



Study Guide for Book Clubs and Workshops

Boomer Guru: How M. Scott Peck Guided Millions but Lost Himself on the Road Less Traveled

by Arthur Jones

(Capparoe Books, 2015)



This is neither a lengthy book nor a difficult one to read. For study/discussion purposes, the overall text (fourteen chapters) is divided into four parts: Chapters 1-3; 4-6; 7-10; 11-14. Then, as a conclusion, there are three overarching questions for the entire book.

Chapters 1-3

1. Hurtful words and the hurtful behavior of others sting all of us as children. Did you recover, surmount those in your life? Was Peck indulging himself in that he would never let the hurts go?
2. Peck is relentless in his criticism of his father. Do you sense this is the adult Peck angry at his father for the manner in which he treated Peck's mother?
3. Peck was not baptized as a child. If you were baptized, do you feel the knowledge of God helped you surmount childhood difficulties? Or did that knowledge and the religious proscriptions that came with it, make your childhood worse?
4. Peck sees himself always fighting "the system" – at Exeter, until he switches to the Quaker school; at Middlebury until he switched to Harvard. Was he really fighting the system, or was he just growing up – slowly?
5. Attempting to gain two sets of parental blessings on his and Lily's decision to wed, list the inadequacies you perceive in the stances and reaction of Peck's parents, Lily's parents, and Lily and Scott.
6. When Peck recounts his dealings with his army therapist (page 59), do you sense Peck is troubled, insecure, still immature, or genuinely seeking a father figure? And is his search for God also part of "seeking a father figure"?



Chapters 4-6

1. At the very end of chapter four (page 69), Peck, on leave from Okinawa, goes to his parental home. Do you see the “tough it out” strictures of the WASP Establishment in play here? Was his mother too tough? And were *her* WASP Establishment strictures as much to blame for Peck’s troubles as his unfeeling father? But Peck refused to criticize his mother, whom he saw as his father’s victim.
2. Were both parents in fact simply adhering to a WASP code as if it were an unyielding religion?
3. Okinawa appears to be a settled period for the Peck family. Do you agree Peck himself appears settled? Is it, as he suggests, because of the distance between himself and his father, and his financial independence of him? Or is it just a growing-up stage?
4. The Pecks leave Washington. Do you like his poetry (page 79)? Have you been glad to leave somewhere you have lived?
5. Peck, reflecting on parenting, says he was fine with the infant stage, admits he was adept at the growing children stage. He regrets he “competed” too much with his children when they were young. Was he asserting his authority like his father? He also regrets he had his children rolling his joints. Was he an unfit father for doing that? Or was it the same as asking a child to bring a beer from the refrigerator?
6. Then he starts writing the book. Do you accept his “stoned on pot” (page 91) as the source of his inspiration?

Chapters 7-10

1. *The Road Less Traveled* was out and gaining attention. Peck gave talks at AA groups and churches. Does it seem that his church appearances were responsible for the idea of a retreat? Had he genuinely taken a large step on the road to seeking God? Did you have to consciously take a big step to get closer to God?
2. Peck sought out a place where God was the centerpiece of the life lived, an Episcopal convent in New York. Have you gone on retreat? What was your experience? If a step forward, did it last?
3. In 1980 Peck was baptized in the same convent by a Methodist minister. He did not join a denomination, though Christianity is community, not a solo pursuit – except for mystics and hermits, which Peck wasn’t. Did he not understand that simple Christian requirement of community, do you think?



4. Thousands of *Road* readers wrote to Peck. Have you a favorite letter (pages 103-108)? Further, despite his psychotherapeutic understanding, and the utility of *The Road* for so many women – but given his many sexual liaisons – does Peck truly value women as equals?
5. Peck credits a Sufi mystic, Idries Shah, as a key influence on his approach to *The Road Less Traveled* (page 87). Was Westerners turning to the East an important development in American self-understanding?
6. In his use of pot, his sexual liaisons, his Eastern mystic yearnings (and given his earlier Zen Buddhist leanings), was Peck simply an overage hippie playing catch-up? Or was he genuinely deeper than that?

Chapters 11-14

1. Peck's behavior in his final six months is at times bizarre. Do you attribute it to his Parkinson's, or do you sense it is ingrained?
2. Were the two women in the Peck household (prior to Kathy's arrival) enablers of his bizarre behavior? What could/should they have done?
3. Peck, manipulative once Kathy arrived, seems either cruel, or unfeeling?
4. Kathy uses "bad Scotty" and "good Scotty" (page 185). What words you would use to describe his behavior at home and on the cruise?
5. Kathy is upset: Peck is dying but never mentions God. Yet, when Peck is close to death, he blurts out that he wants to become a Catholic. Though he quickly dismisses doing anything about it, does that, do you think, indicate that even in the fog of Parkinson's and the cancer medications, Peck was still searching for God?

In Conclusion

1. The author refers to Peck as a "wounded healer." Would "flawed healer" be a more accurate description?
2. Peck was a genuine healer. His reader's letters from around the U.S. and the world attest to that. Do you agree?
3. In a half-dozen words, what is his legacy?