

An open letter to america

[Experience](#), [Personal Experience](#)



Bear with me as I attempt to distill what I've observed about our collective behavior over the past year. These aren't my ideas, of course.

Our culture is suffering a crisis of meaning. The quality of dialogue around things that matter seems to be at an all-time low. The most mildly oppositional viewpoints propel us into such hysteria, that we shame and dehumanize, then with troubling ease, jettison "loved ones" from our lives. We've traded relationships, interests, and principles of substance for temporary hollow surrogates.

I think it's important to reclaim some language and pour a new foundation if we have any hope of restoring meaning.

Let's begin with tolerance

Where once tolerance was about bearing opposing beliefs with civility and consideration, tolerance has devolved to require false respect and public affirmation. In its previous definition, "tolerance" is essential to a free society, but in its current one, it threatens liberty absolutely.

Our culture no longer values diversity of thought, only diversity of skin color, gender, sexual orientation, and other qualities completely unimportant to identity and merely cosmetic in relation to the human soul. They have no relevance to our humanity and worse, when elevated as our identity, our society embraces a mirage of division.

As the stakes raise, people with unfashionable beliefs, like myself, are increasingly afraid to speak out, truth is further obscured, and division is

compounded. “ Division compounded” most certainly has unsettling mathematical implications. Let’s not talk about it.

The term “ you do you” is perceived to mean “ do what feels right for you. Follow your truth. Whatever feels right is right”. But that’s wrong. I’m not challenging the idea that we all have unique life experiences, I’m simply arguing that feelings are fleeting – they cannot be trusted – and morality is not subjective. The moral code built upon “ whatever feels right is right” is scandalously bankrupt. It’s the birthplace of pedophilia, infidelity, and murder. So, given the existence of objective morality, how do we seek it out?

Using Aristotle’s definitions of the two, Norman Doidge suggests that “ cultivating judgment about the difference between virtue and vice is the beginning of wisdom” and presumably a step toward moral good, away from evil.

Judgment. Another word of considerable controversy

In 2018, being judgmental is the highest crime, but like “ tolerance,” the word has been bastardized. Judgment is the mere act of discerning and hardly implies condemnation. Linguistically, the two words are not even distant cousins, yet we consider them as equals. The critical judgments we make all day long – sometimes about other people’s behavior – are entirely innocent when chased with humility. In fact, they are quite necessary. Judgment is what keeps us from jumping onto a moon bounce from a rooftop, eating chicken alfredo before a 5K, or proposing on the third date. Being judgmental is a prerequisite of wisdom.

The act of condemnation, on the other hand, is a little more sinister. In fact, many philosophical perspectives – including Christianity – would assert that no individual can rightly condemn another. We are all equal failures in our unrighteousness. But don't hear me saying we ought not to pursue righteousness, just that we are all equally unsuccessful at apprehending it.

I am entirely enthralled by the idea of needing no human's affirmation. What liberation. When I meet someone new I try to develop a bond by uncovering our shared experiences. I want to understand why they are the way they are and I want them to understand me too... then tell me they understand me, thus providing the vindication I seek. As I've gotten older though, I've seen how poisonous this approach can be to a budding friendship. Most people resist being needed. They know they can't help you carry your load because they can't even carry their own. It's too much, even for such a prized reward as kinship.

This may sound completely scandalous, but I'd like to propose we allow others to condemn us, without attaching their perspective to our self-worth and without succumbing to resentment. After all, we each have an equally obscured vantage point on reality.

I'll also suggest we wholeheartedly reject the instinct to condemn others and instead, embrace humility. Seems like those two things could bring us far more peace than we've ever known. If we could do it, certainly we would have no need for falsely virtuous “tolerance”.

I heard someone say recently that identity is only evident in contrast, which makes it a total illusion. I think that's true. I am only light because someone else is darker; I am only quiet because someone else is louder. Here I go, ironically making a case for relativism. I'm not saying we have no true identity, just that the things we cling to as our identity are really no identity at all, but illusions. I think our identity might only be found in our highest purpose. And theoretically, as humans, each of us has the same purpose.

I'm afraid "kindness" has lost much of its meaning as well, recently spoiling into some concoction of "agreeableness" and "politeness". When a child refuses to put on his seatbelt, is it most kind to give in or to enforce the rule, possibly humiliating, and certainly upsetting him? The latter, of course.

True kindness can only be executed alongside dedicated discernment and integrity, in the face of hostile resistance. A people-pleaser cannot be consistently kind to a friend. A person lacking moral conviction cannot be consistently kind to a friend. Extending true kindness is anything but agreeable and is often a real inconvenience, I'd say. But tremendously and exponentially worthwhile, nonetheless.

The good thing, the best thing is not always the most comfortable. In fact, it's rarely the most comfortable. A true friend loves unconditionally, which necessarily involves some correction, awkwardness, and pain. Not what anyone wants to hear, of course.

I used to find it foolish to participate in contentious discussions online, but recently changed my tune. Many of the most wise, thoughtful people I know

still feel the way I did and while I thoroughly sympathize with their position, I think it's a mistake.

Conversations of eternal significance (ones about politics, religion, and philosophy) need voices of wisdom. They need voices of reason and empathy. Withdrawing from these conversations wouldn't be such a problem if they were still had offline at the same frequency, but they're not. Online communication is replacing offline communication by a wide margin.

Emphasis on replacing. The opportunities to participate in these forums are quite limited and I don't think we get the luxury of engaging only in person, when the stars are perfectly aligned. This brand of dialogue is too important to forfeit. It's an opportunity to advance toward the truth together and when done well, uncover the things that make us the same. Many of us choose to believe in only one path to the firm unchanging truth, but the destination is all that matters. Truth resides at an intersection.

In times of seeking, I've attempted to put aside my religious biases and pursue truth by an alternate route, packing as lightly as I can manage. I'm not afraid of such a journey as I have confidence in the truth and trust it will be revealed. Does that statement give me away? I'm sure its boldness exposes my inextricable partisanship.

What a funny existence we keep, pretending we could possess the comprehensive truth if we would just try hard enough. The most towering intellectuals – scientists, philosophers, and theologians – have spent countless lifetimes trying to expose the complete works of the truth and failed repeatedly. While the truth is tangible and consistent, it's only ever

seen in some of its parts at any one time. I suppose it's a little like the moon. Reflective; symmetrical; illuminated, certainly – but never in its entirety. Always partially concealed. How silly and arrogant we are to suppose we can capture it. And maybe that's a good place to stop.

What I am apparently getting at – which was unbeknownst to me, upon beginning – is this: I am no one's savior and no one is mine. Loving the people in our lives doesn't have to involve forfeiting our individual principles or the truth. How might America be different if we really believed those things? With a hell of a lot of apprehension, but in love,.