

Purposeful Wanderings

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

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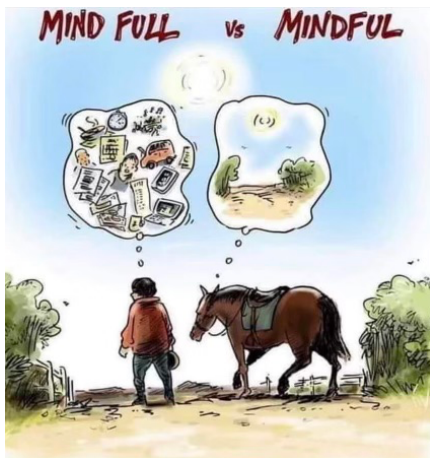
Mindful ... Or Mind Full

"The quieter you become, the more you can hear." – Ram Dass

I'm often asked by clients and friends how to experience more calm ... in themselves, their lives, the world ... to be more **mindful** than **mind full**. Although the *path* to peace has always been inside us, my conversations suggest they want a "fix" instead, claiming that "walking a path" is too hard, odd, inconvenient, time-consuming. **It's not.**

Activities like exercise, games, projects and socializing are alluring because they take you OUT of your mind's chatter ... offering a brief felt experience of the present moment. Yet they're *distractions*, too, for their benefit (**mindful**) lasts *only as long as you're doing the activity*. When you stop, your mind goes right back to **mind full**. If that's "good enough" for you, ok. But if you're intrigued by the idea of *lasting peace* – a mindfulness that persists while you're IN your everyday life, not just of OUT of it – here's a perspective and a practice on "walking the path" each day. The best part is that *everything you need is already (and has always been) inside you*. **And it works.**

We often blame *not peace* on life, the past, emotions, people. **Not so.** The obstacle is our *mind*, which is filled with *thoughts* ... thoughts we don't even *know* we're having ... thoughts that *stop* us from what we want and who we really are (mind **full** vs. mindful). But with no reason to believe this, we think it's not worth looking there. **It is.**



In reality, we're *walking a path* each day anyway, consciously or not. Each step we take writes the next lines in our life's story. In this sense, the "work" here is to learn to walk with conscious awareness (mindful) in this moment ... and not "mind full" ... of **unconscious** thoughts ... which take us to the *past* (anger, guilt, resentment over what did/didn't happen) or to the *future*, (anxiety, dread, worry over what hasn't/might(not) happen). This moment – **now** – is the only moment anything **can** happen. If we could **see** this, we could change course. But *we miss it*, thinking it's "just the way life is." **It's not.**

If the mind's chatter deprives us of the present, what if we find out **why** ... instead of getting lost in it, fighting it or distracting ourselves from it? That means turning your gaze inward, to what's happening *inside* you. You do that by becoming a conscious **observer** of what's going on, not an *unconscious participant*. See the exercise, but simply stated: *stop, look, listen; awareness of yourself – in this moment – will teach you all you need to know.*

By becoming the audience in your life, you **see** today's struggles; you **see** why they're there; you **see** where they came from; and you **see** the true *you* – the one living *underneath* those struggles ... and opinions ... and beliefs ... and assumptions. You **see** how those things create a "pretend" self – that you *think* is who you really *are*! **It's not.**

The thoughts running around in your head just want to be heard. So, hear them! Get to know them; recognize them; make friends if you like (just don't take them to dinner). This asks only for your five senses; you already have those! No need to go "out there" in search of anything! **It's not there.**

The most powerful tool you'll ever have to create *the way it could be* tomorrow is to gain *non-judgmental clarity, awareness & acceptance of the way it is* today. Being an observer creates *distance* between you and your thoughts ... so you see you, in this moment. You can't gain this clarity as participant alone (the *participant* runs down the street with the mind's drama; the *observer* learns from it instead). Awareness opens you to choices unavailable while you're "in it." This practice goes a step beyond meditation, which asks you to recognize that thoughts are in there, but to then let them go. As you *recognize* negative thoughts, you learn to *ignore* negative thoughts. As the impact of these thoughts wanes, you're left with the real you – curious, self-trusting, non-judgmental, mindful.

Exercise: A Daily Practice. For 15 min. each day: **Show up ... Shut up ... Sit still ... Listen.** That's it! Silence focuses awareness on *this moment* (that's the moment you usually *miss* while you [unknowingly] allow the mind to take you to the *past* or *future* instead!). With time, you learn to **identify yourself with the silence inside you, not the noise all around you** (or in your head). Be patient. Just "showing up each day" is progress! Do this (and no more) for several days, maybe weeks, to get used to experiencing this quiet time ... being with yourself. Celebrate just "showing up each day." If you hate it, do it anyway (that's just a thought!).

After gaining comfort being with yourself in silence, shift your gaze. Use the 15 min. of silence each day to view your life as a movie. As its **STAR**, you've been playing a part, often with little awareness of the script (thoughts) that created it. Most days, this is the "way life is." BUT ... by *becoming the AUDIENCE in your movie/life*, you listen **for** the thoughts/voices in your head, not **to** them. You can observe yourself by 1) noticing what's happening right now, or 2) mentally *replaying* a day/event/situation that's already passed. Your awareness allows you to **see** how your thoughts are robbing you of the present ... to **see** how thoughts are "having their way with you" and **see** how you've been (unconsciously) letting them do it. *The thoughts will always be there, but as you come to recognize them, you no longer join the drama of their message.* You no longer need to judge/change/fix/follow them; just **get to know** them! Listen ... to your body (what do you feel?) ... to your thoughts (what's going on in your mind?) ... to your intuition (what do you just "know?") ... to the *relationship* between "observer" and "participant." Write down what you learn. Over time, your *awareness alone* calms your mind for the long term. As **you** calm, you go (naturally) from mind-full to mindful. A cool result of your mindfulness: the nonsense of life, others and the world just doesn't bother you anymore ... you're just "watching the show." Peace.

Life lessons from nature: We're often taught that being silent means we're unproductive, so we fill our lives with noise, then wonder why we feel uncomfortable being alone with ourselves. Nature, by contrast, exists against a backdrop of silence. Despite the noise a crow can make, it's silent most of the time. A noisy bobcat fails as a hunter. Trees make no noise as they grow or shed their leaves. Waves make noise, yet they don't "disturb." It's all opposite the model we follow, yet nature displays much of what we'd love – resilience, balance, integrity, peace, productivity. Reconnect yourself with this deepest part of you. You are inseparable from that. Walk in the woods; watch a sunset; sit under a tree for a while; watch it get dark ... ok, even take a back road home from the mall.

Book of the month: *Embers*, by Richard Wagamese. This is perhaps the perfect antidote to our obsession with a world *outside* ourselves. *Embers* offers a path back to the world *inside*. As do I, you may find his words *evoking* a truth uniquely your own. It's perhaps my favorite book on getting to know your **inner** world. A few samples:

I am a traveler on a sacred journey through this one shining day.

I keep what's true in front of me (my heart and my silence). I won't get lost that way. I pack light.

I don't tire myself with unnecessary stuff, like my head, my talk.

To live in ceremony is the greatest and truest gift I can give to myself.

All we have are moments. Live them as though not one can be wasted. Inhabit them, fill them with the light of your best good intention, honor them with your full presence, find the joy, calm, assuredness that allows the hours and the days to take care of themselves. If we can do that, we will have lived.

And, just to offer contrast, my favorite on connecting your true self with the **outer** world is *On the Brink of Everything*, by Parker Palmer. Says it's about getting older, but I find it so powerful about self-discovery in general. A few samples:

Once I understand I'm not the sun, I can get out of the sun's way and stop casting shadows. I can step aside to let the true sun shine on everyone/everything, making all things ripe with life's glow.

As time lengthens like a shadow behind me, and as the time ahead dwindles, my overriding feeling is gratitude for the gift of life.

Openings to New Possibility -- at *The Road Not Taken*: 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. More on my website www.roadnottaken.com ... ideas, articles, newsletters, my books for sale ... as well as an invitation to personalized life coaching.