

Everyday Life Questions

"A Question is a Heuristic for What to Do with your Attention"

(As are slogans / proverbs / guidelines such as the Lojong collection)

I won't call these "koans" because I'm unfamiliar with the tradition. I've heard that some people consider them a kind of "test" of whether someone is enlightened. I'm very much not of that persuasion - I look at these questions as openings and as reminders to be aware - in an ongoing and continuous way - of existential aspects of reality that perhaps, can never admit to answers. And if I get answers, I appreciate them and then throw them away. :)

There are some contemplative questions of both daily interest to me, and apparently perennial interest to others, which I carry around in various ways. These are the main ones I "live with" in my current life. Except when "dropping" them, of course.

- Who Am I? - Plus its versions with a different linguistic spin, which I've noticed lead me to view them a bit differently: What Am I? Who / What Are You? Who / What Are We? Who / What is a "Self"?
- What is my / your / our True Face, and what exactly is the resistance to seeing it and showing it to oneself and others?
- What is Desire, and under what circumstances does it motivate one towards right action, or lead one astray from that?
- What is effective posture during formal sitting? (I see this as a lot more than just a question of mechanics!)
- What is Contemplation? (the "meta" question to holding these other questions).
- How can one live a full life?
- What is the interplay between Faith and Doubt?
- How can I / We use our knowledge effectively, or even be used by it effectively? For example, what might one need to understand about Language in this regard?
- What is intersubjectivity? Is there a group mind? In what ways are we one mind or multiple, and what are the connections?
- Where are we headed as a culture and / or multi-civilization?
- What are the real, but unconscious questions I'm living with at this time?

I have a few assumptions in doing this - that these questions don't make sense in the abstract but only in relation to particulars; that none of the words I've used here represent static, unchanging "things" or categories (which are disguised things because they are based on static properties of things). Life is a doing, a process; the word "Being" in my view could be swapped for "Becoming" or "endlessly changing" without loss of power. I have not found much can be accomplished with abstract philosophy (defining terms, reasoning from first principles, etc.) - however seductive that may be.

I don't believe in "Answers" or "Conclusions" - those indicate the place where awareness decides has something tied up in a nice package and is finished with it. That's good for the "little questions" perhaps.

Some more general, but also important questions:

- Why do this? What "value" does it have? For that matter, what value does meditation have, or spending time with Play As Being or Ways of Knowing?
- How do I know (how does one know; how do we know) when the above questions are held in a "real" way - that is, contemplatively, grounded in one's life, not just abstract speculation?

One sign of an answer to the last question- is how generative the question is - how much resonance does it have with experience; how much the question functions as an "opening" that leads to fresh ideas, more knowledge, more generative questions.

Looking at the above list raises the more general question about the "my life as a whole" as a koan. That question lives in me - in a certain inarticulate way - but I'm not much prepared to say much about it -I don't have a good handle on it yet. I am interested in whether that can be opened up more in a group dialogue. If anyone wants a theme session on that, I'll be the first to show up.

I do like to explore the experiential correlates of these questions - a little like the idea of Play as Being. I like to explore these questions with others in a grounded way. If I trust someone has a good memory - one that is connected with past experience in which they were relatively "awake", then discussion has more than just a speculative quality and seems grounded even if "experience" is not in present time. After all, no experience is present-time - even if it happened 9 seconds ago, it has still taken on a large component of concept and memory.

But sometimes it's nice to explore these things with others, when the "glow" of recent experience is still upon them. Yesterday I went with a friend to do nature meditation outdoors. We did a formal sit, then observed our experience and compared notes - the way the appearance of our surroundings had changed, deepened, brightened, become richer, taken on nuances; the changes in relationship to the other entities sharing the space (e.g. people, dogs, squirrels, birds, ...) and so on.

In addition to experiential approaches I find science has a lot to say to shed light on these questions. Maybe that is because I'm suitably "literate" in those areas. I feel we're finally starting to move out of the "dark ages" in which science, speculative philosophy, and spiritual traditions could not converse across their ideological divides. This seems like an exciting time in history for the advancement of human knowledge.

Last but not least :)

- What is "Writing In A Wiki" and how do I / you / we do it?