

Suggested Readings ... from The Road Not Taken



***Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*, by Richard Wagamese.** Perhaps a perfect antidote to our obsession with a world outside ourselves, *Embers* offers a path back to the world inside. As do I, you may find his words *evoking* a truth uniquely your own. This is perhaps my favorite book about honoring our *internal* world. A few samples:

I am a traveler on a sacred journey through this one shining day.

I keep what's true in front of me (my heart and my silence). I won't get lost that way. I pack light. I don't tire myself with unnecessary stuff, like my head, my talk.

To live in ceremony is the greatest and truest gift I can give to myself.

All we have are moments. Live them as though not one can be wasted. Inhabit them, fill them with the light of your best good intention, honor them with your full presence, find the joy, calm, assuredness that allows the hours and the days to take care of themselves. If we can do that, we will have lived.

***On the Brink of Everything*, by Parker Palmer.** And this is perhaps my favorite book about honoring our way of being in the *external* world. Said to be about wisdom and perspective we associate with aging, it's truly about wisdom which, if "discovered" sooner, could allow us to live happier, more meaningful, less stressful lives. In its exploration of life's potential, I found myself in tears and smiling, both at the same time. A few samples:

As time lengthens like a shadow behind me, and as the time ahead dwindles, my overriding feeling is gratitude for the gift of life.

Once I understand that I am not the sun, I can get out of the sun's way and stop casting a shadow. I can step aside to let the true sun shine on everyone and everything.

When asked for the 'elevator speech' that sums up my work, I respond, "I always take the stairs, so I don't have one. If you'd like to walk with me a while, I'd love to talk. I don't know of a life worth living or work worth doing that can be reduced to a sound bite."

Nothing makes me more grateful – even in hard times – than knowing life is a pure gift that I didn't earn and won't have forever.

***The Way of Ignorance*, by Wendell Berry.** Although 20 years old, Berry's work echoes even more powerfully today than then. Life is far too complex for us to apprehend it all. What we need, he suggests, is a way of being that allows for our "ignorance," thereby opening us to far better choices than we make today (believing as we do that we must have answers for issues too complex to even *have* an answer!) A series of short essays, each inquiring deeply and honestly into an aspect of human and societal malaise. Each is insightful, thought provoking, personal, and filled with potential for individual change. Collectively, they offer an antidote to the often destructive and ultimately unsustainable path on which we find ourselves, individually and as a society.

***Thinking Fast and Slow*, by Daniel Kahneman.** A journey into the way our minds work, and a window into "how" we think. He explores the plusses and minuses of our fast (intuitive and emotional) mind as well as our slower (logical, purposeful) mind, and how the results of each color our thinking, largely without our awareness, or consent! So many of our problems – personal, professional, societal – stem from our lack of awareness of how our minds have messed up our "intentions."

***Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm*, by Thich Nhat Hanh.** Uncertainty (always present) often leads us to fear (an option). Our fears run across all aspects of our lives, from spiders to health to politics to being good enough. Thich Nhat Hanh, well-known Zen master, monk and author, delves to the space of our fears, offering practices that help bring us to a place of peace. He offers a path that is paved with compassion and self-care ... not to eliminate the fears, but to transform our reactions to them.

***The Untethered Soul*, by Michael Singer.** In a simple, yet elegant way, Singer opens the door to freeing the mind of its constant, negative, life-limiting chatter and fear-response, offering practical ideas & suggestions to release our unconscious attachment to the mind's drama. His leads you to your own deepest essence, your unique truth.

***A Religion of One's One*, by Thomas Moore.** A book of uncommon wisdom and depth, about finding and living experience of the sacred in all aspects of everyday life. *Belief*, as Moore describes it, is a personal, rather than dogmatic, thing – a “calling of the soul,” a way of living, the result of deep self-reflection into what matters most – to *you*. He shows how you can find, and create, this path to self, and live with meaning and purpose, whether part of a formal religious tradition or not. It's about deep, personal inquiry and self-reflection, which lead to self-knowing, self-trust and meaning. Personal belief is created, not followed. As if to emphasize the power of our own uniqueness: “‘The Lord is my shepherd’ is a beautiful psalm, but people are tired of being sheep.”

***Daring Greatly*, by Brené Brown.** Each of us experiences vulnerability; the issue is *how we respond*. We often fear being vulnerable to the point of discomfort even addressing it, allowing it to hold us back from life's possibility. Yet embracing vulnerability is an opening to courage and to your potential. If one topic can have such impact in our search for freedom and authentic living, it would seem a worthy (albeit difficult) one to explore. A powerful book, well-written, approachable, and quite humorous at times.

***Atlas of the Heart*, by Brené Brown.** All of her work is insightful, clear, helpful ... and funny. Here she speaks to emotions that make us human ... emotions that can scare us, but which can be understood, reframed and used to create meaningful connections, both with others and with ourselves. Being vulnerable is an act of courage, not one of weakness.

***Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*, by Adam Grant.** Insights and perspectives when they're desperately needed (and disturbingly missing). Consciously or not, we have a tendency to believe what makes us feel better, listen to those we agree with, and preach, prosecute or politicize things ... when we'd be far better off if we stopped, stepped back, and saw all we encounter with a “fresh mind.” Grant shows us how to choose courage (through thinking) over comfort (through unconscious desire for safety).

***Who Do We Choose to Be?*, by Margaret Wheatley.** A powerful piece for chaotic times. We are at a critical moment of *choice* – individually, culturally, as a planet. Civilizations have fallen apart by favoring entitlement, selfishness, greed. History shows this; science explains this. Large-scale change begins with small-scale (individual) choices. Who do *you* choose to be? Her message is well-crafted, real, insightful, hopeful.

***The Book of Awakening*, by Mark Nepo.** 365 inspirations ... one for each day of the year. Each is short, easy to absorb, actionable and insightful. Start with today's date and read one each day for a year. Easy. I don't often find myself recommending New York Times Bestsellers, but here's one I connect with. And its subtitle: “*Having the Life You Love by Being Present to the Life You Have.*”

***Courageous Dreaming*, by Alberto Villoldo.** A beautifully written perspective on the power of consciousness to create the world we want to experience. Each of us has levels of consciousness far deeper than what's needed to get through an ordinary day, but if we believe we must/can experience only the ordinary, we never tap these more powerful levels. Here, however, is the key to *creating* the world we imagine. He describes four levels from which to view our life, offering us a power we didn't know we had. Given the unconscious slumber our world is in, it's easy to reject his ideas; but that just ensures the slumber continues. As always, life is a choice, and it's a choice based in the power of thought – to dream the world into being. My favorite from this book: “You can either have what you want or you can have the reasons why you can't.”

***Living Beautifully, with Uncertainty and Change*, by Pema Chödrön.** While all her writing is heartfelt, artful and extremely practical in today's world, this is a favorite. Her point is simple: the ground underneath your feet is always going to be shaky ... but *you* don't have to be. Chödrön helps us to become comfortable with shaky ground, to be open to learning, to live without judgment, and to connect more deeply with others. It's a recipe for peace in a world that might seem to convince us that's not possible.

***The Tiny Book of Big Manifesting*, by Jeffrey Segal.** A delightful, approachable and practical look at the amazing powers human consciousness holds for us to design and walk the path of our choosing, every day. It's a gratitude journal and awareness practice together, all in one.

***The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu.** A beautiful conversation between two remarkable men, known for their love, joy, compassion and humor, along with [and perhaps despite, or maybe even because of] lives of extreme hardship. Filled with wisdom and emotion ... and practices to create a life of joy that is *independent of circumstances*.

***The Book of Hope*, by Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams.** A "conversation" between the two (he did the same with the Dalai Lama in *The Book of Joy*), in which Jane expresses the foundations of the hope she experiences for our future. It rests, she says, on 4 pillars: (1) the amazing human intellect, (2) resilience of nature, (3) the power of young people and (4) the indomitable human spirit. A fascinating, deeply personal look into the consciousness and life of one of the world's great naturalists, opening us to what she's experienced in her eight-plus decades ... about nature, the earth, humanity, the human spirit – and *hope* ... for the potential the future may hold.

***The Courage to Be Disliked*, by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga.** Odd, if not intriguing, title, but a wonderful piece on how we mess up our lives [often unknowingly] by making our decisions around what other people think of us instead of our own inner truth. This leads to resentment, as well as to a belief that we're not good enough (we're never "right" for everyone). It offers a path to creating tomorrows based on your inner potential and life's possibility rather than on history or the opinions of others.

The Fifth Agreement*, by don Miguel Ruiz and don Jose Ruiz.** A bit of an oldie, perhaps, yet it's filled with perennial wisdom, so needed in our world today. If you've read it, consider a re-reading, absorbing to even deeper levels. They offer a "re-do" on the original ***Four Agreements and add another: *Be skeptical but learn to listen*. "You learn if something is true for you by *questioning* it, then listening to your answer. This helps shift you from judgment to discernment, the opening to wisdom. Question with respect. You can hide out from other people, but you can't hide out from your own judgment. When you question your story, you reclaim the power it once held over you."

***Wabi Sabi: The Wisdom in Imperfection*, by Nubuo Suzuki.** An ancient Japanese concept turned into a way of living. *Wabi sabi* is *acceptance* that everything in life is imperfect, temporary. It's just *the way life is* – reality. Only our desire to make things certain and permanent, combined with the futile effort it gives rise to, causes us such stress. There's no one right answer or right way or right result; everything is just as it is. Yes, we may aspire to something greater, yet by being *unwilling to accept things as they are, now*, we create the stress we so often suffer and complain about in our lives. A favorite line: Ambiguity is beautiful; it leaves the door open to possibilities.

***The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, by Charlie Mackesy.** Although labeled a children's book, even the author claims it's for children from eight to eighty. It's not so much *about* reality as it is reality itself. A delightful story ... about life, learning, love, perspective, truth. It's about fear and courage, living in the present moment, finding self-trust. I love this: "One of our greatest freedoms is how we react to things."

***21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, by Yuval Noah Harari.** A sobering yet hopeful survey of huge challenges facing humanity and planet, viewed through lenses of both history and deep clarity. You'd think that with clarity like his, *answers* would emerge. Yet what shows up instead is the sheer impossibility of "right answers." Because challenges are both outrageously complex *and* global, and because our thinking and judgments are both flawed *and* self-centered, he suggests adopting humility and curiosity about all we *don't* know would be a better path than today's prevailing divisiveness and arrogance about what we think we *do* know. Eye-opening.

***The Art of Possibility*, by Ben & Roz Zander.** One of my "perennial favorites" on personal change. A few of their many [simple] ideas for "possibility living." (1) Life is a possibility *to live into*, not an expectation *to live up to*. (2) Be present, without resistance. The need to control creates stress. Instead, start with what you have, not what you don't. (3) Assumptions and beliefs we hold about life often block what's possible. Draw new frames around old circumstances and the extraordinary becomes everyday experience. (3) Shift from "meeting life's challenges" to "designing the stage on which life plays out."

***To Walk Alone in the Crowd*, by Antonio Muñoz Molina.** An artfully done story (or set of stories, really) designed to help you know (and remember) who you are, even *while* in the midst of life's noise and distraction. It's not so much about being alone as it is about being awake and aware of your own experience in this very moment ... just so you don't miss so much. It's a book for all of us, not just the "alone-minded."

***The Big Leap*, by Gay Hendricks.** And his newer, ***The Joy of Genius*.** Both are great exposés of how we sabotage ourselves, even, (or especially), when things are going well, because we become unconsciously trapped by old stories, lessons and assumptions. By believing them, we limit possibility. But through a regular practice of self-reflection, you open to your own genius, and evolve into living from your innate potential instead of old stories.

***The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down*, by Haemin Sunim.** Subtitled "How to be calm in a busy world," this book is filled with insight about the busyness in our inner world. The outer world moves fast, but when our minds move just as fast, chances are we're missing a lot – perhaps including who we really are.

***Mentoring: The Tao of Giving and Receiving Wisdom*, by Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch.** A book about coaching and mentoring yes, and as such, one of my favorites. Yet it's so much more. Starting with its compelling look and feel (for me, always a sign of a great book), this is a simple, yet elegantly written text on "ways of being" in the world so as to treat yourself, and others, with respect, reverence and compassion. It integrates Eastern and Western thought and philosophy clearly in its teachings. Anyone on a path to a meaningful life would enjoy.

***Goddesses in Every Woman*, and also *Gods in Every Man*, by Jean Shinoda Bolen.** The myths of Greek Goddesses (and Gods) are used to define personality archetypes, models that live in each of us, and can help understand ourselves more deeply. Excellent reading, wonderful insights. Read both, regardless of your gender. Start with Goddesses; it introduces both.

***Quantum Theology*, by Diarmuid O'Murchu.** A look at theology (not religion) from the perspective of quantum physics, and how all the world's great religions are based in the same universal life truths.

***The Power of Kindness*, by Piero Ferrucci.** In a world that seemingly grows less kind by the month, Piero offers an antidote, supported by his work, experience and research. Although easily labeled *weak* in this "post-truth" world, kindness has the power to sustain us as individuals, to heal us as a society and to bring us back from the edge of divisiveness so destructive to us all.

***The Universe Story*, by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry.** "From the primordial flaring flash to the ecozoic era, a celebration of the unfolding of the cosmos." It traces the history of the universe in a way that's accessible to non-science people. It's one of the only books I know that elegantly integrates both natural and human history "as one," and describes "humanity's evolving place in the cosmos and the boundless possibilities for our future."

***The Power of Now*, by Eckhart Tolle.** It's been around a long time, but its wisdom is timeless. We've been taught that we are our mind, that the "thoughts" that inhabit it are real, and that they make us who we are. This is how we miss NOW, and the peace that emerges from being present. "Love, joy, and peace cannot flourish until you have freed yourself from mind dominance." "An emotion is the body's reaction to your mind."

***A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey to an Undivided Life*, by Parker Palmer.** Palmer suggests we tend to hide our true selves from our visible selves, living differently in different parts of life – perhaps so as to protect parts of us we don't like. We live "divided" lives ... cut off from our deepest essence, or soul. Herein lies the opportunity for wholeness, for meaning ... allowing each part to embrace the other. He speaks strongly to the notion of *being alone together*.

Wholeness does not mean perfection. It means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.

Solitude does not mean living apart from others; it means never living apart from oneself. Community does not mean living face-to-face with others; it means never losing awareness that we are connected to each other.

We must learn to stand in the gap – to hold the tension between the **reality** of the moment and the **possibility** that something better will emerge.

***Return to Creation*, by Manitonquat.** Wampanoag elder Medicine Story writes masterfully from native wisdom ... on life, community (human and natural), spirit, relationship, education and culture. His words are of inclusion, inquiry, dialogue, healing, peace, collaboration ... all so dearly needed in these times. A bit hard to find, but worth the search.

***The Art of Stillness*, by Pico Iyer.** The more complex, chaotic and uncertain life becomes, and the more we depend on technology to “keep us ahead of it all,” the more we need a break from the overwhelm. We’re generally afraid to create this time, however, for fear we might lose ground in the race life has become. Iyer makes a compelling case for slowing, even stopping, for as little as a few moments a day or as long as a 3-week retreat. He came by his observations in getting lost himself. A practical guide to how simple *being* matters.

***The Art of Pilgrimage*, by Phil Cousineau.** Although intended for a “proper pilgrimage,” his ideas are helpful everywhere ... a vacation, a difficult conversation, a project, even life itself (the ultimate pilgrimage). He defines *pilgrimage* as a journey with challenge and purpose, created by finding the sacred along the way. He expands *sacred* to mean “the ground that stirs our hearts and restores our sense of wonder.” Cousineau suggests that our sacred longing lies not in a time or place or event or plan, but in how we see and think and walk, every day. “Practice listening as if your life depended on it; it does.” This book has provided a great framework for my travels and serves as a companion for life’s every-day journey, too. A repeated bit of wisdom: “*Pass by that which you do not love.*” What a freeing thought.

***Outliers*, by Malcolm Gladwell.** Like his other books, *Blink*, *The Tipping Point*, *What the Dog Saw*, *Outliers* is an insightful journey into our perception and perspective, on ourselves and the world. In a set of entertaining and well-crafted essays, Gladwell explores what makes us *unique*, rather than the *same*, showing how both individuality and life circumstances contribute to our experience of life. In coming to *understand* how we think, we *change* how we think.

***Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn't*, by Bradford Glass.** Its *premise* is simple: in the midst of a world that has lost its way, you need never lose your own. Get to know, then honor, your unique truth; the self-trust that emerges will light your way forever. Insights, perspectives, personal reflections as well as exercises ... so you can make your life your own, not someone else’s. A “self-coaching” book in a way, yet filled with fresh perspective on charting your path into tomorrow, next month, years.

***A Field Guide to Life, Navigating the Challenges of our Lives and Times*, by Bradford Glass.** Here you’ll find an opening to a world beyond today’s stress, struggle and overwhelm. A collection of 11 mini-books, really, each exploring one of the largely ignored/neglected/denied obstacles that keep us from the life we dream of and long for. Perspective, understanding, reflection, exercise. Make your life your own, not someone else’s.

And Last ... but not Least: Create your own! Perhaps more significant than taking in more information is learning from what is already inside you. I suggest a journal; make three sections: 1) A gratitude journal – each day, write three things you’re grateful for. 2) My dream life – each day, name a way you’d like to live, but do not, today. Pay no attention to how it could come true. 3) Why I can’t have it – each day, name something that you *believe* stands in the way of your dreams. No judgment, just learning ... about the stories in your head. You’ll be surprised at how these three simple things, honored each day, actually change the way you think – about yourself, life, world.