



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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What Brings You JOY?

"Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

What brings you *joy*? (If your first reaction to that question is, "yeah, right," then what *could* bring you joy ... if you *pretended*?) A powerful question, with often-elusive answers – perhaps even more so in these uncertain and trying times. Yet the amazing power (often ignored or even denied) is this: whether they're conscious or unconscious, ***your thoughts create the steps in the path your life becomes.*** (Perhaps a case for choosing good ones!)

The potential: contemplate – consciously, on purpose – life as you'd love to live it. Imagine *experiencing joy*. Just imagine. What would bring *you* joy? Everyone's view is different, so your response is uniquely your own.

A crucial distinction: joy vs. excitement. We have a tendency in our society to equate (and therefore confuse) joy and excitement. They're vastly different. ***Excitement*** is a response to something *outside* yourself; as such, it's short-lived, and requires continual feeding from the external world, creating a kind of dependence. ***Joy***, on the other hand, has its source *inside* you; and because it's inside you, it's long-lasting; "you" are its ongoing fuel. It doesn't depend on life's circumstances or other people. Joy isn't just "feeling good;" it's a sense of deep abiding peace, a *way of being* ... perhaps "happy for no reason." You can "find" excitement anywhere; you "choose" joy, from within.

Create space to contemplate (even though old beliefs may tell you it's a waste of time). Purposeful, conscious thought serves to *override* protection-oriented unconscious stories, replacing them with big potential. As you ponder how your hours, days, weeks and years might be if you put your energy into whatever brings joy *to you*, you'll begin to feel the pull toward actually living that way. I've found this work extremely powerful. My days have changed. My thinking has changed. My awareness has grown. I don't miss so much. I love the experience each day brings. Sure, I've got my struggles; and I still have obligations to others. But with the rhythm of my day designed around my well-being, not "their" demands and opinions, the struggles just don't ruin my day. I refer to my "What Brings Me Joy" writing regularly. I edit it when I'm so inspired. But mostly, I ***DO*** the stuff.

In pondering what creates joy for me, I found that my answers include short- *and* long-term things, everyday *and* once-a-year things, things about self-care *and* things about my work in the world. The common *theme*: they bring me joy. The common *result*: when I bring energy and attention to something, I create the *conditions* for that something to manifest. Of course, this leaves me with a question: "why would I think dumb thoughts, given that I'd just be creating conditions for *them* to manifest, too?" So I've stopped thinking dumb thoughts (mostly).

So devote some of your energy to the exercise below. Reflect; contemplate. Touch the depths of your heart, soul, spirit ... your deepest longing. No censoring; for now, treat it as an imaginative exercise, not a project plan. Imaginative exercises have a curious effect – they "teach" the unconscious mind to be *comfortable* ... comfortable with [*uncomfortable*] new ideas, so it won't "try to stop you" when you take a step into the positive energy. If it helps, use my answers to get started. If it helps, pretend you're looking back a year from now, thinking about the joy this past year has offered you. Write your story!

Note: It's easy to get lost in prevailing beliefs and stories that run 24/7 through the unconscious mind. In fact, you could live your whole life from this habituated "thinking," should you fail to gain the awareness needed to see beyond it. (It's a role of the unconscious to protect you from uncertainty. The more uncertain life gets, the more the unconscious "tries" to take over – to protect you. This autopilot response likely feels so natural to you that that you believe it's totally conscious.) The problem isn't the beliefs and stories; they will always be there. It's that you *listen* to them. And ... you're not aware you're doing it. This means the missing ingredient in life is *consciousness*, not skill, effort, smarts, luck, money, or "catching a break."

Exercise: *What brings you joy*: Stop for some quiet reflective time. What would bring **you** joy? Just imagine. (This is *not* a way to deny connection with others, but a way to reclaim your authentic self in the midst of them.)

Start with “everyday things.” Imagine how a *day* would go, with you *being* what means most to you, every day.

[My “every day” list: (1) quiet time with coffee every morning, watching it get light, enjoying the sunrise; (2) a walk and/or quiet time in nature; (3) contemplation space for creative pursuits. I **do** these every day, two hours each. As a result, I’m centered and joyful. I also find I’m *adaptable* and *resilient* in the face of whatever else life may toss my way.]

Next, look at things you may not need to experience every day, but perhaps a few times each week.

[My “weekly” list: (1) *inspiring* conversations, with clients, friends, family or spontaneous connection; (2) *reciprocal* relationships; (3) learning (for me, on human consciousness and on the workings of the cosmos). I **do** these, too, at least a few times a week. The inspiration I feel *adds* energy to my day.]

Lastly, look at things that still matter, but less frequently, perhaps only a few times each year.

[My “less often” list: (1) a drive to nowhere every month or so, (2) travel (Maui, perhaps) each year; (3) a half day of complete silence once or twice a year. I’m a “regular” with the drive to nowhere; less so it seems, lately anyway, with travel and extended silence. I notice the pull when I *don’t* make space for these – a clue to me that they really *do* matter to me.]

Write down what you discover; keep your story visible. Edit any time and in any way that feels right to you. Claim your story as your own unique “joy equation.”

Life lessons from nature: There are times when immersed in nature that I’m overwhelmed by the majesty and beauty of creation. Shapes, colors, textures, relationships, adaptations, rhythms, community, connectedness. It’s almost as if nature created just for the sheer joy of it all. True, everything in nature has a purpose, but I mean really, how many different kinds and colors of flowers do you really *need*? The answer I always come up with it that it’s not about need, or plan, or agenda, or control, or guilt, or unconsciousness. It’s about infinite possibility, and how nature’s creative process steps into that possibility in each moment, transforming “what isn’t” into “what is,” creating order out of life’s uncertainty. But why? Ah, yes ... for the sheer joy of it all.

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 Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu. A beautiful conversation between two remarkable men, known for their love, joy, compassion (and humor), 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. (Until the shop re-opens, you may place orders online; just send your request to MarketStreetBookshop@protonmail.com.)

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