

Session 7: “Ask Me Anything Else” Crowdcast

Metaphysics and Mystery Online Course

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Charles Eisenstein: Hi everybody. Yeah, here we are for our final session of Metaphysics and Mystery. Yeah, it's been quite a journey. Quite a big effort on our parts. Maybe before I begin I'll just express my gratitude toward the team. Oh, hi everybody. Nice comments. Yeah. Toward gratitude for the team: Patsy who is basically running this Crowdcast in the background, Laurie who's been keeping all the moving parts functioning, Kyle and Lauren who have done -- who did a lot of the production. And other people -- Aaron did sound engineering, Patsy did a lot of the sound editing, Vicki and Grimm did transcripts of the sessions. It's really been a team effort and we have here a couple of our team members. So do you guys want to come up and say hi, Patsy and Lauren? Just come on screen and say hi to everybody.

Patsy: OK. Hi. Thank you.

C.E.: That was the wonderful Patsy.

Lauren: Hi everyone! So good to see you guys. I just got to meet one of you in person in Boulder the other night and it was really exciting. I hope I get to meet more of you.

C.E.: And we have Laurie only on as a voice. She'll be -- so she and Patsy will be in the background bringing you on. If you raise your hand -- raising your hand just basically means that you ask to do that in the chat box. But I'm going to set aside certain times for hand-raising and for participation because I have a whole bunch of questions I want to go through first. And I think it will be more efficient rather than bringing every questioner on. We're trying to do that because there are so many questions. Oh and by the way, all the votes got eliminated somehow. We had a technical difficulty. And anyway, the number of upvotes for each one got eliminated. So we're not going to do that whole part. I'm just going to go by the order as of yesterday. And I'll go through the questions and then after I've done a bunch of them then I'll say OK, anybody want to comment on the question that you submitted? And you know, I'll offer some time for interaction and then I'll do more questions, more interaction. And then we'll wrap it up. I'll probably offer some kind of -- I don't know what I'll offer at the end. Something. So let's see, anything else I need to let you know? Yeah. Again, a lot of wonderful, wonderful questions both on the Crowdcast and through the contact form and on Tribe, on that platform. There's been a lot of really interesting conversation. So maybe I will start with that.

Patsy: Excuse me Charles. I want to say that before we sign off the video, so when we go into the section of inviting you for questions I will send an invitation for you, so you will look at your screen and you need to accept the invitation before you get on screen.

C.E.: Oh, good. OK. Thanks for that.

Patsy: All of our team will all sign off from the video now and we'll just be a voice in the background. Thank you and have fun. Bye!

C.E.: Thanks Patsy. Yeah. So, if you guys could all mute in the background. I'm still hearing some background noise. Great. Thanks. Yeah. It's really actually been a joy to work with Patsy on this. Patsy and I were a long time ago married and had three children together and I'm really happy to be collaborating with her in this way, especially since our children are mostly grown up. So yeah, it's a good new expression of our love to work on this together.

OK, so I'm going to do a couple of the issues that came up for discussion on the Tribe forum. One of them -- these were collected by Lauren. So there's a question about allowing versus intervening on life, death and health. Do we allow the natural course of things, or intervene with modern technology and medicine when the natural course of things would otherwise lead to suffering and death? So for example, insulin for type 1 diabetes using modern medicine. If a home birth goes awry would it be better if we just allowed nature to do its thing even if that meant more of us suffering and dying? OK, so this gets to what's really an artificial distinction between -- or a distinction between human and natural or natural and technological that really breaks down if you examine it closely. In every way that human beings developed -- I mean if we accept that we are part of nature then every way that we've developed is itself natural. So we could look at technology as an extension of nature and then we can say OK, in what ways do our systems of technology violate ecological principles and how can we make them an extension of ecology rather than an exception to ecology, because it's the ways in which they are exceptional to ecology that make them unnatural in a robust sense of the word. So another way to look at it is that nature is itself evolving, becoming more and more of itself. So I don't think that we can write off any of these technologies as unnatural. Yeah, and then the question becomes how do we incorporate this technology into the growing ecosystem that comprises human beings and nature. All right. So I don't know, I hope that helps a little bit. Yeah, definitely, it's not "back to nature" and too bad for all the -- we've become technologically dependent in a lot of ways. So it's a matter of what's the next evolutionary step.

OK, so here's an interesting one about having lifelong recurring feelings of unreality or feeling like you're in something like The Matrix or the Truman Show. A group of us in the course have described it being so visceral that it's distressing. Some people have been diagnosed with DPDR, depersonalization/derealization disorder. And there is a funny description of it from, it looks like -- I'm actually going to read it, it's quite funny -- it looks like from some psychiatric diagnostic manual. "The core symptoms of depersonalization/derealization disorder is the subjective experience of unreality of one's self or detachment from one's surroundings. People who are diagnosed with depersonalization also experience an urge to question and think critically about the true nature of reality and existence. It results in significant distress." I don't know if that's parody or not. Like wow, how terrible to question the nature of reality and existence. Better not do that because then you'll be distressed. So I first came across this depersonalization or derealization as a thing when my son Jimi described it to me when he was a teenager, he was I think 14. So it's something that is spreading. I think that it is a symptom of

a world story and story of self that isn't compelling, that doesn't merit or draw our full participation. So we stand back a little bit from what we recognize as the drama of life, which has a role that we're invited to play. If the drama, or let's say as the drama transitions to something that does merit our enthusiastic wholehearted participation, then we will no longer hesitate to let go of ourselves, into full participation. It's like if you're a thespian, you know, if you're an actor. If the screenplay is compelling, if the character is compelling, if this is something that you want to be in, you're going to have a much easier time releasing yourself into the character and allowing yourself to be taken over by that character, than if you're, in the back of your mind you're like OK, this isn't the play I want to be in and this is the wrong play. So looking at all of life as a play. I think it's quite understandable that a lot of sensitive people, especially young people, are pulling back from it, not immersing in it and therefore experiencing DPDR.

OK. This is a somewhat related topic: pulling away from intimacy even though we crave it. One person said, "Intimacy can feel like staring into the light of the sun. And it's just too much." I'm sure most of you have had moments like that where the love is so intense you can hardly stand it and maybe you *can't* even stand it. You can't even stay there and so you pull back from that, you turn your gaze away. But still the impression of that experience is with you. And it gives us a hint of the world to come. Imagine what the world would be if we didn't have the conditioning to the darkness that prevents us from holding that light, holding our gaze in that light for very long. This is a matter of conditioning. Just like if you spend all of your life inside a cave and you experience even just a little bit of light it will be blinding to you and you won't be able to stand it. So we are becoming acclimatized to more and more light, more and more love. And as we do, and maybe this will take time, we'll be able to live in the reality, the world, the self that those moments of intense intimacy that we can hardly stand promise to us. Yeah. OK, I think that's enough for that.

You know, if everybody weren't even listening I could just be monologuing here; I wouldn't even know if anyone -- like that could be happening right now. So at least I'm speaking to myself because I need to hear these things too.

"Yearning to migrate into a new reality and to have transcendent experiences and even putting a tremendous effort but not feeling like anything is happening." Yeah. So these transcendent experiences aren't going to happen through efforts or through ambition. They come as gifts. Your efforts -- they're at least a prayer asking to be given these experiences but then what are you really wanting, when you want transcendence? Whatever is hearing the prayer might know better than you what you actually want. So I think that would be -- if this is your experience, I guess -- I don't know -- I guess I have this. I recognize this question. And what happens to me sometimes is when I give up the pursuit of transcendent experiences and make peace with the mundane, then I discover the transcendent within the mundane. And the feeling is like it was here all along. It wasn't outside of this world. So that's maybe something to carry with you. OK, so that's some of the stuff that was going on on Tribe. We also opened a Facebook group, just because a lot of people didn't -- I don't know, Tribe was an experiment. Facebook seems like, kind of inescapable. Anyway, I'm going to move on to the questions here.

Patsy: Excuse me, Charles.

C.E.: Yes.

Patsy: The questions, if you can answer it from the question box. I have moved the whole asked questions in full back to the question box. So you go to the question box and go from the top. That way I can time mark it for the audience.

C.E.: OK, let me see if I can find that. That's a good question. Here we are. OK. It did that. OK, so the first question is about "How do we effectively and gently integrate our shadow side. Is our shadow side of use in the new story? Or is it a construct or a narrative we make up to limit us from immersing ourselves fully in the new story and our full potential?" I mean I think that these shadow aspects, these wounds that we carry that generate what we call our shadow -- the path from where we are to the more beautiful world our hearts know as possible goes through that territory. It comes as a result of healing the wounds, healing the shadows. And that doesn't mean that we have to focus just on that. I think I might have spoken, I think it was on a podcast, of the push and the pull. Or the Chögyam Trungpa quote about the necessity for yes, holding the pain of the whole world in your heart but also never leaving your gaze, never taking your gaze off the Great Eastern Sun. We need to know that there is a there there, to know that we're going to a place and we have experiences that show us this place and that resonate with the enlightened, uplifted, ecstatic, joyful parts of ourselves that maybe even give us the energy to work on our shadows. If you have somebody in your life and you're thinking that they're just not working on their shadow and that they should work on their shadow, ask: are you providing them the fuel to work on their shadow? What is the fuel? The fuel isn't necessarily to point their attention, to call them out again and again and make sure that they don't be so joyful because they better pay attention to their shadow. It's to give them whatever you can provide of safety and the love, the security, the non-judgmental attention, so that they can do that hard work. And in that context, yeah, maybe there will be a time where you point their attention to something as the result of a subtle invitation on their part, and an understanding of a readiness to look at something. Because healing has its own pace and rhythm. And when we tune into that in partnership with another person we can easily be agents of that coming to light of the shadow. So I hope that's helpful.

I think I'll move on to: "Will you speak more on how to create and foster intimacy." Yeah. Lots of us grew up without a lot of intimacy, where showing a real emotion was embarrassing, or dangerous even. I was talking with my son today about that, actually. When I was his age 13,14 I had to do everything I could never to be seen to cry or even to exhibit any real emotion, and all the people around me were doing the same. Even to some extent in my family, but especially out in the world. So intimacy became an unfamiliar thing. And how do we regain that? I mean there are thousands, millions of people doing this kind of work. Rebuilding intimacy -- there's so many practices out there. One aspect would be intimacy with yourself. Self-acceptance. How can you be intimate if you do not accept yourself? How can you be intimate with another person if you do not accept them or if you hold a judgment about them and you're seeing not the true person but a projection of them? And so this might come down again to the wounds and the shadows that generate the judgments and projections. But yeah, there's a whole universe out

there of relearning intimacy and It's not my area of expertise but I just want to say it's super important for healing, not just on the personal level.

OK. Let's see, here's a question. Oh gosh, I should have been mentioning people's names here. The first one was Tracy, I remember. And the second one was -- let me just find that -- that was Jessica. OK. I'm just saying first names here. So -- no, that wasn't Jessica. The last one was Heather. Jessica was the one on parenting which had a lot of votes last time. Maybe I'll -- yeah, I'm going to skip to that one about parenting. "Can you share something about raising children in a story of Interbeing. Or raising children with an understanding of every act a prayer." You know, I think children learn from example a lot. So if we can address children with true respect and act ourselves from a new story -- and let me just mention, a new and ancient story. The idea that this story is new is actually itself part of the old story. But let's say "new" for a mass civilization. So to act from that place, not to shame, for example. Not to act from a place where your development and progress and improvement come through winning a struggle against yourself. And so I'm going to create conditions of struggle by shaming you. To not act from that place and to speak from a place of non-judgment, that is very powerful for the child. Anyway, I've been thinking about maybe doing a whole series on parenting. Not that I'm super expert on it but there are a few things that I've learned. You know one thing that people remark on and I can't -- I don't want to claim that I've been a perfect parent or even an above average parent. There are some very painful failures that I see when I look back on my parenting. But one thing that seems to have worked is my children are all very polite. And it's not because I ever told them to be polite. In fact I have a policy never to tell them to say please or thank you. Which is so contrary to common practice. You know, people think that children need to be taught to say please and thank you. Or to say I'm sorry when you hurt somebody. "Go say you're sorry!" But I think that what they learn through that is insincerity. Not to actually apologize but to demonstrate submissiveness. Often a demand for an apology is actually a demand that you be submissive. And it doesn't actually heal anything. It just establishes a power relationship. Genuine apology comes from a place of understanding how another person has suffered. So I like to try to connect those dots. And if Cary, my youngest son, if he hurts somebody or makes a kid feel bad, hurts somebody's feelings, I will as gently as possible confront him with that truth and then trust that that truth will do its work, that truth will do its work because I trust who he is, as I trust who all human beings are. So anyway this is a huge topic. I think that the general principle that I work with is: do not contribute to the war against the self. Do not create conditions for the war against the self in your children. So. And I don't know. Like, everything I said -- there could be times where you should tell them to say please or thank you or I'm sorry, but just consider what I said as a possibility.

OK, next question. From Jesse, it looks like, who has always been in touch with his gifts and passions but struggles with getting wrapped up in a sense of "must" and "need," almost a compulsion for accomplishment. "My guess is this has to do with wounding from infancy and childhood, trying to buy the love of an uncaring Other. What can I do to integrate this void in me so I can approach my callings without hidden agendas?" [long pause] I have a standard answer to the question like that but I'm looking for something that's more authentic in the moment.

Sense of “must” and “need,” compulsion for accomplishment. Yeah. There's two things there. There is the basic energy, the unstoppable yearning to express yourself as who you are supposed to be in this world, to serve the purpose for which you were born. And then that energy gets diverted sometimes. The system, the world story that we've grown up in always seeks to divert that energy onto something that perpetuates the status quo. That's how the status quo gets perpetuated. So it's the ways that it channels that, through socially and economically recognized accomplishment. Here are the things that count. And here are the things that don't count. So it hijacks that primal beautiful energy that just wants to serve life. And it might even offer substitutes. So I think just to be aware of where it's really coming from might be helpful. And to feel that purpose alive in you. Feel the purpose alive in you, of: I am here to serve life. To serve life's preservation, to serve its unfolding, its development, its evolution. This came up earlier in the course. The purpose of life is to become more alive. And yeah, OK.

I'm wondering here -- I'll do one more for now. Let's see. “What is your relationship to your students' lives transforming? Do you feel like you do it or that you have a hand in it? Do you feel that you merely succeed in directing people to something which was in front of them the whole time?” I mean, I just say the things that I say and people are drawn to them if that's what they need at the time. And also in a way I'm a mouthpiece that just gives voice to things that are arising in many many people. And so of course they resonate, but they're not really coming from me. They're just coming -- they're coming through me. They're an expression of collective consciousness. So yeah, I can't claim credit for the effect of those words.

Let's see here. Maybe let's bring some people on. We've gone through a few of these questions. If anyone would like -- so maybe either it was your question that you asked and you feel like there's really more to be said there, or it awoke a further questioning in you, then maybe raise your hand in the chat box. Or maybe I said something that really tweaked you or set you on fire in a good way or an angry way. Not that angry's not good. But you know, something that you responded really strongly to. Let's have one or two volunteers come up and break the monotony of just me. So you can volunteer if you want by going to the chat. I will not rush you, I will pause. In fact let's actually just all pause here. Part of me is like, oh my God, twenty something questions, I've got to get through them. Already I'm feeling like I should probably slow down. [long pause]

Patsy: Excuse me Charles.

C.E.: Yes.

Patsy: A participant posted a question asking you to answer the next question.

C.E.: OK. I will move on to the next questions. The order is different than the order we originally had. It's more confusing to me. Let's see. All right. Here's from Victoria. “As much as I'm aware of the universe as a conscious entity and want to believe in a new period of humanity -- my question: why would this new period start just now? Is time even relevant talking about

those deep mechanisms of the universe? Isn't it the same as it's always been? Some people are just more in touch with reality than others. Is there any evidence that the transformation is happening collectively and more intensely than at any other time?" Yeah. There's a paradox here. It seems like every age thinks that their time is special, that change has never happened so fast, that everything is going to change in our lifetimes. And generation after generation goes by and it's hard to say whether that is actually true. Maybe it's always true. And you know, it's just a different kind of change each time. But there are certain changes historically that we recognize were qualitatively different, such as the fall of the Roman Empire. Now probably the fall of the Roman Empire -- it took a long time. Probably in A.D. 200 when the empire was already degenerating, there were probably these raving lunatics in the streets of Rome saying, "Before long, in our lifetimes, the Germanic tribes are going to invade Italy and sack Rome and burn it to the ground." And people thought that that was ridiculous. Rome had always been here and always will be here and we're the most powerful nation on earth. And those raving street lunatics, like me -- they were wrong. Rome did not burn. But actually, eventually, they were right. There did come a time when the collapse that they were proclaiming actually did happen. So all to say that what we are seeing is hard to pinpoint in linear time. But unless you believe that infinite growth is possible on a finite planet, things *are* going to change fundamentally, qualitatively, sooner or later. And I'd say really what it is -- we're faced -- it's like an addict who is faced with a series of invitations to embark on a radically different way of living. Each invitation becomes stronger and stronger. The first invitation might be that his wife leaves him because he's abusive every time he gets drunk. The next invitation might be that he spends a night in jail because of something he did while he was drunk. The next invitation might be when he loses his house because he couldn't hold his job. The next invitation might be a severe health crisis because of his drinking. Each one of these for some person might be called hitting bottom. But for another person it is not hitting bottom. There's still a deeper bottom to go to. Our society is in a similar place. A series of worsening crisis moments is each an invitation to -- each of those is like a push into a different world, and each time we choose collectively: do we stay in the old, or do we let go of our addictive props and embark into a different reality? So this question, is our time special? There is no objective answer outside of ourselves. The answer to that question is, that depends on us. And really, specifically, that depends on you. It is not a random choice outside of ourselves. It doesn't depend -- let's see, how can I put this? It's another paradox that whether we are in the time of the Great Turning, as Joanna Macy calls it, depends not only on everybody's choices but it depends uniquely on *your* choice too, as if you are the most powerful person in the universe. And that's true for everybody.

So I would like to say that this *is* the time of the Great Turning, because we choose that it is the time of the Great Turning. The time when everything changes. And the question then is -- well, one question is how do we align ourselves with -- because earlier in the course, remember, a state of belief is a state of being; the story that we live in corresponds to an external reality and to an internal reality. A story is a layer of a much larger and deeper entity that includes our entire psychology, our entire state of being, and the state of the world too. So the question then is how do we align ourselves with the world that we want to birth, that we want to participate in, that we want as the future for our children and our grandchildren and the people who are going to be here in a thousand years or ten thousand years? Who are we called to be through believing and embracing that particular reality? And this is not just, you know, a spiritual bypass,

because who we are called to be has everything to do with how we choose and how we act and what we see in the world and what we devote our life energy to. The reason I frame it this way is to counter the despair that comes from “Well, what I do doesn't really matter because nobody else is doing it.”

That reminds me of another of the questions about the -- there's one that's yeah, two more down here. “My intense -- yeah, I've been struggling with a certain problem my whole life. It is my intense judgment of people. I can't seem to overcome it. They live lives that to my sensing are very monotonous and ugly and inform the world I have to live in, which fills me with frustration, frustration that borders on hatred. I despair over the ugliness of our built environment every day. How can I reframe my intense dislike of ugliness in the world and people into some kind of compassionate state of love or patience?” So yeah, so leading into this, you know the reason I skipped to this one is that there is -- and I'm well familiar with this myself, a feeling of victimhood at the attitudes, the ignorance, the ugliness, the violence, the closed-mindedness of all those people out there. So I ask then, I look at that feeling of helplessness, of victimhood, of martyrdom almost, of like this heroic lonely enlightened person who sees the truth and nobody else does. OK. Like that whole picture, it kind of feels good in a way. In a way it feels good to be the victim because it alleviates what otherwise is just raw pain. So what I would say is: underneath the hatred, underneath the judgment, underneath the contempt that's expressed in this piece, in this question, the frustration -- what's actually underneath those things? It is a raw pain that is not -- there's nothing wrong with it. I mean, it is painful to see what is happening on this earth. An open, sensitive person is going to feel pain. Not that you necessarily have to open to it and feel it all the time. But it's going to be there. So holding that feeling of the pain -- that's half of Trungpa's formula. I'll say his full quote. “If you can hold the pain of the whole world in your heart while never dropping your gaze from the Great Eastern Sun, then you can make a proper cup of tea.” In other words precise, correct action depends on both of these things. So the Great Eastern Sun is the tremendous creativity of life and the goodness, the innate goodness of human beings. The order out of chaos that came up in this course, the fact that organization and intelligence are built into reality, all that. That's the Great Eastern Sun. But if you only have that and ignore the pain of the whole world then you're not going to be able to accurately act in reference to what actually needs to be done. And if you only have the pain of the whole world without these other things then you're going to succumb to despair and you're not going to exercise the full range of tools that are available to meet the pain in the world. OK. So to hold the pain of the world in your heart means that you do not channel it onto hatred. You do not channel it onto a false thing that alleviates that pain but is actually a lie, because hatred is based on a lie. Judgment is based on a lie or on a misunderstanding, an inaccurate understanding of who is to blame for all this. So I don't know, sometimes if I feel hatred and blame towards somebody I look at them and I just rewind the video in my mind back to when they were a little baby, a little bup-bup. That's our family's term for a baby because -- anyway, there's a cute little story behind that. A little sweetums, and I ask what happened to that sweetums? What happened, to make you into what you are today? And when I do that rewind, I realize that the hatred is misplaced. And so then I can pull my energy back from that hatred. And then I have more energy available to actually be effective. But yeah, I wouldn't say to reframe your feeling of the ugliness of the world. I mean it's not supposed to be like this.

I mean maybe in a larger sense it is part of an evolutionary process, but that evolutionary process that necessitates the ugliness depends also on our rejection of that ugliness and our adherence to our innate knowing that the world *is* supposed to be much more beautiful and we don't need these strip malls and big box stores and ghettos and strip mines and all of the human, social and ecological misery that's happening. It doesn't have to be this ugly. That's true.

OK, let's see here. OK, just checking the comments here. It doesn't look like anyone's -- anyway, anytime someone really feels moved to come up on stage, so to speak. OK. There is one volunteer. Yeah, Victor. Yeah, Victor, why don't you come on, if you want to share the story.

Patsy: Give me a minute to find him.

C.E.: OK. Yeah. Patsy is gonna find you and -- yeah, I remember your story. It's related. Also while you're finding him I want to say that some of these stories I want to eventually make a series that people can subscribe to called Medicine Stories -- no, called Story Medicine -- that collect stories that convey information to people that is important for society in a different way than just, you know, me talking about stuff or anybody talking about stuff. Like, stories reach the psyche in a different way than other forms of speech do and so I am collecting some of these stories to eventually make some kind of program from. Is Victor up yet?

Patsy: Yes.

Victor: Can you guys hear me OK?

Patsy: Yes.

Victor: Well thank you so much, Charles. I'm grateful to be able to share with everybody. So this week I've been invoking the question that was asked in the course. I've been blessed to move into the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Washington D.C. recently. So I'm in the southeast corner of a massive park called Rock Creek Park. And I've been waking up early morning and having urges to go out into the park and into the forest, into the woods. So I started asking the question to a larger boulder that I saw along the creek, to a few trees, trying to empathize, you know: what is it like to be you? And just meditating on that. And a couple mornings ago in particular was an especially powerful experience where the night before was kind of one of those nights where I just fell asleep in my clothes exhausted and kind of woke up in a daze early morning before dawn and I just really felt this urge to step right outside. So I started walking outside. I put my shoes on, went straight out the door and into the woods. And as I was walking up the trail -- it's very dim out, you know, before dawn is broken and I'm getting to the -- I'm walking up this trail and I see a tree there, its trunk about the size of mine. It's a young maple tree and it's right on the side of the trail, a little bit separate from the rest and I thought about having a hugging meditation with the tree. I recently read Thich Nhat Hanh's *Art of Communicating*, something anecdotally mentioned. So I came to this tree and I put my arms

around it. It's still really dark out and I just kind of rested my chest and belly on it and just kind of leaned into it and rested my head on it. And I just meditated on my breath, felt the sensations that were arising, had some intense kind of sensations coming up, passing away. And I looked - I kind of raised my chin and looked up at this expanse of the tree and I invoked that same question. What is it like to be you? And in that moment this really intense grief just struck me. I just started sobbing and sobbing and my abdomen was just crunching in as I was kind of hugging and holding on tight to this tree. And dawn was starting to break at that time and things were a little bit lighter and -- what was powerful I guess was just this, I don't know, call it an interpenetration. This dissolution of separation between it and I, and this very kind of visceral felt sense of that that struck me, and that passed and I spent a little more time with it and rested there and after a few more minutes I looked up again and asked that again: what is it like to be you? And more tears just started to flow and flow and flow. And so I spent a little more time with it. I kind of went on my way and went on a bit more of a hike and kind of looped back around and as I kind of saw it my heart kind of lit up seeing this tree again and seeing my tears on this tree and it kind of felt like a friend. It's not a connection I've ever really made before. And yeah, so I've been spending more time with it these days, going back to that space. And that was that.

C.E.: Thank you for sharing that. Yeah. I just see that as part of building some bridges that have been severed for a long time, coming back into relationship. OK, I'm not going to say a lot about that. That's a powerful story. Thank you for sharing it. And we'll just bring up another person. Someone looks like they popped up and --

Patsy: Yes, it's Julie. Are you ready?

C.E.: Yeah. Ready.

Julie: Hi Charles. Thank you for taking my question. I really enjoyed this class a lot and I've gotten so much out of it and I'm so grateful. I've been a huge fan of yours for a long time so this is really great to be meeting you like this. And hi everybody. So my question is, if you could talk a little bit about your views about -- well, the question that I shared, just to get into it -- I had recently come out of just this terrible suicidal fantasy loop that wouldn't stop and it was all due to simply taking a supplement that I didn't realize was causing that. And you know, having other experiences and ingesting other kinds of chemicals or plants or what have you can totally and completely change how I feel, how I'm experiencing this life. And things like that make me question, geez you know, when I think about, you know, this AI that people are creating today. It's just like this set of responses; it will react this way if I type in this formula and this, that and the third. And like you know, it just makes me question: is that all we are, a set of responses to different chemicals and different hormones? Or yeah, like what are your thoughts on that? Because man, it just shifts so much based on these little tiny things that we can consume.

C.E.: Mm-hm. Yeah, or a certain part of your brain could be stimulated or something and you would have a very different experience.

Julie: Yeah.

C.E.: Yeah. It makes you question free will and question how much agency you have over your life. I recently interviewed a guy named Robert Schwartz. He wrote a book called Your Soul's Plan. And he does these hypnotic regressions. He regresses people to their previous life's ending and then to like, this place between lives. He calls them between life regressions where people re-experience consulting with a committee of elders, of spiritual guides, to plan out their life. So it's not just a chemical or something that comes in and totally changes your responses; it's also meeting somebody and falling in love or having a traffic accident where like, all of these things that come in send you down a certain pathway. And what he's saying in this book is that this is mostly planned out in advance. Certain big events are inevitable; they're gonna happen to you. Others, it's not actually like a single life trajectory that's planned out. It's actually more like a flowchart. So if I choose this at some point then I'll go down this one, and if I choose that I'll go down -- and it's this fantastically complicated flowchart. So it might look like just some random thing, you took some random supplement and look what happened to you. But the necessity to go through that experience could be either something that you need to go through in order to have the life lessons and development and to go to the place where you're supposed to go developmentally in this life. It could be that. Or it could be something that comes to you as the result of a choice that you made a long time ago that seemingly has nothing to do with that. But you know, it's part of your flowchart. If I made choice A at that moment then I'm going to need to go down a path in which I have this suicidal ideation episode. Which means that -- it doesn't mean that we don't have free will but it means that our free will and our choices are not what we think they are. That the things that we think we're choosing are not what we're actually choosing. And that the real choices that determine the flow of events are, I would say, seemingly inconsequential from the mind's understanding of how reality works. Like that moment where I chose to let loose and shout at my child instead of holding my patience: like it seems like it doesn't make a difference. But that could be something that precipitates through unseen mechanisms, that means that you have to go down a different developmental trajectory. And what I'm saying is completely -- it's logical but it's also not something that you could falsify. So it's not scientific. I could pretty much account for anything by saying oh, well, you know, you planned it out. So the mind will not really be satisfied with this explanation. It is at least coherent but I cannot offer any evidence for it. But actually I can offer some evidence, which is: have you ever felt in those moments -- in certain moments it feels like this is an important choice. And I don't know why, I can't say why. But in the moment you know. Yeah. Yeah. Listen to that, I would say. Well, I was going ask if you wanted to follow up on that but you disappeared. Patsy, do you want to resurrect her, just --

Patsy: Yes, I will. Just give me a second. [pause] She should come back in a few seconds.

C.E.: OK.

Julie: Thank you.

C.E.: Yeah.

Julie: You know, it was so stark and it was so, like, such a different mindset, such a different place, so extreme and so tied to like, is it the chemical? However the only thing I would really like to say to follow that up is: it didn't happen that long ago but I'm able to so specifically pinpoint these amazing, incredible, life-altering gifts, like life-altering in a very positive direction that I got out of that experience. So yeah, thank you. And that was awesome and I loved what you said. Thank you very much.

C.E.: Yeah, thanks. Yeah, I think I'll stay away from that supplement. So, yeah. I think somebody else wanted to come up. I'm kind of -- this time I'm really enjoying people coming up. Let's stick with that. If there's more questions that I didn't get to I could even make a video about them or something, although I probably shouldn't commit to that right now because I'm about to leave for a trip.

Patsy: I'm looking for Suzanne Huffman so just bear with me for a minute. [pause] But she's not live. So, next one.

C.E.: I'm looking at some of the comment stream here. There was one, while we're waiting. There's one about maybe there *is* a place for fighting the bad guys and so forth.

Patsy: What's the user name?

C.E.: It was Dee. I don't think she was asking to come up, but she was putting it on the chat.

Patsy: I can send her an invitation and see if she -- so I sent it.

C.E.: All right. So we'll see if she wants to come up and if not I can just respond to it a bit.

Patsy: She rejected.

C.E.: OK. Yeah. Not everybody wants to come up in front of like, several hundred people so that's totally understandable. So the comment that came up was yeah, maybe there is a time to fight. I think there *is* actually a time to fight. I'm not saying never use violence to resist violence or never use violence to protect the innocent or something like that. What I'm saying is that sometimes -- so yeah, sometimes force -- it's not like everything that sounds like it's from the old story is automatically bad. What's the problem is the habit of using violence or using force based on a certain understanding of human nature and how the world works. So it's basically violence as a default response. In the context of the world the way that it is today or has been for hundreds of years, we've been trapped in a situation where violence is often the only response to a given situation. And I would like to say that we are transitioning out of that, so that the role for violence in general and especially, even more generally, would be the role of force-based technology is going to recede to a much smaller zone than it has been during the age of separation. It won't disappear. High-tech medicine won't disappear, for example, but it will no longer usurp the place of other ways of relating to material reality, and the fight will recede to a much smaller place, no longer usurping the role of other ways of engaging social reality. The

fight, competition, struggle, war. Yeah. Someone else want to come up here? I haven't been able to look at all the comments and talk at the same time, so if you did volunteer and I missed you then I apologize.

Patsy: So there was one participant who wanted to come up but now she's not live. So do you want to go back to the questions and we'll wait?

C.E.: Sure, yeah. I can do that. Oh here's a Greta Thunberg one. That's good. Let me address that because that's so topical now.

Patsy: Could you tell me which one it is?

C.E.: The second one that's remaining here. Suzanne Huffman? Whoops, I wasn't supposed to say last names but I think it's okay, it's not a real personal thing. And previous to that there's Jessica's. So it's the first two here. Jessica's being about how to protect remaining intact ecosystems. Yeah. Extinction Rebellion, OK. This woman says, if I had the opportunity what would I say to Miss Thunberg and the millions who participated in actions this month? I get asked that a lot these days. I actually made a small video about that. It's so polarizing. So I'll say, I admire Greta Thunberg, her clarity, her intelligence, her courage. I can see why people gravitate to her leadership. And you know, also, I think that maybe this is normal for a 16-year-old, but she does paint things in very stark terms and those stark terms draw from an understanding of climate that I think is too narrow. As maybe some people in this course know, I work with what I call the living earth paradigm. Living earth paradigm, which understands that globally *and* locally life creates the conditions for life. And that if we continue to degrade ecosystems, cut down forests, destroy soil, expand cities and so forth, then whether or not we cut carbon emissions is irrelevant. The planet will still spiral towards death. And I really want the climate movement to embrace extinction in a larger sense. It's not just a threat to our own livelihood and survival on Earth, it's also the progressive dying of the planet. And understanding that changes our priorities. So much of the energy is now directed toward fossil fuels: cutting fossil fuel emissions, cutting greenhouse gases. And that's actually a much harder problem than healing ecosystems, healing soil, healing water, healing forests. Which actually if we orient in that way ends up drawing down more carbon than we could possibly cut even through radical changes in our economic infrastructure, which is hard to do. People are wedded to fossil fuel powered machines. It's not easy to make that transition. I think the transition has to happen where the problem began, which is our direct relationship to the land. So anyway, I'm not going to try to lay out the entire thesis of this. I just want to, maybe in a more general sense, similar to the point I made earlier about the energy, the revolutionary energy of "I want to change the world, I want to participate in a more beautiful world" getting channeled onto hatred, onto judgment, onto a fight. The same thing can happen (I don't want to say that it's already happening but maybe it is) but it can happen with any revolutionary movement, any political movement where that energy gets diverted onto a temporary enemy who is blamed for something that is actually caused by conditions much deeper and prior to that enemy. So that enemy could be the evil people and corporations or something like that, or the enemy could be a substance like carbon dioxide. So yeah, I would like to validate and celebrate the basic energy

of Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg, which is: this is intolerable. The world can be better and I refuse to put up with it. I refuse to tolerate what is intolerable. And to call attention to the truth of that. And then to be aware that the rush to a solution risks reenacting the problem. One of the biggest, most impactful policies that is motivated by reducing carbon emissions is switching to biofuels. Whole power plants in Europe are now run on woodchips rather than coal. They were converted from coal-fired plants to woodchip-fired plants. I talked to somebody who is Romanian, from Romania, and she spoke of the convoys of logging trucks carrying the logs from Europe's last virgin forests to the chipping facilities to be burned in these power plants. And then in their place they've planted tree plantations of fast-growing timber that can be sold, you know, as lumber for construction. So if you do the superficial carbon math everything's fine: for every tree you cut down another one's growing and taking carbon out of the air. But the ecological damage is horrendous. Same thing's been happening in southeastern United States: whole forests getting converted into woodchips. And in the Amazon -- someone was telling me about how the burning of the Amazon to clear new land for ranching, a lot of that is caused because the ranchers have been pushed off the land they had originally been ranching because that land is getting converted into biofuels plantations, which is even more lucrative than cattle ranching or soy planting. So this is the kind of reenactment of the old story that comes when we don't step back enough to question what we think we know. So anyway, I just would hate to see this beautiful upwelling of authentic rebellion at the world that has been offered to us as normal to be co-opted and hijacked toward solutions that are not really solutions, and also just toward fighting each other. As long as we keep fighting each other then nothing is going to change. And that's why as a political person -- this isn't like some spiritual thing -- that's why as a political person I think that I put so much energy into things like judgment, hatred, condemnation, the template of the fight. And the necessity to build a peace narrative. If you guys haven't read it, I wrote an essay called [Building a Peace Narrative](#) that makes a lot of these points. I really hope that that circulates more. Because only -- because for so many reasons. In a war you sacrifice everything to the war effort. And defeating the enemy becomes the top priority. We need to unify as a species in order to change directions toward healing. It's a huge change and without coherence we're not going to make that change. So let's be avatars of peace, first and foremost. OK, let's see here. How are we on time? So a few more minutes.

Patsy: Charles, Kitty who is the next question, she agreed to come on screen.

C.E.: Oh great.

Patsy: So you can read the question if you want, while she's accepting the invitation.

Kitty: Hi Charles.

C.E.: Hi. Hi Kitty. Good to see you.

Kitty: Good to see you too, and that whole dialogue just kind of leads up to my question. I had asked the question about the carbon tax, because in my specific situation I have a nonprofit that installs electric vehicle chargers and I'm generating low carbon fuel credits with these electric

vehicle chargers. I want to market the LCFs so that I can continue to install chargers and make them free and encourage people to use them. But the dilemma is: how do I step outside the system but still work the system at the same time? You know, I don't want to leave these credits on the table when they're valuable and could be working towards good.

C.E.: Yeah. Yeah. So the important thing I think is to distinguish, if you're wary of using these things that are part of the system and doing whatever is expedient to make your business work, where is this wariness coming from? What part of it is coming from oh, I'm gonna be bad. I'm gonna be tainted by the infection of the system if I touch this bad thing and I want to be good and this is the bad world and -- like, how much of your motivation is coming from that and how much of it is coming from: actually if I use these it's problematic for very rational reasons I understand.

And I think that if -- like, I have no problem whatsoever with engaging the system.

Kitty: OK.

C.E.: You know, it's not like -- the point here isn't to maintain your purity. The point is to serve what you're serving.

Kitty: [phone rings] Sorry. The system.

C.E.: Yeah. The point is to serve effectively what you're serving. So, what is the system and what isn't the system -- that category, that distinction is another one that breaks down under close scrutiny. There's no pristine, pure land that is outside of the system. And this is inside the system and any organization or institution in the system is going to have -- it's not a monolith. It's going to have people who are trying so hard to reform their institution and to do good in the world. And so I would just say you've got to take these things on a case by case basis. And also to stay open to the other problem with identifying as the good guy, for example because I'm, you know, doing this good thing in the world, EV chargers. Right? If that's part of your motivation, then if you come across information that says maybe this isn't so good for the world, it is going to be a challenge to your identity and self-worth. Which will make it hard to take in that information. So in fact identifying as being on Team Good in the war against Team Evil actually in the long run will put you on the Team Evil without you even knowing it, because you will be impervious to the data that allows you to evolve. So you know, as far as electric vehicles go, I right now do not know if they are good or bad for the future of life on Earth. I mean I kind of tend to think that they're probably a good thing overall, or that they could be part of a system that's a lot better than what we have now. But you know, there's skeptics who talk about the rare earth minerals in the batteries and et cetera et cetera et cetera, you know. So I'm not, you know, I'm not like, warning you but I'm using that to illustrate a general principle of how important it is for all of us in change movements to be open to being wrong.

Kitty: OK.

C.E.: And to not attach our identity too much from being the good guys, you know. Because that'll prevent us from taking in that information that -- it's not necessarily wrong or right, but it

could be the information that says OK, the way I've been doing it, there's some real problems there. And here's the next evolutionary step.

Kitty: Yeah. Well what I do like about electric vehicles is they're disruptors and there's potential here to bring everybody together. So instead of having like, big oil companies and you know, having everything handed down, this is something that you can so easily create that gifting economy. You know, maybe somebody has solar panels and they're offering electricity as an amenity, which is encouraging someone to get the electric car. So it's really disruptive in the -- it is part of the new story, I see that. But you know, I guess really my question probably applies to a lot of different things that people are working with on this. It's like, how do you deal with the old story from the new story? So you know -- because I'm with Victor, I'm hugging trees and talking to rocks and so how do I take that and put it in this three dimensional space of dogma, I guess.

C.E.: Yeah, that's cool how you're using EVs as a vehicle to put an entirely other impulse into the world, which is the impulsive gift. That's a good twofer there. As far as your question, for me it's just a matter of asking, what's the natural next step? The next evolutionary stem that the system can handle or that a person can handle or that I can handle, you know, rather than to pole vault into a completely different self or a completely different world. Usually there's something that is available that's kind of at the edge of the system or the person's capacity to change. And maybe it's a push, it's a stretch, but it's not totally unrealistic and you present it and of course they say no. And then you go away nursing feelings of resentment and superiority.

Kitty: Yeah. I'm going to pay very close attention to how each decision makes me feel. And yeah, I'm not going to be discouraged by any critics or any negativity that comes my way because that's part of the learning process. And so yeah, thanks. I feel pretty good about it. I got my answer, so thank you.

C.E.: Yeah. Awesome. Thank you Kitty.

Kitty: Yes.

C.E.: Thanks. OK. So how are we doing here? I could take one more if there's one that's burning. Or I could begin to wrap things up.

Patsy: So Charles, earlier there was Pan Vera. She says she would like to come up but we don't really have her questions. Should I just pull her up?

C.E.: Yeah. Pull her up; she doesn't even need to have a question. She can just spontaneously --

Patsy: I just -- I'm sending her an invite now. [pause] She's accepting it. She'll be on in a few seconds.

C.E.: Great.

Patsy: It's possible she might have some technical issue because the [inaudible] is saying that she had been accepting and connecting, but I'm still waiting.

C.E.: All right, let's give it another few seconds. [pause] This will be the last course I put on for quite a while -- oh, here we are.

Pan: I can't hear.

C.E.: I can hear you.

Pan: I can't hear you. Let's see. [laughs] I don't know what to do. I can't hear anything. I'm looking to see, for the typical -- let's try this. OK, this is the one. Hello?

C.E.: Hello. Can you hear me now?

Pan: All right. Now I'm going to try to save this.

C.E.: Just go for it.

Pan: I don't think I hear anything at all.

C.E.: You can just talk.

Pan: OK. Hi. Yes. When I have that experience of transcendence -- it's transcendence. I mean in a room with anywhere from 5 to 15 people. And there's a tremendous amount of engagement that's going on, and the experience I have is it's both intensely me and intensely me as audience and us and this connection with everybody in the room. And I guess what I wanted was to hear what your experiences of that were like, but unless I can figure out how to solve this headset issue, I'm not going to do that, am I? I'm not going to be able to hear you.

C.E.: OK. Yeah.

Pan: I can hear you!

C.E.: Oh, you can hear me. OK.

Pan: I heard you. Yeah.

C.E.: OK, good. So your experiences with 5 or 10 or 15 people in a room, you're feeling connection. I don't quite understand the question though.

Pan: Well, you talked about how there are times when you're presenting that you have this experience of being a -- you didn't call it an empty vessel or a reed, but you've given yourself over to a voice that's bigger than your own.

C.E.: OK, yeah. I mean, I'm just speaking from a field. It feels to me like I'm speaking from a field of information and I don't feel like I'm channeling something, but it's the same feeling as if I'm in a good conversation with a person and I'm really looking at them and really tuned into them. What I say then is tailored to the listening. In fact it's a function of the listening. I'm not just going to go run off on the mouth on some story that I told the last person and it worked and so I'm going to tell you.

Pan: No, you're really engaged with that person.

C.E.: Right. And so the same is true with a group being. And I'm not saying I can always do this, but -- sometimes I'm nervous, sometimes I have an ego agenda of impressing the people or something like that.

Pan: Oh, I understand that it's a gift. You know, like you were saying: you can ask for it but it's given to you.

C:E: But yeah, it's not just like a random gift though. It's from trying to just really take seriously: who are you? You know? I'm speaking to a real person, a bunch of real people and that effort is what brings me to a place where I can say what's relevant.

Pan: Yeah.

C.E.: When I can. I hope I'm doing it now, I don't know.

Pan: It sounds to me like it is, in terms of just me listening to what you're saying and actually having a connection with you that's other than just through your office. I lived in Vermont and have been following you for a long time. What you describe fits in with my experience even though I use different words for it. And I also want to just express gratitude that you have gathered the honesty and authenticity to talk about this and to present it and to share how you live it and make a place for community to happen. And I greatly appreciate that.

C.E.: Yeah. Thank you, Pan.

Pan: OK. Thanks.

C.E.: Yeah. So maybe I should bring it to a close now, because we've gone for an hour and a half. Thank you all for being so patient. I hope that the information has been useful. Yeah, this is the last session of the last course that I'll be doing for quite a while. I'll be doing some other kinds of things I think next year, but not so much with -- it'll be more like broadcast and not so

much with feedback and interaction, because I'm taking a bit of a sabbatical. I'm wanting very much to take an in-breath after all of this literal out-breathing, i.e. speaking. But also metaphorically speaking, I just need to take *in* some. Otherwise I risk repeating myself and saying things just because they've run a rut in my brain and not because they are relevant to the time and place and person. So I'm doing some of that next year. So I guess to bring this course to a close: there is something of a community that formed on Tribe and maybe can continue there and/or Facebook. And then there's -- but that was only a fraction of the people who have registered for the course and are listening to the material. There's actually two thousand, more than two thousand of us. And I want to just right now invoke a sense of that group of several thousand people, including those who may listen in the future, as also a being a collective being full of yearnings, full of contradictions. Maybe a mix: maybe gratitude here, trouble there. And note a sense of togetherness. That root of all questions. The questioning or the questing. The seeking. The growing, the restlessness. That feeling is the universal process of life becoming more alive as it inhabits you. We've investigated many questions in this course and I've offered some answers and some non-answers. I've hopefully offered bread crumbs or entryways to the place where you can find answers, or to a place where the questions are replaced by other questions. And after all of that, even if you received from me or from yourself or from somewhere else more answers than you could imagine, even so you will notice that the questing, the questioning is still there. Because that's life itself. And because of that you know that the quest is endless. Because life is endless and complexity is endless, just like the Mandelbrot set. You zoom in and the novelty, the beauty in new forms never ends. So if there is anything I'd like you to leave this course with, it is to embrace that questing. To know it as intrinsic to your being. To celebrate it. To befriend it. To love it. And to know that it co-resonates with your love of life. Yes. Please take your questioning with you. And thank you so much.