



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Your Beliefs Shape Your World

“Yesterday is ashes; tomorrow is wood. Only today does the fire burn brightly.”

– Native proverb

Since the time I was maybe 12 years old, I’ve been fascinated by ancient Polynesian voyaging. I still have the books describing how, with ‘only’ stars, winds, waves and even birds, by the year 1000, these early explorers had discovered almost all the islands in the Pacific (Hawaii included), scattered as they were over an expanse of 10 *million* square miles. I was hooked. Perhaps it was already “in me,” a deep connection to an ancient world. Perhaps it was the idea of “life as possibility” I found intriguing, brought up as I was with so many constraints to the potential I knew was inside me. Yet in school, I was learning only about the Europeans of that time, who still believed the earth was flat, and were hundreds of years from developing instruments they thought essential to sail more than 300 miles from land. Even for my young mind, something didn’t add up. Teachers couldn’t help because they didn’t seem to know.

Fast forward over 50 years, past 30 of my own trips to Hawaii, past learning (and seeing) how western culture nearly ruined Hawaii under the guise of “freeing them from primitive ways.” Fast forward to an even more recent learning, of a Polynesian voyaging canoe, *Hokule’a*, a reproduction of the originals, built to show how ancients discovered Hawaii, and to revive an almost-lost connection with ancient culture. I went aboard *Hokule’a* in 2016, on Martha’s Vineyard and in Woods Hole, during its 3-year worldwide voyage. I felt instantly “home” here. My spontaneous tears aside, the experience brought into stark contrast for me how vastly different western/European and Polynesian worldviews were.

Worldview is a society’s “context,” the unconsciously-but-collectively-held set of assumptions and beliefs about how life is perceived to work. By living out, then passing on, these beliefs, a society *acculturates* itself into specific ways of seeing and thinking. Over time, this way of thinking becomes *invisible, unconscious background* to life, convincingly *creating* a sense of what’s true, what’s possible, and what’s not.

For most of the past 2000 years, western or European worldview was defined by church doctrine, because it had “the” way to explain the world. Somewhere around 400 years ago, about the time of Descartes and Newton, classical science supplanted religion as worldview, because science could now explain things religion could not. (Both missed the fact they were explaining different things!) Since that time, we’ve been *acculturated* into science’s belief system that life is mechanistic, rational, linear; if we have enough *information*, we can **control** outcomes. We’ve come to *like* this way of seeing as it appears to offer safety in an uncertain world. It’s also no doubt why we like goals ([December article](#)); they give us a sense of control in the midst of life’s chaos. Perhaps it’s also why we seem to avoid living in the present – it’s too uncertain. Instead we wallow in the past or fret about the future, secure in knowing that we can at least control our wallowing and fretting. We often even believe that if life isn’t a struggle we must not be trying hard enough.

Yet for most of those same 2000 years, Polynesians experienced a completely different world. Theirs was a world of potential, an adventure into uncertainty. Voyaging was in their blood; they couldn’t *not* explore the seas. Rather than trying to *control* their world, they were carefully *listening* to it instead. In response, it taught them all they needed to know. Their outer life was guided by a deep connection with nature. Their inner life was guided by a **vision** of ultimate possibility, societal **values** that united them over generations, **commitment** to something bigger than themselves, and deep **belief** that their vision mattered, a consciousness that led them to be at home in the unknown and master the seas. I can’t help thinking how Europeans would have fared taking a “command-and-control” mindset into uncharted seas!

Why does this matter? The way I see it, our unconscious, yet unwavering, devotion to a world of predictable outcomes, measurement, and control tactics has left us stressed, afraid, dissatisfied and feeling separated from the natural flow of life. Yet it’s not “life” that has left us this way, but our own thinking. It’s here – in the cauldron of the very complexity, paradox and uncertainty we try to avoid – that our greatest potential lives. Unaware, we miss or deny this possibility because we’re too busy trying to *force* life to conform to our will instead. We delude ourselves into believing we know what comes next, but in fact, we share something with early those explorers ... we haven’t a clue.

Despite cultural conditioning, we can learn to find possibility where it truly lives, *in between* the everyday, unconscious thoughts that today drive us to find certainty instead. *That* depends on our *willingness* to believe such possibility exists (it's actually there whether we believe it or not), the *ability* to stop long enough to get to know the thoughts that *deny* our potential, then the *courage* to honor what we find. With growing awareness, we'll stop listening to the outdated beliefs the unconscious mind continually ferries into our heads.

Exercise: Trying on a new personal worldview. You can't *make* yourself see the world in a new way. Your "thinking" gets in the way, unconsciously bringing you back to old stories of control and predictability. But you can purposefully *expose* yourself to new ways, as if an experiment, then *listen* to what your inner voice tells you is true. If we admitted the possibility here, we might better focus our energy on what we *can* control – how we see and think – then (1) devote our precious energy to what matters, (2) listen to our world, (3) learn from what happens, and (4) celebrate wherever the path leads, knowing the path expresses our own truth. *The practice:* on four successive days, choose a half hour or more of quiet time. During each session, create a mental movie of your future. On day 1, imagine the kind of future that runs through your mind whenever you think/plan/dream these things. No "edits," just let the movie run; the difference today is that you "watch" it closely so you get to know the story line that has been inside you for some time. On day 2, imagine a new future, but this time, purposefully frame your movie with the classical western worldview – that tomorrow is predictable, that goals need to be measureable, that if you know enough you can you control life, etc. (You may find days 1 and 2 result in the same movie!) On day 3, imagine yet another possible future, this one framed consciously by the energy of Polynesian (or any native) worldview – that tomorrow is pure possibility, that it's not "invented" until *you* create it, and that your awareness in *this* moment is the greatest determinant of how the *next* moment turns out. If you struggle here, remember it's just an experiment. On day 4, replay each of these mental movies to yourself, one at a time. Notice how you *feel* while "living" each life. Notice the quality of the energy inside you, the level of empowerment you feel, your sense of connectedness with life. Lastly, notice where inside you all these messages and feelings come from. If you like, come back regularly to where those feelings live, listening to this often-faint voice of your deepest longing. The point of this exercise (and article) is to make your background thinking more conscious. Awareness opens you to making new choices. (Acting on those choices will always be up to you.)

Life lessons from nature: Although we may not often think about it, nature is not the same as science. Nature simply *is*, with or without our belief, proof, agreement or even acceptance. Nature has been quietly (ok, mostly quietly) doing her thing for billions of years. Science, however, is a *process*, a process invented by humans, one designed to help us understand our world, to *explain* nature. As such, science has some serious limitations, the most significant of which being that it tends to see nature as mechanistic. In this view, if we have enough information, we can control life. Another "inconvenience" of science is that it believes/assumes the scientist (or observer) is 100% impartial and has no impact on the observation. (No matter how much you "get" about science, you know that we are rarely so impartial.) Considering this month's article, I might compare science and nature this way. Polynesian culture never steered away from "*nature as worldview.*" To them, *the* world and their *view* of the world were the same. Their awareness, coupled with the inherent uncertainty of life, opened them to a world of possibility. Western culture, on the other hand, had a "better" idea. They reckoned that through science we could know everything. So they adopted "*science as worldview*" instead. Well, science has made some miraculous discoveries, but the notion that by knowing more we can control life has led us down a slippery path. The problem, for us, is that we generally lack awareness that this way of thinking lives inside us, courtesy of acculturated worldview, so we simply don't know how much we miss out on our own potential.

Book of the month: *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, by Rebecca Solnit. The basic premise of this book, a set of delightful stories, is that the best way to find yourself (and find your life's truth) is by getting lost – whether on purpose or by mistake. We're off course 95% of the time anyway, no matter how "in control" we believe we are. And when we're off course, our trust needs to be placed in our inner guidance system and not in the world we are trying to control. The path to finding that guidance system, and to finding that trust, is in discovering the "joy of being lost." And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.