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Awareness :: Coaching :: Well-Being

# Good Questions

# Good Questions

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## Introduction

The questions you ask yourself shape your life and experience. Questions impact your present and future. They inform your understanding of the past. The questions you ask direct your intention. Questions can lead you to the truth. Are the questions you're asking big enough for you? Are they accurate? Helpful? Are they compelling? Are they serving you? Are they providing direction? Are they truly your questions, or are they questions you inherited or borrowed from someone else?

We are all looking for answers. The times in which we live are filled with uncertainty, complexity, chaos and rapid change. We seek answers when we feel confused, are in transition, have experienced loss, have conflict, need to move in a new direction, feel stuck or need to make a decision. Answers give us the feeling that there is something secure to hold on to. We think the right answer will give us some solid ground under our feet and a way to move forward. With an answer, we have clarity and direction and know what to do.

Some questions do not have answers, but simply asking them gives greater depth and meaning to life by directing our energy, curiosity and attention in a new way. Sometimes, just having a good question is innately satisfying, enriching and inspiring. Some questions, though unanswered, provide the aspiration for living a life of purpose, contribution and value.

Good questions are questions that evoke and illuminate. Good questions stimulate possibilities. Good questions can be unsettling or inspiring. Good questions offer new perspectives, increased awareness, and greater possibilities. Good questions offer new perspectives, increased awareness, and greater possibilities. Good questions bring us to greater understanding of what it means to be human. Good questions bring us closer to the truth.

The questions in this book were designed to provide new perspectives. For each question, a practice is given to help you explore the question at a deeper level by seeing how the question is activated on a day-to-day way in your life. It gives you the opportunity for inquiry, self-observation and reflective action. The questions are in no particular order. Feel free to randomly turn a page in this book and see if the question there can inform your journey. If not, turn the page.

As you read, remember the works of William Penn, *“The question is the answer.”*

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### What's another perspective?

It's easy to see things from your own perspective. There is tendency to think that this is "the way," the "one way" to look at a situation. Seeing things from only one perspective limits your possibilities for action as well as your ability to respond. If you've ever witnessed a car accident, you know that each person who witnessed the accident will have a slightly different version of what happened. Is there another way of seeing your situation that may be helpful?

### The Practice

Bring to mind a conversation that did not go as well as you would have liked. Re-play the conversation from your perspective. Notice how you feel, what you hear, what you see. Notice everything you can. Now, put yourself in the other person's shoes. Re-play the conversation. As the other person, what do you feel, hear, see? Now, observe the interaction as if you are seeing it from behind a camera. Take in the whole conversation. As an observer from an outside point of view, what do you notice? With this information, if you had this conversation again, what would you do or say differently?

### What are you forcing?

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Don't push the river?" This occurs when you are trying to make something happen that is beyond your control. No matter how much you push the river, it does not stop. The river flows at its own speed. If you paddle your canoe up the river, you expend a great deal of energy, and it's not much fun either. What are you pushing? What are you making more difficult? Have you noticed that when things work well in your life, it is more like flow, and not force? What would it like to literally, "go with the flow"?

### The Practice

For one week, take time to notice when things seem especially difficult. What are you forcing? In what way are you expending a great deal of effort? How do you benefit from making things harder than they are? Ask yourself whether there is an easier way to fulfill your commitments.

### What have you outgrown in your life?

Do you ever feel as though your life does not fit you anymore? It's easy to get into routines, habits and activities that no longer serve you. You can see when children go through growth stages and outgrow favorite clothes or toys. It's not as easy to notice what you are outgrowing. One clue that you have outgrown something is when you are in pain or confusion. Examples of the things adults outgrow are jobs, relationships, or beliefs. What no longer fits you?

### The Practice

This week, notice activities that you have been doing for many years. Does the activity still serve you? What is the balance in your life between old, on-going activities and new ones? After reflecting on these questions, ask yourself what kind of activities support who you are now and who you are becoming.

### What is the opposite of what you're thinking right now?

Our thinking patterns tend to repeat and reinforce themselves. The more you think about something in one way, the more likely you are to believe it as truth. As soon as you come to a conclusion about something, you limit other possibilities. Looking at something 180 degrees differently can bring new perspectives. For example, if you are thinking how lonely you are, you may not notice how many people have invited you to do something during the last week. If you focus on how stressed you are, you might miss a moment of humor.

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## The Practice

Take one of the most persistent negative messages you hear in your mind. What is that thought? Now, ask yourself, what is the opposite of this thought? Say it to yourself. Repeat it out loud. Notice how you feel. Notice if part of you wants to dispute it. Notice what possibilities the new thought creates. What action will you take based on this exercise?

## What's the best that could happen?

We are conditioned to think in terms of worst case scenarios. How often have you had a big decision to make and a well-meaning friend or colleague asks, "What's the worst that can happen?" While that question may be helpful to consider, it is not the whole picture. By not looking at all sides of the situation, you limit your choices. For example, you might not speak out about a problem in a relationship because you fear it could cause an argument. However, speaking out might solve the problem and deepen your relationship.

## The Practice

Think of a decision you need to make soon. What's the best that could happen? What if it really worked out the way you envision it? How would your life be different? How would it affect other people? What would it allow you to do that you can't do now?

## When do you need to say *No*?

We live in a culture that wants us to say yes to everything. Our lives are full and busy. We say yes to our co-workers, our friends, the volunteer committee, our children. When we feel stuck or overwhelmed, saying yes to one more activity can be unwise. Sometimes the better answer is *no*. When you say *no*, you create the space for a yes somewhere else. When you say *no*, you can fulfill commitments to other things you already said yes to. If you say *no* to working late, you may be able to say yes to dinner with your family. If you say *no* to buying a new shirt, you may be able to say yes to your retirement savings.

## The Practice

Notice what requests come to you this week. Before responding, ask yourself whether you really want to do what is being asked of you. Does it fit into what you are committed to? What is your motivation to say yes? Can you do it? Are you willing? Are you trying to please the other person or make yourself look good, competent or reliable? If you say yes, what are you simultaneously saying *no* to?

## What three words describe your situation?

Are you familiar with haiku, the form of poetry that is composed of 17 syllables? It is a concise way to get to the essence of something. Can you describe your current situation in just three words? By boiling the situation down to three words, such as "transition, uncertainty, anticipation," or "newlywed, comfort, hope," you get the essence of it. This helps you get past the stories and justifications that can distract you from what's really going on.

## The Practice

Right now, take three deep breaths. Ask yourself what three words describe your situation. Write them down. Do these words capture your situation? Do they surprise you? Do you see your situation any differently now?

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## What do you need to let go?

To create space for new possibilities in your life, there may be things you need to let go. Do you need to let go of something physical, such as clutter, mementos, or gifts that remind you of the past? Do you need to let go of beliefs such as the need to be right? Do you need to let go of an emotion such as anger, hurt or resentment? Do you need to let go of commitments to others that are no longer viable? Do you need to let go of a toxic relationship or unhealthy friendship? Do you need to let go of the voice of your inner critic?

## The Practice

Make a list of things you could let go. Use the examples above to help you create your list. Pick one item from the list, and for a week notice how you think life would be different if you let that item go. At the end of the day, make a few notes in your journal about how you anticipate letting go would change your day. At the end of the week, review your notes. Based on your reflections over the week, is this something you actually want to let go of? If so, who can support you in this? When will you begin?

## When do you feel most alive?

When you feel most alive, you may notice that life seems brighter and you have more energy. You may experience yourself as being “in the flow” or “in the zone.” The times you feel most alive give you clues about what is most important to you as well as what your natural talents and gifts may be. When you feel most alive, your self-esteem is usually high too. Aliveness can come from many different places including being with loved ones, discovering something new, listening to music, or seeing the truth.

## The Practice

For a week, notice when you feel most alive. Pick one experience of feeling alive each day. Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing? How did your body feel? Was this something you planned or did it happen spontaneously? How will this awareness inform your actions in the future? At the end of the week notice what trends have emerged about the situations, activities, or mood that lead you to feeling most alive.

## How can you use a difficulty to become stronger?

Sometimes challenges seem overwhelming, and make you feel like giving up. When this happens, you don't even want to deal with the situation. You opt out. This undermines your sense of self and strength. Another way to look at it is to see yourself at your growing edge. What is the difficulty calling forth in you? Do you need patience, courage, or assertiveness to deal with the situation? These qualities and others can be strengthened or developed in response to the difficult situation. Developing these qualities will leave you stronger and more capable in dealing with future challenges.

## The Practice

Pick a difficult situation you're currently facing. What qualities do you need in this situation? Some examples might be perseverance, compassion, innovation, or leadership. Choose one quality to develop by practicing it in an area of your life other than the difficult situation. For example, if you want to develop perseverance in the face of difficult work assignments, you might practice sticking with your exercise regimen an extra five minutes each day.

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## How are you showing up in this situation?

Consider the possibility that you have multiple selves, and not just one self. You might show up as a role, such as supervisor, mother, friend, or child. You could show up as one or your feelings such as greed, generosity, anger or compassion. A state of being such as optimistic, pessimistic, trusting, or suspicious might be the way you present yourself. Will you show up as novice or experienced? Victim or persecutor? Are you showing up in weakness or strength? What is the most natural way to show up?

## The Practice

Take a situation that you are in the midst of. Ask yourself: “Which of my roles is predominant in this situation? Which of my qualities is showing up? Which of my states is showing up?” Once you identify how you are showing up, consider whether you are satisfied with this outcome. Are you showing up in a way that is a habit that you’ve practiced for many years? How would the situation change if you showed up in a fresh, new way?

## What does your busyness cost you?

Busyness is not only sanctioned, but encouraged and rewarded in Western society. Closely related to busyness is speed: fast food, fast cars, fast information. Speed and busyness can blind you to what’s really important and what’s really happening. You can lose your sense of inner guidance and your ability to respond. This causes reactivity. Does your busyness have costs that you measure in stress, confusion, or physical ailments? Does your busyness strain your relationships, or your quality of work? Does your busyness cost you peace of mind or deeper connections? What would happen if you slowed down?

## The Practice

Begin to practice slowing down. One way to slow down is to put your multi-tasking on hold. To practice, spend one day doing one thing at a time. If you are on the telephone, resist the temptation to check your email. If you are eating, don’t watch television. If you are driving, don’t listen to the radio. If you are writing a report, don’t take phone calls. If you are reading the newspaper, don’t eat. At the end of the day, notice what you accomplished. Notice your attention to each task. Notice your stress level.

## What assumptions do you make?

This question speaks to what you are *not* questioning. When you make an assumption, you think things are a certain way. Rarely do people question their assumptions, which are just interpretations or their perspective on a topic. For example, do you assume life is easier for other people? Do you assume that your family will not support you in a decision? Do you assume if you make the “right” choice, you’ll avoid any obstacles? Do you assume you need more education or experience? After you identify your assumptions, you can test them to see if they are true. Untested assumptions can limit your choices, lead to miscommunication with others, and create frustration for you.

## The Practice

At the top of a page, in a few words, describe a decision you need to make. Write non-stop in a stream of consciousness. Do not lift the pen from the paper. Write anything that comes to your mind about the decision. Your thoughts need not be organized or logical. Just keep the pen moving. At the end of the writing period, read what you’ve written. Underline each assumption. Next, take each assumption and ask yourself the following questions: “What evidence do I have supporting this assumption? Does the assumption help or hinder me? How can I challenge my assumption?”

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## What's missing?

This can be a starting point in freeing yourself from limited ways of looking at things. You may not know what you want, but you likely know what you don't want. One way to work with this question is to ask what part of yourself you have ignored, walled off, or compromised in order to be accepted, loved, or successful. Perhaps what's missing is your creative expression, deeper relationships, or a beautiful environment. Perhaps it is time alone, the adventure of travel, or a better relationship with yourself.

## The Practice

At the end of each day, ask yourself "What's missing?" Record your answers. Do you notice a difference in your answers depending on your mood or your effectiveness that day? Is what's missing persistent? How can you attend to what's missing? Can you do this on your own or do you need the support of others?

## When do you let yourself down?

Letting yourself down is an act of self-betrayal. Clues that you are letting yourself down include depression, low levels of energy, anxiety, health problems, constant busyness, or conflicts. Letting yourself down suggests there are internal or external standards you're not meeting. Or it may suggest that you are ignoring a call or guidance. You may let yourself down by doing what is easy instead of what you're committed to. You may know what's best for you, and yet act against what is healthy, life-affirming or loving.

## The Practice

In the categories of work, relationships, health, friendships and finances, investigate the possibility that you may be letting yourself down. Choose one category and write for five minutes nonstop to explore when you're most likely to let yourself down. What action will you take from this exploration?

## What would you like to give yourself permission to do?

Even when you have clarity about something you want, you can stop short of actually giving yourself permission to take the next step—whether that is to take care of yourself or pursue a calling. Are you afraid to give yourself permission to go back to school? To try something new? To be confused? To not know? To be ambitious? To take time off? Are you afraid to give yourself permission to succeed or fail? Would it be okay to make mistakes, to change your mind or be imperfect? Giving yourself permission can open the doors to being more human.

## The Practice

Create your own permission slip. Write the following on a small piece of paper or in your journal: I, (your name) hereby give permission to:

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Be sure to sign the permission slip. After you have given yourself permission, talk with someone who can support you in this new arena.

## What do you expect?

Expectations can help or hinder you. Unreasonable expectations can set you up for disappointment and failure. You can get trapped by expecting circumstances to be a certain way or for people to act a certain way. When events or people turn out differently from what you expected, you can feel a wide range of emotions from anger to betrayal. Being tuned in to what you expect can help you see life and yourself more realistically.



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## The Practice

Each morning, write several activities you plan to do during the day. Then write what you expect to happen. At the end of the day, review your notes. How did what actually happened align with your expectations? In which situations did having expectations result in positive outcomes? In which situations did having expectations result in negative outcomes? What did you learn from this exercise?

## What sustains you?

What do you count on when things are not going well? What do you count on when all the usual supports seem unavailable? What resources do you, frustration or restlessness? Knowing what you can count on lets you tap this resource when you need it.

## The Practice

Reflect on the last difficulty you faced. What sustains you during that time? Think in terms of your own qualities, support from others, actions you took, structures you set up, or reading you did. Now reflect on another difficulty you faced. Were you sustained by the same or different things? What can you add to your repertoire?

## What gives meaning to your life?

The search for meaning is a universal urge. The large context of your life as a whole may be love, relationships, achievements, helping others, contributions, creative expressions, adventure or spirituality that give you meaning. Also, think of this question in a smaller, day-to-day sense. Small acts of kindness, making a good meal, taking a walk, doing a good job may be your source of meaning on a daily basis.

## The Practice

Create a collage of what gives meaning to your life by gathering photographs or pictures from magazines. You may add quotes, poems or symbols. Keep the collage in place where you'll see it each day.

## When did you learn something new?

How often do you experiment with something new? How often do you experience something new? This raises the question of what the balance is in your life between routine, habitual activities and new activities. Learning something new can put you in touch with your "beginner's mind." This helps you reclaim your curiosity and have compassion for being a beginner. It helps you to appreciate what you've mastered. Learning something new can spark enthusiasm and lead to new possibilities and opportunities.

## The Practice

Bring to mind an example of when you learned to do something new. Was it fun? What did you enjoy most about it? What part of you did it awaken? Would you do it again? What would you like to learn next? What if you learned to do something new every year, quarter, or month?

## What part of your situation are you not accepting?

When you don't accept all or part of your situation, resistance arises. This resistance may show up as denial, lying, or pushing back. Are you resisting parts of aging such as slowing down, changing appearance, or changing interests? If you used to be able to pull an all-nighter to finish a project, maybe you can't do that anymore. Are you resisting aspects of your job situation—such as your boss's personality, how others are treated, or a project deadline?



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If you are not accepting these things, do you notice yourself complaining about them? How does accepting your situation give you ideas of how to make better choices?

## The Practice

Think of a situation in which you find yourself complaining on a regular basis. Now take a few minutes to breathe and relax. Ask yourself, "What part of this situation am I not accepting?" When you accept that part, it does not mean that you have to like it. It simply gives you a starting point to do something different about something that troubles you. Now that you have accepted what is, what action will you take?

## What can wait?

We live with a fierce sense of urgency. This question asks you to decide what is most important. Maybe everything need not be on your "do today" list. What can wait? What can be set aside for now? What can be put on the short-term or long-term back burner? Is it critical? During an illness, after a death, or after an accident, other things are put on hold. Why does it take such a drastic measure to allow some things to wait?

## The Practice

For one day, take a look at your to-do list. This may be a written list or a list in your head. Must everything on your list be accomplished today? What if you did not do it all? Is there one activity that can wait, or be dropped? Experiment by allowing one activity to wait. What is it like to make a choice about waiting?

## How could you be more flexible?

What you count on to stay the same helps you feel secure in an uncertain world. Security can lead to rigidity. Freedom lies in flexibility. Just like old, rigid trees in a storm, you are at risk of snapping under stress. The trees and people who survive tough times are the ones with flexibility. A good place to experiment with greater flexibility is with your most strident views. What if you could be even one percent more flexible?

## The Practice

Think of a situation in which you feel stuck. Stand up straight with your feet together, your legs straight, arms tight and straight by your side, and your eyes focused forward. Breathe in a shallow manner. Notice your thinking and feeling as you bring to mind your situation. Next, relax, shake your arms and legs, and then take a new stance. Place your feet hip distance apart. Open your peripheral vision to soften your eyes and allow your arms to hang loosely. Flex your knees slightly and sway gently from side to side. Swing your arms easily. Move your body in a floating manner. Breathe long, deep breaths. Now bring the situation to mind. Does having a flexible, moving body affect your thinking, feeling and mood about the situation?

## What does your intuition tell you?

This question calls for you to go beyond thinking, to a deeper part of yourself. Some have described intuition as the still, small voice inside. But intuition may show up in ways other than a voice inside of you. You may experience it as a feeling, a sense, or a knowing. Just about anything can trigger your intuition: a book, a movie, the person next to you in a meeting, or a song. To invite the wisdom of your intuition to speak to you, it helps to start with a question. Once you have your question, you can pay attention to what your intuition says.

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## The Practice

Bring a question to mind to heighten your intuition. Write the question on a card so you can look at it every day for a week. Look for answers to your question through a means other than your rational mind. At the end of each day, review your question and your day. How did your intuition speak to you today?

## What is your intention?

This question goes to the heart of the matter. It is different from “What is your goal?” or “What do you expect?” Intention sets a tone for action. It’s like being on a sailboat heading for shore. The intention is to get to the shore. While the wind may change directions, blow strong or soft—you keep steady with your intention as you adjust the sails and move toward the shore. Intention directs your action through a variety of conditions.

## The Practice

Set an intention for a week. You may want to write your intention on a note card or sticky note. Read your intention each morning to keep it fresh in your mind. At the end of each day, see what actions you took based on your intention. See what showed up in your life based on your intention. How was a week with intention different from weeks you did not set an intention?

## Is this time to “talk your walk”?

Many people are quietly living courageous lives of integrity. They live simply, refusing to get caught in the consumerism of our times. They may practice random acts of kindness with strangers as well as friends. Recently a woman who attended a training program sent the facilitator an email. In it, she requested that in future seminars, the supplies be re-used in the interest of preserving the environment and reducing waste. By speaking up and making this request, this woman talked her walk. When you talk your walk, you share yourself with others. What part of you needs to be talked?

## The Practice

What are you doing in life that could benefit others if they knew about it? Are you telling people about this? Is it time to share how you’re living your life? How will you begin?

## How can you calm yourself?

If you take action from a place of anxiety, it may be wrong, ineffective, or even harmful. Do you know how to find calm in yourself in the midst of anxiety, stress or upset? You probably know that you can use the breath to calm down and become more present. Petting an animal, listening to music, dancing, working in the garden, walking around the block, and stretching are other ways people calm down. After the energy of anxiety lifts and calm ensues, clear thinking, problem-solving, peace or action can follow.

## The Practice

When you feel stressed, bring to mind what calms you. Is it something you can do immediately? If so, take time to do it. You can experiment with one of the suggestions above or invent one of your own. It’s helpful to develop a repertoire of calming strategies you can access when you need them. Sometimes the calming activities require advance planning (seeing a friend, getting a massage). If what calms you requires pre-planning, make these plans now.

## Which commitments no longer serve you?

Does it seem like your list of commitments is growing? You may be committed to your family, to the community, to your personal growth, to your friends, to your work, to a project, to your home, to your health or to your pets.

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Trying consistently to fulfill all your commitments can be a heavy burden. Are there any commitments no longer serving you? Can you let go of any commitments to make space for commitments that better serve you? Can you let go of other commitments to free up time for relaxation, reflection, leisure and spontaneity?

## The Practice

Make a list of your commitments in the following areas: Home, family, friends, work, community, financial. Review the list and decide if each commitment is truly how you want to spend your time and energy. Re-work the list until you are comfortable with what you are committed to. Try thinking of your commitments in a certain time period such as the next three, six or twelve months. Review your list at the end of that time period and make additional adjustments.

## What holds you back?

This question speaks to our excuses and justifications for not following through with commitments or taking actions. Sometimes, we need to notice there's a roadblock so we can take an alternate route. For example, if you have always wanted to take a yoga class but have not done so, can you identify the obstacle? Is the obstacle the fear of trying something new? A worry about what other people might think? Now knowing where classes are offered? Not knowing how to get started? It may be a combination of these. How will you face the obstacle?

## The Practice

Most of the time, what is holding us back falls into one of these categories: emotions (such as fear), relationships (what other people think), knowledge (more facts are needed), skills (I don't know how to take action), or identity (who I take myself to be). Which of these types of obstacles is holding you back? What will you do about it?

## If you did the unexpected, what would that be?

Have you noticed that you can often predict how people you know will react in certain circumstances? This is not a psychic capability, but the result of your observations of them in the past and their predictability. Are your actions just as predictable? Your responses can become rote and you may not realize you're in a rut of limited choices. If you did the unexpected, what new perspectives would that bring? If you didn't think of yourself as a person who never (fill in the blank), what new options would that provide?

## The Practice

Experiment with this notion in a small way before you apply it to larger areas of your life. If you are usually the first to speak up in meetings, wait until everyone else has spoken before speaking. If you usually accept the invitations of others, but rarely extend an invitation, invite someone to do something. If you usually make a list before you go to the supermarket, try going without one. Conduct one experiment in which you do something unexpected. What was it like for you? Repeat this experiment several more times. Notice if doing things in unexpected ways gets easier. See if it opens new possibilities for you.

## What would bring you peace?

Modern life is made up of busy schedules, racing thoughts, and noise all around us. How can you have peace in the midst of daily living? What is peace to you? When did you last experience the sense of peace? What brought that about? Are you ignoring what brought that about?

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## The Practice

Set aside some time for quiet where you will not be disturbed by other people, pets or telephone. Sit comfortably and take a few deep breaths to relax. You may want to do some gentle stretching to help with the relaxation. As you relax, think about a time when you felt very peaceful. Remember this with all of your senses. Where were you? What did it look like? What did it sound like? What did it feel like? What did it taste like? Recall it in greater detail. Notice the colors, the textures, the sounds, the smells. Notice how your body feels. Notice that simply recalling this from a relaxed and centered place brings the experience of peace to your body.

## What energizes you?

What is your energy level throughout the day? By observing, you can identify what energizes you. Knowing what energizes you can help direct your decisions on a day-to-day basis as well as enable you to make wise decisions for your future. When you identify what energizes you, you can look for ways to add more of those activities to your daily routine. You might find yourself energized by working on a favorite project or playing with a child.

## The Practice

For one work day and one non-work day, take note of what energizes you. At the end of each day, make a list of what energized you. Think back to what you did after each energizing activity. Notice what you did to shift between these. How will you use this information?

## Are you opening yourself to possibilities or limiting yourself?

Every thought you think, every word you speak, every action either creates or limits possibilities. In every moment, you are expanding or contracting. Can you notice what brings about a sense of possibility or expansion? It could be beauty or accomplishment or kind words or creative expression. Can you see what limits you? It might be thinking you already have the answer, believing nothing more is possible, or believing you are not enough.

## The Practice

This practice is designed to help understand how you can use your body to know whether you are opening yourself to possibilities or limiting yourself. Bring to mind a situation, a person, a place, a song, or an accomplishment that makes you feel expanded and confident. Is there a particular place in your body where you are most aware of this expansive sensation? Is your breathing full or shallow? What is your posture like? Now, switch and think of a situation in which you felt small, fearful, or contracted. Notice body sensations, breathing, and your posture. Do you feel open or closed to possibilities? How can you use your body awareness to notice whether you are opening to possibilities or limiting yourself?

## What is hiding behind your busyness?

Is busyness a way of life for you? Do you use your busyness for the specific purpose of hiding something from yourself? What feeling would you need to face if you really slowed down? What would come to the surface if you were not always in a busy mode? What do you avoid by being so busy? Does your self-worth depend on keeping busy? Do you need to be “productive” to feel good about yourself?

## The Practice

The next time you find yourself rushing, simply pause. Take five minutes to sit still, be silent and become aware of your breathing. Notice any urge to keep moving. Notice any thoughts that tell you to do something. Notice what you avoid by getting busy.

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## Do you want to “get it right” or do you want to learn?

Wanting to be right inhibits experimentation and mistakes. This keeps you stuck. Without ongoing learning, you may experience life as boring, or repetitive. Have you heard the expression “If it’s worth doing right, it’s worth doing poorly”? You can add vitality to life if you open to the whole learning process and do not block it by the need to “get it right.”

### The Practice

To experiment with the learning process, identify something you’re interested in learning. It may be making lasagna, painting watercolors, tying knots, juggling, or changing your oil. Closely observe your response to learning something new. Follow your thoughts. Do you want to get it right the first time? If you are a beginner, it is unlikely that you will get it right the first time. How can your mistakes help you learn?

## What don’t you want to happen?

If you don’t know what you *want* to happen, don’t worry. Here’s a way to get more clarity. Start by stating what you don’t want to happen. This automatically helps you consider what you do want. If you know you do not want to work full time, do not want to work downtown, and do not want to take the bus to work, this gives you plenty of clues about possible work environments that may be appealing to you. By knowing these things, you may consider part-time work near your home that is within driving or walking distance. This helps you come to clarity through the back door—by using what you already know.

### The Practice

Think of a situation where you aren’t sure what you want. Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side, write very quickly, without stopping, a list of what you don’t want to happen. Then on the right side, list the opposite of what you wrote down on the left. What would you need to pay attend to in order to have the items on the right side happen?

## How can you help?

Sometimes we think that working harder or faster or better will make a difference. For some reason, we think that doing more of what has not worked in the past will work now. This tack can be futile and exhausting. What do you we do when that does not work? What do we fall back on? This question asks you to look beyond your normal responses to see what might really make a difference. It urges you to customize your action. It encourages your inner knowing to guide you, rather than reacting out of habit. It invites you to question the rules you’ve set up in your mind.

### The Practice

Choose a situation where someone you know and care about is suffering in some way. They may be overwhelmed with work, suffering some illness, going through a loss of a loved one. Look very carefully at the whole situation. What would really help? Try to separate out what you think you can offer or what you ant to offer from what is needed in the situation. Perhaps what is needed is to offer to watch the children. Or maybe what is needed is to make a cup of coffee. Perhaps what is needed is your silent presence. The purpose of this practice is to see what would make a difference. Then, if you are willing, offer what would make a difference.

## What are you most grateful for?

This question helps you focus on what there is to appreciate. It puts things into perspective. The practice of gratitude leads to more resilience when facing life’s inevitable down times. This question invites you to bring into the foreground all of the things, large and small, that make life worth living.

# Good Questions

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It is surprising how much more you notice about yourself, others and your environment when you ask this question. One way to begin working with this question is to notice gratefulness through your senses. What do you see that you are grateful for? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you touch?

## **The Practice**

At the end of each day, list ten things that you are grateful for. Do this for a week and see if the items on the list change or stay the same. What does this tell you about yourself? Take the next step and express your gratitude in a way that is meaningful to you.

## **Are you open or closed to seeing this in a new way?**

This question asks how invested you are in your opinion. If you think your boss is totally unreasonable, you may be so invested in your opinion that you miss seeing actions that are quite reasonable. You will also be likely to miss opportunities to make suggestions to your boss. This guarantees the continuation of your anger and frustration. If you were willing to see the situation differently, you could see that your boss, like most people, makes a combination of reasonable and unreasonable decision. This can melt away the anger and frustration and give you some leverage with your future suggestions and actions.

## **The Practice**

Bring to mind a situation you find irritating. Write your idea of how you think it “should be.” Now, write the standards you use to determine this. Do the standards open or limit your view of the situation? Do you apply these standards in other areas of your life? What if these standards did not determine how it “should be”?

## **What are you tolerating?**

Some things, people, or situations that you tolerate deplete your energy and keep you stuck. The word “toleration” implies putting up with something unpleasant. While there are many unpleasant parts of life that we cannot control, there are things that we could do something about, but choose not to. Sometimes, we don’t even notice what we are tolerating. You may find yourself tolerating behaviors in others like foul language, habitual lateness, or excessive complaining. You may notice yourself tolerating things in your environment like an appliance that doesn’t work quite right, a shirt with a missing button, a car filled with fast food bags. Every time you tolerate something that can easily be taken care of, it steals energy away from what’s really important.

## **The Practice**

At the top of a piece of paper, write: “Things, people, and situations that I’m tolerating.” For one week, jot down what you are tolerating. Review the list at the end of the week. Choose three items to take action on this month. Notice any shifts in your energy and repeat this practice once a month.

## **What brings out your best?**

If only we could be our best all the time! In times of confusion and change, you may forget that you have patterns that bring out your best. You already have a track record for success. It may be working as part of a team, getting a good night’s sleep, or taking on a challenge. Knowing this, how do you foster what brings out your best? How can you create the conditions to bring out your best on a more frequent basis?



# Good Questions

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## The Practice

Spend time with a person who brings out your best. After your time together, make a written list of the specific qualities that person brings out in you. For example, you may notice that your humor, playfulness, and creativity are more available when you're with this person. To cultivate your best, plan to spend time with this person on a more frequent basis. Then you can begin to notice how you express these qualities with other people.

## What aren't you seeing?

This question invites you to find ways to see more than you're seeing now. You can find out what you are not seeing by asking a new question. For example, "What am I ignoring? What does not make sense yet?" Are you not seeing your mood, your reactions, your habits, your attributes? As soon as you can see what you have not seen yet, you will have many more possibilities open to you.

## The Practice

Go outside to a place that's unfamiliar to you. This might be your backyard, the walk to your car, or the walk to the bus stop. Walk ten paces and take in as much as you can. Now stop. Soften your eyes. Look around you. What do you see that you haven't noticed before? It might be peeling paint on the fence, a flower blooming, a spider web glistening in the sun, or an anthill in the crack of the sidewalk. Walked a few more paces and stop again. Now what do you see that you weren't seeing before? Gradually expand this practice to other places in your life. What aren't you seeing in the grocery store? What aren't you seeing in a meeting? What aren't you seeing in a friend?

## How can you take better care of yourself?

This question asks you to notice your needs in different areas of your life including physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. If you eat better, take a walk, exercise, or relax, would that help you take better care of yourself physically? Perhaps you can care for your emotional needs by talking with someone, joining a group, or writing in your journal. Spiritual needs can be met through prayer, meditation, study, or service to others. How can you take care of your mental needs? Reading something challenging, enjoying the arts, and doing a crossword puzzle are a few possibilities.

## The Practice

Make a list of the following areas: Physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual. For each area, list one to three ways you can take better care of yourself. Select one way to try for a few weeks.

## Would it help if you apologized?

Unfinished business can drain you of energy, cause confusion, and contribute to the sense of being stuck. One way to clear the air may be to apologize. This may not be easy. What do you lose if you do not apologize? What do you gain if you do? To apologize is to take responsibility for your words or actions. An apology may build trust or allow understanding.

## The Practice

If this question triggered something in you, there is a good chance that it would help if you apologize. Bring to mind the person to whom you will apologize. Do a dry run in your mind or write down what you would like to say to that person. Take the next step and apologize. As you apologize, notice any shifts in your body and your thinking. Does this act of apology create any new possibilities for action?



# Good Questions

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## Do you need a time out?

If you're losing focus, feeling tired or stressed, you may need a time out. Have you noticed that in many team sports, coaches call time outs when there is a big challenge, a setback, or the need for a rest? In the game of life, knowing when to call a time out can help you meet the challenge, re-group after a setback, or rest up. The time out can help you think more clearly and return to the task with renewed energy and focus.

## The Practice

Just like in sports, call a time out several times a day. This time out is brief, but renewing. If you have strong feelings coming up, can you take a "time out" to see what the feelings are about and whether you want to express them? If you are having a hectic day, you can use your time out to drink a cup of coffee or water, or take a short walk. If you are working on a project and you're losing focus, can you simply stop? What type of time out would be helpful?

## Who needs your kindness?

It is easy to become too self-focused or work-focused. It can be valuable to shift the focus toward others by asking, "Who needs my help?" this gives you the opportunity to see the needs of others and to respond in a resourceful way. Maybe someone close to you needs extra care of attention, or your generous listing. Maybe a friend needs a call or email from you. Maybe someone far away needs a few pennies a day for food. Maybe someone in your neighborhood or community needs something tangible that you have to give. By helping someone else, you bring forth your compassion, your gifts, and your humanity.

## The Practice

Notice who needs your help in small ways. This could be letting someone in a hurry go ahead of you in the line at the supermarket. The person who mows your lawn could need a glass of water. An upset friend could need some kind words or a caring touch. Begin to notice how many times a day your kindness can make a big difference to someone. Notice how it makes you feel to help someone. How do your feelings about your situation change as you give help to others?

## Are you compromising?

In any relationship, there is give and take. Only you know when this is in the healthy range. If you find yourself angry or drained, perhaps you are giving yourself away or over-compromising. You may compromise because it is easier to give in than to assert yourself. A compromise may keep the peace. When you compromise, is it because the issue is not important to you? Will your compromise give you freedom to move on to something else? Does your compromise consider what's important to someone else? It is important to know what is behind your compromise.

## The Practice

At the end of the day, ask the following questions: "In what way did I compromise today?" "In what ways did I resist compromise?" "What was the result of these actions?"

## What needs to end?

What served you for a time may no longer be useful to you. Just as things come and go in nature, part of you may need to end in order for you to have a new beginning. In times of confusion or transition, something is waiting to be born. While something is being born within you, simultaneously, something is ending. What sustained you to this point may not sustain you in the future. Does your lifestyle, anger, ambition, or a relationship need to end? What needs to end to make room for something new?

# Good Questions

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## The Practice

You probably have an intuition about what needs to end in your life in order for you to move forward. In your journal, write a page or two about what this is. Then, ask yourself these follow-up questions. "What scares me about this ending? What will there be room for now? Is there a hint of a new beginning?"

## How can you use today to get closer to the life you want to live?

If you want more freedom, how can you use today's time, energy and agenda to experience more freedom? If you want more time with your family, how will you schedule your day? If you want to take up a new activity, what will you need to give up? If you want to write a book, how can you begin? Getting closer to the life you want to live does not mean a complete overhaul. A small act can make a big difference. Putting your attention on the life you want to live helps you move in that direction.

## The Practice

Write down a few key words that describe the life you want to live. You can also create a collage that captures visual images of the life you want to live. Choose one aspect that you see in your writing of your collage. Where do you need to direct your attention to get closer to the life you want to live? Keep this question at the forefront for one week and notice what action follows. At the end of the week, notice how you got closer to the life you want.

## Are you exaggerating or minimizing your concern?

How a situation seems is not always how it is. What you take as an objective assessment may not accurately reflect the situation. Does the drama and intensity of exaggerating your concerns appeal to you? Are there times when something significant is happening and you are not attentive to the short-term or long-term consequences? There is a Native American tradition of considering a decision or action from the perspective of seven generations forward. This is one way to look at the long-term perspective so we know whether we are exaggerating or minimizing.

## The Practice

Take a few minutes to write down three main concerns in your life right now. Ask yourself whether you are exaggerating or minimizing each concern. You may want to gather the perspective of an outsider. Ask someone you trust whether they think you are exaggerating or minimizing the concern. Notice similarities and differences from your answers. If you were to move to a more centered position, a place without exaggerating or minimizing, what new possibilities are available to you?

## What can you rely on?

If you look deeply into this question you will discover that much of what you think you can rely on is not truly dependable. You can rely upon other people. But what happens when they move away? Or become ill? Or die? You can rely on your skills. But what if your skills become obsolete? Most of the things that we rely on are changeable and therefore unreliable. So, what can you rely on? You can rely on change. Everything changes. How does remembering this impact you?

# Good Questions

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## **The Practice**

Make a list of some of the things and people you rely on. Ask yourself how this might change in the future. Based on your answer, how reliable is this person or thing? What happens if you rely on the fact that what you rely on will change? How does this shift your view of yourself and life?

## **What are the risks of doing nothing?**

When you consider a change, you probably weigh the risks. You consider the “What if’s?” You make a list of all the possible things that could go wrong if you make the change. But how often do you weigh the risks of doing nothing? What opportunities will pass by if you do nothing? What experiences will not be available to you if you do nothing? Have you ever thought that doing nothing could actually be more harmful than doing something? What are the short-term and long-term consequences of doing nothing?

## **The Practice**

Pick something you need to decide. Consider what might happen if you do nothing. Is it more of a risk to take action or do nothing? It may help to think of this in the immediate future as well as from a longer term.

## **How did you strengthen trust in a relationship today?**

Building trust in relationships can bring great rewards such as better working relationships, deeper intimacy, and new possibilities. You strengthen trust by following through on what you promised, sharing more deeply, or keeping a conversation confidential. You strengthen trust when you refuse to gossip, keep a promise, apologize, delegate an important project, show up on time, or ask for advice. How can building trust affect your current relationships? What other ways can you think of to build trust?

## **The Practice**

Write the word TRUST where you can see it many times each day. Put it in your planner or on a note on your computer or in your car. Every time you notice the word TRUST, find one way to strengthen trust with the next person you interact with. At the end of the day, record in your journal the specific actions you took to strengthen trust. Do this for at least three weeks. At the end of the three weeks, see if any of your relationships are different.

## **What’s worth keeping?**

Looking for things to change or looking for a way out of your current situation is tempting. Bring to mind the old adage, “the grass is always greener on the other side.” This question invites you to notice and appreciate what is good and working in your life right now. It allows you to pause in the present moment without fast-forwarding to some idyllic time in the future. How can you embrace what is going on right now, even if you are in the midst of difficulties? Notice what does not need to change.

## **The Practice**

Start a list of “Keepers.” What in your life is worth keeping the way it is—for now? Now does each of your “Keepers” benefit you? Does this give you a new perspective on the way things are?

## **What do you want more/less of?**

This question speaks to balance. You usually know when you are out of balance. From the perspective of time, it may be that you have too much time invested in household maintenance, and too little time for leisure.

# Good Questions

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You may have too many volunteer activities and not enough time to yourself. You may have too much time in front of the television and too little time for spirituality. Once you recognize your imbalances, you can take steps to add or subtract as a way to focus your time, energy and attention.

## The Practice

For this question, you can use a pie as a metaphor for your life. Imagine your life as a pie. Cut your pie into slices with the following names: career, family, spiritual, community, financial, health, contribution, relationships. Are the slices of the pie of equal size? Or are some slices of the pie bigger than others? Do you like the way the pie is sliced right now? Would you like to see the pieces sliced differently than they are today? What would it take to change the size of your slices?

## How do you respond to others' success?

How do you feel when a co-worker is promoted? How do you feel when your neighbors buy a new car? Do you feel that others' success makes you less successful? Do you see life as a competition? What feelings are triggered by the success of others? Is there anger, resentment, happiness, or excitement? Do you think that others' success stops you from being your best? Does your response to the success of others open or limit your own possibilities?

## The Practice

The next time someone shares some good news, notice what you say and how you feel. Do possibilities open or close for you? Do you feel more or less capable? Do you feel like reaching out or contracting?

## What drains you?

When you feel tired or overwhelmed, there is a good possibility that something is draining your energy. Do you feel as if you have no power over what is draining you? Do you know what drains you? Perhaps you feel drained when you spend too much time alone, when you over-give, when you run too many errands, or when you eat at your desk. When you eliminate drains, you will have more energy available for creative thinking and activity.

## The Practice

For one week, keep an energy drain log. Each time you are feeling tired or drained, notice how this shows up in your body. Do you have a headache, tight neck, or lack of expression? Do you complain more, withdraw more, or become combative? When you are drained, how are your relationships affected? What are you thinking when you feel drained? What specifically triggered the energy drain? Do you see any patterns in your energy drains? What can you do to have fewer drains next week?

## Where's the opportunity?

Before you look for opportunities, you need to know what you mean by "opportunity." Is an opportunity a time to use an acquire skill? Is an opportunity a setting where you can practice your spiritual principles? Is opportunity about making financial progress? When you know what you mean by the word opportunity, you can set about taking action.

## The Practice

Begin by defining the kind of opportunities you are looking for. For one week, make a list of the opportunities that come up each day. Notice whether the opportunity is one you were able to act on immediately or one that will take additional attention and action on your part. How will you act on the opportunity?

# Good Questions

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## Why do you pursue the life and work you do?

This is a question to ask periodically because it is easy to stay in a lifestyle or work situation out of habit. As you age and circumstances change, what is important to you may change. What was meaningful five years ago may feel lifeless and dull today. You may still enjoy today what you did in the past, yet the reason why you enjoy it might have changed. What is motivating you today to choose the life and work you have?

### The Practice

For this practice, experiment with automatic writing. Take five minutes to write non-stop in a stream of consciousness on this question. Do not worry about what you are writing or how it might sound. Simply keep the pen moving on the paper. Repeat this exercise every day for a week. Then, read what you have written and see if you have gained any insight into why you pursue the life and work you do.

## What commitments do you regret making?

If you regret committing yourself to something, take time to reflect on your original reasons for making the commitment. Were you clear on what you were committing to? If you made the commitment to another person, were the specifics of the commitment the same for you and the other person? What expectations did you have, if any? Notice what trade-offs you made by making the commitment? What did you say “no” to in order to make this commitment? What opportunities did you miss by saying “yes” to this commitment?

### The Practice

Take stock of your current commitments. Which commitments do you want to re-commit to? Which commitments do you want to re-negotiate or re-design? Which commitments do you want to abandon? What are the likely consequences of re-working your commitments?

## Are you in a resourceful state of mind?

When you are not in a resourceful state of mind, you see few possibilities, and you may feel stuck or hopeless. Unable to see possibilities, your mind is like the parched soil in a draught. In such a state, your creativity and imagination are less available to you. When you are in an unresourceful state of mind, it is important not to act, lest you take an unwise action. A resourceful state of mind is like a fertile delta, offering life-giving substance to all that surrounds it. From this resourceful state of mind, you can take useful, inspired action. Finding ways to shift towards being resourceful can open new possibilities of wise action to you.

### The Practice

To put yourself in a more resourceful state, try this experiment. Go into your kitchen and pick up an everyday object such as a spoon, coffee filter or aluminum can. Set the timer for five minutes and brainstorm with yourself as many different uses for that object other than its intended use as possible. Now bring this state of mind to your current situation. Do you see any new possibilities?

## What's the paradox?

It is tempting to see life as either/or. Seeing things this way feels safe, knowable, and predictable. But what about when things at both ends of the spectrum are equally true? Could it be that the tighter you hold on, the more something slips away? Could it be that letting go can actually help you feel more in control? Could it be that trying harder takes you further away from your goal? Paradox also shows up when we learn something new. The more we learn, the more there is to learn. Can you identify what paradox is operating in your life now?

# Good Questions

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## The Practice

Read through the following paradoxes. Pick one and write a paragraph about how you are living in the midst of this paradox.

- The more things change, the more they stay the same.
- Less is more.
- We grow by subtraction not addition.
- We will resist help when we most need it.
- In every ending there is a beginning.
- To find your life you must first lose your life.

## What's the most daring thing you could do?

This question moves you out of your comfort zone and takes you into the realm of possibility. It is often boldness that is called for to bring forth your strongest and most creative energy. This question invites you to take a stand, to make a statement, to get off the fence. Ask and answer this question to release energies that hold you back from your best. The most daring thing you could do may be to suggest a new idea, move to another city, or say "I love you." Take a chance and be daring.

## The Practice

Think about an area in which you feel stuck. What have you tried to get yourself unstuck? Now, with your stuck area in mind, stand up. Be aware of taking a strong stand—literally. Feel your feet on the ground. Feel your body tall and aligned. Take a few deep breaths. Let your mind wander. What is the most daring thing you could do?

## What parts of yourself are hiding?

Whether you are aware of it or not, you are always hiding parts of yourself. It takes courage to allow others to see the weak, fearful, selfish parts of oneself. Maybe you hide your responsible, successful, loving, or tender self. You may fear that these parts will bring negative reactions from others. Paradoxically, what we most try to hide becomes most visible to others. Hiding hinders honest, authenticity, intimacy, and trust.

## The Practice

Start this practice by noticing what you want to hide from others. At the end of each day, jot down what you kept hidden. After one month, allow yourself to read through what you've recorded. Then, reflect upon why you wanted to keep these parts hidden. If these parts were visible, how would that change your interactions with others?

## Who do you aspire to be?

What qualities do you aspire to embody as a way of life? Perhaps qualities of compassion, assertiveness, efficiency, patience, openness, initiative, calmness, or ease come to mind. This question shifts the focus from goals and outcomes to who you are or want to be. How would being this way affect your daily interactions with others? How would your contribution in the world change with these aspirations?

## The Practice

Select a quality that you aspire to embody. Use this as a focal point for a week. At the end of each day, reflect on the situations that gave you the opportunity to bring forth the quality. Repeat this until the quality feels as if it has become part of your nature. You can continue the practice with additional qualities over time.



# Good Questions

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## **What would you do if you couldn't fail?**

This is a possibility question. It helps you get past all the “yes-buts” and toward a greater vision for yourself. It calls forth the best in you. A big vision will take you to your growing edge. Another great beauty of this question is that it helps you circumvent the “F” words—FEAR and FAILURE. So often we grand plans for ourselves and then out of fear we don't take action on them. Failure is one of our fears. So if you take away the fear and the possibility of failure, what's left? Pure aspiration. Pure vision.

### **The Practice**

What would you do if you wouldn't fail. Write it out. What would you do personally? Professionally? Athletically? Creatively? Just how big are your dreams? You may want to make a picture that symbolizes this dream. Whether you write it or picture it, place your creation in a place where you can see it every day.

## **How is your body communicating with you?**

Your body continuously communicates with you. What kind of listener are you? Do you hear the subtle message of tight muscles, or do you wait until you have a headache to listen? Your body will let you know when you need to slow down. It will tell you when you are about to take an unwise action or when something is wrong. Each person's body will use a different language. Your body might communicate with you through a particular organ such as the stomach, through your energy level or through your overall health. When you listen, you'll discover that the body is a wise source of information.

### **The Practice**

Take a few minutes each day to scan your body from head to toes. Notice which parts of your body you can and cannot feel. Notice where in your body there is tension. Notice the parts of your body that feel relaxed. Notice how your breath moves through your body. Is your breathing full or shallow? How does this reflect what is going on in your life now?

## **What conversations are you afraid to have?**

Do you spend energy avoiding certain conversations? That energy is not available for more productive or fulfilling activities. A conversation can resolve a conflict, cut the tension, clarify expectations, explore options, give an outlet for expression, or show you care. If the topic or relationship is highly charged, fear may arise. Acknowledging this helps you see things more clearly. It can clarify what you need to be able to go forward with the conversation. Maybe you need support or someone to talk to before and after the conversation.

### **The Practice**

If there's a conversation you are afraid to have, it probably came to your mind as soon as you read this question. Use the following questions to clarify the situation. What's the worst that can happen if you have the conversation? What is the best that can happen if you have the conversation? If you have the conversation, what will it enable you to learn? What might you learn? What might you explore? What support do you need before and after? Do you need to rehearse it first, or simply let it flow? When you are ready, have the conversation. During and after the conversation, pay close attention to how you feel.

## **What are your resources?**

This question can move you through difficult situations by focusing you on the resources you have available right now. It moves you from noticing what you lack to noticing what is present and available. You have both visible and invisible resources.



# Good Questions

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Visible resources include friends, education, money, skills, home, books, access to information, a healthy body, a computer, or a car. Invisible resources include emotional, spiritual, and mental resources. Examples include calm, peace of mind, faith, trust, intuition, confidence, and willingness to risk. Notice if you have more visible or invisible resources. If you don't personally have a particular resource, are you in relationships that can offer resources that you need?

## The Practice

Create a page in your journal to record your resources. Begin by brainstorming a list with yourself. Then, at the end of each day for the next month, reflect on the resources you used and see if there are any new ones to add to the list. When you have your list developed after a month, refer to it when you are faced with a problem or difficult situation to refresh yourself with all the resources you have to bring to bear on the situation.

## Where are there spaces in your life?

If you were to try to read this book and all of the spaces had been removed so that it was just a string of letters, it would be quite difficult to understand. When it comes to living your life, you may run one activity right into the next without any space for reflection or pause. Without spaces there is no sense of meaning in what you do. You need spaces between the activities of the day. You need spaces for something new and fresh to enter your life. You need spaces for renewal.

## The Practice

Use a metaphor to imagine your life as a closet. What kind of closet are you? Is every shelf crammed full to overflowing? Are things stuffed in and the door quickly shut in hopes that nothing will fall out? Is there any space on the shelves for something new? Do the items in your closet have room around or is everything touching something else? Are some things hidden? Do you like this picture of your life? If not, what would it take to reorganize your closet? How will you begin?

## What are you searching for?

Why do you search? You may be looking for closure. You may be searching for an answer. You may want completion. You look for something, be it a mate, a piece of data, or a quality, to make you whole. The search can also be about maintaining the status quo, as when you search for a reason to stay in a relationship or a job. The search may be about connection and fulfillment, as when you're on a spiritual search. It's useful to know what you're really searching for. What you think at first glance may turn out to be quite different at a deeper gaze.

## The Practice

Become aware of the part of you that is searching, looking for something. Ask yourself what you're searching for in this particular situation. For example, you might be in the store searching for a chocolate bar. Then drop below the obvious and ask again "What am I searching for?" Now the answer might be "comfort." Maybe you are searching for a new home. What is below that? Are you searching for stability or change? After doing this exercise for several weeks, look for themes to your searching. Are you looking for the same thing in many places?

## What loss have you not grieved?

Most of us carry with us at all times a heavy load of loss and grief, sorry and hurt. You could be carrying the loss of a loved one, a favorite pet, a job, an opportunity, a relationship, or of good health. These feelings are not easy to face and as a consequence, we postpone facing them. We delay feeling our grief and sorrows. That does not mean that the sorrow is gone.

# Good Questions

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It is held in the heart where gradually the heart begins to armor itself to protect itself against feeling this pain. One day you awaken and realize that your heart has become hard, and you cannot feel the softness and openness of the heart any longer.

## The Practice

There are some losses that you may immediately be aware of that you haven't faced yet. Many of these losses are buried deep within you from long, long ago. The practice of uncovering these losses will not be easy or quick. Begin by noticing when you want to protect yourself. Follow-up by asking "What am I afraid of losing?" As an answer presents itself, remember when you've suffered that loss in the past. Now, ask "What have I lost?" Is this a loss that needs to be grieved and released?

## What is the theme of your life right now?

Your life can be understood in many different ways. You could think of your life as stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, or old age. Or you could think of life as continuously renewing cycles like the seasons. The theme of your life might be tired or learning, struggling or exploring, grieving or searching. How long has this been the theme of your life? Would you like it to continue? Are you ready for something new to emerge?

## The Practice

Begin by gently turning this question over in your mind for a week or so and noticing what your intuition offers you as a theme. Set aside 30 minutes to sit down with a piece of paper and jot down the major events in your life up until now. Once you have them written down, look over them for a felt sense of the themes. How long do the themes seem to last? Months or years? What is the theme of your life right now? When did you step into this particular theme? Was there a specific event that ushered in this theme? Or was it a gradual dawning? What would need to happen if you wanted to shift it?

## What if no one is to blame?

When something happens that is unpleasant, there is a tendency to look for someone or something to blame. Being able to place blame gives you a feeling of control. It hides the reality that life is uncertain. Loved ones die. Mistakes will happen. Misunderstandings will occur even with the best of friends. What would it mean to you, to your country, to the world if you decided not to place blame? What would you be free to do? Solve the problem? Learn? Forgive? Take responsibility? Learn to live with more uncertainty?

## The Practice

For the next few weeks, look for situations when things do not go according to your expectations. Notice the tendency in yourself to search for someone or something to blame. Consciously stop yourself as soon as you notice this tendency. What will you do if you don't allow yourself to blame? Do you find more compassion within yourself? Do you discover more awe for the mystery in life?

## What is the question that lives in you right now?

You may wonder how this question got into a book of questions. For a simple reason: we are all, every one of us, living in a question. That question may be very small such as "What will I have for dinner tonight?" That question might be very big such as "What is my purpose?" The question might be personal such as "How can I get ahead in my job?" The question could be existential: "What is the meaning of life?" How is the life you're living a result of the questions you ask yourself?

# Good Questions

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## The Practice

For the next week, keep track in a journal of the question you ask yourself. At the end of the week, look over these questions and ask yourself, “What is the question that I’m most living at this time?” Is that question big enough for you? Who are what is at the center of your question? Do you need to change the questions you’re asking?

## What if you’ve already arrived?

There is an emphasis in western culture on self-improvement, getting ahead and advancing oneself, all of which can be good things. However, they can be overdone. When taken to an extreme, this drive for more results in feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. There isn’t much permission granted to reach a plateau of accomplishment and relax there. What if you were to stop all the striving? What if you are already done enough? From that place of fullness, what arises?

## The Practice

For the next week, pretend that you’ve already arrived. In other words, you know enough and you have enough experience. Who you are is sufficient. Assume that you can respond appropriately to whatever arises. Move through your days and conversations grounded in this feeling of confidence. There is nothing to prove. There is no one to convince of your worthiness. Your worthiness is innate. At the end of the week, write a few paragraphs in your journal about what it felt like to interact with the world from an inner place of ease, confidence, and relaxation.

## Are you moving into or away from fear?

Because fear is such a strong feeling, it is easy to move away from fear and try to hide, deny, or block them. Fear can become an ally and great teacher if you are willing to move towards it. For example, you might fear speaking before a group. One way to respond to this fear is not to put yourself in any situation where you have to speak to a group. That is moving away. Another response is to find a trusted person who can coach you into facing the fear and learning how to speak before a group. Which response do you think will expand you? Which will lead to contraction?

## The Practice

Select a situation where fear comes up for you. How do you respond to that fear? Do you move away from it? How? Do you move towards it? If you were to experiment with moving towards it, what might be some possible approaches? Who could help you? How will you try it out?

## Who needs your support?

This question takes us out of ourselves and invites us to remember that we are all interconnected. Your life is not just about you getting what you want. Your life is about recognizing your connection to others and serving them whenever you can. How could you make a difference by acknowledging someone? Who could you verbally support in a meeting? What child is frightened about something and needs you to listen or comfort? Who is trying to advance an idea or cause and needs your backing? You have the opportunity to make a profound impact by paying attention to who needs your support.

# Good Questions

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## The Practice

Make this question your companion for a week. Continuously ask yourself, in all situations, “Who needs my support?” Notice all the different forms that support can take from listening, to advocating, to smiling, to helping, to contributing material resources. Which forms of support are easiest for you to give?