

GOD

We Have a Few Questions

Have you ever

wondered why....?

A Collaboration of  
Questions for GOD

Curated by:  
Kevin Deeny

# QUESTIONS FOR GOD

A Collection;  
Respectfully Submitted

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

It is often difficult to talk about intimate things and expose your thinking and questioning to others. This is particularly true about core beliefs that have shaped the contours of one's life. We tend to keep such questions to ourselves and in so doing, may miss the creative interplay that allows us to appreciate another perspective or point of view. It is important to acknowledge the graciousness of those who have contributed to these conversations and provided Questions or Commentary. For brevity, contributors are identified in the text by their initials and they are:

AD	Alice Deeny
AD2	Anitta Dowdell
ER	Elizabeth (Betsey) Ramos
GM	Gerard Mullin
JH	John Hammond
JJ	Jamie Johnson
KC	Kym Cridland
KD	Kevin Deeny
KLD	Kelly L Deeny
LP	Leslie Padilla
MD	Mary Deeny
RS	Robert (Bob) Spalinski
SJ	Sheana Johnson
WS	William (Bill) Sitman

## INTRODUCTION

[KD] As many of you know, the post script of my novel, SNOW PICTURES, includes a few Questions for GOD that the main character compiled during his life. Those of course arose from my own questioning. As a result of several recent conversations, it soon became apparent to me that I am not alone in this – we all seem to have questions for GOD or our personal definition of a higher power. With that realization came an idea for a new project; to ponder and publish (in some form) a collection of Questions for GOD.

To attempt such a project requires broad life experience and since each of us is on a unique path with different perspectives, questions and comments have been solicited from others who may have considered such things during the course of their lives. As a result, both questions and commentary have been provided by multiple people who have been identified in the text by their initials. For one contributor, consideration of the Questions prompted a written essay which has been included as a prologue to the Questions themselves.

The conversations about these Questions are not an attempt to define “Truth”. They instead represent the results of observations, both inward and outward, arising from life experience. As such, they are a point of view – no more, no less. As you read these conversations, it is well to take heed from Marcus Aurelius; “Everything we hear is an opinion, not fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.” Sometimes though, shared opinions and perspectives can lead you on to your individual search for truth. Please enjoy the journey.

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## Questions for GOD; My Discovery

### An Essay [MD]

“Where does electricity come from?” Not the theory of electricity – but the actual energy that we harness?

“What is God?”

“What’s the nature of God?”

“Is God separate and apart from you and me?”

Can my dog really read my mind? Because I swear she does!

While I feel I’ve answered these questions for myself (except the electricity one – haven’t a clue!), they still remain the most interesting for me to talk about it.

My beliefs and foundation have changed so much over time that I find it difficult to grasp the old concepts I once had. See I’ve come to know that I’m not separate from God; that I am God “being human.”

We’re not one or the other; we’re both. We aren’t a mere human born of God and yet somehow born into sin and tasked with figuring out how to become perfect so we can get back to God. I think we’re more than that. I think we “Are” and “Being” simultaneously. I think we are God. A facet. An expansion. An extension. So we Are something and we’re “Being” something...

“Source Energy, Being human.” This is what fascinates me. It fascinates me because the questions have changed. No longer am I separate and unknowing. Now the question “why am I here” has blown wide open because my beliefs changed. My foundation has expanded and along with it, limited beliefs dissolve.

I mean just the name God now has very limited thoughts associated with it.

What I ponder now a days is...creation creating form and experiencing form through “being form.” Wow I say. Now we’re onto something.

I always wanted to be an astronaut. I wanted to know what’s out there. Where do we come from? To explore the unknown. What’s so funny is I feel I am an explorer. I create and discover myself continuously.

Haven’t you felt the synchronicity of life? The very cooperative components of the universe? The coincidences that we stumble upon or if we’re lucky actually observe? I don’t believe in coincidences. I believe our inner being/God force/whatever is always communicating with us. Pointing out opportunity after opportunity. Isn’t that where the statement “pay attention to the road signs” comes from? Or how about that thought of “I better take the umbrella just in case,” and it turns out to rain like hell that afternoon. Or what about thinking about someone and they call. We’ve all had these experiences. For me, that’s my soul, my inner being, creation itself interacting with me (itself).

I mean seriously, just because we can’t see something doesn’t mean it isn’t real. We think matter is solid. Well under a microscope it’s break dancing! It’s all a matter of perspective. A tiny shift in perspective can create an entirely new world. Have you ever read the book “Watership Down?” I re-read it recently, savoring it as much or maybe more so than when I first read it. What stuck with me this



last time however, was how I recognized there are worlds inside of worlds. Right now, there's a world that revolves around a herd of deer, or den of rabbits where we're on the peripheral of.

I've come to discover that creation is endless. It's always evolving, expanding, never ceases. So what's the point? Well, discovery is fun. Or it can be if we just relax and allow it. For me being human is delicious! When I hear the neighbor's girls laughing and playing, it feels like love and I can't help but smile. What about feeling the breeze touch your face at that right moment...doesn't it remind you of a lover's kiss? Or what about the scent of honey suckle in the air. Or what about an ice cold beer on a hot summer day. Or what about that song that just sits so right with you that you sing along even if you can't carry a tune because it feels so good anyway. Or when I lay my eyes on my dog and just can't believe she's sharing her life with me. Or someone holds the door opened for me at the store and looks me right in the eye and smiles and says "good Morning." It's all so extraordinary, this life. Knowing who I am, living. Sometimes it gets boring. When it does, boring feels good too. I like binge watching Netflix!!! What a creation it is! Magnificent, I say.

I believe the basis of life is freedom, the meaning of life is joy and the nature of God is love. We are, however, so free we can choose bondage.



## QUESTION 1

### Is there a GOD? [RS]

[KD] Alternative definitions of GOD have percolated up through history and pop culture; Supreme Being, Higher Power, Father GOD, The Force, are a few that come to mind. In Judeo-Christian mono-theistic cultures, the term GOD refers to one god who is the creator, all knowing, all powerful, and the source of all moral authority. Other cultures such as the early Greeks considered a hierarchy with some gods defined on the basis of their area of influence or responsibility (i.e., Apollo as the god of Sun and Music) with Zeus as their King. In our present sense, when I refer to GOD, I've taken that to mean a Supreme Being or more simply Father and have written it in all caps (GOD). That is the context that I have used to consider the question. And so, "Is there a GOD?"

While growing up, I had been taught that there is a GOD, but I struggled to discern his/her influence in my life or the world in general. I was skeptical and angry, but I was also curious. I set out as a teenager and young adult to answer this question for myself. For all of us, it is important to realize that a search for GOD is a very personal journey; what I may find moving and persuasive might be considered unconvincing to others. Such is life – we all will, and I think must draw our own conclusions. For my part, I have concluded that GOD exists.

In my considerations, I first had to confront the negative, since the history of humanity includes compelling arguments for the absence of GOD. I was (and still am) aware of pain and suffering in the world with war, violence, hate, and many contra-indications for GOD. The argument for the absence of GOD boils down to a common consideration; 'How could a GOD allow this?' Much in our history and

present life is reprehensible; we have even coined a phrase for it: “Man’s inhumanity to man.” Whether the result of persecution, lust for power, religious intolerance, or wars large and small, mankind has produced countless examples of our inhumanity. In the face of this, many, including me, have asked, ‘What GOD would stand idle while his children suffer?’ For me, it was the consideration of this very inhumanity that gave rise to a glimmer of GOD’s existence.

I came into this world in the 1950’s – after the World Wars, but I eventually became aware of other conflicts that have raged since; Vietnam, Cambodia, 9/11, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and many, many more. Our capacity to wage war on one another seems endless. These are all man-made events.

Conflicts that resulted in so much human destruction, burned brightly and eventually cooled to allow us to see what they were in their essence; inhumanity. Recognition of inhumanity indicates by contrast that man’s ideal is the opposite – to be human is to act humanely. As such, one who acts humanely is defined to be, “marked by compassion, sympathy, or consideration.”<sup>1</sup> This consideration is where I found the glimmer of GOD among the ashes; there has to be a spark of humanity to recognize inhumanity or more simply, good is required to recognize evil. This contrast becomes the basis for morality and begins to hint at a name for the source of moral authority; GOD. One of the many lessons of conflict must not be who can produce the greatest inhumanity, but the least. This is a lesson we must learn and I suspect, is among the reasons GOD does not intervene to save us from ourselves.

Although a consideration of the negative provided a glimmer of GOD’s existence for me, an appreciation of the positive decided the issue. Although I have heard over my entire lifetime that man has evolved from the primordial soup of the early planet, it has never been a complete and satisfying explanation of our existence for me. Evolutionary pressure has failed to demonstrate to me, the linkage to a rational, thinking existence with the capacity to imagine and create. There is something more at work, it seems to

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humane>).

me. The creation of art and music as well as the persistent pursuit of knowledge through philosophy and science is not explained to my satisfaction by a Newtonian view of the universe; a view that has now been turned upside-down by Quantum realizations.

Most of all, I am struck by the beauty and complexity of the world that is teeming with life. Although, like most, I am aware of the biblical accounts that chronicle GOD's interactions with us, I looked for more current confirmation in the world around me. In this, I am reminded of the quote attributed to Khalil Gibran, "I discovered the secret of the sea in meditation upon a dewdrop." Although immersed in incalculable examples, I looked first at the example surrounding me quite literally – the human body. A single human body is a marvel of complexity, synergism, and elegance. The intertwined functions of the organs, structures and processes have been characterized by some as simply miraculous; all of which is managed by subconscious brain functions while conscious functions interact with the world. I fail to see the linkage from this to the chemistry of the primordial soup. A world full of this complexity and elegant inter-functionality has led many to argue that the world we inherited is the result of an intelligent design, which requires a designer; GOD. I agree.

Beyond the appreciation of the complexity and elegance of the world, I considered my life experience personally, subjectively. I sense GOD's presence in the embrace of a loved one, in the hug of a child, in the view of a baby at a mother's breast, in the hand shake of a friend, in the view of a sunrise on a mountain top, the glow of a sunset at the shoreline, and the fury of a storm front across a plain. I am awestruck by this creation and have concluded that GOD is.



## QUESTION 2

**“If You had it to do all over again and could change one thing, what would it be?” [JH]**

[KD] This question, in and of itself, is interesting with a lot of implied meaning.

To ask GOD if he would do things differently implies, he or we didn't get something right, perhaps a lot of somethings. It is a broad question that is not limited to individuals per se but can apply to all of humanity. It indicates a belief that GOD does not predetermine or control all aspects of our lives; otherwise, a do-over wouldn't be necessary. At the same time, the question considers GOD as the change agent.

Except for life itself, the greatest of GOD's gifts is often declared to be our free will. Were it not to be so; we would be mere puppets, and all the failings of our lives would be attributable to the puppet master. And if such were the case, would indicate that GOD is fallible and not GOD at all, but god in reality. However, the view of GOD, as a parent who provides the opportunity of life and exercise of free will is echoed in the world by all of us who are parents. We have all struggled with uncertainty as our children step out into the world, and we've constrained ourselves from becoming overly protective so that they may develop the capacity to know and live in the world. Similar self-constraint may well be an aspect of GOD's relationship to us; we are encouraged to live our own lives, make our own decisions, and seek our path. However, it is important to recognize that not all children follow the path their parents envision. I believe then that the conditions that would cause GOD to reconsider his choices would be the result of my (or humanity's) limitations and not his. Still, what would GOD change if he chose to do so?

For those who adhere to the teachings of the Bible, the answer was given some time ago; GOD might change everything as he did with the Great Flood when he re-booted humanity with Noah and an ark full of creatures. Or perhaps he would change things less globally as he did with a plague of locusts, a burning bush, or a sightless beggar. Having considered those biblical possibilities, I don't believe those changes are appropriate for our time; we need something more powerful. I imagine for this moment in history; GOD would change our hearts so we might universally realize that we are all one and have much to accomplish together.



[JH] When I pondered what God's answer might be, the one thing that seemed most likely to me is that He'd say "I'd create a world without HATE", because I think that is at the root of most of the world's problems and also why he gave us the Great Commandments (to love (unconditionally accept) one another)...



[AD] My first thoughts about changing one thing would mean to me, that I get to choose to change it next life -- a tweak if you will. Sort of like a video game with many options that we can do over and over again. The longer we play the game the better we get at some skills. As we live out our lives in the individual scenarios we picked for ourselves, we also have the GOD ability to change our minds in this one lifetime.

Another thought would be in the belief that we are all one--that we really are -- all of us-- GOD living and experiencing all things through living beings. All life -- humans, animals, fish, plants and more.



### QUESTION 3

#### Does a spirit transcend death? [SJ]

[KD] Many religious traditions teach that the spirit does indeed transcend death. Quite often though, these can include fire and brimstone accounts of heaven or hell. Some teachings urge followers to fear GOD and do his will, or else. Heaven awaits those who don't stray from the path, and for those who don't quite live up to that standard, well that's what hell is for. I can't count the number of times as a kid that I heard sermons that evoked images of eternal damnation. I always thought it curious that fear was used as an incentive for people to be 'good.' There were never any granular details about life in heaven or, god forbid, hell. Our view of heaven consisted of good people sitting around on clouds with winged angels playing their harps. And since I was already damned, in that Catholic guilt sense, by the time I was a teenager, it didn't seem likely that I would get any space on the cloud. I thought I would look into the matter to see what I should expect. I found that life and life after death are far more interesting than I was given to believe.

Much is written about life after death – this has been a fascination for humankind for a very long time. Ancient cultures have long histories enshrined in their literature and ceremonies that celebrated the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians are a case in point with their elaborate preparations to cross the river of life. I thought this all very interesting, but none of it could be verified unless of course you too crossed the river and somehow found a way to return. I wasn't willing to make that trip and looked for other possibilities. I came upon the life work of Edgar Cayce ('The Sleeping Prophet') whose studied readings were rich in detail and from there came to Raymond Moody's 1975 book Life After Life which included accounts of people who had near-death experiences (NDEs). Many books have been written about

similar events since. Generally, these are accounts from individuals of all ages and from all walks of life who experienced a life-threatening condition (disease, accident, injury, etc.) and had passed, for a time, into the afterlife and were able to provide detailed accounts of their experience. I found these accounts fascinating.

Several accounts, from differing cultures, regions, and eras described common themes; a deep feeling of love and acceptance, relief of all concerns, interactions with loved ones, and a luminous, vibrant setting. Some visits were short, and to the point, others were detailed and expansive. Almost universally, none wanted to return to life but came to understand that there was a purpose for their return and continued life here. I came away from a study of many of these experiences with a perspective that has been comforting for me. Here are a few of the points I thought were important from glimpses into some of these NDEs:

- Heaven (or Hell if you so believe) is not a binary, either/or choice to be made by a gatekeeper of sorts when we die.
- Upon death, we pass to a place appropriate for our spiritual development, with help and support to continue a spiritual journey at a pace of our choosing.
- We may interact with loved ones who preceded us if we choose.
- People are busy. They seem to be engaged in a spiritual purpose, study, create music and art, and pursue various interests.
- Love is unconditional and is not meted out based on your status in life.

I found this study to be very encouraging for a trouble-maker such as myself, and I was lucky to arrive at this understanding as a young man. For me, the prospect of my death, whenever it occurs, is un-concerning. I look at it simply as going home.





#### QUESTION 4

**Are there other beings anywhere in the universe who are “intelligent” in a way that we humans can understand? If so, will we ever meet or communicate with each other? And if no other cognizant beings are out there beyond our own solar system, why include all that vast empty space in the design? [GM]**

[KD] I too wish that GOD would give us some insight into these questions, but it is also a fun to think about. I consider it not only possible but probable intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe. NASA estimates, based on Hubble telescope measurements, put the number of galaxies at around 2 trillion and the number of stars in those galaxies as essentially infinite. And the number of planets? Who knows; it's a big number? Based solely on evolutionary assumptions, the probability is high that life emerged elsewhere as it did on Earth. The question becomes then, what is the evolutionary state for those planets; are they more advanced or less? That's a hard question to answer with only one statistical data point (us), and our evidence-gathering efforts in search of more data are very limited. Earth is a veritable grain of sand in the cosmos; our reach is meager, and our ability to probe the universe is very limited.

However, probing can work both ways, and our popular literature is full of accounts of extra-terrestrial contacts and sightings. As recently as this year, the New York Times reported the accounts of Navy pilots who tracked UFOs at hypersonic speeds capable of maneuvers well beyond the limits of our present technology. It seems to me that if we are curious about life elsewhere, other intelligent life can be just as curious. And if they happen to be further advanced than we, may be able to express that curiosity through direct contact.

If we consider non-evolutionary possibilities such as an act of creation, as the question implies, it would be a waste of space for there not to be other intelligent life to share this universe. The diversity of life we witness here on Earth suggests that a creator enjoyed the acts of creation here and it is reasonable to assume that creation did not stop, or may not have begun, here.

As a fan of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Forbidden Planet*, *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, I have been conditioned to accept the prospect of intelligent life beyond Earth. To be clear, although my favorite character is Yoda, I am a *Close Encounters* kind of guy. We tend to focus on technological advancements we imagine from extra-terrestrial life, but in the context of this discussion, GOD is GOD for them too, and I would hope that spiritual advancement has at least kept up with technological advancement.

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## QUESTION 5

**What is the Bible, really? Was it authored by you (GOD) and given to man to serve as a guidebook for life? Or did it start out that way but get muddled up by human translators? Or is it entirely the work of fallible human beings? [GM]**

[KD] Over 2,000 years after the fact, this question is still debated. GOD has not answered this question for us during my lifetime, and many have opined about it throughout history. Some have spoken on the subject with resounding authority, - and yet, the question is still asked and is still relevant. I am not a biblical scholar – far from it. I have read the Bible a few times out of interest and curiosity, but it was not a subject of intense study. So, for me, I have to start with some fundamentals.

In a Christian dominated society, when we refer to the Bible, we generally have in mind a Christian bible, but in fact, a Jewish bible (Torah) predated it. The Christian bible is bifurcated into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament adopted some of the content of the books of the Jewish bible, while the New Testament focuses on the Life of Jesus Christ and his apostles. There are various versions of Christian bibles; certain denominations have adopted 39 books into the Old Testament, while others include 47 or 49. The New Testament includes 27 books. The Old Testament content is generally believed to be based on Greek translations from the original Hebrew. Original authors of the Old Testament content are believed to include Moses and Joshua among others, but modern analysis has identified challenges to that belief. New Testament authors are not well known, except for epistles which were letters sent to/from some of Christ's apostles. The collection of New Testament writings is believed to have been written about ~100+ years after Jesus' death. The collection of books in the Bible does not represent the entirety of religious writings that were available for consideration and inclusion.

The creation of the Bible that we have today resulted from a selection process that included negotiation, and argument. Not only does the content of the Bible vary, but the interpretation of the content also varies depending on the particular denomination. There does not appear to be historical certitude regarding biblical writings and authorship.

Some of the works of the Bible are claimed to be divinely inspired, and still, others claim that given divine inspiration, writings contained in the Bible are literally true and serve as the basis for the claim of inerrancy. Many years ago, when I considered this claim for myself, I arrived at a different point of view. I began my consideration with the Bible I had available; it was written in English. I conducted a thought experiment of sorts and imagined how this book in my hands came to be. I focused on the New Testament since the events it describes were the most recent, even though they took place 2,000 years ago.

Jesus spoke Aramaic and preached throughout Aramaic-speaking regions; thus, his followers would have heard sermons and conversations in Aramaic. As a Jew, it would also be expected that Hebrew would be included in his language influences. Many people witnessed his preaching and may have retained some of its content. Nearly 100 years after Jesus' death, accounts of his teachings and life story emerged written mainly in Greek. The collective writings of Jesus' life came from different sources which were not always in agreement and arguments ensued (intellectual and otherwise) about what version of the writings represented emerging Christian doctrine. Not all of the writings made the final cut.

Until development of the printing press, scribes produced copies of the Bible by hand; a tedious and time-consuming process. Translation into various languages occurred subject to the skill and experience of the translator until some 2,000 years later, I held an English language version in my hands. In my thought experiment, I imagined the passage of this information forward in time through many steps; Jesus lived his life, followers and witnesses heard him speak and experienced many of the moments of

his life with him, but their first-hand accounts are absent, un-verified authors produced accounts of Jesus' life nearly 100 years after the fact – in a different language, many differing accounts of Jesus' life, including some in his native Aramaic, were excluded from the Bible, copies and translations were made through the centuries, and meanings were interpreted by a host of others in multiple denominations.

I concluded that the Bible has had a very long developmental pathway and many minds and hands have touched it along the way. Throughout this time, it remained an inspirational moral guide. Yet much like the inspired works of Michelangelo or DaVinci who sought to bring to life the inspiration they received, the Bible too is a work of mankind; humbling in its scope and achievement. It remains a guidepost for us all, but should not forestall looking beyond its covers.



[AD] I love that we had discovered ancient texts. It gives insight to our past but really—divinely written (debatable) or not-- way back then, in languages we can't agree interprets into today's language correctly, I find it difficult to accept on its face value. I liken it to playing the game whisper-down-the-lane. Input from the start never comes out the other side anywhere close to what was said or intended. Are we to believe that men have not subverted the message on purpose to fit their own needs? Was man so incorruptible so long ago? I think we know the answer to that.

So, what should we believe or take away from the Bible when so much been deleted, excerpted and changed through its handing down? I'd say, take what makes sense and don't feel guilty about leaving the rest for another time when you might take another look-- or not.



## QUESTION 6

**Is 'time' no more than a tool or vehicle for unique experiences-- stage props? [AD]**

[KD] An interesting question, - short and deep. Before considering its use as a tool, we should probably try to define what it is. Thus; What is time?

Various definitions of Time exist that condense to a few key concepts: Time is a progression, a continual serial, directed movement. It is not a 'thing' in and of itself. It is essentially a concept – the pace by which we experience or observe ordered events that proceed serially – in progression, one after another. Time witnesses the order of events; a sunrise, then a sunset, a heartbeat followed by the next, and a tick followed by a tock. The concept of Time seems inextricably entangled with our measurement of it. Our orbital progression around the sun is transformed into a unit of time as a year. The observed continual rotation of the Earth is defined as a unit of time - a day,  $1/24^{\text{th}}$  of a day as an hour,  $1/60^{\text{th}}$  of an hour as a minute, and so on. Yet Time, and the measurements we ascribe to it are separate.

We tend to refer to our measurements of time as if they are Time itself. They are not. Measure of time marks the interval between events. Time is not a sunrise, it is the space between sunrises and is a characteristic of them, just as the measure of eight feet is not the 2x4 needed by the carpenter, but a characteristic of it.

The concept of Time underlies how we experience our lives; in an orderly sequence, one heartbeat at a time, one sunrise at a time, and one moment at a time. Its progression is always forward, from one moment to the next, which provides for our accumulation of knowledge and experience.

The question asks if 'Time' is a tool or vehicle for unique experiences and suggests that it could be a stage prop – necessary as a setting for the play, but peripheral to the core event. It may prove to be that Time as we presently understand it will change and we will experience and comprehend life events simultaneously. Quantum physics already points to that possibility. Yet it is not Time that seems to be important after all; it is not a thing – it has no substance or force. It is a concept. What is important is that our life experience occurs in series; one thing after another. This progression allows for growth and evolution. It allows us to experience, process, learn and repeat in an upward spiraling accumulation of knowledge leading to human advancement and quite possibly, a Quantum future. Time is the agent of evolution and it seems to be necessary for our development. This may not always be the case.

Our understanding of the universe is evolving and Quantum conditions suggest that our concept of Time may need to change, perhaps soon. The clock is ticking.



## QUESTION 7

### **Why doesn't GOD speak plainly and openly? [KD]**

[KD] I have always wondered about GOD's current silence which is at the root of a lot of skepticism I have for formalized religion. The absence of plain speech has left a vacuum that others try to fill. There are many who claim to speak for GOD and few are on the same page. Not only is this confusing for someone simply trying to make their way in the world, but these claims have often been used in the past for control instead of guidance. In some cases, this has led to great harm that has been perpetrated in GOD's name. Given that history, my skepticism of those who claim to speak for GOD runs deep and it causes me to wonder why GOD is mute. Why doesn't GOD clear this up?

It has been my belief that plain language, simply spoken, would clear away a lot of confusion allowing us to get on with living our lives with some common understanding between us. I am now not so sure. We currently live in an age where things we see with our own eyes, hear with our own ears, measure with our own instruments, and consider with our own intellect are denied; sometimes gleefully and sometimes heartlessly. Open mindedness and critical thinking are, for some, in short supply. It is quite possible that if GOD spoke to us in the morning, a meme of him would go viral by the afternoon and people would argue about what they saw and heard. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons he or she hasn't chosen to speak openly to us. So, where does that leave us?

In its essence, a search for GOD is a personal matter, propelled by interest, need, or simply a longing to be home again. Many religious and spiritual traditions embrace the practice of meditation, particularly



as a means to be in touch with, “the still, small voice within.” We have been advised for millennia to look within for the good by religious leaders and philosophers of all kinds. Perhaps, this is where the conversation with GOD must take place and where we will hear his or her voice.

I look forward to the time when I can sit on the back patio, sip a cup of coffee, and shoot the breeze with GOD about all of the events of the day. I bet she has some really interesting stories to tell. Until that time comes, I will listen quietly between my heartbeats for her voice.

✧

[AD] Maybe God needs no words. Perhaps all you have to do is look at those flowers you took so many pictures of. 'nuf said.

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## QUESTION 8

### **Is there a GOD for each religion? [BS] Why are there so many versions of you? [KLD]**

[KD] Humankind has sought to ascribe some meaning for the mysteries, complexities, and vastness of the cosmos and has concluded, with some dissent, that a Higher Power exists as a creator or designer of this overwhelming universe. (See Question 1.) The early Greeks and Romans held beliefs in a hierarchy of multiple gods, while others proclaimed the existence of one GOD, as in Judaism and Christianity. Before diving too far down the rabbit hole, it's important to pause and consider the nature of the above questions. I've interpreted them as GOD being asked why different groups of us have different definitions for GOD.

Although Judeo-Christian religious traditions take the same position that there is one GOD, other religious traditions have a belief in multiple gods; Hinduism comes to mind as an example. Even with Catholicism, there is a belief in a Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and the Bible describes the existence of angels and archangels which, to mere mortals such as us, may seem like lesser gods, but gods none-the-less. This is all very confusing.

Religion, in a broad sense, provides some structure to the spiritual musings of humankind and seeks to interpret the world or cosmos through an agreed upon set of beliefs. One pocket of humanity asserting a particular set of religious beliefs may interpret things differently than another resulting in a different concept of GOD. No belief changes what GOD is, no matter what the differences are in humankind's definition. We do indeed, "see through a glass darkly" and do not yet have a clear view on which to base our common belief.

I have given up trying to sort out the various belief systems that describe GOD or god in some way. It is all above my pay grade. I have become comfortable with the non-denominational concept adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous; Higher Power. My concept of GOD is essentially defined by me and is formed in the quiet moments of contemplation. This, of course, doesn't change who GOD is, it only defines who GOD is for me.



[AD] *"My concept of GOD is essentially defined by me and is formed in the quiet moments of contemplation. This, of course, doesn't change who GOD is, it only defines who GOD is for me."*

So yes. I think GOD is made in our own image(s) not the other way around. There are probably millions of versions.



## QUESTION 9

### **Is the notion of Heaven and Hell or punishment/Karma all just nonsense? [AD]**

[KD] This question involves somewhat different, but related concepts; Heaven and Hell are classically analogous to reward and punishment – that is, Heaven is a reward and Hell is a punishment. These ‘assignments’ are expected to be meted out at the end of life and are considered by some to be permanent – essentially one and done. Catholicism adds the wrinkle of Purgatory – a sort of nether-land between Heaven and Hell. Karma, on the other hand, is thought to be a universal law by which a person’s actions are judged. Some consider Karma as if it were a scale and refer to ‘Good Karma’ and ‘Bad Karma’ as if they were on opposite sides of a fulcrum measuring the balance of life. I think we have to consider these concepts separately.

The concepts of Heaven and Hell, or Purgatory for that matter, require a belief in an afterlife. It assumes that our spiritual essence or soul survives physical death. This is consistent with many belief systems associated with the major religions of the world. Aside from religion, this is also supported by the many, and growing, accounts from people who have experienced a Near Death Experience (NDE) and provided convincing descriptions of their brief encounters in the afterlife. I have accepted the concept that our spiritual essence survives and that continued personal experience awaits us in the afterlife.

The idea of Heaven I held as a child (i.e., clouds, harps, and cherubs) has given way to a nuanced and more complex belief. I look at Heaven as the place from which we’ve come; it is our home. And not unlike our present life, home can be diverse and very much what you make it. Our life here, it seems to me, is an opportunity to learn, teach, feel and help fill the needs of others, and to pay attention to the

details of creation without being subsumed by it. And when we pass from this life, we do so with the experience and spiritual development of our lifetime; good or bad. However, I don't believe an 'Amen' at the end of life is appropriate because the journey continues. It is not clear to me that the occasion of our death in some way removes the responsibility we have for our spiritual development nor do I believe that we should expect to receive vast knowledge, become imbued with deep empathy, or know how to play the flute, if there was no interest in these attributes in life. If important to our continued development, these would remain chosen areas of interest to pursue.

My concept of Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory, is simply a safe and loving home, defined by the choices I've made. It is not a place of punishment, but a place of continued development. It is also an existence that changes with awareness and is not a 'one and done' experience.

The concept of Karma as a universal law has been around for a long time. Although Karma is reported to be a central concept in Hinduism and Buddhism, it also has a biblical corollary, "As you sow, so shall you reap." Karma is sometimes described to be somewhat like an accounting system that keeps track of your good and bad acts during your lifetime. Others describe it as a system of reward and punishment in such a way that if you accumulate 'Bad Karma' it is considered a debt that will result in some proportional punishment (i.e., an eye for an eye). Conversely, 'Good Karma' is considered a credit that results in proportional rewards. Perhaps a simpler way to describe it is as a universal justice system. This is not the way I look at the concept of Karma.

Karma, in my view, reminds us of our responsibilities to one another and ourselves. The toll of our lives can be modified by grace and forgiveness, but key to our development, each of us must face the why of our decisions and actions, not to have punishment meted out, but to learn from whence we came and to where we are going. Karma confirms to us that we reap what we sow - examples in life and nature abound. If we live a life of ambivalence, the afterlife (call it whatever you like, Heaven, Hell, or

Purgatory) will reflect that ambivalence and will not change unless we choose it to change. The choice is always ours to make, - it always has been.



[AD] We didn't begin religious insights in church or at Catechism. We had those eventually, but didn't realize until much later that it really began with our psychic mother.

Mom often picked up the phone before it rang, knowing who was calling-- had prophetic dreams --felt twinges of pain when touching another person and saw things (visions really) that as a young girl, she believed everyone else had. She learned soon enough that she was different.

These were ordinary things in our growing up and because she did not hide it from *us*, we just naturally accepted a different understanding beyond what we could see and touch. It was those observations that cemented our baseline view of the world and created a different jumping off point for questions and exploration throughout our lives.

My understanding of GOD has changed many times over the decades as I came to differing thoughts from other ideologies. These ideas again changed my beliefs about who we are and why we might be here. I'm sure I will change my mind again as I come across something else. New thoughts and information emerge, almost daily, about the mind /body connections, Epigenetics, energy psychology, and and and. The possibilities are endless but one thing I firmly believe-- is that we come again and again and that GOD does not punish. There is no hell as we were taught. Is there a heaven? Maybe, but again, probably not as we were taught. It is, however, fun exploring.



## QUESTION 10

**Given that most of human life, worldwide (until maybe 150 years ago) has been pretty wretched, why would we choose to come here and live so badly? Would we do it freely? Are we just puppets on a string living out someone's fantasy? Reminds me of a Star Trek episode. [AD]**

[KD] There are a couple of important concepts in the above questions; Do we play a role in choosing our life here? And do we have free will? From my point of view, I believe the answer is yes to both of these questions.

In previous discussions, I mentioned that my concept of Heaven is as a safe, comfortable, and loving home, “from whence, we came and to where we return.” This, of course, means that we leave Heaven to come here. Why on Earth, you might ask, would anyone want to leave Heaven to come here into this crapshoot of good/evil, rich/poor, disease/health, faith/faithlessness and love/indifference? My answer to myself is simply; Where else would we go to learn how to deal with these issues?

For me, contrast has always been required for me to learn – I have to be pushing against something, even if it is my limitations, for the lesson to take hold. It has to mean something to me and be more than an abstract concept. Contrast helps to define the “why” of the choices I make; I choose light having experienced darkness, and I choose serenity having experienced anger. My choices are not absolute, and I find that it takes work to maintain resolve for a single day – until the next. Unlike Heaven, this place is a crucible of swirling challenges conjoined with delight. It is a place where love can emerge from beneath smoldering ashes. Painful; perhaps, but where else would we find such things that would strike us deeply with a force that would command our attention? And if we are paying attention, we learn and grow.

As important as personal experience may be, this is also a place to become aware of the needs and joys of others. We are surrounded by family, friends, and other members of our various communities who all experience life differently than us. Through our interactions, we share in the experiences of their lives too, in both the joy and sorrow; all of which adds to the fabric of our lives. Yes, I believe we come here purposely to take a deep dive into living and learning.

The decision to come here is ours to make, and once here, decisions continue to be ours to make, otherwise, what would the point of our existence be? I don't believe that we are instruments used to measure the depths of GOD's curiosity. Instead, our free will allows us to be creators too – however imperfectly. And our small acts of creation, allow us to humbly recognize the creation that sits before us which has only been explored in the minutest sense.

I also remember Star Trek and the crew of the Enterprise who were tricked and then coerced to play for god's interest and pleasure. In the end, Captain Kirk and his faithful crew broke free to continue their wandering exploration of the universe directed by their free will. And so, it is with us.

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## QUESTION 11

**When Jesus and Mary Magdalene married, you were totally smiling, right? [KLD]**

[KD] This is clearly a tongue-in-cheek question, but it points back to an interesting time in the development of Christianity. To make some sense of this, I had to take a trip into history via Mr. Peabody's Way-Back Machine.

During early years around Jesus' life and death, there were multiple groups that espoused somewhat varied beliefs and produced different accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. One such group was referred to as the Gnostics and their set of beliefs was generally referred to as Gnosticism. Many of their beliefs were centered around gospels and related writings; some of which included different accounts of the same gospels contained in the Bible while others were entirely separate gospels that were not included in the Bible. Collectively, these gospels have become known as the Gnostic Gospels and include lesser known writings such as; The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Judas, and the Gospel of Mary among others.

Early Christian leaders considered the Gnostic Gospels heretical because they differed from the accepted view of the emerging New Testament canon. They were purged from common usage but some effort was made to preserve copies for posterity. These gospels were re-discovered in 1945 preserved in earthen jars in or near caves in a place known as Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt. One of the interesting aspects of these gospels is the special relationship that was hinted at between Jesus and Mary

Magdalene which has led some to speculate that they were in fact married. This is the theme that Dan Brown's book *The DaVinci Code* is based on which also includes speculation that Jesus had children.

The above question essentially asks if marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene would have been pleasing to GOD. I see no reason to think otherwise. For a man and woman of the era immersed in Jewish culture, marriage would have been expected and accepted. Mary Magdalene's repeated reference at key moments in the existing gospels and her prominence in the Gnostic gospels confirm her participation in Jesus' ministry. She was often at his side. The prospect of their marriage and even the possibility of children, although speculative, is not hard to imagine. Would GOD have smiled on the union? Surely.



## QUESTION 12

### **What is the purpose of pain and suffering? [KD]**

The issue of pain and suffering in the world has been one of the most difficult concepts I've had to deal with as a personal spiritual question. I wrestled with this question as a young man and to be clear, it was not the result of pain and suffering I experienced at the time. For me, it was an issue of fairness and I wanted to know why some people experience pain and suffering while others do not when it is within GOD's power to control. This is one of the main arguments for many that there is no GOD because surely, a loving father would not allow it.

There is also a distinction to make regarding the nature of pain and suffering some must endure. It can be argued that in some cases it is the result of personal choices we all make; our lifestyles, diet, work practices, habits, etc. can all contribute to the pain and suffering we experience. It can also be argued that victims of accidents, violence, war, and senseless irrational acts of others, have not made choices to be victims, but suffer none-the-less. A special case can also be made for children who suffer; particularly for those children who are born into suffering from disease, disability, or life circumstances. If we rationalize suffering that adults experience as somehow related to the poor choices made during their lives as if a karmic toll is being paid, what then do we rationalize for innocent children who suffer? To me, this question speaks to the very essence of GOD's existence.

In search of an answer to this question I cast a wide net. One particular source, Viktor Frankl's Man's Search For Meaning, provided deep insight into the suffering that occurred in the concentration camps

of WWII. He was a prisoner at Auschwitz and as a trained psychologist, struggled with the horrific suffering and deaths of so many of his fellow prisoners. He searched for meaning in the experiences he and so many others endured and became aware of the different ways in which his fellow prisoners responded to the suffering. He witnessed selfless acts of some who gave their rations to those in need and faced their own suffering with dignity and courage. He later wrote about this experience and said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." He offered this insight; "We give our suffering meaning by the way we respond to it."

Frankl's conclusions took some time for me to internalize; it involved deeper thinking than I was capable of at the time. Eventually I understood that it was not the circumstances of pain and suffering that ascribed meaning; it is us, individually and personally who give them meaning. As with those prisoners in Auschwitz that Frankl suffered with, stripped of all worldly trappings, some gave meaning to their suffering and chose that meaning to be dignity, courage, and love.

If all pain and suffering were similarly considered, something could be said for it as a condition that can elicit meaning for the individual. To do so, requires a choice, a perspective. But what of the suffering of those who do not choose, - what meaning is there for children who are born into suffering? This question remained a difficult one for me for some time. Like most, I am aware of the joys and blessings that parents and caregivers recount in their lives while caring for a child with special needs. For some, their service to the needs of the child brings them a deeper understanding of life and love and in that experience, may find meaning. But what meaning accrues to the child – particularly to a child without the ability to consider their circumstance?

A high-level principle expressed by many is that everyone has a unique life purpose which could include infinite possibilities; leadership, service, teaching, learning, exploration, discovery, invention, or perhaps

to enjoy some rest and relaxation after a long trip across the galaxy. Discovery of that purpose is an important goal for each of us. Yet what is embedded in the statement of principle is a simple question; Who decided that purpose for each of us and must that purpose include the experience of pain and suffering? I don't believe anyone's life purpose is to experience pain and suffering, but should it occur, it may be purposeful to draw meaning from it with dignity and courage. Anyone who has spent time in a children's hospital can attest to the courage of children.

Many people have experienced pain and suffering, but one in particular has been given to us as an example above all others – the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Many others have been crucified before and since, but this was a crucifixion of a good man, a holy man and a great deal of meaning was ascribed to it, so much so, that a world-wide religious movement considers it foundational.

I grew up reading and hearing about it including the often-repeated biblical reference; "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." (John 3:16) Religious doctrine also includes the interpretation that Jesus' blood was shed, "... so that sins may be forgiven." I have always had difficulty accepting this interpretation. The idea that pain and suffering was required to forgive sins or that GOD intentionally "gave" up his son into suffering doesn't sit well with my concept of GOD or my sense of Jesus' purpose.

If the accounts of Jesus' life are accurately given to us, he had the ability to heal, transform matter, walk on water and much more. His skill set was way beyond ours and I believe could have avoided persecution and death in such a manner. But he chose to subject himself to this cruelty perpetrated by those who were, it could be argued, far less advanced than he. He endured the pain and suffering with dignity and courage and gave meaning to it while others in witness also took meaning from it. I don't believe his life purpose was to be a sacrifice, but a teacher; an example of dignity and purpose in the world from which we may draw meaning. Pain and suffering were not requirements for his teaching, but it was given to him by his persecutors and he gave it meaning.

I look at the pain and suffering of innocent children with much the same viewpoint. They too are teachers and it is up to us to draw meaning from their experience. It should cause us all to care. I believe the sacrifice of these souls is not unlike the sacrifice we look back on 2,000 years ago. I further believe that pain and suffering have no intrinsic meaning beyond the usefulness as a medical warning of disease or injury. Any spiritual meaning for it rises from the individual.



[JH] I've got a couple questions/comments:

1. In a very basic sense, if man didn't experience "pain" would he need God? If everything always went well for folks, they wouldn't be humble and learn to ask for help, and experience gratitude for God's grace.
2. Again, in a most basic sense, aren't pain and suffering totally distinct from each other and not necessarily linked in lock-step. While most pains are a result of an "external assault" on the body or mind (caused by ourselves, external sources, or "fate" (e.g. birth defects)), "suffering" is man's conscious response to these assaults. I know of cases where man has rejoiced over "pain" because it has drawn him closer to God...

Thoughts??



[KD] The questions above could have differing interpretations about what is pain. In one sense, pain could apply broadly to many conditions beyond the typical definition; it could also include perhaps fear, grief, helplessness, despair, psychic trauma, remorse and many other conditions that cause pain to the individual. Alternatively, the question could be interpreted more narrowly as it applies to physical pain as we understand it in the medical sense. For this discussion, I've considered it broadly.

We often turn to GOD for the alleviation of pain (or fear, despair, etc.) and for many of us, this may be the only time we turn to GOD in our lives. Unfortunately, by association, this links GOD to those conditions. Thus, it is tempting to think that GOD is only associated with these conditions and if we have no pain, we have no need of GOD. My view is that our need for GOD is far beyond the alleviation of “pain” in our lives. It may well be that we may pass through pain during the course of our lives, but I believe there is more on the other side of that journey. We need GOD to teach us of the universe, to hold our hand as we step into the galaxy, to help us find a path to unconditional compassion, to breathe into us courage in the face of uncertainty, and to teach us of forgiveness. Pain and suffering are challenges to be certain, but they are not the only ones we face and they alone don’t define our need for GOD.

Pain in its physical sense is a feedback process that alerts us to injury and disease. It saves lives and is often the starting point for assessing our condition and seeking help. Typically, our first step along the road is to seek our own help – from each other and the medical community at large. In that regard, pain focusses our attention so that we can seek and apply for help. It seems to me that when conditions are severe and perceived to be beyond our limits to deal with, we turn to GOD and, as many others have said, ‘give the problem to GOD’. We seek his grace and intervention on our behalf. I have a different perspective on this process, but I think in the end arrive, basically at the same place.

I believe that an important aspect of our search for GOD during these moments of pain and suffering is that they turn us inward and it is there where we may have the conversation with GOD. I also believe that help and grace is all around us and that GOD doesn’t necessarily decide occasion-by-occasion to offer grace. It is my view that grace was given once and forever, - it is always there for us, but like the commercial says, “you’ve gotta want it.” And before you want it, you have to acknowledge that it exists.

I do agree that there is a difference between pain and suffering, but there is also a relationship between them. I look at that relationship as a Venn Diagram with intersecting regions; not all pain results in suffering, yet prolonged pain can and still other forms of suffering (grief, PTSD, etc.) may not involve physical pain.

The proposition, "...suffering is man's conscious response" (to pain), is interesting and I think parallels Frankl's perspective to some degree, although he considered suffering largely as an external condition in the concentration camps. In his interpretation, conscious effort was used to give meaning to the suffering that was imposed on them. In that perspective, starvation is suffering – objectively. That conscious response to suffering is what Frankl had in mind when he said, "We give our suffering meaning by the way we respond to it." I interpret that to mean that suffering still existed, but through their conscious acts, they chose that it would not define them. This also seems to be the perspective of Eric Cassell, a physician and author who wrote [The Healer's Art](#). He delved into the doctor-patient relationship and through the many years of practice described how we all face important issues about life and death. He found important meaning in how we all face critical points in our lives.

Lastly, the questions above note that there are cases where man has, "rejoiced over 'pain' because it has drawn him closer to GOD". I have to parse that to understand it more fully. I can't think of any circumstance where rejoice and pain belong in the same sentence. In the past, some religious sects believed pain could be a gateway to GOD, but I don't believe that is held commonly now. I can see the case for being thankful that a person's response to pain caused them to grow into a closer relationship with GOD, but I think the linkage of GOD and pain is unfortunate and misleading. Pain and suffering are not requirements in a relationship with GOD although they may be frequent motivators to seek one. I believe our natural state is to be whole, healthy, and pain-free and that it remains a goal for us humans to work toward that state. Individually, we need not pass through pain to get there.





[JJ] Do you have a few credible sources that argue that GOD is loving and would not allow pain/suffering? Can you quote some? This reader is not aware of any.



[KD] I am not a theologian and my interpretation of GOD as a loving father is borne of my experience and observation. I have no citations to offer except perhaps a world full of loving fathers, such as yourself. I will attempt an explanation. There are actually two parts to the question that have to be sorted out; 1) Is GOD a loving father? and 2) Does GOD allow pain and suffering? I believe the answer to both questions is yes. However, I believe a more important second question is; Why?

GOD as a loving father. Like most, I am aware of the contrast in the depictions of GOD in the Old Testament versus the New Testament. The Old Testament GOD had anger issues, in my opinion, and was quick to show it. One was expected to fear him and if you crossed the line, - you better be prepared to build an ark. I have met enough angry men over the course of my life to know that if that is truly GOD's character, I want none of it.

The New Testament depiction was more like a loving father, - more interested in forgiveness and the return of the prodigal son. During my life, I have also met a lot of good people and good parents who look to the well-being of their families. The example of good parents in the world led me to accept the GOD of the New Testament as my point of view. It was for me a personal choice, - I believe that GOD would be no less than the best of us.

The presence of pain and suffering. It is evident from human history that pain and suffering have been around for a very long time. Given the premise of GOD's existence, this has occurred on his/her watch. If

we adopt the position that GOD is the creator, then elimination of pain and suffering is within his/her capabilities. The fact that they do exist indicates that GOD permits them to exist and that some aspect of pain and suffering may exist by design. The larger question is; Why?

Pain is experienced by many of the creatures on Earth and is considered to be beneficial because it warns of harmful conditions and allows us to seek help or respond in a way to reduce further harm or pain. This capacity is part of our design, - it is baked in.

As JH noted above, pain and suffering can be separate things. I think they can also overlap particularly when prolonged pain transitions into suffering. Although our individual response can contribute to our interpretation of suffering, I believe that suffering can exist objectively as we've all witnessed when an animal 'suffered' with prolonged pain. We all cringe at such suffering and generally seek ways to reduce its suffering and ease its pain. We empathize with the suffering of animals and the empathy we feel is no less than we have for each other. Perhaps that is part of the meaning to be derived from suffering. It serves as a basis for caring about one another; to strip away all other differences and know only that we care.

I recognize that some pain and suffering can be self-induced, but among all of the creatures in the world, we alone can choose. Sometimes we choose well, sometimes we don't.



[JJ] Are you saying, if we face pain/suffering with the same dignity as Jesus then we may learn something, be enlightened or rewarded?



[KD] This is a complicated question. I believe that there is an innate dignity to us as human beings. We may lose sight of it often, but it is there. Some people live their entire lives as exemplars of human

dignity while others gain sight of it during moments throughout their lifetime. Although this discussion is primarily focused on questions related to pain and suffering, dignity is a larger issue since it spans a lifetime. It is not just how to face pain and suffering with courage and dignity, but how to face life so. Our life experiences challenge us to find it, in classrooms and boardrooms, in churches and around campfires. Although the experience of pain and suffering crystalizes our focus at critical moments, I suspect that those who have lived a life with courage and dignity face crisis in the same way. What we may learn from facing pain and suffering with courage and dignity depends largely on what we bring to the experience. If we live such a life, pain and suffering may not have much to teach us, but it could serve as an example for others.

I don't believe that the act of facing pain and suffering with dignity alone results in enlightenment or spiritual reward. It is a step along a path. Consideration of a reward, I think would run counter to the purpose. It is we, individually who assign meaning to the conduct of our lives.



[JJ] I think you should take a much more holistic view of these questions and answers. What does Buddhism say? What do other religions say? I'm sure that this thinking has been done for you.



[KD] My intent has never been to produce a treatise on world religious views. I am not qualified. By practice and training, I am an engineer, not a theologian. But I live and travel in the world, observe life, and ask questions constantly. I have read some about Buddhism as I have for other world religions and philosophies, but I am not as well versed as I should be. It is my hope that those who are better informed can bring that content into this discussion.



### QUESTION 13

#### **Can my deceased friends and family see me? Are they watching and part of the jury deciding if I go to heaven or hell? [RS]**

[KD] I don't believe that those who have passed before us keep their eye on us in any continuous sense. They are, after all, quite busy experiencing their lives there, just as we are here. There are occasions when there has been contact between us, - there are many accounts of such in literature and popularized in movies. Yet I think for the most part, our friends and family who have passed on before us realize the importance of us living our lives as best we are able and with the exercise of free will – just as they did.

The issue of judgement is interesting to consider. We pass judgement on each other all the time, fairly or unfairly, and it isn't pleasant to be the subject of someone's judgement, particularly if it is unfounded or in error. We've learned to fear it. Many of us have grown up with the belief that we will be judged when we die and the result of that judgement will determine if we end up in heaven, hell, or somewhere in between. We've discussed the concepts of heaven and hell in Question 9, but skirted the issue of who makes that assignment.

Even if deceased friends or loved ones could track our progress in life, I don't think they would participate in a judgement which would decide our fate into heaven or hell. From a basic point of view, simply because someone dies and passes into another experience, doesn't mean they got any smarter, wiser, or any more qualified to pass judgement than they were previously. From many accounts that I have read from people who passed, however briefly, into the afterlife and returned, each passage was

met with love, acceptance and support when they encountered loved ones. It seemed to me, that these were essentially 'Welcome Home' greetings and no judgements were expressed by them.

When the judgement process was described in those accounts, it was not a judgement per se, but consisted mainly of a life review that occurred quietly between the individual and a spiritual presence many described as their concept of GOD. The review was detailed and expansive and allowed the individual to see how their attitudes, decisions and actions rippled through the lives of others. Emphasis was placed on moments in their lives of compassion, acceptance, and love as contrasted with those of anger, indifference, or hate. The individual was left with a sense of what opportunities were lost and gained during their life experience. During this review process, there was no fear, no angry white-haired man threatening fire and brimstone. Instead, they described a loving acceptance as a parent would have for a child, with an expectation that there is much more to come.

It appeared to me from those descriptions, that following the life review, judgement was left to the individual who afterward found themselves with limitless opportunities to explore, learn, and develop along their particular path. To what end? I don't know, but the universe is vast and curiosity is calling.

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## QUESTION 14

### **Is there truly one GOD? [RS]**

[KD] It is difficult to say what is truth from across a temporal and spiritual divide. The question may not be answerable until we stand before him or her and ask it directly. Until then....

We touched briefly on the concept of one GOD in Questions 1 and 8, but it bears a little further discussion. There is still uncertainty about the singularity of GOD; there always has been. Man's interactions with and characterizations of GOD have suggested that different personalities of GOD exist as are exhibited in some of the earliest religious writings. Many have commented for ages, that the GOD depicted in the Old Testament is entirely different from the GOD depicted in the New Testament and thus, must be different beings. Alternatively, others have suggested that GOD is the same being who evolved during the course of time. Either case has proven to be problematic for theologians since it either suggests the occurrence of at least two GODs (Old and New Testament jurisdictions) or that GOD is not omniscient or omnificent and is somehow lesser than imagined; in short may be god and not GOD after all. I personally don't have a problem with the latter, - I like the idea of a GOD who evolves.

We are aware of early Greek and Roman beliefs in multiple gods, but early Christians struggled with this issue too. Not only were they aware of differences between the Old Testament GOD and the GOD (Father) that Jesus described, but some also believed there to be a different GOD involved in creation apart from the Father that Jesus described. The early Christian differences eventually sorted out to the prevailing view that we have today; that a single GOD exists as a trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This assertion ties logic and language into knots – 'How can GOD be both Father and Son at the same

time'? some have asked. From a Christian perspective, the acceptance of the concept of one GOD became cast as dogma around 300-400 years after Jesus' death and is essentially the belief held today. Of course, while all of this was going on, indigenous peoples around the globe were praying to multiple gods.

For my part, I have adopted the concept of a Higher Power, a loving parent, as my concept of GOD. Whether this Higher Power is singular or plural makes little difference to me. After all, I had two parents. I know that when I seek GOD in quiet moments, I feel his/her presence. That is enough for me now – to be a leaf riding on the current of this life, feeling the warmth of the sun.



## QUESTION 15

**Did he/she create good and bad people in hopes that we would learn good from bad?**  
**[RS]**

[KD] This question on its surface appears straight forward but it leads to surprisingly complex concepts.

Here are two concepts that can be extracted from the question directly;

- Did GOD create people intentionally to be less than good or in fact bad?
- Does GOD expect us to learn goodness from its opposite?

The above two sub-questions (if there is such a word), spawn many more:

- The creation of something “bad” is a task usually attributed to the devil (choose your own term here; Satan, the dark side of the force, etc.). If both good and bad people are created that way by GOD, it would imply a duality of GOD – not only capable of both good and bad, but expressing both. (This actually sounds like us.) Is this how we characterize GOD?
- Is it possible that we were all created as “good” people who became “bad” – as the Adam & Eve story in Genesis suggests? If so, didn’t GOD have a hand in this too? Why did he/she create the Tree of Knowledge if its fruits were forbidden? If the knowledge it represents is “bad”, it is a creation of GOD and that leads us back to the concept of a GOD who creates “bad” stuff. However, the fall from grace depicted in Genesis is a story after all. Is it otherwise painting the picture that the fall from grace is due to our actions and not GOD’s?



- And if the above is true that we were originally created as “good” people who fell from grace, it raises the question about timing, because I sure don’t remember that happening in my lifetime. This issue surely led religious leaders in the past to concoct the concept of original sin – in essence the “bad” act of Adam and Eve is the original sin that we all are paying for. How unfair is that? (For the record, that’s not how I see it.)
- The prospect that GOD would intentionally create “bad” people so that we could learn “good” from them, seems counter-intuitive to me. I agree that the contrasting example of “badness”, (let’s call it evil), helps us to see “goodness”, but I believe the concept of what is good is pre-defined. When we see the horrors of evil, we are affected. We know it is evil because we know what goodness is. Evil does not instruct us about goodness; it shocks us into awareness of what we already know. Is that what this question asks?
- The intentional creation of good and bad people, if that were so, would be fundamentally unfair. The “bad” people would be getting a raw deal and have to work hard to become “good”, while the “good” people wouldn’t have to work at all. Is GOD unfair?

The question of GOD’s duality, as it relates to good and evil, has come up before given the presence of good and evil throughout all of recorded history. I have always had difficulty with religious leaders who urge their followers to ‘fear GOD’. They are bringing to mind a wrathful and vengeful concept of GOD in stark contrast to a loving father depiction. Taken on face value, fear is not a warm and fuzzy attribute to associate with GOD. Could it be true that GOD can be and create both good and evil – in essence have a dual Yin and Yang nature? Anything is possible but I don’t think of GOD in those terms.

If we accept the role of GOD as the creator, I expect fairness to be a fundamental requirement. Yet life here is not fair – not everyone has the same opportunities in life. Some lead lives of privilege while others have brief and difficult lives. Such differences don’t result simply because someone is not working

hard enough. Many are born and die in hardship. How does one resolve this obvious inequity if we believe GOD is the creator of each of us? In the face of this inequity, religious leaders point to a future time and place when all will be righted with statements such as, “Your reward will be in heaven.” This convenient and unprovable admonition does not address this inequity, it simply kicks the can down the road into someone else’s jurisdiction; GOD’s. In an attempt to understand this for myself, I found it helpful to look beyond our physical existence to our spiritual nature and found an explanation that made sense to me.

It was helpful for me to consider the question of creation on two tracks; spiritual and physical. On the spiritual track I have adopted the viewpoint that we have all been created by GOD and therefore are of GOD. This creative act took place a long time ago and at some point, in our exploration of GOD’s creations, we lost our way and moved, in a spiritual sense, away from the source of creation; GOD. We each then experienced existence differently and developed unique needs. Our absence was noted and a pathway to help us find our way again was created for us, - which brings us to the physical track. Our physical experience is on that pathway; we are born into life in whatever state of awareness our existence has come to. It is important to realize that we are creators too and free to create what we will; good or bad. I don’t share in the belief that some external force or being such as GOD or Satan creates bad people. I believe we do this ourselves, individually and collectively.

We have not yet figured all of this out – we are still evolving, yet it is important, it seems to me, to pay attention to our spiritual evolution or re-awakening as we proceed. Our physical existence is the vehicle through which we travel on the path, but our purpose is to awaken the spirit through our interactions with each other and come to know again the nature of our existence; that we are of GOD.

So ..... in answer to the question, “Did GOD create good and bad people...”?, I don’t believe so. I believe that GOD created us spiritually, of himself (or herself) and when we wandered away, provided a

pathway to re-discover ourselves. We are on that path here and now. I also believe the “bad” that we see in the world is the result of our creation. The hope in that belief is if this “badness” is our creation, we have the power to change it. We have always had that power.



[KC] Such deep thinking for me so late at night. But when I read it what actually came to my mind first was not about good/bad but rather that when there is something we need to learn be it patience or compassion. I do believe that God provides us opportunities to practice those things in the hopes that we ultimately learn them. So, I guess it depends on what you consider bad.



[JH] I have one question – is it possible that things only appear to be “bad” to us because we’re short-sighted and we haven’t been patient enough to let God produce an eventual “good” outcome as a long-range result? For example, in a not so trivial sense, “hitting bottom” for an alcoholic has short-term consequences which are “bad” but it’s what it takes to build a personal relationship with God in the long-term, which is good... I know many folks who say that becoming an alcoholic was the best thing that ever happened to them – because of the new life they’ve found...being born again, if you will.

Romans 8:28 says *“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them”*. In this case, *“loving God”* might mean to trust in Him that He will see that things work out for the good in the long-run and having the patience for this to occur...and also trying to understand His purpose for the events in our lives...

Also, as far as the “tree of knowledge” goes – maybe the lesson to be learned relates to the consequences of living a life based on self-will – once the consequences are learned through “bad experiences” we are more likely to surrender to His will – ultimately, a good outcome in the long-run...

Thoughts???



[KD] Both comments from [KC] and [JH] bring up the point about the definition of what is “bad”. I am not sure what the original questioner had in mind, but I agree that there is much to be gained by learning from bad experiences. We may have all used the phrase, “Some good will come of it,” when we are faced with difficult things. Yet I think good that is drawn from the experience comes afterward, sometimes long after. The act or experience may be “bad” intrinsically, no matter how much good we draw from it later. The holocaust is only one such example. Even if survivors have found some solace later in life or the world at large came to realize the needs of fellow human beings in retrospect, the event was intrinsically “bad”. I don’t place such things on GOD’s side of the ledger because we, as creators, were the architects. And yes, we can learn from this and draw some goodness from it, if we choose, but we do have to choose. In large part, whether good is drawn from a bad experience or not depends on the attitude of the individual.

The example of an alcoholic being grateful for his/her alcoholism because it led to a rebirth is an important point to consider. I have, in previous writings, noted that I was thankful for having been the son of an alcoholic because of the life lessons and example of a courageous struggle it allowed me to witness. I believe I get the sentiment of this gratefulness. Yet I know that alcoholism, like any addiction, is not something I would characterize as a “good” thing. Goodness comes from the individual who battles through it and from the family and friends who provide support. Still others fail in their efforts and never have the opportunity to look back on their struggle as a positive experience. The present opioid crisis is breathtaking in its scope and carnage. In time, there will be a lesson there too, and some goodness may come of this, if we allow it to. Yet I don’t consider it part of GOD’s plan, in essence to use alcoholism, addiction, or any personal crisis as a tool to awaken us to his presence. I believe in those

critical moments of crisis when we shed the ego, we become receptive to the small clear voice of GOD within – where he has always been. I don't believe that GOD takes anyone into addiction, but has helped many find their way out.

I am less familiar with how the term self-will is interpreted, but I get the sense that it means a person may be applying their will (i.e., being willful) instead of surrendering to GOD's will, in other words being disobedient. I think I get it and have to acknowledge that I am often in a state of disobedience. I have struggled with this perspective and have had long conversations with GOD about it. I'm still waiting for him/her to reply. Until then I have to try my best to figure out how to live this life.

I look at the issue of obedience this way; aside from life itself, the greatest gift GOD has given us is free will. As it is with love, this gift is unconditional. It is intended, indeed expected that we will use this gift and in so doing, we can do great or terrible things. We should not fear the use of it because of the harm we could cause, we should welcome it because of the good we can do. In our moments of crisis, I don't believe that it is the adherence to GOD's will that is the focus, but our own. As the creator, if GOD set his will to move the planets, they would move. So, it is with us - if GOD willed it, it would be so. But GOD has turned his will over to us when it comes to the management of our lives. It is his gift. He is there to guide us, console us, strengthen us, love us but it is for each of us to apply the will we have been given. The success of the alcoholic in recovery is an example of this very aspect; I don't believe that the surrender to a higher power is a surrender to his will, but to his love. It is the individual who sets his/her will to the recovery, minute by minute, day by day, year by year. Strength comes from this resolve. Our challenge is in applying our will responsibly, morally, ethically, and lovingly.

One real issue that I have always had, is that religious leaders have interpreted what they believe is GOD's will and given it to us to adhere to. Often as interpreters, they become gate-keepers instead of guides. On this, I have been disobedient and it is likely, I always will be. There are many paths to GOD

and I have the sense that GOD delights in our diversity and in the many applications of free will he has given us so that we may be creators too. I consider GOD's will as defined by one word; love. It is the canvas on which we should be painting. But we should be painting.



[AD] Fear of God? Hell no! Why should there be fear? In my opinion, Man came to fear what he couldn't explain. Disease was a punishment for offending GOD. Remember that one? Given my beliefs about why we do this thing called Life -- I believe we did it with GOD blessings (free will or a wink and a nod), to go for it. Play it out and no matter how it turns out, it's all okay. Punish us if it didn't go as planned? I don't think so.

As to GOD creating good and bad (duality)--Isn't the relative world (the stage show props of dark/light, male/female, up/down) we live in perhaps an opportunity to learn all aspects of the whole? The good the bad and the ugly? I don't think GOD chooses who will be what. As KC writes in remarks, "I do believe the God provides us opportunities to practice those things in hopes that we ultimately learn them". I agree. I also think it's all in the 'infinite cloud of possibility' for us to choose.

The reasons we choose are a mystery but what if we needed to learn contrast (dark/bad) in order to understand/know the opposite -- Goodness? What does Light mean if there was no dark? What if we needed to understand pain and poverty? What if that learning helps us be better in the next life of privilege? Does too much good in a life lead to complacency for others or the environment?

Above, [KD] writes in Q 15 "...I have adopted the viewpoint that we have all been created by GOD and therefore are of GOD." I will take it a bit further... I believe we are GOD living it all (each and every life) out. This also means to me-- no blaming GOD-- we would be blaming ourselves. We know we are creators too. We (man) have experienced and created amazing things, good and bad. The thing is, we get to choose. Most of us just don't know or remember that we can.

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## QUESTION 16

### Have we met before? [WS]

This is such a simple and direct question that gets to the core of so much. An equally simple answer is: Yes. But a bit more explanation is warranted.

On one level, it is logical to assume that the creator would have met all of us at the point of creation, so of course we would have met GOD in a manner of speaking. Further, throughout our lives we may all have been in touch with GOD as we sought council, blessings, or solace. But this was one question that was asked personally in conversation and I saw the twinkle in this friend's eyes when he asked it. There was deeper meaning being hinted at here. It was also a question I expected, because I asked it myself many years ago.

I have commented a few times in these discussions about life after death and my personally held belief that it need not be feared because, in my view, it is simply a matter of going home again. This life after life which we abstractly refer to as heaven, is richly described by many people, from all walks of life, who underwent a near death experience (NDE) and were later able to provide detailed accounts. I have read many of these accounts and became satisfied that the majority have merit. Although many of us were taught as children that there was an afterlife, it was mysterious and very little detail about it was provided. We were also told that we would reside there for all of eternity. Which eternal realm we would reside in; heaven, hell, or somewhere in between, would be decided based on our performance in this life. In other words, our fate for all of eternity would be determined by these relatively few years



of this life span. As a teenager with raging hormones and a tendency toward disobedience, this prospect scared the hell out of me. It also seemed illogical and very unfair. But I was fortunate; I had a library card and I set out to understand this for myself.

My reading took me across many spiritual and religious traditions and I eventually came away with the conviction that the descriptions and processes of the afterlife we were taught as children simply did not ring true to me. The afterlife, according to my expectations, will be a nurturing, supportive, loving environment in which we can focus on personal development and creativity.

As I considered this awesome prospect, I was also intrigued by the large void in my viewpoint encompassed by the question; What about life before life? As I said at the outset, I look at my eventual physical death as a homecoming, - a return to the place from which I came. This of course implies that there was life before life and that our existence doesn't begin at the point of our physical birth here.

This prospect, of course, raises more questions. Oh no, not more questions!

Even with a supportive and nurturing environment in the afterlife (it's ok to substitute the term 'heaven' here if you like), it was clear to me then as a teenager that I would be way behind the curve when I got there since I did not grow up in a nurturing and supportive environment, - not unlike a lot of kids in the world. It seemed like an impossible task to me to live a good enough life in my relatively short life span to be worthy of a joyful afterlife in eternity. This all seemed very unfair to me until, with unrelenting use of my library card, I came across the life work of Edgar Cayce which introduced me to the concept of reincarnation.

Although reincarnation was a foreign concept to me, simply stated, it means that we may live again, physically. As I considered this possibility, I came to realize that it was hopeful, not just for me, but for everyone who had yet to live that ideal life. I was relieved to discover that the game would not be decided after the first inning and I would have another chance (or more) at bat. This cycle of life allows

us to experience and learn from each other across many varied relationships through time. This realization eased my anxiety; there would be time to work toward a better version of me.

And to the question that started this personal rambling, "Have we met before?". If the question is directed to GOD, the answer would be yes. We meet GOD here and, in the hereafter, as we choose to. He or She is an old and dear friend. And if the question is directed to each of us, the answer there too is likely to be yes since we may have crossed paths many times before in our passages. And to put a finer point on it, when we take the time to know someone well, there too we meet GOD again since we are all of GOD.



[AD] I took the question to be ... did each of us meet each other before? And my answer immediately was -- yes, well most likely. My brothers, sisters, parents, close friends --most certainly.

As an analogy---I tend to see each incarnation as a interactive stage play set within a specific period of time. Each of us has agreed to play certain parts as well as being the central character in our own micro play. This of course is a very simplistic view but essentially, it's that analogy that stays with me. Some of us get to play good guys, others bad guys (it's just darn good acting) and we all play fringe characters others' stories. So just like a play is microcosm -- a small slice of life situations, it is just a microcosm of the whole big picture multiplied trillions of times over and over throughout time. And just to throw in another somewhat outrageous thought... (well maybe not so crazy), I don't think Time is linear. We can probably incarnate into any time period of our agreed choosing. I know this is getting a little wild on my part but-- how about another apart of the universe? Okay-- thoughts are delicious are they not?

Like [KD], I came to believe in reincarnation as a young adult-- and yes it was a foreign concept at first but one that has never left me since I stumbled upon it. Reincarnation answered a lot of unfairness questions. The fact that [KD] and I came to these subjects separately and apart, was just another indication to me that we came to this life in a sort-of unremembered agreement. The hows and whys of it all have evolved for me over time but not the essence. My first insight started with a book called "Life After Life" by Raymond Moody M.D. who studied near death experiences. It was that book that drove me to that small section of the library that I grew to know so well. It went on from there.

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**QUESTION 17****What is my purpose in life? How do I know I am on the right track? [AD2]**

[KD] At some point in our lives, don't we all ask these questions? The questions themselves are an acknowledgement by each of us who ask them that life is purposeful and we each want to discover what that unique purpose is. We seek to find our place, much like a puzzle piece that is necessary for the whole to be complete. There is often a great deal of pressure associated with these questions, particularly as we age. We have this sense that the clock is ticking as that great philosopher John Wayne reminded us, "Saddle up, we're burning daylight". We are driven by the notion that there is only so much time to get things done; – if only we knew what our purpose is. And to pose this question to GOD assumes that GOD knows that purpose, as we have all been told since childhood that we are all part of GOD's plan.

As I thought about my life's purpose, I also thought about the concept of GOD's plan; that he or she had a precise plan for each of us but it was up to each of us to somehow find out what that purpose is. This concept just didn't work for me on at least two levels. Firstly, if in conforming to our defined life purpose, we are all executing a hidden plan into which we all fit, with GOD as the puzzle master, what is the point of all this if everything is preordained, if the puzzle is already created and all the pieces cut? Is our purpose simply to play a given role? And if we are playing a role, why does it have to hurt? That just doesn't seem reasonable to me. If GOD gave us free will, which I believe he did, we are free not to be

that puzzle piece. Indeed, we are free to create our own puzzle. GOD's plan therefore has to be pretty flexible.

Secondly, for each of us to fit into GOD's pre-defined plan, we would have to become that piece of her puzzle knowingly or unknowingly with our free-will-directed life somehow operating within the boundaries of the plan. However, I needed only to look around and take notice of all the other people that I am sharing this experience with to know that this doesn't make sense to me either. Everybody seems to be living a different plan, which is just fine, except for the long line of people taking advantage of other people. Are these people living the plan? Are their victims living the plan; is their purpose in life to be victims? I don't think so. And if any one of us doesn't live the plan, does that mean the plan is broken? Again, I don't think so.

I have come to the belief that GOD's plan is painted in very broad strokes; he or she has given us all of creation with time and opportunity to explore it. The plan evolves as we do. Most of all, we've been given the potential, as creators ourselves, to define our own purposeful lives and learn from the experience. Our life purpose is not a static goal, but an evolving one. It changes with the tides of our decisions and experience.

Imperfectly, I have found a Zen perspective to be helpful, - to try and live in this moment and to enjoy what I am doing in this moment, whether it is doing dishes or running calculations. I realize too that it is me who gives my life meaning and purpose, especially in the difficult times. I believe our lives are characterized by potential – as we make decisions and accumulate experience, our potential evolves and the course of the river changes exposing even more potential. Moment by moment we build hours, days, and years of life experience – all of which forms the foundation for the next moment. I try to give meaning and purpose to the moments in my life and then let them loose into the wild. They will, I trust, coalesce into something interesting and I look forward to that discovery.

And since we are the creators of our own life's purpose, I imagine that these questions posed to GOD would elicit the response that we have received from so many throughout the centuries: "The answer is within."



[JH] One thought that seems relevant – life is a relay race, we're not in it alone, and the baton we're carrying is wisdom which we received from our elders and will (hopefully) pass on to the next generation. The beginning (birth) and the end (death) of our lap, which are pre-determined, are not as important as what we do along the way. The key is to nurture this baton (react to experiences - translating them into "enhanced" wisdom) and not to drop it while we have responsibility for carrying it – doing so well, is God's will, rather than simply reaching the pre-determined destination. Another aspect of this is to recognize that life is a team sport, whose ultimate rules are God's will, best determined by the discernment efforts of all teammates.



[LP] Very interesting question. In my humble opinion and taking from what little time I have walking my spiritual path, for me, the answer at this moment to "What is my purpose in life? How do I know I am on the right track?" follows:

My purpose is to allow myself to be completely vulnerable and in this state of complete "emotional, spiritual and intellectual nakedness which evokes fear" know I am right where He intended me to be so I may learn to turn to Him, trust Him and understand the greatest meaning of Love that only He may offer. This state of vulnerability does not need to be dramatic or extreme (which of course is where the alcoholic tends to lead when in active addiction). Vulnerability can be as simple as "Am I...noticed, correct, sad....and this list goes on." So in the past I would turn to all kinds of things and people to answer these questions for me, which of course all I was looking for was self substantiation. So - while

this may seem a digression - it brings me to my simple answer that...for me...where I am today...my purpose is to be vulnerable on every front and to turn to God for the answer(s). And I know that I'm on the right track as when I do this, I simply feel peace. And that peace - perhaps serenity - is evidence to me that God loves me when I lean towards him with every one of my doubts and fears and insecurities - and find peace rather than answers - as ultimately I am simply seeking love. And to me, Love it God.

So I would think that would lead to the next question - which is "What am I doing with this purpose?"

And my thinking is to help guide others to learn this beautiful way of living in Faith. Pass it on 😊



[ER] I'm not sure that your Question 17 is really a question. But I do agree with your final conclusion that our answers are within.

Personally I believe, and have for a very long time, that we are here living on this planet at this time to help one another with any given potential capacity we have inherited. Some, if not most, of us do not reach our full potential for many various reasons beyond our control. There is no real way to know what our " full potential " is. " I could have been a contender", if only.

Just by being alive we create. Something. It could be good, it could be no so good. But I don't think it can be neutral. However, we may not be aware of the negative ripples our behaviors have on our global neighbors or our planet. Only by being informed can we get a clue. Even then what control do we have on negative impact globally?

In regards to why we have to suffer pain. If we are alive and know love, we will experience pain. Why? I don't know. It's the human condition. There is no answer. It just is, IF we know love.

Is it part of a plan? Maybe. I just know it sucks and there are too many missing pieces to this puzzle for my tiny mind to fathom. Maybe that is why I don't like puzzles???

Trying to gain the use of tools to manage stresses beyond my ability to understand is my only hope of surviving and even finding joy until the next challenge or test.

I admit, I do tire of learning how to use and tire of looking for new tools. Sometimes I wonder if those “tools” have even been conceived of yet. But what choice do I have?

I guess that’s where our personal evolution and creativity comes in. God help me and give me strength.

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## QUESTION 18

### Why is there abortion? [KD]

[KD] This topic has divided many societies in the last few decades. It is therefore important to seek GOD's perspective; - if only she would speak clearly on the subject. Until then, we are left to consider this ourselves.

It seems to me that at least two perspectives have to be reconciled, one secular and the other spiritual. Before I include commentary, I have to disclose that I am a man and as such, my opinion or point of view is secondary to that of any woman for reasons that I'll explain below.

For those of us who are parents, we well know that having and raising children requires sacrifice and hard work. It is not without its joys and rewards but I don't know many young parents who are not in a state of exhaustion nearly all the time. Sacrifice simply comes with the program.

When my wife and I first learned that we conceived our first child, we had decisions to make. We were young and ill prepared for the roles of parents; even today I'm not sure that most of us are really prepared. Yet we knew that our child conceived in love would be received in love and we decided to be what we were ill prepared to be; parents. It was a decision we would make again as we welcomed our four daughters into the world. As I have thought back on those times, I am mindful of the importance of the fact that we decided and no one else decided for us. I believe that each of us should decide and most important of all, a woman's choice should be primary.

The decision to become a parent requires a life-long commitment for both parents with all of the sacrifices that come with it, but it is the woman who must sacrifice the most and give her body to the nurturing of a child. For that reason, I believe the decision to have a child must first be hers because a sacrifice that is imposed by someone else's will is bitter and cold.

Many of us know of children who have been born into poverty, despair, violence, or disfunction and deeply wish that it could be otherwise. And yet, we have not yet found the will to make it otherwise. I do not place judgement on someone who has decided not to be a parent and I cannot and will not impose my will on someone else to do so.

The spiritual or religious arguments on the topic of abortion are heart wrenching and sometimes oddly contradictory. We argue about the sanctity of life until we rationalize the bombing, starving, or caging of each other. Life's sanctity seems to be flexible once a baby has passed from its mother's womb. I have thought about this dichotomy from time to time and wished that all pain and suffering would end, - by choice and that all children would be accepted and well cared for, - also by choice. But that is not the world I find myself in.

Many have stood in judgement of some who have sought an abortion and cited scriptural foundations in the process. Others also claim to speak for GOD on this issue but I believe that GOD is perfectly capable of speaking for herself if she so chooses.

It is my belief that we all choose to come here and experience life in this crucible where understanding and growth can evolve through facing challenges that exist here. As I have discussed before, I believe at the end of my life, I will return home – from whence I came. I believe this is true for all of us. None of us is lost to GOD.

There has been a great deal of debate about when 'life' begins; upon the first heartbeat or perhaps when our young bodies become viable. I confess to not knowing the answer to that question as it relates

to our present experience. Yet, I do believe that as beings, we were created long ago, once and forever, and our lives continue whether we are invited into a family here or not.



## QUESTION 19

### **Why is there homosexuality? [KD]**

[KD] Finally, an easy question. I am anxious to hear GOD's thoughts on the matter. I have thought about this question from time to time as the issue crept into our politics and public discourse.

So much of the discussion about homosexuality is tied to a moral judgement. After all, the core of the issue for some, is about sex which can be a delicate topic no matter how it is expressed. As a society, we have always been inhibited in discussing sex, - at least until the Kinsey studies were published in the 40's and 50's. I have always thought it strange that we are so inhibited in talking about the very act of procreation that is responsible for our existence and is fundamental to our species. Clearly, we have been designed as sexual creatures with bifurcated genders that require the union of two to make another. I don't know why that is so, - I'm sure GOD had choices in the matter. Perhaps it's not about sex at all, but about the love that exists in the union. And if alternative unions are similarly based in caring, wouldn't those also "make the world go 'round".

Same-sex pairing seems to upset some people for reasons that I don't fully understand. It seems that sexuality is conflated with morality, but in my view, these are entirely separate issues.

Not long ago, my daughter as a prospective GOD parent, had a conversation with a church administrator who was exploring her religious beliefs to vet her for the role. She mentioned to him that she took issue with the church's un-welcoming position regarding homosexuality. He responded with an analogy – "Wouldn't she try to save a friend from jumping off a bridge?" When I first heard her telling of this conversation, all I could do was shake my head in disbelief.

The above conversation emphasized that some believe homosexuality (indeed sexuality itself) is a choice and that the wrong choice would put someone in mortal danger. To the best of my knowledge, homosexuality is not a choice that someone makes – it is the reality of their existence in this life and part of who they are – but only a part. Just like the rest of us. All of us in all of our diversity, are of GOD. If people are joined in love, there really isn't a lot of our differences that matter.

My criterium for consideration is simply – Do people care for one another? How someone loves or who someone loves are not my business. I am however hopeful, that someone loves.



## QUESTION 20

### **Are there angels and if so, what is their purpose? [AD]**

[KD] Angels are a popular topic now and have been historically. Discussions of angels are almost universally associated with religious beliefs with references to them in both the Old Testament and New Testament as well as in other religious texts. They are defined in various dictionaries as “spiritual or celestial beings” who are “attendants or messengers of GOD.” I think these definitions fall a little short of the common beliefs about angels; as messengers to be sure, but also as defenders and guardians. There are also quite a lot of references to ‘fallen angels’ who are often up to no good and from which we needed to be defended.

To be clear, I have never met an angel – at least that I know of. My earliest concept of an angel is likely from religious art – angels are depicted everywhere it seems in illustrated versions of the Bible, stained glass windows in churches of every kind, statuary, and paintings. I didn’t give much thought to this imagery beyond noting their wings and frequently bare feet, but a brief tour through many of the churches in Italy confirmed their prominence in thoughts and expression.

They have also become major themes in movies and television programs for several decades. We annually celebrate when Clarence finally gets his wings in [It’s a Wonderful Life \(1946\)](#) and feel empathy for Dudley (Cary Grant) as the angel who answers a Bishop’s (David Niven) prayer and becomes entranced with his wife (Loretta Young) in [The Bishop’s Wife \(1947\)](#). More recently, [Angels in the Outfield, Michael](#), and [Touched by an Angel](#) have carried that fascination forward. All of the themes at

the heart of these stories suggest that angels are more than messengers. Where does this belief come from?

Historically, references to angels exist pretty far back in time and can be found in multiple religious traditions; Judaism, Islam, and Christianity among others. The Book of Enoch is said to include extensive references to angels including a detailed account of how some angels fell from GOD's grace, thus becoming known as Fallen Angels. Enoch was purported to be Noah's great grandfather and therefore was around before the Great Flood.

I was completely unaware that there is a defined area of study about angels (angelology) and that an extensive dictionary of angels exists. There is a hierarchy of angels, with archangels at the top of the heap. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are acknowledged in Catholicism as archangels. Depending on what source you refer to, there are seven archangels in all with a whole host of angels below them. There is also a general belief, based in part on rabbinical statements, that each of us is assigned a guardian angel to help us through life. I have always liked the thought of that possibility but, at the same time, had some difficulty with the concept. There seems to be some angels that are better at that job than others.

My difficulty lies in what the role of an angel is in our lives, because bad stuff still happens. It is nice to think of them as a safety net of sorts, but there are a lot of holes in it and they don't seem to be all that effective. If their role is limited to being messengers, I suppose that would make more sense, but they have the same restraint that GOD seems to have; an aversion to speaking openly and plainly. (See Question 7). In my life, I've decided not to tax any angel assigned to me with too much responsibility. I have to figure things out for myself as best I can. But if I should become aware of an angel, I would be grateful for a conversation.



[JH] I believe that angels can be other humans, who show up in our lives when we need help the most - with "messages" from God, resulting in what I'd call "miracles" (God's mercy and grace).

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## Excerpt from SNOW PICTURES

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These questions have been excerpted from the Novel SNOW PICTURES which were asked by the main character; Marcus.



Marcus had many questions that he asked of God. But God was typically silent, and he was left to consider them himself....

### **What is the point of us?**

This question and other variations have been asked for eons and Marcus, when he asked this as a teenager, didn't expect to discover any novel philosophical or religious insight to a question that had been pondered by much more capable minds. His interest was personal and the answer he sought only needed to serve him. Later in life, he thought this question could be asked more simply; Does life have a purpose?

His love of science as a kid and his training in science as an adult were intimately linked to his sense of wonder. He marveled at both man-made and natural creations but found nature to be far more complex and subtle. He embodied Einstein's belief that "Curiosity is more important than knowledge." He was both curious and humbled about what he did not yet understand, and he wondered still; "Where does this come from?", "Why are we driven by curiosity?" and "Why does this matter to us?"

As a biologist, he was in awe as he peered through a microscope and saw life teeming in a drop of pond water and was further amazed when he watched cells divide; life emerged before his eyes. And taken to the scale of fields of corn, vast expanses of forest and animals of every description, his amazement led him to ask “What is the purpose of life?”

Although fundamental to his training, Darwinism did not sufficiently answer the question for him. He did not see the linkage between the chemical reactions of the primordial soup and the animating force of life, - particularly one that leads to a curious and questioning mind. As important and illuminating as the discovery of DNA was, he remained unconvinced about DNA determinism; that our DNA determines who we are. He knew that who we are can be changed with a single thought.

To ask “Does life have purpose?” is essentially to ask, “Is there a God?”, since who would give life purpose other than God? Man has asked that question forever too. Marcus had already decided that question to his own satisfaction before that fateful swim in the Delaware River. He believed that God exists, but that she is all too silent. When Marcus considered what purpose she might have had in mind, he thought about the arc of history that got us to this place and time, man’s stumbling, bumbling, herky-jerky progression, the driving concept that came to mind was the same one he felt every day; curiosity. And since curiosity is our search for knowledge we don’t yet have, he thought this was as good an explanation as any other. The point of us may well be to learn, - everything.

**Why are some people born with “gifts,” while others are not?**

As a teenager, Marcus struggled with the inequities he observed and lived with in his life. The family he was born into was itself struggling; his father’s alcoholism was a stone that each dragged with them. He decided at an early age to find strength in that experience. It forced him to focus.

Yet as he looked out to the broader world, he realized that some inequities cannot be overcome with individual focus. Those that occur at birth have a different genesis, and this realization gave rise to his question about those conditions that exist at the very beginning of life.

In his search for understanding, there were at least two avenues he chose to consider: science and religious philosophy. He started with science. He summarized that science would suggest that the attributes we call “gifts” are the result of random interactions and variations in our genetic make-up, environmental conditioning or both. Therefore, the occurrence of prodigies such as Mozart, Newton, or Einstein is the result of a chaotic biochemical interplay with no particular guiding impulse; in other words, simply by chance.

Further, human capabilities would be distributed as illustrated by the bell curve with some above and others below the normal condition. Marcus found it depressing that the best of us, by some measure, would be the result of a random genetic nuance. Although he understood the logic, it felt hollow and didn’t address the substance of meaning. “But these prodigies do exist in the spectrum of humanity; is it possible that their very existence points to

a human potential that we could all attain some day – in other words, can we shift the curve?”, he asked.

The religious philosophy side of the question felt to him like wading through quicksand; without the logic of science, there was little firm ground on which to stand. But he dove in any way. He concluded that the use of the term “gift” to characterize the attribute of a prodigy had implications all its own. A gift is something bestowed on someone, and the use of the term implies that there is a gift giver. Since many of the attributes of prodigies are innate, the gift giver is assumed to be God; who else has the means to bestow an attribute at birth? Yet if this reasoning is adopted, other issues and questions arise.

If God determines who gets the prodigious gifts, does she also decide who gets the disabilities? Is there a limit to God’s determinations; does she select some things and let nature determine the rest? And if she does determine every aspect of every life, what then is the point of us? Are we then mere lumps of clay on God’s workbench? Marcus thought not.

He turned to his personal concept of God as a loving parent and asked what parent would bestow gifts on one child and disabilities on another? None that he knew of. Therefore, if God is not responsible for this inequity, who or what is? At this point, he thought that it would be easy to circle back to science and assign the cause to chaos, but he was nagged by another question; Is it possible that there is a purpose or intent for this inequity that he doesn’t yet grasp?

He asked himself that aside from the immediate contribution that a prodigy makes to society, what other purposes might the prodigy serve? The results of their work live on and

elevate understanding to be sure. The calculus of Newton and the relativity of Einstein are radical, thought-changing concepts that took a prodigy to conceive, but are now taught in high school. A prodigy's contribution from a human sense, may well be to help us all move along the path toward realizing greater human potential, but is that also their purpose?

And if prodigious 'gifts' are purpose driven, what of the opposite end of the spectrum, what purpose do disease and disability serve, particularly with children? If there is a purpose known only to God, clearly those afflicted are important individuals since much has been asked of them. Marcus thought of the kids in the children's hospital and what they taught him. Is that the point? Are we to learn courage from children and empathy from those with fewer "gifts"?

"Yes, we are," he concluded.

### **Why do healers die – can't they heal themselves?**

One thing that Marcus was aware of from his earliest readings about healers was that healers die too. No 1,000-year-old healers are walking about so, despite all of their capabilities to heal others, they cannot cheat death, as the saying goes. To Marcus, this is consistent with the accounts of healers who considered themselves to be conduits that direct energy to others; they don't hold onto it themselves. And, the recipients don't live forever either. It seems that this process is more about quality than quantity.

**Why are people angry and mean?**

As a boy, Marcus was witness to a lot of anger, particularly from his father. Even as a teenager, he tried to understand it. Marcus knew that some of the anger he saw in his father was expressed through his alcoholism, but he didn't think his addiction was the root. He had seen happy drunks and mean drunks and his father was the latter. He believed that anger was already there and became manifest more readily when he was drinking.

His struggle with this question, which he placed on God's list, caused him to look inside for the answer. When Marcus looked within himself, he saw his father, some good and some bad, and realized that the anger of his father existed in him too. He had long been focused on himself as a victim of other's meanness but failed to see it in himself. In the end, he did not know why his father was angry and concluded that he might never know, but he understood confronting that was a battle uniquely for his father. However, he discovered he could do something about his own anger and actively sought to control it. He would fail frequently but would build on the successes. As an adult, few would ever see Marcus angry.

In the end, he had answered his question in part; he did not know the source of anger and the meanness it spawns in others, but he did understand it in himself and learned that it can be set aside. People do not have to be angry or mean; in the end, it's a choice.

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

Questions so far considered only scratch the surface of our wondering. I think it is good and necessary to ask questions; at least I hope so because I have asked questions all of my life. I have never claimed to have found answers to all of my questions but I have spent a great deal of my life wondering.

I have noticed during the course of my life that we often hesitate to talk about such questions as these as if a question posed to GOD or about GOD was in some way taboo. It seems that we are reluctant to question authority and GOD is the ultimate authority. Perhaps our concern is that our questions might offend GOD or worse yet, expose our lack of faith in a belief we were taught to accept as given.

Questioning can be unsettling and erode the status quo, that place of comfort we all enjoy. So be it. It is how we learn.

Questions begin adventures and explorations. Our search to discover what is over the horizon begins with a question and is driven by curiosity, that desire to explore and seek the knowledge we don't yet have. And questions about our origins, purpose, and potential are at the very core of our search for identity and understanding of our place in the cosmos.

I have a sense that GOD delights in our questions just as I delighted in the questions from my children. As they matured, their questions grew deeper and reflected their insights into their world. In time, these questions and conversations with my children took place with all of us as adults. This is a good place to be. We have all been given the gift of intellect. It is my belief that in our curious pursuits for knowledge, we are expected to use it. And so, we have collected Questions for GOD, respectfully submitted.