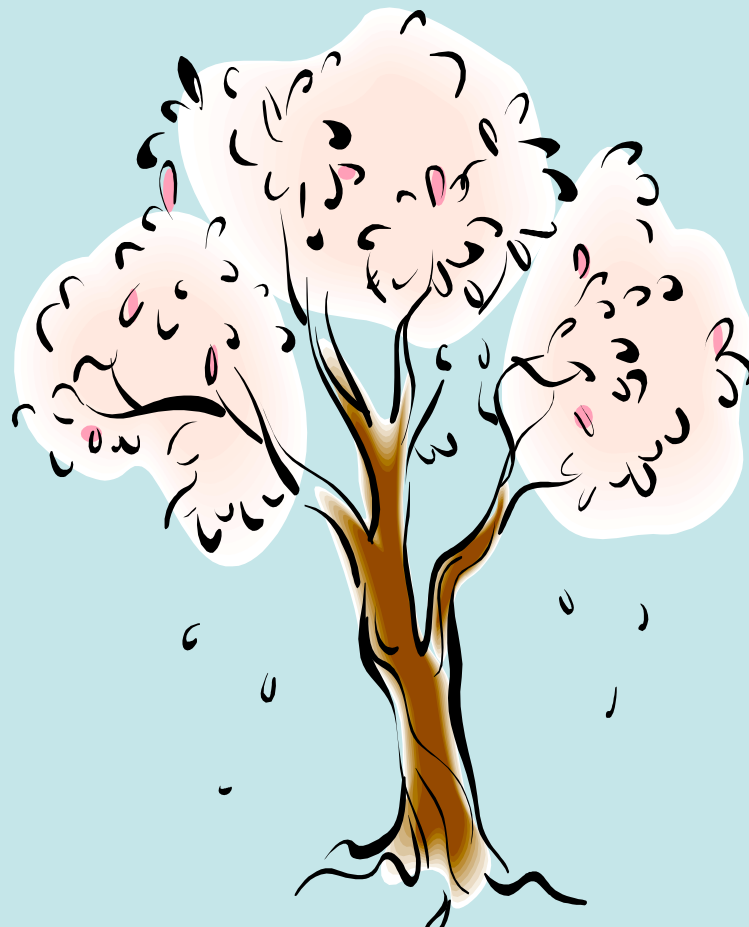


# SHARED LEADERSHIP

BRINGING FORWARD THE ENERGY OF POSSIBILITIES

STORIES FROM WHICH TO LEARN

## The Tree and The Man



Michael Marlowe

## “The Tree and the Man”



Once there was a man of good intention and many lines in his mind. For the man the world was simple – black or white, with him or against him, intelligent or foolish. He was known by his family and friends as Will – Will the Stubborn. One day he was walking in the

woods and he heard a voice say, “Hello.” Startled he looked around from side to side seeing no one.

“Hello,” said the voice again.

“Who is there?” yelled Will. “Come out!” The voice seemed to be coming from behind the old tree almost 50 paces away. “Come out from behind the tree,” said Will.

“Hello,” again the voice said. No one was there that Will the Stubborn could see.

“Where are you?” yelled Will.

The voice said, “I am here right in front of you.”

Will could see no one. Becoming very anxious he fled down the trail. Will of course did not believe in magic.

A week later, needing to go to the home of a friend and running late, Will took the short cut through

the woods. As he approached the clearing, he ran as fast as he could, brushing past the tree. He heard nothing. The man was both relieved and surprised. He was fully expecting to hear the deep full voice say hello again. Now feeling much more relaxed, he began to use the path through the woods again. On approaching the clearing one day, he stopped to look at the tree. At over seventy feet tall it was clearly one of the oldest trees in the forest.

As he slowly shuffled past the tree, a deep voice said, “So I see you are not in a hurry today.”

The man jumped several feet off the ground, his heart racing at the sound of the voice. “Who are you? What trick is this?”

“No trick,” said the tree. The voice seemed to come directly from the tree. The man could see no wires or a speaker, nor was anyone up in the tree.

“I must be losing my mind, a tree can not talk!” he exclaimed.

“Then how do you explain my words?” said the tree.

“Trees can not talk! This is madness!” screamed the man. And again the man fled the woods.

This experience was a great burden for him to carry; he could tell no one, not even his wife, for fear that they would think him crazy. The man knew what had happened was impossible. A tree can not talk; trees have no brain, no visible means to speak. It was just a tree, merely living wood, good for building and heating homes. His wife noticed that he seemed upset and distracted and she worried about him.

After carrying his burden in silence for many months the man made a big decision. He went into the forest with an axe. He would cut down this tree and put an end to all of this. As he approached the clearing he heard nothing. With great resolve he approached the tree and swung his axe. The axe bit deep into the bark. He did this several times. Having never cut down such a large tree before, he realized it was going to be hard work and take a long time. He continued to swing the axe, creating a three inch slash in the bark.

As he swung the axe again, the tree said, “Why do you seek to injure me?” Startled the man swung the axe even harder.

Again the tree said, “Why do you seek to injure me?” He had prepared for this and pushed cotton deep into his ears. Again the tree said, “Why do you seek to injure me?” The man still heard the voice. “Human, what have I done that you would seek to do me harm?”

The man fell to his knees holding his hands over his ears. Rocking back and forth he thought, ‘This can’t be happening. The voice inside my head - it can’t be happening.’

The tree sensing the man’s distress said, “Is it so hard to believe I am speaking to you? If my voice creates so much pain for you then I will stop talking.”

The man stopped rocking, realizing that the tree was sensitive to his distress. ‘What is happening to me?’ he thought. Trying slowly to come to terms with the possibility that all of this might be true and that it was not all in his mind, he addressed the tree directly



for the first time. “What do you want from me?” There was silence. The man, raising his voice, said more loudly, annunciating each word individually and slowly, “What do you want from me?”

After a time the tree spoke and said, “I chose to greet you. I do not want.”

“But why me, why now?” cried the man.

“I noticed you and said hello. The others said I was foolish and no good would come from this,” said the tree to the man.

“The others? They can all talk?”

“If they choose to,” the tree responded.

“I do not believe any of this. If what you say were true, then many other trees would talk and many other people would hear them talk. This wouldn’t be happening just to me,” stammered the man.

“They simply choose not to talk,” said the tree. “We only speak when we choose. If I had known this would be so upsetting to you then I also would have chosen differently.”

“I just don’t understand. This is all so impossible.”

“Well,” said the tree, “This is the first time I have tried to talk to a human. Now I realize why no one does it. Maybe this is why you have never heard of any other trees talking to humans. We mostly listen and grow. That seems to be enough. We provide for the forest; that is our form,” said the tree to the man. “Tell me, human, what is your form? What is it that you do?”

Will the stubborn was very, very quiet. He had no answer. So he asked a question. “What do you mean,” he said. “What do I - what do we - do?” he barked at the tree.

“What is your form?” the tree simply repeated. After some silence, the tree said, “How is it that you provide? We provide shelter for the animals. We enrich the soil. We hold it in place, stabilizing the earth. We clean the air.”

The man thought and then said, “Well, we create music. We have art. We build things.”

“I do not know the word ‘art’ or ‘music.’ Tell me, human, who lives in these things you build? Do you provide shelter for other species?”

The man explained that humans have families and children to provide for and the buildings are places to work and gather. “Art and music make people happy, well at least some of the art and music does,” said the man.

After a time the tree said to the human, “So humans provide for other humans.”

“Yes,” said the man, “that is right.”

“So you provide for yourself and no others. We must ponder this,” said the tree. “Let us speak again.”

Each day the man returned, but the tree did not speak again. No matter what he did, the tree did not speak. It seemed to surprise the tree that humans only provided for themselves and no other. The man could of course come up with other examples. The veterinarian took care of animals. Many people had

pets. The land conservancy groups were trying to stop building and preserve open land, and there were other organizations like the National Audubon Society. Yet, when he thought more about it, humans for the most part provided for themselves. And in some cases he could think of, they did not take care of other humans at all. In fact, as the man read the newspapers and watched TV, he started to realize it was more extreme. Not only did humans only provide for themselves, and not always well, this was done in a manner that was, at times, rapidly diminishing other species and resources. Humans took care of themselves by diminishing both humans and non-humans.

Often he came back to the tree and told it what he was learning about himself and other humans. Always there was silence. He missed the tree's voice. As he would sit and talk to the tree, he would pretend that the tree was listening to him.

The man started to change things about how he lived his life, slowly at first. He made sure to donate money to those people who provided for the land and species other than humans. He would now tend the trees on his property, cleaning out dead branches, fertilizing them regularly. Secretly he hoped one might say something to him. His small piece of property over time became lush, green and alive. From here he became an advocate of land conservation and forest preservation. He no longer went everyday to the tree. The space of his visits grew longer and longer.

The man always asked the questions in every situation he was in, "What do you need? How can I

provide?” Over the years he became very good at listening, as the tree had told him they did, speaking only when he had something to say. Those that knew him as a young man, found these changes remarkable.

About twenty years passed since the tree had spoken with him. One day the man returned to the clearing, intent to talk with the tree and tell the tree of his most recent work and learnings. As always, he told the tree his deepest thoughts and feelings, explaining his experiences, asking his questions, and speaking from the heart. He sat quietly and imagined the trees’ answers and questions back to him. He found great comfort in this, even though the tree continued to be still.

Several years later on a warm day in October, as he sat by the tree looking up at the multicolored leaves, he heard a familiar voice. “Hello, human.”

The man jumped, startled at hearing the voice after so many years. He was speechless, having given up hope of ever hearing that voice again. “Hello,” was all he could manage.

“I have pondered the form of humans,” the tree said. “When we first spoke, human, you told me of the form that humans take. I found this very confusing and disturbing. There are as many humans as trees on this earth and you only provide for yourselves. You improve little and in many places on this earth you harvest everything, everything. Yet, in you I see a spark of hope. It is good that I pondered this, for if I had not, we would have never spoken again. I have listened to your stories and seen many changes in you.”



The man responded, “Couldn’t you have answered me just once? It has been over twenty years since we last spoke!”

The tree replied, “What are years?”

“You know, they are like your rings - years, seasons, time.” Then the man realized the tree would only know about growth rings if the tree had seen another tree cut in half. “Seasons,” he said, “seasons when the leaves fall off and then grow back.”

“Yes,” the tree said, “Numerous cycles of spring, of my leaves growing and falling off, have passed. I do not count these. You call them years?” murmured the tree. “I do not understand your concern.”

“I listened to you well and included all that you said to me in my pondering. The moment is right, you are here, you were not talking and so I wish to ask a question. This is why I speak now.”

“Tell me, human, how did you change your form? And how do you see and accept my true form now, when before I was invisible to you?”

“Well,” said the man, “I think differently than before, for one thing. You were just a tree of no consequence to me.” Looking down at the old scar where he had cut a gouge deep into the bark he grimaced; “Now I see you as a wise ‘person’.”

“Yes, but how did this happen?” the tree pressed the man. “For this, I believe, is key. I/we have no experience changing form. We are as we are.”

The man thought about this. Again it was another hard question. “For a long time I kept remembering

what you said to me, ‘so you provide for yourself and no others.’ I started to notice examples of this all around –the truth of this wherever I went. Somehow it didn’t seem right. There was wrongness about this, that humans should just use things. And that most of us humans live in a way that provides for themselves at the expense of others.”

“So, I spoke the truth and you saw the truth in it?”

“Yes,” replied the man.

The tree continued, “Before this happened something else occurred. In the beginning when I first spoke, you thought me to be a trick or the creation of your mind. You said to me that I was just a thing, not a consideration. How did you come to consider me, so that you could even hear my truth - so that you could begin to learn and see examples of the truth around, so that you could choose different actions, so that ultimately you could change form?”



“All this hinges on you seeing and experiencing me not as your version of my form, but as my version of my form.”

The man was amazed. He had never heard the tree speak for so long. It was a beautiful song and he wished it would just continue.

“I do not know,” said the man, “how this happened. One day I came to cut you down and put an end to my madness. Then you spoke and asked, ‘why do you wish to injure me, human?’ and for a moment I glimpsed at another possibility that might exist.”

“Yes,” said the tree, “we call this shifting the lines.”

“Shifting the lines?”

“Yes, shifting the lines. We have always known the earth to be one mass. There are no boundaries; it is oneness. The water flows through the land. We feel this through our roots and connection to the air. In our consciousness we still feel separate. Yet our physical existence knows that we are one with the earth. We both provide and are provided for in perfect symmetry. Yet the energy of our consciousness draws lines and says it is separate, that it is not the earth. It is part of the function of our consciousness to preserve itself, not lose its identity. So it draws lines to separate.’

“For a time before humans came here to the earth, we tried to rid ourselves of our consciousness. It is still part of us though and we could not end it, other than by going to sleep. Some of us did. Others learned to shift the lines. By learning to shift the lines we realized that we could more and more experience new possibilities and more oneness. I shifted lines that said do not speak to humans which the other trees still hold.”

“What you are saying is beyond my understanding,” said the man. “I am just a human and do not have the trees’ wisdom. I can see that my own lines, as you call them, about what the form of a tree is, were in my mind. My lines about your form were hard and fast and very thick. They let no light in to see it any other way. This is a very powerful idea of shifting the lines, the lines which my mind creates. Since I met you,

I have learned many new things and without realizing it, I have shifted some lines concerning what I think is important and what I care about.’

“I suspect,” the man continued, “that this new thought you have given me of ‘shifting the lines’, of the existence of lines that I create in my consciousness, needs to be pondered. It needs to be nurtured and grown, much like the idea that you gave me over 20 years ago that humans only provide for themselves. I just hope we can talk a bit more often about this idea than we did with the first idea you offered me,” he said wistfully, “it would have been so nice to hear your voice. But I realize now that you take a long time to ponder.”

The tree laughed. The man had never heard a tree laugh before. “Why are you laughing?” asked the man.

When the laugh was finished, the tree said – “You think I was silent all that time because I was pondering. I was silent because I was listening and waiting for you to finish. I did not want to interrupt your pondering.”

