



# 50 Questions

*that could change your life*

by Heather Plett

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## **50 Questions That Could Change Your Life**

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2016**

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## Welcome to 50 Questions That Could Change Your Life!

I compiled these questions around the time that I turned 50. At first I was going to create “50 tips for wise living” and then I realized that I have learned more from questions than I have from tips.

**Good questions are like keys to hidden doorways. They open whole new vistas where once we saw only walls.**

Good questions are at the heart of my work. They open meaningful conversations in workshops, they invite deeper exploration in coaching sessions, and they spur me on to dig deeper and deeper in my writing.

### Suggestions for how to use these questions:

- as mantras in a daily meditation practice
- as daily journal prompts (written and/or art journals)
- as inspiration for art-making or interpretive dance
- to initiate conversations in sharing circles, workshops, and community gatherings
- for teachable moments with your children or students
- for \_\_\_\_\_ (let your imagination fill in the blank)

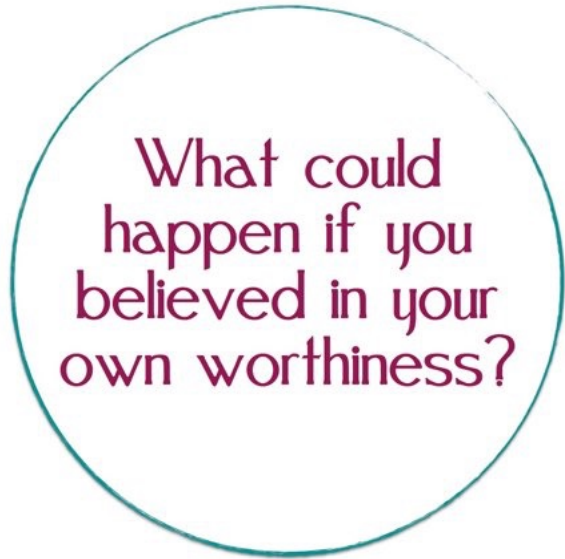
I hope you find inspiration inside these pages:

*Heather Plett*

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*“I would like to beg you dear sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language.” – Rainier Maria Rilke*

# Q1. Worthiness



A client once told me a story of her childhood. A church leader offered her a blue pencil as a Sunday School prize. She didn't want the blue pencil, so she reached past his hand and plucked the pink pencil out of the bunch behind it. As a child, she'd believed in her worthiness, but as an adult she'd forgotten it. This memory spurred her on as she built her business. "I am worthy of the pink pencil," she said with boldness and determination. She painted a pink pencil onto a canvas and hung it on her office wall as a daily reminder.

Are you worthy of the pink pencil? Or do you accept the blue pencil because that's what you've been offered?

**What would happen if you reached for the pink pencil instead?**

## Quotes

*"When you get to a place where you understand that love and belonging, your worthiness, is a birthright and not something you have to earn, anything is possible." ~ Brené Brown*

*"I sometimes lead retreats, and from time to time participants show me the notes they are taking as the retreat unfolds. The pattern is nearly universal: people take copious notes on what the retreat leader says, and they sometimes take notes on the words of certain wise people in the group, but rarely, if ever, do they take notes on what they themselves say. We listen for guidance everywhere except from within." ~ Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak*

*"All my life I've thought I needed someone to complete me, now I know I need to belong to myself." ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Mermaid Chair*

**Additional Reading: Books:** Let Your Life Speak, by Parker Palmer + Carry On, Warrior, by Glennon Doyle Melton

**Blog post:** Somewhere between "you're awesome" and "you're worthless"

## Q2. Liberation

What do you  
need liberation  
from?

Cages can come in many shapes and sizes. Sometimes a cage looks like your family of origin or your marriage. Sometimes it looks like your religious belief systems. Sometimes it's the patriarchy or racism. Sometimes it's the old stories you carry about your obligations, your limitations, or your lack of worthiness. Sometimes it's addiction. Sometimes it's the little "shoulds" that show up in our vocabulary every day. Sometimes it's shame or fear or self-limiting beliefs.

**Naming your cage is the first step in seeking liberation from it. Once you can take a good look into your jailor's eyes, the jailor has less power over you.**

It's possible that your liberation isn't entirely within your grasp (ie. if you are imprisoned or trapped by your country's laws), but you can still choose a liberated life within the cage that confines you. Consider Nelson Mandela whose body was confined to prison but who wouldn't let his jailers imprison his mind.

Liberation begins with a heart that says "No more!"

**If you have already been liberated, then change the question to "what can I do to liberate others?"**

## Quotes

*"Imperialism is a system of exploitation that occurs not only in the brutal form of those who come with guns to conquer territory. Imperialism often occurs in more subtle forms, a loan, food aid, blackmail . We are fighting this system that allows a handful of men on Earth to rule all of humanity." ~ Thomas Sankara*

*"Until you realize how easily it is for your mind to be manipulated, you remain the puppet of someone else's game." ~ Evita Ochel*

*"A 'woman on the loose' is a woman who leaves the woods where she has been growing strong all these years. She swoops out of trees, ringing her bell. She is saying, I am here now. And I am not going away. The motto that the women on the loose adopted is: 'To improvise, surprise, and come uninvited.'" ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

*"You wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down." ~ Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon*

*"If you live in the dark a long time and the sun comes out, you do not cross into it whistling. There's an initial uprush of relief at first, then- for me, anyway- a profound dislocation. My old assumptions about how the world works are buried, yet my new ones aren't yet operational. There's been a death of sorts, but without a few days in hell, no resurrection is possible." ~ Mary Karr, Lit*

*"You must learn one thing. The world was made to be free in. Give up all the other worlds. Except the one in which you belong." ~ David Whyte*

**Additional Reading:** Lit, by Mary Karr

## Q3. Lineage

On whose  
shoulders are  
you standing?

There is a lineage that longs for your liberation. They want you to be free and brave and untethered to old stories and old wounds. They have walked this earth before you, clearing the undergrowth along the path so that you can walk strong and tall and courageous. They have been your teachers, your spiritual guides, your nurturers, and your healers. **You might not know it yet, but they are there, waiting for you to succeed.**

They want you to do your good work, because they believed in this work before you were here and they know its value in the world. I didn't recognize this truth until I joined Gather the Women and found myself surrounded by a circle of women who had walked the path of feminism and feminine spirituality for a generation before me. They had challenged the patriarchy and the status quo so that I could rise. They became my fierce supporters and my equally fierce nurturers.

Your lineage may no longer walk this earth. They may be the mystics, the freedom fighters, the prophets, the teachers who paved the way for you long before you were alive. They may even be the nameless shamans and grandmothers who appear in your dreams. Naming them and claiming them will help you to see your work as a part of the whole. They support you even when you feel alone.

**You stand on their shoulders so that others can one day stand on yours.**

*"I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back."  
~ Malala Yousafzai, I Am Malala*

*"The women's movement brought about extraordinary shifts in attitude and subsequent changes through women meeting together in consciousness-raising groups and supporting each other to take the actions that culminated in a movement." ~ Jean Shinoda Bolen, Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women and Save the World*

*"I know you can't live on hope alone; but without hope, life is not worth living. So you, and you and you: you got to give them hope; you got to give them hope." ~ Harvey Milk*

*"What is a teacher? I'll tell you: it isn't someone who teaches something, but someone who inspires the student to give of her best in order to discover what she already knows." ~ Paulo Coelho, The Witch of Portobello*

*"A true teacher would never tell you what to do. But he would give you the knowledge with which you could decide what would be best for you to do." ~ Christopher Pike, Sati*

**Additional Reading:** Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics, by Carol Lee Flinders + Urgent Message from Mother Earth: Gather the Women and Save the World, by Jean Shinoda Bolen

## Quotes

## Q4. Fear

### What is your relationship with fear?

Fear comes in many shapes and sizes and to work through it without letting it control us, we need to examine it with clear and open eyes without flinching. There are four kinds of fear:

- **warning fear** which lets us know that a course correction is necessary
- **ego fear** that does everything in its power to protect itself and avoid telling the truth
- **invitational fear** that's a message from our bodies (often a trembling) that we are on the right track and need to step in the direction of the fear
- **trauma fear** that is deeply embedded in our bodies from ancient traumas (that we may not even remember or that may have been passed down to us) and that takes special care and compassion to address

What is your typical response to fear? Fight, flight, or freeze? And what is the fear trying to teach you? In that moment of intensity, be still and mindful for a moment and inquire into the fear to see what lessons there are to learn from it. And then gather your courage and determination and act accordingly.

## Quotes

*"Openness doesn't come from resisting our fears but from getting to know them well." ~ Pema Chodron, The Places that Scare You*

*"Courage is not living without fear. Courage is being scared to death and doing the right thing anyway." ~ Chae Richardson*

*"Making room for our own fears, we suddenly have room for the fears of others. Once we have renounced the need to live without suffering, to be special, to be exempt from the losses and doubts that have afflicted all people since the beginning of time, we can see the difficulties of others without being afraid ourselves. Our fearful, disappointed surface face starts to fall away. We can welcome other people into our lives because no matter their fears, they do not make us afraid. Suffering is the natural cyclical visitation that comes from being alive." ~ David Whyte, The Three Marriages*

*"Often we have to rehearse the truth until we find the courage to live it. In this, repetition is not failure, but the heart's way to learn how to be in the world." ~ Mark Nepo, Finding Inner Courage*

*"When we drop fear, we can draw nearer to people, we can draw nearer to the earth, we can draw nearer to all the heavenly creatures that surround us." ~ bell hooks*

**Additional Reading: Books:** Finding Inner Courage, by Mark Nepo + The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times, by Pema Chodron **Blog Post:** Four Kinds of Fear (What self-help books might be missing)

## Q5. Connections

What are you  
doing to make  
deeper  
connections?

Disconnection leaves us with deep soul emptiness and terrifying isolation. We try to fill the emptiness with addictions, vices, materialism, unhealthy relationships and dangerous behaviour. Instead of blocking the pain of the emptiness, though, we intensify it, and then we find ourselves reaching for an even larger dose of that which we hoped would drown it out.

The only way to resolve our disconnection is to take the risks inherent in connection. We need to turn to each other, to ourselves, and to the Sacred, and we need to be vulnerable and exposed. We need to risk rejection, to dare to see the shadow in ourselves and in each other, and to open our hearts to the hurt.

**What small step can you take to make a deeper connection?**

## Quotes

*"I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." ~ Brené Brown, [Daring Greatly](#)*

*"We are a community of possibilities, not a community of problems. Community exists for the sake of belonging and takes its identity from the gifts, generosity, and accountability of its citizens. It is not defined by its fears, its isolation, or its penchant for retribution. We currently have all the capacity, expertise, programs, leaders, regulations, and wealth required to end unnecessary suffering and create an alternative future." ~ Peter Block, [Community: The Structure of Belonging](#)*

*"It seems that intuitive listening requires us to still our minds until the beauty of things older than our minds can find us." ~ Mark Nepo, [Seven Thousand Ways to Listen](#)*

*"The only reason we don't open our hearts and minds to other people is that they trigger confusion in us that we don't feel brave enough or sane enough to deal with. To the degree that we look clearly and compassionately at ourselves, we feel confident and fearless about looking into someone else's eyes." ~ Pema Chödrön, [When Things Fall Apart](#)*

**Additional Reading: Books:** [Seven Thousand Ways to Listen](#), by Mark Nepo + [Community: The Structure of Belonging](#), by Peter Block  
**Blog Post:** [Everyone needs connection](#)



## Q6. Soul

### What do you do to grow your soul?

Your soul needs tending. It's your most powerful asset, but if you neglect it, it will languish out of sight, causing you pain and longing and restlessness until you pay attention to it.

An awakened soul is a force to be reckoned with. To wake yours up, you must make space for it, find the practices that nourish it, and sit in silence while you listen to it. Your soul is different from mine, so the practices that awaken it may be different. Try a few things out (journal-writing, art-making, meditation, walking, dancing, prayer, etc.) until you find the one(s) that makes you feel alive and in deep connection with yourself.

Be aware, though. An awakened soul will require much of you and it won't let you live an unfulfilled life.

## Quotes

*"The purpose of life is not to maintain personal comfort; it's to grow the soul." ~ Christina Baldwin, [The Seven Whispers](#)*

*"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing  
and rightdoing there is a field.  
I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass  
the world is too full to talk about."  
~ Rumi*

*"Put your ear down close to your soul and listen hard." ~ Anne Sexton*

*"The soul is a spiritual organ that we carry to work with us every day, and it informs and observes every move we make. There is no ignoring its demands with impunity. It is capable of meting out punishments as real as any that could be meted out by a boss. It is the ultimate BS-detector, the part of us that absolutely knows what it knows, that knows the feel of integrity and the feel of its absence. It is also the part of us that sees the big picture of our lives, the blueprint against which all our actions are compared, and which is hardwired into each of us." ~ Gregg Levoy, [Callings](#)*

**Additional Reading: Book:** [The Seven Whispers: A spiritual practice for times like these](#), by Christina Baldwin

**Blog post:** [What if every moment is sacred?](#)

## Q7. Holding

### Who is holding space for you?

Everyone needs a place where they can fall apart and not be judged unworthy for their weakness. This is what gives us courage to carry on, to be strong, and to face the challenges in our lives.

Our greatest desire is to know that we belong. Without a sense of belonging - without healthy attachments in their lives - children grow up to be emotionally unhealthy adults, forever craving what they don't know how to ask for.

If you have someone who holds space for you, acknowledge that, be grateful, and continue to foster that relationship. If you don't, contemplate what you need to do to find it for yourself. Do you need to ask for it more specifically? Do you need to offer to hold space for others so that they will know how to show up to hold space for you? Do you need to work on your sense of worthiness so that you can accept what you need? Do you need to practice holding space for yourself so that others will see you model it and learn how to do it for you?

**The first step is always the hardest - reach out and make yourself vulnerable.**

## Quotes

*"The Quaker teacher Douglas Steere was fond of saying that the ancient human question "Who am I?" leads inevitably to the equally important question "Whose am I?" - for there is no selfhood outside of relationship. We must ask the question of selfhood and answer it as honestly as we can, no matter where it takes us. Only as we do so can we discover the community of our lives." ~ Parker Palmer, Let your Life Speak*

*"How strange that we should ordinarily feel compelled to hide our wounds when we are all wounded! Community requires the ability to expose our wounds and weaknesses to our fellow creatures. It also requires the ability to be affected by the wounds of others... But even more important is the love that arises among us when we share, both ways, our woundedness." ~ M. Scott Peck, The Different Drum*

*"Those who truly love us will never knowingly ask us to be other than we are" ~ Mark Nepo, The Book of Awakening*

*"Generosity has little to do with giving gifts, and everything to do with giving space to others to be who they are." ~ Patti Digh, Life is a Verb*

*"The truth is, in order to heal we need to tell our stories and have them witnessed... The story itself becomes a vessel that holds us up, that sustains, that allows us to order our jumbled experiences into meaning. As I told my stories of fear, awakening, struggle, and transformation and had them received, heard, and validated by other women, I found healing. ~ Sue Monk Kidd*

**Additional Reading: Books:** The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace, by M. Scott Peck + A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward and Undivided Life, by Parker Palmer **Blog post:** How to hold space



## What brings you joy?

**Joy is an indicator. It's like a pin that drops on the map and says "go here."**

Do you feel joy when you're surrounded by people? Do you feel joy when you stand in front of a room full of people and speak from your heart? Or maybe you feel it when you're out in the woods all alone? Or in a studio making art? Or maybe you feel it when you're caring for the sick? Or when you're making food for people?

Consider your joy moments. If you imagine a map with the pinpoints of joy on it, what does it tell you about the journey you're on or the one you need to take? Do you need to make changes in your life to see more of that which brings you joy? Or perhaps you simply need to practice more gratitude for the life you already have?

*"Always leave enough time in your life to do something that makes you happy, satisfied, even joyous. That has more of an effect on economic well-being than any other single factor." ~ Paul Hawken*

*"Contrary to what we usually believe... the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen. For a child, it could be placing with trembling fingers the last block on a tower she has built, higher than any she has built so far; for a swimmer, it could be trying to beat his own record; for a violinist, mastering an intricate musical passage. For each person there are thousands of opportunities, challenges to expand ourselves." ~ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Flow*

*"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened." ~ Dr. Seuss*

**Additional Reading:** Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi + The Joy Diet: 10 Practices for a Happier Life, by Martha Beck

## Q9. Narrative

What part of your story do you need to reclaim?

Two things captured my attention in an inflight magazine recently. One was a multi-page spread about the best doctors in the U.S. All of them were white males. It's clear who owns that narrative. Anyone looking at it would assume that in order to be the best, you would have to be white and male.

Another story in the magazine was about women in Iran who had created a photo exhibit of what the lives of women in their male-dominated culture are like. The photo exhibit, *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab world*, told the story of women who'd reclaimed their own narrative. Though the media does its best to uphold the status quo, where positions of power are largely filled by white men, they created their own opportunity to tell their story.

Does someone else control your narrative? Have you let yourself stay trapped by whatever narrative is associated with the label of victim, wife, black, unemployed, disabled, young, shy, etc.? What would it mean to take control of your own narrative and tell the story your way? How might you step into the power of your own sovereignty?

## Quotes

*"I dare you to stop counting and start acting. To stop pleasing and start defying. I dare you to trust what you know. The second wind is beyond data. It is past pain. It is found in the bloodstream and cells of the women and men who purged the poison of their perpetrators, who walked through the cancer, the nightmares. The second wind is coming from your body, it's in your mouth, it's in the way you move your hips." ~ Eve Ensler, *In the Body of the World**

*"I often went to Catholic mass or Eucharist at the Episcopal church, nourished by the symbol and power of this profound feeding ritual. It never occurred to me how odd it was that women, who have presided over the domain of food and feeding for thousands of years, were historically and routinely barred from presiding over it in a spiritual context. And when the priest held out the host and said, "This is my body, given for you," not once did I recognize that it is women in the act of breastfeeding who most truly embody those words and who are also most excluded from ritually saying them." ~ Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter**

*"In the end I began to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like. Just as in corrupt, totalitarian regimes, those who exercise power over others can do anything." ~ Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile**

*"Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." ~ Chinua Achebe*

*"I will not have my life narrowed down. I will not bow down to somebody else's whim or to someone else's ignorance." ~ bell hooks*

**Additional Reading:** *In the Body of the World*, by Eve Ensler + *Feminism is for Everybody*, by bell hooks

## Q10. Duty

What do you  
sacrifice on the  
altar of duty?

“Should” is a dangerous word. It enslaves us with its expectations. “I should look after my kids instead of taking time for self-care. I should take this job because it gives me more security. I should clean the house instead of making art.”

“Should” shuts down our desires, dampens our passion, and makes our lives smaller. When we sacrifice what we truly love on the altar of duty, we cheat ourselves out of joy. We accept a half-lived life.

Duty has a place (I don’t, for example, advocate that you never feed your children because you’re working on a masterpiece), but when the scales are always tipped in favour of duty and we sacrifice love, passion, and our own wildness, it becomes a trap. Balance the scales and step into your life.

## Quotes

*“A perfect man would never act from a sense of duty; he’d always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and of other people) like a crutch which is a substitute for a leg. Most of us need the crutch at times; but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits etc.) can do the journey on their own.” ~ C.S. Lewis, Letters of C.S. Lewis*

*“Pleasure and desire are a natural guidance system that directs organisms toward food, warmth, sex, and other things that meet their needs. Are we to imagine that we are exceptions to nature’s way? Are we to imagine that we’ve graduated past that guidance system, moved to a higher realm in which pleasure is no longer ally, but enemy? No. That is a thought form of Separation. The guidance system of pleasure words in us too. It does not stop at the basic animal needs of food, sex, and shelter. In all its forms, it guides us toward the fulfillment of our needs and desires, and therefore to the unfolding of our potential.” ~ Charles Eisenstein, The More Beautiful World our Hearts Know is Possible*

*“But obligation, I eventually saw, is not the same as commitment, and it's certainly not an acceptable reason to stick with something that isn't working” ~ Twyla Tharp, The Creative Habit*

**Additional Reading:** The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible, by Charles Eisenstein + Dance of the Dissident Daughter, by Sue Monk Kidd

## Q11. Shame

What if you  
had nothing to  
be ashamed  
of?

Shame wants us to stay invisible, to hide behind what's safe, to take the easy road. Shame tells us that our stories aren't worthy, our ideas are useless, and our gifts aren't wanted in the world. Shame doesn't want us to take risks, to bare our souls, or to be vulnerable.

The only way to loosen shame's grip is to step courageously into vulnerability and trust. When we expose our shame within our circles of trust, where people hold space for us without judgement, then we can be free.

Imagine, for a moment, if there were nothing to be ashamed of, if you could speak all of your stories out loud and expose all of your flaws, and nobody would judge you for it. This is the place of true freedom.

Once you have begun to look unflinchingly at your own shame, you develop the capacity to serve as a safe place for others to expose their shame. When you stop judging yourself, you'll be less judgemental of others.

## Quotes

*"Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change." ~ Brené Brown*

*"Shame unravels our connection to others. In fact, I often refer to shame as the fear of disconnection - the fear of being perceived as flawed and unworthy of acceptance or belonging. Shame keeps us from telling our own stories and prevents us from listening to others tell their stories." ~ Brené Brown*

*"Shame is a soul eating emotion." ~ C.G. Jung*

*"So often survivors have had their experiences denied, trivialized, or distorted. Writing is an important avenue for healing because it gives you the opportunity to define your own reality. You can say: This did happen to me. It was that bad. It was the fault & responsibility of the adult. I was—and am—innocent." ~ Ellen Bass & Laura Davis, [The Courage to Heal](#)*

**Additional Reading:** [I Thought it was Just Me \(but it wasn't\)](#), by Brené Brown

## Q12. Heartbreak

### What breaks your heart?

The first time I was asked this question it was by Margaret Wheatley at a leadership workshop. Sitting in circle, we were asked to consider what broke our hearts and what this might be telling us about the direction in which we were called. Wheatley had been asking herself that question recently and it eventually fed into her books, *Perseverance* and *So Far From Home*.

I don't remember my answer, but I've never forgotten the question. It's the kind of question that stays with you and shifts over time. Since then, I have followed the calling of my broken heart into race relations work, into empowerment work for marginalized women, into a deep exploration of social injustice, and into a deeper connection with the physical world threatened by climate change.

If your heart breaks over the news of Syrian children drowning in the Mediterranean, follow that pain where it leads you. If it breaks over injustice to animals, do something about it. If it breaks over forests disappearing under the bulldozers of progress, find a way to respond.

**Your broken heart calls you into service. Follow it.**

*"In these troubled, uncertain times, we don't need more command and control; we need better means to engage everyone's intelligence in solving challenges and crises as they arise." ~ Margaret Wheatley*

*"Determination, energy, and courage appear spontaneously when we care deeply about something. We take risks that are unimaginable in any other context." ~ Margaret Wheatley*

*"The human heart has a way of making itself large again even after it's been broken into a million pieces." ~ Robert James Waller*

*"Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I had cried, than before--more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle." ~ Charles Dickens, Great Expectations*

*"How strange that the nature of life is change, yet the nature of human beings is to resist change. And how ironic that the difficult times we fear might ruin us are the very ones that can break us open and help us blossom into who we were meant to be." ~ Elizabeth Lesser, Broken Open*

**Additional Reading:** Broken Open, by Elizabeth Lesser + Perseverance, by Margaret Wheatley

## Quotes

## Q13. Love

### What is love asking of you?

Love is not the insipid sentiment of Hallmark greeting cards. Love is fierce and dangerous. "It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Love wants to rearrange our lives, turn us upside down, and alter the landscape of all that we know.

Love is not easy, nor is it cheap. It asks a lot of us. It requires sacrifice and commitment, courage and strength.

When we dare to love, we risk betrayal, grief, sacrifice, and pain. When we dare to love, we may be asked to cross oceans to care for hungry children, open our homes to strangers, or give up our privilege for those with less.

**Are you prepared to follow love where it leads you?**

*"Let us walk away from that mountain of despair-inducing failures and focus instead on the people in front of us, our colleagues, communities and families. Let us work together to embody the values that we treasure, and not worry about creating successful models that will transform other people. Let us focus on transforming ourselves to be little islands of good caring people, doing right work, assisting where we can, maintaining peace and sanity, people who have learned how to be gentle, decent, and brave as the dark ocean that has emerged continues to storm around us." ~ Margaret Wheatley, So Far From Home*

*"You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams." ~ Dr. Seuss*

*"The true signature and perhaps even the miracle of human love is helplessness, and all the more miraculous because it is a helplessness which we wittingly or unwittingly choose; in our love of a child, a partner, a work, or a road we have to take against the odds." v David Whyte, Consolations*

*"Genuine love is rarely an emotional space where needs are instantly gratified. To know love we have to invest time and commitment... 'dreaming that love will save us, solve all our problems or provide a steady state of bliss or security only keeps us stuck in wishful fantasy, undermining the real power of the love -- which is to transform us.' Many people want love to function like a drug, giving them an immediate and sustained high. They want to do nothing, just passively receive the good feeling." ~ bell hooks*

**Additional Reading:** So Far From Home: Lost and Found in Our Brave New World, by Margaret Wheatley + The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self, and Relationship, by David Whyte

## Quotes



## Q14. Failure

What are the lessons you have learned from failure?

Failure can be your jailor or your teacher. When failure keeps you small and shameful, it becomes your jailor. But when you are compassionate with yourself and ask what you can learn from the failure, it becomes your teacher.

Failure teaches you who you really are. It teaches you what has meaning in your life. It teaches you which paths you should avoid and which ones you should turn to. It teaches resilience, courage, and perseverance.

A woman who has never failed is a woman who has never taken a risk. Is that really how you want to live?

**You have a choice - stay in jail or step into the classroom.**

## Quotes

*"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it." ~ Maya Angelou*

*"We must be willing to fail and to appreciate the truth that often 'Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.'" ~ M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Travelled*

*"There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure." ~ Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist*

*"The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently." ~ Pema Chödrön, When Things Fall Apart*

**Additional Reading:** When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times, by Pema Chodron + Rising Strong: The Reckoning, The Rumble, The Revolution, by Brené Brown

## Q15. Unresolved

### What is unresolved in your heart?

To be truly alive is to be forever on the edge of restlessness, always with some longing in your heart for sweeter love, greater freedom, more adventure, and deeper learning. The restlessness is what keeps us alive, hungry, and engaged.

Those who give up their restlessness extinguish the light in their eyes. They settle for a tame and cautious life. They let duty eradicate curiosity.

You don't want to live like that. You want to live a life guided by questions, curiosity, wildness, and dreams. You want to be awake and fully present. Otherwise you would never have signed up for a course based wholly on questions.

**Embrace that which is unresolved and never let anyone persuade you to extinguish it.**

*"I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." ~ Rainer Maria Rilke*

*"Therefore, at any time of life, follow your own questions; don't mistake other people's questions for your own." ~ David Whyte, The Three Marriages*

*"It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are still alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger for them." ~ George Eliot*

*"The things we need most are the things we have become most afraid of, such as adventure, intimacy, and authentic communication. We avert our eyes and stick to comfortable topics. We hold it as a virtue to be private, to be discreet, so that no one sees our dirty laundry. We are uncomfortable with intimacy and connection, which are among the greatest of our unmet needs today. To be truly seen and heard, to be truly known, is a deep human need. Our hunger for it is so omnipresent, so much apart of our life experience, that we no more know what it is missing than a fish knows it is wet. We need more intimacy than nearly anyone considers normal. Always hungry for it, we seek solace and sustenance in the closest available substitutes: television, shopping, pornography, conspicuous consumption — anything to ease the hurt, to feel connected, or to project an image by which we might be seen or known, or at least see and know ourselves." ~ Charles Eisenstein*

**Additional Reading:** The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible, by Charles Eisenstein

## Quotes

## Q16. Colonized

How have you  
been colonized  
and what will  
you do about  
it?

Wikipedia tells us that colonization “is an ongoing process of by which a central system of power dominates the surrounding land and its components (people).” There are many ways to be colonized. Traditionally, we think of colonization as the countries or people groups who use their power to control other countries or people groups - like the settlers who took away Indigenous lands or the slave traders who filled their ships with exploited people.

But colonization can happen on a smaller, more subtle scale as well. We can be colonized by marriage partners who don't respect our boundaries. We can be colonized by religious institutions that inflict rules instead of extending grace. We can be colonized by patriarchal organizations or systemic racism. We can be colonized by our own shame and lack of self-worth.

We can be colonized by any person, institution, laws, cultural practices or self-limiting beliefs that take our power and autonomy away, whether by force, coercion, or manipulation.

If your power has been taken away, what steps will you take to reclaim it?

**The partner question is this: “How are you helping to decolonize others?”**

## Quotes

*“As Americans, I began to see, we had been colonized, too, not by a foreign government, but by something subtler - materialism itself and the competitive, painfully separate way of life it brings about.” ~ Carole Lee Flinders, Enduring Grace*

*“We are the people of the second wind. We, who have been undermined, reduced, and minimized, we know who we are. Let us be taken. Let us turn our pain to power, our victimhood to fire, our self-hatred to action, our self-obsession to service, to fire, to wind. Wind. Wind. Be transparent as wind, be as possible and relentless and dangerous, be what moves things forward without needing to leave a mark, be part of this collection of molecules that begins somewhere unknown and can't help but keep rising. Rising. Rising. Rising.” ~ Eve Ensler, In the Body of the World*

*“When a woman starts to disentangle herself from patriarchy, ultimately she is abandoned to her own self.” ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

*“The underlying message of my father's life, and especially his final year, is one that wise women and men have known for millennia: when we are wrong it is better to respond with love, courage, and grace than with anger, bitterness, and rage. We are made whole by living up to the best part of human nature - the part willing to forgive the aggressor, the part that never loses sight of the humanity of those on the other side of the relationship and the part that embraces the person with whom we have every right to be angry and accepts him or her as a brother or sister.” ~ Wab Kinew, The Reason You Walk*

**Additional Reading: Books:** The Reason You Walk, by Wab Kinew + Calling Down the Sky, by Rosanna Deerchild

**Blog Post:** What's the opposite of holding space? Emotional Colonization

## Q17. Truth

### What if you told the truth?

We learn to tell little lies about what really matters to us. From a young age, we learn that the “right” answer to “how are you” is “fine”. We learn that if we show our passion too much, our anger too much, or our fear too much, we will overwhelm people. With every rebuke, every sideways glance, and every disappointment, we learn what’s acceptable in the world around us. Safety and belonging are more urgent needs for a child than self-actualization, and so we adapt and learn to hide the truth.

What would happen if you chose to tell the truth? What if you started to trust that the world is safe enough for your truth, and even if it’s not yet safe, you can survive the insecurity? What courage would that take? And what would change in your life?

“And you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free,” the Bible tells us. How might telling your truth set you free? Perhaps, at the beginning, it won’t feel like freedom, but in the end it will.

## Quotes

*“I tore myself away from the safe comfort of certainties through my love for truth; and truth rewarded me.” ~ Simone de Beauvoir*

*“No man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring twopence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it.” ~ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity*

*“Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it’s personal. And the world won’t end. And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don’t miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you ... And at last you’ll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.” ~ Audre Lorde*

*“Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.” v Brené Brown*

**Additional Reading:** Daring Greatly, by Brené Brown + Transformational Speaking: If you want to change the world, tell a better story, by Gail Larsen

## Q18. Journey

What is the nature of your journey?

Joseph Campbell tells us that the hero on a journey must go on a quest to find something that has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. There is a going out, a searching, and a returning.

A microcosm of this quest can be found by walking a labyrinth. Walking into the labyrinth, we release that which no longer serves us, in order to carry less weight on our journey. We travel a winding path that takes us sometimes near the centre and sometimes far out to the edge, and all the way we must trust that the destination will emerge before us. Once we reach the centre, we have emptied ourselves and we are ready to receive whatever is there for us. We open our hearts to Source and we sit, exposed and vulnerable. When we are ready, and the journey calls us once again, we return, bringing whatever we received at the centre out into the world to offer it to those we are called to serve. (This is a more feminine interpretation of the hero's journey. Rather than conquering, we are giving birth.)

We go through this journey again and again in our lives, plunging into the depths to receive the gifts of the centre, and then daring to emerge and to serve out of those gifts.

Your journey is your own, and the unique gifts at the centre are meant for nobody else but you. Dare to step onto the path.

## Quotes

*“Take the path that runs along the cliff--that one, the one without any guardrails. Take that path, and know the exhilaration of the ride and the pride you feel when you reach the end will inspire you to take that path again and again. And that experience ... every day, will make you more fulfilled, more complete, and more alive.” ~ Harry Beckwith*

*“The heroine must become a spiritual warrior. ... She must not discard nor give up what she has learned throughout her heroic quest, but learn to view her hard-earned skills and success not so much as a goal but as one part of the entire journey. She will begin to use these skills to work toward the larger quest of bringing people together, rather than her own individual gain. This is the sacred marriage of the feminine and masculine--when a woman can truly serve not only the needs of others but can value and be responsive to her own needs as well.” ~ Maureen Murdock, The Heroine's Journey*

*“The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there is something lacking in the normal experience available or permitted to the members of society. The person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a coming and a returning.” ~ Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces*

**Additional Reading:** The Heroine's Journey: Women's Quest for Wholeness, by Maureen Murdock + The Hero with a Thousand Faces, by Joseph Campbell

## Q19. Mystery

How are you making space for mystery?

Is your life filled with drudgery and duty, or do you make space for mystery? Do you pause in awe while a pink and orange sunset spreads across the sky? Do your eyes fill with tears at the wonder of a new baby born into this world? Do you pay rapt attention in those moments when an animal steps out of the woods and stops you with its stare?

In Celtic spirituality, they speak of “thin places” as those places where heaven comes down to touch the earth. It’s the place where the veil between the sacred and the ordinary is so thin you don’t know which space you’re standing in. When you’re in a thin place, there is no earthly explanation for it - there is only awe and reverence.

I was in such a thin place once, at a folk festival while Jordie Lane was on stage singing “Like a bird you swooped down, you edged closer, then off you flew.” In that moment, two eagles flying above me clasped talons and plunged earthward, spiralling with wings outspread in their wild air-dance. For the rest of the day, I walked around as though on a cloud, changed by that mystical moment of wildness.

We are offered those thin places regularly, but we only notice them if we take the time to pay attention. **If we rush through our lives, we miss the mystery.**

## Quotes

*“People who’ve had any genuine spiritual experience always know that they don’t know. They are utterly humbled before mystery. They are in awe before the abyss of it all, in wonder at eternity and depth, and a Love, which is incomprehensible to the mind.” ~ Richard Rohr*

*“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science... I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and with the awareness and a glimpse of the marvellous structure of the existing world.” ~ Albert Einstein*

*“Third-eye seeing is the way the mystics see... I like to call it presence. It is experienced as a moment of deep inner connection, and it always pulls you, intensely satisfied, into the naked and undefended now, which can involve both profound joy and profound sadness. At that point, you either want to write poetry, pray, or be utterly silent.” ~ Richard Rohr, [The Naked Now](#)*

*“I realized it for the first time in my life: there is nothing but mystery in the world, how it hides behind the fabric of our poor, browbeat days, shining brightly, and we don't even know it.” ~ Sue Monk Kidd, [The Secret Life of Bees](#)*

**Additional Reading:** [The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See](#), by Richard Rohr

## Q20. Opinions

What if other people's opinions don't shape you?

Our childhood years teach us that other people's opinions matter and we must strive never to let people down. First our parents instill in us their values and expectations, and then our teachers remind us daily that their opinions are what makes the difference between a passing mark and a failing mark.

Once we leave childhood behind, our task is to learn to detach ourselves from other people's opinions and to stand in the power of our own. Gradually, one small action at a time, we must learn to let other people down in order to be true to ourselves. It's risky, and it can be painful, but it's necessary.

**What will it take to stop living to please others? What will it take to please yourself?**

*"We will discover the nature of our particular genius when we stop trying to conform to our own or to other people's models, learn to be ourselves, and allow our natural channel to open." ~ Shakti Gawain*

*"I can't give you a sure-fire formula for success, but I can give you a formula for failure: try to please everybody all the time." ~ Herbert Bayard Swope*

*"Our job in this life is not to shape ourselves into some ideal we imagine we ought to be, but to find out who we already are and become it." ~ Steven Pressfield, The War of Art*

*"We must bear patiently not being good . . . and not being thought good." ~ St. Francis of Assisi*

*"It doesn't interest me if the story you're telling me is true.  
I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself,  
If you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul."  
~ from the poem "The Invitation", by Oriah Mountain Dreamer*

*"Finally I was able to see that if I had a contribution I wanted to make, I must do it, despite what others said. That I was OK the way I was. That it was all right to be strong." ~ Wangari Maathai, Unbowed*

**Additional Reading:** The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Creative Battles, by Steven Pressfield + Falling Upward: A spirituality for the two halves of life, by Richard Rohr

## Quotes

## Q21. Darkness

How has the  
darkness  
changed you?

A fear of the darkness may be one of the most limiting factors in a person's life. When we live as though only the light matters, we hide our own shadows, we shut down our grief, we silence those struggling with depression, and we only visit those places that make us happy.

The darkness has lessons for us, if we dare to peer into it. The darkness has gifts, if we dare to receive them. Earlier in my career, I visited some of the poorest places on earth, in Ethiopia and Bangladesh. Years later, I still carry the blessings I received from what I witnessed in those places of poverty and injustice. In the midst of it, I saw resilience and compassion. I saw that the human spirit is capable of a great deal more than we sometimes think. And I saw my own privilege staring me in the face and daring me to confront it. I live differently because of what I witnessed.

**What will it take to release your fear of the darkness? How can you open yourself to what it offers without letting it consume or destroy you?**

## Quotes

*"I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light." ~ Barbara Brown Taylor, [Learning to Walk in the Dark](#)*

*"Even what has been created needs to be returned to chaos from time to time so that it can be regenerated in more vital form. When a leader fears chaos so deeply as to try to eliminate it, the shadows of death will fall across everything that leader approaches - for the ultimate answer to all of life's messiness is death." ~ Parker Palmer, [Let your Life Speak](#)*

*"Leaders who think as nature thinks are more skillful in shifting our focus to understanding how nature helps us learn from living systems and living processes. Like topsoil, they appreciate that to build fertile ground for a new story they need the richness that comes from the death of old ideas. This also shifts what we want from leaders. It is not that they be warriors/heroes imposing their will in creating a future determined in advance, but that they be thoughtful stewards and gardeners whose artistry involves aligning their work with how nature itself thinks and understanding the generative way the future really unfolds." ~ Michael Jones, [Artful Leadership](#)*

*"It is the acceptance of death that has finally allowed me to choose life." ~ Elizabeth Lesser, [Broken Open](#)*

*"Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift." ~ Mary Oliver*

**Additional Reading:** [Learning to Walk in The Dark](#), by Barbara Brown Taylor + [Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam](#), by Zainab Salbi



## Q22. Birth

What wants to  
be born in your  
life?

Imagine you are pregnant, about to give birth to that thing that has been begging you for an eternity to bring it into the world. What is it that is being born? What will your baby look like? What will you agonize over and then nurture and protect until it is ready to walk on its own two feet?

Or perhaps you are giving birth to yourself, a tiny new being who is daring to walk in her own authenticity. Perhaps you are the caterpillar who has entered the cocoon, waiting to see what kind of butterfly you will become, waiting to fly.

What risk will it take to give birth? What support do you need to survive the labour pains? Who will serve as your midwife and who will walk alongside as the baby learns to walk?

## Quotes

*“He allowed himself to be swayed by his conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.” ~ Gabriel García Márquez, Love in the Time of Cholera*

*“There is no place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming. But more than that, birthing the kind of woman who can authentically say, 'My soul is my own,' and then embody it in her life, her spirituality, and her community is worth the risk and hardship.” ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

*“How does one become a butterfly? They have to want to learn to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.” ~ Trina Paulus, Hope for the Flowers*

*“Vocation does not come from a voice “out there” calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.” ~ Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak*

*“Yellow decided to risk for a butterfly. For courage she hung right beside the other cocoon and began to spin her own. 'Imagine, I didn't even know I could do this. That's some encouragement that I'm on the right track. If I have the stuff inside me to make cocoons—maybe the stuff of butterflies is there too.’” ~ Trina Paulus, Hope for the Flowers*

**Additional Reading:** Hope for the Flowers, by Trina Paulus + Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as Pilgrimage of Identity, by David Whyte

## Q23. Compassion

### How do you show compassion to yourself?

In order to look deeply into your own shadow without flinching, in order to take risks and survive failure, you must first learn to be compassionate with yourself. You must learn to care for yourself the way you would care for a small, inquisitive child who is stumbling through the world, following his curiosity and making mistakes along the way.

You wouldn't yell at that child for tripping over a tree root, would you? Then why do you mistreat yourself when you make a mistake? Instead, pick yourself off, brush yourself off, give yourself a little hug, wipe away the tears, and then carry on. Learn to forgive yourself for making mistakes and you will be more able to forgive others.

The most damaging thing to our psyche is the negative self-talk we subject ourselves to every day. "I'm not good enough. I shouldn't have made that mistake. It's no wonder people reject me."

Practice self-compassion and you will find the courage to speak your truth, to live authentically, to take risks, and to love deeply.

## Quotes

*"The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely." ~ C.G. Jung*

*"By surviving passage of doubt and depression on the vocational journey, I have become clear about at least one thing: self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch." ~ Parker Palmer, Let your Life Speak*

*"Until we learn to love others as ourselves, it's difficult to blame broken people who desperately try to affirm themselves when no one else will." ~ Richard Rohr, Falling Upward*

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." ~ Marianne Williamson*

**Additional Reading:** A Return to Love, by Marianne Williamson



## What is the next right thing?

Be quiet for a moment. Listen for the whispering deep in your soul. What is it calling you to do? What step is it asking you to take? It may not be a grand life-changing calling. It may simply be a nudging to do the next right thing.

In her book, Unbowed, Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai shares the story of how her calling started with a nudging to plant trees and to teach other women to plant them. Years later, she has transformed the Kenyan landscape and created livelihoods for thousands of women.

**Maybe all you're being asked to do for now is to plant a tree.** Maybe you can't see the whole forest yet, but one tree will set you on the right path.

*"Vocation does not come from a voice "out there" calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice "in here" calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God." ~ Parker Palmer*

*"We must therefore be willing to get shaken up, to submit ourselves to the dark blossomings of chaos, in order to reap the blessings of growth." ~ Gregg Levoy, Callings*

*"A calling is an organism, a living entity, with an animus all its own. It exerts a centrifugal force on our lives, continually pushing out from within. It drives us toward authenticity and aliveness, against the tyranny of fear and inertia and occasionally reason, and it is metered by the knocking in our hearts that signals the hour. If we are at all faithful to our calls, to the driving force of soul in our lives, it will lead us to a point of decision. Here we must decide whether to say yes or no, now or later, ready or not. And it will keep coming back until we give it an answer." ~ Gregg Levoy, Callings*

*"Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible is an idea whose time has come" ~ Wangari Maathai, Unbowed*

**Additional Reading:** Callings: Finding and Following and Authentic Life, by Gregg Levoy

## Q25. Desires

How will you  
give your  
desires more  
power than your  
fears?

Your desire is calling you, nudging you forward onto a path of aliveness, courage, and beauty. It wants you to see the world with open eyes, to feel all of your passion, to melt into “that fierce heat of living.” It doesn’t want you to live a small and shallow life. It wants you to dive into the depths, to risk it all for a life fully lived.

But your fear rises up and tells you that your desire is invalid, it’s selfish, it’s sinful, or it’s dangerous. Your fear takes the steering wheel of your life and desire is banished to the back seat where it’s handed sugary sweets and told to play car games to pass the time.

Desire wants to drive, to take you on the road trip of your life. Desire wants you to turn onto the road less traveled, the one that leads you through the spectacular mountain pass, along the edge of the cliff that overlooks the roaring ocean.

**What will you do to give desire the keys to your car?**

*“Let yourself feel your deep desire right now. Desire is the call of your incarnate soul, and a messenger of your Sacred self.” ~ Hiro Boga*

*“If I’ve never been encouraged to think of myself as someone capable of making choices in the simplest matters - what tastes good to me, how I like my room to look, what kind of people I want to be around - there is a certain kind of fire and light that will quite possibly never ignite in my life. I won’t know how to reach out for what matters most or even, possibly, to recognize it when it comes - when it whispers to me, from the depths of my own being.” ~ Carol Lee Flinders, At the Root of this Longing*

*“Men go to far greater lengths to avoid what they fear than to obtain what they desire.” ~ Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code*

*“I want to know  
if you know  
how to melt into that fierce heat of living  
falling toward  
the center of your longing.”*

*~ David Whyte, from the poem Self Portrait, in Fire in the Earth*

**Additional Reading:** At the Root of this Longing: Reconciling a Spiritual Hunger and a Feminist Thirst, by Carol Lee Flinders

## Quotes

## Q26. Walk

What do you  
need to walk  
away from?

Whatever served you in the past may not serve you in the future. Perhaps it's time to walk away?

In my life, there have been a series of walk outs and each of them came after months or years of discernment and contemplation. I walked out of a secure and high level government career that was stifling me. I walked away from a non-profit leadership position because I felt called to teach and write. I walked away from a church that no longer fit the shape of my faith. I walked out of a marriage that was no longer healthy for any of the people involved.

All of these walk outs were hard, and sometimes I hurt people in the process, but all of them were worth the effort. All of them allowed me to step deeper and deeper into my own authenticity and power.

**A walk out is not a failure, it is simply an acknowledgement that what worked in the past no longer works.** What I needed in the past may not be what feeds me in the future.

## Quotes

*“Walk Outs are people who bravely choose to leave behind situations jobs, relationships, and ideas that restrict and confine them, anything that inhibits them. They walk on to the ideas, people, and practices that enable them to explore and discover new gifts, new possibilities.”*  
~ Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, Walk Out Walk On

*“When people and communities walk out, they discover they’re more gifted and wiser than they believed or had been told, that working together - even in the harshest circumstances - can be joyful, that they can invent solutions to problems that others have declared unsolvable. These communities are creating meaningful change in some of the most difficult political, social, and economic circumstances.”* ~ Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, Walk Out Walk On

*“One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice--  
though the whole house  
began to tremble”*

~ from the poem “The Journey”, by Mary Oliver, in Dream Work

**Additional Reading:** Walk Out Walk On, by Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze + Leaving Church, by Barbara Brown Taylor

## What is possible if you open your heart?

At first, an open flesh wound is bandaged to protect it from further harm, but eventually the bandage must be removed so that the exposure to air can help it heal fully. If it remains bandaged too long, it risks festering and infection.

When your heart has been wounded, as all of ours have at some point in our lives, it feels safer to keep the bandage on, to guard yourself against further wounding. But a heart won't heal if it remains closed and guarded. It will fester and become infected with bitterness and hatred.

Open hearts may be exposed to risk, but they are also exposed to beauty, possibility, and love. **Open hearts are thriving hearts that allow their wounds to become part of their gift.**

*“What I want is to open up. I want to know what’s inside me. I want everybody to open up. I’m like an imbecile with a can-opener in his hand, wondering where to begin – to open up the earth. I know that underneath the mess everything is marvelous. I’m sure of it. I know it because I feel so marvelous myself most of the time. And when I feel that way everybody seems marvelous... everybody and everything... even pebbles and pieces of cardboard... a match stick lying in the gutter... anything... a goat’s beard, if you like. That’s what I want to write about... and then we’re all going to see clearly, see what a staggering, wonderful, beautiful world it is.” ~ Henry Miller*

*“Openness doesn’t come from resisting our fears but from getting to know them well.” ~ Pema Chodron, [The Places that Scare You](#)*

*“Each difficult moment has the potential to open my eyes and open my heart.” ~ Myla Kabat-Zinn*

*“That we find freedom, aliveness and power not from what contains, locates, or protects us but from what dissolves, reveals and expands us.” ~ Eve Ensler, [Insecure at Last](#)*

*“We are able to cross and dissolve all kinds of borders if we are willing to go to the political, emotional, and spiritual places we most fear and resist.” ~ Eve Ensler, [Insecure at Last](#)*

**Additional Reading: [Books](#): [Insecure at Last: A political memoir](#), by Eve Ensler + [The Dance of Connection](#), by Harriet Lerner**

**[Blog post](#): [Dare to live with an open heart](#)**

## Q28. Beauty

When did you  
last pause for  
beauty?

In two of the poorest places on earth, in remote areas of India and Bangladesh, I visited villages where the non-profit organization I worked for was supporting food-related programming. The villages were equally poor, but in one there was a sense of hopefulness and in the other there was an overwhelming sense of despair. For a long time after those trips, I contemplated the differences in the two places. Why was the pervading sense so different when they had equal limitations and misfortune?

The conclusion I came to was that one village had managed to maintain a sense of beauty while the other had lost it. In the hopeful village, the people's clothes were clean, their homes, though sparse, were bright and cheerful, and the young girls wore intricate braids and beads in their hair. In the other village, there was a look of decay and disorder and nobody's hair or clothes were clean or well cared for.

What came first, the beauty or the hopefulness? Did a connection to beauty bring hope, or did hope help them value beauty? I'm not sure, but I know that there is a connection one way or the other.

**Beauty gives us hope and hope gives us beauty.** When we pause for beauty, we feel the hope rise up in us. When the hope rises up in us, we see more beauty in the world.

## Quotes

*"A life without delight is only half a life." ~ John O'Donohue, Beauty, The Invisible Embrace*

*"Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy." ~ Anne Frank*

*"When our eyes are graced with wonder, the world reveals its wonders to us. There are people who see only dullness in the world and that is because their eyes have already been dulled. So much depends on how we look at things. The quality of our looking determines what we come to see." ~ John O'Donohue, Beauty*

*"A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul." ~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

*"You were given life; it is your duty (and also your entitlement as a human being) to find something beautiful within life, no matter how slight." ~ Elizabeth Gilbert*

**Additional Reading:** Beauty: The Invisible Embrace, by John O'Donohue + Mindfulness, by Ellen J. Langer

## Q29. Grief

### What have you learned from grief?

When we'd gotten the news that my dad had been killed in an accident, and my sister and I made the agonizing journey out to the farm to be with Mom, we drove past several coffee shops and shopping centres where people were going about their daily lives in oblivion. "How can they just be going for coffee as though nothing has happened?" we marvelled, caught up in our own grief. "How can they not see that the whole world has changed?"

Grief changes the landscape. Whatever loss you suffered causes everything around it to shift - like an earthquake that cracks open the land. You never completely get over it, but you learn to live in a new landscape. You learn to find your equilibrium in a world that's now tilted.

There are lessons in that shift. There are new perspectives, new understandings, and perhaps even new ways of being in relationship. If you open yourself to the pain, you will open yourself to the possibilities.

## Quotes

*"There is no teacher more discriminating or transforming than loss." ~ Pat Conroy, My Losing Season: A Memoir*

*"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me." ~ C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed*

*"You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp." ~ Anne Lamott*

**Additional Reading: Books:** A Grief Observed, by C.S. Lewis + The Geography of Loss, by Patti Digh

**Blog post:** On birds and dying and women's voices





What if you let  
go of other  
people's  
baggage?

When we take on other people's baggage, we do more harm than good. Nobody benefits - not them and not us. Instead, they become frustrated because they feel judged and inadequate, and we become frustrated because they don't cooperate with what we think is right. They might think they want us to carry their burdens, but what's really happening is that their autonomy is being eroded.

Our attempts to fix people are always based in our own ego and fear rather than genuine desire to be of service. If their problems are not fixed, then our lives feel less secure.

When I look back on my marriage, I know that this was the primary lesson I needed to learn from it. Married to a man with mental illness, I was always striving to find a solution, to fix him. I thought I was doing it out of goodness and love, but I was really doing it out of a selfish desire to have a more secure and comfortable life. I had to let go of his baggage so that we both could find freedom.

**Put down the baggage and instead, hold space.**

*"Our boundaries are blurred when our desire to be loved and needed by others seduces us into becoming overly involved in their lives. Or when we find ourselves overly committed with tasks and social engagements—even ones we enjoy. We must remember we need time alone, time for the stillness within to nurture us." ~ Karen Casey*

*"To begin with, I think we have to cultivate our willingness to let go, that is, to detach from the trials and tribulations of our contemporaries if we want to find the quiet peace we long for, a peace that will allow us to truly love, to truly embrace, and to appreciate those who journey with us. In this process, we also give those companions the freedom to grow and to find their own way, thus their own eventual peace to. I don't think we can come together as loving equals without embracing the willingness to detach." ~ Karen Casey, [Let Go Now](#)*

*"Is it possible that, with each inhalation, we take in the world and awaken our soul? And with each exhalation, do we free ourselves of the world, which inevitably entangles us? Is this how we fill up and empty a hundred times a day, always seeking the gift of the two breaths? Perhaps this is the work of being." ~ Mark Nepo, [Seven Thousand Ways to Listen](#)*

*"Truly loving another means letting go of all expectations. It means full acceptance, even celebration of another's personhood." ~ Karen Casey, [Let Go Now](#)*

*"Take yourself out of the center of other people's universe - it will free you up and let the universe turn more easily." ~ Patti Digh*

**Additional Reading:** [Let go now: Embracing Detachment](#), by Karen Casey

## Q31. Animal

What does the  
“soft animal of  
your body” love?

Sometimes the line of a poem grabs me and won't leave me alone. That's how it was with the line from Mary Oliver's poem, *Wild Geese*. "You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves." Ever since I read that line several years ago, I have been practicing listening to the "soft animal of my body".

What would you do differently if you were attuned to the soft animal of your body? Would you dance more, play more, sleep more, laugh more, love more, write more, have sex more, or feel more? Would you let go of guilt and step into desire?

**What will it take to let the soft animal of your body live wild and free?** Stop trying so hard to be good and open the cage.

## Quotes

*"You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves."  
~ from Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver*

*"Doing what you love isn't a privilege; it's an obligation." ~ Barbara Sher, Refuse to Choose!*

*"Find out what you love. Do it because you love it. Stick with it. Start now." ~ Barbara Sher*

*"The ultimate authority of my life is not the Bible; it is not confined between the covers of a book. It is not something written by men and frozen in time. It is not from a source outside myself. My ultimate authority is the divine voice in my own soul. Period." ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

**Additional Reading:** Refuse to Choose: Use all of your Interests, Passions and Hobbies to Create the Life and Career of your Dreams, by Barbara Sher + Women Who Run With Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes

What are you doing to ensure there are clear boundaries protecting your heart?

It took me a long, long time to believe I was worthy of boundaries. I thought I had to sacrifice myself for other people. I thought I had to keep people happy even when it meant putting up with behaviour I was uncomfortable with.

But the longer I live, the more I realize that clear boundaries and respect for those boundaries are essential ingredients in true love and true community. To teach someone to love you the way you deserve to be loved, you need to show them where the boundaries are and then trust that they will respect them.

I watched my daughters bouncing on the trampoline recently and I realized that a trampoline is a good metaphor for the value of boundaries. As long as you stay inside the circle and respect the edges, you can have fun without getting hurt. But when you don't respect or can't see the edge of the circle, you injure yourself or the others in the circle.

When people consistently cross your boundaries, they need to be told how to respect them, how to stay within the circle of your trampoline. And if they don't respect them, then the relationship may have to change or end. A relationship without boundaries is a relationship without sovereignty or respect. Nobody can thrive in an environment that feels so unsafe. Imagine a trampoline where you couldn't see where the edges were.

*"No' is a complete sentence." ~ Anne Lamott*

*"All too often women believe it is a sign of commitment, an expression of love, to endure unkindness or cruelty, to forgive and forget. In actuality, when we love rightly we know that the healthy, loving response to cruelty and abuse is putting ourselves out of harm's way." ~ bell hooks, All About Love: New Visions*

*"If you spend your life sparing people's feelings and feeding their vanity, you get so you can't distinguish what should be respected in them." ~ F. Scott Fitzgerald*

*"By refusing to surrender your own well-being to the demands of others, you give them the gift of clear boundaries and a powerfully sovereign self. Our kids learn how to be themselves by the example we set for them. By being yourself, choosing yourself, choosing your sovereignty, you shine a light that illuminates your path and theirs. You give them incomparable gifts — the freedom to be themselves, to choose their own joy, to learn from their explorations and to grow in creative sovereignty." ~ Hiro Boga*

**Additional Reading:** The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed, or Desperate, by Harriet Lerner

## Q33. Why

What is your  
"why"?

In the book, Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl writes about how he and others survived concentration camp during the Second World War. Those people, he says, who continued to search for meaning even in the midst of the brutality had the best chance of surviving. I read that book (on a friend's recommendation) just before traveling to the poorest parts of Ethiopia, and it helped me understand the resilience I saw in the midst of poverty.

You may never be subjected to that kind of torture or poverty, but nevertheless, your life will be more bearable if you continue to search for meaning - for your personal "why". Don't worry if you can't give a clear and succinct answer to this question. Give the answer you know today, and then ask yourself again a year from now, and a year after that.

Some of the power of the question is in the continuous asking, the continuous searching, the continuous openness to follow your why into its next iteration. The quest is what keeps you alive.

## Quotes

*"Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'." ~ Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning*

*"Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible." ~ Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning*

*"The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

*"If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for." ~ Thomas Merton*

*"Each suburban wife struggles with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question-- 'Is this all?'" ~ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique*

*"When you get your, 'Who am I?', question right, all of your, 'What should I do?' questions tend to take care of themselves" ~ Richard Rohr, Falling Upward*

**Additional Reading:** Man's Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl + Sacred Contracts, by Caroline Myss

## Q34. Alone

### How does it feel to be alone?

It took me a long time to discover how much I enjoyed being alone. As a teenager, I longed to be the life of the party, assuming that to be of value meant that you were always surrounded by other people. I was never the life of the party, though, preferring instead to live on the edges, with one foot in the crowd and one foot in the stillness. I thought my place on the edge meant that I was somehow flawed and not as interesting as the popular girls in the centre.

Years later, I watch my daughters navigate the same terrain, and as much as I want to tell them to embrace the solitude, I know they have to learn those lessons for themselves.

The more you learn to love yourself, the more you learn to enjoy your own company. Healthy solitude gives you space to connect deeply with self and Source and that connection makes you feel less alone.

Valuing solitude does not mean that you run from relationships. Quite the opposite. As bell hooks says, "When we can be alone, we can be with others without using them as a means of escape."

## Quotes

*"Solitude does not necessarily mean living apart from others; rather, it means never living apart from one's self. It is not about the absence of other people - it is about being fully present to ourselves, whether or not we are with others. Community does not necessarily mean living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other. It is not about the presence of other people-it is about being fully open to the reality of relationship, whether or not we are alone." ~ Parker Palmer*

*"I need to be alone. I need to ponder my shame and my despair in seclusion; I need the sunshine and the paving stones of the streets without companions, without conversation, face to face with myself, with only the music of my heart for company." ~ Henry Miller*

*"I live in that solitude which is painful in youth, but delicious in the years of maturity." ~ Albert Einstein*

*"Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving. When we can be alone, we can be with others without using them as a means of escape." ~ bell hooks*

*"Solitude is one of the most precious things in the human spirit. It is different from loneliness. When you are lonely, you become acutely conscious of your own separation. Solitude can be a homecoming to your own deepest belonging. One of the lovely things about us as individuals is the incommensurable in us. In each person, there is a point of absolute non connection with everything else and with everyone. This is fascinating and frightening. It means that we cannot continue to seek outside of ourselves for the things we need from within. The blessings for which we hunger are not to be found in other places or people. These gifts can only be given to you by yourself. They are at home at the hearth of your soul." ~ John O'Donohue, [Anam Cara](#)*

**Additional Reading:** **Book:** [Anam Cara: A book of Celtic wisdom](#), by John O'Donohue **Blog post:** [Learning to be alone](#)

How might your wounds help you serve as a source of light?

When you are wounded, you can choose to shut down to avoid further wounding (and, for a time, that may be the safest choice) or you can choose to do the hard work of healing your wounds and then begin to spread that healing to others.

The work I do now is deeply enriched by the many wounds that have changed the shape of my heart. The death of my parents, the stillbirth of my son, my sexual assault, the suicide attempts of my then-husband - all of these wounds have become gifts that deepen my work and deepen my connections. Without these wounds, I wouldn't have discovered what it means to swim in the deep end of the spiritual pool.

I'm not suggesting that you short-circuit the grief and pain and jump too quickly to the healing so that you can return to serving others. No, instead I invite you to be fully present in whatever the experience requires of you - all of the pain and the learning - so that your understanding of it deepens and your ability to rise from the flames like a phoenix is awakened at the right time.

**You are not your wounds, but your wounds change the shape of who you are.**

*"In a futile attempt to erase our past, we deprive the community of our healing gift. If we conceal our wounds out of fear and shame, our inner darkness can neither be illuminated nor become a light for others." ~ Brennan Manning*

*"I knew that my heart and mind would always be tempted to feel anger--to find blame and hate. But I resolved that when the negative feelings came upon me, I wouldn't wait for them to grow or fester. I would always turn immediately to the Source of all true power: I would turn to God and let His love and forgiveness protect and save me." ~ Immaculée Ilibagiza, [Left to Tell](#)*

*"This is the same power that I feel propelling me forward into the next phase of my life. God saved my soul and spared my life for a reason: He left me to tell my story to others and show as many people as possible the healing power of His love and forgiveness." ~ Immaculée Ilibagiza, [Left to Tell](#)*

*"...there is a great choice that awaits us every day: whether we go around carving holes in others because we have been so painfully carved ourselves, or whether we let spirit play its song through our tender experience, enabling us to listen, as well, to the miraculous music coming through others." ~ Mark Nepo, [Finding Inner Courage](#)*

*"It has been acceptable for some time in America to remain "wound identified" (that is, using one's victimhood as one's identity, one's ticket to sympathy, and one's excuse for not serving), instead of using the wound to "redeem the world," as we see in Jesus and many people who turn their wounds into sacred wounds that liberate both themselves and others." ~ Richard Rohr, [Falling Upward](#)*

**Additional Reading: Book:** [Left to Tell: Discovery God Among the Rwandan Genocide](#), by Immaculée Ilibagiza + [I am Malala](#), by Malala Yousafzai **Blog post:** [On letting go, forgiving, and healing our wounds](#)

## Q36. Space

What do you do to ensure there is spaciousness in your life?

When M. Scott Peck, psychiatrist and author of fifteen books, was asked how he accomplished so much, he said “I get a lot done because I spend an hour and a half every day doing nothing.” For 45 minutes in the morning and another 45 later in the day, he guarded his time so that he could meditate, read, wander in his garden, or simply sit and stare into space. This spaciousness in his life gave him the energy and inspiration to get all of his work done.

Just as a tree needs a dormant season, a body needs sleep, and yeast dough needs time to rise, we need to seek stillness and spaciousness so that our minds and hearts can do their good work in the world. We cheat ourselves out of the rich fertility of emptiness when fill our lives with too much activity.

When you are in the midst of a transition - the “space between stories” - you need even more spaciousness than you do when life is humming along at its usual pace. You need space to let go of what you’ve left behind, and space to prepare yourself for what is coming next. Like a pregnant woman, you need to give the new thing time to germinate and grow before it can be born. If you rush that, you’ll find yourself suffering later, when the grief, trauma, or fear sneak up on you unexpectedly.

**Rest, relax, and give yourself space.**

## Quotes

*“Silence is like a cradle holding our endeavors and our will; a silent spaciousness sustains us in our work and at the same time connects us to larger worlds that, in the busyness of our daily struggle to achieve, we have not yet investigated. Silence is the soul's break for freedom.” ~ David Whyte*

*“All transitions are composed of an ending, a neutral zone and a new beginning” ~ William Bridges, Transitions*

*“It's a transformative experience to simply pause instead of immediately fill up the space. By waiting, we begin to connect with fundamental restlessness as well as fundamental spaciousness.” ~ Pema Chodron, When Things Fall Apart*

*“Before they are able to enter a new story, most people - and probably most societies as well - must first navigate the passage out of the old. In between the old and the new there is an empty space. It is a time when the lessons and learnings of the old story are integrated. Only when that work has been done is the old story really complete. Then, there is nothing, the pregnant emptiness from which all being arises. Returning to essence, we regain the ability to act from essence. Returning to the space between stories, we can choose from freedom and not from habit. “ ~ Charles Eisenstein, The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*

*“I am saying that there is a time to do, and a time not to do, and that when we are slave to the habit of doing we are unable to distinguish between them.” ~ Charles Eisenstein, The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*

**Additional Reading: Books:** Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, by William Bridges + The Book of Awakening, by Mark Nepo  
**Blog post:** The value of spaciousness

## Q37. Searching

What are you  
searching for?

Sit quietly and go deep with this question. Ask it again and again until it changes you. What are you REALLY searching for? Does it have a name? Does it have a shape? Or is it simply some vague sense that there is something missing in your life?

If you can learn to love the quest itself, you can learn to love life. If you can practice openheartedness, curiosity, and perseverance as you pursue that which drives you forward, then you will find a deeper joy than you thought possible.

**For in the quest, there is discovery, there is surprise, there is connection, and there is love. In the quest is your sense of purpose.**

## Quotes

*"I go to seek a Great Perhaps. That's why I'm going. So I don't have to wait until I die to start seeking a Great Perhaps." ~ John Green, Looking for Alaska*

*"Religions are like cookbooks and guidebooks: they are not the food or the foreign country; rather they suggest ingredients and point us in the right direction." ~ Elizabeth Lesser, The Seeker's Guide*

*"Beginner's Mind is about discovering the essence of our humanness - the pure water of the inner heart, before it was clouded by conditioning." ~ Elizabeth Lesser, The Seeker's Guide*

*"If I were really asked to define myself, I wouldn't start with race; I wouldn't start with blackness; I wouldn't start with gender; I wouldn't start with feminism. I would start with stripping down to what fundamentally informs my life, which is that I'm a seeker on the path. I think of feminism, and I think of anti-racist struggles as part of it. But where I stand spiritually is, steadfastly, on a path about love." ~ bell hooks*

**Additional Reading:** The Seeker's Guide: Making your life a spiritual adventure, by Elizabeth Lesser



## Q38. Play

When was the  
last time you  
played?

In Zimbabwe recently, members of Kufunda Village invited local community members to play the Oasis Game. The Oasis Game is a community mobilization tool that brings together people from many different areas of society (NGOs, local government, businesses, and citizens) and invites them to discover what they can change in their community through play.

My friend Maaianne shared the results: “The weekend of the Oasis Game was the time for the 'Miracle', where the community came together to manifest a dream in two days. And they did. Together we did. A community centre was upgraded, a playground created for the kids outside, and a compost toilet for the people using the centre. Working, singing, making happen. Most of the materials came from the community, given by the community. No-one really believed all this could be done in two days - but it was!”

**Play can unleash possibilities we barely dare to dream of.** It can crack open creativity that otherwise laid dormant. At the same time, it offers lightness and liberation we often forget to seek in our grown-up lives.

## Quotes

*“Those who play rarely become brittle in the face of stress or lose the healing capacity for humor.” ~ Stuart Brown, MD*

*“Art is the only way to run away without leaving home.” ~ Twyla Tharp, The Creative Habit*

*“Here’s how I learned to improvise: I played some music in the studio and I started to move. It sounds obvious, but I wonder how many people, whatever their medium, appreciate the gift of improvisation. It’s your one opportunity in life to be completely free, with no responsibilities and no consequences. You don’t have to be good or even interesting. It’s you alone, with no one watching or judging. If anything comes of it, you decide whether the world gets to see it. In essence, you are giving yourself permission to daydream during working hours.” ~ Twyla Tharp, The Creative Habit*

*“Life is more fun if you play games.” ~ Roald Dahl, My Uncle Oswald*

*“It is a happy talent to know how to play.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

**Additional Reading:** **Book:** The Creative Habit: Learn it and Use It for Life, by Twyla Tharp **Blog post:** Maybe the world needs as many play sessions as there are board meetings



What if you  
saved yourself  
first?

Flight attendants remind us to put on our own oxygen masks first. If we want to save others, we have to first make sure we are able to breathe.

I was raised by a mother who never put herself first, and so I believed it was sinful and selfish to do so. As a result, it took me a long time to learn that I was worthy of boundaries and self-love. It took me a long time to realize that I couldn't serve others from a place of depletion.

If you are burnt out or discouraged, perhaps you need to stop serving others for awhile and serve yourself. Perhaps you need a few deep breaths of life-saving oxygen before you can hand it to the person next to you.

*"If you feel lost, disappointed, hesitant, or weak, return to yourself, to who you are, here and now and when you get there, you will discover yourself, like a lotus flower in full bloom, even in a muddy pond, beautiful and strong." ~ Masaru Emoto*

*"As May Sarton reminds us, the pilgrimage toward true self will take 'time, many years and places.' The world needs people with the patience and the passion to make that pilgrimage not only for their own sake but also as a social and political act. The world still waits for the truth that will set us free - my truth, your truth, our truth - the truth that was seeded in the earth when each of us arrived her formed in the image of God. Cultivating that truth, I believe, is the authentic vocation of every human being." ~ Parker Palmer, Let your Life Speak*

*"The road to enlightenment is long and difficult, and you should try not to forget snacks and magazines." ~ Anne Lamott, Traveling Mercies*

*"When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life." ~ Jean Shinoda Bolen*

*"This surprised me because it made me realize that what I sought was not outside myself. It was within me, already there, waiting. Awakening was really the act of remembering myself, remembering this deep Feminine Source." ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

**Additional Reading:** Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith, by Anne Lamott

## Q40. Battles

### What battles should you stop fighting?

"You've gotta pick your battles," parents often say to each other, admitting that we let our kids get away with some things that just weren't worth fighting for. In my house, "picking my battles" meant that there was pink hair on one daughter and a shaved head on another. Both were harmless - there were so many worse things they could have done.

What does it mean to adopt that maxim in the rest of your life? What if you stop fighting some of the battles that don't need to be won? What if you simply surrender and save your energy for the more valuable work of building a positive future? What if it you don't need to be right?

Walking away from the battles that are ego-based or fear-based allows you to focus instead on living a peaceful life. Then, when the important work that requires your fighting spirit to rise appears - the work of fighting injustice, racism, etc. - you will have the strength you need to be a warrior.

## Quotes

*"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change things build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." ~ Buckminster Fuller*

*"My great teachers these days are people who no longer need hope in order to do their work, even though their projects and organizations began with bright, hope-filled dreams. As 'the blood-dimmed tide' of greed, fear, and oppression drowns out their voices and washes away their good work, they become more committed to their work, not because it will succeed, but just because it is right for them to be doing it." ~ Margaret Wheatley, So Far From Home*

*"An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind." ~ Mahatma Gandhi*

*"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you." ~ Friedrich Nietzsche*

**Additional Reading:** So Far From Home: Lost and found in a brave new world, by Margaret Wheatley + Power and Love: A theory and practice of social change, by Adam Kahane

## Q41. Journey

What if you hold your goals lightly and focus on the journey instead?

As a leader in government and non-profit, it was always my job to write annual goals and strategic plans for my team. I spent days crafting just the right goals so that I could impress the board of directors. But as soon as they were submitted, I promptly forgot them and went back to the work that needed to be done.

I used to think that meant I was a poor manager, but now I recognize that what was showing up for me was a delight in the journey instead of the goals. Goals can be valuable tools to help us stay motivated, but they are simply that - tools. When we give them too much weight, they cast a shadow on the path and we lose the pleasure of the journey.

When we focus instead on the journey, we open ourselves to surprises and delight. We become more adaptable and less resentful of disruptions. We make more spaciousness for conversations and relationships. We torment ourselves less because we stop focusing on whether or not we reach our arbitrary destination.

**Set goals, if you wish, but hold them lightly while you remain mindful and present for the journey.**

## Quotes

*"Your soul knows the geography of your destiny. Your soul alone has the map of your future, therefore you can trust this indirect, oblique side of yourself. If you do, it will take you where you need to go, but more important it will teach you a kindness of rhythm in your journey."*  
~ John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*

*"The journey in between what you once were and who you are now becoming is where the dance of Life really takes place."* ~ Barbara De Angelis

*"We have to go from what is essentially an industrial model of education, a manufacturing model, which is based on linearity and conformity and batching people. We have to move to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture. We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish."* ~ Ken Robinson, *The Element*

*"As I swept the last bit of dust, I made a covenant with myself: I will accept. Whatever will be, will be. I have a life to lead. I recalled words a friend had told me, the philosophy of her faith. "Life is a journey and a struggle," she had said. "We cannot control it, but we can make the best of any situation." I was indeed in quite a situation. It was up to me to make the best of it."* ~ Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed*

**Additional Reading: Books:** [The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything](#), by Ken Robinson + [Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion](#), by Sara Miles **Blog post:** [My lack-of-vision board](#)

## Q42. Body

### What is your body trying to tell you?

Not long ago, when the combination of business and relationship stresses was pushing me to the point of burnout, I went to see a psychotherapist. After listening to me talk for 45 minutes, she looked at me for a moment and said, “I’m going to go out on a limb here and say that what you need is not talk therapy. You’re very good at talking and thinking. You’ve read all the books and you know how to analyze all of your problems. But your tendency to talk your way through things is blocking the deeper healing that needs to happen. What you need to do instead is listen to your body.”

As soon as she said it, I could feel the truth of it resonate through my body. I was trying too hard to think my way to healing, while my body was crying out for attention. I was listening to my head but was ignoring what my body was trying to tell me.

I spent the next few weeks trying to be intentional about giving my body what it was asking for. I treated it with more loving care, I went for a massage, I took long walks, and I sought out an energy healer. The more I listened and gave it my attention, the more I knew what I needed and the more I understood what had blocked me before.

**There is wisdom in your body that your mind knows nothing about.** There are memories in your body that your mind has long forgotten. When you pay attention, you will find a greater wholeness than you’ve ever known.

## Quotes

*“The body is wiser than its inhabitants. The body is the soul. The body is god’s messenger.” ~ Erica Jong*

*“Neuroscience research shows that the only way we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our inner experience and learning to befriend what is going inside ourselves.” ~ Bessel A. van der Kolk, [The Body Keeps the Score](#)*

*“As I often tell my students, the two most important phrases in therapy, as in yoga, are “Notice that” and “What happens next?” Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than with fear, everything shifts.” ~ Bessel A. van der Kolk, [The Body Keeps the Score](#)*

*“Mindfulness not only makes it possible to survey our internal landscape with compassion and curiosity but can also actively steer us in the right direction for self-care.” ~ Bessel A. van der Kolk, [The Body Keeps the Score](#)*

*“People have always understood intuitively that mind and body are not separable. Modernity has brought with it an unfortunate dissociation, a split between what we know with our whole being and what our thinking mind accepts as truth. Of these two kinds of knowledge the latter, narrower, kind most often wins out, to our loss.” ~ Gabor Maté, [When the Body Says No](#)*

**Additional Reading:** [When the Body Says No: The cost of hidden stress](#), by Gabor Maté + [In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness](#), by Peter Levine + [MindBody Code: How to Change the Beliefs that Limit Your Health, Longevity, and Success](#), by Mario Martinez PsyD

## Q43. Create

What do you  
want to  
create?

Not all of us are called to be artists, but all of us are called to create. If you believe, as I do, that we were made in the image of God, then you believe that we are all creators.

Those who dare to create are those who dare to change the world. The more we create, the more we empower ourselves and the more we birth a more beautiful world.

Perhaps you want to create a safe place for children to play. Or a dinner party where the neighbours can build relationships. Or a new committee to address homelessness in your city. Or a public art space. Or a comfortable room where you can entertain guests. Or an online course where you can teach people self-care practices. Or a spreadsheet that organizes your family's finances. Or a beaded necklace to give to a friend.

If the urge to create comes over you, don't resist it. If you ignore the muse, someone else will be visited with the good idea that wants to be born.

## Quotes

*"In the rare moments I permitted any stillness, I noted a small fluttering at the pit of my belly, a barely perceptible disturbance. The faint whisper of a word would sound in my head: writing. At first I could not say whether it was heartburn or inspiration. The more I listened, the louder the message became: I needed to write, to express myself through written language not only so that others might hear me but so that I could hear myself. The gods, we are taught, created humankind in their own image. Everyone has an urge to create. Its expression may flow through many channels: through writing, art, or music or through the inventiveness of work or in any number of ways unique to all of us, whether it be cooking, gardening, or the art of social discourse. The point is to honor the urge. To do so is healing for ourselves and for others; not to do so deadens our bodies and our spirits. When I did not write, I suffocated in silence." ~ Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts**

*"Creativity is not a gated square into which only professional artists and dancers are allowed to enter, but a public park through which all pass." ~ Thomas Ryan, *Soulfire**

*"How willing are we to color outside the lines of the activity in which we are accomplished and secure? What would it be like to let our creative energies run free like wild horses in new pastures?" ~ Thomas Ryan, *Soulfire**

*"Others have seen what is and asked why. I have seen what could be and asked why not." ~ Pablo Picasso*

*"The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is - it's to imagine what is possible." ~ bell hooks*

**Additional Reading: Books:** *Soul Fire: Accessing Your Creativity*, by Thomas Ryan + *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron

**Blog post:** *How to grow your creativity*

## Q44. Citizen

Do you see yourself as a citizen or a consumer?

When you walk down the street in your neighbourhood, do you wonder why nobody has picked up the litter on the sidewalk or fixed the broken swing in the park? Do you blame your politicians and government workers for the problems in your city and complain about how nobody is caring for the elderly or cleaning up the waterways?

When you view yourself as “consumer” or “taxpayer”, you can dismiss responsibility and place the blame firmly on someone else’s shoulders. You give up the power to make meaningful change in your neighbourhood to someone else and you become a victim of other people’s choices. When, instead, you begin to take your role as a citizen seriously, you start to ask yourself “what is my responsibility here? What can I contribute to making my home and neighbourhood more safe and comfortable?”

A man in India got tired of waiting for his government to clean up the polluted river. City governments had been dumping their human waste and garbage into the sacred Sikh waterway. After unsuccessful attempts to convince the governments to stop dumping waste into the river, Seechewal drew on the Sikh tradition of kar sewa (free voluntary service) and started to clean up the river single-handedly. Before long, others joined him, and soon the governments could no longer ignore their responsibility. Today, this once revolting river teems with life and is a beautiful sight for all who live near it.

In contrast to that, at Glastonbury music festival, many people see themselves only as consumers, not responsible for their own waste or the state of the earth. At the end of last year’s festival, in the campground there were 5,000 abandoned tents, 6,500 sleeping bags, 400 gazebos, 3,500 airbeds, 2,200 chairs and 950 rolled mats.

## Quotes

*“A citizen is one who is a participant in a democracy, regardless of their legal status. It is one who chooses to create the life, the neighbourhood, the world from their own gifts and the gifts of others. A consumer is one who has surrendered to others the power to provide what is essential for a full and satisfied life. This act of surrender goes by many names: client, patient, student, audience, fan, shopper.” ~ John McKnight and Peter Block, The Abundant Community*

*“Citizenship is more than an individual exchange of freedoms for rights; it is also membership in a body politic, a nation, and a community. To be deemed fair, a system must offer its citizens equal opportunities for public recognition, and groups cannot systematically suffer from misrecognition in the form of stereotype and stigma.” ~ Melissa V. Harris-Perry, Sister Citizen*

*“The complexity of the so-called individual that’s been praised for decades in America somehow has narrowed itself to the ‘me’. When I was a young girl we were called citizens – American citizens. We were second-class citizens, but that was the word. In the 50s and 60s they started calling us consumers. So we did – consume. Now they don’t use those words any more – it’s the American taxpayer and those are different attitudes.” ~ Toni Morrison*

**Additional Reading:** The Abundant Community, by Peter Block and John McKnight + The Gift, by Lewis Hyde

## Q45. Shadow

What does your shadow look like?

According to Jung, the shadow is full of all those things we have no wish to be, and certainly no wish to present to others; our fears, our insecurities, our anxieties. It's the part of ourselves that we are often not in touch with or have possibly disowned.

The shadow can show up in many ways. Think about those little secrets that you hide when you're talking with friends - the things that make you feel like "if only they knew the truth about me, they wouldn't really like me". Are you afraid to tell your friends that you're the daughter of an alcoholic? Are you hoping your co-workers don't find out that you're going for marriage counseling because your marriage has hit a rocky spot? Are you a closet binge-eater or a secret trashy-romance reader? Do you try to hide the fact that you're living paycheck to paycheck and never know when the money will run out?

The problem is, the more we try to keep our secrets in the dark the larger the shadow grows and the less energy we have for spreading light into the world. The only way we can live a wholehearted, undivided life is to address the shadow and to bring it into the light.

An honest look at your own shadow will begin to loosen its grip on your life. Freedom comes when you make peace with your shadow and take responsibility for what you discover there.

## Quotes

*"Your life will be transformed when you make peace with your shadow. The caterpillar will become a breathtakingly beautiful butterfly. You will no longer have to pretend to be someone you're not. You will no longer have to prove you're good enough. When you embrace your shadow you will no longer have to live in fear. Find the gifts of your shadow and you will finally revel in all the glory of your true self. Then you will have the freedom to create the life you have always desired." ~ Debbie Ford*

*"We can't fight darkness with darkness. We have to find compassion, and embrace the darkness inside of us in order to understand it and, ultimately, to transcend it." ~ Debbie Ford, [The Shadow Effect](#)*

*"But the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward; not wholly bad. It even contains childish or primitive qualities which would in a way vitalize and embellish human existence, but convention forbids!" ~ C.G. Jung*

**Additional Reading:** **Book:** [The Shadow Effect: Illuminating the power of your true self](#), by Debbie Ford, Deepak Chopra, and Marianne Williamson **Blog post:** [Trying not to trip on my shadow \(in which I admit to my weaknesses\)](#)



## Q46. Justify

What would change if you no longer needed to justify or defend yourself?

When I scroll through social media, I witness the way that people (myself included) need to quickly jump to their own defence and justification when someone critiques or questions them. Heaven forbid that someone should think we're foolish or wrong or misinformed or incompetent.

It's human to be triggered by other people's responses to us and it's human to jump to our own defence. But that very human reaction is based in fear and ego. It's based in our own sense of unworthiness and inadequacy and our fear of rejection.

I'm not suggesting that you should become a human doormat and never stand up for yourself or your ideas. Instead, I'm suggesting that you pause before reacting and ask yourself if the need for a response is being fed by your ego or by a genuine desire for meaningful conversation. In that pause, you might find deeper wisdom than the first reaction that comes to you. That wisdom might even invite you into silence.

**What if you begin to believe that your own wisdom and worthiness needs no defence?** What if you approached life with a "yes, and..." attitude instead of "yes, but..."?

## Quotes

*"...when I betray myself, others' faults become immediately inflated in my heart and mind. I begin to 'horribilize' others. That is, I begin to make them out to be worse than they really are. And I do this because the worse they are, the more justified I feel." ~ The Arbing Institute, [The Anatomy of Peace](#)*

*"The more sure I am that I'm right, the more likely I will actually be mistaken. My need to be right makes it more likely that I will be wrong! Likewise, the more sure I am that I am mistreated, the more likely I am to miss ways that I am mistreating others myself. My need for justification obscures the truth." ~ The Arbing Institute, [The Anatomy of Peace](#)*

*"The greatest thing I learned while taking classes at Second City was the very first thing they taught: 'Yes, and...'. In improv, you keep scenes alive but accepting whatever you are given and then adding to it or amplifying it. There is no space on stage for 'No,' 'I'm sorry, you're mistaken,' or 'Yes, but...'. Those transitions kill energy, set up interpersonal conflict, engage the ego in a defensive posture, and stymie the flow of conversation onstage." ~ Jason Seiden, [How to Self-Destruct: Making the Least of What's Left of Your Career](#)*

*"If we seek spiritual heroism ourselves, the old ego is just back in control under a new name. There would not really be any change at all, but only disguise, just bogus self-improvement on our own terms." ~ Richard Rohr, [Falling Upward](#)*

*"If any female feels she need anything beyond herself to legitimate and validate her existence, she is already giving away her power to be self-defining, her agency." ~ bell hooks, [Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics](#)*

**Additional Reading:** [Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the heart of conflict](#), by The Arbing Institute



What needs to die?

Look to the seasons for a better understanding of the cycle of life and death. In the Spring, green things sprout from the ground, eager and full of life. In the Summer, they flourish and multiply, dropping their buds and growing their fruit. In the Fall, the fruit ripens and begins to fall off, planting new seeds in the ground for next year's growth. In the Winter, this season's greenery dies so that the cycle of dormancy and rest can begin. And then it begins all over again.

In the forest where I love to wander, there is a young sapling growing out of the rotted remains of an old dead tree. Each year, I visit to witness this year's growth and to pay homage to the tree that gave up its life so that a young tree could take root in its compost.

There may be things in your life that are ready to die. They have reached the end of their cycle, the fruit has been harvested, and they are ready to give themselves up so that there can be spaciousness for what needs to grow in the next season.

**When you resist the death, you block the next season of birth.** When you let death happen, you create fertile soil where something new can take root.

*"The human ego prefers anything, just about anything, to falling, or changing, or dying. The ego is that part of you that loves the status quo – even when it's not working. It attaches to past and present and fears the future." ~ Richard Rohr, [Falling Upward](#)*

*"I have trained myself now - when something is not going my way, and I feel rising up within me a big, hard, No! - to take a breath or two, and to counter that no with different counsel. I tell myself to 'die to it'. Sometimes just saying that little phrase - 'die to it' - is all I need to do to clear my head of the emotional storm clouds. What must die? Any resistance to the bigger truth. Any holding on by that part of me - my little ego part - that cannot see beyond its own nose. If the situation involves another person who appears to be getting in the way of what I want - even if that person is being led around by the nose of his or her own little ego - it is still only necessary for me to 'die to it.' When I can clearly see the whole picture, then I'm free to choose wisely my own next steps." ~ Elizabeth Lesser, [Broken Open](#)*

*"What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly." ~ Richard Bach*

**Additional Reading:** [The Geography of Loss: Embrace What Was, Honor What Was, Love What Will Be](#), by Patti Digh + [Leaving Church: A memoir of faith](#), by Barbara Brown Taylor



What stories  
are holding you  
back?

We carry around our old stories like heavy stones in a backpack. Those backpacks have become so much a part of us that we assume it's impossible to put them down.

Inside the backpack, there may be stories of unworthiness we picked up in the classroom. Or stories of shame and sinfulness we brought home from Sunday School. Or stories of weakness associated with our gender. Or stories of marginalization carried by our race.

These stories control us and keep us trapped. Sometimes - when it comes to the patriarchy or white supremacy - that is by design. When that is true, it becomes harder to extract ourselves from them. But still we must do the work of liberating ourselves, story by story, until we are free.

After Apartheid was over in South Africa, Bishop Desmond Tutu found himself on a plane flown by black pilots. At first, he was delighted to see that his people were finally given access to the controls. But then, when turbulence hit, his first thought was "Can Black people really navigate us to safety?" The old stories of Apartheid were so embedded in him that he'd internalized doubt about his own people.

Maybe you have stories like that in your backpack, dragging you down and holding you back. What will it take to let go of them? When will you begin?


*"It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here." ~ James Baldwin, Collected Essays*

*"Within each of us lives an Inner Patriarch that continues to carry the old patriarchal rules and values, many of which may have been taught us by our mothers. This Inner Patriarch controls us from the inside, not the outside. We do not necessarily know about him because he operates beyond the edges of our awareness. He rules from the shadows of our unconscious, which is why I sometimes call him the Shadow King. When we do not know about him, this Shadow King is our enemy." ~ Sidra Stone, The Shadow King*

*"A child has no trouble believing the unbelievable, nor does the genius or the madman. It's only you and I, with our big brains and our tiny hearts, who doubt and overthink and hesitate." ~ Steven Pressfield, Do the Work*

*"This is a hard question. But as women we have a right to ask the hard questions. The only way I have ever understood, broken free, emerged, healed, forgiven, flourished, and grown powerful is by asking the hardest questions and then living into the answers through opening up to my own terror and transmuting it into creativity. I have gotten nowhere by retreating into hand-me-down sureties or resisting the tensions that truth ignited." ~ Sue Monk Kidd, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

**Additional Reading: Books:** The Shadow King: The Invisible Force That Holds Women Back, by Sidra Stone + Long Walk to Freedom, by Nelson Mandela **Blog post:** Women and power



What does it  
look like to move  
beyond duality?

Right and wrong, good and bad, us and them - that's the way we want to line up the world in our youth. It feels safer to cling to that kind of duality. It's neat and unambiguous and it fits our need for clarity. Many of our politicians want to keep us in that place as well because it's easier to line up voters who see the other side as "purely evil" or "always wrong" and who see their political candidate as the "hero on the white horse rescuing them from harm".

In psychology, they refer to this as "splitting" or "all-or-nothing thinking" - the failure in a person's thinking to bring together the dichotomy of both positive and negative qualities of the self and others into a cohesive, realistic whole. It is a common defence mechanism used by many people who fear the insecurity of the alternative.

But a mature psychology and worldview invite us to move past a binary view of the world. They invite us into the place of ambiguity. There are shades of grey in between the black and white. There is a "we" that is more complex than "us and them". Like the yin-yang symbol, there is an intertwining of the dark and the light within each of us.

What does non-duality look like for you? Would you be less hard on yourself or other people if you stopped trying to line up everyone into categories?

*"This path moves us beyond duality into unity, a unity that includes opposites at all times. Whenever we live in duality, there will be an 'us' and a 'them'. In this case, it is women and men, or Matriarchs and Patriarchs. When we move beyond the opposites, we move to a 'we,' a broader definition of humankind." ~ Sidra Stone, [The Shadow King](#)*

*"Are the great spiritual teachings really advocating that we fight evil because we are on the side of light, the side of peace? Are they telling us to fight against that other 'undesirable' side, the bad and the black. That is a big question. If there is wisdom in the sacred teachings, there should not be any war. As long as a person is involved with warfare, trying to defend or attack, then his action is not sacred; it is mundane, dualistic, a battlefield situation." ~ Chögyam Trungpa, [Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism](#)*

*"I know the term "non-dual thinking" is still new or strange to many people. It simply means our ability to read the moment, to read reality in a way that is not judgmental, a way that is not exclusionary of the part that we don't understand. And it takes practice to learn that. It's very interesting that the term "non-dual" is taken for granted in three of the Eastern religions: Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. This word would be very familiar to them because it's the best descriptor of high-level consciousness—when you don't split everything up according to what you like and what you don't like. You leave the moment open, you let it be what it is in itself, and you let it speak to you. ~ Richard Rohr, [The Naked Now](#)*

*"Instead of either/or, I discovered a whole world of and." ~ Gloria Steinem, [My Life on the Road](#)*

**Additional Reading:** [Falling Upward: A spirituality for the two halves of life](#), by Richard Rohr + [My Life on the Road](#), by Gloria Steinem



## What are you grateful for?

When I found myself in the hospital on strict bedrest after a failed surgery threatened to end my pregnancy, there was one thing that turned my experience around and made it bearable - my gratitude journal. Though I was tempted to feel bitter and angry about the series of doctors' errors that had landed me there, I chose, instead, to look for what I was grateful for. Each day, I recorded the little gifts that came my way while I lay there alone and disconnected from my life. My perspective shifted dramatically, and soon I was viewing this time in the hospital as a spiritual retreat rather than an imprisonment.

When my son died, after three weeks of hospitalization meant to keep him alive, I was able to enter the grief in a peaceful rather than resentful way. I would have emerged very differently if it hadn't been for my gratitude journal.

I haven't been consistent about keeping a journal, but I still maintain a gratitude practice. I find it especially helpful if, when I wake up in the morning and begin to worry about whatever stress wasn't resolved the day before, I start my day with a mental list of what I'm grateful for. Being intentional about choosing gratitude rather than worry shifts the course of my day.

*"True forgiveness is when you can say, 'Thank you for that experience.'" ~ Oprah Winfrey*

*"Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

*"Gorgeous, amazing things come into our lives when we are paying attention: mangoes, grandnieces, Bach, ponds. This happens more often when we have as little expectation as possible. If you say, "Well, that's pretty much what I thought I'd see," you are in trouble. At that point you have to ask yourself why you are even here. [...] Astonishing material and revelation appear in our lives all the time. Let it be. Unto us, so much is given. We just have to be open for business." ~ Anne Lamott, [Help Thanks Wow](#)*

*"Gratitude begins in our hearts and then dovetails into behavior. It almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. It means that you are willing to stop being such a jerk. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled, and pleased to give back." ~ Anne Lamott, [Help Thanks Wow](#)*

*"The most significant gifts are the ones most easily overlooked. Small, everyday blessings: woods, health, music, laughter, memories, books, family, friends, second chances, warm fireplaces, and all the footprints scattered throughout our days." ~ Sue Monk Kidd*

**Additional Reading: *Book:*** [Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers](#), by Anne Lamott

***Blog post:*** [Gratitude practice: letting the light through the crack](#)

# Bonus Questions

*submitted by others via Facebook*

“Who first told you you needed permission to be yourself or speak your mind - and why did you believe them?” ~ Fortune Buchholtz

“Why are you so afraid of succeeding?” ~ Steve Hayes

“What’s one secret you’re willing to share now that you’ve never shared before?” ~ Janine Le Gal

“What would happen if you told the truth?” ~ Sharon Simon

“During the worst of my health crisis, while I was walking home - visibly in pain - a co-worker caught up to me and we chatted a bit. About where I was with my health, she asked me ‘what would you do differently?’ I answered, ‘cry more.’” ~ Teresa Deak

“When trying to decide a path... ‘What brings you joy?’” ~ Michelle Casserley

“Can’t you ever think for yourself?” ~ Rhonda Ransford

“What is your purpose for being here right now and tomorrow?” ~ Gini Smith

“Why not?” ~ Jaimee Loewen

“What are you devoted to?” ~ Kerrie Blazek

“What’s the worst that could happen? What is the best scenario?” ~ Bo N Tami Shurling

“What was the promise you made before you were even born? What beauty did you promise to deliver to this world from the other?” ~ Reda Racily

“What’s more important to you, a career or a family?” ~ Sera Bishop (asked by an aunt I was 23)

“If you had it to do over, in your younger years, what kind of career or life path would you choose?” ~ Linda Sullivan Phillippi

“Do you think you are mostly your true authentic self or do you have a concept of who you were, who you should be, or who you planned to be that you are trying to live up to?” ~ Gloria Lawrenson

“What is saving your life right now?” - Tina Forster

“What are you here (on this earth) to be the antidote to?” ~ Shannon Leflar

“What if you were a man in Saudi?” (asked of Saleha after her last trip to Saudi Arabia, where she grew up) ~ Saleha Alshehri

“Take it or leave it?” (Not necessarily talking about something that you can literally take physically) ~ Barret Davies

“If you trusted yourself, what would you do now?” ~ submitted by Lauren Bacon, asked by Hiro Boga

“What do you want?” ~ Lesley Hughes

“Does being happy matter to you?” ~ Michael Kang

“What is the self-limiting belief that is keeping you from saying yes to this?” ~ Crystal Gurney

“What do you feel physically, what do you feel emotionally? What do you need physically, what do you need emotionally?” ~ Heather Randazzo

“What role did (former passion) play for your spirit? In what way did it feed others?” (While being lost and unsure what I’m meant to be doing.) ~ Caren Knox

# Bonus Questions

*submitted by others via Facebook*

“Would you rather be happy or right?” ~ Stephanie Warfield

“What questions are holding you now?” ~ Stephanie Warfield

“Where do you feel this (decision, issue, problem, question) in your body?” ~ Karen Richter

“What needs to happen in order for you to forgive yourself?” ~ Trina Isakson

“How can we support you right now?” ~ Lilwen Selina Joynson

“Does this move me toward LIFE?” ~ Jill Emmelhainz

“What are you afraid of?” ~ Linda Marie James

“How did you learn how to teach us about integrity if they didn’t teach you that in teacher school, Ms. Gold?” (Asked by one of my second grade students this year.) ~ Jen Gold

“Is your assumption true?” (It’s amazing how often we simply accept something as a “truth” without questioning whether or not it really is true or if it is a truth that we want as our own. For example, the statement “I must live in my city of origin.” These assumptions keep us stuck.) v Stephanie Binewych Clark

“What is the one belief you hold that, if it turned out not to be true, would render your work irrelevant? And, what do you believe that, even if presented with evidence to the contrary, you would go on acting as if it were true?” ~ submitted by Angela Blanchard, asked by Margaret Wheatley

“What if the answer were yes?” (Regardless of the question.) ~ Sue Kindred

“Who are you?” ~ Maite de la Rosa

“What are you focused upon?” ~ Amy Ozarow Oscar

“Have you thought about just letting yourself be uncomfortable?” ~ LaVonne Ellis

“At this very moment, what would you most like to tell me about?” ~ Mahala Mazerov

“Which path leads toward joy?” ~ Amy Ozarow Oscar

“What if you aren’t meant to know what things mean?” ~ Amy Ozarow Oscar

“What do YOU need?” ~ Crystal Rae Morrissey

“What are you willing to live with?” ~ Casey Rasmussen White

“What would you like me to know about you right now?” ~ Eleni Zatz Litt

“What kind of relationship helps you to continually become more of all that you are here to be?” ~ Aine Dee

“What do you want to create?” ~ John Munroe (asked by Robert Fritz)

“What if...?” and “Why?” ~ Martha Oestreich

“What are you not saying?” ~ Christine Rogers

“If money were no issue, what would you be doing?” ~ Maia Heissler

“Is it really true?” ~ Louise Schullery Cox

“Will you help me either die or get better?” ~ Kathy Glover

“What does compassion sound like? Feel like?” ~ Sorrow Grey

“Are you insane?” ~ Carlene Rummery

# Bonus Questions

*submitted by others via Facebook*

“Why don’t you ever wear colours?” ~ Jennifer Cresswell-Ketley

“Why do you ask what you SHOULD do? Maybe instead it is what you WANT to do!” ~ Flow Bambenek

“What is it that you most need to hear?” ~ Debbie Huff

“Who would you be, where would you go, and what would you be doing if racism didn’t have you prisoner?” ~ Melanie DewBerry

“When will be the right time for now?” ~ Melanie DewBerry

“Tell me who you are” or in question form “Who are you?” ~ Ivy Thomas

“What makes your heart sing?” ~ Deborah LeeAnn Morley

“Are you happy?” ~ Nancy Naumann

“How is it possible...?” ~ Diane Amsted

“Do you want to be a priest?” ~ Susan Paul Johnson

“The best question I ever asked was when I asked my Grandmother what was the happiest time of her life. She said ‘When I had my kids with me.’ The time she was talking about was the most difficult time possible... the depression, poverty, losing the family business, and then the War. But it was still the happiest time of her life. I took it to heart and always kept it in mind every day I had my own kids with me. I truly appreciated every day of their childhoods.” ~ Gail Kasprick

“What are you willing to suffer for? (Things that are worth having are worth working hard for. What are those things?)” ~ Miki DeVivo

“When I was in junior high, I was filled with rage and was furious at my gym teacher over something that was in now way her fault. I walked behind her in the hallway muttering nasty things. She turned around, looked me in the eye, and said ‘Why are you treating me like that?’ Suddenly I realized that she was a human being and not an object of scorn, that my nasty words were painful to her. It was the moment I realized I wasn’t the only person on earth and that it mattered how I behaved.” ~ Melissa Steele

“What do you want?” ~ Georgina Cole-McGuire

“What does this mean to you? If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently? How is that working for you? What part of you benefits from this situation/choice/behaviour?” ~ Maria Mangiarelli Rippo

“What is your highest vision in this situation? What is your mission here, according to your soul? How do you express wholeheartedness in your life? How do you create meaning, depth, and value in your life for yourself and others? What are your highest values? Who or what will you serve today?” ~ Lucy Young

“What if...?” and “Is that true?” ~ Silvia Tiya Hayakawa

“When are you going to get serious about what you really want to be doing?” ~ Amanda Fenton

“What are you most afraid of?” ~ Idelette McVicker

“With every question comes many answers... I simply ask if you can love me for who I am and who I am becoming... for I am you yourself... in lakesh.” ~ Kohala April Gallactic Davis



# Bonus Questions

*submitted by others via Facebook*

“What will you do to make the apology real?” (Asked in relation to the United Church’s apology to Indigenous people in Canada for the role they played in the residential school system.) ~ Chris Corrigan

“What business is it of yours?” The answer: “None whatsoever.” And a thousand burdens fell away. ~ Nancy Horner

“What do you know for sure?” ~ Ellie Hagey

“Who are you?’ asked by a very drunk Swede one night in an Irish Pub. He was not satisfied with any of my answers, and left me thinking he was some kind of angel making sure I get it.” ~ Barbara Patterson

“If you had 30 days to live... what would you do with them?” ~ Mandy Baldie Joubert

“What is the most fruitful make-believe? I liked it because it acknowledge a made-up quality, but yet challenged some deliberateness and purpose.” ~ Tennyson Woolf

“What was very clarifying in the moment: ‘Is this a relationship or an entanglement?’” ~ Mary Alice Arthur

“Who looks after you?” ~ Mandy Bennett

“What sustains you through difficult times? What do you truly long for? What would you risk everything to do if you knew that you could not possibly fail?” ~ Julie Lynn McIntyre

“What is a life well lived?” ~ Deborah Frieze

“And so, how are you really?” ~ Allie Kirby

“Is this true for me?” ~ Ericka Hines

“So... let me make sure I understand - you’ve apologized and they have forgiven you. But you are still beating yourself up and stuck in guilt. When are you going to forgive yourself? How much more do you need to suffer?” ~ Karen Zamora

“What did you need as a child?” ~ Theresa Reed

“How do you want to be in this world?” ~ Liz Fochtman

“What are you willing to feel?” v MJ McGraw

“Is there more?” A question asked by a dear friend when I was trying to figure out what I was feeling... and paused for a moment. It said to me, “I am here for you, listening, and I will be here until you get it all out.” ~ Susanne Personette

“One that stopped me in my tracks was a question on a sign in a photograph from a gay pride parade. It read, ‘Leviticus also says no haircuts. I guess we’re skipping that one?’” ~ Claire Colvin

“What is the BEST thing that can happen to/for you?” ~ PJay Sutherland

“What is your work to do here?” ~ Quinn McDonald

“The question that comes from tuning in and being fully present and is the one that expands perspective. Could be as simple as ‘And?’” ~ Sandy McMullen

“If you didn’t have to work for a living to support yourself financially, what would you do for the next 10 years?” ~ Yolande House

“What will you do next?” ~ Poppy Lochridge

“What makes me happy? How do I know it?” ~ MJ McGraw

# Bonus Questions

*submitted by others via Facebook*

“What is the most important decision you will make this week?”  
~ Doug Koop

“Do you deserve God’s love?” ~ Julie Ann Hawker

“What makes you think you will always be happy?” ~ Ken Waddell

"What if that really isn't true?" (Or as my daughter and I figured out to ask when she's dealing with severe anxiety... "This feels like truth, but what's the proof?" This honors the feelings while still looking for alternate possibilities.) ~ Jill Emmelhainz

“What’s your purpose? (in life)” - Cynthia Plett

"What's the worst that could happen?" A question suggested to me by a colleague over 20 years ago. I have found it extraordinarily helpful in addressing fears and/or change. When I chose to leave a job without a new job in place, when a later job was eliminated, when my life changed - for good and for bad - it helped me address fears, make back-up plans, and regain my equilibrium. ~ Julie Wolkoff

“What advice would you give to your younger self?” ~ Linda Sullivan Phillippi

“How do you want to feel?” ~ Angie McLeod

“Do you love yourself?” ~ submitted by Emily Gillies, asked by Heather Plett

“What do you want?” ~ Dominic Bosman Venter

“What are you afraid of?” ~ Theresa Reed

“Nana, is Siri ‘God’? She knows everything.” ~ Florence Oldford