

What If We Have Been Seeing “Wrong” the Wrong Way?

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Some beliefs do not need to be taught outright. They show up in how we are corrected, in what is not said, or in the way silence lands after we have done something “wrong.” Over time, these small moments start to form a kind of atmosphere: if you have done something bad, you should feel bad. And if you keep feeling bad, that must mean you are a good person.

It sounds like accountability, but often it is just repetition.

What brings people into therapy is not always what they have done. It is the revisiting. The returning. The part of the mind that keeps circling back as if it must stay there until... what? It has suffered enough?

There is a difference between regret and being stuck. But when we are in it, the cycle feels necessary. It feels like thinking. It feels like being responsible. However, it is often a form of mental captivity, a local experience the mind keeps recreating in hopes of finally solving it.

When Guilt Starts to Feel Like an Identity

There is something strangely compelling about guilt. Not only painful, but compelling. It can become familiar, even reassuring in its own way. If I still feel guilty, maybe I have not escaped the consequences. Maybe I am still “good” for punishing myself.

It is not only emotional. It is structural, a way the mind keeps the story intact. When guilt starts to become identity, punishment begins to feel necessary. And if punishment is necessary, then maybe what happened was more than a mistake. Maybe it meant something essential about you.

That is when the pattern closes in.

Sometimes in therapy, there is a small shift, not a breakthrough, not a quiet realization, just a pause, and the question shows up: “What if it was not a sin, just a mistake?” Not to minimize or excuse, but to let the mind look at it from outside the repetition.

That moment, even briefly, opens space. In that space, guilt loses some of its gravity. The mind stops protecting it. Something that once felt like it had to keep repeating might finally begin to loosen its grip.

We Rarely Get There on Our Own

This kind of shift almost never happens in isolation. Our systems, both internal and cultural, are built to preserve punishment. Feeling bad is often seen as morally appropriate. Self-condemnation receives quiet approval. People say things like, “At least you feel bad about it,” as if that is the end of the process.

But holding onto guilt does not always mean something is being repaired. Sometimes it only means we have mistaken suffering for repair.

Therapy does not fix this outright. However, it can make room for something else, a quieter awareness. A question instead of a sentence. Someone sitting beside you in the same old pattern, not trying to drag you out of it, but helping you notice: this is a pattern. It is not a truth. It is not a punishment that proves something. It is simply a mental circuit that the mind keeps running because it is afraid to do something different.

The Left Mind Wants Closure. Healing Does Not Always Give It.

There is a part of the mind, the left brain, the analyzer, the judge, that wants to label and lock things in. It wants to know who was right, what went wrong, and how to make sure it never happens again. That part of the mind does not trust uncertainty. It does not like gray areas. It certainly does not trust letting something go without punishment.

But healing is rarely that clear cut. It does not usually arrive with a clean resolution. It does not reward suffering or moralize confusion. What it does, in small and often unremarkable moments, is interrupt the repetition. It softens the pattern. It allows you to stay with what happened without making it everything you are.

You do not have to be “good” to grow. You do not have to keep bleeding to prove you care. You do not have to live inside the same mental rehearsal to learn from it.

It Is Not That the Past Did Not Matter. It Is That It Does Not Own You.

There are things we have done or lived through that still ache. They still feel unfinished. But pain does not need to become a personality. Punishment does not need to become a practice.

Often, it is not the event itself that holds us. It is the shape our mind gave it. The label. The meaning. The verdict. Therapy cannot change the past, but it can create space to ask different questions of it. Not, “How do I make myself pay?” but, “What part of me still believes I must?”

Sometimes, quietly, the mind stops answering with guilt and begins listening for something else.

Author’s Note

These reflections come from what I often witness in therapy: how the mind can turn guilt into identity, and how healing begins not by denying it, but by softening our relationship with it. My hope is that these ideas help you notice where you might still be carrying the weight of “wrong” that no longer needs to be held.

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