

How do you live with
life-questions?

How do you find answers
and solutions?

What is your question
at this moment?

‘Living with your questions is often more important than having the answers.’

The credo at the start of this chapter might seem like a remarkable statement at first sight. After all, most people tend to think answers are more important than questions. When it comes to solving practical problems, this makes total sense.

However, when it comes to life itself, it is questions that set and keep people in motion. They are the engine for processes of personal development, while it is the answers that often stop the engine. When you have found the answer or the solution, you don't look any further - and the process stops. People who always have a solution at hand are usually not the most interesting people. They risk a stagnation of their development, whereas those who understand the art of living with questions have the continuous possibility of new discoveries, both about themselves and about the outer world.

As a child, we were full of questions. “How come that big horse fits into my little eye?”, four year olds asks their father. “Mummy, why is the sky blue?” asks another. The vague and abstract answers given by adults are one of the reasons why we quickly learn to stop asking genuine questions and turn into parroting adults.

Our own initial and original questions have therefore faded away. We are no longer aware that we have them. We are shocked when someone asks us what questions are on our mind. We don’t have any! And if we do, we call them ‘problems’. We then want to get rid of them as soon as possible because it feels unbearable to carry a problem that is unresolved.

The art of living with questions is about honouring the question. That is, to not push the question away, but to let it exist and not turn it into a problem that has to be solved quickly. Instead, make it the motive for searching, taking initiatives and making discoveries. This art can be learned.

Breaking the natural continuation of life

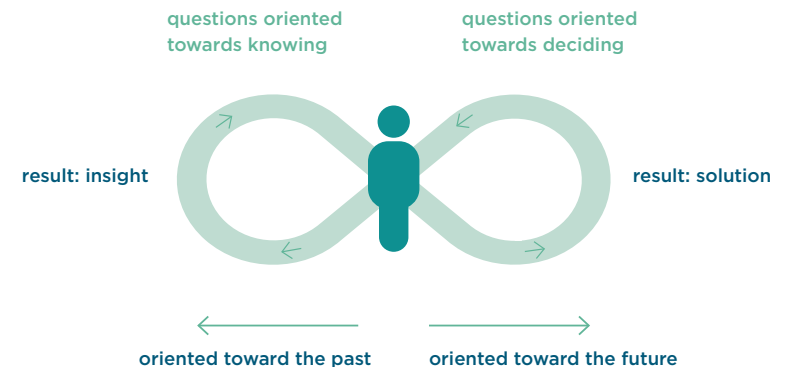
To have questions is characteristic for the human being. Unlike animals, we are able to take distance from ourselves and have the capacity to question ourselves and our surroundings.

Animals are at one with the world. An animal’s body and all of his instincts are attuned to it. In this interwovenness, there is no place for a consciousness that asks questions.

As human beings, we too take the world we live in for granted, at least to a certain extent. We go to work and return home, we read the newspaper, we have a cup of coffee, we chat

with the neighbour and go to sleep - without questioning any of it. Thank goodness! How frantic would our lives be if we did? Sometimes, however, due to an unexpected event, an inner mood or feeling materialises and this self-evident connection with everyday life is broken and we ask ourselves a question. What is this actually really about? Do I want to continue as I have been doing for years?

Questions arise when the familiar in life gets disrupted, either by ourselves or by the world around us. Questions can sometimes make us feel unsettled to the extent that we cannot find sleep at night, or cannot shake the questions off by day. Once asked, you cannot ignore these essential questions. They are ‘at work’ inside you. Sooner or later, a genuine question governs a new development.



In biography work, the natural rhythm of life is paused. It is a resting point on your life path. You stop for a moment and ask yourself a question.

The deepest questions that have occupied people for thousands of years remain unchanged: 'Who am I?', 'What am I doing here?', 'What do I want with my life?'.

Connecting the question with yourself

A lot of the questions you hear in everyday life are questions that are being asked for the sake of asking. They might be interesting, clever or polite questions, also questions that shake someone in their beliefs, and so on. They may be useful in certain situations, but they are of no importance in starting and continuously supporting a process of personal development. This needs questions that are more deeply rooted. Questions that are genuinely personal and they have their origin rooted in our emotional life.

This begins when something in our emotional life gets provoked and then gives a sign, breaking up the ordinary, normal way of life. The balance between our inner world (where our opinions, thoughts, values, norms and intentions live) and the outer world is disturbed. The feeling that this brings, can be a vague distress or yearning, an oppressing fear, or any of the variations in between.

The theory of Dynamic Judgement-Formation, developed by Lex Bos, points out that this emotional sign can be taken in two different directions. On the one hand, it can be a feeling of wonder or amazement about what 'is' or exists. This feeling leads to questions that have 'knowing' or 'gaining insight' as a

purpose. For example: 'why do I repeatedly stay in a relationship even though I know it is a failure?'. On the other hand, it can also be a feeling of oppression. This leads to questions about the future, such as: 'What am I going to do next, now that my employer no longer needs me?' These questions lean more toward a choice or a decision and much less toward an insight.

Within a biographical inquiry, we work with both types of questions. Most people who start this kind of self-examination are focused on the future and have questions about a decision. Yet, in order to make the right choices, insight is required as well: insight into who you are, what is part of you, what you are capable of, and so on. This direction of questioning, which Lex Bos called the 'path of knowing', is part of it too. At the root of every question lies a feeling and this feeling needs to be put into words. This can be a difficult task as you have to translate something deeply personal into common words and concepts. This creates a tension: on the one hand, you can get too stuck in your feelings, blocking you from being able to formulate a clear question; on the other hand, you can detach yourself too much from your original feeling and turn the question into one that is too general or too abstract. The aim is to formulate the question in such a way that it is as clear as possible so you can work with it and maintaining the connection to the original feeling from which the question arose. In order to achieve this balance, you often need a sparring partner to help you articulate your question. This is someone who listens and mirrors what they hear in your words. It is hardly ever possible to get to the right question

straight away. And what is 'right' in this respect? The question is always preliminary. It often changes as the process of the inquiry continues. Or perhaps you discover another question behind the initial question, which may be more essential for you. In any case, the initial question should be clear enough to allow you to work with it.

In working with your biography, the initial question gives you guidance. The biographical material of your life is endless. You can easily lose your way in it because you can always see new and interesting aspects and connections. Your question keeps you on track. It gives you a compass with which you can investigate your life path. It also works like a magnet that attracts information that is relevant to your question.

Connecting the question with specific situations

A question arises, initially, in our inner world. Even when it is formulated clearly - for example: 'Why is it that a few years into every new job I start, I end up in a conflict with my boss?' - it is still, more or less, about an isolated experience within our own soul. Therefore, to be able to work with the question, it is important that the question has a connection with the outer world, that is, within specific situations in which this question comes up. There are two ways of doing this, which arise spontaneously in your daily life. The first is, you link the question to concrete situations from the past. This involves bringing to mind one or more situations from the past in which the question came up. You describe these situations in images, so that a visual/film picture is created. Then, secondly, you connect the question to a conception of the future. You

imagine a future situation that will happen if you do not take action, and instead, allow a 'come what may' feeling or attitude. In other words, you leave it entirely to your surroundings as to what will happen. The resulting picture needs to be as specific and as visually detailed as possible.

In both descriptions, you move from the inner world to the outer world. As these descriptions have a visual character, another person can envisage the situation and tell you what touches them.

It is not always easy to make this transition from inside world to outside world. Perhaps you have locked yourself up in your inner world with your question, due to emotions associated with your experiences. Relating your question to specific situations can also evoke inner resistance, as it inevitably means a distancing from yourself, being objective, looking at the situation through someone else's eyes. Expressing your feelings is sometimes easier. You may have to do that first and that might bring you a clearer view of the facts, circumstances and actions that your question is about.

Your friends, your partner or a biography practitioner can help you in the process of describing a specific situation by asking detailed questions. When they also share what touches them in the described situation, they can shed a surprising light on your question. This enables a first shift in the question. By connecting the question to specific situations in the past, you get a better view on what in essence is involved. And by connecting it to a representation of the future, the willingness to work with it can be strengthened.



“I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language.

Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything.

Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”

Rainer Maria Rilke - Letters To A Young Poet