

Part I

Potential

X

Possibilities

Dare to Question

“To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don’t grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float”

- Alan Watts

Philosophical Discovery

Few people question the depth and meaning of life. Obviously, you are one of them as you’ve chosen to read a book that presents an approach to understanding. Below is a list of questions that few people can answer as they’ve never considered the questions. There are no right or wrong answers—we are all different, and our answers come from our personal perspectives. See what you answer now then answer them again when you’ve completed reading the book. Did any of the answers change? (Write your answers in the notes section located in the back. When you finish reading the book, compare

your answers now to how you feel when you've finished reading the book. See if they have changed.)

- What attachments can't I let go of, and can I live without these earthly attachments?
- What is out there that you would jeopardize your life to protect?
- Do you still harbor guilt from any event in your life, if so, why?
- What is my purpose or reason for being in this world?
- What illusions do I continue to uphold, and why?
- What are some of the lies that I tell myself?
- What grief have I not been able to forgive?
- What would others say at my funeral?
- What are you ashamed of, and why?
- What are you most afraid of?
- What are my core values?
- What do I hate?

We all have the freedom to find answers. The above questions require we search ourselves and our experiences. We aren't going to find them online or in reference books. They come to us through our experiences and perceptions. Sometimes the answers

are based in gentle memories, and sometimes they are based in pain. To achieve honest answers requires we are honest with ourselves. American songwriter and musician Henry Rawlins once wrote, "Sometimes the truth hurts"¹—in seeking the answers, you will find pain.

Finding your truth is a journey, and as with all journeys comes pleasure and pain. In order to grow, we must allow ourselves to go through all the emotions generated by any given situation. In an article printed in Psychology Today, Jennifer Rollins states, "Rather than trying to suppress your feelings, work to be a mindful observer of them. Notice the emotions that you experience and where you feel them in your body. Then, try to cultivate a curious and nonjudgmental stance. Our emotions are often messengers, which signal something important that we need to pay attention to."² Allowing ourselves to experience the emotions allows us to find our truths. In seeking answers, don't turn away from the painful, embrace the emotions, and grow from them.

¹ "Henry Rollins Quotes." BrainyQuote.com. BrainyMedia Inc, 2019. 15 May 2019.
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henry_rollins_381416

² Jennifer Rawlins; Psychology Today.com, 2016. 25 November 2016
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mindful-musings/201611/3-reasons-let-yourself-feel-your-emotions>

“Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose.”

Viktor Frankl

When we find meaning in our suffering or pain, we find the strength to go on—to keep moving forward. That meaning can be anything that is significant to us, whether that means moving toward a goal, enriching our lives, or making someone smile. In doing so, we begin to live our lives and not just exist.

To Live, really live, is rare. Most people just exist. They survive. They continue to breathe. Many people don't know themselves. This situation isn't isolated to young adults. The world is filled with definitions, expectations, and beliefs that bombard us. As young adults are, however, we are particularly affected as we are still trying to define who we are, who we want to be, and how to get there. We have an infinite amount of influences, and there are always those who try to guide us yet have no real map. These mapless guides are typically trying to take us down their paths versus guiding us to find our own.

Knowing who we are is the first step in finding our path. We need to understand what our strengths are as well as our weaknesses. This knowledge will lead us to what we want to accomplish in life. Think of it

as a steppingstone. Each stone we set, builds our path. Before we begin to build the path, we must decide not to be complacent.

Hidden Strength

“The very basic core of a person’s living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.”

- Christopher McCandless

Complacency is defined as “self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.”³ In this context, the ‘dangers or deficiencies’ refer to not looking at who you are or caring who you want to be. You live someone else’s agenda for you. This situation often leads to the ‘pity-party,’ victim response. “Life isn’t fair.” “I deserve more.” “It should be given to me.” These attitudes can deplete your strength and rob you of your dreams.

You can bemoan the situation you find yourself in, and say that it isn't fair—that you deserve everything to be easier. But, is that what you really want? Do

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/complacency>

you want to say that you are happy because everything was handed to you, or do you want the strength to defeat the odds and claim what makes you happy yourself?

"Nothing worse than being strong, but not strong enough."

Shinobu Sensui (Yoshihiro Togashi)

If you are going to do great things, you need strength. To have strength, you need a good foundation to build your strength on. The example I give is in building a beach house on one piling—a powerful wave can wash it away and the house will crumble. But, build it on four pilings, and one is washed away, the house will stand. The same is true for building ourselves. If we do not have a solid foundation, that wave—in this case, the “victim/pity party” approach—will wash away our foundation, and we will be lost.

Foundation is defined as a basis (such as a tenet, principle, or axiom) upon which something stands or is supported.⁴ Given that definition, what is our foundation? Where does it come from? It comes from our beliefs. I grew up reading scriptures and

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/foundation>

going to church, therefore my foundation is God. It is what I believe.

Paradox of Beliefs

Meriam and Webster define belief as a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing.⁵ For example: her *belief* in God; a *belief* in democracy, or perhaps, I bought the chest of drawers in the *belief* that it was an antique. These beliefs are formed by our acceptance of what people have told us or by experience and reflection. The difficulty comes in what is really true. Because someone has told us something does not make it true. By the same token, when we reflect on our experiences, we are biased, so is our conclusion correct? Not a simple question.

In science, something is deemed qualified through its repeatability and quantified by an equation. Special Relativity is quantified by $E=mc^2$. This equation means Energy is equivalent to mass (m) x velocity² (c). C is the constant representing the speed of light. In 1905 the speed of light was accepted as 186,000 miles per second. Experiments at CERN laboratory in Switzerland showed that a

⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/belief>

neutrino traveled from there to Italy 60 billionth of a second faster than the speed of light.⁶ Does this mean that what Einstein postulated isn't true? No. It proves that things change and beliefs shift.

Some scientist finds this difficult to believe because of its implications, however, many are fascinated. This isn't a physics lesson, so I won't get into the implications. What I am trying to illustrate here is that not everyone believes the same things even with proof.

As we formulate our beliefs, it is important to know that it's ok not to share or agree with someone else's beliefs as it is acceptable for people not to share yours. The lesson is not to allow others to dictate what is right or wrong for you. People who believe in God are no different from people who believe in things that they have read or seen, which was created by somebody they have never met. Whatever it is you believe in, make sure it helps aid in who you are.

If somebody disagrees with you, then so be it. Everyone doesn't need to be in agreement with you

⁶ Wynne Parry; Live Science; Why the Speed of Light Matters; 26 November 2011; <https://www.livescience.com/16248-speed-light-special-relativity-neutrinos.html>

for you to achieve your goals or what it is that you want to accomplish on this earth. Most people go with the majority to not feel alienated despite what they have seen. In some cases, the majority isn't always the best way example to follow. Our opinions are more often formed from questionable sources on the internet or even in news broadcasts. These sources are not always objective and try to sway us in one direction or the other. Without verifying the facts for ourselves, we have little way to tell what reality versus fiction or propaganda is. Have the strength of your convictions and be cautious where you base your faith in information.

Science continues to develop new theories, while some older theories are set aside. The classic example here would be that Newton proved Galileo wrong, who in turn proved Aristotle wrong. Here the theory evolved from one physicist to the next. Were they wrong to begin with? No, they saw the problem differently and had more information to work with. The same principle can be applied to our beliefs. Formulating our beliefs should come from multiple sources, but we should also be open to having our opinions evolve.

Believe in what you want despite what people say. We would rather live thinking everything is ok then know the truth. We feel fine but don't want to go to the doctor in fear that something may be wrong. There are those who have mastered the art of perception, so don't always believe things that tend to be true. Live your life, and go with what you feel is right. Live by what you feel and think not by what you have been told to think despite who tells you whether that be your friend, teacher, parent, or boss. Don't be brainwashed. If you feel differently, then speak up or ask questions. Be true to yourself—who you feel you are not, what others think you should be. Shakespeare wrote one of the greatest lines in Hamlet that says: “To thine own self be true.”⁷ How appropriate that statement.

Our beliefs are what make us who we are. It doesn't matter what those beliefs are. You may believe a lie, but that lie is your reality. You may be atheist, but that doesn't make you wrong, or evil as some would tell. What it makes you is different. You believe in something different. That does not make it wrong. We are individuals with our own experiences that formulated our ideas. Because someone doesn't

⁷ William Shakespeare; Hamlet; Circa 1600

believe the way we do, does not make them wrong either. Remember, we were created equally, and each have our skills and talents.

It is also important to be open to other ideas. Listen. Don't judge or criticize. Doors open when we listen. Be adventurous enough to walk through that door. Once it closes, it may never open again. Don't be left wondering what if or wishing you could step back in time and walk through that door. While we learn from the past, we cannot go back and change it. If we are not willing to entertain new ideas, then we become complacent and can easily stagnate.

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but seeing with new eyes."

- Marcel Proust

Believability—how do we define that? Believing something can come from hard proof as in seeing something happen or it can come from faith, knowing that it did from some visceral response within ourselves. Love is real, yet it is difficult to believe in because of the great pain it can cause. Ask any lover. The universe is hard to believe. There are so many things we cannot see, yet they are there. Ask a scientist.

Our beliefs come from a variety of sources—educators, parents, clergy, books, newspapers, magazines, as well as rumors, myths, and legends. Those beliefs formulated from ‘verifiable’ sources are easy to justify. We can do tangible research with qualified results. The question is, how do we discern between the latter three influences in terms of truth?

First, we have to look at how each is defined. Rumor can be a noun or a verb. As a noun ,it is defined as talk or opinion widely disseminated with no discernible source or as a statement or report current without known authority for its truth.⁸ As a verb: be circulated as an unverified account or to tell or spread by rumor.⁹ One of the most famous rumors in the 1920s-1930s was that alligators lived in the sewers of New York City. It was said that New Yorkers visiting Florida would bring home baby alligators as souvenirs. When they grew too big, they would flush them down. Was this true? Well, of course not. An alligator would not survive the frigid winter temperatures of New York; they are a warm climate animal. Not to mention, that no

⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rumor>

⁹ See 9

creature would survive long navigating in sewage. Rumors can be proven or disproven.

“Through action, a man becomes a Hero. Through death, the Hero becomes a Legend. Through time, the Legend becomes a Myth. And by learning from the myth, a man takes action.”

- Corazon (Eiichiro Oda)

A myth is defined as something that is usually a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon or a belief that embodies the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society. Most interestingly, it is defined as a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence.¹⁰ A very famous myth was the Earth was flat. Pythagoras first postulated it was round sometime around 500 BC, yet it was a matter of speculation into the 3rd century BC. The myth began to be challenged when Hellenistic astronomers quantified the spherical shape by calculating the Earth's circumference. It wasn't until the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages that the paradigm was adopted. Again, we can prove or disprove a myth.

¹⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>

Legend, by definition, is a combination of both rumor and myth—a story coming down from the past, *especially* one popularly regarded as historical although not verifiable.¹¹ One of the most famous legends of all was King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. We can neither prove nor disprove this. Who's to say that the legend was based on an idea from a true King?

Christ could be considered all three of the above. There is a Christ myth theory where Earl Dougherty¹² argues for a version of the Christ myth theory, the thesis that Jesus did not exist as a historical figure. Dougherty says that Paul thought of Jesus as a spiritual being executed in a spiritual realm.¹³ And yet according to a 2011 Pew Research Center survey, there were 2.19 billion Christians around the world who believe otherwise. The numbers alone would imply that Dougherty is incorrect in his assumptions, so what do we believe?

Perhaps the answer comes more in it isn't so much what we believe but in how we apply our beliefs. We

¹¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legend>

¹² Earl J. Dougherty (born 1941) is a Canadian author of *The Jesus Puzzle* (1999), *Challenging the Verdict* (2001), and *Jesus: Neither God Nor Man* (2009).

¹³ Dougherty, Earl, *The Jesus Puzzle*; Canadian Humanist Publications (1737); Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; January 1999.

use religion, science, what we believe to justify our knowledge, yet our knowledge can be used for good or bad. I have seen those who use religion to justify their acts. To judge, persecute, and worse. I have seen those use proven facts to justify their acts. The murder whose lawyer uses faulty genetics as a defense. I have seen those use the disbelief of God to justify their acts. There is no God, therefore, there are no spiritual consequences in my actions. It comes down to basics—what do we do with what we believe. On this note, I leave you with the following quote to ponder:

“People live their lives bound by what they accept as correct and true. That's how they define "reality.” But what does it mean to be "correct" or "true"? Merely vague concepts... Their "reality" may all be a mirage. Can we consider them to simply be living in their own world, shaped by their beliefs?”

- Itachi Uchiha (Masashi Kishimoto)