

Personal Question

The practice of crafting and using a “Personal Question” can be very powerful for change.

There is a Buddhist practice called zazen. Zazen means a lot of things, but Taigen Dan Leighton in his book *Zen Questions: Zazen, Dogen, and the Spirit of Creative Inquiry* states, “Zazen is a question, an inquiry” and “the point of this practice of questioning, however is not to discover an answer.”

This practice can be a very powerful one for those on the threshold of birth, life transition, or looking for transformation in their lives.



It is normal to have lots of questions on the threshold of great change. How can I get through this? What’s the best way to proceed? How did you do it? What should I watch out for? What should I do next? How do I avoid...? There are thousands of people willing to answer your questions from your friends and therapists to the checkout clerk at the grocery store. The challenge isn’t finding the answers; it’s knowing which questions to ask and sorting through the answers to find the ones that matter to you.

Many of the questions we ask during transformation have no one answer and if they do, how do we know which answer is right? Remember the old Magic 8 Balls kids of the ’80’s played with? You

know the ones that have answers like “without a doubt” or “you may rely on it” or “better not tell you now” and “outlook not so good.” A Magic 8 Ball cannot answer questions of the heart and soul. Questions of the heart and soul must be asked many times and explored as a practice rather than a quick fix.

(I first learned a practice similar to this from Pam England, author of *Birthing From Within* as part of my training as a childbirth professional. She called it the “Deepest Question” and used it as a skill for childbirth preparation. I have found it to be helpful far beyond the labor room. I am indebted to Pam for the gift of the “Deepest Question.”)

Crafting Your Question



What is the shift you wish to see happen in your life?

Search for ***the shift that needs to happen that will move you in the direction of your desired life.***

These are not things that can be answered by the Magic 8 Ball or with a yes or no answer. What do you need to know about yourself to become the person you desire to be?

Write your question as a “*HOW AM I*” question rather than a “*CAN I*” question. And, make your question present tense. For example, one woman’s question might look like this: “*How am I embracing the unexpected in this moment?*” Another might be, “*How am I holding myself tenderly in this moment?*” Or, “*How am I being the woman I wish to be in this moment?*”

There is no formula, but this structure can help some who are struggling to take their *desired inward shift* into a question. You want your question to send you seeking HOW you are already moving in the direction you wish to grow.

How am I...*(fill in the desired inward shift here)*...in this moment?

A question in your nerves is lit
Yet you know there is no answer fit
To satisfy, insure you not to quit
To keep it in your mind and not forget
That it is not he or she or them or it
That you belong to

Bob Dylan

“It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)”

Putting Your Question into Practice

Once you have crafted your question, begin using it. Think of it as a thorn in your back pocket. When you sit down, you notice it poke you, just a bit, like a reminder to wake up.

I recommend writing your question (or just a few key words) on Post-It notes and placing them where you will come in contact with them in your daily life. I have put my notes on my bathroom mirror, the refrigerator, and my favorite is on the dash of my car (there's one there now!).

Ask yourself your personal question and notice where in your life ***you are already there***. The idea with this practice is to water what you want to grow. Noticing what's already ***working*** helps to strengthen that muscle encouraging it to grow further. We need to focus on what we want. Use your question to focus your attention out the front windshield rather than driving the vehicle of your life by looking out the rear view mirror. Focus forward in the direction of what's working, where you wish to go, and the change you want to see in your life.



When your question no longer holds power for you, it's time to change the question. A question can last for years or only a few weeks. I hope you enjoy the process.