

A Deeper Meaning

Jacob was hanging out with a guy he knew whose name was Mark, and while he hadn't known this person very long, and by very long it had been less than 3 years, they had become friends. Three years could be a long time but the two men rarely saw each other. They first met when Jacob hurt his shoulder quite seriously, and needed someone to stack his winter wood supply. They were an odd mix, with an unlikely combination of pasts to have become close. Their extraordinary differences ranged from education to finance, to the condition of their vehicles, and to how they took care of themselves and their properties. Their biggest similarity was their hearts and minds were both good, untouched by the meanness that often surrounded them or the meanness they had lived through. Both had lived full lives, which had taken them literally from the safety of their families and friends, and out into a world of competition, deceit, and treachery. Jacob was older than Mark by fourteen years. Once each had left the safety of their family and the friends they had partially grown up with, and because they were both from broken, dysfunctional homes, they found a world of more disharmony. Interspersed in the world they had stepped into were also many good people, but these two lived their lives in the company of people whose realities were often fuelled by illegal drugs and copious amounts of alcohol, and so, because of the company they kept their social orbits were limited. As they grew older Jacob had gone to college and earned a degree in Computer Science, and he also obtained his certification as a Life Coach. He moved on from the hard work of labouring for his wages, and he made a lot more money. Mark bought a home too, and he worked in the forests he dearly loved being in. His main business was selling firewood to the people in the surrounding counties. Since the woods were inaccessible in winter due to the deep snow, Mark also worked

as a handyman. Mark was a good worker, and he was honest. Mark wasn't always on-time but Jacob didn't care about that. As they talked, worked together, and got to know each other, they found they each had the same propensity towards people.

The older man had changed his social orbit many decades earlier after the birth of his children. The change left Jacob alone and confused for many years. It is true that he stopped his carousing, and in doing so his life became tame. But he was undeterred because he wanted to give his children a life they would love. It was as if Jacob felt compelled to sacrifice his life for the sake of his children. Jacob did very well for many years, and he did everything he could to make his children's lives happy. Everyday Jacob's intention was to do what his children wanted and needed. His children grew up, his children grew away from him, and Jacob grew, even more, to prefer calm, minimally stimulating people and environments. Jacob would often feel completely drained after socializing and to regain his energy he needed to spend time alone.

The first inclination of these two men was to treat everyone they met as if they too possessed good, honest hearts and minds, and despite being disappointed time after time after time, each of them kept the same optimism and hope that they would meet people who were the same as they were in heart and mind. But Mark had problems with the people he was meeting, and Jacob had problems with the people he was meeting, and so the stalemate and frustration continued throughout the many years of their lives. It is true that they both met several people whom they both loved and became true friends with, and still each had moved on for their own reasons leaving those friendships behind.

Mark seemed to be much more of an extrovert, and, seemingly, he sought out people every day, or they sought him out. This was a major difference between them as Mark had kept his

socialization open and thriving while Jacob had not. Jacob had become very limited socially, and so their even meeting was by chance. And really all they did was to act as gregariously as they always did, but one little known aspect of people who are socially gregarious is that often times they are only looking for a certain characteristic, or characteristics, in the people they meet. Once they know the answer as to whether a person has or doesn't have the type of character, or characteristics, they are looking for they decide what to do.

Jacob was more prone to, and able to, be alone than the other man. And while he was always being gregarious during his rare social outings, his reason for even talking to people was he was always optimistic about finding people of his ilk. But really most of what Jacob found were people living their lives without deep meaning, or people who were only interested in transactional relationships. Neither of those relationships were bad or negative in any way, but Jacob refused to settle for less than he wanted. By not settling for less he would navigate his life mostly alone.

Mark hadn't gotten to Jacob's place of preferring solitude over pretence. And so, Mark's life still consisted of having the same mostly shallow, mostly non-nurturing relationships over and over while he was still expecting a different result. And many times, he was experiencing the same outcome with the same people who had let him down previously. The older man began suggesting, teaching him even, the word no. "Just say no" the older man would tell him, but old habits are difficult to change especially in small towns where friendships are often based on needs. Those who have more than those with little or nothing are often asked to give. Even if it's simply their time so they can mend a neighbor's fence, or carry in firewood, or remove snow, once you've done it for someone they come to ask again, and others think it's fair to ask you to

do it for them too. For Mark his habits of helping others became subconscious to him, and helping people became an acceptable pattern of behavior for him. Many of the people he was helping took his help for granted and that behavior wasn't acceptable to Mark, and he would often complain about those people in his life. Mark would get so busy helping others that his own life suffered. His home, property, cars, trucks, and even his business began to fail because there wasn't enough time for him to do his own jobs, maintenance and repairs.

And so, the times these two odd-fellows spent together would range from happy-go-lucky times, to times of deeper conversations, to times of working together. Jacob's injured shoulder had healed and he was able to work more, but still he needed Mark to help him with many of the jobs around his half acre property. Often times weeks would go by without them seeing other, but usually a phone call or a text message would stop there being a void of quiet.

Jacob, who was prone to deep, serious thought, would often write stories about a happier world. Stories that contained characters who were willing to ask and answer his two most compelling questions of who am I and why am I here. And stories about people who had good hearts and minds, or, if their hearts and minds weren't good, the stories told of how they went about a life of introspection that would make their hearts and minds better, until they finally lived with happiness. Jacob wrote about good people, or at least people becoming good people, and that was the sole reason for Jacob's social gregariousness, and those were the people Jacob sought. Jacob had graduated from many grades in the school of life, and he was still graduating from post school of life classes by learning the ever-changing curriculum of life.

Jacob had finally, for the most part, more than a half a year earlier, turned his television off. He had not watched the news since then and while he tried to watch a few shows that interested him,

the commercials became too egregious, and went on too long, for him to bear. Jacob wanted to control what was coming into his mind, and he couldn't do that while watching television, especially the news. He couldn't pick the content nor the quality of the content, because all of that was decided by others. Jacob grew content to sit in the quiet of his home, located in the forest in which he lived.

One evening he had this thought:

As the mind empties out the daily trivia that society wants to clutter it with, you become free to think your thoughts.

The next day Jacob sat down and wrote this to nobody in particular:

I'm not sure you remember me telling you this but I dropped out at 17 years old after a very difficult first 17 years. I loved finally being free. Of course, we're never really free are we? There are always going to be rules and laws, some written which are legal laws, while others are written in religions, and while they're not legal they are punishable because of the peer pressure of the religion you belong to. But trying to conform by getting a steady job, or a steady anything always led to boredom and frustration for me. Once I had mastered the thing I was doing, whether that was marriage, working as an auto mechanic, or whatever, I didn't see the point in doing it any longer and I didn't want to do it again. It wasn't as pleasurable as doing a new thing. And so, I wandered and drifted. Looking back would have contained responsibility and potential pain for doing what I wanted and needed to do, and that meant having to hurt others, and so I tried not to look back. The pleasure of going forward was too good to even consider stopping.

Not too many years ago, maybe a decade ago, I decided that the life I was leading was without

deep meaning.

I had chosen a life of pleasure to escape the pit of pain I lived with when I wasn't distracted by pleasure.

I began the long and very difficult path of extricating myself from that situation and I developed a physical problem that almost killed me. Or maybe it was the other way around? But I didn't die, and eventually my plan to once again drop out of the rat race came to fruition.

It took a longer time than I thought.

I've paid a lot of voluntary, self-punishment for the wrongs I've done, and I've apologized to those I hurt without expectations. I've forgiven the wrongs done to me without expectations too.

Receiving nothing in return was more difficult than I had presumed it would be, and I was surprised that no one felt else the need to apologize for their part in the dysfunction relationships I was apologizing for.

I'm living a life of meaning now and, while I'm occasionally lonely, I'm normally happy.

Occasionally I'll meet someone to hang out with and then I'm happier.

I'm like this now:

I pay attention

I'm astonished by life

I write about it.

These are the Commandments I wrote and that I try to live by:

My 9 Commandments

- 1- Your relationship with god should be first in your life.*
- 2- The relationship with your self should be your number one human relationship*
- 3- You should strive to have the highest moral character*

- 4- *Neither gender should try to dominate the other, or each other, in any way*
- 5- *Marriage should be between consenting adults*
- 6- *Always do the next right thing*
- 7- *You should not join a tribe nor a gang to dominate others*
- 8- *Forgiveness of others and yourself should be a priority*
- 9- *These commandments are intended for the consenting adult in you*

And just to clarify I write god in lower case to differentiate from the God referred to in religions.

My commandments are not difficult to follow and the only enforcement is from one self, or not.

And finally, as your mind empties the daily trivia that society wants to clutter it with, you become free to think and hear your own thoughts.

Jacob had yet to ask, or even to hint to Mark, either of those two questions, because there were still many rudimentary topics to go over. But the time was coming for Mark to graduate, just as it had been for Jacob. Jacob felt his *who am I? and why am I here?* questions had led him to where he was today, and he felt where he was today was a good and honourable place to be. To Jacob it was obvious that the answers to those two questions would change as one lived their life, and yet he always felt he needed to remind people of that fact and those questions. For instance, when his first child was born the answers to those two questions changed, when his second child was born the answers were reinforced, and when he became a single parent, the answers became far more complex. Jacob wasn't ready nor was he prepared to be a single parent. Jacob was mostly ignored as a child growing up, and so he didn't have the requisite knowledge to be a parent. He did good for many years as a single parent, but when his children became teenagers, he didn't understand what happened. They seemed dissatisfied and rebellious towards him, and try as did his family seemed unhappy. He kept asking the two questions, and he was dissatisfied

with the answers. Jacob had lived his adult life in a way that allowed him to leave whenever he got bored or unsatisfied. He would simply leave wherever or whomever he was with. But he couldn't do that here or now. Jacob was stuck. Intellectually he knew that failure to lead a life of deep meaning would sometimes cause a person to live a life of pleasure, because pleasure was a great escape mechanism.

The transition from a life of meaning to one of pleasure was actually seamless for Jacob. He loved his beautiful cars, he loved his fabulous ocean boat, and he loved the Pacific Ocean. His many new hobbies from crabbing to salmon fishing kept him occupied and distracted from the pain he was hiding from. When his children were finally gone Jacob forgot to ask his two questions again, and he got so caught up in the pleasure he was finding that he forgot for nearly two decades. Finally, several seemingly random and seemingly unconnected events happened which reminded him to ask his two questions again. Jacob, as he once again answered those two questions, was deeply embarrassed for whom he had let himself become, for his actions, and for forgetting who he was and why he was here.

One thing Jacob knew for sure was there was too much meanness in the media, on the news, everywhere it seemed, and too much meanness in a lot of people. He'd lost several dear friends of 20 and more years because their hearts got mean. It seemed to Jacob that many people had put a cap on their intelligence, and on their ability to behave in a caring and considerate manner. Jacob's heart wasn't mean and he knew he needed to protect it. He hadn't watched the news in 6 months at least and he began to love the calming effect that had on him.

This time answering those two simple questions caused a major, life-altering transition. The change was radical and, while it took almost a year to complete, that time was packed with

change after change after change. Every change was a major change; he sold his home, he sold his luxury cars and his beloved boat, he sold his business, and he even left his girlfriend to move from the city to a cabin in the woods where he had few close neighbours. Jacob decided he didn't want new friends, and he didn't want to make enemies. Jacob wanted a rest from the outside world, and everything was the outside world to Jacob. Of course, he needed some of the outside world, but he wanted it on his terms this time. Diminishing his need for the outside world was actually a lot easier than he thought it would be. The change was as easy as not watching television, and while that required some getting used, it was actually also quite natural for him. He turned off all notifications on his smart phone for instance, so then his smart phone wasn't interrupting him any longer. The text messages could wait until he wanted to check if there were any. The only noise his phone made was if he received a telephone call, but he turned off the notification when someone left him a voicemail. Jacob simply wanted to be left alone by the world, and that included the electronic world too.

Mark understood Jacob's need to be left alone, while at the same time understanding that Jacob liked him. Mark also understood that Jacob understood him too. Thus, the two men could talk, laugh, work together, or just hang out and be friends, and their understanding of each other was based on fact and reliable evidence.

It's a strange but true fact that many people know what they don't want or don't like, rather than what they do want and do like. And probably that fact helped them get to know each other. Jacob's gregariousness was purely to find if a person was suitable to be allowed into his world. Usually, it didn't take but several minutes to ascertain that answer. Probably each of them saying to the other what they meant repeatedly produced an acceptance and trust in the other.

Perhaps each person doing what they said they would do repeatedly, produced an acceptance and trust in the other. And perhaps choosing to laugh about the things that could have divided them also produced an acceptance and trust in the other. Whatever the combination was it worked, and each man was freed from the shackles that usually thwarted a meaningful friendship.

And of course, the one trait they both shared and kept was their getaway trait. Their getaway trait was if things were to go wrong for whatever reason, or for any reasons, either one of them, or both of them, could simply walk away. Walking away would be nothing new, and for both these men it would be natural. Mark had left so many friends and family members that now he was unfazed or only fazed for only a few days by his moves.

Mark would tell Jacob how his goal was to visit his father before his father's death, and so Jacob figured if Mark ever left that's where he would go. Jacob for his part, didn't really care where he went next. Well, he cared, but his caring was pragmatic and not about family at all. Jacob wanted a place with plenty of water, an area with a low threat of wildfire, an area with little to no crime, and an area either near the ocean or on a high hill overlooking a river. This difference in where they wanted to go next was really where the two men's paths split.

The two men could stay or they could go, and it was odd to them both that there was such a lack of anxiety or emotion as to what their choice might be. They sometimes alluded to their innate need to go somewhere new after a time. Then they would laugh and shake hands or do a fist bump, and laugh again. Mark had moved to his little town eight years prior, and Jacob, while he had owned his cabin for two decades plus, had only lived there fulltime six years ago. For now, they were both good. Life was good for Jacob, and Mark was showing signs of unrest. Unrest in people was always a good sign to Jacob. Neither man was hiding from anyone or anything,

neither men were carrying the load of another person like a wife or girlfriend, and neither had an anchor thrown out.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © June 11th, 2022