

Inquiry

In the spiritual search, if we only meditate, over time, as useful as that may be, it can tend to remove us from Life, and allow us to get a little too “dreamy,” you could say.

The counterbalance to meditation is something that grounds us in the reality of Life itself, in the form of asking important questions. We can call this practice “inquiry.” By important questions, I mean that which is important to *you*. It could be any significant question that you have about Life. For example, your question could be about how this body-mind works. Or, it could be about your relationship with other people, or your place in the world.

Our questions can be whatever we choose as long as they are important to us. If we ask something out of idle mental curiosity, there won't be any energy behind it. But if we're asking a question that we really don't know the answer to, and that we really want to know the answer to, then our inquiry has power. It has energy.

With inquiry, it's important to remember that the point isn't to end up with a nice concept. If you are asking really good questions, any answers that come are not likely to be easy to summarize for the entertainment of your friends. The purpose of a really good question is to take you to the frontier of the thinking mind, where you can realize that the answer cannot be found in the mind. The mind may be puzzled by the question. This is okay. Let the mind be puzzled. The mind likes being able to understand. A good question will lead us beyond the mind's ability to comprehend.

It doesn't matter what the question is for you. Maybe it is: “What is love? What is this existence? Who am I?” – the classic question from the Indian sage, Ramana Maharshi. Whatever question has juice for you is the right question to ask.

It's best to ask the question out loud or in writing. This makes it clear to the Universe what our question is. (If we just say it mentally in our minds, there is too much other activity there for the Universe to know what we really want.) It's also important to simplify the question. If you're writing two or three pages to explain your question, it's too complex. Aim for one sentence or maybe two at the most. Our job is to get very clear about what our question is. Often, when we simplify our question, the answer becomes apparent.

Ask your question out loud or write it in your journal. Come back to it the next day, and then the day after that. Ponder it: “Hmm, I wonder what that is.” Don't try to figure it out. Be receptive. Be open to what may show up. The answer may not come in the context that you think it should. It may very likely not show up as a nice, concise mental concept. It might show up in an event in your life, a sensation of bringing you to the mysterious, bringing you into a sense of awe, a sense of wonder, or joy.

We might ask: “I wonder who I am. I wonder what this Life is about. I know that I have my story and my history, my current situation, my hopes and dreams, my family and career. But what am *I*?” That's a question that leads us into a sense of wonder. We can become curious as to what we may find. We don't know what we may find lying hidden in the murky depths or in the elevated states. Any expectation about what we will encounter is counter-productive because it is trying to fit the unknown into whatever mental concepts we may hold.

It is useful to inquire when we find ourselves relating to others in a way that doesn't feel comfortable, in a way that doesn't feel right and tends to create separation between ourselves and others. In such a situation, our question might be: "I wonder what I am doing that's creating this discomfort?" Or, "How am I keeping myself separate from this person?" In this way, we can use how Life is appearing to us as fertile ground for inquiry.

We don't need to seek out problems to solve. Life is perfectly capable of giving us what we need when we need it, if we are paying attention.

So, clarify the question. Remain attentive to the question. Don't demand an answer within your timeframe. Put the question out there and give the Universe time to show you the answer in the most appropriate way for you. Be willing to rest in this sense of not knowing. It is pregnant with possibility. Be vigilant about your mind stepping in, which it will try to do. The mind relieves the pressure of resting in the unknown by attempting to come up with an understandable response. Instead, allow the mystery to simmer.

By asking important questions, we can learn about our deepest nature. These kinds of questions pull us into the unknowable mystery of Life. The "unknown" sounds very mysterious, very "spiritual." But it's really an arena where we don't know, and can't know, what is happening and where this inquiry may lead. But we can be present to experience it. We can experience the joy of it, the wonder of it, and the deep sensation of being comfortable with whatever Life has to offer. These are possibilities that are beyond the conceptual mind. Inquiry can take us there by using important questions that can lead us into the unknown, into the mysterious, into what's typically called the spiritual side of Life. But there really isn't a spiritual side and a worldly side of Life.

We are an indivisible part of the whole of Life. The part can never know the whole. So, we can never step outside of Life to get a good look at it without falling into conceptualization. But we can experience the reality of Life. To do so, however, is beyond the ability of our thinking mind.

Inquiry (asking important questions with sincerity) can bring us closer to this realization. Together with meditation, inquiry is a very powerful practice to accelerate our journey to the Divine.