

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# Guest Interview with Byron Katie

April 19, 2015



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Awaken To Your Life

Mark Matousek interviews Byron Katie, an American speaker and author who teaches a method of self-inquiry known as "The Work of Byron Katie" or simply as "The Work." Other bestselling books include "Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life," "I Need Your Love—Is That True?" and "A Thousand Names for Joy: Living in Harmony with the Way Things Are." On her website, [www.thework.com](http://www.thework.com), you will find her blog, her schedule, a network of facilitators, a free hotline, audio and video clips, articles, and basic information about Katie and The Work, including free materials to download.

**MM:** The last time we spoke, Katie, you said something to me that I've never forgotten. You said that the mind is a child and it believes what we tell it. This runs counter to so much we are taught about the brilliance of the mind. I love the way you refer to the mind as a child. Could you say more about that?

**BK:** Well, yes. I'm referring to the mind as ego, and ego it is. It's a child, it's an immature, innocent that needs more information. I don't know if it's information that it needs, but it needs to be enlightened to what it's thinking because it's so far off base. It's so untrue to what it wants, untrue to what it's really looking for.

I have the thought, for example: *I can't do it*. Maybe I want to, maybe I'm in bed, maybe I'm lazy and I have the thought: *I can't get up, I can't do it*. I don't know where this comes from, I don't experience this anymore, but I did for years. (Katie giggles)

So I have the thought: *I can't get up this morning, I'm just too tired. I can't get up*. Is this true?

Well, yes. The mind is responding to just the thought *I can't get up*, it's reinforcing what it believes to be true. That early in the morning, it has already started its job.

How do I react, that identified person in bed, how do I react when I believe the thought? My mind just pounds all of this into me, it gives me all the information to support why this thought might be true. And so, that's how I react when I believe it. So, with these four questions I work with, *I can't get up*, is it true? Can I really know it's true that I can't get up? How do I react when I believe that thought? I'm bombarded with every reason why not: *I'm too tired, it's not worth it, they won't mind if I'm late for work, I'm always on time, it's okay today*. These thoughts, here they go.

So, who would I be without the thought, *I can't get up*. So with that, just witnessing who I am without that thought, eventually I get up or I don't. And without all of that stress on me, either way, I'm lying in bed and I enjoy it without being miserable there. So I win/win.

**MM:** Right.

**BK:** So, there are two ways lying in that bed. One of them is at peace and one is not. Either way, you get up eventually. Without the burden, when we're clear headed, it's effortless. There's no reason to lie there and there's no reason not to. So then, when I turn it around, *I can't get up*, and it's opposite, *I can get up*, I can test it without my mind being bombarded with reasons why I can't. It's effortless until finally the mind is awake to itself and no longer a child. It's no longer playing with those toys.

So, now I'm up. Let's say, I got up the hard way. My mind is going: *I'm so tired. I'll be glad when I'm retired and I don't have to do this anymore. I need more time off.* That's the child's mind speaking. *There's something wrong with my life,* etc. Now what if we treated that mind like it was a child. Just begin to talk with it. Now, my language would be just something gentle: *Is it true? Are you sure?* Not a brutal message: *There's something the matter with me, I'm so stupid.* I don't have great examples or references for this. (Katie chuckles)

**MM:** It makes complete sense.

**BK:** You can find your own scenario. It works with anything when the mind is stressed out, we are witnessing the mind that is so uneducated, it is so infantile. Look how we react when we believe the thought. Childish mind, childish life. And war is for children that just don't know any better.

**MM:** What I love so much about the way you frame that, is that it's not so much about making the right decision, or the right choice, it's about being at peace with whatever your choice is.

**BK:** Yes! Because either way, it's reality.

**MM:** Right. (Mark chuckles)

**BK:** And there are two realities. One is to love what is and the other is to be at war with it. And you know, we you know we don't make great decisions when we are at war.

**MM:** Right. And there's not much middle ground, is there?

**BK:** There's not. Because you know the mind is busy proving that it's right so there is no middle ground. It's got to win. So, my work is about the end of war with the self, the end of the mind's war with itself.

**MM:** Beautiful.

**BK:** As long as the mind is at war with itself, we'll have war in the world.

**MM:** And what about the role of the body, Katie, the emotions in this case? You talk so much about the mind and its thinking, what is the role of emotion and feeling with self inquiry?

**BK:** Okay. So that third question out of four, *How do I react when I believe that thought?* All the emotions are there. For instance, the thought: *He doesn't care about me.* How do I react when I believe that thought? All the emotions are there.

You know, he walked into the room. He just walked in the room, that's all he did. He's guilty of walking into the room, period, that's it. Maybe he even said, "Good morning." But my mind, you know, it came to this: *He doesn't care about me.* When I believe that about him, I superimpose that identity on him. How do I react when I believe that thought? Well, I was in a good mood, but I'm not now. And all he did was walk into the room. Because my mind is going: *He doesn't really care about me. I don't know why he's pretending that everything's okay right now. He never washes his teacup or coffee cup.* It just goes on and on and on with that belief (*he doesn't care about me*) and the emotions, you can feel them as we talk about them. *It was a beautiful morning until he walked into the room.*

So, who am I without the thought, *He doesn't care about me?* He walks into the room and my morning hasn't changed, it's been added to.

**MM:** And does the thought always precede the emotion?

**BK:** Always.

**MM:** That's fascinating, because I think a lot of people believe that their feelings exist apart from thoughts.

**BK:** It's only right that a lot of people would believe that because they don't know the creator of everything, existence. They see their identities as themselves. People believe that their feelings exist apart from thoughts because the feelings are what they experience first. They see it this way because they are unaware.

**MM:** Right.

**BK:** So they have to believe that. Now meditators come to this easy. If you do The Work, you identify the emotions, they let you know loud and clear. So then, if you get really still and you notice what you're thinking and believing, you see the cause of the emotion. And then you come to understand, in fact, we think, then feel. Then, we act on those feelings. And that's what we have. A good day, a bad day, a good moment, a bad moment, whatever you're in touch with.

**MM:** All traceable back to a thought.

**BK:** All. And by thought, I mean concepts, judgments.

**MM:** Right. Tell me, Katie, do you encounter a fear of freedom and a fear of happiness in students?

**BK:** Yes, oh, yes. And I understand that well. Their identities are being threatened. *Who am I*, you know that question, *without my identity?* It's that big "don't know." I've tested it. Like, who am I without the thought? Between you and me, who am I without my mind, it's just noticing that "I" whatever that is, is okay. There's no proof otherwise. If I'm sitting here, and let's say, I'm worried and I notice my thinking. I begin to laugh. This work is so alive in me now, alive in so many people.

I begin to question what I'm believing. Let's say I'm left without what I was believing. So who am I? I'm the woman sitting in the chair talking to my friend. That's what I love about the turnarounds. The turnarounds always bring everyone back safely to reality, as we understand it, without the fear. And in that, oh my goodness Mark, that is where the creative mind has space to live.

It has space because as long as there is judgment—*This is not okay, that is not okay, I shouldn't have, I want, I need*—when all of this is going on, there is absolutely no room for the creative mind to live. And that creative mind, that is Source. There's nothing it can't heal. War in the world, politics, all of it. It's sane and there is nothing to argue against it. That's why in history, we have these really clear beings that can move forward. They move forward fearlessly and it's so attractive. It's appeals to us because it makes sense and it shifts everything.

**MM:** Do we fear happiness for the same kind of reasons that we fear freedom?

**BK:** Yes. People, when they're happy, they actually feel guilty sometimes. When we're happy, the ego can actually take that over too: *Oh, I'm the happiest person in the world, I'm happier than you are.* The ego will just take anything over and the way it takes it over is through the identity that is thinking and believing its thoughts.

You know, I talk about seeking love, approval and appreciation and invite people to find a time when he or she hasn't. Find a moment in your life when you were NOT seeking love, approval and appreciation in the company of other people.

**MM:** Good luck with that.

**BK:** Yes. (Katie laughs) But it's so much fun when we understand that the mind isn't a terrible thing, it's just this misunderstood child-like expression, a creator.

**MM:** Right. (Mark laughs) Katie, I want to talk to you a little about the connection between love and pain. Most anyone you ask will say that there can be no love without pain, because I think most of us have not experienced love without pain. How would you address that belief?

**BK:** One way that comes to mind is personalities don't love; they want something. When they lose that something, then it's the identity that's suffering, it's fearful. If two people are attracted to each other, it's usually because they're complimenting each other. (This is the short version.) I smile at him, he smiles at me, it looks like everything is fine. He says something, I laugh, I think we're in love. We just had this instant, love at first sight. I see him the way he wants to be seen, he sees me the way I want to be seen and so we continue from this innocence to seeking each other's love, approval and appreciation.

When we marry or we're together for a while, our true identities start to show, not our really true identities, but it all begins to fall apart because he doesn't understand why I've changed. When I stop seeking his love, approval and appreciation, he doesn't recognize me anymore and he stops seeking my love, approval and appreciation. In other words, he stops pleasing me and I don't recognize him. Why do I care about him? So it's like this: Personalities don't love, they want something. No one has been hurt over love, but what we call love, we're gonna be hurt over. Because, *if you really love me you will—, you would—, you should—.*

**MM:** It sounds like you're saying what you're calling love is really unconditional.

**BK:** It really is unconditional.

**MM:** Yes, so in the same way love without pain is unimaginable for a lot of folks, so is awakening or enlightenment without struggle and pain hard to imagine. That has not been your experience. Can you talk a little about separating struggle from spiritual awakening?

**BK:** For me, I just noticed the difference. Yes, I was going into some really unknown territory for sure, but it could not be as difficult as what I had survived which was depression. I was so depressed when The Work found me; I didn't know it was going to take me, I just knew I didn't want to be where I was. Something inside me understood it was a state of mind. But I didn't have any help along the way, I had the privilege of figuring that out for myself. Hopefully it saves a lot of people from having to do that.

It's really scary turf, but when we look back at the world as we understand it, especially in this climate, goodness, there is no way to go but up. My website and The School for the Work, is turning young. Younger ages. Thirteen and sixteen year olds are bringing their parents, rather than the other way around.

**MM:** Really?

**BK:** Yes. Eighteen, twenty, twenty-four-year-old young people whose parents were not required to come, they are filling the rooms. It's a most amazing thing. Our generation has not left them with a lot of hope, there's not a lot there. They look at their resources. Not only are we not stopping what we're doing, but we're increasing. That's what they can see. Somehow, it could be that they are figuring out, you've got to go within if you're going to find anything worth finding.

I don't know if that's true or not because I haven't talked with them, but I've watched the numbers at TheWork.com. The largest age group is eighteen to twenty-four and it's amazing.

**MM:** That really is amazing. And it gives you hope.

**BK:** It really does. And hope is something I've got plenty of. Here's why, Mark. If we're down to the last drop of water, what we're thinking and believing is always going to be the only problem that we've got.

**MM:** So walk me through that Katie, if there's no water.

**BK:** I mean, if there's no water, the worse that can happen is what I'm thinking and believing.

**MM:** Right. So, if there's no water we die. Before that, it's all in our mind. Is that what I hear you saying?

**BK:** Exactly. But people don't understand, "all in our minds." It's what I'm thinking and believing about starvation, or about my life, death and the future. What I'm thinking and believing is all the pain I'm going to suffer. Even physical pain is a projection of mind. (That is going way out for a lot of people, however, it's true). But it's not true if they don't believe it to be true, so it's a paradox. I love inviting people to never believe a word I say but just to test it for themselves.

**MM:** Yes, that's why The Work is so powerful. It's not about convincing anyone of anything; it's about experimenting and experiencing it with our own minds, testing it.

**BK:** Yes, exactly so. And it takes our lives over and fills us with joy and creativity and all of the energy that it takes when we're stressed out. That's a lot of energy down the tubes. And when we are free of that kind of worry, that kind of energy goes into our creativity and it benefits all of us. When we are benefited individually, we are all benefited. So that's beyond any kind of physical security for a body.

**MM:** Katie, what about anger? Is anger ever constructive or helpful or constructive in your opinion?

**BK:** No. I've tested that one.

**MM:** So the notion of righteous anger or productive anger, that doesn't speak to you?

**BK:** No, it's clumsy. Someone has to win or lose, someone has to be overridden. If I have an idea, I don't have to fight for it, I just live out of that idea. If it's a good idea, then people take it on or not; if it's a bad idea then I'm not putting something out there in the world that causes some kind of pain. If it hurts me, it hurts you.

**MM:** Right. Personally, do things ever make you angry?

**BK:** You know, I'm so open to it, I don't know. But I'm so very open to it. I can't say that I would never be angry, but I can tell you honestly, it's been a long, long time.

**MM:** Wow. So, you don't have bad days?

**BK:** No.

**MM:** That's fantastic. And what about fear? Do you become fearful of things?

**BK:** No. But you know, people looking at my life as I live, I've gone through periods when I couldn't walk because of neuropathy in my legs, going through airports and needing wheelchairs, ridiculous stuff. I call it ridiculous. It could sound like I'm having a rough time but I'm not.

That's why, when I see someone in some kind of trouble, I'm really clear that they're not. I don't judge that. I look, I see. I talk to them if need be. When I see what they're thinking and believing, they're in terrible trouble. So now, I'm just sharing my experience and opinion. I don't have to project their pain. I'm just 100% there to support that person in their reality and it's so simple because there is no "me" in it.

**MM:** It's so simple and yet it takes practice, doesn't it?

**BK:** Yes, The Work is a practice, it's a daily practice, and it's free at TheWork.com. Videos, everything is there to support people. If there's anything I've got of value, it's there and it's at no charge.

**MM:** It's such a beautiful offering Katie and I've benefited so much from The Work and I know many, many others who have. I just want to thank you for taking the time to touch in with me today, I truly appreciate it.

**BK:** Well, you're irresistible, number one. I'm so grateful, Mark.

**MM:** Thank you so much, I appreciate it.

**BK:** You're welcome, Mark. Be well.

**MM:** Thanks, have a wonderful day.