

Contemplative Dialog - Past Discussion Topics

2023_02_15: When we look up at the stars at night, we see familiar constellations. We have named them. We have stories about them. They have meaning to us.

From other locations in our universe, the stars align differently. The stars that form our constellations do not align the same. There our names have no relevance, our stories no meaning.

Which of the many things we give meaning to, are only relevant from our perspectives?

2023_1_1: Stress cannot exist in the presence of a pie.

2022_11_20: I do not **have** a soul. I **am** a soul and I have a body.

2022_05_15: The real benefit of people who offer alternative suggestions comes less from the ideas they espouse or suggestions they make than from the ways they change how the rest of us think.

They don't have to be right, just initiate thinking in a broader light.
(Power of US p. 209)

2022_04_17: The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing. (Albert Einstein)

2022_03_20: Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. (Carl Sagan)

2022_02: Is morality measured more by what we do or by what we don't do?

2021_01_24: Would you be the same person; same values, same perspective, same outlook, family, household If you were born black?

2021_11 Some are guilty, but all are responsible. (Fyodor Dostoevsky)

2021_10 What advice would you offer a child today?

2021_08_22 What advice can we give those struggling to find new ways of attaining fulfillment as our changing world takes away our normal means?

“What do you gain and what do you lose by getting older (in other words what are the advantages and disadvantages)?”

2021_5_16 What does it mean to “live life to its fullest”? Is this possible? If you try to live life to its fullest, what does that look like for you even if you don’t do it consistently? Who do you know who is living life to the fullest?

2020_5_18 Western philosophy embodies Descartes concept: I think therefore for I am. While Eastern philosophy is said to stem from the concept: I breathe, therefore I am.

2020_11_22 How do you describe yourself? - Who am I?

How we identify ourselves reflects on who we tend to associate with, who we feel comfortable with, and those “others” whom we do not feel comfortable with.

How does who you are affect your daily activities? Animal lover, singer, hiker, game player.... Do you not associate with “the others?” Are you limiting your life experiences by not associating with “the others?”

1. Never let anyone be humiliated in your presence. (Elie Wiesel)

2. He started reading the French philosopher Michel Foucault and reflecting on his own life. “Who am I, how do I want to live? What do I need for a good life?” he said. “Hard questions, but it’s totally cool if you have the chance to ask them.”

3. “When another person makes you suffer, it is because he suffers deeply within himself, and his suffering is spilling over. He does not need punishment; he needs help. That's the message he is sending.” (Thich Nhat Hanh)

5. “When I was 15, I spent a month working on an archeological dig. I was talking to one of the archeologists one day during our lunch break and he asked those kinds of “getting to know you” questions you ask young people: Do you play sports? What’s your favorite subject? And I told him, no I don’t play any sports. I do theater, I’m in choir, I play the violin and piano, I used to take art classes.

And he went WOW. That’s amazing! And I said, “Oh no, but I’m not any good at ANY of them.”

And he said something then that I will never forget and which absolutely blew my mind because no one had ever said anything like it to me before:

“I don’t think being good at things is the point of doing them. I think you’ve got all these wonderful experiences with different skills, and that all teach you things and makes you an interesting person, no matter how well you do them.”

And that honestly changed my life. Because I went from a failure, someone who hadn’t been talented enough at anything to excel, to someone who did things because I enjoyed them. I had been raised in such an achievement-oriented environment, so inundated with the myth of

Talent, that I thought it was only worth doing things if you could “Win” at them.” (Kurt Vonnegut)

6. One Stick, Two Stick: The Way of the Old African Kings.

An old man is dying. He calls his people to his side. He gives a short sturdy, stick to each of his many offspring, wives and relatives. “Break the stick,” he instructs them. With some effort they all snap their sticks in half.

“This is how it is when a soul is alone and without anyone. They can be easily broken.”

The old man next gives each of his kin another stick, and says, “This is how I would like you to live your lives after I pass. Tie your sticks together in bundles of 2s or 3s.”

He waits quietly as his family ties their sticks together.

“Now, break these bundles in half.”

No one can break the sticks when there are two or more in a bundle. The old man smiles.

“We are strong when we stand with another soul. When we are with others we cannot be broken.”

7. Some are guilty but all are responsible. (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

8. Our societies have become societies of strangers - people with whom we share no common experience, who may not speak the same language as we do. They certainly won't know the same poems and the same books. What can you expect in such circumstances? We are strangers to one another. We are suspicious of one another.

Alexander McCall Smith in his book *The Careful Use of Compliments*

9. More than half of the settlers that emigrated to Appalachia came from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, so the Celtic influence has been significant in Appalachian culture, and constitutes the single-most dynamic ethnic influence upon Appalachian music.

What about spirituality?

According to John O'Donohue in his book *Anam Cara* (gaelic for soul friend), for the Celts “the world is always latently and actively spiritual.” With regard to our senses, there is no barrier between soul and body, with each natural and related to the other. “Being in the soul, the body makes the senses thresholds of the soul.”

10. Our lives are continually changing. But the current pandemic has changed our lives in ways we couldn't have imagined a year ago. It has prevented us from doing things we were comfortable with and has caused us to do new things.

What new things has the pandemic caused you to do which you will continue to do when the pandemic is over? Why didn't you do those things before?

11. Who are in my comfort circle? Who cares about me?

12. Therapist Resmaa Menakem, in his book *My Grandmother's Hands*, examines the damage caused by racism in America from the perspective of body-centered psychology. He argues this destruction will continue until Americans learn to heal the generational anguish of white supremacy, which is deeply embedded in all our bodies.

At a speaking engagement he asked, and we ask here in our Contemplative Dialog: session: "Do you believe in diversity?" pause. "Diverse from what?"

13. Do you see the country as divided? If yes, in what ways?

How do people generally treat others who have opposing views and beliefs? Do you see them treated with respect, or with contempt?

Do you enter into the condemnation of those who hold strong beliefs that are opposite to your beliefs?

What do you think has brought us to this place? What is our responsibility as Christians?

How can we be part of the solution, instead of a part of the problem?

14. When is a time you've experienced fear and how did you deal with it?

Are you typically more fearful or more at peace (non-anxious)?

What are some things you currently fear?

What helps you experience peace when you are fearful? And what is peace for you?

How, specifically, can you offer peace to another?
(Corner Table)

15. I am not sure that I exist, actually.
I am all the writers I have read,
all the people I have known,
all the women I have loved,
all the cities I have visited.

16. Play for adults is critical in our stressful go-go-go lives. **Play has been shown to release endorphins, improve brain functionality, and stimulate creativity.** And it can even help to keep us young and feeling energetic. Studies show that play improves memory and stimulates the growth of the cerebral cortex.

Do you play?

17. Pluralism: The world view that one's religion is not the sole source of truth.

1. With which statement would you agree, if any: No religion is true. Only one religion is true. Every religion is true. One religion is the true one in whose truth all religions participate.
2. Does any religion have all the truth?
3. Do we need to know more about other religions before we could say they are untrue?
4. Are all religions God-given originally?

18. The County Commissioners are finalizing the budget. There is a proposal to cut funding to the library and not provide raises to the staff because the library purchased and displayed materials on LGBTQ during Pride month. The Commissioners are using their power to punish the library staff because they are doing something they do not like.

What powers do you use to cause others to accept your ideas?

19. A scarlet cardinal was sitting motionless in the tree, sated having finished his breakfast at the feeder. Close to him was a dark object. It might have been a clump of leaves or it could have been his mate. Being obscured by branches one could not tell. Thinking that it was his mate, gave me a warm feeling; a couple enjoying the morning sun after the cold night.

I did not try to discern which it was.

When I look at a painting of some cuddly, wildlife, I similarly get a warm feeling. I do not know if the painting was of actual wildlife or the imagination of the artist.

How much of what makes us feel good is our mis-interpretation of reality? Does it matter to you?

20. Community is like a river formed from the many streams of our lives that meet and merge and flow to the sea.

As members of our community, we share our time and energy, our creativity, imagination, and vision, our talents, skills, and gifts, and the streams of our individual lives to create a river that is both deep and broad: a river that is made of many streams, sustains life, and refreshes the land through which it flows.

Does this reflect your view?

21. Ships don't sink because of the water around them; Ships sink because of the water that gets inside them. (TinyBuddah.com)

22. Youth is often thought of as a time when the world looks rosy. Life is wonderful, full of hope, dreams and accomplishment; a time when all things are possible. We are told: "You can **be** anything you want. You can **do** anything you want."

Remembering your youthful vision - did your vision materialize?

Why? Why not? Should it be re-activated or revised?