



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Personal Peace in a Divisive World

“There is no greater threat to the critics and cynics and fearmongers than those of us who are willing to fall because we have learned how to rise.” – Brené Brown, in *Rising Strong*

We live in trying times. A hollow thought anymore it seems, given both overwhelming evidence proving it and incessant commentary lamenting it. Anger, hatred, divisiveness, judgment ... and the anxiety these things evoke. Although we may dream of a more peaceful life and world, it's easy to be consumed by negativity. How can we find peace in a world that seems intent on anything but? As is often the case, the answer may lie in the “culture of our thinking.”

A Culture of Judgment: A result of both upbringing and society's prevailing “wisdom,” we've come to see life through a filter of “what's *wrong*?” Our attitudes and questions seem to support this claim: Life *should* be fair. Why won't *they* change? Nobody has a clue. How can I get *her* to fix this? Why is *he* so stupid? Statements such as these are rooted in *judgment* – that something or someone is wrong, and therefore needs to be fixed. Interestingly, our judgment leads us to the same divisiveness we complain about in the world. Turned inward, and perhaps worse, this judgmental thinking leads to a pervasive sense of self-loathing. No wonder life feels difficult. The voices in our heads don't help us, (until we learn to ignore them – [July newsletter](#)), for they tell us to fight “the way it *is*” in a [futile] attempt to turn life into “the way it *should* be,” whatever *that* is! We often have no clue what we really want, yet we're angry we don't have it.

A Culture of Curiosity: There's another voice in your head, too, however – a calmer, quieter, yet more confident voice (remember, truth doesn't need to scream). As you learn to listen through the noise, you begin to hear it. It reminds you tomorrow is a place of limitless potential, a world not yet invented, a world willing to shape itself to match the loftiest thoughts you hold about life. When you consciously choose to hear it, this voice draws you into curiosity. But how?

I recall an idea from the book, *The Shack*, by William Young, that says there's a big difference between *expectation*, that something has to happen in a certain way, and *expectancy*, that anything is possible. One seems to justify our resentment and revengefulness (things just don't always go as we'd like), while the other fills us to the brim with hope and curiosity about what the next moment may hold. The difference between the two? Simple: releasing judgmental thought. Here are a few deep questions that can start the journey there. What if we could learn to see the world (and hey, maybe even ourselves) with *curiosity* instead of *judgment*? What if we didn't have our minds already made up? What if we were willing to have our questions *change* us? What if we actually had to think *forward*, to understand the implications of opinions we hold so strongly? What if we actually had to think *backward*, to understand the thought process that brought us to those opinions in the first place? Would we still think as we do? Unlike judgment-based thinking, curiosity-based thinking leads, in the external world, to relatedness and compassion, and in our internal world, to learning and self-love. It sounds peaceful already, even before trying it out! Imagine the potential here.

Exercise: Get to know – first-hand, deeply, personally – *how* you know what you know, *why* you see life the way you do, *where* your thinking rules your actions. Create some serious quiet time for this inquiry. Ask big questions – about life and your place in it. Ask even bigger questions about your own thinking. See ideas above. Notice where and how your answers cause you discomfort. Instead of retreating to your comfort zone, *be* with it; allow discomfort to teach you. As you learn to trace the *life you experience* back to the *thinking that created that life*, you find your mind, body and worldview softening; negativity falling away; and positive energy generated about your life and its potential.

Life lessons from nature: We often think of wonders such as the Grand Canyon as “products” of nature. The Grand Canyon isn't the “result” of anything. It's only the current state of one of nature's processes (a river) in touch with its environment (rocks.) The word *river* is a verb; if a river stopped flowing, it would no longer exist. (*Life* is also a verb.)

Book of the month: *Living Beautifully: with Uncertainty and Change*, by Pema Chodron. Nothing can change life's uncertainty, confusion or paradox. Yet we can learn, as Pema shows, to “leave shore” and release the fears, living with passion, confidence and sanity in a world that is anything but that. Buddhist philosophy adapted to western “thinking.” And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.