

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# Soulshaping: An Interview with Jeff Brown

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The Seekers Forum  
Awaken To Your Life

Welcome to the Seekers Forum Guest Interview for this month's program, "Questions that Matter." Today I spoke to Jeff Brown, who is a very interesting figure on the spiritual landscape. He's a former criminal lawyer and a psychotherapist and the author of five popular books: *Soulshaping*, *A Journey of Self-Creation*, *Ascending with Both Feet on the Ground*, *Love it Forward*, *An Uncommon Bond*, and *Spiritual Graffiti*. Jeff is the producer and the key journeyer in the award-winning spiritual documentary *Karmageddon*, which also stars Ram Dass and Seane Corn. He's also the owner of Enrealment Press and an on-line school, Soulshaping Institute. Jeff is a very popular presence in social media and lives in Toronto with his partner, the poet Susan Frybort. We had a chance today to talk about the questions that matter and what Jeff recommends on the art of self-inquiry in his very unique, somewhat idiosyncratic language. So, I hope you enjoy the interview.

**MM:** Welcome, Jeff Brown. It's so great to finally talk to you. I've admired your work for a long time, and we have friends in common. So thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today.

**JB:** My pleasure, Mark.

**MM:** Thank you, Jeff. Let me just begin by saying as a teacher and a seeker, your personal spiritual journey has been full of a lot of unexpected surprises. And I'd just like to talk a bit about how you came to do the work that you do and this unique perspective that you have on wisdom and awakening. How did you first come to this work?

**JB:** Yeah, I think I was doing this work from the beginning on some quiet level internally. I mean I was mostly as a child kind of locked into my adaptations and disguises, so the becoming who I had to become in order to survive my family battlefield I guess. But in the heart of that, there were voices or glimmers of knowing in various indications, hence "callings," that would somehow in the most unexpected ways arise into my consciousness.

So for example, I would watch a very famous criminal lawyer named Eddie Greenspan on television in Toronto as an adolescent. And I had this deep feeling that I knew him and that I would work with him one day. And I would say, "I am going to work with him one day." And so, you know, along the way during all that period and into my early twenties, there was this sense that there was a path encoded in me, what James Hillman called the "innate image."

I didn't have words for that at the time, but that there was something that I was born to embody in this lifetime. And I think one of my mistakes was thinking that my reality was bifurcated completely, that is that there was this true path encoded in the bones of my being and that there was this false path that I was experiencing with this crazy family. And one of the most surprising things, because you mentioned, unexpected surprises, has been that really understanding that in many cases – not all cases, but in many cases – the experiential material that I inhabited in my early life was fundamental to my true path, or what I call my soul scriptures in this lifetime; and that really very little of it was an accident; and all of it if converted in the right direction was grist for the mill for my transformation and my movement in the direction of the path that I was here to walk. And so at some point along the way, my early twenties, I was an undergrad and I would be sitting in class, and I would be kind of bored and writing notes. And on the sidebar I

would find myself writing, “You are not who you appear to be. You are not who you appear to be.”

So some part of my consciousness was waking up to the reality, in a much clearer and more clarified way at least, that there was something else for me, calling to me. And at first I thought it was like leading. I went to law school and I worked with Eddie Greenspan. That’s when all of these things happened. And just at the end of it we had the bar admission process, and throughout my bar admission process, when I was about to become a lawyer and become a prominent lawyer, this voice got stronger inside of me. And originally it was a bifurcated dialogue. It was the warrior consciousness that said, “Go and survive in the world. You come from no money. Go and be a prominent lawyer. You have great work to do.” I loved law. It wasn’t that I hated law.

And this other voice seemed to pull me in the direction of whatever the next step was. It didn’t tell me what the next step was, but it told me what the next step wasn’t. And it wasn’t to become a prominent trial lawyer. And at that time, still I had this radical conflict internally between who I had become to that point in my life and this idea of who I was to become. And as the journey has unfolded, I have really come to realize that all of it is fundamental to my unique soul scriptures in this lifetime.

**MM:** Hm. And so how did you make that initial cross-over from a lawyer and that kind of a path to the path of a spiritual journeyman and teacher and seeker?

**JB:** Well, I mean I wasn’t ready to abandon law entirely. So I made the decision not to practice right after being called. There were a number of people I was going to get an office with, and I just decided not to participate. And then I just allowed myself to surrender to my body and to my emotional process. We’ll talk a little bit more about it. But I don’t distinguish spiritual maturation from emotional maturation. So my first direction was because I wasn’t really a spiritual guy. I was a psychotherapeutic guy.

**MM:** Mmm.

**JB:** I had left law after first-year law school to do two years of therapy before going back. So I was really connected to the idea that I had work to do in the therapeutic realm. What happened is I stepped back and then I started to sit in the back of courtrooms, thinking somehow I would watch trials and I would find my answers there. And what started to happen is I just started crying. I would sit in the back of the courtroom and just cry. And it wasn’t because of the content of the case. It was because my emotional material was pushing up against the edge of my arm or trying to find its way through me.

**MM:** Mmm.

**JB:** And so I spent a long time just in emotional process and learning how, in order to get to where I had gotten from my impoverished background, I had to armor up and warrior up. And I sold windows door-to-door, and I sold *People* door-to-door, and I punched my way through everything, Mark. And so now finally I had an opportunity to drop below the puncher and to feel

and to live and to live at the core. As that journey enfolded more and more, as I stepped more deeply into that and did a very important workshop at the Omega Center in Rhineback with Terry Hunt – where I really, really unraveled some material that was obstructing my consciousness, I think – it just became clear to me that I just could not go back to law.

So I went back for a few minutes, just to confirm that I couldn't do it any longer, and then after that, it was over. But it was an incremental process. It wasn't a "yes" or a "no." It was so much a part of me, the law; and Eddie was so much a part of me. And the beautiful work that I wanted to do in the courtroom was so much a part of me that I had to give space and time for this process in order to move in the next direction.

**MM:** Mmm. And so what was that direction? How would you define the direction you wanted to move in, Jeff? You say it wasn't quite spiritual?

**JB:** Right.

**MM:** It was more psychotherapeutic? Or was it a blend of the two?

**JB:** Well, I mean I don't distinguish the two any more. I don't even know any difference between any of these things any more. But I think it was at first psychotherapeutic, but as part of my exploration. So for example, Alexander Lowen in the Bioenergetics Center was my therapist for awhile because I joined the training program. It was one of the steps I took. And I would work Al in the psychotherapeutic material. I would release all of the holdings, or many of the holdings, in the office with him in Connecticut. And always invariably at the end of the session I would feel like I opened into a unity consciousness field of experience.

**MM:** Mmm.

**JB:** It was like clearing the emotional debris. I just naturally entered a meditative state. So there I began to understand that there was no distinction between these things and that it was all part of the so-called "spiritual field." And then it continued. I had a great love experience that cracked my heart open even a little bit more. And at the end of it, I had to decide whether to armor up again or to move in the direction of opening. And for whatever reason, I moved. At Harbin Hot Springs in California, I did weeks of release and I opened to the next level.

**MM:** Mmm.

**JB:** And inside of that opening, the next stage on my path – my callings – was revealed to me, which was that it was time to write. I always knew I would write, but I wasn't ready to write because I wouldn't know what to write.

**MM:** Mmm.

**JB:** And all of these steps of revealing in terms of what my innate image was in this lifetime came through in the heart of, or at the tail end of, somatic release through psychotherapeutic process. So that's why I don't distinguish spirituality from psychology, both because the release

work opens up the field of inquiry and revealing, but also because I've come to realize that the transformative work I do around my unresolved issues is actually what grows me in karmic statute and expands my capacity to be here in a spiritual sense.

**MM:** Mmm. Beautiful. What do you mean by “karmic stature,” Jeff?

**JB:** Well, I mean to be able to take – I use the term “taking the one seat.” My work and my life – and perhaps it's true for all of us – is to take the one seat. That is to really allow myself to grow to the next stage on my soulshaping journey. Just the idea that we come in at a certain stage of development, karmically, cosmically, psychically, psychologically, and that really there is this unfolding if we allow ourselves to surrender to it and to actually do the work around it, to move in the direction of what my experience of wholeness could be in this lifetime. So if I didn't do law with Eddie, something would have been missed. Because I think fundamental to my journey archetypally is a movement from a warrior consciousness to a more (and a malevolent conciseness in some ways) to a more benevolent or surrendered warrior, healer consciousness. That's really the unfolding of my journey. And my career path decisions reflect that.

**MM:** Got it. And so for other folks, Jeff, what kind of spiritual practice do you recommend for people who are not drawn to an organized religion and are turned off by the New Age, but want a legitimate, authentic spiritual practice: what would you recommend?

**JB:** Well I would recommend that they don't accept patriarchal ideas of what spiritual practice is as the answer. Meditation is not the royal road to the Kingdom of God for everybody. I would encourage them, and often encourage people I work with, to embrace somatic work, body-centered release work in the psychotherapeutic sense, dance as a release and expression practice, love-making as a release and expression practice, really anything that allows them to move more deeply into the self to clear the debris that obstructs the self and to then move into a more unified experience of consciousness.

I don't believe in encouraging spiritual practices that take us too far away from selfhood, that bash the self, that bash the ego, that bash all of our identifications, that bash our story. To me that's just disassociation masquerading as enlightenment. They're useful tools for a period of time. Detachment is a tool. It's not a life. So for me I invite people in the direction of spiritual practices that are more human, and encompassing, and inclusive, and congruent with what I call an Enrealment experience rather than a very linear, single-minded mastery-focused experience of spirituality.

**MM:** Mm-hm.

**JB:** So you can hang out at Tim Hortons' donuts and have a spiritual experience if you actually have a genuine intention. You know it all comes down to intention, a genuine intention to have that experience and in a way that allows you to try to connect both to a unified field and to a deeper experience of your localized reality.

**MM:** Mm-hm. Gotcha. And what about self-inquiry? I know you have your own sort of approach to self-inquiry. I get the somatic approach. But isn't there also something to be gained

by doing deep work around the question, “Who am I?” for example. How do you relate to self-inquiry in your own practice and teaching?

**JB:** I feel like, “Who am I really?” was the fundamental question that I was confronted with in the decision whether or not to be lawyer Jeff or some other Jeff. This is threaded through my journey almost from the beginning. And again, I’ve often found my answers in experience. I encourage people to depth-charge, that is to go out and have experiences, often very uncomfortable experiences, because often that yields more information, experience as to the path that they are here to walk. So we have to have outer experiences. And then we check in with our bones, and our bones will tell us whether or not that’s a direction that we are here to walk or whether that’s a false path, a direction we are not here to walk. But also the importance for me of going into the emotional release chamber. I believe, Mark, it’s all in your bones. I believe the innate image is encoded. I don’t believe it’s a cerebral construct. I believe it’s an enheartened experience. I believe it’s in the tissues. I believe it’s in the emotional body. I believe it’s in the truth chills we get when we know we’ve come to something so deeply true. I believe it’s in the truth aches that we experience, all kind of symptoms of our malaise or our alienation from our true path. I believe that the body and the connection to the body, physical and emotional body, is the direction to go when you are trying to ask the question, “Who am I?”

**MM:** Hm.

**JB:** I don’t believe it’s a transcendent experience. I believe it’s a deeply imminent experience.

**MM:** And yet you’re saying of course that the two are not separate, that by going into the imminent experience don’t we move through into a transcendental experience that includes the imminent?

**JB:** Well maybe. Or we move into just an inclusive consciousness. I mean maybe the word “transcend” is not the best word because it sounds somehow distinguished from or disassociated from an imminent experience. I mean, “What do we move in?” “We move into a broader lens,” let’s say. “We move into an awareness of our connection to a unified field, to an all-oneness consciousness.” But people have to be careful. If they move too far away, if they follow Eckhart Tolle and just move towards disassociation, then basically all they end up doing is floating in the oneness abyss in the emptiness. I don’t believe we are here just to be in the emptiness. Otherwise we wouldn’t be in a body temple. But at the same time I understand that we have to have that experience in order to have a break from this madness down below and also because we want to have a vaster perspective that we then bring back into the body, the localized experience.

So we want to go to some degree in that direction, but we don’t want to get so far from the self-hood. And I also understand we don’t want to go so far into the self-hood and the individual experience that we become locked there or so grounded as to be buried, that we can’t see anything through a vaster lens. I think the difference in my perspective is that I believe most of that happens through the emotional body and through the self-container, rather than through the disassociation from the container, because I think then it becomes very difficult to come back home and work with what lives inside of you and integrate it.

**MM:** Mmm. Right. And we're saying the same thing really. It's both-and. It's not either-or. And having access to that unified consciousness helps us go more deeply into the imminent and vice versa.

**JB:** Well if it's used in the right way it does. And as we know from the New Cage Movement, if it's used in the wrong way, it doesn't. I use the term "Eastern Consciousness." My goal is to find the blend between the wisdom, the all-oneness or unified focus in the East and the emphasis on the healthy ego and healthy self-concept and this magnificent self-hood in the West, not going too far in either direction. I try to find that point of balance, and it's complicated, between the oceans of essence and my individual droplet of meaning. I guess that's what we're talking about. And it concerns me that so much emphasis on what has been called spirituality for a long time in the West, and maybe forever, is that it seems to be about dissing self-hood identification, the ego and structure and the beauty and glory of our localized moment-to-moment existence. This feels to me like a grave and disassociate mistake. I think it's important for us to find a way to do it with our feet planted firmly on Mother Earth.

**MM:** Yeah. Absolutely. And Jeff, what kinds of questions do you recommend that folks ask ourselves on the path of embodied self-inquiry to take us more deeply into our own wisdom and our own power?

**JB:** Questions like, "What information?" I mean the question, "Who am I really?" is always a good, broad framework question. But, "What information do I have from my lived experience as to why I am here?" I ask my clients that all the time. "What do you know? What information do you have or you know?" That requires us to unplug, to have experience of solitude, to selectively attach so that we're not locked in difficult and impossible dynamics that wear us out.

We have to make changes in our lives, especially nowadays, in order to access that question. But we have information coming through us. We have a feeling of resonance. That's meaningful information. We have a feeling of resistance that's sometimes meaningful. And one way or the other, it's meaningful information. So I think if people just keep coming back to that. And if their answer is, "I don't have enough information from my experience," then the answer is they have to go more directly into experience and then come back to that in order to find their way home.

**MM:** Mmm. You know in these days a lot of people are asking themselves, "How do we live in this turbulent time when there is so much danger, there is so much fear, and there's so much conflict?" You know. How do we work with our anger? How do we work with our aggression? What is the place of outrage? What do you recommend in this regard around the work that you do?

**JB:** I think focusing on a regular basis on healthy emotional release, appropriate healthy emotional release, is helpful. So I have a foam cube in the house, a bionenergetics cube, that I use to release anger sometimes. I encourage people to allow themselves the space and the time to drop into their hearts and to move through their tears, all kinds of grief forums, whatever it is that they're holding so that they don't continue to accumulate. Accumulation is the big problem, that we're so flooded and overwhelmed that all this material accumulates until eventually we don't even know what day it is on an emotional level. So that's important. I think practicing the art of

selective attachment is important, keeping people close to you that really nourish and sustain you, that hold you in the highest light, I feel is very important. Many people are trapped in unhealthy, unfulfilling dynamics that obstruct them and prevent them from having the time they need to go deeper. And I think establishing healthy boundaries – energetically, physically, emotionally – through awareness work is fundamentally, is absolutely essential. Because in that overwhelmed (state) – in the way that the unconscious media wants us overwhelmed, and the consumerism wants us overwhelmed, I mean, consumerism preys on the uncentered – I think it's absolutely essential that we do a lot of work around establishing, testing, developing, forming consolidating boundaries so that we can manage the madness of the world more effectively and protect our center.

**MM:** And what about engaging with the world politically or through activism...

**JB:** Yeah.

**MM:** ...making social change. What part does that play in the way you see things?

**JB:** You know I just published a book by Andrew Harvey and Chris Saade called *Evolutionary Love Relationships* that I love so much because it focuses on taking the fire of connection in whatever form of connection in your life – and it doesn't have to happen in connection – and bringing it out into the world, boots on the ground, actually doing work to help the world. So I see my work, my sacred purpose, now moving fundamentally in the direction of sacred activism. And finding causes that are deeply, truthfully important to you and finding your way into the heart of bringing your voice to the world is... it's very clear that it's our only hope now, with the madness that's going on, and particularly in America, but not only America. And I think it's the direction of spirituality. We have to ground it in something. If we spend our time floating away from the core and the self as our idea of a spiritual or enlightening experience, it's very easy for us to ignore everything that's happening around us because we see it all as an illusion.

**MM:** Mm-hm.

**JB:** It's important to come into the body and understand spirituality as an embodied construct so that you remain very vigilant, aware of what's happening in the world around you, and the voice and calling that you have, to bring into the world in order to effect change.

**MM:** Hm. Beautiful. Tell me, Jeff, how has your own teaching evolved over the years? I mean what do you know today that you didn't know when you first embarked on this journey as a teacher and as a seeker?

**JB:** Well I think I know that I don't know very much. I mean I really get that if enlightenment exists at all, it's a relative experience. I have had experiences of moving into say a unified awareness or a more expansive or inclusive consciousness and thinking that I had hit the endpoint. But it's like Maslow talked about with the rumble theory. You reach this stage in yourself where you've developed to a certain place and then you come, you sit quietly in that place, and you begin to feel the frustrations then because there is a deeper calling to move to the next level of consciousness. I have learned that the next level of consciousness never stops, there



is no fixed point. And it's important, when you're working with people who call you up and say, "Can we do all of this in five sessions?" to tell them, "No we can't do all of this. We can only do maybe five sessions together, but this is a lifelong journey. This is an unfolding in the direction of wholeness and you have to stay connected to that journey throughout. So that's changed. And also I think when I started this – I mentioned a little bit earlier – I was really much more in a simplistic understanding of, "I was either going to be this guy or that guy." I didn't understand that I was going to be all those guys, that all of my aspects were going to be eating from the same plate. I thought I was going to eradicate the warrior. I was going to become this other being.

And really now that I'm bringing my work into the world and I'm gaining enormous, well, a fair amount of support from people, I am finding that I need my warrior more than ever. I need my vigilant consciousness. I need my legal skills – all of these aspects that I was dising and thinking I had to push away from, and I did for a while. I had to push them away to explore an opposite way of being. But now I'm understanding that really an enreal consciousness means that it's all part of it, and we just have to find the way in which that all of those things have to integrate.

**MM:** Mmm. You have mentioned "the warrior" several times here. And I would just like to talk about what are the characteristics of the warrior that you are cultivating? And what are the characteristics of the warrior that you were learning to not listen to or to leave behind more in your life?

**JB:** You know I think it's just that the thread they have in common is a courageous willingness to assert my voice in the world. And I think the distinguishing characteristics are – and I didn't go so far into this, but I saw moments when I could have – I saw what the malevolent aspect of that was, the unhealthily egoing versus the healthily egoing warrior consciousness, the accumulating male who is fixated on the fruits of victory without thinking about whether or not they really mean anything. You know, how they are going to affect the world around him, all of those things. Really much more self-centered, but in a way that's unhealthily egoic. And I think the movement has been more in the direction of benevolent warriorship. Like, "Just do good," right? And really feeling into what that means, so, still being feisty and assertive, and understanding that we live in a world where we have to stay grounded and vigilant. The great shift in consciousness is simply not upon us. We know that because look who is the president of the United States.

**MM:** Mm-hm. Right.

**JB:** Let's get real together. So I've never lost that vigilance. But I think that my vigilance is not as defensive and not as edgy as it was in my childhood and maybe in my past lifetimes. I think it's just more softened in its intention and it's more heartfelt in its inclusivity.

**MM:** Mm-hm. And that is also masculine. That's not saying that everything that is soft and benevolent is female and that everything that is, you know, aggressive and selfish is male. You don't bifurcate gender in that way either, do you?

**JB:** I find the whole gender— I read a lot about gender and I mean I don't know what our ultimate direction is. I think that's the question to come back to. Are we transcending gender? Are we all going to include all aspects of gender? What will be the distinctions we'll be left with? I don't really know. I'm uncomfortable calling warrior consciousness, I mean we've called that a masculine way of being, but I really don't know.

**MM:** Okay. Well you mentioned patriarchy earlier so I was curious. That's why I was asking.

**JB:** Yeah. Well patriarchy, yeah, I think patriarchy is distinctly linked to the steps often of a malevolent warrior consciousness. But I'm not sure that a benevolent warrior consciousness is necessarily linked to masculinity. I mean it feels to me like that would be just some kind of a human experience.

**MM:** Mmm, gotcha. Great. And just one last question, Jeff. I'm curious about what you're working on now. Where is your curiosity leading you?

**JB:** Yeah.

**MM:** Where do you feel like you're growing?

**JB:** Yeah. I'm moving on one level more in the direction of audio with Soulshaping Institute. I want to grow that quite large. And I want to create a reality or a paradigm where there are free courses for people who can't afford them, and translated courses for people who wouldn't be able to access my work because they don't speak English. And so that feels like the next step after I complete a book that I am working on now, which is really my model of spirituality, some of the things I just mentioned.

And I'm both focusing on trying to tear down patriarchal spirituality and at the same time I don't want to just be a gadfly. I want to try to present the beginnings of a framework or a model for us going forward, at least as a point of dialogue. So I am going to be in the heart of that book for a number of months. And then my focus primarily will be on short writings and developing audio and moving far more in the direction of spiritual activism, that is bringing my lawyer much more to the table and doing work in the world around the building of movements that I believe will help us going forward.

**MM:** Great. And does your book have a name, the upcoming book?

**JB:** Yes. But it's quietly held.

**MM:** Okay. Great. Jeff, thank you so much for your time. It's so good to finally connect, and I wish you so much luck with your wonderful work. It does so much great good in the world. By the way everyone – Chris Saade and Andrew's book is terrific and I recommend everybody listening to this go out and get a copy today. So anyway, thank you, Jeff Brown. It's wonderful to talk to you.

**JB:** Great. Thank you, Mark.

MM: Thank you.