

A Message to Women

An excerpt from *The Hand That Rocks the World*, by David Shackleton

“A woman is like a tea bag - you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.” – Eleanor Roosevelt

“The test of civilization is its estimate of women.” – George William Curtis

“Women don't realize how powerful they are.” – Judith Light

In Honor of the True Love of Women

I find that some books or movies can move me greatly, but that the affect, the emotion is fragile. Conversation, even innocent questions about what I am feeling and what in the movie affected me, seem to break the spell. This short piece is my first attempt to withdraw into silence after watching a movie, and to write from that affected space.

What can be said to capture a mood, an emotion? Many have tried. Even to hold it within myself, after a powerful, touching movie like *The English Patient* is difficult. Emotions seem so ephemeral, so fragile.

Who was the woman? I don't remember her name. The French Canadian nurse who looked after the English patient, and swung high in the church to see the paintings. She represents for me those women, those many good and honest women, who have loved men truly. What a gift that was. My heart is full of gratitude to the women who have loved men. Loved them as she loved the Seik bomb disposer, with her body and her heart. Loved them as she loved the English patient, with her heart and her mind. Loved truly, in wisdom, so that she could honor his final wish to die, and help him to do so, even as it brought her pain and sorrow. How I wish to honor such women, who know how to love men. Like Katherine Maddox, dying alone in a cave, trusting her man that he had done all he could to get back to her, and so avoiding sinking into resentment and recrimination even as all she feared closed in on her in the dark, and she died alone. No wonder that he so treasured her diary.

I wish to die with praise on my lips for women like these, who love well and truly. I wish them to hear from my mouth and my pen that their love is much valued, is esteemed and honored. In these times of shame and anger, of fear of men, I wish to say to women that this is what most men live and die for. Love of this kind is what men move mountains for. There is nothing between men and women that can inspire a man to greater heights of heroism or of dedication than this.

And yet, love of this kind is not drawn forth by arguments like this, as though it were to be purchased by the heroism of a man. No, love like this is given freely, because the true heart of its author would have it no other way. I do not write to reward women for their true love. No payment is possible, or necessary. I write only to honor them, to speak from the depths of my own feeling in gratitude and in praise. There is no exchange of value here, no trade. My gift is free, as is theirs.

May such love never die in the world. And may men never cease to honor it. It is women's form of heroism, and it is worthy of its own medals, its own ribbons and rituals of celebration.

I give honor, and bend the knee in homage to women who love well.

As we approach the end of this book together, I want to tell you something of what it is like to be a man these days. As I watch the beauty of love between good women and good men in movies like *The English Patient*, *The Time Traveler's Wife* or *The Adjustment Bureau*, I feel blessed to be alive, to share

the world with women, to be loved myself by a good woman. As I look more widely and see the poisonous judgment of men spread by feminism into every corner of our world, as I see the erosion of goodwill that it causes, the undermining of trust, the suspicion, the exaggerated fear on the part of women, I feel much sadness. As I listen to men, some angry, some confused, some just unaware, I see the diminishment of what we could be. I see some women struggling under the propaganda of victimhood, of moral superiority, wondering whether they should claim their responsibility or whether things in their lives really are a man's fault. I see other women who are totally caught up in feminist ideology, hateful and self righteous.

There are as yet relatively small numbers of extreme cases where lives have been completely destroyed by sexist prejudice, but the more subtle and more widespread damage is insidious. It seeps into our communities and families like water into fabric, growing slowly more saturated with invisible and poisonous lies. I see no solution to it until more of us grow up and become able to see and to speak the truth, and to do so with love in our hearts. For feminism is riding on our immaturity, our biased feelings, our codependent blindness, and will continue to do so until we find the strength to change.

At this time in history, with respect to this particular issue, women are more powerful than men. The evil of feminism is being propagated through women's moral power over men – but that power can be employed for good as readily as for evil. When men speak out against feminism, they are easily silenced or disregarded, both because of women's power to shame them and also because they are easily dismissed as self-interested, as defending patriarchal privilege. It's usually a lie, but a powerful one.

Women are more difficult to dismiss. Good men, most men, have protected women with their bodies and their lives throughout history; can women now step forward to protect men, to defend them from this most unjust assault upon their character and their lives? Will you? We men are suffering, we really need your help, and I for one humbly request it.

For women who have believed the feminist story about oppression and victimhood, a wonderful discovery awaits you. You are as powerful as men and always have been. You don't have to fight for power or step into power roles; you have only to open your eyes.

But there is a difficulty. It is the difficulty that has kept many women from doing this for a long time. With power comes responsibility, and with responsibility comes guilt, the knowledge of having done harm. There is no getting around this, it must be accepted. The biggest guilt that must be accepted is that feminism, the movement that has been launched and propagated in your name, is built on lies and has done much damage. It hasn't been about equality at all, but about women's advantage. I am sorrier than I can say that this is true, but it *is* true and it must be acknowledged.

What does that look like when women own their own power and accept responsibility for it? More than twenty years ago, while I was working at a Canadian telecom company, I happened to see a sign that a female employee had posted in her cubicle. It read, "In this cubicle, sexual harassment will not be reported – but it will be graded!" That's it. That's exactly it. This woman was repudiating generic female victimhood and stating unambiguously that she had the power to handle male overtures that the culture regarded as oppressive. I regret to this day that I did not then have the awareness or confidence to step up to that woman and congratulate her on her personal attitude of empowerment. But her sign made an impression on me; even then I knew that it was admirable, and I never forgot it.

I know that men have done a lot of harm. One of the gifts of feminism has been for men to learn humility. Back in the fifties and before, men were "up on the pedestal" of social adulation. Now we're in the basement of social contempt. But neither place is where we belong. We belong in the middle, in dualistic balance; neither worshipped nor scorned, just human. Imperfect, but worthy.

Women belong there too, right beside us, just as imperfect but just as worthy. That is real equality. But in the last fifty years, women have been up on the pedestal themselves. Perhaps it's hard to hear coming

from a man, but as feminism has been blaming men for the state of the world, women have been able to feel morally superior. Men have helped with this project, but it has primarily been driven by women's power to shame men into silence and to control moral discourse in the public sphere. It will be necessary for women to own up to this power and to the fact that they have employed it abusively.

Now, no woman is responsible for what others have done, so let me speak to my female readers as individuals. Feminism is not your fault. It is not your fault, unless you are actively feminist, and even then you have an excuse, for you did not know what you were doing. You were sincere in your belief about men's power and women's victimization. Your blindness was willful; you denied and dismissed all the evidence that you were mistaken because it didn't feel right, but it was still blindness. Feminism is not your fault.

However, it is your responsibility. Not exclusively; men bear some responsibility for it as well, for taking the easy path of compliance and appeasement rather than growing ourselves up to where we can stand up for what is true in the face of female shame attacks. But the primary responsibility, and the primary power to fix the problem, lies with women.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of hearing this message. Perhaps a gender reversal would make the situation more accessible, if no less painful. Feminism is propelled through an abuse of women's moral power over men. The analogous male power is men's physical power to coerce women through fear. The gender reversed equivalent to feminism, then, would be if men en masse, as a political program purporting to be about gender equality, had progressively disenfranchised women, eroded their equality rights, frequently stolen their children, confiscated some of their property, and threatened women with extreme violence if they spoke out against this program in any way. Spend a moment considering how that would feel – that is what feminism is like to men.

There is one difference, of course; such a masculine program would be consciously intimidating, while feminism's intimidation is usually unconscious to both women and men. No less powerful, but we have been unaware of, in denial of its power. But surely, after reading this far, you cannot remain completely unconscious. Even if you disagree with my thesis, you can see that it is a plausible alternative to the feminist cover story. The theory hangs together; it makes sense even if it still doesn't feel right. You have the opportunity now to check it out, to do your own research, to think carefully and reach your own conclusions. If you choose instead to dismiss the argument I have made and to turn away, you do so knowing the risk – that what you continue to support may be an evil ideology.

It may be difficult for you, as a woman, to realize how powerful your ability to shame men is. It is fully as big in men's psyches as is your own fear of violence and murder. When women shame men, it feels like emasculation, it feels like death. It is utterly terrifying. Yet we men hide our pain and our terror, because that is how we have been taught to be true men, to be good men, to be worthy of a good woman. We hide it even from ourselves. Men have been complicit in hiding and denying women's power; we carry some responsibility for your lack of awareness of it, but the larger measure belongs to women, for it has been used massively and destructively in your name in the last fifty years.

Here's the heart of the problem. Women must come to acknowledge that their first major foray into public policy, into practical politics, has been a disaster. It has been founded on lies and propagated through intimidation using a power that most women don't consciously realize they possess. It has done and is still doing immense harm. It is ideologically evil. I know that it is harder for women to acknowledge such responsibility than it is for men, for women's codependent moral power is built on a foundation of innocence. Acknowledging this responsibility means giving up moral power, moral superiority, and embracing guilt for a time. It will hurt a lot.

But it must be done. For each woman who does it, there is the reward of a relationship of genuine equality with men, and the ability to see men for who they truly are; flawed and beautiful, honorable and

human and worthy of full equality with women. For each woman who does it, it means the end of the “no good men” refrain which is built on an erroneous contempt for masculinity. For each woman who does it, it means the beginning of a new life of non-addictive, non-codependent relationships with others in the world. For each woman who does it, it means becoming progressively able to see clearly, to discern truth, and to manage your life successfully. For each woman who does it, the world is a little more healed, a little less wounded, and a little happier.

The choice is yours. You can be a leader, one who chooses early to embrace wisdom, or a follower, one who takes a path only when it is well trod by others. I do not say what you should do, because I cannot know your circumstance, your history, the issues that keep you stuck or your access to courage to overcome them. I do say that you can, if you desire it enough, because I believe this to be true for us all. In the end we are responsible for the shape of our lives because we all have the power to grow ourselves up if we choose.

Who am I to say these things to you, to speak in this way? I am a man who has done some personal growth work to get free of my own gender codependence, to become able to speak even in the face of female shame attacks. I related some of that journey in chapter five. It was not easy, and it isn't finished yet, but it has given me the ability and the will to speak with authority about these matters, to see them clearly and to know what is so and what is not so. You don't have to believe me – in fact, I prefer if you look for yourself, discover the truth about gender and power and wisdom yourself. Then act, powerfully and decisively, to change your own life.

One of the saddest aspects of the moral polarization that feminism has wrought is the loss of masculine wisdom from the world. Women have become isolated, left with just their own half of dualistic wisdom and frequently unable even to understand the loss that this represents. Let's look at rape to explore this issue.

Feminine wisdom about rape is that it is devastating, life-changing. Real, forcible rape undermines the innocence that women feel within the gender codependent matrix, so that they now feel dirty, shameful, unworthy. One of their most basic powers and rights, the power and right of sexual choice, has been ripped from them, possibly with major consequences – disease or an unwanted pregnancy. All of these feelings are appropriate – but they are also unbalanced, and men hold the balancing piece, the piece that is missing.

Masculine wisdom is the wisdom of choice, of will. Men know that where there is no choice, there is nothing to forgive. They *feel* the truth of this. Good men will reassure a woman who has been raped that she is not dirty or shameful, she is not unworthy because of the actions of another. The rapist carries the guilt and the shame, whether he acknowledges it or not. For a woman who can let it in, this wisdom is healing; it restores her feeling of innocence and moral purity, as indeed it should. It is a blessing from the sacred masculine. But today, the contempt for male wisdom and the feminist insistence that men have no right to speak on the question of rape, isolates women from the healing that men can offer.

It is the same in all areas of gender politics. Consider women's shelters. They usually prohibit men from even entering the building, ostensibly to alleviate women's fears. But what is needed for women who have been victims of male violence is to learn that there are good men, non-violent men, and how to tell the difference between them. Abused women need, above all, to recognize and heal whatever it is in themselves that attracts them into abusive relationships. Isolating women from good, positive masculinity is a recipe for protracted fear and insecurity. It inhibits or prevents full healing, which cannot be completed in isolation from men.

The healing of gender issues, for both men and women, requires both single gender and mixed gender processes. I have found this to be true for me personally, and I am convinced that it is a general rule. I have found it inexpressibly sad at those times when a woman, hurting because of what some man has

done, has been righteously indignant when I have offered a perspective which could empower her out of victimhood. Powerless victimhood, whether in the case of rape or domestic violence, can appear attractive to women in that it preserves moral innocence – but at what horrific cost! Masculine wisdom sees the downside of victimhood; it is a perspective that is sorely needed in today’s world, but it is a perspective that is shamed as abusive, as “blaming the victim.” In pushing masculine wisdom away, in using women’s moral power to shame it as abusive, women have lost access to a vital, healing component of our human heritage.

I am struggling to imagine, as I write, what might be the stumbling blocks for you, what might stand in the way of seeing yourself as an owner/operator of moral power over men. I know that it is difficult for women to *feel* the power that they have over men, to actually experience it as power. Perhaps it would help if I said something about how I think this balance of gender power came to be.

For thousands of years, men have mostly held societal power roles, and women have mostly not. During those years, we evolved cultural forces to restrain the abuses of power that men tend towards. Indeed, chivalry itself is a way of requiring men to internalize and accept the *responsibility* of power, to serve others even at the cost of their lives. We have grown accustomed to holding men accountable and holding women blameless; these things now feel right to us.

The widespread modern movement of women into social and economic power roles traditionally held by men is brand new in evolutionary terms, less than a hundred years old, and none of these evolved restraint mechanisms work effectively against abuses of power by women. Neither the internal mechanisms such as chivalry (there is no cultural ‘honor code’ instilled into women obliging them to protect men), nor the external social control mechanisms such as courts and legislation. These institutions still operate mainly to protect women, and seem unable to find the will to hold them accountable. So women today are exerting great power in our society, and there is no cultural mechanism yet evolved to restrain their abuse of this power. As they do what feels right to them, some of their actions are doing massive harm.

If it is the case that women have forms of power that balance the more overt forms possessed by men, then we have to ask ourselves how such an arrangement might have originated. I am not an anthropologist, nor have I attempted to research this area. However, I wish to offer, purely as plausible speculation, a scenario describing how this might have happened.

My scenario begins with violence. Consider that in prehistoric society there was an unavoidable need for either aggressive or defensive fighting.¹ Such wars arise naturally from the competition between tribes for resources, or for any number of more complex reasons. (The modern notion that primitive societies were peaceful and harmonious is a nostalgic fantasy; most, like Native Americans, were warlike long before they encountered Europeans.)¹ Given the biological differences between men and women which lead naturally to women being engaged in child rearing and men in hunting (a division of labor also common in the animal kingdom), this task of war would naturally have fallen to men, and that would create a problem. For once men organize themselves as a fighting force, what is to prevent them from taking over the society, enslaving women and taking what they wish from them?

The answer is that nature abhors a vacuum, including a power vacuum, and always finds a balance. The balance in this case was provided by an honor code. Such a code remains the chief way that societies guard against military excess to this day. In elegantly simple fashion, men held the physical power and women the moral power. Each had a power over the other, and each had something the other needed. Men had the physical power but needed the moral affirmation of women in order to achieve social recognition as good men, not to mention a wife and children. Women had the moral power but needed the physical protection and often also the provision of food and shelter from men. So men had the power

¹ In his book *War Before Civilization*, archeology professor Lawrence H. Keeley concludes that casualty rates in prehistoric tribal conflicts were on average 20 times those of 20th century warfare.

to destroy women's bodies and women had the power to destroy men's souls and a kind of detente, a balance of power, was struck. All of this was unconscious social evolution, where things that work persist *because* they work, because they have survival value. We don't need to know *why* we feel a certain way in order to feel that way: fear, shame or pride spring from within us and are shaped in us by physical and cultural evolution without us knowing or caring how it is done.

Perhaps at first there were tribes where the men enslaved the women. What must have happened is that such tribes were less effective, less able to compete with those where a gender balance of power was invented and men and women were able to work cooperatively, and so over time evolution favored those with an honor code restraining the force of the warrior men. We are their descendants.

This is simply plausible speculation; I do not present it as factual. Whatever its anthropological roots, however, there is little doubt that this honor code exists today and has taken many forms over time, from the ritual chivalry of the middle ages or the heroic "counting coup" of Native American tribal culture to the exaggerated Puritanism of the Victorians, but it has usually been focused on and controlled by women. Its deepest root is, of course, the power that women have to grant or withhold sexual favors, and so to cut off a 'dishonorable' man from access to sex, marriage, progeny and a normal community life.

This honor code is deeply and fundamentally alive in men today, and it is still society's greatest defense against both individual and collective male perfidy and violence. This is where the urgency of our present situation is apparent, for feminism has, for the first time in history, turned women from shaming individual men who are judged dishonorable, which had an important function in service of social order, to shaming men in general and masculinity as an institution. The very real danger is that if men come to perceive that there is no way for them to achieve honor, to be recognized publicly and privately as 'good' men, then they may sense that they have little to lose by taking what they want, since they have little to gain by restraining themselves. I very much fear that if we do not turn aside from our still-growing, wholesale shaming of men and all things male, that our future may contain civil violence of a degree we have never seen.

Let us not underestimate the power that feminism holds. The deepest, most deadly power given to women by tribal evolution is the power to shame. It had to be powerful, because it balanced the most deadly power given to men; the power to kill. That power to shame the deep souls of men is the power that feminism is using today to silence most of the men (and women) who would otherwise shout its errors and biases aloud. It is not easy for a man to grow out of his dependence on women for his essential honor. This is deep masculine stuff: "death before dishonor" is not a trivial male soul-cry. History has proven that regular, ordinary men will charge from trenches directly into machine gun fire, as we have seen in numerous battles. They will stand on the deck of a sinking ship as they did on the Titanic, watching lifeboats filled with women and children pull away and leave them to die. They will choose certain death rather than face the shame that they experience when they see themselves as dishonorable, as cowards. That's how big the honor code is in men: bigger than the fear of death, bigger than the survival instinct.

Women, until men grow themselves up, you hold the strings of that power. It is a huge responsibility. You carry this power simply by virtue of being female, and I hope that you will choose to step up and take the lead in acknowledging that power and learning to use it well again. The distortions that we see in society today around gender – programs that address only women's fears and ignore men's issues – have succeeded *only* because of that female moral power to shame good, civilized men into compliant silence.

The feminist movement has used the unconscious honor code of chivalry, resident in all good men, to overcome men's evolved wisdom about correct use of social power and instead install hugely harmful, oppressive and abusive one-sided rights-for-women-and-responsibilities-for-men laws and policies – even as it has simultaneously shamed that whole honor code and wisdom as patriarchally abusive and oppressive. It is a feat of unprecedented, though unconscious, hypocrisy. The very best in men, their

self-sacrificing code of honor, has been co-opted to bind them while the very thing that their honor code was designed to prevent – widespread abuse of social and political power – is put into place to serve the interests of women alone.

Remember the balance of power: men can kill women's bodies; women can kill men's souls. What does it look like when men's souls are being killed, even as they are shamed into silence about it? Look around you. The evidence is huge: it requires only a glimmer of consciousness and a lick of courage to perceive. Yet, most of us do not yet perceive it. Such is the blindness of addictive denial. Addiction recovery workers are not kidding when they say that a dysfunctional family (or society) is like having an elephant in the living room, that no one ever points to or consciously acknowledges is there.

My hope is that women will choose to move into recovery around their gender codependence and own their half of the dance of power. As an individual woman, you have the choice to step into full awareness around these gender issues, and to acknowledge the hidden half of the gender codependent matrix – women's power over men, especially moral power, and men's victimhood. I hope that you will find the courage to own up to the power, the responsibility, and feel the pain of your previous blindness. With that will come a deep grief, which will be the process by which you will heal yourself and let go of the image of innocence and moral superiority. Do not forget, as you do your grief work, that you are worthy and loved by men, by good men, by most men, and certainly by this man.

On the other side of this personal journey of recovery and growth toward enlightenment lies a different kind of power, an empowerment based in truth and love that you will employ in wisdom to help heal the world. On the other side, as well, lies a new kind of relationship with men, a relationship of respect and of genuine love, a relationship solidly founded in the truth that men and women are equal and always have been. In that place, you will *feel* the truth and the glory of that essential equality, you will feel men to be good and worthy partners for the journey of life.

ⁱ See *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*, by Lawrence H. Keeley, archeology prof. at the University of Illinois. Oxford University Press, 1996.