



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Patience and Non-Judgment

*"Yesterday is ashes; tomorrow is wood; only today does the fire burn brightly."
– Native American proverb*

It doesn't take one of my newsletters to know that we're navigating uncharted territory these days. Unknowns at every turn pull us off center, causing anxiety or stress. But there are ways you can *re-center* in the midst of an *off-center* world ... *practical* ways ... that don't depend on years of spiritual practice, or giving up your everyday life. Here are two that stand out, and have become sources of both peace and freedom for me.

Perhaps more than anything right now, life calls us to exercise *patience* and *non-judgment*. And you don't need more than a glimpse of the media to know that both are in short supply. Anxiety, criticism, divisiveness – fertile breeding grounds for judgment and impatience. Although life's circumstances may *separate* us, our wisdom and intention need not. They could even *bring us together*. Patience and non-judgment would serve us everywhere in life – reducing stress and anxiety, enhancing compassion and self-trust. For me, *becoming consciously aware* of my impatient and judgmental thoughts helped those same thoughts to soften, thereby guiding me to feel centered and at peace. For some time now, the benefits of this shift have been showing up everywhere in my life.

What started me on my journey involved simply *choosing to see* patience and non-judgment in new ways, then adopting this new perspective through a practice of conscious awareness. The ideas, (really nothing more than consciously chosen definitions), along with suggested exercises, may have just as big an impact on your life, too.

Patience: patience is "to wait, but *without an agenda*." The issue is that, mostly, we're waiting *for* something. It's the "for" part, the *agenda*, that causes stress. A simple example: if I say, "I'm waiting patiently for the rain to stop," no I'm not. I'm waiting *for* something, so I'm not patient! Patience, then, is *being present and aware* of what's happening right now ... with perhaps nothing more than *curiosity* and *openness* as to what may come next. Things *are* just the way they *are*. Period. Patience involves no judgment or "condition of satisfaction."

Non-judgment: to judge something or someone is to believe they should be *other* than *how they truly are*. It's an *opinion*, an opinion based in *lack of acceptance* of "what is." Judgments have no power whatsoever to *change* "what is." They're different from facts; *knowing* the difference is *wisdom*. Non-judgment, then, is *seeing without making it wrong*. A common tactic today is to think, "everything is perfect" instead. To me, that's not only pre-tending, but it's a distraction ... from the real work of learning to accept, without judgment. Things just are.

One reason shifts in consciousness like this matter so much is that the mind is very susceptible to the power of thought. Whatever we've had *repeatedly* poured into our minds (through lesson or experience), becomes wired as *truth*, regardless of whether there's any "truth" to it or not. This is how *lack of awareness* causes us trouble – old thoughts continue to create the same experiences over and over. Unaware, we question none of it. The same is true of judgment and impatience. If it's all we've ever known, why would we stop to notice? But as you learn to *see* in a new way, *that* way gets wired "as truth" instead (by repetition). The issue is simple: if you can't see it, you can't change it. Having practiced these definitions for some time now, I've found my experience – of myself, others and life – has become calmer, kinder and more loving ... a result of awareness alone.

One conclusion is that even if the *unconscious* mind doesn't care about *truth*, *you* still can! Your most powerful tool is your *conscious* mind. The conscious mind can easily overpower the unconscious ... but only if you use it. (And *thinking* that you're using it doesn't count.) You find out which is true – *and* release old patterns, judgment and stories – just by looking, consciously, of course. The exercise that follows will light your path.

And if you're worried that becoming calmer, kinder and more loving might "ruin your image," (1) that's just a judgment; (2) your *conscious* mind is the pathway to your authentic truth – the most trusted source you'll ever have to guide your personal presence – as soon as you come to know it first hand and honor it with your trust.

Exercise: Practicing self-reflection is a *purposeful* action. By consciously interrupting the continual flow of old messages from the unconscious mind, you “catch it in the act” – the act of messing up your life, which it’s been doing for some time, without your awareness. The simple but focused process of **noticing** is all that’s needed. When you **see** your impatience or judgment, *as an observer*, you realize the tenuous nature of the thoughts that drive them. *Using* the conscious mind *gives power* to the conscious mind. Through regular practice of inquiry, you create the repetition needed to rewire old lessons into new learning.

Part 1: *The wisdom of non-judgment.* Invariably, examining judgments causes them to fade away. Invariably, **not** examining them keeps them alive. (Conscious mind vs. unconscious mind.) Background: two “prevailing questions” commonly frame how we view life. One: “*what’s possible here?*” The other: “*what’s wrong here?*” Although we don’t consciously notice either the question or its impact, the question itself forms a filter, and it colors our experience. You might begin your everyday practice by replaying events of your day in your mind at the end of each day, and simply noticing which question was most often behind your “thinking.” The point: *Both* questions *acknowledge* what happened; one of them accepts it (non-judgment; it happened); the other denies it (judgment; it’s wrong.) If you discover you tend to see what’s wrong, it’s because you *learned* to. Most of us were brought up to see how life “should” be, then devote our life energy to turning “what’s wrong” into what “what should.” (By the way, even though you’re noticing your judgment, there’s no “judgment” in your noticing.)

Part2: *The wisdom of patience.* Using the framework for the practice above, stop at the end of each day; replay in your mind events from your day. Look for situations that may have evoked impatience. (These days, they’re not difficult to find.) Just notice – without judging, denying or trying to change it – where you were perhaps waiting for something instead of just waiting. Name the agenda. What were you waiting “for?” Ask yourself if you believe you had any power over whether your agenda happened or not. If not, see if you can find how your agenda may have served you anyway. (There’s a principle of human behavior that says there’s always a “payoff” for what we do, even if only in our mind. Example: “By proving *them* wrong, I get to prove *I’m* right.” Find the payoff and you are free.) It’s truly amazing how the simple act of noticing all this can open you to huge change.

Life lessons from nature: Nature is chaotic, uncertain, unpredictable, paradoxical. Nature doesn’t plan what has to happen next, how it should turn out, or what’s right or wrong with the present. Yet her process is both elegantly simple and remarkably effective. First, she listens to “what is” and hears it as “what is” – no judgment. If a storm blows down a tree, it blows down a tree. Second, because she “heard” there’s now empty space, she steps into that space with “creative genius” – as if to answer to her prevailing question, “what can I do now?” Another tree grows. (Note this response as opposed to being pissed at the storm.)

The point is this: below the surface chaos, complexity and uncertainty defining “everyday life in the forest,” (and for us as humans, too), there’s always beautiful, exquisite order and unity. Nature “knows” this; so can we. As an observer of nature, I can’t help thinking that if, even for one simple minute, we were to stop fighting the way it all “should be” and accept the way it truly is, we, might glimpse that order and unity in our lives, too. Oh yes, what holds us back? Judgment – which lives only in our heads. This is why I’m such an advocate for becoming students of our thinking. Releasing its stranglehold opens us to divinity, right here in everyday life.

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.

A PODCAST: I was recently invited to be a guest on The Living Alive Show, a podcast hosted by Autumn Shields. I know Autumn, so it was a fun and easy exploration into “living authentically ... in a world that would rather you didn’t.” If you’d like to listen, here’s a link. It’s 35 minutes long. You can sign up for her on-going programs there as well. I’m sure she’d welcome you, *and* that you’d gain from the experience.

Book of the Month: *The Wisdom of No Escape*, by Pema Chödrön. A perfect companion both for this month’s ideas as well as the uncertain times we face today. As in all her writing, traditional Buddhist wisdom presented in a way that’s accessible and real. Accepting *what is so* (non-judgment) leads to peace and wisdom. An antidote to our futile attempts to know, to control, to fix and to be instantly satisfied. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985. (Until the shop re-opens, you may place orders online; just send your request to MarketStreetBookshop@protonmail.com.)