



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Vol. 19, No. 3 -- March 2020

Being Prepared for Real Life

“Exhaustion is not a status symbol.” – Brené Brown

We're born into this world fully aware, filled with curiosity, wonder, and an inner knowing anything is possible. Need proof? Watch young children play. It's totally natural – *until we learn it's not*. Wonder stops; curiosity falters; learning ceases; self-trust fades; possibility thinking wanes. We had it all, yet we let the world take it away.

Fast forward to today. The issues are pervasive: struggle, stress, despair, divisiveness ... in individuals, families, businesses, nations, planet. What happened? My take: early lessons *pushed* the skills we'd need to be “prepared” for life – know more, be productive, go along, avoid mistakes, achieve (even *over*achieve), “succeed.” Each lesson asked us to be someone we're not, however, so as adults, we've become pretty good at that. We lost the “authentic self” along the way. But hey, that's just what life is about, right? I don't believe that. (I doubt you do either).

I think we struggle because we *learned* to struggle. I think we're obsessed with achieving because we *learned* to be obsessed with achieving. This may have left us prepared for *one* thing (a hostile world filled with obstacles), yet completely *un*prepared for *any* thing (a real world of uncertainty, complexity, chaos, and potential – a world our learning couldn't even ask us to *imagine*). No wonder we're stressed. It's like being lost, following a map to someplace else. What we're *un*prepared for is *being ourselves* – curious, creative, resilient, aware, self-trusting, open, collaborative. What we need is already inside us ... **capacities** to navigate an uncertain and ever-changing landscape, tools that allow us to transform “knowing” into effective action in the world. (If we don't know who we are, we can't possibly make sense of the world around us, so we're easily fooled by whatever floats by.)

I see two kinds of capacities – *skills*-based and *presence*-based.

Skills-based capacities are those we need in order to bring ourselves and our knowing effectively into the world:

- **critical thinking** – the tenacity to ponder the nature of truth, ask life's tough questions, be objectively open to new answers, to know the difference between evidence and faith, and to tap the innate creativity needed to solve insanely complex problems ... and ... the will to stand strong in the aloneness truth often creates.
- **effective communication** – the commitment to listen, speak and relate with others from a place of mutual respect and dialogue – where no one is excluded or judged, where everyone learns and grows.
- **socialization** – the compassion to relate to and connect with others (and self) with acceptance, oneness and community; to *be with* the emotional reality of others, so as to hold the polarities of a subjective world.

Presence-based capacities are those we need in order to hone trust in ourselves amidst life's uncertainty:

- **awareness**, of what is true and who we're being, right now (not living from what we think “should” be true),
- **patience**, to recognize opportunity when it arises, and to wait for the impact of our choices to manifest (not driving for instant gratification or forcing our agenda on today's issues),
- **acceptance**, to realize we all see the world in different ways, different, but not necessarily wrong ... and that *understanding* someone else is not the same as *agreeing* with them,
- **courage**, to open our heads and hearts to learning rather than judgment, whenever we encounter the edges of our knowingness, and to be persistent with our commitments in the face of judgment and criticism,
- **resilience**, to see life's inevitable challenges and setbacks as teachers, not as signs of failure; to devote life's energy to expressing personal passion and truth (while not attaching to its results),
- **trust**, to accept that, even though life is uncertain, we have what it takes to respond with confidence.

The “static,” command-and-control world may tell us it's a waste of “time,” yet we can *nurture* these innate capacities back to life, *evoke* them from where they've always lived, and re-integrate them into our being ... and with that, experience the resilience, curiosity, freedom and peace we long once had, and now long for.

Exercise: Without critical thinking, we're easy prey for those who want to manipulate us. When we don't think for ourselves, we tend to believe more untruths and go along blindly with others more than when we *do* think for ourselves. (Without an inner compass, you're lost anyway; any direction will do.) Nurturing *capacities* noted above opens you to the courage to ask big questions, and to not shy away from life's uncertainty. Try some of these out in your everyday life, perhaps starting with "simple" issues, only then moving on to what you see in the news, or pondering life's big challenges (health, education, environment, etc.) *A few questions:* How do you know what you know? By what inner process did you come to know it? (evidence, experiment, intuition, faith, etc.) What alternatives to this truth might you have considered along the way? If you don't *know* your truth, did you try to find it and came up empty, or did you refuse to look? And for each: Does this *feel* right? Does it make *sense*? Am I willing to ask one more question before I move on? Lastly, try to see this topic from the perspective of someone who disagrees with "your truth." How might *their* thinking have brought them to *their* position?

Life lessons from nature: Some time back (and perhaps persisting today), the attached image was common on social media, entitled "Sunset, North Pole." In the spirit of critical thinking, the capacity for discernment, and a search for "truth," I use it to make a point. It's a striking scene ... but no way is it real. The "photographer" who manufactured the image *knew* it was fake, but those who "liked" and reposted it probably *didn't know*. OK, I have a science background, but even without that, there is much about this image that [should] evoke serious questioning – *critical thinking* – before "adopting it as truth." Whether it's a big new idea, a claim of the end of the world, or a phenomenon from nature, the discernment that comes from critical thinking will help you steer a course to your greatest potential. See the questions above. Viewing life this way, you may stand out in a crowd; at the same time, you'll never be "lost" again.



Here's where my thinking led me when I first saw this image. Any *one* of these observations would be enough to label it a fake. Collectively, case closed. And again, you don't need to "get" all this in order to "know." The first three of these, however, should be discernable by a novice.

- Viewed from earth, sun and moon *appear* to be the same size. (It's why eclipses 'work.')
- Near the horizon, the thicker atmosphere distorts images, making *both* sun and moon *appear* larger. When this happens, however, the one *closer to the horizon* looks larger than the other.
- The North Pole is in the Arctic Ocean. The closest land is 400 miles away. The sea around the North Pole is also frozen year-round (at least for now), so the 'land and sea' portion of the image is from farther south.
- In the Arctic, the moon is never seen directly above the sun. The path of the sun (and therefore the moon) across the Arctic sky is oblique (angled to the horizon) year round. A new moon would appear *beside* the sun, not *above* it. (The moon sets directly *above* the sun only near the equator – between the tropics.)
- A new moon occurs as the moon passes by the sun. The sun's brightness obscures our visibility of a new moon, however, until the moon is about 10 degrees past the sun, which takes about 19 hours after "new." This image shows them far closer than 10 degrees apart yet without sun's interference. Not happening.

My book: *Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn't*. Its *premise* is simple: in the midst of a world that has lost its way, you need never lose your own. Get to know, then honor, your unique truth; the self-trust that emerges will light your way forever. Insights, perspectives, personal reflections and exercises ... so you can make your life your own, not someone else's. All you need to know [here](#) – intro, samples, purchase link – for you or as a gift.

Coaching programs: I appreciate the interest many of you have expressed in a personal coaching program to explore living authentically with greater depth and meaning. If *you* would like support for the journey and are committed to your own authentic path, give me a call or send me an email, and together we'll create a program just for you. Just imagine living authentically ... in a world that would rather you didn't.

Book of the Month: *The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down*, by Haemin Sunim. There are some things (many, actually) you simply can't even *see* when traveling at the speed of life. And if you can't see them, the potential they represent is completely unavailable to you. A delightful guide to being more, doing more (or even doing less) by learning the art of slowing down to see more. And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.