

Fable Twelve

*“The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity” WB Yeats*

Jason the unnamed, Jason the dismantled, lost in his time, having no place, the faded gold on the horns of his goat skin his only reminder of human contact, got up on his rock and spoke to an Agora long deserted. Only green lizards and gold finches heard him.

He said this:

Let us imagine Place A.

Place A is made of illusion. Consequently it is strongly built. The walls are thick and tall. The roads are straight and tidy. The position is high up at the top of an isolated hill and consequently easily defended with its powerful weapons of illusion. The inhabitants of Place A feel at ease. It is well governed (tidy streets) and it is safe (thick walls etc.). There are no taxes to pay. There are large luxurious shops where the fancy can be fed and tickled all day long. It is a good and comfortable place to live, a firm base, a safe harbour. Its only drawback is its untruth.

Let us imagine Place B.

Place B is made of fact. Consequently its position is disastrously exposed to attack from all directions at all times and its inhabitants are constantly rushing to defend the walls. The walls are badly built due to weak management and constant conflict. The weapons at the people's disposal are thin reeds and badly written tracts printed on recycled paper. Place B is appallingly led, with dispute, cowardice, and hesitation the predominant features of its government. Morale in Place B is so low that the hospital doctors report spiralling increases in illness both physical and mental; the police report spiralling increases in crime levels. There is a constant dribble of deserters to Place A. To live in Place B is like living on a raft in heavy seas.

Let us imagine a great crisis threatens the planet upon which both places are situated - Planet AZ. Huge fissures have begun opening up all over the surface. It transpires that the mining required to build the walls of Place A have done real and irreparable damage to the planet's inner structures.

Furthermore, a great plague of insects has been reported streaming towards the two cities and it has been established that the insects are a new race that has bred and multiplied on the artificial fertilisers used to feed Place A's population and the insect horde has now exhausted its local food supplies.

Furthermore war has broken out both on the planet and in outer space and the war has been caused by the extremes of poverty experienced by peoples far away who have been grossly exploited to keep the inhabitants of Place A in the manner to which they are accustomed. Various peoples are involved, the carnage is appalling and the weapons being used (sold to them by Place A) threaten the whole planet.

Clearly solutions have to be found in this emergency. New answers are needed. Old patterns have to be changed. A leadership must operate which inspires the richest possible response from the inhabitants of the two cities and is able to focus and contain that response to the maximum possible effect. For, clearly, the best human skills have to be applied, new and unprecedented levels of co-operation, the wisest possible application of knowledge, understanding, strength and organisation.

From which city would we expect that leadership, that level of response, chiefly to come? The firm but illusory base of Place A? Or the insecure but truth-facing raft of Place B?

My answer has always been that the solutions needed must inevitably come from the exposed position of fact and truth. Despite the chaos there, Place B contains people whom experience has trained to live skilfully with truth and insecurity without deserting to Place A. There is nowhere to build except upon fact and there are no builders you can trust except those skilled and practised in handling and addressing fact with familiar affection and without anxiety . Therefore, the skills and experience upon which the planet's future depends must reside in Place B.

But I now begin to wonder whether this is true. Is the exposure of Place B after all so debilitating that just existing there saps all available energy? Perhaps just keeping your balance on the raft takes up all available hope and skill. For instance it seems that the word "intuition" which for me describes an experience of fact, is used quite easily in the world of the new science, which I fear I still associate with Place A. On the other hand that word can no longer be used at all in the world of the new social work, which I still despite everything associate with Place B. The reason that "intuition" has become taboo in social work is that it does not seem "scientific" enough and cannot be measured "scientifically".

Perhaps after all it is people used to the comfort, security and illusory self-belief of Place A who will come up with the answers. It will be answers already known and practised in Place B, but not propounded or practised effectively there, due to the habitual confusion, timidity and exhaustion that runs through the place like the very cement with which it was built.

Small children range far from a secure home, precisely because of its security. The more secure the base, so the more adventurous you feel you can be, and the further out you feel you can go, and the more solid and settled in yourself you feel. Remember to whom Shakespeare handed the crown of the future after the death of old Lear: not to a prince from the facile new world, the new mentalities of the Renaissance, but to a prince from Lear's old tired and corrupt mediaeval world, a prince purged and scoured by an experience of purgatory, a man still based in the old solidities but made whole from them and renewed out of them.

Perhaps, after all, the teachers, the leaders, the discoveries, the changes, the solutions, will come from the false but strong and firmly established position of Place A. Made initially adventurous by its security, made initially strong by its strength, they will survive and be made whole by the scouring, the mortification, the transformation that is now required of them in order to emerge in the doorway and lead us clear.

Rogan Wolf
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