

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# The One Life We're Given with Mark Matousek and Mark Nepo

December 7, 2021



MM: Hello everyone and welcome to the One Life We're Given. I'm so glad that you could join us for this event with Mark Nepo and myself, before we begin, I just like to have a moment of silence to gather our energies, leave the outside world outside for the next hour. So, if you'd like to join me just whenever you are ready, either close your eyes or relaxed them, take a couple of deep breaths in and out through the nostrils. And we'll just sit for one minute together, please.

And after your next exhalation, gently open your eyes and into the room with soft focus. And let me introduce my cohost, Jay Koebele. How are you, Jay? Hello, Mark. Good to see you. And very glad to be here with everyone. Thank you.

So, before I introduce Mark, I'd just like to give you a sense of what the sequence is going to be like. Mark and I will talk for 35 or 40 minutes. Then I will give a short description of The Seekers Forum, so you have a sense of what my online community is all about. Then, we all have time for questions and answers. And for those of you who would like to stay on the call after the top of the hour, I'm going to give a 15- minute writing exercise to give you a taste of Writing to Awaken in what we do in The Seekers Forum. So, without any further ado...

Mark Nepo is a poet and philosopher. One of the most beloved teachers and storytellers in the world today. His number one, New York times bestseller, *The Book of Awakening* has sold more than 1 million copies and been translated into more than 20 languages. Mark has appeared several times with Oprah Winfrey on her SuperSoul Sunday program and been voted one of the most influential, spiritually influential living people by Watkins MIND BODY SPIRIT Magazine in 2016, among other awards. His more than 20 books, include, *The Book of Soul*, *Inside the Miracle*, *Seven Thousand Ways to Live*, *More Together Than Alone*, *The Endless Practice*, and *The One Life We're Given*, which is what we're going to be talking about tonight. All of Mark's work is dedicated to the journey of inner transformation and the life of relationship. Along with this prolific writing, he also offers courses in self-discovery, including one that's coming up on January the 29th called, *The Gift of Relationship: Helping Each Other Stay Awake*. It's going to be a terrific series. It's a three-part series. So, go to [MarkNepo.com](http://MarkNepo.com) for more information about that. I'm so happy that he could be with us. He's one of my favorite people to talk to.

MM: Welcome Mark Nepo.

MN: Well, Mark, it's wonderful to be with you. Thank you so much. It's great to be with you too.

MM: So, tonight we're going to be talking about how to live as spiritually awake people in the world. You know, particularly today with so much uncertainty and upheaval, people are asking themselves, how can they preserve a space of sacredness, a space of spiritual calm, and centeredness in the, in the midst of all of this turmoil, how to make use good use of the one life we're given as you put it in order to experience our liveliness. And I was wondering, would you mind reading that selection, that last paragraph on page 29? I think it's a great place for us to start.

MN: Sure, sure. Thanks so much for finding, locating that. Ever since my cancer journey, I've known that eternity is in each moment. I'm no longer looking ahead. I'm no longer looking for something better to happen in the future. Instead, I try to give my all to every blade of grass so I can stop being separate. From what I see in here, we're constantly drawn in the surface world to move through time. But experience when met with our authentic

innocence, asks us to enter a time when no longer separate from those around us. We experience a complete moment of compassion and those moments of complete compassion. They remove all our excuses, leaving the heart with a sensitivity that never leaves us. When one with what we see, hear, and feel we enter the secret kingdom of a liveliness that is only secret when we remain separate.

MM: So Beautiful. Thank you. Talk to talk to me about this, this secret place of a liveliness, you know, in your own life, how do you keep that place alive? How do you stay connected to that vital core?

MN: Well, I think that, you know, and this really speaks for all of us because no one is there all the time because we're human beings and very limited and finite. And so, the first thing for me is whatever it is that can help me stay present.

We all know the meditation traditions, but there are other things, whatever it might be, it might be our talking together. It might be listening to music. It might be putting my hands in the earth. It might be making dinner for someone who needs it. There, there are a thousand things, but what is in our personal practice of return.

So, when we're, when we are separate and, and that the paradox is that that secret kingdom really isn't secret. It's just when we fall down, it's hidden from us. And, and so how do we return? And that's the practice because I think, I think in our age today, we have whole pockets of us, of us. And I say 'us' because we are they another paradox we can drift into.

We have whole pockets of, of our tribe, of our worldwide TRIBE that are separate, that have lost the secret, hidden in the open. And you know, one, one of my shorter homes, it's only three lines. You know, it goes those who wake are the students, those who stay awake are the teachers how we take turns. Right?

MM: Right. So, let's talk about awakening in the getting of wisdom. You know, I did a book with Ram Dass after he had his stroke and he was, his arm was strapped to the arm of the wheelchair. He couldn't walk, he could barely speak, he couldn't do anything for himself. And he said something I've never forgotten.

He said, everything else can be taken away from you, but only wisdom remains only wisdom is the thing that grows in us. And I love the, the idea that, that everything is impermanent, but that sense of self that we can increase with wisdom, you say, or actually Ram Dass says, you may have expected that enlightenment would come like a zap, instantaneous and permanent. That is unlikely after the first aha. It can be thought of as the thinning of a layer of clouds. Can you talk about your experience of awakening and the moving back and forth between that state and human being?

MN: I'm glad you bring up Ram Dass because he is such an inspiration, a just as remarkable about his fidelity to authenticity. And I think that's, that's key to staying awake is inhabiting our authenticity for me, you know, in so much it could be anything. I think everyone gets the opportunity to be dropped into the depth of life. And often it is a life-threatening experience or something painful, but it doesn't have to be, it could be beauty or wonder, or being loved unconditionally for the first time.

You know, for me, many years ago, over 30, almost 35 years ago, it was almost dying from a rare form of lymphoma. And that changed everything for me because it dropped me below the world of pretense. It dropped

me into the ever present now. And two things happened there that ever since have been, I have been devoted to one is that my, my everything dropped from my head into my heart. And ever since then, my mind has served my heart and not the other way around. And the other is that, you know, I was raised Jewish. I have a great tie to the, the Jewish tradition, but ever since almost dying, I'm a student of all paths. And that has imbued all my work, all my inquiry, all my teaching, because I was so blessed to have people from every walk of life, offer me some kind of help. And so, when I woke up still here, even all these years later, I was not, and still am not wise enough to know what worked and what didn't. And I feel like I was challenged to believe in everything.

And so, you know, in me, it's the poet in me that is devoted to seeing, and it's the philosopher in me. That's devoted to that kernel of wisdom. You speak of, how do I make sense of what I see, but it's the cancer survivor in me that says we got to make use of it.

MM: So, let's just talk about adversity for a moment I've been through my own near-death experience. I know what that's like. I know how it feels to really be at the edge and have nowhere to turn, but toward wisdom for, for sustenance, when everything else feels like it's falling away, you say around adversity, the deeper, the trauma, the greater the need to remember the world outside of our wound in order to restore our sense of wonder.

So, talk about how people can welcome their adversity. You know, if particularly in this moment, how can they, if not welcome it with open arms, at least not resist it and understand it as a lever toward awakening.

MN: Well, I believe that we can't avoid, we don't have to look for it, but we can't avoid our adversity what's in the way is the way. And, you know, there's an old Roman saying that says the fates lead, those who are willing, those who are not they drag. And so, you know, if we don't, if we don't lean into what we're given, it will drag us and double our suffering. And so, I know that for me, paradoxically, the greatest power when powerless is to admit the truth, to admit the truth of what is, you know, often I don't want to admit that I don't want to admit that I'm sad because I already am. You know, I don't want, I don't want things to change. Well, they've already happened and it's just really me catching up.

And so, this is where being really we're being asked to apprentice in the art of acceptance, which is the doorway, the real doorway. And, and yes, that doesn't minimize the pain we go through. You know, when I was going through that cancer journey, I had, you know, a particularly horrible moment when my first chemo treatment was horribly botched and I was very sick just a few days after I had a rib removed from my back it, and I was in a holiday Inn, getting sick and scared and, you know, not knowing what was going to happen next. And, but I think not because of wisdom, but because I was exhausted and I was exhausted momentarily below my fear and worry, I started to realize that the sun was just coming up. It was late, late night, early, almost dawn. And all of a sudden, I didn't, I felt, I didn't think I felt, you know, someone nearby, well, babies being born somewhere nearby couples, making love for the first time. And, and that didn't, you know, often what we do is, well, if I can appreciate that then, well, what I'm going through and while that's nothing, no, it, all of it is true. All of it is true at the same time, I was terrified hurting, but my hurt and terror was not the whole world or the whole mystery. And so, you know, what I learned in that moment was, and I've kept learning from it is to be broken, is no reason to see all things have broken, sees all things as broken. And when, you know, when I'm afraid, I need the company of someone who knows what it's like to be afraid, just like you said, or you've had your own near-death experience. And immediately there's something we share, but when I'm afraid, I need everything.

That's rock solid, under fear to survive. When I'm broken, I need the company of those who understand what it is to be broken, but I need everything whole to heal. And so how do I resist the urge, which is very human to extrapolate and make my experience all of life. I'm afraid. So, they have pro the world's a fearful place I'm broken. Well, the world's a broken place. I'm confused. Well, this world's all crazy. Well, no, yes and no. Yes and no. And how do I let in everything? How do I be so thoroughly myself, that I let in everything that is not me.

MM: Beautiful. So, it's recognizing ourself in the other, the other in ourselves and resisting that, that impulse when we're afraid, or we're in pain to narrow our mind. And the mind narrows and narrows and narrows and that isolation is part of why we suffer.

MN: I think. Yeah. So, you know, I mean, it's really interesting if you look at like, the ocean is a great teacher in this, because you know, we see it from the surface and we see the waves, well, they're not separate from the water underneath it. You can't tell where a wave stops and the deep begins. And so that top six inches of the water, that's like our psychology, that's where our spirit meets the world. And that surface water is always disturbed because of weather. You can't get out of it. But if I go below, it's the depth, it's the ocean of being, remember, it's all one water. So, I can't remove myself from the world, but it, it writes, I still register the, all the disturbance on the surface, but it's held more gently. It's right sized. When I can touch into my being and the depth of all beings, if I stay on the surface, that narrowing that you're speaking of, wow. Then, then I'm like a pinball in a pinball machine. I'm just bouncing around trying not to fall into holes.

MM: Right, Right, right. Let's talk a little bit about the spiritual path. You said that your illness made you a student of all paths. Martin Buber said, "every journey has a secret destination of which the traveler is unaware," which I love a lot of seekers are unsure how to proceed toward a, a discipline that's going to lead them or a practice toward awakening. And a lot of folks feel drawn to a kind of a freelance path. A lot of people are looking for tradition. You say, bees are drawn to nectar. As animals are compelled to their migrations, as plants are drawn to grow toward any inch of light, we are drawn to what we need to learn. So, I wonder how does a person discern the path that's going to lead them toward what they need to learn?

MN: Well, I know for me, humbly, I would, I would say that that it's, it's wonderful and, and, and helpful to have an aim, to set things out, to try to practice holding it loosely because it's all devoured in the presence that opens wherever we are. And so, working for what I've wanted, no matter how noble as most of my life given way has been an apprenticeship for working with what I've been given. And so, you know, on the one hand, it's wonderful to follow a path that we think might lead us somewhere, holding loosely and knowing humbly in my heart. It really, I don't know where it's going to go. It'd probably go nowhere and just opened me up right here. And I think one of the greatest teachers, that's an image. The process is an image of our awakening path. And so, it's not. So, what I'm saying, it's not all well, therefore we don't do anything. We just sit around and meditate. No, but we don't make gods out of our goals. There they're steppingstones. They're kindling for as, as the Buber quote said for my destination, very close that we can't even foresee, but we, but all of it is used up in the illumination of what we already are.

So, the teacher here is just flowers. You know, just think about this, think of how flowers I will reflect on this a bit. And I am just stunned because they're so obvious to all of us. They start as a seed underground. The entire flower is already in coded is not awakened. If you will, it's not yet transformed in the seed. And the seed is

drawn to a force. It has never seen, heard, or have any sense of, because it's underground, that's light, it's already growing to light. What's light. It doesn't know what light is. And then it breaks ground, and it grows both inwardly and outwardly. And then finally the stems get strong enough, strong enough to hold its apparent beauty.

And then when a flower blossoms, what it's actually doing, it's turning inside out to reveal its inner beauty. It's turning inside out to reveal its inner beauty. And it does all of that without going anywhere. What, what a model, what a teaching. And of course, as human beings, I've got to go everywhere to land where I am and that's okay.

That's you know, it's not a mistake. It's not a wrong turn. I've got to read, I've got to try things. I've got to try four kinds of yoga that I hate until whatever it does, whatever it does to me to open another inch of the flower, that's already blooming within me that I'm not aware of.

MM: So, do you recommend not getting too attached to a single path?

MN: I recommend being wholehearted and holding nothing back in every path we try, while not being attached to thinking we know where it's going or what the benefit will be.

MM: So, it's completely committed and completely unattached?

MM: Yeah, because everything, you know, falls away or, you know, there's a great, let me share this story. It's a wonderful story of this. And it's the story of Japanese monk Tetsugen. Tetsugen, in the 16- hundreds in Japan, he, his calling his path that he felt so strongly, no one had translated the talks of Buddha into Japanese yet. He said, I'm doing it. That's my call. So, he had a friend who was a woodblock print artist and he said, let's you, you make beautiful woodblocks. I'll translate. We'll beg alms enough to print this in a beautiful way and we'll just do this. So, they started doing this while they worked on this, they worked on this for eight or nine years, eight or nine years. And then all of a sudden, there was a flood in Northwest Japan where he grew up, that was like Irma or Katrina. He gave all the money away and they went back to translating and doing the beautiful woodblocks and saving money - again, begging alms. Another nine or ten years go by and now there's a famine in another part of Japan, but Tetsugen's heart had been opened. He said, well, I didn't grow up with these people, what's the difference? And he gave all the money away. After 25 years, they finally published Buddhist talks in Japanese. It's beautiful edition. And today in Kyoto, there is an original copy enemy in the museum under glass. And the plaque reads, in his lifetime, Tetsugen published three versions of the holy text. Only one is visible.

MM: Beautiful, beautiful. So, he answered the needs. He answered the call.

MN: He worked with what he was given. He thought that his, his call is, was to translate Buddhist talks. Well, his real call was to inhabit who it is. Talk that was the real translation. Now he was, he was blessed that he got to do both, but often one is kindling for the other.

MM: And so, it's important to see life as the path.

MN: Yeah. Because otherwise we could say so, so let's say that Tetsugen, he didn't get to publish it. Well, he, if he hadn't stayed awake to his own transformation, he could have said, you know, that was nice. I did that, but I'm just a failure. I never did what I set out to do. It was an important thing. Boy I just messed up.

MM: Right. And, and he would have missed the whole opportunity.

MN: He would have missed the whole thing that he was transformed and taught, no, you want to translate? You're, the translation by your deeds.

MM: Right. I asked about the path and following a particular discipline because I know a lot of people who are in traditions where they stop asking questions, you know, there's so much taking in information. There's so much following of the teacher, there's so much sort of moving along a prescriptive path that they stop self-inquiry and without self-inquiry, there is no awakening. So, it's like the curiosity goes out of them in a certain kind of way, and obedience takes its place. You know?

MN: I love that the real and the real humbling thing, that wisdom is a resource, never a shortcut. Like, no matter how much we read, no matter how much we study, no matter what we do, nothing will prevent us from knowing pain and loss and wonder and beauty and confusion.

And this raises this for me, the difference between incarnation and progress. So, progress. So here here's a little parable quick, quick, quick to, to, to help us with enter this. So, there's an indigenous tribe after a long, many years of hardship and even being persecuted, they're up and they're moving, they're migrating, they're going to find a new place to live. They come upon this beautiful plateau on the edge of a mountain range. And that generation says, we're going to clear these trees so that our children, when they're born and when they wake, they will see and never lose the perspective of eternity. So, they do this and that's progress that the children didn't have to clear the trees.

We try to leave the next generation a little bit better than we found it. But incarnation is no one can open your eyes and see for you. Doesn't matter whether those trees were cleared or not. No one can look and see for you. No one can open your heart and love for you. No one can know suffering. So, incarnate incarnation is that every generation has the same beautiful, hard thresholds, archetypes journeys, steps, and we're all the same distance from it. And so, progress makes us think we're going up a mountain and the latest is at the top. You know? No, I, I believe more in incarnation than progress.

MM: Hmm. That's the horizontal, it's the horizontal path rather than the vertical.

MN: Yeah. And so today to offer that in the context of our time today, this is a very unique and difficult time, this pandemic time and the stridency and the polarization among all of us. And yet I would say every generation, this is our turn. These are our particular struggles. But you know, for our parents' generation, it was World War II.

You know, every generation has something to see, well, how are we going to show up? Are we going to show up, how are we going to recognize that we are each up each other one more time?

MM: Right. I like to say that gratitude is the antidote to self-pity. You know, when a lot of folks are feelings, very sorry for we're feeling sorry for ourselves, all the things that we've lost, all the limitations and, and things. In the book, you say that the word grace comes from the Latin, meaning thankful you say gratitude opens us to grace thankfulness lets in the energies of life that surround us. So can you talk a little bit about that dual motion of not denying anything, but also being grateful even for the hardships that we're given because we have the opportunity to be here in this extraordinary human incarnate.

MN: So, let me say in a very real way, when I'm going through something difficult, it's hard to be grateful for it, but functional faith, not faith in a doctrine or a saint or a sage or some principle. Faith in life, while I can't be thankful for it while I'm hurting, I know that I will be thankful for it when it stops hurting while it can't.

MM: Yeah. And can't, we also be thankful for life, even in the midst of pain, even if we're not thankful for the particular blow that we're getting for me, let me speak for myself. Even when I'm suffering, even when I'm going through hard times, there's a part of - me because I did almost die - there's a part of me that is grateful just to be here. It's a very bottom foundational gratitude. It transcends circumstances. And it's hard to explain to people. They think you're a little bit Pollyanna, but even when things are hard, I'm aware, particularly as a seeker, I'm aware, it's going to be useful. It's going to be, there's going to be fruit that comes from it. And there's a gratitude just to being here.

MN: Absolutely. I, I share that with you and it isn't, I mean, I understand how people, you know, it isn't Pollyanna. It's actually, you know, it's what I call mature romanticism. You know, I don't know if you know, the, the poet Czesław Miłosz, you know, now for folks who may be unaware of Polish poet, amazing man won the Nobel prize in 1952 spent most of his life teaching in America while he was born in Warsaw. He was 15 at the height of the Holocaust and of the devastation of Poland and Europe. And he had in his poetry, a searing truth, he would turn an no eye to no matter how difficult the details he needed to report. And yet, like those miners who have lamps on the front of their head, and he had an incandescent light of life that he couldn't help but shine even on those horrible details. So, everything was horribly beautiful. And, and the paradigm, everything, you know, I become a student as I get older and this notion that all things are true, all things aren't fair. They're not just when all things are true, and it's in that mystery that it keeps being a resource that keeps, you know, and I like to think like an example or another water image about what, what you were saying, Mark in gratitude even in difficulty is that, you know, be in a majestic how powerful see in the ocean that scoops up a raft and crashes it. Well, if you're on that raft, that's horrible. And it doesn't minimize the majesty of the sea.

MM: Yeah. Beautiful.

MN: All are true. Yeah. Both are true.

MM: It reminds me of something that Matthew Fox says. He says, we live in a beautiful universe, not a pretty one, actually Matthews are going to be our guests next month in The Seekers Forum. I'm really excited. I'm excited to say, yeah. So, in that few minutes we have left. I just like to talk about love because you are a lover, it comes through everything. You write everything. You talk about, you quote Baldwin in the book saying love, takes off the mask that we fear we cannot live without. And no, we cannot live within. So, talk to me about how love informs you as a poet, as a philosopher and as a seeker.

MN: Love is the, is the oxygen to the spirit's lungs. Love is, you know, it's, it's everything and in how, and not again, not as some pretty abstract notion, but as the means by which we stay authentic and connected to everything. And so, what makes, you know, when I, I look at anything long enough with my heart, it becomes my teacher. Anything. It could be a fly in the window. And until the, my heart, the love pulls me beyond the maps of my mind beyond w you know, I think it was Paul Valery, the French poet who said to truly see is to forget the name of what you're looking at. When you see, when you look at a tree until you drop the name, we've given it. And you say, my God, this thing is growing out of the earth. And so, love helps us recover the initial vision of Adam and Eve all over again

MM: Hmm. That's true in relationship to isn't it. And when, when we forget the other, when we forget that this person is their husband or your wife, or it's, you know, it's, it's Susan or it's David or and we see them in all of their strangeness and unlikeliness and mystery, it really does open the heart in a different kind of way. Oh yeah. And I think that this is part of, you know, one of the commitments to intimacy and, you know, my wife, Susan and I have been together going on almost 27, 28 years and, and, you know, I know her so well, I could finish her sentences and I don't of course, but more so, because more I say, who are you today? I know you believed A, B and C. Do you still see that the world that way? Because I think if we truly love each other, we want us to grow, not stay the same.

MM: Even if that growth means a relationship changing.

MN: Well, absolutely. Because again, the sense that when things change, if we, I feel like if we love each other, that love keeps us supple and flexible enough to keep the nest growing. When we don't love, or we love poorly, that narrowness you spoke of the mind starts to happen to the heart and then there's no room for the person to grow. Now we start to say, wait, wait, wait a minute. You were never like this. What's wrong with you? No, no, thank God. You're not like this surprise. Oh my God. I learned something new. I learned something, you know, and I I'm sure people who are with us and who are in LA, I've been in long relationships. I mean, there were times so often that I just, I get such joy of just watching my wife, Susan, when she doesn't know I'm watching right there once in a while, she'll catch me and she'll say, oh, what's the matter. Nothing. Absolutely. Everything's wonderful.

MM: Right. So, let's now turn just to, self-inquiry a bit, you talk about the Sufi tradition of self-inquiry, making an inventory of our actions, moods, behavior and thoughts at the end of every day. And that's very much what I do with Writing to Awaken is what we do in The Seekers Forum. Is that how you see your work as a poet and as a writer?

MN: Yeah. I mean, I think that this is the real work of self-awareness. And I mentioned earlier that this practice of return. So, for me, I mean maybe someone in history or today can be permanently arrived at some state of enlightenment. That's not been my experience, you know. Medieval monks said when they practice their faith by falling down and getting up, I love that. That's, that's more my experience. And, and so this always, I can be clear right now, we'll get finished here. I'll take the garbage out trip, you know, swear, forget everything we talked about and have to learn it all over again. And isn't that wonderful? What else would we do? But, to all that to say, this practice of return - so, this to me is the work of self-awareness. When I was a boy, my father he's now gone, but he was a master woodworker and he loved the sea and he, he built a 30 foot catch that I spent a lot of my youth on. And when I was a boy, I'm 7, 8, or 9. He put me on the tiller, the steering wheel to

follow the compass. And I think he knew I had, you know, focus and attention. And I learned at a very early age, even when you're on course, it never stands still. Even when you're on course, you're always a little to the left, a little to the right. I think this is a great metaphor for the work of self-awareness for this inventory every day where we have to love saying, oh, I was a little too enclosed. Oh, I gave myself away a little too much. Oh, I was a little, you know, like sand with my convictions. Oh, I was a little too stubborn today. And, and so that we're constantly course correcting and all of this to say, you know, it's the opposite of the mysticism. If it, you know, the way of course rolling the stone up the hill forever. But just imagine he was allowed to roll a ball of light up the hill forever and give it away to those. He met along the way. These, you have to love the process. You have to say, oh God. So today I fell down today, I'll get up today. I, you could lean on me. And today I leaned on you too much. And, without criticism, because this is another, I think, you know, judgment is a, is a virus all by itself in our world. And it was Thomas Aquinas who said, I love this insight, he said, the fairest branch on the tree of reason is discernment. The fairest fruit on the branch is reverence. Not analysis, not criticism, not judgment, not feedback. Reverence. Again, this sense that when we, when we look with our heart, when we hold nothing back when we give our all, the reward is reverence.

MM: Beautiful. Well, let's pause there for a moment. I could talk to you for hours and hours. So, now we're going to talk a little bit about The Seekers Forum. You mentioned in your book that Plato's Sacred Grove, which the word academy apparently comes from Sacred Grove. He used to say, I, you say, I love to sit with others around questions that can't be answered because they light our way.

And that really is what we do in The Seekers Forum. Jay, could you just pull up the first card, please? Here we go. The Seekers Forum is it's an ongoing life course and community that's focused on. Self-inquiry the art of asking ourselves penetrating questions of an existential nature as a path to a war awakened life. Each month, we give a monthly program that has topics, you know, related to spiritual growth, personal development, healing, creativity. It's all around this issue of knowing ourselves. That's the bottom line of all philosophy, as Socrates said, and this is the full quote we don't usually hear. "Know thyself for once we know ourselves, we need to learn to how to care for ourselves."

We may learn how to care for ourselves. And that's what self-knowledge does is it leads us to self-care. So, in The Seekers Forum, we are all about asking ourselves deep questions in an atmosphere of mutual support. It's a group that I started in 2013, just as an experiment, because I wanted a space where we could have these kinds of conversations like I'm having with, with Mark today within, in, on a regular basis, philosophical conversations. So, each month we have a live presentation where I give a talk and we have, you know, Q and A and conversations. There are areas of weekly guided writing session that I offer, which is really a powerful way to sustain an ongoing spiritual writing practice. There's a recommended resource, a video reflection. And each month, we have guest interviews, and we have fantastic people visit us. As I was saying, Matthew Fox is going to be here next month. This really is a group for people from all traditions, all backgrounds from Jews and Christians, to Muslims, to, and Buddhists Hindus. We have agnostics. We have atheists in the group. It's not about what you believe. It's about your commitment to asking questions and being curious. So, as you can see from some of these, a few of our recent interviews, there, there they're a heterogeneous group.

It's psychologists, scientists, sages, artists, and also on The Seekers Forum site for people who decide to join us, we have a lot of resources for folks to, to dive into. I think of it as a sanctuary or as Mark would call it a Sacred Grove, a place where we can come together for this kind of, for this kind of exploration together and, and

individually. So, there are a hundred self-inquiry programs on there. Now we have a large resource library of podcasts and videos and books, articles. There are recordings of all the guided writing sessions we've given, which are full of wonderful writing prompts as well as more than 50 of these guest interviews.

So, I wanted to invite you to join us if you would like to. There's a sliding scale. There's a small, monthly, contribution. There are no obligations, no rules. This is for people who are not interested in authority. Aren't interested in dogma. Aren't interested in being told what to do for busy people who have a lot in their lives, and they don't want more on their sort of to-do lists. So, it's a, it's an open, it's an, it's a Sacred Grove. It's a sanctuary for us to come together and we're going to be, if you would like to join us, we're going to be offering a free trial month if you up until I think it's the 15th of December, it's on The Seekers Forum site.

So, check us out and see, see if it appeals to you. If it does, it would really be wonderful to have you with us. So, Jay, why don't we open up the line and have some conversation?

JK: Thank you Both. That was wow. I, I can't wait for the recording myself, which as everyone on here, please know that the recording will be sent tomorrow. So, we would love to have your life questions, comments, thoughts. All that we ask is if you could raise your hand for those that are familiar with doing that, please go right ahead. And if you may not be kind of the easiest way to do that, depending on your device. And as we all love technology, the version of zoom you might be using, there's a display panel. And if you click participants, there's a little raised hand icon that you should see, or it may be under another tab called more as well. But even if you prefer to use the chat, please go ahead and leave your information in there. And we will go ahead and get started. Hi Ade. Let me go ahead and click unmute and you should be good to go. Thank you. And welcome.

Ade: Thank you, Jay. Hi, Mark. Good to see it too. Yes. I wondered whether you speak to bypassing spiritual bypassing, because as you were talking about gratitude, one of the things I noticed for myself is they are moments where something might be happening, where maybe I'm feeling activated or feeling sad. And I'm tempted to go into this space of being grateful. And at the same time, I feel I'm bypassing that emotion. And I wanted whether you could say, yeah, a few words around that. Thank you.

MM: Sure. Thank you. Ade I'll start. And then we can, we can go to Mark if you have something to add. What Mark was saying is that we can feel our pain, you know, have the experience and also have an underlying a foundation of gratitude for life itself. So, it's not about being grateful for the pain, you know, that can be, as you say, that can be a kind of a new age bypass. You know, I'm just going to go toward the light, forget about the darkness, forget about the shadow. And of course, that doesn't work. So, there is a way to live with both and that this is happening. It's painful, I'm in a small petty angry, hurt place. And that the ocean is still there. Now the wave is there as Mark was saying, but the ocean is also, that's not spiritual bypassing that's truth. That's the actuality of, of our experience. Mark, do you have anything to add to that?

MN: Yes. Thank you for that question. You know, so, so for me, I, I agree too with Mark, that it's grounding ourselves. When I go to the bottom of my authenticity, the fondant of my personality, not skip over it mentally, I then trip into the well of all personality. And so, I can, and one of the things I've learned as I've gotten older, it seems is that for, for every difficult thing and wonderful thing I go through, I feel more than one feeling at the same time. And it's more of a oneness. It's a depth oneness, it's a wholeness. So that, and at first it was very confusing, you know, but I can, I can be happy and sad at the same time. I can be clear and confused at the same

time. And it's as if all the feelings are like facets of a prism, and the deeper we go into the experience of life, we start to feel things so I can feel this hurts. This is terrible. And isn't life amazing. You know, I remember when, and then I'll pause here, but I have a dear, dear friend of mine when I was going through my cancer journey, someone I loved who was also a cancer person going through this, well, she finally passed away.

And I remember the day I had just seen her the day before, the day she passed away was a beautiful day and I did not want it to be beautiful. And the light was mercilessly beautiful. The light was my first teacher, that day of what we're talking about saying go where you need to go, but I will be here when you're done. And I will be here while you're feeling this too, if you care to open to it. And it took me years to understand what came to me in that moment.

MM: Thank you, Mark. Thank you, Ade.

JK: And we've got Donna who is up next. Thank you, Donna. And you should be good on your end.

Donna: Thank you for that discussion. And for having this forum, my question you were talking earlier about like, when you're going through the difficult time or the event that you know, you're not looking at it then with gratitude, or I forget the exact word you said, but you're not looking at it in the moment with that, like hindsight, I guess of, you know, that it's teaching you something. There are particular situations that I have that maybe I'm, I know I'm still going through them, but I don't ever see me getting to that point - the gratefulness for the situation. And I just didn't know if you had any advice on that.

MM: Well, I'll start. It's not about being grateful for the situation. It's about being grateful for what the situation can teach us.

Donna: Right. Right. I guess I'm, I don't even see that being...

MM: That that's a major shift for me, that was the primary shift from being a cynic, to being a seeker was recognizing that suffering wasn't for nothing. And when I got that, when I actually got that pain could be used for something, it completely changed my life. I had grown up in a very depressive household, a lot, a lot of violence, a lot of pain. And I thought that pain was monolithic and one-sided. And when I realized it is actually fuel, it doesn't mean that it feels good when you're going through it, but when you get that, it actually serves a sacred purpose in your own self-knowledge and on your path, it really does change the way you meet it. So, it doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, but it changes how you experience it when you realize it's not the end of the road. Okay.

Donna: Because that is what's happening. I mean, the situation is my 22-year-old daughter died and then less than two years later, my 17-year-old son died both very suddenly from a genetic issue that caused sudden cardiac arrest. So, I'm sorry. So, I do see the shift in my spirituality and awakening and seeking and all of that. I've just still having a very hard time.

MN: Well, Donna and I thank you for sharing that. And I'm so sorry for your loss and the, you know, we all know those losses are inexplicable and what you're opening up, which is where there is another session around grief, which so much grief is even more so during this pandemic. But, you know, I, I know from my own experience

with grief that there, and there's no timeline, but we're thrown in between worlds, the old world that you loved, so dearly is gone. And yet where's the new world? And, this is, you know, if we would never experience such loss, if we didn't love, and if we don't love, what's the point? And we all sooner or later find ourselves in between worlds, losing something dear and not knowing what's next. And you know, that is so real. And that is so hard. And at the same time, I just encourage you a step at a time, a day at a time, I always ask myself, it's kind of a barometer question, just in a daily way, when things seem complicated or difficult, I say is what's before me heartening or disheartening, is it life giving or life draining?

And even if it's like a difficult conversation, let's say, if it's heartening and life-giving, then I'm in, but if it's life-draining, what, what am I doing there? And I think in the midst of such grief to just kind of step a step at a time, just following what's heartening, what's not, what's, life-giving what's life draining.

Donna: Thank you. That's beautiful. Thank you. Both of you. You're welcome. Thank you.

JK: Thank you, Donna. Hi Lisa, I'm going to just share Pamela on chat. She asks, how is being a seeker like coming to consciousness? After 911, an article I read called it a crisis of consciousness.

MM: Being a seeker is all about coming into consciousness, becoming aware of the consciousness that we are and it's experiences like 911 or the pandemic that take us to the edge of the familiar that remind us, what's possible beyond that and that we're not limited by the, the forms that we have gotten attached to. And that's what consciousness is about. It's about moving beyond form. It's understanding that we have this body and this mind, but that we are much, much, much bigger. We're part of something much, much greater. And sometimes as Mark was saying earlier, we need to be cracked, open or knocked down or destroyed before we remember that, you know, before we get that consciousness is what we're here for. We're here for, for that. We're not here for the limited pleasures or the things that we have grown attached to or the outcomes that we've been hoping for. We're here to wake up to something larger than that. And that's, that's what 911 certainly did. And that's what the pandemic is doing for a lot of people. Would you agree with that, Mark?

MN: Yes, absolutely. Because I think, you know, there, there are infinite things that will crack us open and give us the aperture of consciousness. Our challenge always is to stay open and, you know, I experienced this, you know, during my cancer journey, I was never so awake. And then after I was blessed to still be here and everybody went back to work and I was alone in my living room in a bathrobe going, what the hell happened? Then the challenge was, how do I stay that awake without the emergency? How do we, you know, and this is the thing I remember a couple of weeks after 911, I was leading a retreat in New Hampshire for cancer patients, and there was a woman in a wheelchair who had been through her third surgery and she said, well, it's a terrible thing would happen, but now we all belong to the same club. And I knew what she meant. We had all been opened to the fact that life isn't a rehearsal. This is all very real and precious and amazing and difficult and messy and magnificent. And then how do we not, you know, because not because we're stupid, not because we're, we have flaws, but because, you know, a window by its nature, dirt covers it and you've got to clean the window. We forget, we get tripped up in the details and our journey is to always remember how precious it is to be here.

MM: Thank you, Mark. I think we have time for one more.

Lisa: This is more of a comment and it's not going to be long. It just sounds like it might be. I guess I wanted to just briefly mention about death. So, I served as a death doula. I will call it from one of my cats who I euthanized on Saturday morning, she was 18 and a half and she has attended every one of your zooms Mark. She sat right at the computer. She stares at the screen, fascinated with Jay's headphones. And I want to make a few comments about her death, which is for me, adaptive a pet is like, it's like the great unifier, anybody that has lost a pet you, I don't care who they voted for, what their beliefs are in life. It is the great unifier, and it doesn't often carry some of the weight of human deaths in terms of guilt and all that. It's so pure. And this cat slept next to my head for 18 and a half years. She's been at my side, she's a teeny, little thing and for me, the love was magnified a thousand times over because I was willing to let her go and to not let, not to make her carry any of my burdens of how I feel about her leaving.

And my second and last comment was, you know, clinically on Friday night, I could see Saturday needed to be the day, but I was waiting for a sign. And the sign she gave me was she was lying quietly next to me. And in my mind's eye, this painting I'm working on, came up and she chose a blue violet color for the landscape, which nobody would ever do. Okay. And it was her way of saying, I'm not going to be there when you finish the painting. And as your art advisor, I want to give you this advice. So, I think I also connected with her afterlife, which is this, her beloved cat, Rocky who died when she was just four and a half. So, heartbreaking, yes. But a beautiful example of how death, when it is completely in the heart. It is extraordinary. It was what I call a good death. I did not let the vet talk me onto that rollercoaster. You know, when you start trying this test and this treatment, I just said, she chose the color last night and she is ready and she needed the blanket after the vet put the cat catheter in, she was ready and it was, it was beautiful, but no less heartbreaking. So just a few words about the death of a beloved animal.

MM: Thank you, Lisa. Thank you. And it sounds like it was in spite of the loss. It was actually a heartwarming experience. Thank you so much. Thank you. Can we do one more Mark. Do you have time for one more Mark?

JK: Vicky. You should be on and thank you.

Vicky: Oh, I'm glad I get to ask my question. Thank you. Both Marks for such a, a deep conversation that I really needed to hear, and I hope that there'll be a recording of it. This fall. I was hit by a car while crossing in a, in a crosswalk and it just out of the blue and of course, and we've heard other experiences of loss and, and others here. So, I know that I'm not the only one. One moment of clarity I had as they were loading me into the ambulance was this patch of blue sky. And I, knowing that I just needed to surrender to it in that moment. And I pretty serious injuries to the left side of my body, but no life-threatening so something to be grateful for, but this sense of having parts of me stripped away all of the outer roles and knowing that surrender, isn't just a one-time thing. It keeps happening over and over again. So, here's my question. How do I keep surrendering? While, at the same time, holding hope for the future, whatever that might be?

MM: Can you answer that, Mark?

MN: Yeah. Well, I can speak to it. Never any answers? Well, thank you Vicky so much. I think when I think of surrender, it's not surrendering a future, but it's surrendering the expectations and the judgements and assumptions that we accrued just by being human so that we can live without intent and without conclusion, you know. We all know that the heart can have plaque that clogs up the arteries. Well, assumptions and

conclusions are the plaque of the mind. And we have to clear them out regularly so that we remember, we don't know where we're going. We don't know how we got here. And isn't this amazing. And so, surrender is more like shedding clothes than shedding a future.

MM: Thank you. Thank you, Mark. And thank you, Vicky. And so, Mark, I'm going to let you go. I want to be respectful of your time. I so appreciate your joining us. It's wonderful. I love, I feel like we're having this ongoing conversation year after year.

MN: Thank you so much and many blessings to everybody. Thank you so much. It's so great to be with you.