



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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A Culture of Blame

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” – Rumi

They’re wrong. He’s useless. She made me angry. That’s fake news. I’m not good enough. She has no clue. He did me in. It’s a hoax. Life isn’t fair ... and so on ... You’ve heard them; perhaps you’ve participated. It’s the *blame game*. Do you notice how pervasive (and culturally accepted) blame has become in our world? Politicians fight over issues rather than leading from values. Managers referee employee complaint rather than stewarding company visions. Adults complain about behavior of children, spouses or friends rather than nurturing relationships based in love and respect.

I believe this arises from a sense of divisiveness, a belief we’re somehow separate from everyone and everything else. We’re *educated* into separateness from early in life. Parents teach kids how life *should be*. Schools favor tests scores and grades over learning. Friendships thrive on comparison and competition more than respect and compassion. Science proves the simple over grappling with the complex and mysterious. Religions make faith dependent on other faiths being wrong. Corporations put greed ahead of serving the common good. Media engages in deceptive reporting.

We’re immersed in a culture of blame – it’s like the air we breathe. Seeing the world as an either/or place, however, every challenge then leads to making something or someone *wrong*. Of course, we then feel obligated to blame the offender, and to fix it. But in a world so complex that we can’t possibly know enough to make decisions with 100% confidence, we feel trapped, not surprisingly yet unconsciously, by our need to defend ourselves. The language of blame can’t create personal responsibility. Bad thinking can’t create good results. Falsehoods can’t create truth. Divisiveness can’t create peace. Gratitude is easy when things are going your way. Blame is easy when they’re not.

When I look around, I see a collapse in both personal responsibility and critical thinking, and a society delineated more by its fears than by its potential. We don’t want to offend anyone, we worry about being liked, we don’t want to interfere with kids’ “natural expression,” we don’t want anyone left behind. These are not “bad” things on their own, but when we’re afraid of being “wrong,” coupled with an unwillingness or inability to take responsibility for, and then declare, our own personal truth, we become feathers in the wind of a society lost in its own quiet desperation.

By contrast, how often do you hear of *unconditional personal responsibility*? “I am, I trust, I will.” Being responsible is both the opposite of, and the antidote for, blame. But in a world complex beyond comprehension, this also means taking responsibility for *not knowing*. In turn, that means committing to *dialogue* – two-way, reciprocal conversations, conducted in an environment of respect and reverence, with an intention of learning. Learning conversations help us explore life’s inevitable unknowns in constructive ways. Asking big questions, pondering uncertain mysteries, exploring vast unknowns; *none* of these is a way to prove someone incapable or bad, but rather the opposite – a way to grow, by learning to stay with questions, to avoid easy answers, to grapple with uncertainty and mystery. As Brené Brown says, this kind of vulnerability is a true act of courage. Conversations of this variety demand replacing *judgment* with the *discernment* upon which true learning depends. This is all very big stuff; perhaps this is why we see it as so scary. It’s just “easier” to blame, “easier” to going along with others. We’re selling out, but at least we’re not alone.

It’s time to replace a culture of blame with a culture of personal responsibility. The path to get there is clear:

- you need *awareness*, to notice when you come face-to-face with your not knowing ... a signal to stop and listen
- you need *patience*, to recognize old defensiveness triggers ... and not be hooked by them each time
- you need *acceptance*, to realize that others’ thinking brought them to a different place than yours brought you... different, but not necessarily wrong ... and that *understanding* someone else is not the same as *agreeing* with them
- you need *courage*, to open head and heart to learning, not judgment, when you reach the edge of your comfort zone
- you need *trust*, to accept that, even though life is uncertain, you have what it takes to respond with confidence.

What if others truly *are* wrong/bad/deceptive/etc.? It isn’t *about* them; you can’t change them. Proving *them* wrong does nothing for *you*. Peace comes from *learning* from them, so as to self-remember the person *you* want to be.

Exercise: We need the courage (and the perspective) to ask new questions, and the perseverance to seek deeper answers. This begins at the personal level. It cannot begin elsewhere. Questions that can lead to the release of blame-based thinking, and can help reframe how we see, think and speak:

- how are we connected? (instead of how are we different?)
- what's possible? (instead of what's wrong?)
- how can we learn from one another (instead of how can we make them conform?)

Through a simple, yet regular, practice of personal awareness (*making conscious the largely-unconscious questions through which you see the world now*), the way you see the world changes. As you reflect on your thoughts during the day, notice the not-so-obvious ways you may question things as being *different*, *wrong* or *separate*. These may be so ingrained in your unconscious mind that you recognize neither that you're doing it nor the impact it has on the way you experience life. What you discover through the practice of self-observation is that there's a deeper reality that guides all of life, a reality that unifies rather than separates, a reality that calms rather than conquers. When you tap into that level of reality, you find your own peace – peace that's been there all along. You cannot simultaneously blame *and* be a peaceful person.

Life lessons from nature: Imagine for a moment an early scientist, painstakingly dismantling a plant or animal for the purpose of “getting to know” its makeup and inner workings. Imagine for a moment the thrill of discovery that all plants and animals are made up of cells, and that cells differentiate, reproduce, and “become” everything a plant or animal needs in order to thrive. Imagine for a moment the emerging *belief* that the *process* you'd used could explain the entire world. I mean, if you can break something into pieces and discover cell biology, reproduction and genetics, there must be no limit to what fragmenting things into smaller and smaller pieces can offer. No wonder the discovery of atomic particles and sub-atomic particles followed. It's as if you could rule the world with new knowledge.

Wait a minute! Now you look more deeply into the very small, and results change. But results don't just change; they change *because you looked!* “Impossible,” you think. You're a ‘neutral observer;’ everything you've discovered so far *depends* on neutral observation. But now you find there's no such thing. Such is the world of quantum science. That which you *100% knew* as truth is blown out the window with one new discovery. The reason, the “inconvenient truth” of new science, is that old science was severely limited ... *by its own way of seeing*. Everything is connected – united by the singular, primordial energy of the universe. Humans are *part* of that manifested energy, too, deeply connected to everything. As a matter of fact, because we're the same energy, *we*, in fact, are *one*. We are the same stardust, sunlight and creation energy as is every other thing. No longer can we know anything by ripping it apart from its wholeness, because wholeness is one of its attributes. No longer can we rip *ourselves* apart from our oneness, pretending that we live as fragments in an “us/them” world, or worse, an “us *vs.* them” world. It's just not so.

To experience peace, and with it, our oneness, we simply need to shed the old ways of seeing that foster an illusion of separateness, and realize, as quantum science has, that wholeness has always been so, even before its “discovery.” This way of seeing has always been available to *us*, too, despite the “inconvenience” it causes by uprooting our deeply-held perceptions. If we're busy pursuing our *separateness* (even unconsciously), we can't even know *connectedness* exists. Old truths die hard, even in the face of the new. Can we listen? Can we let go? Can we learn? A choice. What's yours?

A NEW WORKSHOP OFFERING: Constructive Conversations. On Wednesday, March 27, from 7-9pm (Eastern), I'm offering an online videoconference program designed to help you make every conversation you have constructive. The idea: conversations succeed and fail for the same reason ... and it has nothing to do with your level of skill, the subject, the emotion or stakes involved, the other person, or even if you're an introvert! So, if you're ready for a new perspective on an old topic (living your life through conversation), consider giving this a go. \$30. Questions? Send me an email or call. The course is offered through Professional Growth Network, a meet-up group member. Registration is required ahead of time – link to details and registration [here](#).

Book of the month: *The Holy Man*, by Susan Trott. A beautiful collection of vignettes, each a story of one of life's inevitable challenges or troubles, brought to a wise man living atop a mountain. From all walks of life they come, lining the path to the mountain top in search of answers. What they gain is wisdom, offered through lessons in personal truth, often touched with humor, always rich with insight into the human condition. And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.