

Getting to What You Want

© Debbie Lacy, 2008

“The only questions that really matter are the ones you ask yourself.” –Ursula LeGuin

Asking yourself a question like “What do I want?” is a heart question. Heart questions are very different from the other questions we encounter in our daily lives, like “What preschool will be best for my child?” Or, “How can I rework my resume for this job?” Yet, we often try to solve heart questions with the same mental gymnastics we apply to all the other questions in life. We believe that if we think it through enough, the answer will come. However, heart questions require attention from *all* parts of us, not just the brain. And, rather than a puzzle to solve, heart questions are more like treasures to uncover. It’s about *allowing* rather than forcing.

So, how do you “allow” an answer?

Paving the Way for Answers

Slow down. Too often when we ask a question, we feel anxious because we immediately putting pressure on ourselves to find The Answer. For now, focus solely on the question. Imagine that it’s simply asking to be held, not to be solved or fixed in any way.

Give it voice. Take a deep breath and then ask yourself *out loud*, “What do I want?” Listen to the tone of your voice as you articulate the question. Is it strong? Hesitant? You may want to place a hand softly over your heart and again. What emotions are coming up? How does it feel to give voice to this heart-centered question?

Make room in your life. For anything new to come into your life, whether it’s a relationship, job, or the answer to an important question, you need space. The clearing can be both symbolic and literal. For example, cleaning out an area of clutter in your home is a concrete action, but it’s also a symbolic one; it shifts energy and can bring about changes in other parts of your life where you may be feeling stuck.

Another way to make room is to look at all the relationships in your life and see if some releasing is required. Perhaps you have a friendship that is more draining than rewarding. We can’t always completely “clear out” relationships, particularly if family is involved, but we can set firmer boundaries, which is another effective way to make room.

You may have the 21st century malady of being overscheduled and pulled in too many directions. Is there something you can let go of? Can you carve out some designated time for yourself?

One of the reasons that heart questions can seem overwhelming is because we aren’t in the habit of sitting with ourselves and being present. Heart questions can make us aware of how disconnected from ourselves we may have become. Making room for ourselves in our own lives is essential to uncovering the answers that lie within.

Make room in you. The stories we hold can create clutter as well. We have beliefs about everything that's ever happened to us, stories about why we are the way we are, and assumptions about our strengths and weaknesses. We are full of stories, some of which *aren't even true*; some we borrowed from the people who raised us; some we created to protect ourselves. Challenging and questioning our stories is a healthy exercise. Imagine the space that can be freed up inside if we discard just one old, worn-out, stifling story.

"In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted." – Bertrand Russell

Finish these sentences with the first thing that comes to mind. You may surface some stories that could be blocking your ability to connect with what you truly want.

People who ask for what they want....

When I ask for what I want...

If I were to get what I want...

Naming the stories is the first step to taming them. Transforming them takes work, but it can be done.

Stay present. If the question "What do I want?" seems too big, ask yourself, "What would feel good *right now*? Knowing what you need *in the moment* is a skill you can develop, and it will help you with the bigger questions later.

Listen. One way to stay present is to listen deeply. Once you've cleared away some clutter, it's easier to hear your own thoughts. Messages come to us constantly, and from many different sources – our thoughts, emotions, physical bodies, other people, synchronistic events, and our spiritual selves. Learning to tune into these messages is vital for your health and well-being.

"To listen is to continually give up all expectation and to give our attention, completely and freshly, to what is before us, not really knowing what we will hear or what that will mean. In the practice of our days, to listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear." – Mark Nepo

Respond. When we ignore the messages from our body and spirit, it's a form of neglect; we deprive ourselves of much needed care and nourishment. Commit to honoring your needs. You may be thinking, "Easier said than done!" But, I gently challenge you; Is it truly "easier" to neglect yourself than to make time to respond to your needs? When you feel depleted, how much can you get done in a day? How much care and attention can you offer those you love? Doesn't it all get much harder when you're undernourished?

You have an inner wisdom about what you need and the best responses to your challenges. You can tap into this wisdom by consciously communicating with that part of yourself. Allow a few minutes before you get out of bed, or while you're in the shower, to connect in with yourself. Take some deep breaths and ask:

- What do I need today?
- What's one thing I can do to nurture myself today?

“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.” – The Buddha

Welcome what comes. You've asked the question and paved the way. Now welcome your heart's desire in whatever form it comes. Like a beloved guest, warmly invite it in...chat, break bread. See what your heart's desire has to say. In the beginning, it may be a whisper, but if you keep tending to yourself with patience and compassion, the answers will unfold.

“Everything has a deep dream of itself and its fulfillment.” –Rachel Naomi Remen
