

A Rolling Perspective: The Deserve Delusion | CPD Blog

Jennifer Holland

11/12/2018



In September, I discovered with alarm I was to join the ranks of the hidden homeless (those who couch-surf when not on vacation), yet another victim of a society with woefully inadequate housing for its citizens, particularly their older, disabled, and poverty-stricken ones. Contrary to popular belief, most homelessness is now due to structural (i.e. economic) factors, not personal ones of addiction or abuse. In my case, they raised my rent, changing my in-progress lease so I could neither afford to remain, nor leave when an ADA unit became available. Yes, I “chose” homelessness, but only because the alternative was so far out of my financial reach, it was not an option.

Do I deserve to be homeless? Of course not. No one does. Am I destroyed by this apparent setback? No. I remain joyful because I’ve taken “deserve” out of my vocabulary. Deserve is a function of linear thinking, and I live in a round world full of possibilities.

For six decades though, I believed in the right/wrong, evil/good paradigm. No fifty shades of gray: there were none. I either moved in a line toward heaven, or one toward hell—and so did you. I judged you, too, and acted smug or ashamed by turns. I injured myself banging my head against those rigid walls of right and wrong.

Maybe the black/white approach made sense when people believed the world was flat, but does it still? We go to great lengths to prevent the Circle of Life’s random events from happening to us. We claim belief in a Creator, and then buy insurance, burglar alarms, and disaster kits. We see greedy people break the rules and prosper; meanwhile, innocent children die of cancer and people become homeless. We despair when we do everything “right” and it all goes “wrong.” We suffer from the Deserve Delusion.

During the shaming process required to get disability, I had to prove I deserved food, shelter, and medical care. After experiencing firsthand our American society’s tendency to look down—literally and figuratively—on the elderly, the poor, and those in wheelchairs, I was forced to overhaul my belief system or drown in despair. I discovered that eliminating deserve from the equation meant I no longer suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. I was simply a round

peg trying to squeeze into a square world. Think about it: squares and cubes are manmade. The galaxy, however, is replete with spheres, from our body cells to the celestial bodies.

A dangerous outcome of linear thinking is this concept of “deserve.” Religions are not the only ones who encourage the “do x, y, and z and you will earn a future reward” mantra. Agnostics and atheists alike fall prey to the “If I do/ then ‘X’ will happen.” Be honest: how often do you say, “she got what they deserved,” or “I deserve a little treat”? Fascinating, is it not, how a group or person deserves something—until it happens (or doesn’t happen) to us?

I’m not saying actions don’t have consequences; they surely do. What I’m saying is that we cannot predict with accuracy what those consequences will be. There are far too many variables. Above all, labeling consequences “good” or “bad” feeds the Deserve Delusion and perpetuates suffering.

Once we appreciate the spherical nature of our world, we can stop the anguish. The no-sided sphere provides infinite points of perception. It is one; yet it holds all. When we cling rigidly to a point on a single plane, we cannot see other possibilities. If I fret over my impending homelessness, I become deaf to offers of help, mute to ask for it, and blind to the possibilities ahead. Now that’s disablement. That’s a sure-fire way to suffer.

Linear thinking sees bottom lines, not spheres of opportunity. Business owners are blind to the thousands of baby boomers and returning wounded soldiers who need accessible housing and assistive technology to secure meaningful work. More round pegs arrive in our square-holed society every day, yet the short-sighted linear thinkers are cutting, not creating, crucial services. They delude themselves they’re climbing to success, when in reality they’re on the same ball we are.

Instead of wheelchair users accommodating to the squares’ world, does it not make sense for the millions of able-bodied persons to use their ingenuity on our behalf? To construct, for example, accessible housing from the get-go? To make us, if not whole, feel part of the whole?

We’re together on this great big ball called Earth, and no one person “deserves” more or less than another. To believe we’re going up, down, straight, or sideways sustains the grandest of delusions and causes untold suffering. We’re spinning madly in space here. Perhaps instead of focusing on what we deserve, we can just serve—serve each other, and make this journey as comfortable as possible for all of us.

* Two days after this article was published, I moved into new subsidized housing. I only have it because years ago I'd put and then kept my name on public and subsidized housing waiting lists. One of these opened up. My advice— if you own a home, keep it. You can always go "Golden Girl" style and get roommates. If you need modifications to stay in your home, that's possible too. All renters are vulnerable, but if you require specialized housing you're even more at risk. Find states that still have open lists and put yourself on them. A few years from now you may be very glad you did.

Jennifer Holland taught herself to read and write at age four and has been doing both ever since. Minnesota-born and Wisconsin-bred, she nonetheless inherited the Irish penchant for travel. Despite the shoestring budget, she visited a dozen countries before her disability, and even lived in Ireland for nearly fifteen years. Her encounters with other cultures inform the quirky insights into human behavior that find their expression in her poetry, novels, and non-fiction works. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys chair yoga, video chats with her children and grandchildren, and living happily with MS on a tiny fixed income.

