



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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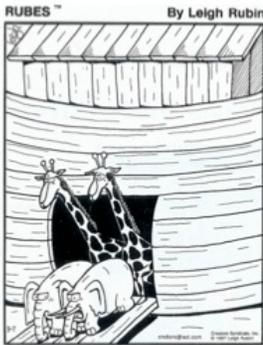
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The Beauty of Bad Days

“None but ourselves can free our minds.” – Bob Marley

All of us have bad days now and then (or bad moments, or weeks, or months). Somehow, sometime, somewhere, stuff happens in our lives. The issue is not the bad days, however; it’s how we respond.

What happens for *you* when you have a bad day? I ask that question with clients. Most “do something” to restore a “good day.” The trigger of “bad” evokes an almost auto-pilot response to find “good.” Yet the potential lies in what gets stepped over in the rush to feel better: (1) How do you *define* “bad day?” (2) What *assumptions* are you making that every day needs somehow to be “good?” (3) Do the actions you take truly *restore* “good?” These are not trivial questions. In general, we skip these questions because we’ve been lulled into a conditioned response to seek pleasure in life and avoid pain. Experience shows that much of the pain we experience as bad days, however, (in stress, guilt, resentment, anger, anxiety, hurt) comes from trying to live life as we think it *should be* rather than as it truly *is*. We don’t stop to realize that all these “shoulds” were thoughts *we made up in our heads* ... then believed ... then judged ourselves (and others) against ... then chose bad-day moods from ... then repeated. We then complain that we have bad days. All the drama we create here serves to give the mind something to do, but it’s just an avoidance strategy for taking personal responsibility for life. Struggling to manage “what isn’t” can become a full-time, if not futile and exhausting, pursuit.



What a lousy trip ...
it rained the whole time.

Perhaps the problem we have with bad days is that they push us into unfamiliar territory, and we simply don’t like that. If we respond unconsciously each time, seeking the return of the familiar, life becomes a monotonous journey of one foot in front of the other, each day looking alarmingly like the previous one. The unconscious mind loves this, because its job is to keep us safe, and yesterday feels safer than tomorrow. Yet our souls want different for us. They want to stand at the edge of the canyon and scream “yes!” to life, letting the chips fall where they may ... as we become our truest selves. What to do?

The antidote to this nonsense is to learn to use the *conscious* mind to see life “as it is,” without the judgment of “should.” Responding to life *as it is* rarely caused anyone stress, guilt or anxiety. Seen in this way, bad days shake you out of unconscious living, bringing you into the reality of the present moment. In doing so, they invite you to stop, to look, to listen, to consciously examine what your life is really about. Bad days remind you to be alive ... by offering windows into what’s possible, what matters, why you’re here, who you are. When you listen to unconscious triggers to restore what you already know, you miss all that! Sure, you may feel better in the short term, but you can still wake up at age 70 wondering where life went. I don’t want to wonder stuff like that. I want to *know* the path my life takes. I want to *know* I chose my way consciously. I want to *know* I didn’t miss so much – “good” or “bad.” I would rather feel used up than bored. Besides, bad days simply go away when you start to see life with more awareness and objectivity.

Exercise: Toward personal clarity. The reason you get tossed off-center today is because your personal clarity isn’t as strong as the incessant yammering of all the “shoulds” in your head. You don’t need to know more or try harder to change this (you are neither stupid nor lazy). What it takes to shift this imbalance is *awareness*, so you can see the world, and yourself, more clearly and objectively. Practicing conscious awareness of “what is” creates openings into life’s great potential: (1) it calms and de-clutters the mind, so new ideas can rush in; (2) it brings you into the present, the only place where life happens (life’s drama, fueled by *shoulds*, leaves you stuck in either the past or the future); (3) it builds self-trust, which allows you to handle reality with ease and grace. As a practice for building clarity, sit quietly for 20 minutes, twice each day. Just notice; nothing more, nothing less. Notice your surroundings, as they are. Notice your thoughts, as they are. Notice your *judgments* of these things, as they are. Notice, too, that seeing things as they are is *not* the same as agreeing with them. At the end of 20 minutes, notice how you feel. By the way, until you’ve experienced the results of this, your unconscious mind will tell you to never believe a word of what I suggest.

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

One of my favorite places to visit is California's Big Sur. It's a stretch of coast that both time and 'progress' seem to have passed by. Pristine, quiet, off-the-grid. If you need wi-fi or a cell signal, you're in for an hour's drive (either direction works, however!) But if you're looking for big trees, waterfalls, quiet beaches, and a bit of solitude, you'll find them all here, relatively unscathed by humanity's greedy hands.

I realize that each of us has a different view of "favorite" in life, so I'll neither explain nor defend mine here. But a great day for me is walking deep into old-growth forest (in this case, mostly redwoods), sitting at the base of a tree for 3 or 4 hours contemplating nature, silence and my life, then returning for a late-afternoon glass of wine on my deck overlooking a woodland creek. In having adopted this ritual several times over the years, I've made an interesting, if not counterintuitive, discovery. The deeper into the forest I go, the *less* lonely and *more* connected I feel. And returning from a day of quiet contemplation, the world feels huge to me (even before the glass of wine). I know those who feel this kind of connection in a big city. The place is not the issue; the issue is feeling connected to the energy of your source – the sun, the earth, its air, water and nourishment.

You don't have to go to Big Sur for your quiet time (although it might help); a nearby place in nature will do. Time in nature helps to release the clutter of the everyday mind, often far more effectively, and more rapidly, than sitting in your office or on your couch. You might do this month's suggested exercise outdoors, in nature's silence. As you notice your (now natural) surroundings, see if you can notice some of "what is" for nature: Nature makes no promises. Nature accepts no expectations. Nature holds no pretense. In the midst of all this, nature is a place of unbridled beauty and creativity, offering us a sense of the miraculous, whether small or large, simple or complex, mundane or exquisite, logical or incomprehensible (to us). In contrast, notice how some of this sense changes in places where human presence has impacted nature's way.

You may also discover, as I have, that nature invites participation more than just observation – a chance to *be* yourself, be *with* yourself, and be part of something far *bigger* than yourself, all at the same time. Congruence. Peace.

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*" -- 100 of my nature images, each offering a simple idea to help experience life's meaning.
- *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 – Love Letter to the Earth, by Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich Nhat Hanh is a modern-day master of the art of peace. His words are simple, clear, and filled with both wisdom and insight. His main point in this work is that, in order to find happiness in ourselves and cure the root *cause* of 'bad days' rather than their symptoms, we need to re-find our place in planet Earth, and specifically, we need to live in a way that honors the earth as the source of everything in our lives – water, air, food, connectedness, and more. We are part of the cosmos, and the cosmos is part of us. Nature lover or not, you'll find this book evokes the balance and peace living deep inside you. Nature is both metaphor and example of a thriving system devoid of judgment (shoulds). ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.