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Why Asking Questions Is Important for Spiritual Advancement

By Andrew McCrorry

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My name is Andrew McCrorry. I was raised in Oregon Ohio. I am twenty one years old and plan to major in business and minor in psychology at BGSU. My essay's purpose is to emphasize the importance of asking the question "Why?," and how this could be beneficial to oneself. If given more time, I would have conducted research on how people form their beliefs. Data would be received by asking individuals what religion they claim and also what religion their parents claim. Then I'd analyze the feedback and see if the two religions correlate. If so, eventually I would test other societal beliefs correlating to their parents' beliefs. My hope is that this paper inspires others to open their minds, to do their own research, and most importantly to think independently.

For some people, asking a question may be a difficult thing to do. Whether it's because they think their question lacks quality or they're afraid to speak in front of others. But asking questions is a very important way to discover new answers. In Warren Berger's book *A More Beautiful Question*, he explains that children through the ages 2-5 ask roughly 40,000 questions, and as we go through schooling and into adulthood, the number of questions we ask drops significantly. Why is this? I believe as a society we have put too much emphasis on the importance of having the answer and lack of focus on how we find these answers as well as what questions we need to ask to find better answers. It is very easy in today's age to find answers. With the use of computers and cell phones, we can find almost every answer to any question with little to no knowledge on the subject. This is why critical thinking and knowing how to pose meaningful questions is becoming more important than ever before. Knowing how to ask the right questions is more important than knowing the answers, so we can form our own beliefs and opinions and even problem-solving skills, instead of unthinkingly inheriting them from others. This is something our education system struggles with. Even in elementary school asking questions is often frowned upon. Teachers many times don't allow students to ask questions due to a strict time schedule or to keep the class structured. Growing up in a Catholic family, I attended a Catholic school where we were taught all about God, Jesus and all the other Biblical stories. After hearing a story of a man named Noah building a boat and getting two of every animal on it before God flooded the earth due to sin, amongst other incredible stories, I naturally had many questions. I remember asking my teacher: "How did Noah feed all those animals and how did he get animals from all over the world to get onto his boat?" Of course, my teacher answered by telling me God works in mysterious ways and to never question Him or the Bible. How can teachers expect children to be willing to dedicate their lives to God and the Church with this closed-minded style of teaching? Children cannot properly learn or form their own beliefs if they feel they can't ask questions or that their questions aren't being taken seriously. Asking questions isn't only important for children; even CEO's are researching and learning how asking the right questions can be extremely beneficial to their business. Studies have shown CEO's that are focused on asking more questions are becoming more successful than ones that are not because they get a better understanding of where their problems come from and how to solve these problems. Asking questions is greatly beneficial to anyone's career, but I will be

focusing on how asking questions can help people through their spiritual advancement to become a more open-minded and independent thinker as well as a happier person.

Some of the greatest unanswered questions known to humankind are: where do we come from, and what is our purpose here on earth? While there are many theories to these questions, no one truly knows the answers. The various religions all around the world all have different beliefs, and it is possible that none of them individually truly depict why and how we are all here. Back in the time of the Neanderthals, there was no such thing as religion, and humans' thought process were very similar to animals' and mainly focused on survival. Almost all religions have different ideas on how and why over the Earth's millions of years of existence, humans have evolved at such a higher rate than all other living things on the planet, but again no one knows the truth. Many people are afraid of not knowing the answers, and religion easily can rid people of the fear of the unknown, which may not be all that great of a thing. Religions have caused many problems over the course of history from isolating people into religious tribes, war, to even keeping people with certain religious beliefs from entering a country, as many fear may be happening in the United States or elsewhere in the world. We need to understand that we need to be more open minded to other people's beliefs. Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic priest, who was later recognized as a saint, once said, "Beware of the person of one book" (qtd. in Wesley). This quote means to beware of people who only listen to one type of teaching and dismiss all others. Just because we have our own certain beliefs, we cannot discredit anyone else's out of hand. How can we continue to grow as a species while we continue to fight and kill over a topic that nobody knows the answers to--especially when most religions teach of doing good and being a loving, caring person? This question bothered me, so I began to ask friends, family, and even some co-workers about their religious beliefs and how they adopted them. I was shocked to find that almost every person I had asked claimed to follow their religion due to their parents' beliefs or because that is the religion they were raised to believe in. These responses may be a result of the shortage of questioning or the lack of asking why. When people decide to stop questioning things, they are taking other people's thoughts as truth and choosing to abandon their ability to think for themselves. Sometimes it is much easier or even more comforting to inherit other people's beliefs and ideas instead of taking the time and thought to come up with our own. Children are being taught that their religion is as true as the math and biology they learn. Or in other words, they are taught their religion as truth instead of a belief, or a fact, not faith. With this type of thinking, it is no wonder why religions are still dividing the world we live in today.

I realize that not all people want to question their most deeply held religious beliefs. Even atheists or secular humanists may not want to question why it is they choose to believe what they believe or don't believe. We all have our limits. So, if another seeker is happy with their "belief" or "non-belief," to that I say: "Good for them!" But my belief, no, my argument at this point in my spiritual journey, is that questioning and curiosity, accompanied by careful research is crucial and that being a person of "one book," as Aquinas warned, may result in a life, perhaps, not worth living.

I personally do not identify myself with a specific religion. I once had a friend question me, "If you're not religious, how can you form your beliefs, or discover the way we should be living our lives as humans"? In response, I said you do not have to be a part of a formal religion to have core beliefs or to even believe in a God. At least, that's where I am at in this point of my spiritual journey. Another interesting and relevant quote by Aquinas is "Clearly the person who accepts the church as an infallible guide will believe whatever the church teaches" (qtd. in

Wesley). Aquinas is saying that some followers of the Church will believe whatever the Church tells them to believe, whether it be the truth or not. Even back in the 1200's, Aquinas was aware of the inability for some people to think independently. In "The Difference Between Spirituality and Religion," an award-winning author and speaker on all things spiritual, Rabbi Rami Shapiro explains that religion is about belonging, community, shared values, shared rituals, and mutual support. Spirituality is about living life without a net, forever surrendered to reality and meeting each moment with curiosity, wonder, gratitude, justice, humility, and love. Some people take in what a specific religion teaches and decides to belong to that religion, while others simply take what they learn from all religions and teachings and form their own beliefs. Being spiritual helps keep our mind open to any teachings or techniques that produce compassion and love throughout the world instead of focusing on religious claims, rituals, and arguments about the afterlife. Shapiro also uses sports as an analogy to religion. Shapiro says that in a way religion is a lot like sports. Most sports are very similar with the objective of getting a ball to a certain goal, whether its basketball, football or hockey, but are all different from one another in their own way. Just like many religions have common core beliefs of being a kind, loving individual, all have their own differences. We as humans are too creative to limit ourselves to just one sport, as well as religion. In no way am I trying to imply that any religion or belief is right or wrong. I'm just stating that by asking questions and doing your own research, you may find answers that were originally ungraspable to you.

Independent thinking as well as questioning is becoming a very important life skill, not only for becoming more successful but more importantly for one's happiness. Of course, asking the question "why" is great for coming up with new ideas like making a prosthetic foot amongst other things, but it can also greatly benefit our everyday lives as well. Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, explains in "Compassion and the Individual" that he believes that the main purpose of life is to be happy. Gyatso goes on to say that from the moment of birth, every human being wants happiness, and no social conditioning, education or ideology can affect this. Therefore, it is imperative to find what will bring the greatest degree of happiness. After I read Warren Berger's book, and started asking myself "why?" it truly started to change my perspective on things. I began asking myself why I was constantly worried of other people's opinions of me as well as where I was headed in life, and why I was so focused on attaining money and other materialistic things. I realized that just like so many others have done with religion, I became a product of the environment I was surrounded by. My thoughts of success and happiness weren't my true ideas at all--they were the beliefs I inherited to fit in with society. Since my journey of questioning began, I have found that my true definition of success was not the amount of money I could attain but the amount of happiness I could take in and pass on to others.

In conclusion, it is important for people to respect others' ideologies and beliefs while maintaining and discovering their own. A famous quote by Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, written on a wall in the Education Building at the Bowling Green State University campus: "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it" supports this view. And asking ourselves "why?" and answering ourselves honestly can help us create our own spiritual path as well as find true happiness.

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