



Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

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Why Your Uniqueness Matters

“A seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible.” – Welsh proverb

Wherever you go, it seems someone is telling you to live your uniqueness. The message comes in many forms – find your passion, follow your bliss, live your soul’s purpose, be your truth. Although it’s tempting to get caught up in (or perhaps reject) these words as mere slogans, the wisdom underneath offers significant potential. I’d say it like this: *There’s a unique essence that has always been inside you, energy that wants to express itself through how you live.*

Our world has become increasingly judgmental and divisive. Often we even *think* in terms of comparison. Examples: they’re wrong; I’m right; my kid’s better than your kid; having more stuff is important; being important matters. The list goes on. There’s an issue with comparisons of this sort, however. They presume all else should be equal. **It’s not.** Each of us is different – as in *unique*. Our culture is so obsessed with judgment-based comparison, however, that we are afraid to be the kind of ‘different’ our uniqueness invites. Schools turn out homogenized kids. Businesses want to hire homogenized employees. And so, as if to comply, parents raise youngsters to be good competitors in this impersonal, anything-*but*-unique world. The way I see it, this kind of [unhealthy] competitiveness leads to just the kind of disrespect, judgment and devaluing of others so pervasive in our schools, companies, society and world. Why so? My view is that because we never learned to honor individual uniqueness (our own or theirs), we’ve grown afraid of what we don’t know (in ourselves and in others). We project this fear onto those who are not like us, judging them as *bad* or *wrong*, as if that would hide our fear and absolve us of taking personal responsibility. It’s easy to see this between nations, cultures and religions, but it’s just as common in our own society, communities and organizations.

Let’s play an alternative scenario, starting with *the magic of your own inherent uniqueness*. Consider the possibility: If you truly knew, embraced and **lived** your own uniqueness, you would come to trust deeply in your own inner truth. You’d no longer rely on either comparison or external measures. Having recognized and cherished your special gifts, you’d then come to see the unique gifts in **others**, too. And as you absorb the rich uniqueness of every person on this planet, then judgment, fear and comparison would give way to appreciation, compassion and connectedness.

There’s perhaps no better way to appreciate uniqueness than to be with someone who hasn’t had it beaten out of them yet. My granddaughter is just under a year old. Although she’s still a bit short on language skills, her presence speaks loudly to her uniqueness. There is clarity, determination, perspective and conviction – about who she is, how she sees the world, what matters to her. She can’t **say** it, yet I can certainly **hear** it. When I simply **be** with her, I wonder how her life would be if everyone around her simply listened for her uniqueness, then helped clear the path for her to become that. And then, of course, I recall my own early experiences, and how anything that wasn’t rational or scientific was systematically denied, leaving me feeling shut off from my intuition, emotions, and the mysteries of the unexplainable. Yes, I cared about those things early in life, but have had to develop them anew in order for their natural and innate voice to be heard once again. Had “allowing” replaced “pushing,” my path may have emerged far sooner.

Exercise: Toward embracing your uniqueness: Here’s a four-part exercise that will help you get in touch with, then honor, your unique ‘gift to the world.’ Stay with part 1 every day for a week, perhaps adding another part each week. **Part 1: Listen:** during regular quiet time each day, just listen. That’s it; just listen. When the voices in your head start to calm, you’ll hear messages from your unique truth. Write down what you learn. **Part 2: Listen for:** replay various phases of your life. Listen for how life pulled you toward your deepest longing. (You may not have responded at the time, but resist judgment; just learn.) **Part 3: Envision:** when you have a sense of the energy that has forever drawn you, imagine what could be if your life were a rich expression of that uniqueness. No project plan, just imagine. As Rumi said, “Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love.” **Part 4: Act:** design an action (as an *experiment*) that honors your uniqueness. No need to quit your job (yet); just create a personal felt experience of what ‘wants to express itself through how you live.’ Then absorb what it *feels* like to be this person. Write down what you learn. Keep going! Create the path as you walk – know yourself; respect others; be your gift in the world.

A River Runs Through It [Life lessons offered by nature]

Nature pushes nothing – no process, no result, no agenda. The moon doesn't set up a competition between high and low tide; there's no game in the forest to see whose chick fledges from the nest first; the Colorado River doesn't look forward to a day off after working so hard at carving the Grand Canyon. The magnificence of nature is a result of the non-stop creative uniqueness of each thing, day after day. The "rules" are simple, yet the results are both magic and synchronized. Nature does this by listening to *feedback*, a natural flow of information in every living system. These messages from *the uniqueness of each thing in touch with its environment* guide the system toward what comes next. In this way, nature creates order out of chaos and sustains the process of creation.

The same is true for us as humans - if we are to allow it. Synchronizing our lives to our own unique inner truth would offer us freedom, peace, meaning and resilience, just as in nature. In a way, it's amazing to consider how we continue such a futile fight to be who we're not, especially with such a beautiful model of peace and freedom right in our own back yards. (Perhaps it has something to do with the power of early "lessons" that we can, or must, change the course of life's river.) I know parents who have pushed their kids into every conceivable activity, to the point of exhaustion for the kids and overwhelm for the parents, all in the name of preparing them for the competitive pressures of adult life. Well, seems to me those "pressures" were learned, and are now simply being passed on – for there is no such thing in nature, that place of wholeness *from* which we all came and *of* which each of us a part. Far easier, and far more powerful it would seem, is the simple act of "listening to feedback," inner messages from our deepest and most unique truth, messages that can light our path for a lifetime. By the way, both the messages and the energy to respond to them are free; they have always been there. End of overwhelm.

Thoreau was on to something. So was Muir. So was Emerson. And it wasn't just about connecting with nature. It was about connecting with our *inner* nature, the phenomenal potential each of us represents – the gift of our uniqueness, not our sameness, and what it can do for the world.

Openings to New Possibility

Available for you:

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. See articles, newsletters and blogs; you'll find "new stuff" [here](#) regularly. I welcome comments and conversation; this kind of dialogue is an example of how we may all learn together.
- "In Nature's Image," a blog series [here](#). Each offers a simple idea for adding meaning to your life, accompanied by one of my images from nature. If you'd like to receive them by email, use the green icon ("receive blog via RSS feed") on any page of my website or [here](#). If we're connected on [Facebook](#), you'll also find each post there.
- My e-book, *A Field Guide to Life: How to Live With Authenticity and Freedom*. Reclaim the power of your deepest longing. You can [purchase](#) the ebook, or read it at no cost as a series of [blog articles](#) on my website.
- *The Road Not Taken* newsletters (12 years, 144 issues of *Purposeful Wanderings*) available [here](#) as a pdf file.
- Photo images from my travels available [here](#) on fun products – note cards, coffee mugs – great gift ideas.

An invitation to possibility: If you have the courage and determination to step apart from the crowd and *challenge conventional thinking* ... so you can live instead with *authenticity and freedom*, contact me for a conversation that can energize your dream. I will help you reach a level of *clarity and perspective* – about yourself, others, your life, your work and the world – that allows you to live your truth, every day. Trade the *way it is* for the *way it could be*.

Book of the month – The Book of Awakening, Having the Life You Want by Being Present to the Life You Have, by Mark Nepo. A delightful book of daily thoughts, ideas and personal reflections (enough for a full year) that offers a path beyond the "sameness" that grips our society. Drawing on many spiritual, wisdom and religious traditions, he opens up big space for you to connect with your deepest truth – your uniqueness. ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book available at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.