

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE

Ask Quality Questions

'The unexamined life is not worth living.'

Socrates

As we grow into adulthood and beyond, we often find that life speeds up with each year. We get more responsibilities and more to do as each day passes and accordingly we accept more and question less. Life becomes what it is – even if it means we are not being our true self or living our life's purpose. When we activate the first principle, Ask Quality Questions, it causes us to observe our life – our beliefs, behaviours, emotions and so on. Questions force us to pause, go inside and intuit the answer. What you find there may surprise or even shock you, but you will have started to see the truth and from that place you can only grow.

Creation of beliefs, values and behaviours

When we were newborns we believed we were the entire world. We didn't yet understand that our arms and legs belonged to us or that those people over there were separate from us. We were part of the fabric of the Universe, the Source, and it was part of us. Later we learned what our mouth, hands, feet and eyes were for, and the colours, shapes and sounds around us morphed into the separate forms of our family and our home. We became separated from the Source, too, as it became something that resided out there in society not in our hearts.

As we grew into toddlers we also discovered that we had less control over the world than we thought and were entirely dependent on others for our survival. When we were ready to speak, we experienced an overwhelming urge to assert ourselves as an independent being. To survive on our own, we had to explore the environment and we questioned everything to find out exactly what kind of a world we were in.

Enquiring into the status quo of our world is crucial for our survival. The more we understand about our environment, the more informed our decisions and judgments will be. But the search for knowledge goes beyond taking care of our needs for food, clothing, comfort and shelter. We find explanations deeply comforting as they give us a sense of control and understanding of the world. There's a pleasure in discovering new ideas or information and sharing knowledge with other people. We ask questions of others because if we don't know something, they might.

Human beings have a limited perception of reality, but giving meaning to what happens to us helps fill in the gaps in our knowledge and broadens our perspective. Naming things, reasoning and giving things a purpose all help us navigate the chaos of reality. To make sense of our world we must ask questions of it.

We also live in a rewards-based society where we are given incentives to search for and give the correct answers. From our school days through to finding our careers and beyond, we are applauded for our ability to create wise or intelligent solutions. When we don't manage to come up with a satisfactory answer, or are unable to convince anyone we have one, we are likely to feel foolish and, conversely, when we ask too many questions we're often told to 'be quiet' or 'don't ask why' – sometimes that's because the people we were asking didn't know the answers either!

So instead of asking 'why' we started to follow what we were told to do without questioning 'why?' As adults we are expected

to be more experienced and knowledgeable about life but often we would rather be left in the dark and pretend we know something than risk being laughed at or rejected for not being wise. Worrying that our ignorance will be discovered may lead us to fear asking questions altogether. But going through the motions of life, accepting others' beliefs and practices as your own without questioning 'why' means you're not experiencing life as fully as you could be.

I believe that everything our ancestors did in their time was right for them in their current time but, as time moves on humanity evolves, so it's our job to update our actions, beliefs and practices, and align them with our current timeline. We need to ask 'why' we are doing certain actions, as the following story demonstrates.

THE LOBSTER'S TAIL

One day a child was watching her mother prepare a lobster for lunch. 'Why are you cutting off its tail?' she asked. 'Hmm,' replied her mother, as she dropped the pieces into boiling water, 'Now you ask, I'm not sure why. It's something your Grandma showed me how to do.' Curious, the little girl ran off to find her grandmother. 'Grandma! Why do you cut off the lobster's tail before you boil it?' Her grandmother said, 'No idea, to be honest. My mother always did it like that.' The girl found her great-grandmother in her rocking chair. The old lady laughed. 'Do they still do that? I just cut it up to fit it into my pan.'

Ask and you shall receive

Our mind is a meaning-creating device, designed to ask questions and to answer them. It is likely that you have experienced the power of questions many times, especially when someone has asked you a question, which you previously knew the answer to, but have forgotten. It's likely that you shrugged your shoulders in response so that you could get on with your day, but that question hooks your mind, even if you thought you'd disregarded it. A few days later, the answer might pop into your head when you least expected it. Unanswered questions get filed in your subconscious, the submerged part of your mental iceberg, and this is where between 80 and 90 percent of your mental processes occur, quietly unknown to you on a conscious level.

Our conscious mind deals with the here and now but it is not equipped to process the vast amount of information we constantly encounter. In his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness*, the distinguished Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi suggests that our mind receives at least two million bits of information per second. This bombardment is overwhelming for the conscious part of the mind, so it creates a system to filter the information to avoid overload. It deletes, distorts and generalizes the information, and out of two million only 134 bits actually go in. Which 134 bits go in is dependent on the programs (beliefs) that are installed by our family, language, religion, teachers, friends and environment.

Unanswered questions sit in the subterranean depths of our subconscious as we scan for a reason, memory or meaning that satisfies our query in the most appropriate way. When our brain finds the solution, it pops back into our awareness, often when our conscious mind isn't terribly busy. That's why we often remember things when we're doing something that takes little conscious attention or in a meditative or flow state, such

as driving the same route home from work or daydreaming while getting the ironing done.

The feeling you have when something is at the tip of your tongue or that you know something but can't place it yet, is because you know on a subconscious level that you have the answer somewhere, it's just that it's on a shelf you can't reach for now.

Why, why, why?

When we ask a question such as, 'Why did I fail?' the Internet search engine of our mind will look for all the likely causes and reasons associated with the circumstances in question. Our thoughts might produce answers such as, 'You were too lazy,' or 'You're a bad communicator,' and so on. Just like Google, the answers we find are limited to what we ask. For example, if you type 'Chicago' into Google you'll receive thousands of pages relating to that word, but if you want to know whether you need to pack an umbrella on your next trip, typing in 'Chicago weather forecast' is going to give you much more useful results.

In the same way, making your question more relevant will yield answers that can get you out of a rut. Rephrasing, 'Why did I fail?' to 'What have I learned from this experience?' will give you answers such as, 'Leaving things to the last minute is not healthy,' or 'I must trust my inner feelings more.' This is information you can learn from and will move you forward.

The quality of your question mirrors the answer you receive.

Reasons versus results

To make your questions work harder, you need to think about how they are constructed: what are you really asking? The majority of questions consist of two types:

- Reason-led questions: Why? Where?
- Results-led questions: How? What?

Both types of question are important and serve great purpose when used in the right context. Reason-led questions give us an explanation for why and where a situation is happening in our lives? Results-led questions make us aware how or what to do to resolve an issue or offer an answer that moves us into a positive direction.

A question opens the doors of possibility to explore. When we look beneath the truth of what's holding us back, we might discover underlying past memories and events where we had made a certain decision that has created the current issue in our lives. But if you have only been asking yourself 'why' questions, you'll be getting reasons but not solutions.

For example, when I was working on reaching my ideal weight. I recognized that one of the major challenges I faced was eating a healthy diet. Asking 'Why do I end up eating unhealthily?' gave me the answer, 'It's easier and more comfortable.' Then I changed my question and asked, 'How can I eat more healthily?' The answer came into my head in the form of a thought, 'Buy more fruits and vegetables instead of cookies and cakes.'

Asking quality questions prods your automatic unconscious responses back into life.

You might find you're sticking rigidly to a belief that helped you survive in the past, and need to ask results-led questions that

move you away from your usual responses. Shift the question and think about how you can change a 'why' or 'where' question into a 'how' or 'what' question. Instead of saying, 'Why do I have no money?' ask, 'How can I earn more money?' Or replace, 'Why am I not attracting a new partner?' with 'How can I invite a new partner into my life?'

Asking quality questions has helped me to manifest the most amazing clients, friends and business opportunities into my life. After walking out on my marriage, I was struggling financially and couldn't pay my bills. I would ask, 'What space do I need to be in to allow a paying client to show up?' As a result I would often receive emails from friends saying that they had just referred someone to me. I learned that asking results-led questions keeps us open to the possibility of something new and different appearing.

Asking the Source, 'Show me the way' or 'What is the best possible way?' has always proved enlightening for me. Whenever I feel down I ask, 'How does it get any better than this?' – meaning show me any feeling that is better than feeling like this. Simply by continuing to ask that question, we can slowly and gradually start shifting our focus and feeling better. Now when I feel really happy I ask, 'How does it get even better than this?'

Mastering language

To master the question is to honour the power of words that we use in our daily language. Words are magical tools of divinity, and each word has a unique energetic imprint. Words bring our thoughts and feelings to life; they give our ideas substance and a personality. These spoken and written symbols of human language enable us to describe all things, so we can communicate ideas, feelings and meanings to each other. All our conscious thoughts consist of words as

part of language: descriptions, symbols and intentions that we choose to define our feelings and the world around us. Therefore it is completely within our power to change the words and change the meanings we give to any situation we find ourselves in.

Choosing uplifting, thought-provoking or optimistic words to describe a difficult emotion or challenging situation changes our perception of it, and therefore our reaction to it. For example, if you tell yourself that you got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning and that nothing is going to go well today, then you'll spend the day looking for things that confirm that perception. Just as if you tell yourself it's going to be a particularly lucky day, then you'll see the smallest thing as a positive omen. It is the intention behind the words that counts.

Our choice of words also affects other people's lives by creating powerful emotional reactions: inspiring or galvanizing people into action for good or evil. If you are in the habit (or have learned from others) to label uncomfortable feelings such as fear, anger and jealousy with negative or unhelpful words such as 'pain' or 'bad' then those emotions don't have the chance to become anything different. If you grew up in a family that had problems dealing with anger, you may have learned to label anger as something that needs to be 'kept hidden' or as 'destructive', when in fact anger can be an extremely motivating, cathartic and insightful emotion once we learn to express it in a way that serves us.

Words give us the power to diagnose what we need in order to make sound decisions and asking quality questions will tell us if we are going in the right direction. Just by changing the words you use to construct your thoughts completely transforms your intention and therefore the results; and this little profound truth can change your entire being.

A BLIND MAN'S STORY

Recently I came across a YouTube video by Andrea Gardner, author of *Change Your Words, Change Your World*, which demonstrates the power of language and our ability to change its energy. You might want to go and find the video and take a look at it. It's about a blind man begging on the side of the road with a sign that reads, 'I'm blind. Please help!' He sits there for hours and most people pay him scant attention. Then a woman comes by and changes the writing on his sign. As soon as she leaves, people started pouring coins into his bowl. Later that evening the woman returns, and the blind man asks her what she did to his sign. She responds, 'I wrote the same – just different words.' The sign now read, 'It's a beautiful day and I can't see it!'

Creating healing statements

Choose the statements that you make about yourself carefully. You might be inadvertently stating things about yourself that are having a negative effect. For example, if you don't like to appear materialistic because you feel unfairly judged by others, you might find yourself frequently saying something like, 'Oh, I don't care about money.' What you mean is you don't like to appear greedy. Money probably makes your life much easier! But if you keep telling yourself that you don't care about it, don't expect it to do you any favours. What you hear yourself saying can become what you believe.

Words heal, words harm, and they have the potential to change the path of your life. You can use words to create

heaven on earth or you can use words to turn your life into a living hell. I believe one of the most powerful starting phrases is 'I am . . .' Whatever you say after 'I am' defines you and your state of being: 'I am grateful', 'I am angry', 'I am always late', 'I am gorgeous', 'I am clumsy' and so on.

Use words that uplift you and raise your energy. In stressful times you can use your statements to give you courage, strength or comfort: 'I am brave', 'I am loved', 'I am creative', 'I am inspiring', 'I am responsible', 'I am peaceful', 'I am focused'. Choose qualities that are true of you, as an individual, and that you would like to demonstrate in your life.

What is your language saying?

Many people use language about themselves that does not serve them. When you dig deeper into your 'I am' statements by asking quality questions such as, 'Who does this opinion belong to?' or 'Where is this coming from?', you can trace the original point of creation to another commonly used phrase: 'You are . . .'

Our parents, teachers, peers and authority figures often used this phrase to start a description of us. When the description that follows is life-affirming and positive, it creates positive healthy energy within us and we take that with us into adulthood. But too often the most influential people in our lives, our families and teachers, give us less helpful descriptions, such as, 'You are silly', 'You are shy', 'You are fat', 'You are dumb' or 'You are lazy', which are converted by us into, 'I am silly', 'I am shy', 'I am fat', 'I am dumb' or 'I am lazy'. This is because, as I described earlier (see page 17), as children we accept the words of authority figures, such as our parents, as being all-powerful and don't question their truth. This leads to us to believe that all these messages are sacred and we live them as though they are true.

What we believe to be true creates our reality and gives us a story to inhabit.

Daily Practice: Make a new statement

Find a pen and your Awakening journal and write, 'I am . . .' at the top of the sheet. Now scribble down at least 20 words that spring to mind, but don't analyze them too closely.

The key here is to write without thinking about it, to channel what's at the bottom of your psyche, rather than what's on the tip of your tongue.

Now look at your results.

- Which words did you choose to describe yourself?
- Are you surprised by anything you wrote?
- Why?
- Is there anything there that you wish to change?
- Which words will you use to describe yourself instead?

Write down your new statements about yourself and repeat them whenever you need to reinforce your new message.

Question your story

We all love hearing and telling stories, and the ones we tell others about ourselves are especially revealing. When you recount a tale of something that has happened to you, your inquisitive imagination is irresistibly drawn to fill in the gaps to give it more interest, make it funny, dramatic or more compelling. The story of how you battled an illness, told your boss to get lost or dealt with an exceptionally challenging person will of course be based on truth, but we like to mould the facts to suit our own agenda, to give the story more power

or to confirm or deny something we want to highlight in our personality. The act of giving your story purpose, reason and structure makes it appear so real that you begin to believe in it too; it becomes part of you.

If what you are saying about yourself is negative, you can become trapped inside your own thought creation.

I believe we all have the power to change our ideas of ourselves by questioning the validity of our behaviour to break free from our self-imposed beliefs, as Jayne's story demonstrates.

LEARNING TO TRUST AGAIN

Jayne was in her mid-thirties and very quiet. She described how she had always found it 'very difficult' to trust and relate to others. She went from a tiny school to another school of 3,000 pupils with massive walls, long corridors and large classrooms. To her, it felt like a prison and the other kids bullied her mercilessly. She was naive and couldn't understand why the other kids weren't nice to her. Jayne described how she was shocked by their mistreatment of her and retreated inside. She was unprepared for this mean new world and felt abandoned by her friends and family.

She spent the next four school years in a permanent state of anxiety and became reclusive. Bullied for her shyness, Jayne described how it had made her mistrustful of new people and she struggled to form any close relationships. 'Strangers are trouble' became her motto. As she grew into adulthood, she prided herself on her independence and not needing

anyone else but deep down she felt isolated. Then she met a man but when he tried to get too close to her she put up a wall to protect herself: 'I could tell he wanted to be my friend, we had loads in common and up until I'd thought he was getting too close, we'd had a real laugh together.' Changing seemed to be 'too big a thing', and she didn't really know where to start.

Using the Awakening process she started to question by asking, 'What am I hiding from?' It made her question her behaviour and she started to see how self-defeating it was becoming. Jayne realized that she had allowed her bad experiences at school to colour the rest of her life with its negativity. After Awakening, she described how her outlook had changed, 'Now I'm looking at life through a brand new lens, one that's not clouded by my own judgments.'

Our story exists so that we can make sense of what has happened to us. Jayne carried the trauma of her bullying around for 20 years. The event itself and all the people involved were long gone from her life but she clung on to the story because it gave her the identity of 'being independent' and 'not needing anyone else', without that story she didn't know who she would become. But we are not the sum of just what has happened to us. By questioning the validity of our story and its relevance in the present, we can let go of past hurt, disappointment, anger and pain, and welcome new experiences into our lives.

Most of the time we don't even know who we are without our family, friends, work, religion and usual environment. We identify ourselves with what we do for a living, which religion

or culture we belong to or who our family and friends are. I hear many people say, ‘I am a doctor’, ‘I am an accountant’, ‘I am a teacher’, but the truth is that we are not what we do; these are just different roles we play. We are more than just that and asking questions expand our identities so that we become more than who we think we are.

It requires courage, faith and tenacity to question your identity. If you are not happy in any area of your life, asking quality questions will help you break free from the false identities you have created from all those ‘I am . . .’ and ‘You are . . .’ phrases and get back to the real you – the one that knows how to be a joyful being.

Ask yourself, ‘What is it in me that is causing this situation?’

Your default questions

Deep down inside, beneath our conscious awareness, questions constantly run in the background of our mind. I call these our ‘default questions’ and they form the basis of our emotions. Knowing your default questions can give you real insight into why you might be in a particular situation or why it’s proving difficult to move forward. You may discover that you have been asking yourself the same things for years and the same answer has been keeping you stuck.

Discovering your default questions and then rewording them from reason-led questions (‘why’ or ‘where’) to results-led queries (‘how’ or ‘what’) takes your mind in a new direction and allows your subconscious to create a different solution – one that isn’t hardwired to go for your usual subconsciously stored response.

Daily Practice: Default questions

To discover your default questions, use the following process with each of your default questions and afterwards record your answers in your Awakening journal.

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths in and out, and bring your mind into the present by simply focusing on your breathing. When you are ready ask:

- What questions do I ask the most?

Give yourself some time and let the answers bubble up from your subconscious as naturally as possible. Don’t try to analyze them; just let them float up to your conscious mind. Did just one answer come to you? Perhaps you had a few questions that you regularly ask. Write down the answers.

Now it’s time to transform that question into one that serves you better by making a conscious decision to change your default question. Choose questions that will lead you to take charge and inspire you to take action. For example, you might ask:

- How can I make this work?
- What am I learning as a result of this experience?
- What would it take for me to achieve the results that I want?

Make sure to take a note of your questions. When you hear a default question arise in your mind, replace it with your new, more creative question.

At first you’ll need to make a conscious decision to ask a more creative question but after a few repetitions it will become your new default question and will serve you better in resolving the issue.

Do this exercise for each of your default questions as you recognize them.

Whose energy are you in?

I described earlier (see page 8) that everything is energy and that we can see, feel and perceive energy everywhere, including from other human beings. Energy flows and exchanges between people, which means that we regularly absorb each other's emotions, thoughts and opinions. This means that sometimes the way we behave has less to do with our own feelings and more with how people around us are thinking and feeling. Believe it or not, most of the way we act is a result of us living according to what other people believe us to be like.

In a famous study looking at the how the intentions behind words can influence matter, Dr Masaru Emoto, author of *Messages from Water and the Universe*, conducted several studies of how different words, images and messages affected molecular structures. Using bottles of distilled water, he recorded how each responded to different emotive pictures, sounds, words and phrases, such as 'thank you' or 'you disgust me' to try to influence the water's behaviour before freezing it. Afterwards he photographed the water crystals and noted that the water that had received positive intentions created beautiful geometric crystals while those that had received negative intentions were marked by distorted, random patterns. Dr Emoto maintains that the intention behind the words on the labels changed the water's structure, effectively proving how it's possible for intentions to transform matter.

I believe that our physical body is the key to unlimited knowledge about us and at a cellular level it remembers every event that has ever happened. It holds the key to all of our locked doors to health, wealth and optimum happiness. This has particular significance when we think that 80 percent of our body is made up of water (our brains even more). Dr Emoto's findings suggest that our thoughts and intentions can have a direct effect on our body and mind because if water holds memories, then our body contains the

record of all the events that we have experienced. No event ever goes unrecorded.

For example, if your parents have always told you that you are the entertainer of the family then it's likely that you'll try to make people smile, even if you long for someone to empathize with your problems. You might be chirpy and talkative at work but if your partner thinks 'you are boring' then you may start to feel down and quiet when you are with them. This is because you have entered the 'zone' of their beliefs about you and you are just slipping back into the role you have been assigned.

It is also possible, because we are all energetic beings, to pick up from someone else's emotions. You may have experienced a time when someone else's bad temper or heightened emotions have 'rubbed off' on you and left you feeling irritated and upset even though their emotions may not have been directed at you personally; or someone else's road rage leaves you feeling rattled and angry when you're usually a calm driver. This is the power of being in someone else's energy.

Daily Practice: Whose feeling is this?

Once you start to recognize that you are acting out others' feelings or beliefs, you can change its energy by using quality questions to recognize where the belief is coming from. When you feel an emotion that you want to address ask:

- 'Who does this feeling belong to?'

Asking this question will give you a clue as to whether what you are feeling belongs to you or has been triggered by someone else or you have picked up on someone else's emotions. Once we access this information we can imbue our cells, our minds and our language with more positive helpful energy that is more aligned with our true self.

Questions stretch minds

When something in our life is not working, it's usually our belief around that situation that requires attention. A quality question stretches the mind and examines the basis of that belief, which is usually a result of the meaning we have given to an event. For example, if your partner says, 'You don't love me anymore', you might reply, 'How do you know?' This type of question will lead them to think about the meaning they have attributed to your actions that made them think in that particular way. If they respond by saying, 'Because you don't call me', you can offer up another question such as, 'What if me not calling you means I trust you and want to give you space?' Altering your question affects the action you might take, and therefore the quality of the results. Giving yourself a more positive vision of the future by making these simple changes can turn your life around.

Ask yourself, 'Whom does this belief belong to?' Your answers will help you separate your own beliefs from those that you have inherited from others.

Daily Practice: Powerful questions to challenge issues

Asking quality questions has brought the right people and situations into my life exactly when I've needed them. I have distilled the knowledge I've discovered into a few powerful questions that will allow abundance to flow into your life.

Pick an issue in your life that you are finding challenging. Then write down any thoughts and feelings connected with it in your Awakening journal. Be as open-minded as possible about what comes up. Now ask a question from the list below that best fits your situation.

- What contribution can I make to enjoy a fun and phenomenal day?
- Who can contribute toward my business project?
- What space do I need to be in to allow a perfect relationship to show up in my reality?
- What space can I create to allow more money, more joy and more love to show up in my life?
- What contribution can I make to the consciousness of the planet?

Your question should be followed by what I call a 'clearing statement' because the answers can bring up fears, judgments, beliefs and past experiences that are stopping you from transforming the energy you need in your life. By using the following clearing statement you will make space for new opportunities to be created with ease and grace.

'Everything that stops [*insert the issue*] from happening, I release you from my energy. From all levels, dimensions and timeframes right to the point of creation. Please remove and clear all traumatic memories relating to past rejection, abandonment and fear of being in love. From the cells, the DNA structure at all levels, dimensions and timeframes. Thank you.'

Ask your questions wisely. Like mastering any new skill, it takes time, practice, perseverance and most importantly patience. The more you practise the more profound your results will be. Get into the habit of using your questioning skills by using them in everyday situations. Stop shrugging your shoulders when your boss gives you a difficult task or accepting excuses from people to avoid a confrontation. Asking a well-timed question can sometimes surprise people into giving an honest answer because they don't have time to think of an alternative.

THE CUNNING STOREKEEPER

A certain man had many problems in his life and couldn't seem to move past them. One day he happened to pass a shop and noticed a sign in the window: 'Special Offer: Any Two Questions Answered. Just 10 Gold Coins!' The man immediately went in and handed over the money. 'I hope you can help me,' he said. 'But all the same isn't 10 gold coins rather expensive for just two questions?'

The shopkeeper replied, 'Correct! Now ask me your second question.'

Divine Magic Statement

I ask quality questions and receive answers with ease and grace.

ACTIVATING THE FIRST PRINCIPLE: ASK QUALITY QUESTIONS

The first step of the Awakening journey, Ask Quality Questions, takes a great deal of courage and perseverance. Questioning the source of your beliefs, values, behaviours and self-perceptions, you suddenly awake to the fact that you didn't create your world and your life is not your own. The right question at the right time then serves as a wake-up call to your subconscious mind and you can then choose to look for new answers to old issues. Questioning your beliefs, behaviours and emotions, and how you use language to tell stories to and about yourself, you start to see others and yourself afresh.

In the next principle, Work On You, we'll explore how taking care of yourself can transform all your relationships and allow your truth to shine.