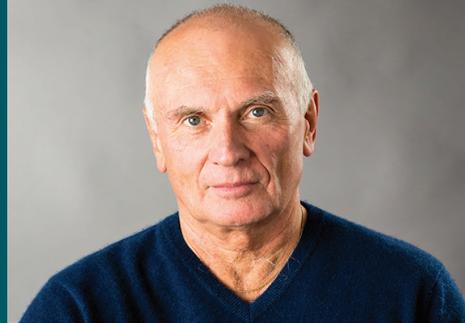


Redemption for the Scapegoat

by Dr. Paul Dunion, Transformational Faculty Member



Of all the childhood roles in a family, scapegoats are in dire need of being in repossession of their essential goodness. Scapegoats enter the family, and all too soon become aware that the Hero child has secured the position of recognition and approval. Scapegoats are rigidly attached to their role when the system is heavily stressed by addiction, illness, extreme transiency, or poverty. Unless some unfortunate situation as an accident or illness deposes the Hero, how to belong as a recipient of parental praise eludes the Scapegoat. Any place worth pursuing seems fully occupied. It becomes apparent that something darker may be the only option.

Characteristics of Scapegoats

- **Negative attention.** It's only too easy to view Scapegoats as incorrigible. The truth is that they simply can't imagine competing with the Hero sibling who has wrapped up everything positive. Hence, negative attention becomes preferred to no attention. There is typically no awareness that negative attention or some kind of attention is what is desired by the Scapegoat. The unconscious pursuit of negative attention can extend way beyond childhood, taking the Scapegoat hostage to a life deprived of ease and richness.
- **Acting-out behavior.** To receive negative attention, the child begins to indulge in uncooperative and delinquent behavior. This disorderly routine can extend beyond the family to school and other social organizations, resulting in a nefarious reputation. Carrying such a stigma can negatively impact the expectations of teachers and obstruct academic success.
- **From role to identity.** As Scapegoats indulge in unacceptable behavior, the understanding that they are anything larger than the role they occupy slowly slips away. They believe that they are bad people, reflecting the spirit of a tragic figure. Unless there is some form of therapeutic intervention, they run the risk of addiction, incarceration, and even an early death.
- **Outside the family.** Convinced that there is no positive way to participate in the family, they rely upon peer affiliation to engender some measure of belonging. They make their way to other children who likely feel a similar frustration with family life.
- **Drug and alcohol abuse.** Scapegoats are extremely prone to abusing street drugs and alcohol to numb the nagging feelings of rejection and hurt. They easily translate these vulnerable feelings into anger and are viewed as angry.
- **Connection through contention.** Scapegoats don't believe that people will find them lovable, endearing, or desired. Hence, they rely on being provocative and contentious as ways to build connection to others. Unfortunately, those are not great rapport building elements, resulting in the Scapegoat self-sabotaging their affiliation needs.

- **Offerings of love.** Scapegoats know they cannot love their parents by what is conventionally viewed as being a success. Instead, the parents receive a negative distraction from their pain. The defiant Scapegoat can generate a myriad of disturbances and disruptions, keeping the attention of the parents away from what troubles them about themselves.
- **Restricted development.** Scapegoats suffer both cognitive and emotional development. They take solace in deciding and proving that they are not like the Hero sibling, who may be comfortable with academic pursuits. Their intellects often do not receive the necessary guidance and encouragement that can be offered by schools and colleges. They are more interested in fine-tuning their cleverness and cunning directed at some scam or scheme to make a buck or to get someone's attention. So much of the Scapegoat's emotions remain subterranean, with only the fire of anger and rage surfacing. Repression of the more vulnerable emotions leads to unconscious emotion influencing beliefs and behaviors. It's challenging for scapegoats to be clear about what motives their decisions and choices and some understanding of likely outcomes. They are very prone to self-sabotage at any age, continuing to prove that their parents were correct in defining them as irredeemable. Prison populations are typically stock-piled with scapegoats, continuing to live out their unconscious self-sabotage.

Restorative Measures for the Scapegoat

- **Psychological education.** Scapegoats benefit immensely when learning that they have been playing a role. They will need solid therapeutic support as they gradually release a way to see themselves that has likely been confirmed by parents, relatives, and a host of authority figures. They can gradually accept that feelings of self-deprecation were part of the role and not a reflection of who they are. It can be very helpful for them to view the entire system, especially the place occupied by the Hero sibling.
- **Getting acquainted with vulnerability.** Scapegoats typically show a tough guy, tough gal persona. In a trusting therapeutic relationship, they might dare to let go of a much-cherished bravado. Allowing themselves to get close to hurt feelings will make them feel more vulnerable. Claiming their authentic selves will be frightening as well

as being supported for doing so. The core of identity includes not being seen, scoffed, and labeled incorrigible. There will be the vulnerability of a lost hope to be accepted and appreciated. If their parents defined them as hardened and hopeless, they then need to feel the vulnerability of betraying their parents as they reclaim their essential worth.

- **Moving out of delusion.** Scapegoats typically build a case in support of their non-conventional and iconoclastic lifestyle. The delusion is that they have not betrayed themselves as so many others have done. They create an ethos condemning those who sold out to the system, acquiring a formal education and a house with a white picket fence. They glorify their errant ways as testimony to their courage and honesty. What they need to get honest about is how self-sabotaging they have lived, dictated by their family role. Beneath all the rhetoric is the claim that their Hero sibling wasn't all those folks made them out to be – nice guys selling out.
- **Welcoming a measure of self-love.** Of all the childhood roles, the scapegoat has the greatest challenge engendering self-love. The scapegoat's ego has settled into being especially bad, avoiding any semblance of being pedestrian or plain-vanilla. They are also convinced that there is no constructive way to receive attention. Scapegoats need to return to the main purpose of the role again and again, an offering of a loving negative distraction. As such, their damaging self-concept was only a story attached to the role. They can begin to be mindful of self-deprecating narratives and learn to interrupt them as bad stories, saying nothing about reality. Such interruptions are the compost for growing love for the self.
- **Building genuine support.** Scapegoats possess natural rapport building skills, especially with peers. They can learn how to deepen their capacity for empathy and carry their sensitivity as a strength. They can be great allies for those feeling disenfranchised, defeated and alone. They can learn that they are deserving of the same support they offer others.
- **Death of a sacrificial lamb.** Scapegoats are the sacrificial lamb of the family. They are willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the family. Healing comes to their souls

as they accept that their sacrifice is no longer needed and learn the distinction between necessary and unnecessary sacrifice. Integrating this understanding of sacrifice can easily morph into a practice of care for the body, mind, and spirit.

· *The emergence of inner authority.* Scapegoats live in the illusion that they have escaped the dictates and expectations of authority figures. The truth is that their compulsive insurrections have negatively tied them to external authority. As they allow the need for defiance to subside, they can begin to develop inner authority. The seeds of which are germinated by asking: What do I love? What is my love asking for? What are my gifts and strengths? How might my gifts serve? To what or whom am I willing to give myself? What feeds my soul?

When the dark path is reinforced by peers, scapegoats can struggle to find their way back to the light of their essential goodness. It behooves educators, clergy, counselors, and coaches to be alert to a client's description of their family of origin. The moment I hear sibling defined as a sure winner, I become vigilantly curious about the possibility of being in the presence of a Scapegoat. Human potential practitioners are the most valuable resource for Scapegoats. It's just too difficult for Scapegoats to wrap their heads around what happened to them in their families of origin. However, anyone who understands the various ways children love can offer a Scapegoat an invitation to step out of this debilitating role.

Justin, a 19-year-old college student came in to see me wearing his hair shoulder length looking like it had been forgotten for some time. He had on a jean jacket and black denim trousers hanging low enough to reveal most of the crease of his buttocks. He dropped into the chair in my office with a resonant thud, suggesting this may be all you will be hearing of me. He made an entrance not concealing his aversion to be in my company.

Although I had no idea where the session might go, I had grown a resiliency for being in the presence of tough guy energy, knowing there was tons of humanity just below the surface. I was willing to let go, knowing how little control I had to call for the courage it would take for Justin to drop into his core. All the time wondering if I might be in the presence of someone hip-deep into the role of a Scapegoat.

"So, Justin, tell me why you're here, what brings you to me?" I asked, fairly certain I was about to hear how someone coerced him into this session.

"Well, you know it's not my fucken idea," he quipped, a side of his lip tucked up, eyes jotting around the room and likely hoping his language would disarm me.

"Yeah, I hear you. It's not my fucken idea either," I retorted, thankful for the neighborhood I grew up in, which in times like this seemed more valuable than my academic training.

"Do you talk to all your clients like that?" Justin blurted, attempting to control the conversation.

"No, no I only talk to clients who fucken talk like that", I teased, wondering if he might be willing to relax his untethered bravado.

"Wow, and you call yourself a shrink!" he returned, letting me know he wasn't quite sure what to do with me, which I believed could be helpful to the both of us.

"Yeah, some say I'm a shrink. What do you call yourself?" I rejoined, hoping for some small measure of honesty.

"Shit, I don't know. My mom pleaded with me to come here. I'm doing it for her. I've got a lot of other things I'd rather be doing, believe me, Justin asserted, letting me know he was feeling a bit lost and willing to honor his mother's request.

"Why would your mother want you to come hang out with me?" I asked, wondering if he could continue to be honest.

"I got suspended for a semester. My grades aren't great and I kicked this guy's ass in my dorm for saying shit about my girl. I think my mom's worried about a lot, not just me. My father lost his job and he's drinking a lot," he explained, his shoulders dropping, offering a few seconds of eye contact.

"Sounds to me like your mother might be experiencing some real stress in her life right now," I offered, hoping he would hear my empathy for his mother.

"Oh yeah, I guess my older brother is the only bright light for her. He's about to graduate from an Ivy League college and he was captain of the Lacrosse team. Sean has really made her happy, well, as happy as she can be", he offered, his sadness regarding his mother's situation being palpable.

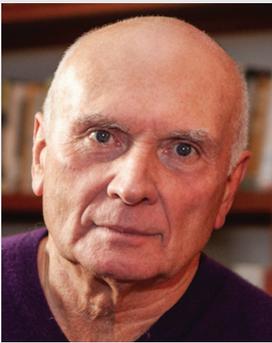
REDEMPTION FOR THE SCAPEGOAT

Justin went on talking about his family, pausing regularly to validate all that his mother gives to the family. When I told him the session was about to end and if he wanted to come back, he responded in true Scapegoat fashion, “Yeah, I think I will. There wasn’t much psychological bullshit that went on”.

I was somewhat surprised as Justin returned regularly for his weekly sessions. Once we went over the role of the Scapegoat, he quickly saw how much he decided that anything positive was going Sean’s way. He was able to understand that there is not a limited amount of love in

a family and that there was surely enough for him. He gradually let go of his strong anti-authority posturing. He learned to employ a Scapegoat’s natural inclination to discriminate authenticity from someone leaning into the script of a role. Both of which strengthened his capacity to trust in a discerning fashion.

He gradually allowed the call to be a sacrificial lamb die off. In its place he learned about the difference between necessary and unnecessary sacrifice. Most of all, he opened to his essential goodness, allowing for the redemption due him.



PAUL DUNION, Mobius Transformational Faculty, Senior Expert, and track leader at the Next Practice Institute, earned his Doctoral degree in Counseling and Consulting Psychology from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and his M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut. He taught Philosophy for thirteen years at the University of Connecticut and Three Rivers Community College.

He has been in private practice for the past thirty-seven years. As a holistic psychological healer, employing an existential modality as well as a somatic approach to treating trauma, Paul is trained in EMDR and is a graduate of the Somatic Experiencing Institute.

From its early beginnings, Paul represented the State of Connecticut at the national gatherings of the mytho-poetic men’s movement, sponsored by Wingspan. As the founder of Boys to Men, he created a mentoring community for teenage boys. He is the co-founder of COMEGA (Connecticut Gathering of Men), having served over 6,000 men since 1992, which continues to offer biannual retreats. In 2013, Paul established the Croton Mystery School and designed its curriculum with a focus on teaching students how to make peace with life’s mystery and unpredictability. He has offered over 200 workshops on topics related to Human Potential. Currently, Paul offers supervision for younger psychotherapists.

Paul has published six books: *Seekers – Finding Our Way Home* (2016); *Dare to Grow-Up – Become Who You Are Meant to Be* (2016); *Path of the Novice Mystic – Maintaining a Beginner’s Heart and Mind* (2013); *Shadow Marriage – A Descent into Intimacy* (2006); *Temptation in the House of the Lord* (2004); and his latest offering *Wisdom – Apprenticing to the Unknown and Befriending Fate* (2021).



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