



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Dialogue: An Antidote to Conflict

“We are so intimidated by other people’s emotions and so convinced by our own that reality gets overshadowed.”

--- Deepak Chopra

In my home, I have a photograph of earthrise taken from the moon. It’s a touching image – an impossibly blue ball floating in the black vastness of space. From this viewpoint, there’s no hint of conflict. I see wholeness, oneness and peace. Although I don’t know firsthand, I suspect I’d not find evidence of conflict until well after returning to earth.

Divisiveness is a decidedly human invention. Intrigued as I am by things uniquely human, I pondered how and why we create such life-limiting structures. So I’ve been asking people about conflict in their lives – clients, friends and family, even everyday conversations. Note: I don’t go looking for conflict’s hiding places; there’s plenty around. I’ve come to understand that we unconsciously tend to label anything *different* as being *wrong* and label any *disagreement* as being *bad*. Unaware we’re making it all up, we draw lines of divisiveness in our minds, react to its “story,” then wonder why there’s conflict. If we’re this good at inventing divisiveness, it’s no surprise how much of it we find. Worse, the unconscious mind, in its role of helping us sense danger, creates a fear response from this, thus obligating us to manage the fear – usually with further judgment. And so it goes – in our differences with loved ones, politics, religion, and nations.

Until the *conscious* mind intervenes (which apparently it does only rarely), we completely fail to realize that difference and disagreement ask us *not* to judge or fear, but to learn and understand. Judgment and fear result from *not knowing*, from ignorance. We cannot truly get along with others if we refuse to understand them. We can’t even get along with ourselves as long as the divisive energy of judgment drives our thinking. An example: most people fear wolves in the wilderness. If you get to *know* wolves, however, you come to understand that you’re safer in their company than you are in the company of other drivers on a highway. If you were to truly get to *know* the stories, lives and challenges of those you may judge or fear today, that judgment/fear would fall away, *even though you may continue to see the world in different ways*. The same happens for them as they get to know you. A process that leads to this kind of knowing is *dialogue*. A dialogue is a two-way conversation conducted in an environment of reciprocity and respect, with an intention of learning – which happens through exploring hidden assumptions and the thinking underlying our ‘truths.’ When you draw a box around your thinking big enough to include the thinking of others, conversations become dialogues. Conversations like this are impossible in a world that denies the thoughtful reflection upon which they depend.

Exercise: *Toward dialogue.* By yourself, you cannot bring peace to a troubled world. You *can*, however, bring peace to how you *relate* to a troubled world. Only from personal peace can collective peace grow. Claim an hour one evening. Think about the *kinds* of conversations you have. Think about what you see as *truths*. Think of truths as ‘stances you hold,’ recognizing that your stance on a topic may differ from that held by others. (If you need ideas to get started on ‘truths,’ see [April’s newsletter](#).) For each “truth,” name it (“I believe”), then ask yourself these questions:

- Do I hold this truth as a result of deep personal inquiry? What thinking or life experience brought me here?
- Does my truth invite/include/accept everyone, without judgment or condition?
- What assumptions might I be making, perhaps without my conscious awareness, that serve to *support* this belief on one hand, yet at the same time may *limit* me from seeing an even larger truth?

After you’ve gained some insight and comfort with how *you* see the world, expand your perspective to include others with whom you do not agree (personally, politically, etc.). Allow yourself to feel the emotion that arises. Then ask:

- How might *their* thinking and life experience have brought them to *their* “truth?”
- What assumptions might *they* be making that, on one hand, support their belief, yet on another, limit it?
- Is my judgment of their belief the result of my own deep inquiry, or is it the result of choosing not to look?
- If I could expand the edges of *my* thinking far enough to include *their* thinking, what *dialogue* might we share?

It’s a simple recipe: seek what you *think* you know; seek what you know you *don’t* know. The path of peace involves learning to accept two conflicting ways of seeing without making one of them wrong. Stay with this practice.

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

I've read a few articles recently that describe research done on the value of being in nature. They often discuss health and wellness benefits of a walk in a park or in the woods. Most of the articles, and therefore most of the research, go into depth about how time in nature changes brain chemistry, and about how their process of monitoring the brain supports their conclusions (and of course because it was scientific research, the research also had to show that a walk on a *highway* did not qualify for said benefits). Now, I love science, and I'm well aware of how much research has helped us to understand our world. Yet at the same time, the benefits of being in nature come from actually *being* in nature, not from (1) doing *research* about being in nature, or (2) *reading* research papers about being in nature. Once you experience quiet time in nature, you don't need a research project to know that it makes a difference. Yet we live in a world that seems to ask for 100% proof of anything before we're willing to take any action at all; and even then, we commonly still do nothing. (Climate change, for example)

I'm being picky here, I suppose, because it's not my intention to debunk science. But, like the problems we have with judgment and fear that come from differences and disagreements in our lives, we're very good at using all manner of methods to distract ourselves from the underlying truth and direct personal experiences that truly matter. Deep inside, we know "truth." Yet we are far more comfortable with our conveniences, materialism, insecurity and even fear than we are with the *discomfort* of deep inquiry and reflection – in nature, or anywhere else. So we distract ourselves with the artificial, the temporary, and the pleasantries, expending little energy or intention on developing our inner sense of truth.

Time in nature changes all this. Time in nature is as much an antidote for our own inner peace as dialogue is for peace between and among others. In both cases, connecting with reverence, with nature or with others, is an antidote to the "not knowing," the ignorance, that leaves us in fear and judgment. If you know this, go sit quietly under a tree or at the beach for a while. If you doubt this, go sit quietly under a tree or at the beach for a while. If it makes you feel better, think of it as a personal "research project." You'll get both the benefit and the truth ... experience speaks for itself.

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 – *The Art of Communicating*, by Thich Nhat Hanh. This is not a book on communications "skills." Yet, at the same time, this insightful, prolific author and wise person offers a path to finding the peace and authenticity within you that open you to communicating mindfully and effectively with others. As is true with all his writing, his words are deep, simple, rich with meaning, and above all, effective – at a time when we need this so badly – as individuals, as families, as organizations and as nations. ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.