

**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED**

**M. SCOTT PECK, M.D.**

**WITH A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR**

*The Road  
Less Traveled*

A NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF  
LOVE, TRADITIONAL VALUES  
AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

*M. SCOTT PECK, M.D.*

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To my parents,  
Elizabeth and David,  
whose discipline and love  
gave me the eyes  
to see grace

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*Introduction*  
*to the 1985 hardcover edition of*  
**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED**

Some, after hearing me lecture, occasionally comment, "He's not the same man who wrote the book." That should not be surprising. I wrote this book about growth and change in 1976 and 1977. Assuming I myself am on *The Road Less Traveled*—that I am growing and changing—it is only proper that I should not be the same person I was eight or nine years ago.

Certainly the most meaningful change is that back then I was not a designated Christian, while today I am. It saddens me that there are a few who are dismayed by this change, as if it were a step backward rather than forward. It is understandable, however, since Christianity has not yet generally earned a reputation for open-mindedness. I hope my fellow Christians will join with me in changing this state of affairs.

Yet I regard it as graceful that I wrote *The Road Less Traveled* before I had specifically become a Christian and familiar with the language of Christian theology. This language can be a very useful shorthand for initiates, but for those on the "outside" it generally sounds like so much gobbledegook. If I were writing this book today, I might be unable to resist the temptation to use Christian shorthand, and would thereby scare away a number of readers unnecessarily.

Other readers, interested in my changes, frequently ask what parts of *The Road Less Traveled* I would now like to alter. Actually, there is only one thing I wrote which is dead wrong—my suggestion that pets are incapable of spiritual growth. It is an error. I want to apologize to those who have truly extended themselves to nurture the development of their pets.

But there are a great many things in these pages which, while not wrong, would benefit from footnoting, elaboration, refinement, or modification of some sort. A number of readers, for instance, feel they have detected hints of a bias against homosexuals. It is not a simple subject, but the truth is that I am in complete agreement with the position of the American Psychiatric Association that homosexuality per se is not a disease or a disorder. Other readers have taken my remarks about "open marriage" and love in relationship to psychotherapy as some sort of blessing upon heterosexual promiscuity. That, too, is a misreading of my intention.

Then there are theological issues. Concepts such as our human calling to deification and the operation of God in and through our unconscious minds, although not false, deserve considerable further

discussion of the fine points involved. Other fine points, too numerous to list, also merit elaboration, but are better left to a later time and later books.

Here, however, there is one important addition: an index. Many have requested it, and I am grateful to my editor, Fred Hills, and to Simon and Schuster for providing it. But most of all, I am grateful to you, the readers of *The Road Less Traveled*. It is your affection for the book which has made this special edition possible.

It has also made possible a number of other things. One is a study guide, *Exploring The Road Less Traveled* (Simon and Schuster), written by Alice and Walden Howard out of their experience leading a large number of study groups on the book. Their work, which contains, in appropriate sections, suggestions for journaling, gestalt exercises, and literary, biblical, and philosophical references, has already been found most valuable by many individuals, groups, and group leaders in their use of *The Road* to “nurture one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”

More personally, your extraordinary response to this book has turned my own life quite topsy-turvy. There have been stresses and strains, but they have been far outnumbered by blessings. One blessing has been your encouragement to continue writing. Another is a whole new career: lecturing and leading community-building workshops. This, in turn, has allowed me the opportunity to travel the length and breadth of the land. I have met so many wonderful people, and I must often resist the temptation to let the attention you have given me go to my head. But I have generally experienced your response to me and my work as profoundly humbling. I have been graced.

Sometimes a person will ask, “Dr. Peck, since you wrote *The Road Less Traveled*, have you had any more examples of grace?”

“It just goes on and on,” is, of course, my response.

I do much of my writing these days on airplanes. It is very precious time for me. So on a recent flight from Hartford to Minneapolis I gave the man in the window seat my usual nonverbal signals that I was not interested in talking with him, and I was glad to see that he gave me equally strong nonverbal messages that he didn’t want to talk either. We sat in complete silence together during the hour-long flight from Hartford to Buffalo, he reading a novel and I staring diligently at the yellow pad on my lap even when I was not writing on it. We continued our silence throughout a long layover in the Buffalo airport. It was forty minutes out of Buffalo and thirty minutes east of Minneapolis that the first words passed between us when he looked up from his novel and out of the clear blue sky—literally and figuratively—asked, “Excuse me, but you don’t happen by any chance to know the meaning of the word ‘serendipity,’ do you?”

Smiling, I told him that, as far as I knew, I was the only person in the country who had written a significant portion of a book on that very subject. I suggested it was serendipity that at the moment he needed to know the meaning of the word, he happened to be sitting next to an authority.

He asked me what my book was about. On such occasions, even I am aware enough to put aside my yellow pad. I told him it was a kind of integration of psychology and religion. He said he wasn't sure about religion any more. I asked him what he meant.

"Well," he replied, "I'm not a scholar or anything, just a moderately successful salesman from Iowa. I grew up in the Methodist Church, and I'm still a member. But I've got all kinds of questions. I mean I really have trouble believing the Virgin Birth and that sort of thing. In fact, sometimes I'm not even sure I believe the Resurrection any more. Jesus is real to me, so I'm a bit sad because it looks like I'm going to have to leave the church."

I told him that in my book I had written, "The path to holiness lies through questioning everything." And I went on to say that, as far as I was concerned, the discouragement of doubt was one of the greatest sins of our sinful church. Doubt was an essential step in the maturing of faith.

We continued our conversation until we parted at the Minneapolis airport and my seatmate commented, "I don't have the foggiest idea what any of this really means, but maybe I don't have to leave the church after all."

Traveling around the country and meeting many of you has also given me the privilege of being able to have a kind of finger on the pulse of this nation in its "sickness and health." As a result I have lost all my old Yankee stereotypes, yet at the same time, learned to appreciate regional differences and the rapid changes which are occurring in many parts of the country. The one constant I find, however, whether it be in the Northeast, the South, the Midwest or the West, is the relative lack of, and thirst for, community. This in turn led me to meet with ten others on the first day of Advent 1984, to establish the Foundation for Community Encouragement. If you want to know more about the Foundation, or if you want to participate in the kind of networking which this book has been giving rise to, please write to the Foundation at its central office in: The 1900 Building, Suite 412, 1900 North Winston Road, Knoxville, Tennessee 37919.

An early reader of *The Road* wisely said to me, "It's not your book, you know." She was right in several respects. As I have told many, it is a better book than I could have written. Sometimes I glance at a page and think, "Wow, this is pretty good stuff. This guy actually seems to know what he is talking about." I hardly mean to imply that *The Road Less*

*Traveled* is a direct, undistorted work from God, or that I wrote it in some kind of trance. But I do feel that I had help and that the book was largely a gift to me. It is also not so much my book as your book. And it is your gift as much as God's. You are the ones who have made it popular, in the sense that it is a book for people.

You are in fact, an extraordinary group of people. Although I wish you were, you are not an average cross-section of America or world citizenry. The reality is that you are what can best be described as a "humble elite." And among the extraordinary things about you is that many, if not most of you, have received substantial psychotherapy either from professional therapists or through some group program of psycho-spiritual growth, notably AA. As an indication of this, the very first letter I received seven years ago began: "Dear Dr. Peck: You must be an alcoholic." The writer could not believe I was able to write *The Road* without having been humbled by alcoholism and living out the principles of AA.

To receive psychotherapy one must be humble. One does not enter psychotherapy with genuine intent if one thinks of herself or himself as perfectly adequate or completely in control of life. Virtually all of you have been sufficiently "unproud" to be able to acknowledge your brokenness and need for growth. Indeed, it is precisely because you are humble that you are simultaneously elite. It is of you Jesus was speaking when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

In the course of psychotherapy, one is willing to examine how she or he has been programmed by heritage, by genes, by childhood traumas and blessings, by the media, society, and culture. This is extraordinarily significant! For it means that virtually all of you have been deprogrammed, or are in the process of becoming deprogrammed. You are becoming free!

In fact, you are in the process of transcending traditional culture. That is precisely what I began unknowingly to do when at age fifteen I quit school and left the path assigned to me. It can be a lonely journey—and sometimes even a bit sad. For example, I have a good friend, colleague, and client, Ralph, who was born and raised in certain traditions. A year ago a niece, who still lived in them, was elected one of six regional homecoming queens. As a moment in the ritual of the homecoming celebration, each queen's father presents her with a rose. But this girl's father had died in a farming accident. So she called her Uncle Ralph to see if he was willing to stand in her father's stead. He was, and happily flew "home" for the occasion.

For twenty minutes of his first session afterwards, Ralph regaled me with tales of the weekend. He described how each queen was dressed in a gown of the same style but a different color. He told how, during halftime of the football game, each girl was driven four times around



the field in an open Impala convertible, the color of which matched the color of her dress. He described in vivid detail that and all the other ceremonies of the weekend. I listened, enthralled.

"But I'm depressed," Ralph then said, "and I don't know why. I started to feel that way the moment I got on the plane to come back."

"Depression and sadness are very close," I commented, "but what I sense in you is more like sadness."

"You're right," Ralph said. "That's what I'm feeling. But I've got no reason to be sad."

"Yes, you do," I countered.

"I do?" Ralph looked puzzled. "Why should I feel sad?"

"Because you've lost your home."

"My home?"

"Yes, your roots. You're sad because you've lost your roots."

Ralph seemed even more puzzled and I tried to explain. "For the last twenty minutes you've told me in exquisite detail about some of the rituals of your hometown with the brilliant objective eye of a cultural anthropologist describing a primitive tribe. There's no way you could have done that if you were still a part of the culture. You're an outsider in relation to your origins. I suspect you're feeling sad because the visit made you realize that you no longer belong to the culture in which you were raised, that you can never again really belong there. You've lost your home."

"You're right," Ralph said. "I can't really go home again, can I? But you know, I wouldn't have it otherwise. I'm glad to be back with my wife and with you and with our other fellow pilgrims. But it's still a bit sad."

Throughout the ages there have been only one or two in millions—a Socrates or a Jesus—who have obviously risen above the culture of their day, whose loyalties have transcended national boundaries and have become rooted in the eternal. But the popularity of *The Road Less Traveled* signifies to me that, as a result of mass communications, psychotherapy, and grace, we are no longer talking about one in a million in this country, but one in twenty. One of the things I have found most striking about my lecture audiences is that they just don't "buy it" any more. They don't believe in "America First." They don't believe everything they read in the newspapers. They don't believe the hype of politicians. They're no longer sucked in by their family or tribal games.

The process of transcending culture is indeed a lonely one. Many of you feel at least partially alienated from your families and isolated from old friends and cultural rituals. That is a necessary concomitant of the spiritual journey. As I quoted T. S. Eliot describing it in relation to the Journey of the Magi, "We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, but