



# Purposeful Wanderings

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

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## Who Do You Choose to Be?

*"We have to decide what kind of difference we're going to make." – Jane Goodall*

We humans have a basic *need* for an identity – a sense of self. Without it, we're neither grounded on this earth nor able to connect with others. Yet our society generally teaches us to find identity in the world around us, not the world within us. As a result, we seem far more comfortable with questions such as, "how do I **do** more?" than with questions such as, "who am I?" or "how do I **be** more?" As we blindly comply, attaching ourselves to job titles, possessions, Facebook friends or the thinking of others, we miss the fact that an identity dependent on a world *outside* us is ephemeral; it can't sustain us for a lifetime. And because we miss this, we fail to draw any connection between our choices and the anxiety and struggle we experience in life. No wonder people are flipping out!

If, like many, you've learned to be uncomfortable with self-reflection, here's a way to create a sense of identity, one you may find more approachable, one that can sustain you for a lifetime. It's based in the power of language. Following the theme of [last month's article](#), what if you chose to see yourself and life *as a conversation*. After all, language is *the* tool available to us as humans to guide the course of our lives. Almost all we believe, think, say or do happens "in conversation" – with others, with ourselves. So, what if you did view yourself as a conversation?

To start, let's look at a few of the world's great masters through a lens of the conversation their lives embodied. Einstein's life was a conversation of unbridled curiosity and wonder. Gandhi's was one of unconditional human dignity. Jesus: unconditional love. The Buddha: right thought. Mother Teresa: unconditional service. M.L. King: unconditional equality. Steve Jobs: elegant design. I believe a reason we hold them as masters is that their deep commitment to their conversation let *nothing* pull them off track ... the powers of language and consciousness.

By contrast, let's look at some conversations increasingly common in our world today: 1) I am a "doing machine;" I get things done. 2) I am a conversation for perfectionism; I live to get things right (so I find lots of things wrong.) 3) I'm entitled; it's my 'right;' you can't deprive me (this often means "you" are wrong.) 4) I am a conversation for judgment; I live to find fault in others. (P.S., there's plenty.) 5) I am a conversation for drama; I'm an expert at complaint, gossip and idle chat ... and I make sure I never take responsibility for any of it. OK, you get the idea.

Somewhere in these wildly divergent ideas you may find **you** – the conversation you are today *and* the one your life could become. Why does this matter? The life you live, as well as the impact you have – on others and on the world – comes not from luck, money, smarts, genetics, life circumstances or Facebook, but from *the kind of person you are*. And that's a **choice** you can make, consciously. A simple example of the power in such a choice: Are you willing to trade the language of blame for the language of personal responsibility ... in every aspect of your life?

As for me, I want to *be* a "conversation for possibility," my interaction with others (and myself) focused on the limitless *potential* greeting us in each moment. (No surprise this led me to life coaching.) Thinking about *being* a conversation for possibility evokes within me the capacities it embodies – curiosity, critical thinking, skepticism (not to deny, but to learn), clarity, gratitude, acceptance, reciprocity ... and to be watchful for what gets in the way – like judgment and denial. I'm not successful 100% of the time, but with awareness, I stay on the path. Better, who I am opens me to new learning, and at the same time, deprives no one of their rights or choices.

If you don't make choices like these, consciously, you become easy prey for a more unconscious path of judgment, doubt, denial, opinion-mongering and lack of self-trust. Basing your compass in the demands and opinions of others means that it points a different direction each day. Trying to follow that "north" is a recipe for stress and anxiety. (Perhaps you know.) But as you find, and follow, "*your own north star*," your inner compass will reliably guide you for a lifetime. With growing awareness and choice of how you use language, you'll become far more effective relating to others, getting done what you want to get done, and creating new possibility. Plus, you'll never have to justify yourself to anyone, or to yourself (truth stands on its own ... in silence). Are you ready to consciously choose, and claim, "the conversation you are?"

**Exercise:** Creating a bit of quiet time each day to explore “the conversation you are.” Ponder the following questions. Resist temptation to answer quickly. (When you have “the answer” (to any question), you stop thinking and just move on to something else.) Have the courage and patience to be with yourself, and with the questions; see what comes up from inside you as a result.

When I “show up” for life each day, what’s my sense today of the “prevailing conversation” I am? Do I relate to others, world and self as a conversation of gratitude, of achievement, of judgment, of service, of blame, of need, of curiosity, of anger, of fear, of love? (Perhaps to test your discovery: would others see me as I see myself?)

What conversation would I like to embody in how I relate to others, world and self? When I envision *becoming* that person (most likely my authentic self), what *feelings* does this evoke from inside me?

How does ‘my conversation’ today compare with my vision? How do I explain differences between the two?

With some felt experience here, you might go a bit deeper, exploring the following, thinking about how you could integrate your discoveries into the conversation you become:

At some level, every conversation (yours and theirs) is about power. How do I get to know whether power (mine or theirs) is the authentic inner power of personal truth, or the ego-driven power of self-defense? How can I use this awareness to allow ego power (mine or theirs) to blow on by, and not threaten my well-being? How can I use this awareness to remind me to stay in my own authentic power, no matter their behavior?

How do I balance my inner masculine energy (which wants to make things happen) with my inner feminine energy (which wants to nurture the conditions in which those things can happen more sustainably)?

How do I balance my inner introvert (who wants quiet time to learn and grow) with my inner extravert (who wants community with others)?

*Sustaining* the conversation you are asks you to **cultivate** conscious awareness, so as to build the courage to live from self-trust of what you deeply believe, not from the opinions of others, or the fears of what you don’t know.

**Life lessons from nature:** Nature, too, can be viewed as a conversation. Hers is one of creative genius. Her prevailing question: *What’s possible now?* Her process: *Try something out.* Her assessment tool: *What works?* Her sustainability equation: *Keep creating.* It’s simple; it’s elegant; it works. Four billion years of experience. And not a hint of judgment anywhere in the picture. Consequences, yes; judgment, no. Might we learn more about this distinction from our connection with nature?

### ***The Shop at The Road Not Taken:***

- ***“Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn’t.”*** The *premise* of this [book](#) 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.
- ***“A Field Guide to Life: Navigating the Challenges of Our Lives and Times.”*** If your life is a struggle, there’s a reason for it – and it’s not the reason you may think. An exploration of 11 common struggles of our times, tracing them back to their causes. Topics include our relationships with Silence, Not Knowing, Reality, Critical Thinking, Conflict, Self-Care, Living Authentically and Living Sustainably. This [book](#) may be an option you didn’t know you had, one that will lead you back to dreams you may have abandoned long ago as hopeless.
- ***Purposeful Wanderings***, 19 years of [The Road Not Taken newsletters](#) available here as a single pdf file.
- ***Personalized Life Coaching:*** If you’re one of the few with the courage to leave conventional thinking behind so you can live instead with authenticity and freedom, I’ll help you gain clarity and perspective – about yourself, others, life, work and the world – that allows you to do just that, every day. Trade the way it is for the way it could be. [Contact me](#) for a conversation that will change your perspective and could change your life.

**Book of the month: *Who Do We Choose to Be?*, by Margaret Wheatley.** A powerful piece for chaotic times. We are at a critical moment of choice – individually, culturally, as a planet. Civilizations have fallen apart by favoring entitlement, greed, selfishness. History shows this; science explains this. Large-scale change begins with small-scale (individual) choices. Who do you choose to be? Her message is well-crafted, real, insightful, hopeful. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find both at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.