

## The Talmud of Paddling

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## **What Paddling Has Taught Me:**

(\*Not that I live by all these lessons, but I try!!!)

This presentation was inspired by the writing of the ancient Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament, a life of travelling in the wilderness, and my teenaged nephews and nieces. For me, a canoe trip is really a metaphor for life's journey. Any lesson learned on a canoe trip can and should be applied to the vagaries of our journey through life.

- **Clean up Your own mess!**  
I mean this in every sense, from our own office to the world, from the physical to the emotional and spiritual. We must take personal responsibility for our actions, and do something about those actions. .
- **Don't be afraid to quit your job and go paddling every now and then.**
- **Better to be on shore wishing you were out there in the storm and to be out there in the storm wishing you were on shore.**  
One secret to a long and happy life is knowing when its time to leave. This applies to every life situation, including death. One secret to a long, happy life is knowing when its time to leave.
- **Never criticize anyone's paddling technique without first criticizing your own.**  
We have to understand our own weaknesses and strengths to gain the qualifications to judge others.
- **You can't spend too much time on the water in a canoe.**  
...unless you are not sharing this time with family and friends
- **Run rapids with humility, dump graciously.**  
No one ever conquers a river. The river may graciously allow you to descend its waters with the open side up...or not.
- **Whether you paddle a rapid successfully or dump, learn why.**  
We really learn best by our failures, not our successes. So don't worry about screwing up, because that's the best route towards perfection.
- **paddle modestly with your god and dog**  
Don't flaunt your lifestyle, your beliefs, your successes. The river that leads to truth is to be travelled with humility. If your lose sight of this, you're sure to dump in the next rapid.

- **If you blame someone else for dumping in a rapid, you can be certain it was your own fault!**  
Find someone who points the finger of blame at someone else, and you need only follow the pointing finger back to the source to find where blame inevitably lies.
- **You can't eat too much oatmeal!**  
I get about five miles of paddling to one cup of oatmeal.
- **Paddle alone whenever you can, paddle a long ways alone sometimes.**  
In our 24/7 multi-tasking world, the pace of life seems to be ever-increasing. People are becoming more uncomfortable about not being 'connect' at all times by cell phones and satellite phones and 'blackberries' and email. However, to be truly connected, you must leave your phone at home, and be alone with your self and your soul. You won't miss anything important, and, in fact, you will miss out on important things if you neglect being alone.
- **Wear soft-soled shoes; this is good for the soul, your canoe, the earth, and you won't track in dirt.**  
The human 'footprint' on our planet keeps getting bigger. If you reduce your footprint on the planet, no matter how small the individual effect, you can be sure you are doing the right thing.
- **Anything that keeps you away from your canoe and water should be used in moderation.**  
Don't get distracted from the really important things in life – family, freinds, soul, spirit, earth, water, planet, universe, starry nights. Its been said many times that no epitath ever mentioned how many extra hours were spent at the office.
- **Long canoe trips remind us that ordinary things are miraculous.**  
A single green leaf, the stars in the sky, rivers that never run dry, the sun and the moon and the earth spinning through space, your beating heart – these are all miracles, gifts given to us, with nothing asked for in return. Every day is filled with miracles.
- **Long canoe trips are completed one paddle stroke at a time.**  
Always strive towards what seems at first impossible. After a few paddle strokes, you will soon see that within us all is the abiltity to achieve what seemed impossible.
- **Finish the canoe trips you start, unless it will kill you (that would really finish your trip!).**  
Its usually the best decision to complete the projects you start, the commitments you make, the promises promised, unless circumstances have changed drastically.
- **Remember, if it doesn't kill you, it will make a good story!**

Whenever you are in a pickle, think of how good a story it will make, and that will make you feel better.

- **Dream big; take small steps towards big dreams.**  
Its not the trouble to dream small.
- **Don't be afraid to fail; it is the best way to learn how to succeed**  
Its really the only way to learn.
- **let someone cut in front of you (and I don't mean just when driving)**  
Except in a canoe race!!!!
- **On canoe trips, make yourself a hot lunch, and while you're at it, make some extra for someone else.**  
You just never know who might paddle around the bend. In my experience, I met some of my best friends on a river. There's no better way to strike up a friendship than by sharing hot bannock.
- **seek beauty...if you add beauty to your life, or to the earth, you can be sure you are doing the right thing.**  
There are elements of beauty that are common to all peoples. It is these elements of beauty that bring us closer to "god". In a selfless search for beauty, no one can lose their bearings for long.
- **If you are lost, wet, and cold, sit down and make a cup of tea.**  
We often expend a lot of energy and generate a lot of angst worrying about things we can't change, about choices we have made that can't be undone, at least not right away. A cup of tea restores one's perspective.
- **If you are still lost, wet and cold, then go to sleep. The world will look better after a good snooze.**
- **Persistence and perseverance are the most powerful forces in the universe, next to love.**  
It is miraculous, almost unbelievable, what a persistent, persevering, paddler can accomplish. Continents have been crossed and criss-crossed by ordinary people in fragile canoes.
- **Seek happiness where you might find it. Don't waste your time looking where you already know it wont be.**  
Life is too precious and short, too full of uncertainties.
- **beware of obsessions about possessions. Having too much stuff can keep you from paddling.**

Success in our society is measured by how much stuff we own. But really, all we have that is of value is, like the TV commercial says, priceless. For everything else....but what else do you really need but a good canoe and the loan of a good chunk of time.

- **Each year, paddle somewhere you haven't been before.**  
Always seek out new experiences. Don't get in a rut. Even if the rut feels comfortable.
- **Face your fears of rapids, bugs, bears, no indoor plumbing, being alone...they are not nearly as scary as you think.**  
Stretch your comfort levels. Most fears are in our imaginations.
- **No canoe trip is perfect**  
It may rain too much, the wind is always in your face, the portage trails are swamps. And that's what makes every canoe trip perfect. As Leonard Cohen says, "There are cracks in everything". And that's what makes life so rich.
- **Listen to the burbling of running water, its a sure cure for sadness .**  
Have you ever seen a depressed person on a canoe trip?
- **Live your life so that when you look back, there will not be many canoe trips you wish you had taken.**  
Canoe trips (and other life adventures) become exclamation points in your life, landmarks (or 'timemarks') that you use to measure your life. These exclamation marks are essential for a life fully lived.
- **Be polite to the rivers, lakes, land, people, and critters you meet, and always say "Thank you".**  
We are here by the grace of God and a lucky draw of genes, time, and space in the big lottery of life.