



Purposeful Wanderings

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Personal Peace is a Practice

“We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are.” – Anaïs Nin

I love living on Cape Cod. I’m drawn by the milder winters, milder summers, a National Seashore, quaint villages, tiny harbors, an ever-changing landscape, a less-hurried stance on life. Living here year-round creates a challenge, however. Especially in the summer, many *other* people love being here, too. In addition, “summer” seems to have expanded over the years, back into April now in the spring and well into October in the fall. I recall the quote: “This place would be more popular if it weren’t for all the people.” (Yogi Berra, perhaps, but I’m not sure.)

Although I breathe a sigh of relief when the crowds wane, I want to enjoy “my” summer, too – a sunset drink outdoors at the Pilot House on Cape Cod Canal or the Chart Room on Cataumet harbor; breakfast outside at Pie-in-the-Sky in Woods Hole or The Center Store in Chatham; a walk in the Cedar Swamp in Wellfleet; a picnic dinner at the beach.

The past many years, I’ve noticed how a practice of “choosing happiness” has made a difference for me, so I decided to see how it could play out with my experience of summer on Cape Cod. Here’s how I’ve found personal peace in the midst of noise and busyness ... perhaps a way to put ideas from [last month’s article](#) into practice. Yes, there’s simple stuff – doing things from 5 - 7 a.m., not buying groceries on Friday or Saturday, going to the beach from 7 - 10 a.m., where I often have the place to myself. But what truly makes a difference is my *thinking*. First, I choose to laugh more. Perhaps I’m easily amused, but I get a kick out of the number of tourists who complain about crowded streets, long lines, and how bakery counters look like we’d just experienced a cicada infestation. It now all seems rather comical.

Second, I’ve chosen to set the *intention* to be happy. It’s amazing what can happen from *deciding* what I really want! I often reflect on lessons from Phil Cousineau in “The Art of Pilgrimage.” Although he intended the book for a “proper pilgrimage,” I’ve found his ideas amazingly helpful in every aspect of my life ... a vacation, a difficult conversation, a project, even life itself (the ultimate pilgrimage). He defines *pilgrimage* as a journey with challenge and purpose, created by finding the sacred along the way. He expands *sacred* to mean “the ground that stirs our hearts and restores our sense of wonder.” With this idea in mind, I sat outside the other evening by the Cape Cod canal with a glass of wine. Sure, there were others doing the same. But *my own experience* was one of appreciation – for this life I’ve been given, for the opportunity to create personal peace in the midst of noise, for already living in a place where thousands spend big money to visit, and for the simple beauty of summer. For those two hours, I absorbed wonder; this was the only world I knew. It all came from the single intention, “find the sacred, be open to wonder.” And what I’ve noticed when I [remember to] set this intention is that my perspective on life expands, the sky seems somehow bluer, the breeze wraps me in peace, and I commune silently with those I might otherwise have allowed to piss me off. So I laugh a lot ... at this, too. I may not be able to influence the number of cars on the Sagamore Bridge, but can certainly choose how I see and think about their occupants. Perhaps obvious, but it takes far less energy to enjoy my day and my summer than it does to be upset. And the reward? This summer has been the most enjoyable one ever for me.

Exercise: As always, creating quiet time for personal inquiry is the beginning. (Turns out from feedback I get that this is where the practice *stops* for many, instead of where it *starts*.) Think deeply about what you truly *want* in life. You’ll notice this is a very different activity than the more common one of thinking about what you *don’t* want. Name actions you can take, things 100% in your control, to bring about what you want. Take action; then notice what happens. Note: “they” will still be doing what “they” may do; your own experience transcends all this.

Life lessons from nature: The saguaro cactus of the desert southwest may get only a few inches of rain each year. The Douglas fir of the Northwest’s temperate rain forests may get 10 feet. Curiously, neither one is pissed off. They adapt.

Book of the month: *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, by the Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu. A beautiful conversation between two remarkable men, known for their love, joy and compassion, despite lives of extreme hardship. Filled with wisdom, emotion and practices to create a life of joy that is *independent of circumstances*. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.