



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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The Problem with Reality

"The world is his who can see through its pretension. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Did you ever see yourself in one of those amusement park mirrors, the kind that distorts your body, making you look odd? As you stare, you *know* it's you, yet at the same time, you know it's "not you."

This same phenomenon affects everything you believe, see, think, say and do, too. Reality as you know it is a form of *reflection*, and most often a distorted one at that. That's because everything you believe, see, think, say and do has been "filtered" through your unconscious mind ... storehouse for your old lessons and life experiences. You "see" all you experience through the *lens* of those lessons – but you *don't know* it's happening. In the amusement park, you *know* what you see is a distortion, but in your everyday mind, you *don't* know. But it is – anyway.

Because you don't know this is happening, your "conscious" mind (to the extent that it's actually conscious), is 100% sure that what you experience each day is real ... to the point you may outright *deny* what I'm saying, and may *deny* that "your" reality is an illusion ... a reflection, actually, of the *life story of your thinking* instead. Need proof? (1) Two people presented with identical "evidence" often come to different, even opposite, conclusions. (2) Witness the divisiveness in our world today; same deal, just magnified – a lot!

There's nothing in our experience (nothing of which we're truly aware, anyway) that could make this idea seem plausible, and even less that might encourage a deeper look. But the reality we *experience* is the reality we *create*, a reflection of how we bring our consciousness into the world around us – which, most often, is unconsciously. Unsettling, but we neither know nor believe this. We may wonder why life is difficult, yet make no connection.

What's going on here? Underneath it all is that your conscious mind and your unconscious mind are two very different parts of you ... and they don't talk to each other so much – or at all – until you choose to get to know them. As your awareness grows, you gain a power you didn't have before – to examine all that happens from the perspective of a conscious observer, not just of an *un*conscious participant. This kind of awareness allows you to *see* the distortion, thereby not letting it trap you into believing it's real. This leads in turn to personal clarity.

The unconscious mind is an amazing evolutionary adaptation. Among its many roles is help with a primary human need – to feel a sense of safety. It does this by cementing lessons about life's dangers as "automatic responses," so we can respond quickly if needed. This worked great when the danger was a tiger. But it's far less effective when the danger is a *thought*. Evolution simply didn't count on how we'd become thusly habituated by repeated exposure to distorted thoughts. Yet each time we hear the same thing, we respond the same way. Whether it's effective or not, we do it again anyway. And we don't know this is happening. Deceived in this way, we notice only the shadow cast by our behavior: life is difficult. Yet we wonder why.

The problem isn't that we're at fault; it's that we're clueless. And ... we *learned* to be clueless. Being unaware – yet so sure we're right – leaves us with little interest, motivation or tools to consider new ways. *Why would we?* Well, we wouldn't ... except that it's true anyway. The recurring stress, challenge and dissatisfaction so many of us experience are not problems caused by others, life or the world (as we believe), but by the habitual, programmed, unconscious ways in which we've come to see and think. Life is a struggle because we *learned* it is!

How do we move beyond, see more clearly, free ourselves from "un-reality?" For starters, we can learn to look at the *shadow* it casts in our lives – stress, anxiety and struggle. We see this as normal, because we learned life is difficult. But by misidentifying the cause, we rarely resolve the issues. Are you ready (and willing) to change that?

Note: this month's article, exercise and nature story are adapted from one of the 11 essays in my new book, *A Field Guide to Life: Navigating the Challenges of our Lives and Times* – available February 4th. [CHECK IT OUT.](#)

Exercise: Finding your life viewpoint: A good place to *begin* the journey to “distortion-free seeing” is to get to know the distortion that impacts you today. (One reason for believing your experience is “reality” is simply lack of awareness (and consequent lack of acceptance) that that it could be distorted!) Awareness alone changes that.

Plant a seed for yourself, a seed that your thinking isn’t static, but has a “life story.” It’s is molded by life experience. You get to know that story through a practice of noticing it. As an observer, you listen *for* your thoughts – consciously, instead of listening *to* them – unconsciously. In this way, you see how “reality” is a reflection of what and how you learned. True, we all learn differently, but our lessons and experiences have much in common, so we’re often led to similar “worldviews,” prevailing frameworks of thought that guide our lives. Perhaps you’ve come to see the world through a lens of scientific reason; or maybe through the lens of religious belief; or maybe perfectionism; or victimhood; or tribalism (just going along with the views of others). Each is a thought framework that **shows up as reality, and as truth, to the one who holds it**. Yet none has an independent existence of its own – beyond what we give it. Living authentically invites taking responsibility for *your own* reality.

With ongoing practice, your thinking becomes more “objective,” less influenced by old tapes, less susceptible to the opinions of the world. One day, you might purposefully choose a new viewpoint – perhaps **curiosity** – allowing conscious presence in this moment to free you from distorted views altogether. It can be a fascinating journey.

Life lessons from nature: Since the time I was perhaps 12 years old, I’ve been fascinated by ancient Polynesian voyaging. I still have books describing how, with [only] stars, winds, waves and even birds, these early explorers had, by the year **1000**, discovered most of the Pacific islands (including Hawaii), scattered as they were over 10 million square miles of sea. Perhaps it was always in me, a deep connection to an ancient world. Perhaps I found the idea of *life as possibility* intriguing, raised as I was with many constraints to the potential I knew inside me. But in school, I was learning only about Europeans of that time, who still believed earth was flat, and were hundreds of years away from developing instruments they thought essential to sail over 300 miles from land. Even for a young mind, it just didn’t add up. Teachers were no help; they were lost, too.

The Polynesian world 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 deep connection with nature. Their inner life was guided by a *vision* of possibility, by *values* uniting them over generations, by *commitment* to something bigger than themselves, and by deep *belief* their vision mattered – a consciousness that led them to be at home in the unknown and master the seas. I **love** that. (I wonder how Europeans might have fared with their “command-and-control” mindset in uncharted seas.) What might we learn from differing perspectives alone?



My new book, ***A Field Guide to Life: Navigating the Challenges of our Lives and Times*** is available February 4th. Order [HERE](#). If your life is a struggle, there’s a reason for it – and it’s not the reason you may think. This book explores 11 common struggles of our times, and with ideas, perspectives, examples, personal reflection and exercises, helps you trace them back to their causes (most often thoughts from the ancient past, lessons of others, and your lack of awareness of the cause-and-effect linkage). Topics include our relationships with Silence, Not Knowing, Reality, Critical Thinking, Conflict, Self-Care, Living Authentically and Living Sustainably. If you have the courage and openness to allow new ways of seeing to change you, this book may be an option you didn’t know you had, one that will open pathways never imagined possible – and back to dreams you may have abandoned long ago as hopeless.

My first 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, exercises ... so you can make your life your own, not someone else’s. It’s all [HERE](#) – intro, samples, purchase link – for you or as a gift.

Book of the month: *A Field Guide to Life*, by Bradford Glass. OK, shameless self-promotion, but here you’ll find an opening to a world beyond today’s stress, struggle and overwhelm. This month’s article, exercise and book intros offer some perspective ... so give yourself a gift, or give a gift to someone you love. Begin to **create** the world *you* want to live in! Not sure? Listen to the [podcast intro](#)! If you want a deep dive, go for both books. Add ***Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn’t***. Both available [HERE](#). And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find both at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.