



Purposeful Wanderings

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

©2024 Bradford L. Glass • www.RoadNotTaken.com Vol. 23, No. 11 -- November 2024

I'm Afraid ... of Myself

"Always drink upstream from the herd" – Old cowboy saying

Uh-oh; there's a problem with living authentically. It's this: Your authentic self – the real you – is what makes you **different** from others ... unique. That means if you want to live your truth, you've got to be willing to *stand out* from the crowd, not go along with it. But frankly, being different scares the hell out of most people. Now what?

The *conscious*/thinking mind loves the idea of being unique, living its own way, even standing out. But that's what the *unconscious* mind is here to defend us *against*! The unconscious mind guards our survival, "programmed" to sniff out dangers at every turn, then "protect" us from the threats they represent. In evolutionary terms, this is huge; we don't want to be happily searching for food if there's a tiger behind the tree. But the "threats" we're talking about today aren't tigers; they're **thoughts** ... that "*being different is unsafe*" ... or that "*I'm not good enough*" or that "*I won't be accepted*" or that "*I might get it wrong*" or any number of common "scary" thoughts. And those thoughts trigger the unconscious mind ... which jumps in to defend us. Because thoughts like these run 24/7, we're in a state of *alert* 24/7 as well. And *THAT's* what stops us from being our true selves.

Because survival is more important than creative genius, we've evolved to ask, "*what's wrong?*" before we ask, "*what's possible?*" There are a few huge problems here, and it's worth ferreting them out ... so you can be aware of them, and aware of how they may conspire *against* your desire to live authentically. Your unconscious mind will tell you these don't apply to you. They **do**. For now, see if you can absorb the picture these ideas paint.

- The *unconscious* mind is always on the lookout for threats. But evolution didn't count on our coming to see *thoughts* as threats, so it's on overload most of the time (because our minds are always full of thoughts).
- The *conscious* mind is always ready to create – when times are safe. But a 24/7 stream of "scary" ensures that such a time never comes. With the conscious on hold, the question "what's possible?" lives only in our dreams.
- Having become used to all this, we *think* we're thinking. We're not; we're *reacting* ... trying to find a safe place to hide. We can't be creating while we're reacting. And in the process, our plan for living authentically slips by.
- We haven't a clue any of this is happening (because that would be a task for the conscious mind)!

What now? Well ... the unconscious mind is playing tricks on us (seeing thoughts as dangers), so how about if we play a trick on the unconscious ... like payback? Here's how. The conscious mind can "reason" beyond **all** of this nonsense in a heartbeat – if it's working. So how about if we *plan a purposeful way* for the conscious mind to do its thing. See the exercise for more ... but if, for even a few minutes each day, we stop, on purpose, and notice, on purpose, just what thoughts are grabbing the unconscious's attention, and how our [unconscious] response simply *legitimizes* the thought instead of *questions* it ... then we begin to build a "pattern recognition system" for scary thoughts. As we practice each day, we get better and better at *noticing* these thoughts *and* how they stop us dead in our tracks from living the life we're here to live. And we soon find that, with our growing awareness alone, we let go of these thoughts naturally and easily, with no "effort" (other than noticing them). It all may sound like esoteric nonsense at first, but as we move forward anyway (because we *planned* to!), we realize that even such judgments are *also* the work of that same unconscious mind, trying to defend us from yet another "scary idea."

Despite our quest for safety, life is a complete [yet beautiful] mystery. Whether comforting or not, we're part of a sea of humanity, living together in an ecosystem, on a "pale blue dot" of a planet, in an unremarkable galaxy, in an impossibly vast universe. What if we could *be* with ourselves for long enough ... to suspend our judgments and fears for long enough ... to become aware enough ... to see clearly enough ... just how life could touch our hearts, our souls, our minds? What if? Hey, let's go big. What if we *chose to fall in love with life's mystery*? If we *could* live this way, we wouldn't even *need* a place to hide ... our self-trust would eliminate the question from our minds.

Exercise: Toward honoring your uniqueness. A daily practice of quiet reflection serves to *calm* your thoughts in a way that allows you to *see* your thoughts. Making the **unconscious** **conscious** this way *changes* your thinking. During a few moments of quiet inquiry each day, focus on: **Awareness:** consciously listen – on purpose – to the incessant chatter that fills your mind, naming what each thought tells you. Resist judging/fighting; just notice. This chatter is trying to preserve your *sameness*; listening to it allows it to slow ... so you can then hear messages of your *uniqueness*. Michelangelo said David was already *in* the marble; he only had to chip away all that was “not David.” As you noticing chips away at the chatter of “not you,” your inner David emerges. **Courage:** in some small way *each day*, say “no” to one thing you now see as “not you.” And in some small way *each day*, say “yes” to one aspect of your emerging uniqueness. **Trust:** as you continue these awareness/courage/trust exercises, take a few moments at the *end of each day* to reflect on how things are going for you. See if you notice the shift inside you as you begin to favor your inner truth over society’s message of compliance. As you do, you’ll notice fears melting away, and a sense of self-trust emerging. Over time, you’ll find you can *be with* sameness, yet never *become* it.

Now with your growing awareness, courage and self-trust as guides, start to ask some big questions. Big questions don’t have easy answers, but they help to expose where you might be stuck ... between the potential you know your life is and the fears that keep you from it. When you can *see* where you may be stuck in the middle, it’s far easier to *get out* of the middle.

An example: am I holding onto the very thing I *don’t* want — a job, relationship, conflict, lesson, the past – knowing it’s too uncomfortable to stay ... yet believing it’s too risky to move ahead? Another: what question could I ask myself (that I always avoid asking), that could pull me out of the middle forever? (Your inner self knows exactly what question would do that. You may not *like* the question, but you *know* the question.) An example of one such question: Will the story I tell myself now – about why I can’t live my dreams – hold water 20 years from now?

The exciting thing here is that once you even *ask*, you’ll not be able to help yourself from moving ahead. *Asking the question creates the path.* But you can’t step to the edge of what’s possible if you’re stuck in the middle of what’s not. And as always, awareness is the vehicle for change.

Life Lessons from Nature: As a species, we’re drawn to question ... to learn, to know *why* and *how*. This curiosity includes our search for “*truths*” about the universe. How did it form? Where did it come from? Where is it going? Why and how did it happen, and continue to happen? We don’t have solid answers to many of these, but with our continued curiosity, the universe may reveal her secrets.

We’re also drawn to question our *place* in the universe. Is the universe benevolent, a place that *welcomes* and supports my potential and creativity? Or is it a universe of *judgment*, a world of predator and prey, fear lurking at every corner, ready to stifle my dreams? Answers to *these* questions, however, don’t come from the universe, because answers live in how you *see and think* about it, not in some yet-to-be-discovered “fact.” Religion has made these questions even *more* difficult, because it can’t even agree with *itself* about whether God is vengeful or loving. It’s our willingness to simply BE with big questions for a while that helps us transcend this kind of nonsense. If you see/think/look for what’s wrong, you’ll find it. If you see/think/look for what’s possible, you find *that*. And ... **how** you see and think is a choice you can make ... as you learn to move from unconscious to conscious presence.

Book of the month: Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm, by Thich Nhat Hanh. Uncertainty (which is always present) often leads us to fear (which is an option). Our fears run across all aspects of our lives, from spiders to health to politics to being good enough. Thich Nhat Hanh, well-known Zen master, monk and author, delves to the space of our fears, offering practices that help bring us to a place of peace. He offers a path that is paved with compassion and self-care, not to eliminate the fears, but to transform our reactions to them.

Openings to New Possibility -- at The Road Not Taken: See more on my website www.roadnottaken.com ... ideas, articles, newsletters, my books for sale ... as well as an invitation to personalized life coaching. If you’re ready to write a new chapter in *your* life story (or maybe even a new *story*), I’m here to help. Together we’ll chart a course into the territory of your greatest potential. An introductory conversation might just change your life.