

Why do I exist?

Peter: It is probably safe to assume that you are here this evening because you believe there is some knowledge or insight you could gain, that will help the quality of your life, even though you are no doubt familiar with spiritual literature which says that understanding isn't really going to help, in the long run. Even though we may have read about, and be attracted to, the experience spoken about in Zen and other traditions, as "no-mind", "beginner's mind", or "non-conceptual wisdom", we have a resistance to being in a state of "not knowing". We seek the impossible. We want to "know" what the state of "not knowing" is. So rather than just feed our intellects this evening, on the assumption that this is useful, let us stand back from our assumptions and begin to explore the immediate consequences of the different directions in which we may move this evening.

[Silence]

So here we are with a block of time - about two hours. By definition you're here because you take your psychological and spiritual search seriously. You paid money to be here. You also had to move your bodies from wherever you were earlier this evening, in order to be here. So we have two hours of free time, with no commitment, other than to use this as skillfully as possible in terms of our spiritual development. So how can we maximize this opportunity? What can we do that will allow you to feel that you have made real progress? We have no agenda. So what is the best thing that we can do?

Woman: To share.

Peter: To share what?

[Silence]

Peter: To simply say that we should share is very imprecise. I think we would all agree that some forms of sharing would be a waste of time in terms of the spiritual path. For example, we could share information about the wild life in Australia and France. But, I don't think this would do the trick.

[Laughter]

Peter: So what type of sharing can help us this evening? And remember, we want to make progress. Most of us believe that time is precious. If we ever think that we're wasting time, then we think that time is precious.

You can see that I'm not giving answers. That is not my style. This is not like a lecture in which you passively listen to what someone else is saying.

[Silence]

Peter: Given that there is already a fair amount of silence occurring, do you think it makes any difference whether we are silent or sharing through conversation? Are we better to sit here in silence or continue conversing?

Woman: For me it does make a difference.

Peter: Which do you feel is better, being silent or engaging in dialogue?

Woman: I would like you to talk to us about what you call "assumptions".

Peter: I could do that but is that going to help us? Let's not just assume that talking about assumptions is useful. And there, incidentally, is an answer to your question. There is an example of an assumption. The assumption is that it will help our fulfillment if we understand what I think assumptions are.

[Silence]

Peter: Assumptions are the beliefs that make sense of what we're doing. By and large, for example, if I meditate, there is an assumption that it will be useful, that it is helpful. If someone doesn't meditate, there is an assumption that there is no real value in it.

Woman: You haven't said enough. I want you to say more.

Peter: It feels as though you want me to offer you a story about the way that our assumptions restrict our capacity for freedom and creativity and how we can transcend their influence. You want to hear my version of the spiritual path. You want me to talk about what gets in the way of real fulfillment. Overall, I think you want me to create some "hope" that a better quality of living is a real possibility.

Woman: Well yes. I do want to hear what you have to say about how to reach enlightenment.

Peter: So what is the assumption that accounts for the very active way you are listening to me right now?

Woman: I want to learn more!

Peter: Yes. But you said to me, "That's not enough. You haven't said enough about assumptions." So what's behind that?

Woman: Many things. In fact I have many questions.

Peter: Right. But that your one question is in fact "many" questions reinforces the feeling that you are operating out of one core assumption.

[Silence]

Peter: What is being challenged right now?

Woman: My need to know, to figure out what is happening.

Peter: Yes. And if you don't know it produces discomfort and anxiety.

Woman: I don't like it. I'm being honest. I cannot stop myself wanting to know. I need to know.

Peter: You need to know what?

Woman: Why I exist.

Peter: Why do you have to know that?

Woman: Because I don't have the answer.

Peter: But if you need to ask the question simply because you don't have an answer, you will be asking questions for the rest of your life. A question of the type you have just asked can be a source of unending frustration. You can never come up with a definite answer to the question: Why do I exist? You can never achieve closure on that type of question. That is why people ask that same question, millennia after millennia, without getting any closer to an "answer" that would stop the question. It is the type of question that is designed to stimulate our thinking.

I'm still not clear why you need to know why you exist. From one point of view there is nothing to even think about. You are a happening, and you will continue to happen until you don't exist.

Woman: But I just feel I need to know more and more.

Peter: What do you need to know right now?

[Silence]

Woman: I need to know what is happening right now. I'm starting to feel quite lost.

Peter: What do you think is happening?

Woman: I'm not sure. This feels very strange. What is happening?

Peter: We are in a conversation in which you are trying to work out what is happening.

Woman: You must know what is happening.

Peter: I'm not coming up with anything. And I don't feel any real need to know what is happening beyond the observations I'm making.

Woman: So you mean we are both lost?

Peter: Well no. I don't feel lost. I'm quite familiar with this space.

Woman: So where are we?

Peter: We are in a space where we can't say where we are.

Woman: Well, I still feel there is something I need to know, but I don't know what it is. And this is really frustrating.

Peter: Do you have any idea where you can begin to look for an answer?

Woman: I don't even know if there is an answer. As I said, I don't even know what I'm looking for. I just feel stuck.

Peter: Stuck in what?

Woman: I don't know. I'm just stuck. What is happening?

Peter: You think there is something you need to know, but you haven't got any idea what it is.

Woman: Right. So what can I do? I don't even know what to do. I don't even know if there is anything I need to do.

[Silence]

Peter: Do we need to do anything more with this at the moment?

Woman: I don't know.

Peter: Are you okay where you are?

Woman: I guess so.

Peter: Are you feeling comfortable or uncomfortable?

Woman: I really can't say.

Peter: Are you okay not being able to say exactly what you are feeling?

Woman: Yes I am.

[Long silence]

Woman: I came here this evening with a lot of questions. I don't know what has happened. I have the feeling of being influenced by a very extraordinary energy. I don't have any answers, at least the type of answers I was expecting. But nor do I have any questions. Thank you.

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