



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

“Follow a set of tracks back to its maker and you unravel the mystery of its life.” – Animal tracking expert Tom Brown

At one time or another, most of us have wished for a more peaceful relationship with someone close to us. Following on last month's theme of finding peace in a troubled world, let's look at the “troubled world” we can experience right here at home – with spouses, parents, children, siblings, in-laws, managers, co-workers and even friends.

Think about someone close to you with whom you don't always get along? How do you respond during trying times? arguing/fighting? pretending? being resigned? complaining to others? You might also ask yourself if you secretly *like* not getting along, or if you think you just can't? Can you *name* the specific cause of contention in your relationship?

When I look back at all the sources of contention in my life, (there have been many), whether with family members, friends or managers, one comes to mind as a great representative of all of them as well as a story of my own journey beyond conflict (forever a work in progress). I inherited “Sam” as a staff member when I assumed responsibility for a 1200-person organization back in my software days. Sam was different from all the rest in that he had no operational job; his role was to help my staff and me work better together. It turns out Sam was different in another respect, too. He and I saw the world in nearly opposite ways. I was, as he put it, a “human doing;” this left plenty of room for me to infer that he saw himself as a “human being.” His role was to convert me. I had too much to “do” to be bothered with his process.

I responded to Sam by judging his being *different* as being *wrong*, and therefore *bad*; so I set out to *make* him wrong (implication: I saw myself as being right). I realize now this was a reaction from my unconscious mind, programmed as it had been to *see differences as threats*. It thrust me into defense mode (a way of protecting me from the perceived danger). Second, also unconsciously, I believed I couldn't even *listen* to his ideas for fear that it meant agreeing with them. I didn't get it that to *understand* someone is very different from *agreeing* with them. As a result, I completely missed the fact that he simply saw the world a different way, and, as it turns out, a much bigger way than I did then.

Looking back over these many years, it's not lost on me that Sam had the clarity and perspective about people and life I now write about each month. Although I was an unwilling player in his conversation, he used those skills, along with a huge dose of persistence, to open me to a new world. It is also curious, if not a bit ironic, that my relationship with him became the “seed” that would eventually germinate into the life I now love so much.

So here's my perspective about what's happening here; it's an opening to shifting almost any contentious relationship toward peace and meaning. How each of us “shows up” each day is a result of our (1) personal history, (2) cultural history, and (3) life experiences. Everyone has different histories and experiences, so everyone's “way of being” is different. We're all the same ... just in different ways. The unconscious mind may always see these differences as threats, yet as you learn to *interrupt* its incessant flow of reaction using your conscious mind, you begin to see how *your* life created who *you* are today, just as *their* life created who *they* are today, too. Not wrong, just different. To get to know someone, however, through the lens of *understanding* rather than the lens of *judgment*, leads naturally to the place of accepting who they are. And with acceptance comes non-judgment, the opening to personal peace.

Exercise: Toward more meaningful connections. Exploring details of my relationship with Sam is the same kind of inquiry you can do on your own to start mending contentious relationships in your life. Part 1: *Get to know your own story*. Look at how you ‘show up’ today – how you see, think, speak, behave. Trace how your history and life experience created you. As you come to a place of personal clarity about how your story influenced who you are, you start to appreciate yourself more. Part 2: *Get to know their story*. Without even asking, you can “hear” the life story of another. Practice listening to how they see, think, speak, behave. Build a mental image of their story. If you want to go further, share your stories on purpose, as an act of mutual understanding. Appreciate how your respective stories are nothing more (or less) than how your worlds came to be. It's not even about agreeing; it's about understanding.

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

The contention we commonly experience in so many aspects of our lives, whether it be fleeting or long-lasting, is unique among all living systems and creatures on earth. Nowhere else does judgment get in the way of a creature living its own creative essence. Trees don't get freaked out if another tree grows too close to it. Cactus plants don't complain that they've not had enough rain. Tropical forests don't whine that they've had too much. Rivers don't criticize the rocks they flow around for being too sharp on the edges. High tide and low tide do not compete to find a winner. Yes, there are circumstances, and yes, there are consequences. Yet they are remarkably free of any kind of judgment or contention.

Our natural world, anywhere on the planet, from our own back yards to a remote part of the wilderness, offers the very same lesson and experience to us, with consistency and clarity. If we can come to share in that experience (as an act of personal practice), we may also come to an understanding and appreciation of why our world needs us to stop messing with it through our judgmental and often unconscious behavior. In the process, we may just stop messing with ourselves, and with others, through that very same judgmental and unconscious behavior.

Take some purposeful time this week to sit quietly outdoors, in a place generally free of human-created distraction. Just notice. In perhaps the same way as suggested in this month's exercise, just listen to the story nature tells you – of its creative genius, of collaboration, of the relationship between circumstance and consequence, and of how all of this happens in an environment free of judgment. After truly absorbing the experience, ask yourself how nature might have helped you to see yourself and others in ways that open more potential and greater peace. Just notice. You don't have to "try" to do anything. Allowing your experience to get inside you will do all the work that needs to happen.

This past month, I enjoyed *another* glorious week in Alaska. And although I can (and do) find peaceful spots in nature right here on Cape Cod, the dramatic splendor of Alaska's wilderness certainly accentuates my experience of nature's way. A three-day, 1000-mile drive took us from Anchorage to Denali to Fairbanks (roughly in the middle of the state), and back down again. There were so many viewpoints along the way where no matter what direction I looked, all I could see was wilderness. Looking at a state road map, it becomes so clear that the vast majority of the state is inaccessible by road (including the state capital, Juneau, the only capital you cannot get to by car). There is something about this kind of experience that gets inside me even more deeply than "everyday" time in nature. Yet, as for that, nature is doing the same thing no matter where I share time and space with her. Amazing.

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 – The Voice of Knowledge, by don Miguel Ruiz. Ancient wisdom made applicable to today. Ruiz shows how we have *learned* to embed bad lessons into our consciousness, and how we can also learn to *release* them, freeing us to the unlimited potential we represents as humans to live lives of curiosity, wonder, creativity, joy and peace. "The way it always was .. still is." ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.