

Self-Empowerment

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The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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What I Know For Sure

On the television show “Super Soul Sunday” Oprah Winfrey asks her guests a number of deep questions, including “What do you know for sure?”

Buddhist Monk Pema Chodron writes that there is “no solid ground” as a way of saying that everything is subject to change, including what I think I know for sure.

Byron Katie offers a therapeutic process to end suffering by asking yourself four questions about what you believe to be true. The first question is “Is it true?” The second question is “Can you *absolutely* know that it’s true?” Those two questions are followed by “How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?” and “Who would you be without the thought?” Those questions can potentially lead toward a releasing of suffering thoughts that were once strongly believed and held as true.

Many years ago I read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values* by Robert Pirsig. I remember one of the ideas that intrigued me was that instead of “Science” eventually answering *all* of our questions, it appears that the more we seem to know, the more (and deeper) questions emerge, giving an appearance of moving *further away* from “knowing it all”. (See page 4 for some fascinating quotes from this classic.)

So, I wonder, is there anything I *can* know for sure? Yes, I believe there is! Although I will never *know it all* in this ever-changing world, there are some things that I *can* know for sure.

While my own lessons and experiences do not necessarily apply to everyone, there are shining examples of *Truth Known* regarding the mind-body-soul that have emerged for me despite changes in my understanding over time.

Spiritual seekers know that words cannot capture and fully express Truth, but we can use words to communicate “pieces of the puzzle.” Together we help one another move toward a greater vision and experience of wholeness, where we feel the sureness we seek.

Upon what authority shall we trust for information? The “world” says I am just a human being, subject to

the many influences of genetics, environment, forces of nature, and just plain luck. The “church” says I am a spiritual being, God’s unconditionally beloved child, having a temporary human experience, who could potentially have eternal life after this physical life (if I follow certain rules and practices?).

Studying psychological theories and spiritual teachings, I sought a balance of my human self with my divine nature. The paradox is that instead of either/or, I am both human and divine, each aspect offering a moral compass to navigate this thing called life, with its many opposites from which I must constantly choose.

The compass the world offers is a “zero sum game” where one person wins and the other loses. The human ego thrives on competition, winning, comparisons, superiority, and being right. On the other hand, Spirit/Essence prefers joining, win/win scenarios, playing together, and being happy. The difference is huge and unmistakable.

Avoiding the Spiritual Bypass

In the past, I attempted to be spiritual all the time. I wanted peace, love, joy, and all the blissful stuff that I thought would be the prize of being non-stop spiritual. I tried to do what I now call a “spiritual bypass” – zooming straight to enlightenment without fully dealing with those pesky human emotions that get in the way of spiritual bliss – like anger, sadness, and fear.

While I certainly nurtured a valuable spiritual connection by choosing enlightenment as a goal, I also tended to repress and deny negative emotions. I am currently at a point in my life where I have a more mature understanding of what peace really is.

When I thought that peace was the absence of argument, I denied emotions I judged as negative. Now I know that denying or repressing emotions simply pushes them into the subconscious where, over time, they trigger illness and pain in the body, signals of important lessons to be learned. So now I am learning to befriend my emotions, allowing them to be felt so that I can learn the lessons they are leading me toward. Negative emotions are part of my human nature, and are also a divine gift that alerts me to something I need to pay attention to.

One of the great gifts of my physical recovery from cancer is the impetus to work on the parts of myself that

got little to no attention before. I have slowed down and shifted my focus. I am getting help from others who have divine gifts to share that nurture me and are healing some broken places.

I am dynamically alive, in process, on a learning curve, gaining new insights as I coordinate a balance between the fragile and vulnerable person I temporarily appeared to be and the eternal Spirit of Love that I ultimately am in the sight of God.

Step by step I have been led to finding a happy marriage, not only with my husband, but also a happy marriage between psychology and spirituality. Where the human mind meets the heart of love, there is a juicy aliveness that makes life an amazing adventure!

What I know for sure is that each step I have taken so far has led me to a greater connection with my own integrity and sense of wholeness. The peace, love, and joy I feel is richer, deeper, and more meaningful than what my attempts at a spiritual bypass offered.

While all things of the world are temporary and changing, there is beauty and perfection in each passing moment that can be appreciated. When thoughts infused with anger, sadness, and fear can be brought to inquiry, suffering can be released. When the answers to questions lead to more questions, curiosity and humility can lead to amazing new discoveries.

It is a joy to share this life journey with you.

May you find your way to the bridge between your beautiful human self and your divine nature for the glorious experience that life holds for you.

Your fellow traveler,

Rev. Jill



The Wisdom of I Don't Know

By Scott Grace

The Dalai Lama is famous for answering the deep questions people throw at him by saying, "I don't know," and then laughing uproariously. He's completely at ease with his not knowing. Wise fellow.

Recently I had a few dates with someone. It's the first woman I asked out since the ending of a ten year relationship a year and a half ago, unless I count the few dates I had six months out, which served the mighty purpose of reminding me that I was not remotely ready to date.

I shared the news with a close friend, and he asked me, "What's your intuition say? Do you have a sense if this could become long term?"

Interesting question. My answer? Three words: "*I don't know.*"

Upon hindsight, I would have liked to laugh uproariously and then add: "It's really none of my business at this point. When a movie is beginning, I don't want my intuition to whisper what will happen in the middle or the end of the movie. I want to let the story unfold. And by the way, I have a wee bit of trouble hearing a still, small voice when gonads and romantic possibilities are at play."

My ego wants instant soulmate connection, just add water, but instant anything is like junk food thrown in a microwave... it may feel and taste hot and great going down, but when it is digested, assuming it is digestible, is it really good for you in the long run? I think there is something to the art of dating...practicing restraint, practicing holding onto yourself, getting comfortable with the not knowing.

My experience of not knowing was all pervading in college. I did not declare a major. There was a name for people like me. I was called Undecided. I did not like that. It made me squirm. I was feeling so much **PRESSURE** to decide, pressure from my peers, professors, and especially my parents. Here I was seventeen years of age, and supposedly all set to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life and commit to it. After giving it a college try for two years I decided to take a break from school and major in having life experiences, making huge mistakes, and seeing some of the world. I'm still doing it, and getting quite an education!

While I was in college, being **UNDECIDED** meant I got to take all the cool and interesting courses that popped out at me, from *New World Imaginations* to *The Gospel According to Zen*. This was at the University of Buffalo, which was labeled the Berkeley of the East during the Vietnam War, as it was a hub for political and social protest and consciousness expansion. Some of the older professors were still hippies, activists, and meditators. One teacher, who taught *Death and Dying*, was a new student of *A Course in Miracles*, as was I. It was my first year studying the Course, and she and I had some fabulous extracurricular conversations about the spiritual path we both were just starting out on. The thirty year age difference between us melted away as we connected as fellow students and seekers on a leveled playing field, thanks to the grace of *I Don't Know*.

A Course in Miracles first seeks to get us to take out the garbage, empty our minds, and face and embrace our not knowing, which is a pre-requisite for acquiring wisdom. Some of the early lessons include: *I Do Not Know What Anything Is For, I Do Not Perceive My Own Best Interests, I Do Not Understand Anything I*

See, and I Am Never Upset For The Reason I Think. If you are looking for ego confidence, a stronger self-image, or clarity of direction, Miracles is not your course. It will drive you nuts.

Usually at the beginning of a coaching session I ask the client what they want to accomplish by the end of the hour. Clarity is a popular one. People love clarity. Who doesn't want to see where you are going? It makes driving so much easier! But sometimes it is not a request, but a demand. Demanding clarity can be a way of pushing to make things happen, to feel secure and safe by being in control. And that usually backfires. My goal is learning to release fear and feel safe in the magic of the mist, the beauty of the fog. If I don't push things, the sun will shine on through and bring me what I need. If cultivating a deep trust in the universe is your goal, and it sure is mine, we can skip clarity and go directly to affirming: *I Don't Know, I Don't Need To Know, and When I Need To Know I Will, in Perfect Divine Timing and Order!*

Bob Mandel, in his book *Money Mantras*, affirms: *Since God is the unknown, the more I know I don't know, the closer I am to God.*

I suppose for some, hanging out in uncertainty is avoidance, keeping fear at bay, stagnant chi. If that is your case, please stop reading this at once and go make a decision, any decision, and dive into it. Any decision is better than no decision when you are suffering from chronic paralysis caused by over-analysis. Unblock the chi and change will come for the better.

For me, being undecided in college was authentic, real, gritty, and opened me to a feast of an education. And for all of us enrolled here at Earth University, we are practicing making friends with the unknown, and maybe even enjoying it, the way you would enjoy the unfolding of a really good movie, knowing that whatever happens on the projection screen, you will leave the theatre safe and whole, lights on, darkness vanished, and laughing uproariously!

As my friend Jana Stanfield says in one of her songs:

*I'm not lost, I am exploring
Life is an adventure worth enjoying
Though I may not know where I'm going
I am not lost, I am exploring
I am not lost, I am exploring*

Scott Grace is a life coach who serves worldwide and does sessions via phone or Skype. Read more about his coaching practice or schedule a free intro session through email at info@scottsongs.com or call 415-721-2954.

SAVE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS: ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A Caring Question is a Key that will unlock a room inside the person you love.

by Glennon Melton

When I was a mama of three very tiny, very messy, very beautiful rug rats, we had DAYS THAT WENT ON FOR LIFETIMES. Craig left at 6:00am every morning and as I watched him showered, ironed self leave the house I felt incredibly blessed and thrilled to have so much time alone with my babies and incredibly terrified and bitter to have so much time alone with my babies. If you don't believe that all of those feelings can exist at once – well, you've never been a parent to many tiny, messy, beautiful rug rats.

When Craig returned each day at 6:00pm (he actually returned at 5:50 but took a STUNNINGLY LONG TIME TO GET THE MAIL) he'd walk through the door, smile, and say – “So! How was your day?”

This question was like a spotlight pointed directly at the chasm between his experience of a “DAY” and my experience of a “DAY.” How was my day?

The question would linger in the air for a moment while I stared at Craig and the baby shoved her hand in my mouth like they do – while the oldest screamed MOMMY I NEED HELP POOING from the bathroom and the middle one cried in the corner because I NEVER EVER EVER let her drink the dishwasher detergent. NOT EVER EVEN ONCE, MOMMY!!! And I'd look down at my spaghetti stained pajama top, unwashed hair, and gorgeous baby on my hip – and my eyes would wander around the room, pausing to notice the toys peppering the floor and the kids' stunning new art on the fridge . . .

And I'd want to say:

How was my day? Today has been a lifetime. It was the best of times and the worst of times. There were moments when my heart was so full I thought I might explode, and there were other moments when my senses were under such intense assault that I was CERTAIN I'd explode. I was both lonely and absolutely desperate to be alone. I was saturated – just BOMBARDED with touch and then the second I put down this baby I yearned to smell her sweet skin again. I was simultaneously bored out of my skull and completely overwhelmed with so much to do. Today was too much and not enough. It was loud and silent. It was brutal and beautiful. I was at my very best today and then, just a moment later, at my very worst. At 3:30 today I decided that we should adopt four more children, and then at 3:35 I decided that we should give up the kids we already have for adoption. Husband – when your

day is completely and totally dependent upon the moods and needs and schedules of tiny, messy, beautiful rug rats your day is ALL OF THE THINGS and NONE OF THE THINGS, sometimes within the same three minute period. But I'm not complaining. This is not a complaint, so don't try to FIX IT. I wouldn't have my day Any.Other.Way. I'm just saying – it's a hell of a hard thing to explain – an entire day with lots of babies.

But I'd be too tired to say all of that. So I'd just cry, or yell, or smile and say "fine," and then hand the baby over and run to Target to wander aisles aimlessly, because that's all I ever really wanted. But I'd be a little sad because love is about really being seen and known and I wasn't being seen or known then. Everything was *really hard* to explain. It made me lonely.

So we went to therapy.

Through therapy, we learned to ask each other better questions. We learned that if we really want to know our people, if we really *care* to know them – we need to ask them better questions and then really listen to their answers. We need to ask questions that carry along with them this message: "I'm not just checking the box here. I really care what you have to say and how you feel. I really want to know you." If we don't want throw away answers, we can't ask throw away questions. A caring question is a key that will unlock a room inside the person you love.

So Craig and I don't ask "how was your day?" anymore. After a few years of practicing increasingly intimate question asking, now we find ourselves asking each other questions like these:

- *When did you feel loved today?*
- *When did you feel lonely?*
- *What did I do today that made you feel appreciated?*
- *What did I say that made you feel unnoticed?*
- *What can I do to help you right now?*

I know. WEEEEIRRD at first. But not after a while. Not any weirder than asking the same damn empty questions you've always asked that illicit the same damn empty answers you've always gotten.

And so now when our kids get home from school, we don't say: "How was your day?" Because they don't know. Their day was lots of things.

Instead we ask:

- *How did you feel during your spelling test?*
- *What did you say to the new girl when you all went out to recess?*
- *Did you feel lonely at all today?*
- *Where there any times you felt proud of yourself today?*

And I never ask my friends: How are you? Because they don't know either.

Instead I ask:

- *How is your mom's chemo going?*
- *How'd that conference with Ben's teacher turn out?*
- *What's going really well with work right now?*

Questions are like gifts – it's the thought behind them that the receiver really FEELS. We have to *know* the receiver to give the right gift and to ask the right question. Generic gifts and questions are all right, but personal gifts and questions feel better. Love is *specific*, I think. It's an art. The more attention and time you give to your questions, the more beautiful the answers become.

Life is a conversation. Make it a good one.

Love Wins,
Glennon

Glennon Doyle Melton is the author of New York Times bestseller "Carry On, Warrior: The Power of Embracing Your Messy, Beautiful Life". She is also a Sunday School teacher, an award-winning blogger, speaker, and the founder and president of "Monkee See-Monkey Do" a non-profit that serves women who need help getting back on their feet. See Glennon's website and blog at momastery.com

Quotes from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values*

by Robert Pirsig

"You are never dedicated to something you have complete confidence in. No one is fanatically shouting that the sun is going to rise tomorrow. They *know* it's going to rise tomorrow. When people are fanatically dedicated to political or religious faiths or any other kinds of dogmas or goals, it's always because these dogmas or goals are in doubt."

"In the high country of the mind one has to become adjusted to the thinner air of uncertainty..."

"If your mind is truly, profoundly stuck, then it might be much better off than when it was loaded with ideas."

SPRING FUNDRAISER



Hello, Friends! Happy Spring!

Many of you have responded generously to our annual Spring Fundraiser as well as at other times of the year.

Each Spring our readers are encouraged to send a voluntary contribution to help cover the cost of publication and other ministry endeavors. For the cost of just one meal at a local restaurant, you can make a huge difference in supporting the ongoing work of this ministry.

This is a golden opportunity to say “yes” to the full circle of Giving and Receiving. Take a minute right now to send a check or money order payable to **Agape Interfaith Ministries**, or donate online at www.AgapeInterfaith.org, or feel free to send a book or two of postage stamps, which also give great support. Your help truly does make a difference. Whether you send \$5 *or more*, every bit of support helps make this sharing of inspiration possible.

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Thank you!

You are a Blessing!

I hope you find something worthwhile in each issue of this newsletter. If you have a question, comment, or submission for publication, please email me at Jilleroni@juno.com. I would love to hear from you.



Who I Am (song lyrics) by Blanca

Another voice, another choice
To listen to words somebody said
Another day
I replay
One too many doubts inside my head

Am I strong – Beautiful - Am I good enough
Do I belong - After all -That I've said and done
Is it real - When I feel - I don't measure up
Am I loved?

CHORUS

I'm running to the One who knows me
Who made every part of me in His hands
I'm holding to the One who holds me
'Cause I know whose I am, I know who I am

I am sure I am Yours

Turning down - Tuning out
Every single word - That caused me pain
Unashamed - And unafraid
'Cause I believe You mean it when You say

I am strong - Beautiful
I am good enough - I belong - After all
'Cause of what You've done
This is real - What I feel
No one made it up
I am loved

CHORUS

I am sure I am Yours
I know who I am
I am sure I am Yours

Fearfully
Wonderfully
Perfectly
You have made me

I'm running to the One who knows me
I'm holding to the One who holds me

CHORUS

I am sure I am Yours
And I know who I am

“Who I Am” is the debut single from Blanca’s (Christian Praise) solo artist album “Who I Am” © 2015 Dayspring Music LLC / Group 1 Crew Music Publishing (BMI). More about Blanca on www.OfficialBlanca.com and www.facebook.com/OfficialBlanca

Daily Word

Every decision offers me a blessing.

When making a decision, I relax knowing that every choice offers me a blessing. I do not allow myself to become anxious that one choice will be “wrong” and another “right.” Whether I turn right or left; go or stay; say yes or no, God is with me. I ease my mind by knowing I am never apart from the Divine Creator.

I claim my power to choose and celebrate the wisdom that guides me. Any direction I take is a fresh path to adventure, new experiences, and deeper understanding. I don't dwell on what might have happened on another path. With God, I cannot make a wrong choice. I embrace my journey! My lessons, gifts, and blessings are right where I am.

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Love

Sent to you with
Love & Blessings

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.