



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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The Power of Emotion

“We are so intimidated by other people’s emotions and so convinced by our own that we lose sight of the underlying reality.”
--- Deepak Chopra

Our world seems increasingly characterized by high-key emotion. Wherever I go, no matter the situation, I encounter complaint, upset, outrage, fear, or some kind of drama – whether it’s personal, local or global in nature. Examples are everywhere: social media posts, ‘she *made* me upset,’ bullying in schools, U.S. elections, climate change. I don’t know about you, but I’m getting tired of it all. Don’t get me wrong; I’m not tired of emotion; it’s a natural, even crucial, part of what it means to be human. I’m just tired of the attachment some people have to their emotions, and the associated drama they then force upon the world. I want to offer a different view, perhaps a path out of the weeds, as it were.

It seems there are two viewpoints when it comes to emotions. The first, and overwhelmingly the most common, says: “Emotions just happen. I can’t help it. Furthermore, they’re real ... therefore they’re valid and true. I need to allow my emotions to express themselves through my thoughts, words and actions. Really, if I didn’t do this, I’d be denying my feelings, right?” This view may be a conscious choice or it may be the unconscious result of not having given the topic much thought. Either way, subscribers see their emotional response as *evidence* that *justifies* the emotion’s *validity*.

The other, decidedly less common, view says: “I agree. Emotions *do* happen; yet they don’t *just* happen. Emotions are indeed real, but what matters is that when they arise, they represent a signal, asking me to stop, listen, and get to know the *thinking* creating them. It’s up to *me* to respond, by learning about myself, not through outrage at the situation. Via practice, I’ve learned that most of life’s events are neutral. (Truth is like that; it doesn’t need justifying.) If emotion is present, it’s because I stirred it into the pot; so it’s time for me to discover what the emotion is trying to teach me. As I get better noticing my hidden thoughts and beliefs, I find my *response* to emotions calming, leaving me more balanced despite living in an unbalanced world.” The key for those adopting this view is: I can’t respond constructively to much of anything if my emotions have hijacked my rational mind.

Exercise: *A path to calm*: we all *have* emotions, but when we *become* them, we lose perspective and personal power, *and* we live in anxiety. The path forward is *awareness*. As you get to know thoughts that trigger your emotions, you become open to choosing new responses. On the other side of this choice you’ll find calm and a sense of freedom. So, in 10 - 15 minutes of quiet time each day, mentally replay events and conversations from your day. Choose a few that went well, a few that didn’t, and a few where you were the only player. In looking back, identify which situations triggered you emotionally, as well as how you responded *at the time*. Just notice. After some practice “noticing but not trying to change things,” look more deeply inside each emotion; see if you can trace it back to a thought that triggered it. Examples: If you’re stressed or overwhelmed, you may recall childhood lessons that said you weren’t good enough unless you did everything perfectly. (If so, do you *believe* that thought is true, for *you, today*?) Or, if you’re furious about the presidential election, perhaps you’ll trace the anger back to early experiences of being denied your personal power (or witnessing others denied theirs), now lodged as a belief about the misuse of power. (If so, is that thought *true for you, about your power, today*?) Resist easy answers to these questions; depth is an opening to freedom.

A River Runs Through It [Life lessons from nature]: When a cataclysmic event happens in nature (no shortage of examples here – earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, flood, forest fire, asteroid), nature doesn’t have a “gee, ain’t it awful, why did this happen?” story. There’s no blame and no drama (except what *we* stir in when we experience such events). Instead, nature just continues doing what she was doing just *before* the cataclysm – *creating*. Mountains, forests, wild-life and beaches come and go, yet the process that creates them is sustained. The beauty we experience in nature today is not static; it’s the current (and temporary) manifestation of a creative process in touch with its environment.

Book of the month – *Emotional Chaos to Clarity*, by Phillip Moffitt. A piece of clarity on the topic of clarity! How to cultivate a *responsive*, rather than a *reactive*, mind, and live from your *values* regardless of life’s circumstances. He offers ways to recognize mental chaos, practices to shift from chaos to clarity, and perspective on living in an uncertain world. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.