

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# Go Your Own Way: An Interview with Stephen Batchelor

March 2020



**Mark:** Welcome Stephen. It's so great to see you again.

**Stephen Batchelor:** Well, it's lovely to see you, Mark. We've not met for years, and it's a great pleasure to see you.

**Mark:** Me too. I'd like to begin by talking about your own path and the importance of rebelliousness on your own path. How has that defined your own maturation as a practitioner?

**Stephen:** Well, first of all, I fully understand what you say, and I know that I'm often considered to be a rebel. I'm even conscious of the fact that I value transgression. On the other hand, I feel the things that I have done that are called transgressive are, from my point of view, simply my own way of most honestly and most cogently articulating what I've learned from these traditions.

What I find is that the problem is not with the traditions, the problems lie really with certain fixed Orthodox beliefs and views that somehow over time become kind of fossilized and often contradicts the deeper teachings and values that the tradition seeks to embody. For example, when I was training as a Tibetan Buddhist monk in a very conservative tradition, the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism, I was encouraged to question everything, to not just take things on faith but to really find my own understanding. That's what I was taught to do, but I recognize in hindsight that that wasn't quite what was meant. What was meant was that you would inquire deeply into this tradition. If you did so, then you're bound to come up with the same views that the tradition holds. If you don't, it means that you haven't done enough inquiry as it were. It's a sort of a catch-22.

I feel that's been the case in much of my journey through the Buddhist tradition, which is the one I'm really most rooted in, is that I feel I'm not being transgressive at all. I feel I'm actually being truthful to the deeper origins and sources of the very tradition itself. It's the tradition I think that tends to get itself stuck both in Orthodox opinions which are all invariably linked into questions of institutional power. You can't separate those two. Once that marriage is made, then it becomes extremely difficult for any individual practitioner to follow a way that is a genuine, heartfelt expression of their own practice.

You feel that to be part of the Sangha, the community, you have to conform. And if you cease to conform, then you are rejected. So, what I found in all of my journey really, with the Tibetan Buddhists and then with the Zen Buddhist and the Vipassana people and Theravada people with Buddhism on the whole, I constantly find myself going back as deep as I can into the roots of the tradition discovering things there which often have been forgotten by Orthodoxy. When I try to articulate and to present these ideas in my own voice, then all hell breaks loose.

**Mark:** Right. Which seems so ironic in Buddhism, which is based on being a lamp unto yourself, killing the Buddha if you meet him in the road and yet as you say, it's rejected, and you're a lightning rod for a lot of Buddhists in particular around this question of obedience and being faithful and what being faithful means. Do you find yourself catching a lot of flak for your views?

**Stephen:** Well, maybe it's not too surprising to discover that Buddhists are very good at passive aggression. As a result, my Buddhist friends, and the Buddhist community as a whole, is genuinely made up of very well-meaning, good-hearted people. They don't like

criticizing others, at least in public, and so I don't get an awful lot of flak from people at least that I'm in contact with. Sometimes, one image that comes to mind is that the response to a lot of my work is like the silent closing of doors. In other words, it's about exclusion. It's an unstated exclusion. I find myself just not really welcomed in many Buddhist forums, but I've never told to my face by these people that they don't want me. It's just that it doesn't happen.

I do get flak, and apparently people – I was talking to someone on a retreat a few weeks ago, he'd read something I'd written and he'd come on the retreat and then he told me, he said, "You know if you go on the internet and you look for stuff on you," he says, "it's a shitstorm out there." Now, I'm not aware of that because I don't Google Stephen Batchelor and see what people are saying about it. I have no interest whatsoever on people's opinions on that regard.

I think the positive side, which I like to give more attention to, is the fact that by speaking out, I find that I'm actually voicing other people's own frustrations and doubts and fears. I seem to, in a way, validate things that people feel deep down themselves to be true, but they don't find an affirmation coming from their sangha or their community or their religion. I'm serving in that sense as a kind of person who stands as an example to take a stand yourself, to find your own voice; to me that is so absolutely essential in this place.

You're quite right, be a lamp unto yourself, say the Buddhist texts, but in practice, it doesn't usually work out like that. There are exceptions, of course, and I don't want to diss Buddhism because there's a lot of good in it. I think even people I disagree with, I still respect enormously. But it's true, I think as Dharma Buddhism tries to find its voice in an entirely new situation, the modern world, of course it's going to clash with certain ancient beliefs and views on how things are.

Of course it's going to clash with certain structures of power who are invested in holding on to certain views, so it's hardly surprising. I think it's actually a very healthy thing that we can have a community that can include people like myself as well as those who are very contented with the Orthodox tradition. I don't feel myself to be at war with anybody, I just think it's a question of integrity and honesty.

**Mark:** Absolutely. I can remember reading *Buddhism Without Beliefs* 20-plus years ago and being so relieved that somebody was saying what I have always felt about the practice. Someone who loves the essential core of it but hasn't lost sight of the individuality and the importance of making it our own.

**Stephen:** Exactly.

**Mark:** There's not a lot of space for that in some Buddhist circles.

**Stephen:** That is absolutely right, and that I think is the key. The very key point is to make it one's own. Weirdly, you'd find that expression in the Pali texts. The Buddha says that the person who has entered the stream of the path is someone who has made the path their own. Exactly the words he uses. He talks of entering the stream as becoming independent of others in your practice. It's all there in the text, but you don't find a lot of contemporary traditional Buddhist teachers citing those texts. You have to go back to uncover what's been covered over and buried. I suspect that's true in many traditions. I know it's true in Christianity.

**Mark:** Of course.

**Stephen:** You have to have been very inspired in my work by the examples of radical Christian thinkers and theologians who've done a very similar kind of thing. They've given me the courage to do what I do, and I'm sure that's true in the Islamic tradition, in the Judaic traditions too. I'm less familiar with that, so I can't really say, but I think it's the lifeblood of a living tradition. A living tradition is one that can't just keep repeating the same things. That's not what a tradition is about, a tradition is about maintaining a live conversation with your own past as a tradition. It's constantly about renewal, and that means in any new generation about finding one's own voice, about somehow becoming one's own teacher in many ways.

**Mark:** You have answered my next question, begun to answer it, but could you say something more about the importance of standing alone in spiritual life? The importance of being willing to break rules.

**Stephen:** I understand spiritual life is not about achieving some preconceived idea of what it means to be enlightened. Not about fitting oneself, forcing oneself sometimes into a position in which you'll be recognized and honored and accepted within your community and then you can just repeat, repeat, repeat down the generations. But it's rather more about really finding out who you really are and honoring that uniqueness of individuality in all members of your community.

To me, a community, a living spiritual community, is one in which groups of individual men and women come together in order to help each other become more truly who they are in themselves. It's not a living community if an aim of the game is basically to get everybody to agree on everything, everybody to have the same boringly predictable answer to all the same questions. That to me is dead. It is not a living community at all anymore, it's about preserving us. As soon as the word preservation of the Dharma comes into play, we're basically in the business of pickling. The only things we preserve are things that are already dead. Buddhism and probably all traditions constantly face that danger.

**Mark:** Beautiful. Let's turn now to solitude, which is the subject of your new book. You quote De Quincey as referring to that inner world of secret self-consciousness in which each of us lives a second life apart and within himself alone. How do you recommend that we begin to cultivate that inner world, that affinity and comfort with solitude?

**Stephen:** Well, first of all, I think we have to recognize that that is part of who we are. Solitude is not a privilege for the spiritual; it's part of our existential condition. We are born alone and we die alone as Shanti deva and many – Seneca, I found the same quote in him the other day. The being alone is part of our existential condition, but what is paradoxical about that is that being with other people is also part of our existential condition. We are alone with others. In fact, my first self-penned book was called precisely that. I was very much struck by how these two apparently contradictory dimensions, participation and solitude, are inseparable.

This to me is the deep paradox of spiritual life, is to recognize that we're not at war with ourselves, we don't have two incompatible sizes somehow have to coexist, but actually our being alone is also already a condition which is embedded in a world. Our being embedded in a world is also a condition in which we're alone. It's how these two dimensions of our being somehow work together that constitutes for me the core of spiritual life.

I was certainly not trying to suggest that the true spiritual life is what's going on deep inside me. That's only half the story, at best, but a genuine spiritual life is one where you've come to some integration of an inwardness as Kierkegaard spoke of, and others, at the same time as a dynamic participation in the social framework within which you live. The first point is to start to recognize that. I think a lot of people who are intuitively drawn to a contemplative tradition probably are already quite introspective or introverted people that this interests them that they're curious about our inwardness, this strange capacity we have to have a part of ourselves that we really cannot ever share with anybody else.

I remember when I was at school, probably seven or eight years old, I was always struck by how all of the teachers would talk about anything except what's actually going on inside us, our worries, our fears, our anxieties, our longings. This was something that was taboo in western education. That struck me at a very young age. That struck me as something very weird that an education could actually ignore the very thing that matters most to us, in other words, how we feel, how we are, who we are.

What attracted me in Buddhism was to meet with Tibetan Lamas in the first instance who had no embarrassment about this. They had no reserve or feeling awkward talking about deeply interior qualities of being. I think that was an enormous attraction to me. For the first time, I'd met people who were completely open about talking about Muslims, and not only talking about them, actually providing exercises and practices and disciplines that enabled you to refine your interiority.

In some ways, I think that's what meditation is all about. Meditation is about cultivating and stabilizing and clarifying your own inward spaciousness. What the Buddhists and Hindu and other traditions are so good at is that they have developed methodologies and ways of being that over time you could train and you can become more true to yourself, meaning that you become less the victim of your random thoughts and fears and emotions and memories and plans and you stabilize inner attentiveness or the mindfulness. Then more and more becomes the center of how you live, not just with regards to yourself but just as equally and maybe even more in the relationship than engage with others. I hope that answer begins to address your question.

**Mark:** Yes, beautifully. I'd like to move now to the question of the wholesomeness of solitude. You talk about a middle ground of solitude as a site of autonomy, wonder, contemplation, imagination, inspiration and care while making the important point that not all solitude is wholesome. What do you mean by that?

**Stephen:** I think solitude is a term that embraces a wide range of human experience from the despair of loneliness, for example, which I think is very much an issue in our time, people have suffered from their aloneness. They suffered from their solitude. I've also found out, for example, except in English, most other European languages, the word solitude is almost entirely negative. In French, la solitude means loneliness, they don't have a separate word for loneliness. German, einsamkeit, again loneliness. That's the connotation. In English, we are very fortunate in having a clear differentiation between solitude, which is broadly neutralizing, whereas loneliness which is largely something to be not valued.

I try to present solitude in the terms that you say. In other words, I see it as a site for autonomy and care and so forth. To do that, you have to learn how to live in solitude. You have to somehow come to terms with your aloneness and to be open to the fact that it does have a shadow side. It has a shadow side of loneliness, of alienation, and I think modernity

with these big cities in which we live and in a working world where very few people are actually from the place where you're working, especially in United States, people travel all over the place, there's very little sense of being rooted and grounded in a community over generations. People are very much on their own.

This causes an enormous amount of suffering and pain just, that fact of feeling disconnected and cut off. That's, I wouldn't say unwholesome so much, but rather as the negative or the dark or the shadow side of solitude. Clearly, if we have to come to terms with our solitude, we have to come to terms with that as well. It wouldn't be much point just valorizing the nice bits. We have taken onboard that if we embark on a life of inwardness, we are also going to be encountering dark nights of the soul. I think the dark night of the soul is very much about that. That challenging and threatening and destabilizing overwhelming sense of what it is to be alone.

I think contemplative practices poses certain philosophical traditions and, as I mentioned in the book also, the use of a certain psychedelics can help us ground ourselves in our solitude in a much more healthy way which will perhaps help us to be more at ease with being alone, with being cut off, with being isolated in some way. Existentially, we are all going to die and we are all going to get old and sick, and these things are going to ultimately be faced by us and us alone. That I think is very central to the practice, this contemplative training, is that we learn to live with the dukkha, the pain of being human, to have the capacity to do that instead of switching our minds off or getting distracted or taking opiates or whatever.

**Mark:** Right. Attachment is another thorny issue in spiritual life and, of course, it has a lot to do with solitude and whether we enjoy it or don't enjoy it. You talk about Montaigne, who says, "Of course we should have wives, children, possessions, and above all health, but not to become attached to them in such a way that our happiness depends on them. Let these things be ours but not so glued and joined to us that we cannot detach ourselves from them without ripping off our own skin in the process." I love that.

It points, to me, a more balanced attitude to human attachment and love. How can we as seekers find a middle path between this extreme idea of being detached, whatever that means, and actually being engaged, emotional, interdependent human beings on the planet trying to get on together?

**Stephen:** Well, I wish I had a simple 25-word answer to that question, but I don't.

[laughter]

**Stephen:** I don't think you're probably expecting one either. What we're both in a way trying to flag is that to flourish as a human being or to become wholly human requires that we embrace all dimensions of our life with equal value. To be able to accept the radical aloneness of our existence and at the same time the radical participatory nature of our being and to live such a life.

Such a life begins to flourish when we're able to somehow bring these two sides together. There's a quote in the book from Emerson where he talked about, to live in solitude according to the rules of solitude, that's quite easy. It's all very well to live in the world and follow the rules of the world, that's quite easy. The real challenge is to maintain what he calls the sweetness of one solitude, in the midst of the engagements with the world, and that is the key. That's also there in Buddhism too, they may not use that language.

I remember one of the things I remembered from my Tibetan Buddhist training, was that the Buddha, the awakened one, is someone who has realized their own purpose and also at the same time realized purpose for others literally. In other words, that's considered to be the goal, not some deep introspective, mystical vision that only you are really having access to, nor opening up hospitals and working with the poor, which is again a wonderful thing, but it might be a way of escaping who you actually are. Somehow we've got in our own specific lives, in the uniqueness of our own situations to forge a path that brings these two dimensions together.

Now, in our society, we're not educated in a contemplative tradition, we're not given these skills as children, or even as young adults. As a consequence, we're very untrained in living alone, we don't get an education as to how to live alone. We need to go to Buddhism or maybe psychotherapy can, of course, help very much in this regard. Arguably, that's what a lot of psychotherapy is about, actually, it's coming to terms with inwardness. How each one of us pursues this path is going to be unique, there's no recipe. It's very important to be clear about the territory within which these practices operate.

**Mark:** Right. People can be so judgmental around attachments, particularly emotional attachments in spiritual life. I find it very judgmental, limiting and hypocritical.

**Stephen:** Yes. At one level, attachment is a neutral term. We are attached to other people. We're attached to our parents, we're attached to our society, we're attached to all these things, and that is not a value judgment. It's just an acknowledgment that we are beings who live and thrive and can only exist through our attachments to other things. The problem is when the attachment becomes pathological. In other words, as Montaigne says, the attachment to my wife and family, for example, is something that I can't do without. It's something that I completely dependent on to feel okay in myself. If my wife leaves, it all falls apart.

Then your attachment has become something that is used as a prop to keep you feeling okay about who you are, but you're not actually okay about who you are in any self-sufficient way. The practice of solitude is really the practice of self-sufficiency in many ways. In a self-sufficiency, your sense of who you are is held up by all kinds of relationships which could break any moment. People might die, you get sick, you move, you have to flee a war, whatever it might be.

It's at those moments that you realize how much your attachments have somehow kept you, prevented you from really living fully on your own terms. The flip side of that, which we'll find in monasteries, and so on, is that attachment just becomes demonized, any connection to anything is somehow tying you down to the miserable world of and birth and death. Whereas, in fact, you've just simply opted for the opposite extreme, that you've decided instead of being overly dependent on other's approval, you've decided to withdraw yourself from others altogether and try to just live on your own terms. That's, again, a form of alienation I'd say at some point.

Temperamentally, some people are more capable and find it easy to do these things than others. We need to acknowledge that, but in the end, once again, we come back to the need for balance. We need actually integration, the wholeness. That's what it's all about.

**Mark:** Speaking of integration and wholeness, I'd like to talk now about intoxicants on the spiritual path. I think that this is going to be the most radical part of the book for a lot of

people. You're the first well-known Buddhist teacher I know who's been willing to come out this way about your use of intoxicants and how certain substances like ayahuasca and peyote have helped you. Could you talk a little bit about why they have mattered to you on your path, and how people can mindfully engage with them without losing their balance?

**Stephen:** Well, this is a long story. I think, like many of my generation, I suspect it is also true with you, Mark, is that one of the things in our experience as teenagers that led us in this direction in the first place were taking things like LSD and smoking cannabis. From my perspective, from when I was 16 or 17, the world of Eastern spirituality and the world of psychedelics was very much interfused one way or the other. One of the key works that really moved my life on to this path was Ram Dass's *Be Here Now*. Of course, Ram Dass has recently died, so maybe we could dedicate this conversation to Ram Dass. I think it's a very good moment.

Ram Dass's work basically was the bridge I think for a whole generation of people to move from a rather indulgent use of drugs and often in a very uncontrolled and unsafe way, near we don't know what the hell it is in that pill you're swallowing. You have no supervision, you have no support at all. It's very dangerous. I wouldn't encourage it, but, on the other hand, it opens the mind. It leads you to realize that you can see and be in the world in a way that's quite different from that of everyday ordinary consciousness of a middle class, young person from North London.

Of course, that perspective doesn't last, it lasts as long as the effects of the drug lasts, but it's not something that many of us then went on to forget. In fact, it was like opening the doors of perceptions of work that for a moment at least we had a vision of another way of being in the world. We don't have to believe the impressions and the things that we're told and we see and hear, but there is other modalities of consciousness that are available to us, and that they have been known to be available for centuries amongst native indigenous peoples in South America or in Asia as well as within all of these contemplative traditions, particularly in India.

Remember, in India, if you go to India today, the Sadhus are sitting around smoking ganja, and that's not seen to them to be somehow breaking of a preset, it's part and parcel of how they pursue this spiritual life. I've always felt that the states of mind in which you can find yourself through the judicious use, let's say, of psychedelics is a frame of awareness, that to me, is very close to many of the experiences I have found through meditation and through philosophical reflection.

I find that these entheogens, as they're sometimes called, these mind-altering substances, if used particularly within the framework of a spiritual practice, can help us towards gaining insight, they can help us towards affirmation or consolidation of where our life is going, and in many ways I think can be used as elements of sacred ritual. What I did at the age of 60, which is now about five years ago, is that I took a year off and I just decided I wanted to revisit my past experiences with psychedelics, but to do so in the context of a religious ceremony, rather than just taking a bunch of pills with some friends in my apartment. This led me to Mexico to take peyote and then subsequently on a couple of occasions in Europe to participate in ayahuasca ceremonies, and I found this enormously valuable.

Again, one thing I do want to make very, very clear, I do not believe that just by taking a substance that will make you enlightened or make you more loving or wise, you cannot separate these, the alkaloids of the substances, from the setting and set of your own specific



life, your outer life, your inner life. For someone who's been meditating for 40 years, who's developed quite a well-articulated philosophy of life, to take one of these substances in a ceremonial setting is not really comparable to a 16-year-old kid taking some pill on the street in New York. I avoid the word drugs in the book. In fact, if you look carefully, the word drug doesn't appear once in the body of the text. I use instead the word meds, medication.

Part of the problem in our culture, in talking about these things, is we just don't have a language to do so that doesn't carry all sorts of toxic associations. The very word drugs doesn't work for me. It's so loaded with associations that I prefer simply not to use it and instead to think of this as a responsible use of certain kinds of self-medication.

The book describes in a way my journey through these plant medicines over a period of about five years. The book, in a way, tells that story as an account of all of that. As you will know, from having read this text, in many ways, it's served for me as a purification, a purging of unhealthy attachments basically, an unhealthy attachment to alcohol that I had, and an unhealthy attachment to Buddhism.

[laughter]

**Stephen:** I am fully aware of the fact that I am the first of my generation as it were in the position of a teacher who has chosen to come out, but I suspect that – again, it's like we talked about transgression and how I said that my writing is often just giving a voice to people who haven't yet found it for themselves. I have a suspicion that this will be the same here. There an underground movement amongst a lot of Buddhism, probably some very senior Buddhists, who are exploring these fields, especially in the last few years. There's been a resurgence of the use of psychedelics.

There's probably a lot more of it going on in than the Buddhist communities willing to admit. One of the things I wanted to do is try to flush that out, but at the same time, I also saw it as another dimension of my work as a writer who seeks to be utterly honest. I have to acknowledge that in my life as a Buddhist practitioner, the use of cannabis primarily has been always a component element of my thinking, of my practice, of my reflection, of my meditation. I don't see these things as somehow at odds with one another. I think Buddhism doesn't really give us much help at all in actually working with these forms of medication, it's basically – don't do it. Abstinence.

That's the approach which in theory is faultless. If you don't take any of these things, they won't cause you any harm. That's true, but in practice, it's completely unworkable, and it always has been that way I think in Buddhist cultures.

I want to bring that out as well. I want to share with people that dimension of my journey, and this is the book in which I've decided to do it.

**Mark:** Yes. My hat is off to you. I respect that you so much for being willing to be so transparent. I don't know a single spiritual teacher who doesn't get high, and yet nobody really talks about it. For a lot of them, it's alcohol, for a lot of them it's doing psychedelics, or smoking cannabis, and yet there's how you dissolve this either/or as you always do. This black/white, and this orthodoxy. I feel like you're the most anti-orthodox teacher I know, which is such a relief.

**Stephen:** I take that as a great compliment. Thank you.

**Mark:** It's meant as one. Let me just ask you one last question, Stephen, which is when you envision a spirituality for the future, can you say a little bit about what that looks like for you moving forward. What does it look like? What is the spirituality that incorporates science, that incorporates rationality, that incorporates intoxicants? What would that be?

**Stephen:** One word I would use is it will be post-creedal. Otherwise it will be a spirituality whose no longer primarily tied to a particular creed. Be that the Buddhist creed, the Christian creed, the Jewish creed, the Muslim creed. I think it might be spirituality in which people find a much greater resource in what goes on between traditions rather than within traditions. I think we find ourselves, many of us today, and I'm sure it's true for you, it's true for me, is that I might call myself a Buddhist, but frankly, I spend most of my time not in a Buddhist space. I read literature, I watch movies, I take ayahuasca. I do this, I do that.

Where I feel most fully alive, where I feel that my life is flourishing is generally not in a Buddhist space, but the Buddhist space is the one that has provided me with the sense of rootedness, of groundedness, of discipline, a certain belonging to a tradition which is all very important, but the difference to me is that for me what is important is to learn to distinguish between being rooted in a tradition from being stuck in a tradition.

I think it's very important to be rooted in a tradition. I think you have to have those roots go deep, and I do think for many of us we need to spend time years really getting rooted in a tradition that really we feel at home. But if we just stay there and exclude ourselves from everything else, we're stuck in it. It actually doesn't serve much purpose beyond just giving me a sense of self-security and maybe self-worth or position in the community.

I think the spirituality of the future for me is one that would seek to be more and more rooted in these traditions, in order that we can learn to really negotiate our way through a plurality of traditions. That I think is one of the great richnesses of modernity, postmodernity, is that we find ourselves exposed to such an amazing set of resources from all over the world both secular, religious and so forth. This to me leads to a notion of spirituality that becomes increasingly individuated.

I think the Dharma needs to be individuated. I'm using that word in a technical sense used by Jung, where to be individuated is to differentiate yourself from the collective, from the archetypes, from the norms or traditions and so forth in such a way that you become increasingly your own person. That doesn't mean you become an egoist, or possibly arrogant person, but it means that you've teased out your potential in such a way that you could optimally flourish to be the person that you aspire to be, and that may have elements of Buddhism or Christianity or Socialism or whatever fed into it, but the mix is uniquely your own. It's your own voice that you find. That to me would be a vision of where we're going but I'm not naive enough to realize that mass movement religion has probably got a lot of life left in it and often for good reasons.

If you are living in a very impoverished country with this oppressive government, often it's the church, maybe and evangelical church that gives you your freedom, that gives your space to-- I don't want to write these things off because for many people in the world who don't have our privileges and social, white middle-class Europeans or Americans, these movements can be life-saving. People need consolation, they need real strong groups. They need the certainties that religion provides to get them out in these situations in which they're trapped. I'm very reluctant because, otherwise, I'd be maybe drawing the blueprint for yet another mass movement.

**Mark:** Exactly.

**Stephen:** We have to avoid falling into the very traps that we seek to free ourselves from, and that's tricky. One of my heroes is Francis of Assisi who founded the Franciscan Order during his lifetime, and within two or three years before he died, he left it. He was sick of it. He had to abandon it. I like that. That to me is a living spirituality. I think I may be trying to emulate people like him in my work too, is to keep being willing to step outside the comfortable and the familial in order to respond more authentically to life as it presents itself to us in our day and age.

**Mark:** Thank you so much, Stephen. This was so great to talk to you.

**Stephen:** Well, thank you, Mark. No, it was a wonderful conversation. I hope the listeners find some value in it. As I'm sure Mark will be telling you, this is *The Art of Solitude* Yale University Press, published on the 18th of February.

**Mark:** Be well, Stephen, and good luck with the book.

**Stephen:** Thank you.