

**The Flame of The Search**  
**from Diamond Heart, Book III**  
by A.H. Almaas

Why am I here? Where am I going? We need to see how honest we can be with ourselves when trying to answer these questions. These two questions are related; that is, most people think they are here because there is a goal, they want to go somewhere. Where do you want to go? You probably think you know; do you? Do you think I know where you should go? If you think I know, can I tell you? And if I tell you, will you follow? Can you follow?

These are questions that you cannot answer with your mind. These are questions that should remain questions. Do not try to simply answer them mentally. These questions are like a flame. If you answer them with your mind, you will put out the flame, because the mind doesn't, the mind can't know the answers to these questions. When you answer them with your mind and you think you know, the question is gone. When you believe you have answered such questions, the flame is gone and there is no more inquiry.

If you settle for answers on this level, you will live like most of humanity, who assume that they know why they are here and where they are going. Such a life typically feels shallow and insignificant. A life with no fundamental questioning is a life lived according to formulas, according to what one has heard from others. But why should you believe what others tell you about life? You don't actually know yet what is true for you, what is important for you, what will work for you.

It is better to remain ignorant than to pretend knowledge. If you know that you are ignorant and don't pretend otherwise, there is a question that stays alive and continues to burn in you, a deep hunger for the truth.

If you look at every moment of your life, such as this moment, you will see that most of the time you believe that you know what is the best thing for you at that moment. You think, feel, and behave as if you know what is supposed to happen, as if you know what you want and what is important to want. You live your life believing at every moment that you know how you should be. Where does this knowledge come from?

Most of it comes from your early childhood, both from what you were directly taught and by what you indirectly absorbed from your surroundings. Some of it comes from what you have heard or read. It is conditioned knowledge. Whatever the source, conditioned knowledge is useless in answering the fundamental questions, such as the question of why we are here. The conditioned knowledge says that what I'm here for is to be happy, to be successful, to feel good, to get what I think I want, to satisfy my dreams, to get someone to love me, or to make a lot of money. The conditioning is simply a mechanism for survival. You have survived, you are here--so that knowledge has done, and is doing, its job. If you want to continue merely surviving, you can. But what difference is there then between you and any animal, any insect that is born, lives and dies?

So the conditioned knowledge says that what I'm here for is to be happy, to be successful, to feel good, to get what I think I want, to satisfy my dreams, to get somebody to love me, or to make a lot of money. This is the knowledge that you have been conditioned with, and it is useless for answering fundamental questions.

How do you know that the knowledge you get from others is the truth? How do you know that your teachers, or even the great philosophers, have the answer that is appropriate for you? Christ says to love your neighbor. Do you really know that that is what you need to do? Buddha says that enlightenment is the best thing. How do you know that is what you need?

Some people say you have to learn to be yourself. It sounds good. Some people say you should be free from your personality and develop your Essence. It sounds great. How do you know it will resolve your situation? You don't really know whether any of these ideas are relevant or true for you. You can't know with certainty until you have experimented and learned from your own experience. Until then your action is based on faith or belief. If you assume unquestioningly that what someone else says is the truth, your inner flame will be extinguished. You will believe that you have answered questions when you haven't answered them; someone else has. And they haven't answered them for you, but for themselves. We comfort ourselves by believing that others know, and that we can use their knowledge. It's a very comforting thought; it encourages us to be lazy. We comfort ourselves by saying to ourselves, "Somebody knows, and in time I'll get around to studying it. It's already known and always available to me."

But do you, yourself, really know in your heart what is supposed to happen? Do you ever allow yourself to question, to have a burning question--and not put out the flame quickly with the first answer that you hear? You put out the flame so that you can return to your sense of comfort and security.

Someone tells you that it's good to pay attention, to be aware. When you try it, it helps a little--but you still don't know whether it's the answer. You don't know whether it will actually resolve your situation. And if you believe you know, you're lying to yourself. You need to keep the question alive while you investigate for yourself.

Our questions about why we are here and where we are going are uncomfortable, but they are real questions for every human being. If you do not ask them, and allow them to be ongoing questions, you will never know for yourself what it's all about. You will never know who you are, why you're here, and where you are going. Your mind is full of ideas and dreams and plans about what will fulfill you, what will make you happy, what will give you freedom. But these ideas silence the question, comfort your mind, and put out the flame.

So begin with the awareness that you don't know the answers. And be aware of the feverish attempts in your mind to convince yourself that you know. It's not only that you don't know the answers, you don't know whether the questions can be answered. Can you allow the questions to remain if you don't know whether there is an answer? Can you be that sincere with yourself You believe you're here because you believe you can get something here, you believe you can experience something here, you hope you can find some freedom here. But do you really know that? Are you certain that what we are doing is right for you? Can you ever be certain if you don't answer the questions for yourself.

Perhaps you have heard the idea that if you think you need love, you need to love others, be selfless. It sounds good. It's what the great masters say. But for you it is hearsay, a rumor, a possibility worth inquiring about. It is not knowledge yet. Is it possible to leave your ideas, your thoughts, your knowledge behind, and let the inquiry be? Can you let the question stand? Can you for a while forget all your formulas, all of what you have heard or read, everything your parents said or didn't say, what all the great teachers have said, and remain alone with the question? Why are you here? Where are you going? What is it all about? Can you let yourself have that question intensely--can you let that flame burn in you without needing to put it out with an answer?

Can we let this inquiry deepen in us, in our hearts, in our bellies, in our being? Can we let our being be a question mark, a yearning? It is a motiveless search, a search that does not depend on any ideas about going somewhere. There is no goal in sight, so it becomes a flame that continues to burn and deepen with time. Don't cover it up, put it out, or let it go; just let it be. Let it consume you. Let it burn away all your ideas and beliefs about how things should be. Let it burn away all your concepts about good and bad. Let that inquiry deepen and expand, so that you can forget. Let go of all you have learned ... for a while at least.

Can you exist as an inquiry, an inquiry into the truth? Are you here just to live, work, eat, love, hate, have children, and die? Can you let go of what you believe you have? Can your mind empty itself of all your possessions, beliefs, theories, knowledge, understanding, and simply remain as a search, a pure inquiry not influenced by anyone or anything, even your own past? Even if you felt love and freedom and relaxation and so on in the past, what makes you think these things are what you need at this moment? The insights you had in the past might have been right, but how do you know they are what you need now and in the future? In order to find out, all you can do is let them go. Can you remain completely ignorant, unknowing; can you let your mind go, not impose anything on your mind, and at the same time not go dead, not become unconscious?

Can we rid ourselves of all influences, of the influences of others' ideas and of our own past, and remain in the now, as an inquiry? You can observe that every time someone says something that sounds true, or every time you have an insight, you say, "Oh, wonderful, that must be it." You want to put out the flame. You want the first answer that comes to silence the questioning.

Why are we in such haste to have answers? We jump on the first promise of salvation that comes. Why not stay with the question? What makes you think that salvation is the answer, that freedom is the answer? What makes you think that enlightenment is the answer? What makes you think that love is the answer? You might feel that you want these things, but how do you know that getting them is the best thing that could happen in this moment? How do you know whether you're supposed to be dead or alive, rich or poor, free or enslaved? Is it possible to let your mind be free?

I am not trying to give you an answer; I'm just giving you a question. You need to let your being be ablaze like a flame, an aspiring flame, with no preconceived ideas about what it aspires to. To be just burning intensely, deeply

wanting to know, wanting to see the truth without following any preconceptions, totally in the present with the question itself, and let it burn away all the ideas, all the beliefs, all the concepts, even the ones you learned from the great teachings. If you don't allow that flame completely, will you ever rest in your life? Will you ever rest in your life as long as you're covering up your question, answering it before it's really answered? Will you ever really be content with someone else's answer?

As you see, it is a completely personal quest. It is your situation, your life, your mind; no one else can answer these questions for you. Whatever answer comes from outside, belongs to the outside; you can try it on for size, but you must make your own inquiry. You can explore any suggestion, any guidance, but you need to keep the inquiry going. Don't just silence it because you have heard something that sounds right. Without this sincere questioning, this motiveless search-without this flame-the Work cannot be done. Without the flame, any work is done simply according to ideas and beliefs.

The Work must be done according to your own inquiry; the Work that we do here is only a guidance. Your motivation has to be pure, real and true; your flame has to be there; otherwise you'll use the Work for the wrong purpose. You'll get somewhere according to an idea, but it is not necessarily where your Being would take you without constraint. You can develop this and that, become free from this and that, but how do you know whether that will fulfill your destiny? You might think you're supposed to be more loving, or less afraid, or more comfortable, or more relaxed, or richer, or more beautiful. Maybe you are, maybe not. These are just ideas. But true questioning, sincere questioning doesn't have a particular goal. If you think you have a goal, an end, and if you think you're going to go there, you've already extinguished the flame. If you've told yourself you're here because you want to be enlightened, you want to be free, you want to be loving, you want to be this or that, that means that you already know.

But you don't know, really. It's a lie to believe that you know. It's true that there's a question and that you don't know the answer-that is the truth. The most honest answer you can give to the question "Why am I here?" is that I am here because I don't know. The truest reason for you to be here is to fan that flame of inquiry.

These questions are not theoretical or philosophical. They are at the root and heart of your life, relevant for every moment of your life, whatever you're doing. If you don't know but you're pretending that you know, you're wasting the moment. It's a complete waste, regardless of what you're doing. It's not only that the idea in your mind might be the wrong one for you-the fact that it is an idea, instead of a direct perception, puts out the flame of the search, and your unfoldment is blocked. Whenever the answer is not a direct perception it will block or distort your experience.

What I'm saying is not meant to lead you to blame yourself for believing that you know. It's not a matter of trying to make you "good." No, we're trying to see the truth. You need to see clearly all the ways that you snuff out the flame, and how consistently you silence the question.

You might do some work on yourself and have a wonderful experience, a great insight or state. But how do you know that this wonderful experience is what is needed right now? How do you know that the knowledge you think you're getting will resolve your situation? The flame must continue. The fire of inquiry needs to be fed, needs to grow, to intensify, to deepen. Our inquiry needs to be directed not at trying to reduce it, but to letting it grow. The flame needs to burn away all the rest, to grow until it answers itself by itself becoming the fulfillment. The fire of that inquiry can burn away all the dross, all the resistance, all the ideas, all the accumulation of the past so you can actually see what is really there, the whole picture in the present moment without needing to depend on anything from the past or on anyone else's experience. When you know in the moment without any influence, then you can completely be alone with your own truth. Without that, it's obvious that you can't know with certainty. Only with that certainty can life become significant. If you know, for yourself, who you are, you will know where you are going, and you will be fulfilled.

Yes, there are guidance and help here, but not to give answers, only to help you inquire. This Work is to encourage your own inner development, whatever that may be, to help you remain alone with your inquiry. It can be difficult to be alone with yourself. We are not usually supported or encouraged to let our being just be, to be authentic, and not an imitation or a reaction. You can be open, listening to what others suggest, but these things are only possibilities; you still need to inquire by yourself within the intimacy of your own heart. Is this answer your own experience, your answer? You need to be completely open, and not use what you hear to comfort yourself. You need to use it to add fuel to your inquiry.

Can you let yourself be completely intimate with yourself, completely uninfluenced and unbiased? Can you let this inquiry, this flame, burn in the intimacy, in the utter aloneness within?

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