

The Seekers Forum Transcript

An Interview with Mary O'Malley

February 21, 2016



The Seekers Forum
Awaken To Your Life

Welcome to the Seekers Forum Guest Interview series. Mary O'Malley is a teacher best known for her plain spoken clarity and deep-seated wisdom. Mary is widely acknowledged as an important voice in the world of spiritual development. Eckhart Tolle thanks her for her contribution to the evolution of human consciousness. It was a great pleasure to talk to Mary about these common sense teachings, her latest book, as well as her own personal journey of awakening. I hope you enjoy our talk. ~ Mark

Mark Matousek: Welcome, Mary. Thank you so much for doing this interview with me.

Mary O'Malley: I'm so glad to be with you, Mark.

MM: I wanted to start out by asking you about your own awakening. What is it that brought you to the spiritual path and how did your own conversion, for want of a better word, actually happen?

Mary: Well I think the first piece of it is that I was gifted with great darkness. I almost died of it in my early twenties. I tried absolutely everything to get out of that place of darkness – psychologists, psychiatrists, mental hospitals, drugs, prescription drugs, hypnotherapy, you name it. And then, when none of that worked, I tried suicide and even hated myself for being a failure at suicide. I tried it three times.

MM: Wow. May I ask, what was the source of this darkness in you, what was your turmoil?

Mary: Well, I had a childhood I don't think you would wish on anybody.

MM: Can you say more?

Mary: Well, it is many, many levels of abuse and too long to really get into it. I really withdrew at a very young age, was extremely shy, very self-contained and became more and more isolated over the years. When I went away at college, I discovered the joys of alcohol and before that I had discovered the joys of overeating and I once gained ninety-seven pounds in a year. All of this was to get away from the unmet pain. Thank god I wasn't successful at suicide because when I was twenty-seven I went to a hatha yoga weekend, but this man also taught yana yoga and I could not tell you what happened in that room. All I could tell you was that my life changed from a B-grade, black and white grainy horror movie to a Dolby surround sound, Technicolor Panavision movie and yet, I couldn't grasp it. All I knew was that he was speaking the truth. Then he would come up from California once every nine months. The third time he came I recorded what he shared and then transcribed the whole thing. Then, my house and store burnt to the ground and I lost that transcribed book. I lost everything.

MM: What happened?

Mary: My house and store burnt to the ground and I lost everything, but what I grieved in the loss was that book. So, the next time he came, I said to him, “I want to tell you what I heard you say and then tell me if I’m on the right track.” He said, “Yes. There are two parts. First, in the seeing is the movement.” His eyes just twinkled.

We all try to fix, change, rearrange, understand, get rid of or rise above, that is what I had been doing all my life and it never brought me the peace I wanted. He gave me the first glimmering of the power of our attention to heal. So, then I had the whole sentence: In the seeing is the movement, until the observer and the observed become one, or in other words, until you can come back fully into this flow of life. It wasn’t until I had the wonderful grace to meet and spend a fair amount of time a man called Stephen Levine, who has written many books about death and dying, (but really, they were all books about being alive); he taught me the other core aspect of consciousness. The first aspect is the ability to see what is right now. See the thought, see feeling, see the temptation, see the clouds, see the dewdrops. The other aspect is the heart, the spaciousness that allows it to be there. After that, all my teaching started to happen, all the travelling and all of these books. I am so grateful that I am allowed to serve life in this way.

MM: It’s such a beautiful thing. Tell me. It’s not as if the shadow immediately and permanently lifted for you?

Mary: Oh no, not at all.

MM: It was an ongoing process of awakening?

Mary: Yes. The way I described it, sometimes, it’s like I lived in this black, black pulsing dark ball. And when I went into that room and he started speaking, when I had that hatha yoga weekend, when I was twenty-seven, I stepped out of the ball. Of course I went right back into it. But I didn’t know the aspect of the heart so I judged myself: *Now you see this and now you’re back in here. What is wrong with you?* So, I struggled with that for many years until I met Stephen. And without even noticing it, Mark, I began to realize that over the years, I would go in and out of ball without noticing, after my awakening started. And then, all of sudden, I realized that I lived outside of the ball. I would go and visit it, something would happen, and this whole fear based mind that was glued together by judgment would wake up and drag me around, but then very quickly, I would wake up in the ball and say, “Ok. Who is here? What is happening now?” Then, of course, the two aspects of consciousness would begin to come on board, curiosity and compassion, or, I like the word spaciousness. Stephen calls one of his books, *A Gradual Awakening*. Eckhart Tolle stayed with me many years ago before he was so well known and I was joking with him. I said, “You know, I want to wake up like you did.” He said, “Oh Mary, very few people will wake up in that way.” It is a process and then in the end, not even a process. You just come back to life.

MM: Beautiful. How long was it between the hatha yoga teacher and meeting Stephen?

Mary: Eleven years. I got a fair amount of spaciousness during that time but I kept getting caught back into the judgment quality of the mind. I call this the storyteller in our head, the unconscious self. I say that it is made of fear and glued together with judgment. I could now relate to fear, not fully, but judgment would hook me and take me on a merry chase. I love to say that my judger went to law school and graduated top in his class and president of the debate club. (Mark and Mary both laugh.)

My judge could convince me of anything but when I met Stephen, I began to do what I call, “look to unhook,” then slowly and surely the judger is in my heart but has no power over me. Every now and then it wakes up, but it goes straight to my heart.

MM: Do you find yourself still dealing with difficult emotions?

Mary: Oh, of course. We used to think, when I was originally awakening in the '60s, that I was going to nirvana. I was leaving all of this behind, I was going to live in unending bliss. Slowly and surely you begin to discover, this is not about getting rid of anything. This is about discovering the space that thoughts, feelings and sensations, and what I like to call “spells” – because of a lot of what the storyteller is made up of, is like a spell -- discovering the spaciousness where all of this happens.

So, if you put me in the right situation I can get caught up. I watched a very close family member almost die last March while in the ICU for six days and the hospital for thirteen days. Sitting there in the ICU all sorts of states (of spaciousness) came. It takes a pretty big challenge to wake up these pretty deep places of fear, despair and shame and, so on and so forth. But, I didn't really get caught. I would start moving into them, identifying with them, I would become a tightness detective because the more you open to life, the more alert you are when the spells come. They tighten your body, they tighten your mind, and your heart. So, I had a long six-day meditation retreat in the ICU at the hospital of safe calming, tightening down and then waking up and the spells would just pass through.

MM: Let me back track just a bit. Did you have any kind of spiritual upbringing of any kind, any religious foundation that this came out of?

Mary: No.

MM: Is there a religion that you identify with today?

Mary: Well, our family did go sporadically to Unity church which is not Unitarian. This is the Unity church that believes the core message of Jesus is love. We didn't go regularly at all. I speak in a lot of churches, but my religion is LIFE, so to speak. It is coming back to life. In my world, God is a verb. God is beingness itself, not a thing. I am sitting here looking out at this gorgeous dogwood tree with a waterfall of orange, and red and little tiny bits of green leaves still left from the fall, and that to me is God, and a little bird just flew through. That, to me, is God. If anything is my religion, it's life itself.

MM: Let me ask, for those who may not be familiar with your work, about the title of your book. What do you mean by, “What is in the way is the way”?

Mary: That’s an excellent question, Mark. I want to just share a little bit about the metaphor that is at the beginning of the book because people will need to understand what that means. So imagine a most beautiful meadow. I live here in the Northwest and have backpacked many times to Mt. Rainier and it is one of the true loves of my life.

Just imagine a most gorgeous meadow with little flowing streams and little marmots all around, beautiful flowers and bees buzzing, these wonderful noble firs, and the mountain as the backdrop. Everything flows in that meadow. There is nothing in that meadow that resists life. Including pain, death and loss. We lived in that meadow when we were very young, in fact, we were born in that meadow. There was a time when there were no thoughts in our head. So we were at ONE with LIFE. So it seems that this was a schoolroom, we had to take on some of the unconsciousness, that was our job. So slowly, like the clouds in the sky that normally would pass by, they eventually get lower and lower and lower and pretty soon they are swirling around us until we can’t see the meadow anymore.

Now, these clouds are all the conditioning, the basis of which were pretty well formed in us before we were six years old. We absorbed this unconscious self from our parents, they absorbed from their parents and so on and so forth. The most important thing to get is that you’ve never left the meadow, you just think you have.

So when you begin to hear about enlightenment, like I did, you think, *I’m going to go back to the meadow. I’m going to be enlightened* and so, now I am a seeker. But as long as you are a seeking you never really truly see the meadow. I learned somewhere along the line that the peace and the joy that I’ve been searching for all my life was already here. And, that how you come back to a recognition of the meadow is to get to know your cloud bank, which is made out of fear, glued together by judgment, takes us into anger, irritation, pushing and the other opposite, despair.

When I say, *what’s in the way is the way*, what I’m basically saying is life is for life. And life has given us this unconscious self as our teacher of awakening. Rather than trying to get someplace, you begin to learn how to see and be with the core constructs of your cloud bank. So, I lived in a tremendous amount of dread, which is part of the reason I tried to kill myself so many times. It’s a horrible feeling, it’s a feeling deep in your core that something really bad is going to happen and it’s going to happen because YOU screwed up. I tried to fix it, I tried to get rid of it, I tried to kill myself to get away from it. And then, with curiosity and the wisdom of the heart from the teaching of Stephen Levine, I started learning how to turn towards the dread. Dread was a very scary state. I discovered how to be with the dread rather than fall into it. I learned the process of alchemy, which is the process of turning unconsciousness to consciousness through the power of my own attentive heart. Now, one other piece to this, what’s in the way is the way, is a wonderful statement that showed up all in one piece as I was writing, or as the

book was being written through me. Here it is: Life is set up to bring up what has been bound up, so it can open up, to be freed up, so we can show up for life.

We don't see this in the unconscious resisting, fixing, changing, rearranging, wanting what isn't here, not wanting what is here self, we don't see how intelligent life truly is. We don't see that life is giving us exactly what we need to see our fear, see our loneliness, see our shame, see our anger so that we can learn how to unhook from it, just from the act of seeing. I trust life. I trust life implicitly. I don't always like it but I trust it.

MM: I'd like to ask you a question. This has something to do with semantics, it's something I'm always curious about. When you say that life happens for us and that what happens is for the best, there is a devil's advocate that comes up in me that thinks what it sounds like is that we're making up a story about the best we can do with what is.

In other words, when people say what's happening is for the best, to me that's a story. Instead of saying, what's happening is what's happening and then we do the best we can with it, we learn to respond skillfully to it, it sounds like a fairy tale to me that everything is for the best. This may be a semantic difference.

Mary: Right. So, there are two things, very important. Number one. We are a part of a highly, highly intelligent process. It is a process that has taken something as insubstantial as stardust and has created dolphins and meadows full of flowers and ladybugs and human beings *and* death, destruction, loss. It's stardust, for heaven's sakes. Let's bring it a little closer to home. You once were a tiny cell that you couldn't see with the naked eye and it developed, and it knew how to develop, into seventy trillion cells and they all work together a *helluva* lot better than the seven billion people on the planet. When was the last time we healed a cut on our skin or regulated our temperature or digested our food?

Now, to that we add the yin and yang symbol, which is, to me, one of the most important symbols on this planet. We have gotten caught in what I call the dualistic mind. If you watch very carefully the unconscious mind, the thing that talks all day long, that likes this and doesn't like that, wants this, doesn't want that and says, "I think I'm going to have an ice cream cone," and five minutes later it says, "I shouldn't have done that," that's the dualistic mind. The dualistic mind, if it would create its symbol, there would be a line down the middle and on one side would be darkness and the other side would be light. But thank god that didn't become this very important symbol called the yin and yang symbol, where dark and light are nestled together.

In the dark is a point of light and in the light, is a point of dark. It's something that we're beginning to grow into now as a species, and that is the understanding that whatever that is that we call god or the divine or the sacred or whatever, is both dark and light, and there is intelligence in both. There is intelligence in the dark. So when I say, "Life is for us," and like I said earlier, I don't always like it, I think having it be set up this way is a little bit crazy, this is what we find ourselves in. And when I say, "life is for us," I mean that life puts us in the exact set of situations that bring up our unconscious self. If you look at evolution, you'll see that life is for life. It is always supporting the ongoing,

unfolding of life. In my world, as Jonas Salk basically said, for billions and billions of years evolution has been in biology and before that, it was molecular, now it is in consciousness. So, in my world, life is putting us in situations so more and more of us can begin to see and relate to the unconscious self rather than from it, and that is what is going to heal the world. So does that answer your question?

MM: Yes, that is actually very beautifully put. Thank you very much. Let me ask you now about the storyteller. We're called *homo narrans*, we're the story telling ape, it is second nature to us. I don't think you're talking about stories that are external fictions, some of which can be allegories to live by.

Mary: Yes. Of course. As Eckhart Tolle said, we have 65,000 thoughts a day. When I say that it makes me a little tired and as Eckhart said, of those 65,000 thoughts a day, most of them are repeats from the day before. At one time, there were no stories in our head and slowly and surely in that process from zero to six years of age, we created a self image. We got the basic view of ourselves and life in the first six years of our life. Yeah, there is some remodeling here and there, but the basic foundation was there. And the key word there is image, it's not the real thing. We pulled ourselves up and out of our bodies and we got stuck in this mental world. And it's not really who we are. Life is experienced as a thought, many thoughts. And I love what Alan Watts, the great Zen philosopher said, no matter how many times we say water, it will never be wet. We've been captured into a mental world. The way I like to describe it is to just imagine the most beautiful house with the most beautiful gardens you can ever imagine with windows open and light pouring in, yet we live in a basement, windowless room with a big screen TV. So what we do is we think all day long, we're caught in this mental world. If you think of a doorway on your forehead you could open up, you would see that the stories that go through your head all day long, you're telling yourself stories about life, stories about your health, about your mate, your health, the future, about the past, stories about how you're doing it right, how you're doing it wrong, and you begin to see, *Oh my god, I just think about my life!*

Now, a really important thing that happened as I was writing my latest book, *What's in the Way IS the Way*, is that I began to realize that when we were very young, we took on eight core spells, if people are interested in that they can just email us awaken@maryomalley.com, and they are in *What's in the Way IS the Way*, but I can send them the list of spells. My group spent a year working on the list, I created eight core spells and then we talked about the ways people would say "this particular spell." People began to be able to relate more to the stories in their heads, they began to realize that most all of it is the spells, taken on when you were young. And the reason that the word *spell* is so powerful is that it's something that's laid over the top of you, it's not true and it can be lifted.

Now, it is something that is so important to say here is that we are not putting the mind down. My god, it took over 13.8 billion years to figure out how to make it. We need to learn how to use it for the exquisite tool it is. Rather than allowing it to take over our life and allowing it to think it is the master.

MM: I was just going to ask you about the spells. Can you list the spells?

Mary: Yes. The first core spell, and oh god, Mark, I've had the grace, for over thirty years to see into the minds and hearts of tens of thousands of people. I've worked all the way from mentally challenged people, to homeless people to presidents of corporations to therapists to homemakers, you name it, all walks of life. This idea of spells started coming about four years ago, and all of a sudden it just started showing up in my head, that all of this stuff could be distilled down into eight core spells that we took on. Remember, spells are something that we took on and are not true.

Before I go into the spells, I want to say one other thing. There is a wonderful book called *The Proof of Heaven* by Eben Alexander. He is a neuroscientist at Harvard who had a near death experience. He got spinal meningitis and was in a coma for seven days and he saw things when he was out of his body and came back and wrote this book. (He doesn't like the title, he says there is no proof of heaven) but he basically said, "Heaven is right here. It's not a place, it's right here and we don't see it." And I say, we don't see it because of the spells. The spells are like the cloud banks.

So, the first core spell. We are born, and we are absolutely at one with our mother. Somewhere in those first few months we get the first glimmerings that *I am a separate being*. That's not true. Well, on some level it is true, I can reach out and touch you, but at the deep level, it's not true. You are not separate from anything. We do these food retreats, and at one of our retreats we do this amazing food meditation and it shows how the entire universe conspires together to bring a single strawberry to you. (That's the first spell, *I am a separate being*.)

The second spell, from the flow, from this recognition that we are part of this flow, as Evan said, when he was pressed about what he saw, he said, "You can't put it into words. The closest I can come is love is the reality of all realities, the incomprehensible wondrous truth that lives at the heart of everything that has ever existed or will ever exist." So in my world, I look out at this beautiful dogwood tree, but see leaves, yes, but I also see love. When we take on the second spell, *life is not safe*, we shut down that connection with life, with love.

Those are the core two spells, then we go into the three operating spells.

I have to control life. I've got to do it. And we leave this wondrous world of being that we knew when we were young.

Second one, *I gotta do it right*.

Third one, *I'm not right or good enough*.

If you open to open that little door on the forehead, and you were able to listen to the messages there, you would see that people live in these three spells. Then, that leads to the hidden spells.

From my thirty years of working with people, I can say, we all have these hidden spells. Most people don't ever allow themselves to become aware of it. Maybe, in the middle of the night when their relationship has ended, or their boss has fired them or whatever, they will wake up and these spells come roaring up from the depths and they just hit you like tsunami waves and you don't want to live anymore.

And now, the hidden spells:

Because I am not doing it right, I am wrong.

Because I am bad and wrong, I am unloveable. We are connectors, we are love, reaching out to love, most people anyway. Most people feel they are unlovable. Then we come to the core spell: *I am all alone*. But the amazing thing is, if you take that word down, "alone," it is all-one. That is the core spell that caused us to separate out and live in so much suffering. And all the while, we are loved more than we can possibly know. We are loved by the sun, the moon, the stars, the pavement, the air, whatever. We are a sea of love and we just don't see it because we are caught in this cloud bank of spells that put a veil between us and what is really going on here.

MM: Beautiful. Wow. Such a wonderful teaching. Mary, tell me. What is the role of activism and service?

Mary: Activism comes from the idea that something is wrong out there and I have to fix it. Einstein said that if you try to solve a problem at the same level that it was created, you only create more problems. As more and more of us begin to see, to recognize the yin and yang symbol, to recognize there's nothing that needs to be fixed, changed or rearranged, that is your foundation, that life is for life, and it knows what it's doing, then, you can respond to situations.

This is where people get really kind of messed up. They think it sounds like if you think life is for you and life knows what it's doing, you're supposed to just sit down by the side of the road. That's just a dualistic thought. They think they have to get out there and fix things, or they go to the opposite and think they don't have to do anything. It's something in the middle. It's more and more people learning how to respond to life from the wisdom of the gut brain and the heart brain, rather than react to it. That, to me, is the greatest service of all. The greatest service is more and more people clearing through their cloud bank so they can begin to live from the heart, which is the main-brain. Science is showing us now, the heart and the gut, those are amazing brains that got cut off when we were very young, and so to me, by far, the greatest service is people in their lives, here for life, seeing it through the eyes of the heart, which is seeing it through the heart of life.

For example, when I go into a grocery store, usually I'm the only one that's really "there." Sometimes I'll meet someone who is really there, and it's wonderful. Most of the people are completely caught in their cloud banks. So to me, one of the greatest things you can do is connect in love. I know, of all the seven billion people on the planet, there's no accident who is in that store with me. I just see them and I see them with my heart.

And when I go to check out, I am there as fully as I can be with that grocery store clerk, because he or she is a unique and necessary aspect of the divine. Now, I want to add one other thing. The greatest service is learning how to meet yourself in your heart. That's so much about *What's in the Way IS the Way*, it's in all my books, my CD's, my retreats, everything. Because it's when you can become whole inside of you, you can weave the dark with the light. I can remember when I tried to kill myself because I was such a worthless piece of crud that I didn't even deserve to live, and now, every single part of myself is woven in my heart. Because of that, there's very little that I have to react to out there, so I can keep my heart open to whatever shows up in my life. In my world, that is what will heal our world, one person at a time.

MM: Great. Just a couple more questions. You say there is nothing wrong in the world and yet obviously there is an enormous amount of suffering.

Mary: Exactly, yes.

MM: So when you turn on the news and you see children being kidnapped or people being beheaded, what do you feel?

Mary: My heart aches but it doesn't break. I had the very good grace to hang out with Brian Swim, a wonderful human being, and I won't say it right, he's now the director for the Center of Science and Spirituality at Berkeley and he's written many books, and he's a scientist. He hung out with a priest called Thomas Berry. I was with him many years ago in the '80s. He did this wonderful thing.

They took many stages of evolution, and they showed how life is a story, a constantly evolving story. They showed how one phase ends and the new phase comes in, there's always chaos as the oldest dies and the new is being born. In fact, Elisabet Sahtouris, the wonderful evolutionary biologist has a twist on the butterfly story. She shares, that there is this exquisitely beautiful being that came from a caterpillar that was a taker. The caterpillar just takes and takes and takes, and eats and eats and eats, and then he wraps himself up in a cocoon. In that cocoon, the caterpillar turns to goo. What they say is that out of the goo comes an imaginal cell, it gives me a chill whenever I say that. This is the forerunner of the butterfly. The goo, the old, always kills this first wave of imaginal cells, and it causes these cells to come together into a community and the urge of the new overcomes the old, out comes this butterfly that is the complete opposite of the caterpillar. It has this grand view, not a view that it is one branch from one tree, but a view that it can fly with the monarch from Canada to Mexico, for heaven's sake, and then, they pollinate.

When I see what you mentioned, my heart aches but it doesn't break because I know we are in evolutionary shift. We are in that shift of the dualistic mind being in charge. All you have to do is look at the evening news to see what is happening to the heart-brain being in charge. And so I feel sadness. But I also know that birth is messy. If you were an alien from another planet and went into the birthing room of a female and witnessed her yelling her head off, seeing the blood, pee and poop, all this stuff everywhere, one would

think, “Oh my god! What’s happening, somebody’s dying!” But if you knew that it was a birth, then you would celebrate.

So, that is what I invite people to do. Allow your heart to ache, to allow that to inspire you more to see those aspects inside of you that you see out there in the world. Because, we are the universe. That is how we will heal the world, healing what we see in ourselves that is also in the world. People say this allows them to stay spacious rather than becoming a part of what is happening by falling into fear and despair.

MM: Mary O’Malley, thank you so much for this eloquent and beautiful interview, it’s been amazing spending time with you.

Mary: Thank you, so much. I so appreciate you getting this message more out in the world and of course your listeners can go to maryomalley.com if they want to learn more about how they can heal the world. And if they are interested they can email me also and I can send them the last chapter of *What’s In the Way IS the Way*, which brings it all together. We truly are in a break-through time. It looks like a break down time, but in my world, it’s a break-through time.

MM: Gorgeous. Thank you, Mary.

Mary: Thank you, Mark.