

## MOSQUITO MOMENTS

An Interview with Raphael Cushnir

**Q: You say you're not an expert on bliss or anything else, but then you describe a very specific process for opening to bliss. Why should anyone believe you know what you're talking about?**

RC: They shouldn't. Instead, if interested, they should put the process to the test in their own lives. Most people would like to more happy, more of the time. Living the Questions is a simple way to bring that about. Plus, it requires no special training or skills. And it's not just about happiness, either. When we're open, present and energized – all things encouraged by Living the Questions – we're best able to serve others and accomplish our goals.

**Q: The concept of "resistance" is at the heart of your book, as well as your process. Can you explain what you mean by that?**

RC: The bad things that happen to us are rarely the cause of our suffering. It's the way we try to push away those things, as well as the emotions and sensations they generate. We can't control life, either outside or inside of our bodies. But we'd like to, of course, so most of us unconsciously close off, or "contract," from the things we don't want to experience. We try not to feel the headache, or the hurt feelings that come from being criticized, or the rage that sometimes arises towards the very people we love most. Trying to push away our life experience means staying contracted. That's resistance. And trying to change ourselves, or other people, or the world from a place of resistance is bound to fail. And it may even make things worse.

**Q: Is that what you mean by "stepping on the hose?"**

RC: Exactly. It's like stepping on a hose and then commanding the water to flow. Hopeless, but we do it all day long.

**Q: Sticking with that analogy for a moment, what happens when we do step on the hose consistently, and for long periods of time?**

RC: We experience life as an endless struggle. We feel victimized, bitter, stuck. Eventually it can lead to disease. And, of course, it makes us pretty unpleasant to be around.

**Q: Are you saying we can reverse all that just by asking your two simple questions?**

RC: Asking "What is happening right now?" allows us to return to the present moment, over and over. It gets us out of our spinning thoughts and stories about what isn't happening, or what ought to be happening. It allows us to flow, allows our lives to flow. When we listen deeply and patiently for the answers, they always come. The answers to that question show us exactly what we haven't been accepting. When we ask the second question, "Can I be with it?" it's an opportunity to stop holding on for dear life, to loosen the vice-grip of our resistance. The release that happens when we can truly be with something occurs in a split second. But the result can be long lasting. Our breathing deepens, our bodies loosen, we "expand." This is what allows access to bliss.

**Q: Then all I have to do is "be" with something and bliss will miraculously arrive?**

RC: Sometimes, but not always. Often there's a whole backlog of resistance we must deal with, as well as all the frozen feelings that come with it. Plus, while sometimes the release is huge and powerful, other times it's smaller and subtler.

**Q: But don't you maintain that this bliss is at the core of existence, and that it's available**

**to us all the time?**

RC: Yes, as long as we are available to it. The more we Live the Questions, the more we're able to open, accept, and arrive in the present where the core of existence resides. It's a gradual process. Over time we get better and better at it. It grows into a sacred habit. We have great fun in locating all the things we're so used to pushing against, like bad grades, weeds, rude people, hunger, mosquitoes.

**Q: Wait a minute – does Living the Questions mean I have to stop killing mosquitoes?**

RC: No, it just means you have to open fully to their presence, to the sound they make, to the itch they cause. And if you kill them, it means you have to accept the fact that you're a murderer of mosquitoes (laughs). It's funny this came up, because I just went through this whole thing about mosquitoes the other day. They're a real sore spot for me. Which is great, because the type of petty annoyance they cause is symbolic of a million other kinds of everyday hassles. And this isn't to imply that there's a right or wrong course of action to take in any of these cases. We can kill the mosquito or not kill the mosquito. Living the Questions just allows us the opportunity to "show up," all the way, which feels better no matter what we decide to do.

**Q: Is this showing up kind of like meditation?**

RC: A little, yes. Like "meditation in action." A way to bring the experience of meditation off the cushion and right smack into the middle of life's challenges. It's hardest to stay present when we're "triggered," when we unconsciously become reactive, and Living the Questions is a tool to snap us back into awareness, into the moment, into our bodies, and into the flow of life itself.

**Q: Is there anything here that's truly new?**

RC: Mystics from all great wisdom traditions have pointed to innate bliss for centuries. And the world is replete with methods to help access it. Perhaps what's new here is the simplicity of the approach, the practicality of it, the universality of it, and the lack of any philosophical or religious wrapping that for so many people can really get in the way.

**Q: What do you say to the view that life is much more complicated than two simple questions?**

RC: I agree, but some giant percentage of life's complications arises from our resistance. Stop resisting, and in the place of complication suddenly there's spaciousness, and peace, and even bliss.

**Q: It's that easy?**

RC: It's simple, but not easy at all. I never said it was easy. To face the reality of every single moment and accept it completely takes discipline, courage, and commitment.

**Q: Do people have the time for all that?**

RC: Absolutely. And you know why? Because first of all it can happen silently, unobtrusively, right alongside most of our daily activities. And second of all, for most of us, hours and hours of every day are taken up with nothing but idle mental chatter. Is it too much to give that up?

**Q: The first part of Unconditional Bliss is about how to Live the Questions. The rest of the book is all over the map, discussing thinking, feeling, illness, work, family, relationships. Does Living the Questions really apply to every aspect of life?**

RC: Yup.

**Q: And it brings bliss wherever we apply it?**

RC: Careful. Not so fast. Bliss is often the result, but it's never the goal. Never, ever. The only goal is to open to life, completely, and truly live in the present tense rather than just giving lip service to it.

**Q: So, coming full circle, how did a filmmaker with no special spiritual training come to discover such a powerful tool for bliss?**

RC: He suffered, suffered some more, accepted his ultimate human frailty, suffered some more (laughs), and then began to pay very close attention.