

The Road Less Traveled Summary

By Morgan Scott Peck

How do you feel your life is going at the moment? According to M. Scott Peck, 'life is difficult.' In fact, that's how he begins *The Road Less Traveled*. While this may seem extraordinarily cynical, there's method in Peck's claim. Many of us may feel that problem-solving, and facing our issues are best avoided, because these actions cause us to experience pain. We tend to try and avoid suffering as much as possible, because we're predisposed to shelving any feelings of despair and discomfort. However, as many studies show, avoiding pain typically causes us to feel a much greater sense of loss and sorrow later on.

The Road Less Traveled suggests that we consider taking the alternative route – the metaphorical road that's filled with bumps, potholes, and possibilities for getting lost. By taking these roads, instead of the easier ones, we'll become more spiritually enlightened, and will grow in ways that we can't imagine.

Dr. M. Scott Peck uses his professional experience as a psychiatrist to give us strategies to deal with life's pain and disappointments. *The Road Less Traveled* is an international bestseller, having sold more than seven million copies. Furthermore, five years after being written, it reached the *New York Times* bestseller list, and made it into the *Guinness Book of World Records*. In short, few self-help books have reached this level of recognition.

This summary will take you briefly down the road less traveled. It's a solemn and sobering read, but it provides insight into psychological change, and recognizing limitations as they occur. For many, the life-

changing strategies and insights that this book offers, have enabled them to grow and adapt to struggles and daily suffering. This timeless classic explores ideas of love, discipline, suffering, and evil, and adds insight into mental illness, anxiety, stress, and everyday crises. We know that each day brings a series of new challenges and disappointments, and we'd be delusional to think we're immune to this. By truly understanding the concepts in this book, we're guided towards a state of increased serenity and inner peace, so that we can begin to experience the richness and excitement of everyday life.

Life Is Difficult

The central tenet is that life is difficult, and that the road to spiritual enlightenment and fulfillment is long. There are no shortcuts, so the lessons in this book may seem arduous at times, but there aren't any quick fixes regarding spiritual growth and self-awareness. As the sayings go, 'change doesn't happen overnight,' and 'Rome wasn't built in a day.'

The first stage of the journey along the road less traveled, is genuinely accepting that life is complicated. The idea is once we can reconcile that life isn't easy, and isn't supposed to be easy, then we will be able to cope with obstacles a lot more effectively. So we need to embrace life's difficulties, and then take responsibility for all of our problems and hardships.

How often do you say things like, 'I'll sort that out later,' or 'I'll confront her some other time'? Running away from problems is never the answer, and one of the critical lessons of this book is to tackle problems and difficulties as they arise, because problems never just go away.

Take Alcoholics Anonymous as an example. The first step, 'we admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable,' illustrates that the first step to any form of problem-solving is admitting that there's a problem to be solved. Prior to joining Alcoholics Anonymous, many alcoholics experience feelings of denial about their addiction. It's only when they take ownership of their problems that they're able to face them head-on. This first step takes incredible bravery and discipline, but it's a crucial part of the journey towards recovery.

The next step takes us back to the idea that change doesn't happen overnight, and that solving one's problems takes a lot of time and energy. In short, it takes discipline. Many of us often begin the process of change or personal growth, but then lose the willpower and strength, and end up back to where we started. Part one of this book deals with discipline and how it's at the core of all aspects of our health: be it emotional, psychological, spiritual, or physical.

We've looked at the importance of taking responsibility for our actions. However, we also need to have a strong focus on the truth, and being cognizant of balance and balanced behavior. When it comes to decisions, there aren't any quick fixes and it's absolutely crucial that we consider all of the factors and how the decision will affect not only ourselves, but others. Then there's the idea of delayed gratification.

Delayed gratification is one of the cornerstones of self-discipline. To define delayed gratification, let's look at Jackie and Nick. Their parents worked every single Christmas, and so Jackie and Nick would only be allowed to open their presents on the evening of Christmas Day. The whole day they would see other children playing with their gifts, and would anxiously wait for their parents to come home from work so that

they could start celebrating. After a long family discussion about the day's work, the family would eventually sit down and open their presents. Over time, every family member found themselves delaying the opening of presents for longer and longer, and enjoying the ritualized chat beforehand. The family grew much closer together, thrived on long conversations, and enjoyed their gifts so much more because they got to hold onto the experience. Even though Jackie and Nick's parents have retired, the ritual of delaying presents and spending time chatting before giving and receiving gifts, has become a fixture of their Christmas celebrations. Patience, and being able to wait for things, can bring enormous and unexpected rewards.

We all need to accept that lasting change is a result of a long and tiring journey, and that we need to lean on others to support us along the way. Other people are crucial on our individual journeys, but we also need to be wary of emphasizing love as the guiding light towards infinite happiness.

Putting Love Into Perspective

We're often told that love makes the world go round. We've been told a lot about love, and often we're led to believe that we won't be truly happy until we find true love. The trouble with this is that love can make us lose our sense of purpose and individuality.

According to Peck, love is separateness and understanding one's partner as their own person, with their own personal journey. This doesn't just apply to our intimate partners, but to every person with whom we have a relationship. Furthermore, self-love is a significant part of enlightenment and fulfillment, and needs to be nurtured continuously. This section of the book is challenging, and requires a lot of self-reflexivity, but it

provides valuable insight into reevaluating our relationships.

Let's look at parenting as an example. Are you very similar to your parents, very different, or somewhere in between? Take the example of Sarah and her daughter Sophie. Sarah grew up in a very traditional family in terms of gender roles, and expects her daughter to cook, clean, and marry a good husband who will provide for her. Sophie has no interest in domesticity and wants to be able to study and provide for herself. As a result, Sarah and Sophie argue relentlessly and cannot understand each other. Sarah feels disappointed continuously, and as if she has failed as a mother, and Sophie experiences constant guilt and isolation from her mother. Although they love each other, they're unable to come to terms with the idea that love is separate. We can't expect everyone we love to be just like us, no matter how much we want this.

What's more, exploring and engaging with our relationships helps us to become more self-aware. Love isn't about dependency, it's about freedom, and one of the key lessons is that we need to be more sensitive and understand another's differences. Once again, this takes discipline, and all parties need to make an effort to sustain and nurture love.

Love Is a Risk

Love is a risk because it can cause extreme suffering. Have you ever heard the saying that 'love is a verb'? Many of us think that love is a magical and all-encompassing feeling, but love takes a lot of commitment and discipline.

In psychotherapy, there's a term called cathexis. When we experience love, we often feel connected to something or someone. Emotional

investment is a powerful feeling. Do you have a sentimental object that you cathect? Do you remember meeting someone for the first time and having instant chemistry with them? Cathecting often clouds our judgment, and the lesson here is that faithful and lasting love is about commitment and working towards long-lasting solutions.

Most relationships fail because partners don't put in the hard work. They also believe in the mythology of love and embody all of the feelings we experience when we cathect. To truly understand love, we need to work at and nurture our relationships, and be realistic about ourselves and our partners.

Religion as a Worldview

In the second half of the book, the author redefines religion, suggesting that we think about it in terms of a worldview.

According to Peck, there's a divine deity that's responsible for grace, and that when life is difficult, spirituality will fill in all of the unknowns. The suggestion here is that every human has a religion, and here it's worth using the synonym "worldview." The idea of a worldview is that every culture and society has standards and beliefs, which enable us to live our lives more critically.

What is your belief system?

It's unlikely that you don't believe anything at all. The argument here is that everyone has some sort of worldview or belief that guides us. Using a wide range of case studies and examples, Peck shows how religion can be an obstacle or a helpful tool to help someone reach self-actualization.

There are many misconceptions about religion, and many of our reactions towards it are steeped in cultural and social traditions. Hence, if religion has been used as a weapon against us, or if it has been used as a source of comfort, we interpret it in different ways.

Alongside religion, is the idea of grace. This is viewed in terms of our conscious and unconscious, and how we allow openness and a sense of purpose to flow through us. According to the author, grace is a protective force that enables a sense of stability and wellness.

Why is it that some people can cope with trauma, and others find it more difficult?

The author believes that this is because a force and an instinct protect us so that we survive. The more we listen to and interact with our beliefs and spirituality, the more heightened this force. Peck gives examples of numerous everyday miracles and states that, 'the miracles described indicate that our growth as human beings is being assisted by a force other than our conscious will.'

Achieving Our Goals

Achieving our goals, and solving problems take discipline. Being disciplined means that we have to negate any sense of laziness. When you think of laziness, you probably think about not working hard enough, procrastinating, or not going for that run you promised yourself you'd go on. However, laziness comes in many different forms, and often we jump to conclusions, or make poor decisions because we don't think them through enough. Our author takes us back to the Garden of Eden, and suggests that had Adam and Eve thought more critically about eating the

apple, they would have come to a different conclusion. The gift of rational thought comes down to spending time solving problems, and not being lazy with internal and external conversations.

What's more, many of us are lazy when it comes to altering our mindsets, or searching for knowledge.

In Conclusion

There are a lot of stories about traveling along roads, and meeting people along the way. As with all things, if you pick the easy route, you're likely to find like-minded people who have chosen the same path. *The Road Less Traveled* isn't only about your own personal journey and spiritual growth, but about other people's encounters and how they have dealt with life's hardships. And, that's not to say that everyone is successful at overcoming obstacles and challenges. There are numerous cases where individuals have refused change, or have lost interest in the process.

The first step is accepting that life is hard, and it's not always fair. Once you've done this, you can take back control, and everything else falls into place, provided that you're committed and accept responsibility for everything in your life. Relationships are hard; achieving our goals is hard; dealing with mental illness and suffering is hard. Still, once we know this, we can remove our rose-tinted glasses and get down to the business of becoming happier and more fulfilled.

And, as with all things in life, it's not about the destination at the end of the road, it's about traveling slowly and carefully down the road in order to accept and embrace suffering and hardships. After all, as Peck says, 'problems do not go away. They must be worked through or else they

remain, forever a barrier to the growth and development of the spirit.'

So, how will you take back control and make the brave decision to choose the road less traveled?