

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# **Vision for Your Life: An Interview with Byron Katie**

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Mark Matousek Interview: Byron Katie  
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Welcome to The Seekers Forum Guest Interview for this month's program, "Vision for Your Life: The Practice of Intention." Our guest is the incomparable Byron Katie, one of the most extraordinary and original teachers I've ever known. Named by *Time Magazine* as a "Spiritual Innovator for the 21st century," Katie created a method of self-inquiry known as The Work and is the founder of Byron Katie International as well as the author of several bestselling books, including *A Thousand Names For Joy* and *Loving What Is*.

Though she never intended to be a teacher, Katie began sharing her wisdom with visitors after the four questions that comprise The Work came to her following an enlightenment experience in 1986. These four questions -- Is it true? Can you absolutely know it's true? How do you react when you believe that thought? Who would you be without the thought? -- have helped thousands of seekers around the world to identify the destructive patterns in their minds and stop believing thoughts that create more suffering. Katie, who is married to the eminent writer and translator Stephen Mitchell, sat down with me recently to talk about The Work, and the connection between telling the truth and creating a life of intention.

**Mark:** Welcome, Katie. It's so good to see you again.

**Katie:** Thank you, and you.

**Mark:** Thank you so much. I'd like to begin by asking you, if somebody came to you saying that they had no sense of direction or vision for their own life, what would you say to them?

**Katie:** I would say then just do the dishes.

[laughter]

Uh, sweep the kitchen floor, brush your teeth.

[chuckles]

**Mark:** You don't think it's important to have a vision for your life?

**Katie:** That's a vision for some of us, you know, because we hear the thought, "Brush your teeth." And, you know, it shows up and then, "Oh, I'll do it later, it was too early," or, "I'll brush them." On and on. "I need coffee first." Whatever, you know, is just brush your teeth, do the dishes. That's not a little thing, Mark, because if I can't just follow those simple directions, if they're so overridden by the ego, the 'why nots,' if I can't follow that simple direction -- how much use am I in the world with a goal that is really a figment of my imagination until it's reality?

**Mark:** Mm-hmm. Right. I understand. To me, you are unique among teachers. I often don't think of you as a spiritual teacher so much as a teacher of reality. Do you think that the idea of spiritual life versus a so-called ordinary life is just passé?

**Katie:** What is your definition of a spiritual life?

**Mark:** Exactly. That gets to my point. People think of their spiritual life as different than their mundane life and that I think is a problem.

**Katie:** Oh, I see. An example of that might be someone sitting in meditation every morning as a practice, and then when the practice ends, going on about their life as though they were separate. And to my experience, just to get still and see what arises – I’m fascinated with that, Mark, as opposed to all those years of being a slave to it.

**Mark:** Hmm.

**Katie:** I’m curious. And because it’s all about past/future, so it’s irrelevant to life as I see it individually, we’ll say, myself, and it shows me what isn’t and it’s great education. But everything I need to live a kind life, it’s available to me now and we all know what that is, and it’s in my life. Just do the dishes, do your work –

**Mark:** Right.

**Katie:** – change the diaper.

**Mark:** Right-right. So there is no enlightenment to get to?

**Katie:** I’m enlightened to what is and what isn’t. More importantly, I’m awake to what hurts and what doesn’t and how to understand specifically how that works. So, hopefully, people’s lives become kinder, which is the ultimate goal because there’s no guilt in it. And, when we’re experiencing guilt, we’re not kind people so it’s self-inflicted over and over and over.

**Mark:** Mm, beautiful. And, the way toward this is through asking questions, right? That’s the great a ha.

**Katie:** Identifying what I was thinking or believing in the moment I did what I did or said what I said, and question that mindset and that is, it wakes us up to the cause of suffering and guilt and awe, so we’re more awakened.

**Mark:** Yes, it makes absolute sense. You talk about, the work begins to do itself.

**Katie:** The question, is it true for people who sit in the practice of this particular inquiry to identify, you know, what you want to question and, for example, “She doesn’t care about me.” Something just mundane that just flows through the mind or, “There’s something wrong with me,” or, you know, anything that you can just identify that’s running, and then just meditate in on that. Is it true? And then notice in your life, what happens when you believe that thought in that specific situation? That’s where we can see that we say cruel things, we do things that go against our true nature and then we experience guilt, and that is the ego that is like the fertile ground that the ego can exist in. It’s just delicious to the ego.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm.

**Katie:** And then to sit and meditate in that situation. Who would I be without the thought?

**Mark:** And when we want to begin questioning our thoughts and our emotions get in the way, how do you advise people to deal with the emotions that can be so overcome?

**Katie:** Oh my goodness, the emotions, you know, it’s like something terrible is going to happen. And let’s say we have that thought, and I don’t even know I’m thinking it, but all these emotions are going on.

So if I get really still in that storm, that emotional storm, and look at the cause of the storm, that puts me in touch with what I'm thinking and believing. And now that I'm in touch, I can move those thoughts from my head to paper and I can sit in inquiry with those judgments, those thoughts, those things that are causing the emotional storm.

Now, the first question is, is it true something terrible is going to happen? Now when I get to the next question, how do I react when I believe the thought? Now, my emotions, I can locate the epicenter and get in touch with how much of my body from that center, the center of the emotion, how much of my body does that take over?

**Mark:** Mm-hmm.

**Katie:** Does it go all the way from the top of my head to my toes? To become intimate with those emotions, when I experience emotions, Mark, as like, I often call it the temple bell –

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** – that wakes us up to what is the cause of these emotions, and so we can get still anytime these emotions, you know, it just it becomes automatic. Emotion? Ah, now I see the cause of my emotions. It's what I'm thinking and believing. You know, that's homework for me.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** What I'm thinking and believing belongs on paper. It's something that causes emotional like that, it shows me I'm really lost in the dream of past/future. I'm in touch with the cause of all suffering –

**Mark:** Mm-hmm.

**Katie:** – the cause of all joy, the cause of apparent life. But if these emotions that are anything less than peaceful, to look at the cause –

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** – and to question that cause.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** And then to just do the dishes, show up, meet my commitments.

**Mark:** This is such a mind-blowing concept for people. They can't, with the work, they can't believe it's so simple.

**Katie:** Oh –

**Mark:** And they can't believe that asking questions as self-inquiry can be so transformative.

**Katie:** Well, you know, I run into a lot of that, they just don't get how transformative that is. They don't sit in it. So it's just natural that they would believe, you know, just how could it be so simple? But in some way, it's starting, it's not so simple. We really believe, oh, everything changes and it won't always be this way. And we talk ourselves out of just sitting

and meditating in the cause of the suffering that would bring on those emotions to let us know that something there needs questioning.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** Because there's a lack of kindness going on. And that's not a help to my life and to the life of others in the world that I truly don't want to cause more harm. I'm left with an ability to understand and that's a leveler.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** You know, under all conditions.

**Mark:** If somebody comes to you with conflict, wanting to create something in their life, say write a book or have some career or have a relationship, but conflict prevents them from moving forward, what would you recommend?

**Katie:** I would say to just do it and anything your mind would attack you with that would hold you up, get excited, put it on paper, question it, sit in inquiry. It's a meditative process and work with all the "why not's."

**Mark:** Mm-hmm.

**Katie:** To question all the "why not's" that would hold you back because that's all that does hold a person back. And also if I want to write a book, I write it for myself. I don't expect anyone to read it, to understand it, to appreciate it. That would be crazy. This is my life I'm dealing with and if good comes out of it, we all benefit. You know, Mark, we're all writing a book.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm.

**Katie:** You know, or it's been written in us. It's just, do we love the book that we're living out of? Meaning, can I open my eyes this morning and I love what woke up. I love who and what I am, I love there's an energy that doesn't even have to think those thoughts. It just is, and it doesn't move on the way to the toothbrush. And it doesn't move on its way to the – on and on and on. You know, the "why not's" have lost their power because they have been included an inquiry and understanding was met. So there is no cause for war when the mind understands the mind, when it understands itself.

**Mark:** And so when the conflict dies down, when the mind isn't fighting with itself, things can happen.

**Katie:** Uh, well, they happen one way or another. It's just [chuckles] how you do it.

[laughter]

**Mark:** So, Katie, is it true that through the work, you can really get to the point where you don't need acceptance from other people?

**Katie:** Well, you don't need it because you're living out of acceptance. It's a state of mind and being, and so you can't need what you already have.

**Mark:** You can't want more of it, say, you're in a relationship with a person, and you want their acceptance even though you may have your own already?

**Katie:** If I understand the question, I'm accepting my life, and let's say I want something more from Stephen.

**Mark:** Right.

**Katie:** And he'll say yes or no. And that's what I want to need. And Stephen, [chuckles] as it happens, is very clear about his yes and no. And I'm good with that.

[chuckles]

You know, it's just a matter of, do we respect another human being's integrity? And I can't know if he's being honest or not. That's his. Mine is to respect, take it for what it is, and then go on with my life. Yeah, because anything I would want from him, I could ask anyone.

**Mark:** Mm. People get so attached to that special other.

**Katie:** Yeah, we're certainly not limited as far as people in the world too. If I invite him to the movies and he says, "No," and I say, "It's a wonderful movie, you would really like it." And he still says, "No," then, my goodness. I have people, other people I could ask to go to the movies with me. The old way would have been to sulk and make small and ridicule and get even.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm. [laughs] In that order.

**Katie:** Yeah. And it's really not to get even. It's just a kind of punishing thing we do. And that's an unquestioned mind at work. That is the ego, just running a non-existent show that seems so valid and real. Whereas, in the moment, oh my gosh. You know, I can see that going on, for example, and what I'm really seeing is the sun shining through the window and Stephen's integrity and nothing hidden from me because it's reality. And everything else is fake news. You know, that's an old world we all have a right to find a way out of.

**Mark:** Mm, good. [crosstalk]

**Katie:** Freedom is our birthright. And the way that I understand that to be true is anything less than that, it hurts. It's painful, and it puts us at the mercy of the world that needs to change. And no, not for me. Not for me. It will change on its own or it won't. It's just what am I contributing to that? That's where it lands.

**Mark:** You say that reality is kinder than our ideas about it. Can you say more about that for somebody who's in pain, either emotional or physical pain?

**Katie:** Well, let's say Stephen said, "No, I don't want to go to the movies with you," and then my mind says that he is selfish, he doesn't care about me, you know, these attack thoughts that happen. And that's not a problem if you don't believe them. You're just witnessing mind and how it works. It's not valid. And let's say I believe them, how do I react? When I believe the thought, I give Stephen the look. I say, "You don't care about me."

I say, you know, "You —" blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever it is. And then who would I be without it? That means dropping any past/future in my mind's eye that would

attack the Stephen of a moment ago and get sane because the Stephen of a moment ago is not Stephen. Because the Stephen of the past is pure imagination running.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** And it seems to be life, but it's not. It's pure imagination. So without the past/future running in my mind's eye, it can run all it wants to. I'm just [chuckles] awake to the dream.

**Mark:** Mm. Mm. Mm

**Katie:** I'm awake to the dream.

**Mark:** I understand. So that's why reality is kinder than our ideas about it?

**Katie:** Always-always-always-always and when you think it can't get any more beautiful, it has to, it's a law.

**Mark:** Mm. Mm.

**Katie:** It is unfolding, uncomplicated love.

**Mark:** Beautiful. Katie, do you believe, and this is a big question, it's a speculation, but do you believe that our species is evolving in any major way?

**Katie:** Um just, [chuckles] –

**Mark:** [laughs]

**Katie:** – you know, I can't answer that question. I can tell you my world is absolutely evolving, yes.

**Mark:** And the people you work with obviously it sparks awakening?

**Katie:** Absolutely evolving. If you know, anyone or anything in my world is evolving.

**Mark:** I'd like to just ask you a couple of questions that are a little more personal, not extremely personal. The first one is, are there things that particularly trigger you today? A particular kind of person, a particular kind of [chuckles] comment? What are the things that trigger you?

**Katie:** You know, and, as you ask that and I sit in it, what's flooding me is the sunlight coming through the glass triggers me. Sitting here with you triggers me. Just the thought of Stephen triggers me, but all in the most beautiful way.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Katie:** You know, the apparent world triggers me and when there's no opposite to conflict with that, it's unfolding without end. So all the triggers shift from pain and suffering to reality and that leaves us in the job of, "How can I help? How can I serve?" You know, just to be a utility that is as kind as a blade of grass or a cloud moving in the sky or the very breath we breath, all support. There's nothing in this world that is not here to support us. But we're thinking and believing about the world. That's what could use a little work.

**Mark:** Mm. [chuckles].

**Katie:** So that's my job. Just to make sure that as many people as possible know that this work exists, it's simple inquiry, and anyone with an open mind can do it and it's always free.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And in my last question which I think I probably know the answer to is, what is your idea of a perfect day?

**Katie:** Oh, gosh, my mind doesn't go past just sitting here with you and Paul and Mary are sitting here, supporting our connection. And the air I'm breathing and, oh my gosh, what is my idea of a perfect day? This one.

**Mark:** I knew you were gonna say that. [laughs]

**Katie:** Yeah. [laughs]

**Mark:** Thank you, Katie.

**Katie:** Oh, thank you, Mark.

**Mark:** Thank you so much, Katie, for taking the time today.

**Katie:** You're welcome, Mark. Thank you for our time together. It's very generous of you to invite me.

**Mark:** I appreciate it. Take good care and give my best to Stephen.

**Katie:** I will. Thank you, Mark.

**Mark:** Thanks so much. Bye.

**Katie:** Bye bye.

**[00:18:54] [END OF AUDIO]**