrote *The Road Less Travelled*, which in many ways is a book about growing up, I was being driven around to a number of TV and radio stations on a promotional tour by a cabdriver in Washington, D.C. After the second or third station, he said, 'Hey man, what you doin'?'

So I told him that I was promoting a book, and he asked, 'What's it about?'

I went into this intellectual bit about how it was an integration of psychiatry and religion. After about thirty seconds he commented, 'Well, it sounds to me like it's about getting your shit together.'

That man had the gift of discernment. So at the next TV talk show I went to, I asked if I could tell that story. They said no. Thinking that they objected to the word 'shit', I offered to say 'stuff' instead. But they still said no.

People just don't want to talk about real maturation. It is too painful.

CONSTRUCTIVE SUFFERING

If I am willing to talk about pain, it does not mean I am some kind of masochist. On the contrary. I see absolutely no virtue whatsoever in unconstructive suffering. If I have a headache, the very first thing I do is go to the kitchen and get myself two superstrength, uncapsulized Tylenols. I see absolutely no virtue in an ordinary tension headache.

But there is such a thing as *constructive* suffering. And the difference between unconstructive suffering and constructive suffering is one of the most important things to learn in dealing with the pain of growing up. Unconstructive suffering, like headaches, is something you ought to get rid of. Constructive suffering you ought to bear and work through.

I prefer to use the terms 'neurotic suffering' and 'existential suffering', and here is an example of how I make that distinction. You may remember that about forty years ago, when Freud's theories first filtered down to the intelligentsia and were misinterpreted – as so often happens – there was a whole bunch of avant-garde parents who, having learned that guilt feelings could have something to do with neuroses, resolved that they were going to raise guilt-free children. What an awful thing to try to do to a child!

Our jails are filled with people who are there precisely because they do not have any guilt, or do not have enough guilt. We *need* a certain amount of guilt in order to exist in society. And that's what I call existential guilt.

I hasten to stress, however, that too much guilt, rather than enhancing our existence, impedes it. This is neurotic guilt. It is like walking around a golf course with eighty-seven clubs in your bag instead of fourteen, which is the number needed to play optimal golf. It's just so much excess baggage, and you ought to get rid of it as quickly as possible. If that means going into psychotherapy, then you should do that. Neurotic guilt is unnecessary, and it only impedes your journey through the desert.

This is true not only of guilt, but also of other forms of emotional suffering, like anxiety, for example, which can be either existential or neurotic. And the trick is to determine which is which.

There is a very simple albeit brutal rule for dealing with the emotional pain and suffering of life. It's a three-step process.

First, whenever you are suffering emotionally, ask yourself: 'Is my suffering – my anxiety or my guilt – existential or is it neurotic? Is this pain enhancing my existence or is it limiting it?' Now perhaps about ten per cent of the time, you really won't be able to answer that question. But about ninety per cent of the time, if you can think to ask it, the answer will be very clear. If, for example, you are anxious about filing your income taxes on time because you once got hit with a big late payment penalty, I can assure you that the anxiety you feel is existential. It's appropriate. Go with your anxiety and file on time. On the other hand, if you determine that the suffering you are experiencing is neurotic and is impeding your existence, then the second step is to ask yourself: 'How would I behave if I did not have this anxiety or guilt?'

And the third step is to behave that way. As Alcoholics Anonymous teaches: 'Act as if,' or 'Fake it to make it.'

The way I first came to learn about this rule was in dealing with my own shyness. It is human to be shy, but we can deal with it in ways that are either neurotic or existential. In the audience, listening

famous speakers, I sometimes felt there was a question I should ask them, some piece of information I wanted to know, or some comment I wanted to make – in public, or even in private after the speech. But I would hold back because I was too shy and afraid of being rejected or of looking like a fool.

After a while, I finally came to ask myself: ‘Is this way of dealing with your shyness – which is holding you back from asking questions – enhancing your existence or is it limiting it?’ As soon as I asked that, it was clear that it was limiting my existence. And then I said to myself: ‘Well, Scotty, how would you behave if you weren’t so shy? How would you behave if you were the Queen of England or President of the United States?’ The answer was clear that I would approach the speaker and have my say. So then I told myself: ‘Okay, then, go ahead and behave that way. Fake it to make it. Act as if you weren’t shy.’

I admit that is a scary thing to do, but this is where courage comes in. One of the things that never ceases to amaze me is how relatively few people understand what courage is. Most people think that courage is the absence of fear. The absence of fear is not courage; the absence of fear is some kind of brain damage. Courage is the capacity to go ahead in spite of the fear, or in spite of the pain. When you do that, you will find that overcoming that fear will not only make you stronger but will be a big step forward towards maturity.

Just what is maturity? When I wrote *The Road Less Travelled*, although I described a number of immature people, I never gave a definition of maturity. But it seems to me what characterizes most immature people is that they sit around complaining that life doesn’t meet their demands. As Richard Bach wrote in *Illusions*, ‘Argue for your limitations, and sure enough they are yours.’ But what characterizes those relative few who are fully mature is that they regard it as their responsibility, even as an opportunity – to meet life’s demands.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND HEALING

To proceed very far through the desert, you must be willing to meet existential suffering and work through it. In order to do that, if you are like most of us, you need to change your attitude toward pain in one way or another. And here is some good news. The quickest way to change your attitude toward pain is to accept the fact that everything that happens to us has been designed for our spiritual growth.

Donald Nichol, the author of *Holiness*, refers to it in his introduction as a how-to book. He says, ‘If you’re caught carrying around a book on the subject of holiness and people ask you what you are doing with it, you’re likely to tell them, ‘Well, I’m simply interested in what authorities have to say about the subject.’ Actually, Nichol points out, there’s absolutely no reason for you to purchase or borrow, much less carry around a book on the subject of holiness unless you want to be holy. And so he calls it a how-to book, about how to be holy. Approximately two thirds of the way through the book there’s a wonderful sentence where Nichol says, ‘We cannot lose once we realize that everything that happens to us has been designed to teach us holiness.’

Now what better news can there be than that we cannot lose, we are bound to win? We are guaranteed winners once we simply realize that everything that happens to us has been designed to teach us what we need to know on our journey.

The problem, however, is that this realization requires a complete shift in our attitude towards pain – and, I think, toward consciousness. Remember in the story of the Garden of Eden, we became conscious when we ate the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Consciousness then became for us both the cause of our pain and the cause of our salvation, which is a word synonymous with healing.

Consciousness is the cause of our pain because, of course, were we not conscious, we would not feel pain. One of the things that we do for people to spare them unconstructive, unnecessary suffering

physical suffering – is to give them anaesthesia so that they can lose consciousness and not feel the pain.

But while consciousness is the whole cause of pain, it is also the cause of our salvation, because salvation is the process of becoming increasingly conscious. When we become increasingly conscious we go further and further into the desert instead of burrowing into a hole like the people who choose not to grow up. And as we travel onward, we bear more and more pain – because of our very consciousness.

As I said above, the word *salvation* means ‘healing’. It comes from the same word as *salve*, which you put on your skin in order to heal an area of irritation or infection. Salvation is the process of healing and the process of becoming whole. And health, wholeness, and holiness are all derived from the same root. They all mean virtually the same thing.

Even old atheist Sigmund Freud recognized the relationship between healing and consciousness when he said that the purpose of psychotherapy – healing of the psyche – was to make the unconscious conscious; that is, to increase consciousness. Carl Jung further helped us understand the unconscious by ascribing evil to our refusal to meet our shadow, or that part of our personality that we like to deny that we like not to think about, not to be conscious of, that we’re continually trying to sweep under the rug of consciousness and keep unconscious.

Note that Jung ascribed human evil not to the shadow itself but to the *refusal* to meet this shadow. And refusal is a very active term. Those people who are evil are not just passively unconscious or ignorant; they will go far out of their way to remain ignorant or unconscious; they will kill or start wars to do so.

I recognize, of course, that evil – like Love or God or Truth – is too large to submit to any single adequate definition. But one of the better definitions for evil is that it is ‘militant ignorance’. Militant unconsciousness.

The Vietnam War is one of the best examples I know of this militant ignorance on a grand scale. When the evidence first began to accumulate in 1963 or 1964 that our policies in Indochina weren’t working, our first response was to deny that anything was wrong. We said we just needed a couple more million dollars and a few more special forces. But then the evidence continued to accumulate and our policies clearly weren’t working. So what happened then? We sent in more troops, the body count began to escalate, and incidents of brutality became commonplace. It was the time of My Lai. Then as the evidence continued to pour in, we continued to ignore it. Instead, we bombed Cambodia and started talking about peace with honour.

Even today, despite all that we now know, some Americans continue to think that we succeeded in bargaining our way out of Vietnam. We didn’t bargain our way out of Vietnam – we were defeated. But somehow many still *refuse* to see this.

OASES IN THE DESERT

Consciousness brings more pain, but it also brings more joy. Because as you go further into the desert – if you go far enough – you will begin to discover little patches of green, little oases that you have never seen before. And if you go still further, you may even discover some streams of living water underneath the sand, or if you go still further, you may even be able to fulfil your own ultimate destiny.

Now if you doubt me, consider the example of a man who went on the journey far into the desert. He was the poet T. S. Eliot, who became famous early on in his career for writing poems of total aridity and despair. In the first, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ which he published in 1917, at age twenty-nine, he wrote:

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

It is important to keep in mind that J. Alfred Prufrock of the poem lived – as did T. S. Eliot – in a world of high society, the ultimate civilized world, yet he lived in a spiritual wasteland. Not surprisingly then, five years later, Eliot published a poem called ‘The Waste Land’. And in this poem he actually focused on the desert. It is also a poem that has in it a great deal of aridity and despair, but for the first time in Eliot’s poetry there are little patches of green, little hints of vegetation here and there, images of water, and of shadow under rocks.

Then in his late forties and early fifties, Eliot wrote poems like ‘Four Quartets’, the first of which opens with references to a rose garden, birds calling and children laughing. And he went on to write some of the richest and most luxuriously verdant and mystical poetry that has ever been written, and indeed, he is reputed to have ended his life very joyfully.

There is much solace we could take from Eliot’s example as we ourselves struggle along with our rocky path and our pain. We need some comfort on our journey, but one of the things we don’t need are quick fixes. I have seen a lot of people who literally murder each other with quick fixes in the name of healing.

They do this for very self-centred reasons. For example, let’s say that Rick is my friend and he is in pain. Because he is my friend, that causes me pain, but I don’t like to feel pain. So what I’d like to do is to heal Rick as quickly as I possibly can to get rid of my pain. I’d like to give him some kind of easy answer like: ‘Oh, I’m sorry your mother died but don’t feel bad about it. She’s gone to Heaven.’ Or: ‘Gee, I had that problem once and all you have to do is go running.’

But more often than not, the most healing thing that we can do with someone who is in pain, rather than trying to get rid of that pain, is to sit there and be willing to share it. We have to learn to hear and to bear other people’s pain. That is all part of becoming more conscious. And the more conscious we become, the more we see the games that other people play and their sins and manipulations, but we’re also more conscious of their burdens and their sorrows.

As we grow spiritually, we can take on more and more of other people’s pain, and then the most amazing thing happens. The more pain you are willing to take on, the more joy you will also begin to feel. And this is truly good news of what makes the journey ultimately so worthwhile.

CHAPTER 2

Blame and Forgiveness

A big part of growing up is learning to forgive. We go through life blaming others for our pain. And blame always begins with anger.

Anger is a powerful emotion that originates in the brain. Throughout the human brain there are little collections of nerve cells called neural centres. And in that part of the brain which we call the midbrain, these centres are involved in the governance and in the production of emotion. Neurosurgeons have actually mapped out the locations of these centres. With a human being lying on an operating table under local anaesthesia, they insert electrodes, or very fine needles, into the brain from the tip of which they can deliver a millivolt of current.

For instance, we have a euphoria centre, and if neurosurgeons insert the needle in that area and deliver a millivolt of current, the patient lying on the table will say, 'Oh wow! You doctors sure are wonderful and this is such a marvellous hospital. Do it again, will you?' This feeling of euphoria is very powerful, and the reason certain drugs like heroin are so habituating is that they may have a stimulating effect upon our euphoria centre.

Studies have been done on rats in which neurosurgeons insert an electrode into a rat's euphoria centre and allow the rat to stimulate itself by pressing a lever. As a result, the rat will be so busy pressing the lever that it will not eat and will starve to death. It will pleasure itself to death!

Not far away from the euphoria centre, there is another centre which governs a quite different emotion – the depression centre. If neurosurgeons insert an electrode in that centre and give it a millivolt of current, the patient lying on the table will say, 'Oh God, everything looks grey, I feel horrible, I feel just awful. Please, please stop it.' Similarly, there is an anger centre. And if neurosurgeons stimulate that, they had better have the patient strapped down on the table.

These centres have been built into the human brain through millions of years of evolution, and they are there for a purpose. For example, if you somehow cut out the anger centre in a child's brain so that she could not get angry, you would have a very passive child. But what do you think would happen to such a passive child when she got into kindergarten or first or second grade? She would be stomped on, she would be walked right over, she might even get killed. Anger serves a purpose; we need it for our very survival. It's not bad in itself.

The anger centre in human beings works in exactly the same way as it does in other creatures. It is basically a territorial mechanism, firing off when any other creature impinges upon our territory. We are no different from a dog fighting another dog that wanders into its territory, except that for human beings, our definitions of territory are much more complex. Not only do we have a geographical territory and become angry when someone comes uninvited onto our property and starts picking our flowers, but we also have a psychological territory, and we become angry whenever anyone criticizes us. We also have a theological or an ideological territory, and we tend to become angry whenever anyone criticizes our beliefs or casts aspersions upon our ideas.

Because our human territory is so complex and multifaceted, our anger centre is firing off all the time, and often very inappropriately. To give you an idea of how inappropriately, sometimes it can

fire off even when we invite people into our territory.

~~Back some twenty-five years ago when I went into analysis, I already had an interest in the relationship between psychology and spirituality, and knowing that Carl Jung had stressed this area, I went to great trouble to find a Jungian therapist. I went to see him, and I kept waiting for him to say something Jungian to me. The only problem was that he approached me like a Freudian, which, as I later learned, was exactly the way I needed to be treated.~~

After our introduction, this therapist didn't say a word for the next seven sessions. He made me do all the talking and I began to get more and more annoyed with him. Here I was paying him the vast sum (back then) of twenty-five dollars an hour, and he wasn't doing or saying anything to earn his money. Finally, during the ninth session as I was talking about how I felt about a particular matter, he actually said something. He said, 'Well, I'm not quite sure I understand yet why you feel that way.' And I snapped, 'What do you mean you don't understand why I feel that way?' The first moment he challenged my psychological territory, I was furious at him, even though that was exactly what I was paying him to do, what I had invited him to do.

Because, as human beings, our anger centre is firing off all the time, and often very inappropriately, we must learn a whole complex set of ways of dealing with anger. Sometimes we have to think, as I had to do in relation to my analyst, 'My anger is silly and immature. It's my fault.' Or sometimes we have to conclude, 'This person did impinge upon my territory, but it was an accident and there's no reason to get angry about it.' Or, 'Well, he did violate my territory a little bit, but it's no big deal. It's not worth blowing up about.' But every once in a while, after we think about it for a couple of days, we may discern that someone really did seriously violate our territory. Then it may be necessary to go to that person and say, 'Listen, I've got a real bone to pick with you.' And sometimes it might even be necessary to get angry immediately and blast that person right on the spot.

So there are at least five different ways to respond when our anger centre fires off. We not only need to know those ways of responding, but we also have to learn which response is appropriate in any given situation. It is an extraordinarily complex task, and it is therefore no wonder that very few people learn how to deal well with their anger before they are into their thirties or forties, and many who never learn how to deal with it.

BLAME AND JUDGMENT

When we get angry and blame someone for making us angry, we are also making a judgment about that person – that he or she has sinned against us in some way.

Back when I was sixteen, I won my first and only speaking contest, on the topic 'Judge not, and you will not be judged.' Pontificating on Jesus' words, I said we shouldn't make any judgments of other people, and I won a can of tennis balls.

Today I no longer believe that it is possible to go through life without making judgments about other people. We have to make judgments about whom to marry or not marry, about when to intervene in the lives of our children or when not to intervene, whom to hire or whom to fire. Indeed, the quality of our life is determined precisely by the quality of our judgments.

I am not contradicting Jesus. First, His words are often misinterpreted. Jesus said, 'Judge not, and you will not be judged'; He didn't say, 'Never judge.' But each time you judge, be prepared for judgment yourself. And second, He immediately went on to say, 'Hypocrite! First take out the beam' or two-by-four; he was a carpenter, remember – 'out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly the mote' – or splinter – 'in your brother's eye.' In other words, Jesus said to judge yourself before you judge anyone else.

On this same subject Jesus also said, when confronting an angry crowd about to stone an adulterous

woman, 'Let that person who is without sin cast the first stone.' Since all of us are sinners, does that mean we shouldn't cast any stones, that we shouldn't blame or judge anybody at all? In fact, no one threw a stone at the woman and Jesus then said to her: 'Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you.' Again he said to judge yourself before you judge others.

But despite the fact that we are all sinners, from time to time it is necessary that we cast a stone. It happens when we say to an employee, 'This is the fourth year in a row that you have failed to meet your performance objectives, this is the sixth time that I have caught you lying, and I'm afraid I'm going to let you go. I'm going to have to fire you.'

It is a terribly painful, brutal decision to fire someone. How do you know you are making the right judgment at the right time? How do you know you are right in blaming that person? The answer is you don't. But you must always look at yourself first. Even though you might find that you have no choice but to fire that person, you may also find that there are many things you could have done – and did not do – that would have spared you that decision in the first place.

You need to ask yourself questions such as: 'Was I concerned about this person and his problems? Did I confront him when I caught him in the first instance of lying or was that confrontation too difficult for me and I let it slide until the situation got unbearable?' If you answer such questions honestly, you may find that you will treat other employees differently, and you may be spared such a brutal judgment in the future.

THE AGONY OF NOT KNOWING

But how does one know exactly when the time has come for appropriate blame or judgment rather than self-criticism? When I first started public speaking, I didn't know whether it was the right thing to do. Was it really what God wanted me to do, or was I doing it out of an ego trip because I enjoyed the roar of the crowd? I didn't know which and I agonized almost continually, looking for the answer. Finally, I got some help – and this reinforces my earlier point that everything that happens in life is there to aid our spiritual growth, and that we very much need each other in this regard. I had shared the agony I was going through with the person who sponsored my second speaking engagement. And about a month after that engagement, she sent me a poem she had written. She had not written it with me in mind, but the last lines of that poem were exactly what I needed to hear at the time:

*The Truth is that I want It,
and the price I must pay
is to ask the question again and again and again.*

Reading the poem, I realized that I had been looking for some kind of revelation – a formula – from God, which would say: 'Yes, Scotty, go speak for all time.' Or: 'No, Scotty, don't ever open your mouth.' But there was no formula, no easy answer, and I knew that what I was going to have to do each time I was invited to speak, each year that I renegotiated my lecture schedule, was to ask the question again and again and again: 'Hey, God, is this what You want me to be doing now?' All any of us can do whenever confronted with a painful decision is to ask the question each time and once again agonize over the answer.

For example, if you are a mother or a father of a sixteen-year-old daughter who confronts you with a request to stay out until two a.m. on a particular Saturday night, what do you do? There are three ways that parents can respond. One is to say, 'No, of course you can't. You know damn well your curfew is ten.' Another way is to say, 'Oh sure, dear, whatever you'd like.' Those are what might be called right-wing and left-wing responses. But even though they are at opposite ends of the spectrum

there's something similar about them. They are shoot-from-the-hip, formulistic responses. They require no energy from the parents at all.

In my opinion what good parents would do is to ask themselves, 'Should we or shouldn't we let her stay out until two a.m. this Saturday night?' And they will probably answer, 'We don't know. It's true that her curfew is ten, but we set that when she was fourteen and there's probably no way that that's a realistic curfew any more. On the other hand, at the party she's going to this Saturday night there's going to be alcohol and that's a little worrisome. But then, you know, she gets good grades in school, she does her homework, she's obviously got a sense of responsibility. Maybe we owe it to her to trust that sense of responsibility. On the other hand, the guy she's going out with looks to us like a total loser. Should we, or shouldn't we? Should we compromise? What's the right compromise? We don't know. Should it be midnight, should it be eleven, should it be one? We don't know.'

Ultimately it does not matter so much what such parents decide. Because even though the daughter may not be terribly happy with the final decision, nonetheless she will know that she has been taken seriously, because her question has been taken seriously. And she will know that she is loved, because she is valuable enough for her parents to agonize over in their not knowing.

This is precisely why when I am asked, 'Oh Dr Peck, would you give me a formula so that I will know when it's the right time to blame and when it isn't the right time to blame?' I answer, 'I cannot give you any such formula.' Each instance is different, each is unique, and each time, if you are seeking the truth, you have to ask the question. Should you do this you will likely come to the correct decision, but you will also have to put up with the pain of not knowing for sure you have done the right thing.

TRUTH AND WILL

I have just spoken of both truth and God. Their proximity is no accident, because when we are talking about truth, we are talking about something higher than ourselves. We are talking about searching for and submitting ourselves to a 'Higher Power'.

Lest you be tempted to dismiss that as a primitive 'religions' notion, let me point out that science is truth-submitted behaviour. The scientific method is nothing more than a series of conventions and procedures that we have developed over the centuries in the interest of truth, in order to combat our very human tendency to want to deceive ourselves. And so science is submitted to a higher arbiter, a higher power – truth.

Mahatma Gandhi said: 'Truth is God and God is Truth.' I believe that God is also light and love, but certainly truth. Thus I propose that the pursuit of scientific knowledge, even if it doesn't answer our questions, is, in its place, very godly behaviour – behaviour that involves submission to a higher power.

The single greatest cause of inappropriate blaming is the combination of a strong will with the lack of submission to a higher power. A strong will is, I believe, the best asset that a human being can possess, not because it guarantees success or goodness, but because a weak will pretty much guarantees failure. It is strong-willed people who do well in psychotherapy, who have that mysterious will to grow. And so it is a great asset and a great blessing. But all blessings are potential curses, and all have their side effects. And the worst side effect of a strong will is a strong temper – anger.

The way I used to explain this to my patients was to tell them that having a weak will is like having a little donkey in your backyard. It can't hurt you very much; about the worst it can do is chomp on your tulips. But it can't help you that much either. Having a strong will, on the other hand, is like having a dozen Clydesdales in your backyard. Those horses are massive creatures and extremely strong, and if they are not properly trained, disciplined, and harnessed, they will knock your house

down. On the other hand, if they are properly trained, disciplined, and harnessed, then with them you can literally move mountains.

But to what is the will to be harnessed? You cannot harness it to your own will because it thereby continues to remain unharnessed. Your will has to be harnessed to a power higher than yourself.

The distinction between the harnessed and the unharnessed will was beautifully drawn by Gera May, in his book *Will and Spirit*, the first chapter of which is entitled 'Willingness and Wilfulness'. Wilfulness characterizes the unharnessed human will, whereas willingness identifies the strong will of a person who is willing to go where he or she is called or led by a higher power.

This distinction was also described poetically in that absolutely magnificent play *Equus* by Peter Shaffer. The play is about a boy who has blinded six horses, and the psychiatrist treating him, Martin Dysart, who is going through a midlife spiritual crisis. At the end of the play, explaining how he has come through his crisis, Dysart says:

'... I cannot call it ordained of God: I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage. There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.'

THE BLAMING GAME

It is no accident that people who commit the most evil in this world see no power higher than themselves. The evil are very strong-willed men and women. And because they are narcissistic, self-absorbed, and their will is supreme, they are the ones who are most into inappropriate and destructive blaming. They are the people who cannot – who will not – take the beam out of their own eye.

For most of us, if there is evidence around us that might point to our own sin and imperfection, that evidence pushes us up against the wall, we usually come to recognize that something is wrong and we make some kind of self-correction. Those who do not I call 'people of the lie' because one of their distinguishing characteristics is their ability to lie to themselves, as well as to others, and to insist on being ignorant of their own faults or wrongdoing. Their guiding motive is to feel good about themselves, at all costs, at all times, no matter what evidence there may be that points to their sin and imperfection. Rather than using it to make some kind of self-correction, they will instead – often at great expense of energy – set about trying to exterminate the evidence. They will use all the power at their disposal to impose their wills onto someone else in order to protect their own sick selves. And that is where most of their evil is committed, in that inappropriate extermination, that inappropriate blaming.

It is important to realize that blaming is fun. Anger is fun. Hatred is fun. And like any pleasurable activity, it is habit-forming – you get hooked on it.

Just how insidious this can be was brought home to me while reading some literature on demonic possession. I had come across several descriptions of the allegedly possessed person sitting in a corner, gnawing on his ankle. And this reminded me of some of the medieval paintings of Hell, in which you may see this same kind of figure – a damned person gnawing on his ankle. This seemed to be a very strange and very uncomfortable position to get oneself into. It didn't make sense to me until I read a little book by Frederick Buechner entitled *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. Right in the beginning of that book, under A, Buechner lists Anger and compares it to gnawing on a bone. There is always a little more tendon, always a little more marrow, always just a little bit left, and you keep gnawing on it. The only problem, Buechner says, is that the bone you're gnawing on is you.

Blaming others becomes a habit. And you end up gnawing on that bone, over and over and over again as you remind yourself how someone has wronged you. For this reason perhaps the most common of all psychological games might be called the Blaming Game. The term 'psychologic

game' was coined by the late, great psychiatrist Eric Berne in his book *Games People Play*. Berne was not writing about playful games, although there can be some analogies, since psychological games certainly may be fun of a sort. Rather, he defined a psychological game as a 'repetitive interaction between two or more parties with an 'unspoken payoff'. By repetitive interaction he meant something that is not only habituating but also stale, a kind of uncreative spinning of your wheels. By unspoken payoff he meant that there is something unsaid, something underneath the surface, underhanded, even something manipulative about psychological games.

The Blaming Game could also be called the 'If It Weren't for You' Game. Most of us have played it. It is the most common of all marital games. For instance, Mary will say, 'Well, I know I'm a nag, but that's because John has this emotional shell around him. I have to nag in order to get through to him. If it weren't for John's shell, I wouldn't be a nag.' And John says, 'Well, I know I have a shell around me, but that's because Mary's a nag. I have to have that shell in order to protect myself from her nagging. If it weren't for Mary's being a nag, I wouldn't have this shell.'

So there is a kind of circular, repetitive quality to these games that is hard to interrupt. And in explaining how to stop a psychological game, Berne spoke one of the only two great truths I know that is not a paradox. He said that the only way to stop a game is to stop. That sounds simple, but in fact it is extremely difficult. Just how do you stop?

Remember what it's like to play Monopoly? You can be sitting there and saying, 'You know, this is a really stupid game. We've been playing it for four hours now. It is really childish. I've got many better things I ought to be doing.' But then you pass Go and say, 'Give me my two hundred dollars.'

No matter how much you might complain about it, as long as you keep collecting your two hundred dollars when you pass Go, the game goes on. And if it is a two-player game, it can go on for ever unless one player gets up and says, 'I'm not playing any more.'

The other player might then say, 'But, Joe, you just passed Go. Here's your two hundred dollars.'

'No, thanks, I'm not playing any more.'

'But, Joe, your two hundred dollars.'

'Didn't you hear me? I'm not playing any more.'

The only way to stop a game is to stop.

Stopping the Blaming Game is called forgiveness. That is precisely what forgiveness is: the process of stopping, of ending, the Blaming Game. And it is tough.

THE REALITY OF EVIL

These days great numbers of people who are flocking to all types of New Age religions have somehow been seduced into believing that forgiveness is easy. Forgiveness is easy only when one becomes convinced that there really isn't such a thing as evil. And it just ain't so.

This misperception can lead people into certain traps, an example of which is found in a very popular New Age book called *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*, by Gerald Jampolsky, a fellow psychiatrist. His book is about forgiveness, a terribly important topic, but my problem with it is that Jampolsky makes it sound easy. He makes the blanket statement that rather than making judgments about people we should look for the good within them, look for God within them, and affirm them.

I am always leery of blanket ideas and concepts, because they tend to be simplistic and get people into trouble. I am reminded of the words of an ancient Sufi master: 'When I say weep, I do not mean for you to weep always. And when I say don't weep, I don't mean for you to become a permanent buffoon.' But unfortunately, a great many people in the New Age movement have come to believe that 'affirm' means 'always affirm'. I do agree that ninety per cent of the time that is exactly what you should do, but maybe ten per cent of the time – when you are confronted with someone like Hitler

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