



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Always Drink Upstream from the Herd

“The veil will be lifted by the hands that wove it.” – Kahlil Gibran, in *The Prophet*

We live in a culture that increasingly expects, often demands, and curiously even rewards *conformity* – in the form of compliance, sameness, going along, not rocking the boat. If you need proof or examples, look around you, at our:

- schools – where standardized testing, behavioral ‘norms,’ and even bullying keep students “between the lines”
- businesses – where policies, protocol, autocratic management and position power constrain workers/workplaces
- politics – where “correctness” and homogenized language mask clarity, distinction and action on major issues
- religion – where agreeing to one belief system and denying others is often a condition of membership/acceptance
- science – where the ‘scientific method’ identifies and eliminates “outliers,” so as to focus on the average or mean

Yet no matter what area of life you consider or how far back in history you go, you *also* find a story just as consistent but remarkably opposite: those who took a stand for their *uniqueness* over their *sameness* were the ones who made a difference, those who changed the world. Gandhi, Thomas Jefferson, Thoreau, Mother Teresa, Steve Jobs, Einstein, M.L. King. They stand out because they refused to let dogma stifle their deepest truth. How do we reconcile all this?

OK, so we need *some* “consensual structures” in order to live in community with others – cell phones, bank accounts and highways come to mind. But I’m referring to the kind of conformity that crushes critical thinking, creative genius and sense of self – by keeping us more afraid of what happens if we *don’t* go along than encouraging us to believe in ourselves and our dreams. It’s tempting, and often easy, to “hang out” here, even if only by not being aware, lured by perceived safety in numbers. It’s even easy to ask, “how can *they all* be wrong?” If you doubt me, ask yourself where and how you hide from your own power, giving up *yourself* in exchange for social acceptance or personal security.

Human connection offered by true community offers both love and affirmation; it’s where you experience that part of you most *like* others. Yet there’s also part of you *unlike* others; it’s home for your unique gifts, greatest potential and dreams. You feel the yearning of this truth all the time. To honor it feeds your sense of meaning, your soul’s journey. To deny it is to deny your true self. Yet society’s messages continue – don’t be vulnerable, don’t risk, don’t be alone.

How do you live your authentic self in a world that would rather you didn’t? How do you stay connected with others while not becoming trapped by the dogma of the masses? How do you choose to “drink upstream from the herd?” In my own life, three skills have been faithful companions: *awareness* – so I can continually and consciously inquire as to what’s true *for me*, *courage* – to choose from messages of my inner self rather than those the outer world sticks in my face; and *trust* – that the light of my own truth will always guide my way.

Exercise: *Toward honoring your uniqueness.* A daily practice of quiet reflection serves to calm your thoughts, in a way that allows you to *see* your thoughts. Simply making the *unconscious* *conscious* actually changes your thinking. Therefore, you can develop the skills I mention above through *noticing* alone. During a few moments of inquiry each day, focus on: **Awareness:** first, consciously *listen* to the incessant chatter of society’s messages that dominates your mind, *naming* what each tells you to think. Resist judging or fighting; just notice. Then, as the chatter of your sameness slows to a crawl (it will), *listen* for the messages of your unique truth. Michelangelo said David was already *in* the marble; he only had to chip away all that was “not David.” As your noticing chips away the chatter of “not you,” your inner “David” emerges. **Courage:** in even some small way *each day*, say “no” to something you now see as “not you.” And, in even some small way *each day*, say “yes” to an aspect of your newly-emerging uniqueness. **Trust:** as you continue these awareness and courage exercises, take a moment at the *end of each day* and reflect on how things are going for you. See if you notice the shift inside you as your energy balance begins to favor your inner truth over culture’s demand for blind compliance. As this happens, you’ll notice fears melting away and you’ll notice an emerging sense of trust in yourself. Over time, you’ll find you can be *with* sameness, yet never even consider *becoming* it.

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

The Beauty You Love is You, by Christine Wuschke

Do you know that feeling you get, when it's a beautiful day and so you go somewhere to be in nature?
And you are sitting there in the calm breeze and gazing at your favorite mountain, or lake, or river or tree-filled mossy patch ... and something comes over you ...
It's subtle at first like a little buzz, but soon it starts to get louder, as if begging to be noticed.
It reaches into you, all the way in, deeper than words ever can.
It soothes all worries and starts to move you and expand you.
And before you know it you are smiling a soft smile, knowing that everything is going to be all right.
And as your lips curl into that gentle softened expression of peace, it's as if nature gives you that same look back.
And you share in it for a moment. A secret, silent knowing; that no matter how it all plays out, everything is already in the right place.
And do you know what's amazing about this feeling? The most amazing thing is that it's You.
Nature's beauty is a perfect reflection of what you really are, what you've always been and what you will always be.
Reflecting back to you Your pureness, Your ease, Your grace.
She is unapologetically flourishing, because she doesn't know anything about holding back.
And somewhere in you is that same beauty, unable to not shine.
We only think we can hide it, but nature knows our real Truth.
And that's the secret we share with her on those beautiful days.
When you remember that the beauty you love is what you really are.

Openings to New Possibility

Available for you:

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. Articles, newsletters and blogs [here](#). I welcome conversation; dialogue is how we all learn together.
- “*In Nature's Image*,” 100 of my nature images, each with a simple message to help experience life's meaning.
- *The Road Not Taken* newsletters (13 years, 156 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: This (or any) newsletter could be the basis of a focused program of personal coaching. So if you read something that evokes the yearning inside you ... and have the courage and determination to 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 will allow you to live your truth, every day. Trade the way it *is* for the way it *could be*.

Book of the month – 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. ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.