

Asking the Freeing Questions:

Coming Down to Simplicity

“Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free, tis a gift to *come down where we ought to be*” . . . so the famous Shaker song goes. For me, *coming down* is the task of growing into more simplicity. It’s not a matter of coming up with something wonderfully superfluous and new, but of centering down into a deeper sense of knowing what is essential and therefore to be truly chosen. To be simple of heart is to grow to know. It is not a knowing ahead of time. Therefore a good question can be a loyal friend. Like a slow snail it will carry its answer on its back, but it means dwelling with what scares us, what inspires us, what disgusts us and what forces us to make important choices for our lives.

I have had three ongoing questions that have helped me greatly. I consider them deep friends. I tuck one in my left pocket and one in my right pocket. The third is in my heart pocket. They are always there ready to help me out.

Whenever I am caught up in confusion, a disturbing reaction, a need to make sense of things, or perhaps having to make an important decision right away, I pause (those dots are a symbol of making inner space). The habit of pausing and making space has taken a long time to establish. I believe it can’t be skipped if we truly want simplicity. Then, having given myself space to feel and think, I take up the first question with more willingness to listen and to learn. I ask, *Is this mine?* I am asking if whatever I am deciding about belongs in my life, if I feel I have a responsibility for what is confronting me, and if I want or need to engage? I am waiting for a gut response, which is far different from a quick and perhaps thoughtless mental one.

The gut does not speak English, but it is wise beyond measure. It speaks in body talk. I have noticed that my lungs take a deeper breath when the answer is *yes*. I breathe shallowly when the answer is confusing and nebulous. I may even hold my breath a moment when the answer is *no*. If I notice warmth and excitement, I am inspired to say *yes*. If I feel a kind of tummy dread, I know it’s a signal that I don’t want to be part of what is being presented to me. My task here is actually obvious and simple. If the answer is *yes*, I know to take up the task with enthusiasm and willingness even if I sense things might get difficult along the way. But if a tummy dread shows up, I know not to believe habitual thoughts like *you ought to* or *you owe at least that*. I need to say *no*, or at the very least give myself time by saying, *I’ll think about it*. It has taken years to learn that my body never lies. It knows in a subconscious way and is very wise. That’s true for everyone.

The second question that I like a lot follows. *What is enough?* I am always astounded by how accurately my inner self knows what really is enough. Like many, I may not always pay attention to that knowing, but it is there nevertheless. Asking *what's enough* can be applied to the amount of food I put on my plate, how much I spend in a store, how much time and attention I give to others, how much sleep I need, how I pile up chores on my to do list for the day, etc. That question always seems to apply and be useful.

I know most of us have seen babies push away food when they've had enough and don't want more. It's instinctual. Even though we cover it over much of the time, we haven't lost that instinct. We've lost *coming down* to it. That is really a time problem. We don't let ourselves have enough time to hear and feel the truth. The truth is already within us. We need time to sift down through layers of habit and reactive choices to the essence of what is enough for us. Mostly I think it's a few simple things. It is for me. Moving towards those simple things and living them fully will make us free.

The third question helps me with perspective. I need help to get out of too much *me* and into much more *we*. To work with this I ask, *What would Love do?* Asking helps me linger in unknowing and the realization that I am not Spirit's only resource. That lingering may not feel simple, but it is far simpler to let an answer slowly come with awareness of others and the issues at hand than to jump in, convinced that I know and by haste and lack of humility inadvertently do harm. I love how the Shaker song says *to bow and to bend we won't be ashamed*. There has to be a lot of mindfulness (bowing) and a lot of bending (cooperation) to get to simplicity and freedom.

Asking, *What would Love do?* is a courtesy question which encompasses us as well others who are around us, and whatever is needed that can be done at the time.. Asking it, we are helped to *come down* to a larger and more inclusive answer. That answer will not be a black and white, either or one. But it will be inclusive and non-dualistic. The solutions will arise from *within* the situation. It's not easy to take the time to wait and slowly find what is right to do, but ultimately it will prove to bring about more simplicity and clarity.

Pausing in unknowing is tough on the ego. I know mine often sweats the process. The habit of pausing and asking is what has helped me the most. It has brought more simplicity into my life. *Is it mine?* answers whether I am to be engaged or not. *What's enough?* guides me in selecting how much to take in, how much effort and how much time to spend and still be in balance. Finally, *What would Love do?* suggest caring and mindful ways for me to go about whatever I choose to do.

Below are the words to the fine Shaker song that has been around a long time and is still completely relevant in our complex and troubled world.

Tis the gift to be simple
Tis the gift to be free,
Tis the gift to come down to
Where we ought to be.
And when we find ourselves
In the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley
Of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend
We won't be ashamed.
To turn, to turn will be our delight
Till by turning, turning
We come around right.

Coming down is to be truly grounded in the here and now as well as grounded in body-wisdom-knowing, grounded in care for our selves, each other, and our badly aching planet home. Asking the questions that help us come down into more simplicity and freedom is more vital now than ever. That's what turning and turning is all about. Taking the time to savor the words to this old and relevant song you will notice the word *gift*. We can dispose ourselves toward more conscious simplicity, but when we have *come down where we ought to be* we will know we didn't *do* it so much as that we were led, that is, we were drawn deeper into wholeness. Our egos can't get us there, but the wisdom in our truthful interiority will nudge us along until *we come around right*. That is a big gift to celebrate.

Coming down to where we feel free and where we ought to be is filled with grace for then we will have been loyal not only to our bodies, but also to our souls. That turns out to be a bigger loyalty for it inevitably leads to being in some inherent ways loyal to others and to our shared world.