

SPARK

108 PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS

CHANGE

FOR SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

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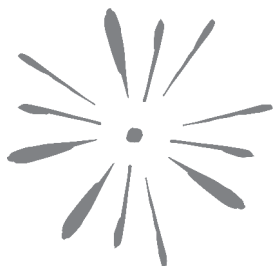
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INTRODUCTION

There is a moment when we know that we are ready for *more*—a deeper understanding of life, a more profound experience of it. No one can make us ready, and no one can stop us once this desire awakens within us. There comes an urgency prompted by our soul, a need to know, a need to evolve, a need to *be* more. Sometimes it comes through the proverbial dark night of the soul, and sometimes it just keeps us up at night! As I write this, it's 2:21 a.m.

The urgency to serve this new level of knowing and being is undeniable. It is an unmistakable call to action, and it often begins with a question. For two decades, as I have studied and taught spiritual philosophy and soulful living, one question has burned in my soul, calling me to action again and again. The question is, “How do I keep the flame of personal evolution toward love alive in my heart and how do I ignite the

spark of spiritual awakening in others?” Okay that’s two questions, but they run together in my mind. The need to serve our shared spiritual advancement is the passion that fuels my life and my work.

The answer I have found, through hundreds of client sessions, conversations with friends, and much internal searching, is that evolution and the willingness to grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually comes either as a result of dramatic pain and suffering or through the blessing of love. Once this directive from our soul has been ignited, it is painful to try to ignore it. Fortunately, when we give our full attention to personal evolution, it becomes a rock-solid foundation for our happiness.

If this makes sense to you, keep reading, but prepare yourself. Most people want simple answers and an easy button. This book has complex questions and a reality check. There is *no* easy button to spiritual self-awareness. It is a process that requires a ruthless willingness to introspect and undaunted courage to change that which needs changing. No one can do the work for you. But this book can help you do it, if you are awake, and if you are ready. Herein lies an invitation to know yourself better, accept yourself more, and realize your life’s highest potentials.

This is the work I do with my yoga therapy clients. Rather than offer advice, I ask illuminating questions that help them find their own inner truth. Then I share practices that enable them to maintain and live from that soul-connected place. I have seen brilliant transformation in every category of people’s lives as a result of this process, from deepened relationships to improved health and newfound purpose. Sadly, I have also watched people pay good money to get the map and the equipment and then never take the journey.

THE VALUE OF INTROSPECTION

Through years of coaching, I have learned that telling someone what to do, or even how to do it, is not enough. Asking the right questions is what matters, because by trying to answer them, people become invested in their own solutions and ways to change. Inquiry is necessary to every human life. From the time we learn to speak, we question the world around us and our experiences within it. Only humans have a consciousness that can observe and analyze itself and make choices based on its conscience.

The questions in this book will help you cultivate greater self-knowing and eventually self-actualization, which leads to an unshakeable inner happiness that is the bedrock of true success. The purpose of the questions is to engage you in the practice of introspection. By puzzling through the right question at the right time, you click on the creative brain and fuel yourself with intention. As you solve your own quandaries, you expand your consciousness and level of joy. As Socrates said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

WHAT IF . . .

Imagine for a moment that life has a question for you. Are you listening to what it is asking right now? Are you aware of your soul’s intention for embodiment at this time or are you at odds with it? By taking a break from the restless rush of life to ponder such questions and to listen to your inner spirit, you give yourself an exceptional gift and consciously invoke your personal evolution.

Introspection such as this book suggests is not for the fainthearted or the self-critical. It is essential to cultivate a positive relationship with our own minds, assessing whether

the thoughts and questions we are entertaining are helpful for our development or not; whether they are life-affirming or detrimental to our spirit. We must be able to raise difficult questions without falling prey to the negative or judgmental inner critic. In order to do this, self-inquiry requires courage, self-compassion, and ridiculous amounts of humor. When undertaken in the right way, it enables us to relax into our lives, as we come to understand and embrace both the absurdity and the lovability of our human nature.

MORE ON WHY QUESTIONS MATTER

Our whole internal thinking process operates on a question-and-answer, or Q and A, system, so it stands to reason that if we are seeking new solutions to life's challenges, it behooves us to make this Q and A dialogue in our heads conscious. Quality questions lead to quality answers. Good friends, good parents, and good leaders all know that the right questions are like keys to our inner doors. They take us to something within that we don't yet know or haven't yet considered. They give us a new way of looking at problems. That is why questions form the foundation of introspection. To be able to question ourselves and life shows curiosity and a willingness to grow. Questions promote deeper thought, connection, authenticity, and humility. They gnaw at us and push us toward greater clarity. And they spark wonder.

Introspection helps us create a thematic, narrative thread for our lives, keeping us on track and nudging us into new possibilities. It is a daily conscious effort to improve ourselves and spiritualize our lives. Good questions help us move toward the intentional creation of our desires and illuminate what sets us backward into old, unconscious patterning or habitual reactivity.

As we learn to be authentic in the questions we ask ourselves, we simultaneously learn how to engage others with connection-building questions as well. This deepens our relationships by engendering empathy, compassion, and understanding. The more truthful we become in our self-reflection process, the more we will recognize any hidden motivations for asking certain questions of others. We will see if we are leading them toward an answer we hope to receive, creating a distraction so we don't have to be vulnerable, or trying to expose some weakness of theirs in order to feel better about ourselves. As we learn to ask questions that uplift and inspire, we experience greater harmony and love, in our own hearts and in every external relationship. And eventually, in addition to evolving into greater self-awareness, we also evolve beyond it to self-transcendence and the expanded experience of oneness.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE QUESTIONS

When I meet someone who asks powerhouse questions, I tingle with joy. Feeling stopped, in need of a moment to ponder my answer, I know I am on the edge of a new perspective and a liberating possibility. In these pages, I aspire to be one of these people for you. I hope these questions make you stop and really think. I encourage you to look at the questions you are asking of life and to listen to the questions life is asking of you. I believe that by undertaking an intentional approach to the questions we ask of ourselves and each other, we will make quicker evolutionary strides, individually and collectively.

I chose 108 questions because the number 108 is significant in many world religions, as well as in fields such as science, literature, technology, and yogic philosophy. On a *mala*, the strand of beads used for repeating mantras, there are typically 108 beads.

In Hinduism, there are 108 Upanishads, which are sacred texts of the ancient sages, and 108 names for God. The number 108 is a Harshad number, an integer divisible by the sum of its digits. *Harshad* is a Sanskrit word meaning “giver of joy.” There are 54 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet, and each has masculine (*shiva*) and feminine (*shakti*) forms: $54 \times 2 = 108$. There are said to be 108 earthly desires, 108 lies that humans tell, and 108 human delusions or forms of ignorance. It has been proposed that if one can be so calm in meditation as to have only 108 breaths in a day, enlightenment will come. And finally, 1 stands for highest truth, 0 for the emptying of the ego into complete spiritual practice, and 8 for the infinite or eternal soul.

The 108 questions are divided into twelve major themes—one theme for each chapter—and each theme has nine questions. Each question is followed by an explanation of its significance and instructions for how to engage with it more deeply. You may decide to take the themes in order and consider one per month for a year or dip into whatever subject strikes your interest, exploring each as it pertains to your life. Some questions may seem similar but are actually another layer of exploration on a particular topic.

THE POWER OF GREAT QUESTIONS

In preparation for this book, I reviewed the personal journals I have kept over the past forty years. I saw repeated examples of how my inner questioning led to my greatest growth. This is why I believe so strongly in the power of introspective questions to lead us all into our full evolutionary potential. The very answer to my nagging question, “How do I keep the flame of personal evolution toward love alive in my heart and how do I ignite the spark of spiritual awakening in others?” lies in the continual asking of deeper questions.

For the past two decades in my yoga therapy practice, I have counseled people seeking greater self-awareness as they navigate experiences such as depression, grief, and stress. Regardless of presenting issues, every person has come because they want to feel happier, more at peace with themselves and the world they live in, and more able to cope with life's challenges. They seek a deeper meaning and purpose in life and a connection to their soul and to the transcendent energy of life itself. This is the driving force beneath all the things we call "self-help."

The questions I offer have come from my own inner journey as well as my study of the philosophies and practices of classical yoga, as taught by spiritual masters such as Paramahansa Yogananda and Mata Amritanandamayi, and the principles of spiritual psychology, as expressed by teachers such as Gary Zukav, Carl Rogers, and Eckhart Tolle. By working through the 108 questions you will learn to listen deeply to your soul and determine what life is calling for you to learn or to express.

In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. . . . Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE QUESTIONS

Your spiritual development depends on how well you can apply your answers to these questions in daily life. To truly benefit from them, you must take time to let the material become a part of you. It is not enough to just read through them. Like chewing food thoroughly in order to digest it properly, we assimilate the wisdom these questions provide

by taking time to fully absorb each one. There is no rush. Allow time for assimilation. Concentrate on one question until it feels complete in your mind and heart. Don't get indigestion by flooding yourself with too many unresolved questions at once.

Before beginning, set aside a few moments of silence. Just as white space on a page creates a sense of spaciousness for words, silence allows space for the meaning of each question to percolate in your mind. When you feel ready, read a question and then repeat it several times silently.

After you have pondered your answer for a while, make some notes. Write down any associated thoughts, connections, insights, or follow-up questions. You may even try writing the question out, as this will help your mind bring in your right answer. Life moves into manifestation from our minds through our hands. The synchronicity created by directing pen across paper activates parts of the brain associated with both thinking and memory. Writing answers out by hand will help you go deeper into your truth and will solidify it in your subconscious mind, which influences future choices and behaviors.

Don't censor your answers and don't worry about grammar or writing style. This is just for you and there is no right or wrong way to write your answers. If you get stuck on a question, you do not need to feel inadequate to it, just recognize that it requires patience and the willingness to look deeper. Try rewording it in a way that makes more sense to you. If any fear arises, it is probably related to not having the answers immediately. No problem! Your journal is your personal space of exploration. Be honest, fearless, and unfiltered. Trust your internal process.

Some questions may challenge you or trigger a negative response, like this one did for me: "What am I supposed

to learn from this (situation, difficult relationship, etc.)?” For over a decade, whenever I considered this, I would groan and roll my eyes because I knew what was coming: a deep dive into my own responsibility for said situation or relational conflict. Ugh! I just wanted to blame others or hide and try to avoid the drama altogether. But it is the questions that we loathe and resist that are often the ones we benefit from the most. If you run across questions that feel troublesome, try reframing them slightly, like modifying a yoga posture you have difficulty with, in order to honor your body. If this doesn’t work, move on, but consider coming back to revisit them later. If two questions seem similar, look carefully for subtle differences and nuances.

Take note of any of your own questions that arise as you ponder the ones presented here. Watch how you phrase your internal questions and be careful of ones like “Why has this happened to me?” or “Why is life so hard?” which keep you disempowered. Take a position of control and reframe them to something like, “How can I grow through what has happened to me?” or “How am I self-sabotaging?” In this way, you will move quickly toward truth and the ability to make necessary personal changes.

You may want to share any particularly meaningful questions with a trusted friend to stimulate conversation. Definitely carry your favorites with you and practice active reflection in order to embody your answers. A consistent habit of introspection will reap great benefits of personal growth, well-being, and joy. Most importantly, enjoy the new perspectives that the questions offer, and even if only one question touches your heart, consider that a success.

So, go grab a pen, make some tea, and settle in. I hope you will enjoy the 108 questions as much as I have. Please know

that every one of them is offered in a spirit of love and the hope that it will take you to the remembrance of your beautiful soul. Now, if you are awake and ready, it's time to find out what more life has for you!