

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm forty-eight years old and over the past several years I've become much more interested in metaphysical questions like: "What is the meaning of life?" and "Who is God?" I feel a need to reflect on these and similar questions, I don't know why I love to read spiritual books and websites that go into these deeper issues. The problem is that my husband and my good friends make fun of me and tell me I've become wacky and self-absorbed. How can I make them understand that these are important concerns?

-- Searching for Enlightenment

Dear Searching,

If you are wacky, you are certainly in good company. Every philosopher and all of the world's wisdom and spiritual traditions have concerned themselves with these kinds of questions.

The early Greek philosopher Socrates warned that, "The unexamined life is not worth living." People who don't spend much effort probing their own inner life may not agree with Socrates, but rest assured, you are not alone in your spiritual journey.

Asking these larger questions about life's meaning is a normal and natural part of living consciously, and the need to do so arises especially at midlife, when we are confronted with a different set of developmental challenges.

At midlife we are realizing our own mortality as we watch our bodies age and our parents, if they are still with us, move closer to their inevitable deaths. The fact that you are seriously reflecting on questions of meaning suggests that you have a rich inner life. That's a good thing.

Remember though that not everyone asks the same questions at the same time. Paracelsus, a sixteenth-century physician and alchemist, understood how people arrive at certain truths according to their own schedule when he said, "Anyone who imagines that all fruits ripen at the same time as the strawberries knows nothing about grapes."

So just think of yourself as a strawberry and your husband and close friends as grapes. No big deal. You're just on a different time schedule (That's assuming that these folks will eventually find their way to reflecting on these questions).

Just because they don't 'get it,' doesn't give your husband and friends the right to make fun of you. It sounds like they are behaving like young children, making fun of other kids who are different. How old are they anyway?

Even though their teasing may be uncomfortable, be thick-skinned. You don't need their support or approval to follow your own heart. There are lots of people asking these same kinds of questions so check out book discussion groups, worship

congregations, conferences, or Internet chat rooms where you can hook up with others who can understand and appreciate the questions you are asking.

You might be asking yourself why your husband and friends are wasting their valuable time making fun of you. People often unconsciously project their own shadows onto others who are doing things that they themselves are not. Perhaps they are envious that you are on an important journey that they have not yet started.

Find comfort in your studies and reflections and realize that it's not your job to make your husband or friends understand your quest. You can even tell them you don't appreciate their making fun and, perhaps, offer to share some of the things you've learned about yourself if they are seriously interested.

In the meantime, look at your own attitudes and behavior. Are you ignoring your husband and friends in order to devote more time to your metaphysical studies? Do you preach at them? Are you being pompous or arrogant or consider yourself to be more "enlightened" than they? (People who say they are enlightened, never are.) Are you ignoring your routine responsibilities – like cooking dinner or washing the car – because all your time is dedicated to pondering the larger questions about life? If the answers to any of those questions are "yes," then cut it out.

You are most likely reading and learning about how important it is to *live* our spiritual truths. Eastern traditions teach us to express our spiritual truths – our wisdom and compassion – on a daily basis, as we "chop wood, carry water."

In this column, I often come back to the importance of balance and "both/and" rather than "either/or" thinking. You can *both* ask these deep questions *and* play cards with your friends. You can *both* ponder the meaning of the universe *and* still enjoy a silly movie with your husband. You can dive deeply into the inner recesses of your own soul and at the same time cherish the minute particulars of your everyday life.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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