

Session 4: “Ask Me Anything” Crowdcast

Metaphysics & Mystery Online Course

charleseisenstein.org/metaphysics

Charles Eisenstein: I think we're live here. I'm going to assume that we are, otherwise I'm going to be feeling rather silly. So, welcome everybody to our session for the first live session of Metaphysics and Mystery. I don't know if you can hear my 6 year old screaming his head off in the background with peals of laughter, but that's what's happening, so. I always start with a few introductions. Hey everybody, I see some people on chat already. If you're totally unfamiliar with Crowdcast then we'll do a little bit of housekeeping in a few minutes. First I'll just introduce everybody who's involved in this call right now. So there's Jason, Jason Gill who's doing -- he's basically a Crowdcast expert and he's so generously volunteered to help us make sure that there's no technical issues. Laurie Young, my dear colleague who's doing live chat support and will help with whatever needs to go on behind the scenes, tech support. If you have a problem and you reach out it'll be either her or Patsy. Patsy Eisenstein -- shared last name because she's my very dear former wife and dear beloved friend and she has basically organized this whole thing and helps choose the stories and the questions and get in touch with people and really key to making this happen. Then there's other people who have been behind the scenes producing the course: Lauren Buckley who you're all familiar with asking the questions, her brother Kyle who's done so much of the video editing and all of the stuff to make it look more or less professional, Aaron Grubbs and Patsy also doing the audio production, Vicki and Grimm transcribing, and really behind the whole thing making sure all the moving pieces work is Laurie Young again. So anyway, thank you so much for all of those people and for everybody joining the call and contributing your energy and attention to building a strong field together. I mean in theory I could probably lead the questions and read the stories and record it all and retake it if I don't produce something I like, but there's something special that happens when we do it in the moment, in real time. It becomes an event. So thank you all for joining and making that happen. So I'm going to turn it over now I believe to Laurie, who's going to do a few housekeeping notes, or is it Jason?

Laurie Young: It's Laurie.

C.E.: Hey Laurie. Thanks.

L.Y.: You're welcome. Welcome everybody. We're really glad to have you here live with us. It's wonderful if it's your first time in the course. I just want to go over a few things that you may not know about Crowdcast. It's pretty straightforward. I see a lot of people have already figured out how to ask a question, it's down there at the bottom. You can still ask questions. There's also an up-voting feature. So if you want to vote for some of them to come to the top and get more attention from Charles, he's obviously probably not going to be able to get through 51 questions, but we have prioritized the ones that are most popular and that he wants to speak to, and what he's going to do is invite audience members to come up and be on screen, if they want to or at least on audio, when a question is chosen. So what happens is Jason will send you an invitation when it's time to talk about that and you can accept it or decline it if for some reason you don't want to come on. If you decline or it's not a good connection or something like that then Charles can improvise. You'll be fine, but we would love to have you because the Crowdcasts are even better when someone's on screen with Charles, really fun that way. But what else? After the end of the Q and A sessions we're going to have a short meditation and we're going to close with an invitation. And as you probably know we are recording all of this and immediately after the Crowdcast is finished the recording will be available. We'll also be pulling down that video and processing it, embedding it on the course website so that you will have access to it ongoing anytime you want. We'll make sure we have an audio version as well. Just keep in mind if

you're on here and you're talking and sharing your story, it is being recorded. So we want you to know that. And I think the last thing to mention is we will have another Crowdcast live session that will be the last one of the course and we've scheduled it for Sunday, a Sunday at 3:00 Eastern so that a lot of people who couldn't be on today or tonight because it's the middle of the night for them have another option and that'll be Sunday the twenty-ninth at 3:00 pm Eastern. We are going to be available to help you during this Crowdcast, myself and the rest of the team and also through support or on Tribe or all the different options, so thanks a lot and I'll hand it back to Charles now.

C.E.: Great, thanks Laurie. One of us on the team has been typing and I can hear the typing noise so unless that's a sound effect, whoever's doing that should probably mute themselves. It reminds me of the old days when the CBS Evening News, they would have typewriter noises in the background to make it seem like it was a busy newsroom. So we are all busy here, but probably we don't need that. I just made a much bigger deal about that than I needed to. Anyway, let me move on, before I dig myself deeper into a hole, to the stories. So a lot of people sent in their stories, their miracle stories you could call them, stories that expanded your experience and your understanding of what is real and what is possible. There's nothing like a direct experience. I mean, compared to philosophical reasoning, there's nothing like a direct experience to open the realm of possibility wider because, as we know, human beings are so adept at arranging the evidence and reason to fit the story that they carry about the world that resonates with their internal state of being, and we're really good at defending that. Often it is a direct experience where sometimes even hearing about somebody else's experience creates a breach in the armor of the worldview that one is living in. So that's one reason why I like to invite stories like this. And so there's tons of great ones. We've been asking your permission to put them on the course page. Thank you for sending them in. We can't do all of them, but we chose two just to do for this call. So we're going to invite two people up to tell their story. First will be Peggy and then Courtney and -- what can I say? Yeah. To the storyteller, just a request to keep it pretty brief because we have a lot of other things I want to move on to, and to everybody else: receive this story as a gift. Just take it in, maybe without too immediate an attempt to explain it or interpret it but just receive the story fully. So let's see. I wonder if we have Peggy up yet. Jason, did you manage to get Peggy on the --

Jason: I found her and just invited her and see if she accepts that in one moment.

C.E.: All right, great. And some of the stories, because of the nature of the story, where it is an event that changed what you think of as real or changed who you are -- there's a certain amount of vulnerability in sharing these stories. So I thank Peggy and Courtney for coming up with us, and I thank everybody for sharing these stories because they are a medicine. These stories are medicine that can liberate others also. So, OK. Peggy, are you here?

Peggy: I'm here. Yes.

C.E.: Great. Thank you so much. Yeah. So I'd just love it if you'd share the story that you shared with me.

Peggy: OK, so as I understood it you were going to read it.

C.E.: Oh, OK. I can do it that way. Yeah, that works.

Peggy: I don't have it in front of me right now. I mean I can paraphrase.

C.E.: So maybe you want to just fill it in a little bit if there's any --

Peggy: Yes.

C.E.: Yeah, we can do it that way. So Peggy started with some quick facts. Married, dealing with infertility, divorced, remarried, adopted and eventually she and her husband adopted a beautiful baby boy who had a heart condition. A very precious child prone to infections, not well all the time, but an active boy and they're having a good family life. Then when the boy was ten Peggy's mother passed away, followed the next year by her grandmother and the next year by her father. Added on top of that, the boy turns 13 and develops some heart arrhythmias, but he seems okay. Still a very stressful time, she says, as you can imagine and I can imagine, everything happening. So she wakes up one morning, wakes up, goes back to sleep and then she says an amazing dream happened. "I was surrounded by golden light. I was moving up into the light. I was told that I needed to open my arms and reach out as I rose up. I felt the light moving into every aspect of my being for I don't know how long and woke up. I felt whole and at peace in a way that I had not felt for years. It was a miracle and I relaxed into it, grateful. The next day, Tuesday, while volunteering for an Easter program I received a call. 'Your son has collapsed, they're resuscitating him. Come now!' When I arrived at the hospital," she writes, "I was informed of his passing. I had never fully experienced love before you came into my life. I'd never experienced healing like occurred in the full body experience of golden light I had, and will never again experience the excruciating pain that is felt when your child is gone in the way that death requires." Then the questions came to her. Why? Why now? Why would I be healed only to be crushed? There's so much more and it's a real heartbreaking story, as any parent can imagine. I talked to Stella about it a little bit and I can't imagine. My mind just won't go there. Even if I touch the possibility of one of my children dying, it's just -- I can't even make myself go there, although sometimes it comes to me. Is there anything, Peggy, that you want to add to that?

Peggy: Sure. You know, I remember early in my life that I was curious about grief and relationships and so many things. And I had had very little experience with it. And then you do have -- those things sort of happened with my mother and my grandmother and my father and you have this -- you think OK, whatever, I understand grief, there's things I can handle. I mean I can handle anything and it'll be fine somehow. And you find out with a child's loss it is not handled. You do not handle it. You survive it somehow, and you look for reasons, and I looked back at the experience of the light and I wondered if -- did that allow me to let him go? Was it time? You know, we have these questions and they go on and on, and so on. So in some ways I just had to put them both into categories of their own. It was a beautiful experience. I've had other times of feeling really connected but I also had to accept that I'm fully human and no matter what happened I was going to experience that level of grief, and I was going to work through it and at times when I couldn't help myself I did things to help other people. So you know, I continued on. But as you noticed that I wrote in the story, it never made it easy. Because you just would like to be healed of these things and make them not be so impacting, and yet life brings us all these things and they end up being the mystery that we call for. So are there any questions you have?

C.E.: Well, I have a couple of thoughts. One is that I imagine that as you come up with these reasons or trying to make some kind of meaning out of it, there is still that the grief is so powerful that even if one of those meanings made sense it wouldn't matter. Like, none of the reasons could possibly matter in the face of the enormity of the loss.. It's not that you haven't found the comfort, it is that there is no comfort.

Peggy: That's right. Yeah. Yeah. I literally walked around for a year amazed that I could look at my body and not find something amputated. It was such a physical response. And you know, I had dreams and I had other ways of connecting but if we can say anything to anyone it's that time - time helps but it never heals. It never takes it away.

We always have this -- I had so many people would -- “Well, it's been a year and now you're so much better and it's OK,” and you want to say, I might be still active but that part of me will never be the way it was before.

C.E.: I had a friend a number of years ago who lost his son. His son was I think 17 or 18, you know, and a really brilliant and extraordinary young man. Died in a car crash. Of course he and his wife, the parents, were just totally devastated. I ran into them many years later and they were so full of light. It's not that they had, as you're saying, like, “healed” or anything but it was like, there was a kind of a lack of fear in them because the worst had already happened. And I wonder if your experience -- I mean that's such an uncanny coincidence that you had the golden light experience the day before this tragedy. And I wonder if it somehow prepared you to be able to carry more -- carry more light.

Peggy: Those are questions you don't really get an answer. I will add, a year and a half later I read a story of brothers in Russia who'd lost their mother at the same time that my son had died. Needed to be adopted in this area, in my area where they could grow up knowing a younger sister that got here. So I ended up grabbing this whole story and working it out. So we flew to Russia and brought them back. Now it happened after 9/11 and everyone else who might have even thought of that was still afraid. And my feeling was, hey what's -- your plane goes down. Not a scary thing. You know that's not something to be worried about when you can do something else like that. That was part of -- when you lose something like that you -- it changes what death feels like.

C.E.: Yeah. Yeah, thank you. I really was grateful for this story. And not only because of what it stirs up in me but also because it also in a way illuminates something I think I said in one of the earlier sessions that -- here Lauren is asking these questions and our minds, especially in this culture, we think that if we only had the right answer to the question then whatever longing is generating the questions would be solved. And your story illustrates how that's just not true, that it didn't matter what answer you got. What was driving the meaning-making could not be satisfied by any meaning that you made of it. And I think that this is -- so your, like, really extreme case is part of something more general, that the longing isn't actually for answers. And I'll leave it at that. Thank you Peggy. Is there anything else you want to say?

Peggy: No, that covers it. Thank you for the opportunity and I appreciate the work that you're doing so much.

C.E.: Thank you too. Thank you. OK, so now -- I'm just giving that actually a few moments of silence. And now I'll invite Courtney, if Jason can find Courtney, for the next story.

Jason: Hi Courtney, great to see you, one second. Here's your invitation Courtney.

Courtney: Hi.

C.E.: All right, great. Thank you Courtney. So would you like to retell the story in your own words?

Courtney: Yeah, I'll try. I'm really nervous so I hope I remember everything I wrote.

C.E.: Well you'd better get it right.

Courtney: So basically my story starts when I was twenty-seven. I was diagnosed seemingly out of the blue with type 1 diabetes, which took a long time to get a proper diagnosis because I was an adult. Usually people think that it would be type 2, but didn't fit that profile. Finally got a right diagnosis that was type 1, it was an autoimmune attack on my pancreas and a few months later I was also diagnosed with Hashimoto's thyroiditis. So it was a big shock. It was really devastating. But I adjusted. Conventional medical treatment really stabilized my health with insulin, Synthroid, an insulin pump and a continuous glucose monitor. And you know, I forged ahead. I went on to earn a graduate degree, I got married and bought a house. I had two healthy babies and everything was going OK until after the birth of my second baby. I developed more conditions. I developed chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia and an autoimmune condition that gave me chronic kidney stones. So pretty much every day was just excruciating pain and I still had to be a human pancreas or a living pancreas and inject my insulin and count carbs and all that stuff while taking care of two babies who were both very high needs babies and had colic, by the way. So yeah, every day was a real struggle and I got to the point after my sixth autoimmune diagnosis, my doctor was like, "You know, I think this is all related to the same issue and there's not really anything else we can do for you, other than just manage the symptoms and keep you alive, but you should really seek out natural treatments for this." And I didn't really trust anything alternative at the time because this was just so out of left field for me to get all these diagnoses and I just, you know, trusted the doctors and was like, fix me and stop this. But it was kind of like, she gave me permission to head down another path. And so I did a little bit of acupuncture, I took supplements, I started meditating, I radically changed my diet and I did have a lot of improvement with all of that over the course of two years. But I was still dependent on opiates, on an antidepressant, on antivirals to control the CFS. And I just knew that I needed to go deeper if there was any way I was going to figure this out and get better for myself and my family. And I just was searching the Internet and researching the psychospiritual causes and origins of autoimmunity and I came across your essay on reuniting the self. And it just touched me so deeply and for the first time I felt like it wasn't just my suffering, my diagnosis, my problem I needed to fix, something that happened to me because I was weak or unlucky, but that maybe these illnesses could be gifts that were given to me, so that I can reflect back the ways that we all have kind of strayed from just -- what's beautiful about us and whole and through the story of separation. And something shifted in me after reading that. And not long after reading that I saw a recommendation for a healer which is, you know, not someone I would typically make an appointment with or go to see, but something about him -- I saw him on an Instagram live with somebody that I follow on Instagram. Something about him just really spoke to me. I don't know if it was his eyes or his voice or it was just something told me: this man can help you. And so I made an appointment and I went to see him and started to tell him about my pain and how I really wanted to heal the fibro and the CFS. And he just went straight in for my pancreas and he said all of those other things are secondary. This is the core wound. And he started asking me a lot of questions about my dad and I was just like, why does he keep asking me about my dad? Let's get back to these problems. Please help me fix this. And he helped me -- he has the ability, apparently, to see memories or emotional issues that are contributing to physical illness. And he brought me to a memory of a few months before I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, when I went to visit my dad and he was really deep into alcoholism at the time and just had lost everything, was sleeping on his mother's floor. He was really drunk when I was there visiting him too and it was just so traumatizing for me to see him in that condition and so the healer really really gently and lovingly helped guide me through the process of seeing my dad this way. And then he asked me a question. He said, "Is it fair to say your father was dying?" And I said "Yes." And then he said, "Is it possible that your love and your loyalty to your father were so strong that you didn't want him to be alone, even in death?" And I couldn't even answer before I felt a huge pain, shock of a pain in my back right where my pancreas is located. And it was just hot searing pain and I just started sobbing uncontrollably and I felt it break open and it just felt like a toxic liquid was just pouring out of my back and I just cried and I cried, which was not something I had done for a really long time. But I cried and I started to gather myself and he comforted me for several minutes while I just let all of this out and he told me that the family is an organism. And that all of our organs are even connected. And yeah, I was in too much of a daze. I'm kind of in a daze thinking about it again now. I couldn't really make any sort of intellectual sense out of what had happened but I

just knew. Like wow, there is so much more to this life in this world than we even realize. And I knew that I was changed and my perception of reality was changed. And yeah, I saw him a few more times in the months that followed and you know, none of the visits were as dramatic as the first one, but over the course of the months that came after, I just slowly started to feel better. I slowly started to get more energy and my pain started to decrease. And then I just thought, you know, I'm having less of a need for a lot of these medications. And just one by one I just was able to drop them. So no more antivirals, no more opiates, no more antidepressant. I'm still on the insulin but I'm using less. And I transitioned off of an insulin pump back to injections. And you know, part of me wanted to wait to tell this story even though I knew it was pretty profound and something amazing had happened. I wanted to wait to tell it until I was completely healed and even the diabetes was gone. But when the opportunity presented itself through this course to share it I just felt really moved to do that. And that's my story.

C.E.: Wow. I love so many things about that story. I love the doctor who gave you permission to seek out natural medicine. That's a generous act that requires some kind of humility that says even though I'm a doctor I don't have all the answers. I wish more doctors had that humility. And I love what you said about that healing experience, that you realize there's so much more to life in this world than you had realized. When I take in stories like this, I realize that my despair over the fate of this world is not including all of the information. Because if this level of healing is possible on your body, what's possible for the social body? What's possible for the ecological body, the body politic? We have to take in this data point if we're going to be realistic. Usually when people say "realistic" they're talking about lowering expectations. But I think if we're going to take in stories like yours then realistic means we have to raise our expectations, because most people's idea of what's possible and practical doesn't include that, just as yours didn't until it happened to you. Yeah. Anything else you wanted to share about it?

Courtney: No, I just really appreciate the approach you're taking with this course about my inquiry, because I think for a long time my inquiry was oh, how can I make this go away? How can I make this stop? Can somebody please just fix me so I can just get back to my normal life and then, you know, through a series of events and just life over time my inquiry changed to: how can I figure out what this is all about? How can I find someone to help me learn what I'm meant to learn from this? And I think that's when the right people and circumstances and events lined up to help me get to where I am now.

C.E.: Mm hmm. Yeah. I also wanted to mention one more thing you said: that the healer said that the family is an organism, and so all the organs are interconnected. And if you take that farther -- you know, all humans share like ninety-nine percent of their DNA. I mean, you know, we *are* all one huge family. And in fact our DNA isn't that different from that of a monkey or a dolphin or even a spider, really. I mean, all of life is one huge organism. So of course, just like what's happening to your father is influencing your pancreas, what's happening to the Amazon, what's happening to the ocean, what's happening to the wetlands -- I mean all of that is happening to the people in places of the world where there's poverty and degradation, that's happening to us too. So, like you were saying, it's not like -- how that happening in the world lands on one person is very different from person to person. But it means that our healing and the healing of the world go hand-in-hand. And I think that when you heal in the way that you did, it also sends a pulse out that helps the healing of the world too. These are not separate things. Well, I don't know, maybe I could say more about it but I think I'll leave it at that. Thank you for your amazing story. Thank you for telling it. Is this the first time you've told it publicly?

Courtney: Well, I've only told it to about my mom and my husband.

C.E.: Wow. Thank you so much. I mean even that story is a healing story. Yeah. Thank you so much.

Courtney: Thank you, Charles.

C.E.: I wonder how many other people harbor secret stories like that and don't tell them because they deviate from normal. So you think that you're alone if you have a story like that. But it's actually more like a big game of let's pretend. Let's pretend normal is this smaller version of reality. Or it's like the Emperor's New Clothes. And now Courtney has named the condition of the emperor, the emperor being the narrow, tight worldview of reductionist materialism. That emperor has no clothes. That emperor is much more than he pretends to be. And we can, through these experiences and hearing about these experiences, we can perceive a much bigger magnificence. And get a sense of what this world could be if it were arrayed in its full raiment. So yeah, let me move on now. Anyway. Yeah, as I was saying there are more of those stories that we'll put up on the website. I hope you all enjoy these. I'd like to move on now to some questions. So what I'm going to do, I'm going to go through the top -- I looked at the top seven questions as of 2 pm on Crowdcast that were upvoted by everybody. So when I go through them one by one I'm going to read the question as Jason tries to find the person who asked the question. And then I'll answer it, and then whoever asked it can follow up on my response and maybe push it further or say yeah that was great. Or say that doesn't add up Charles, you forgot this. Whatever your authentic response is. So I'm going to begin with what was the top voted question posed by Rachel Wakefield. And she wrote "Brian Swimme said that the universe is continually finding its way into deeper and deeper realms of beauty. I feel and believe the truth of this but what I see happening both in my life and in the world is that the universe is finding its way also into deeper and deeper realms of suffering -- not just ordinary pain but anguish beyond anguish. Does the beauty outweigh the suffering? How would we know? It feels important to know, because if the suffering is greater then why did the universe bother existing?" So I have a couple of things to say about this. Let's first see if -- did we find Rachel? Oh yes. Hi Rachel. Is that pretty much where the question is at or is there anything else that occurs to you before I try to answer?

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, go ahead. Thank you.

C.E.: Yeah. So just a couple of things came to me as I read that. One first is that actually there is way more joy in the world than sorrow, even right now. Even with all the horrible things that are happening. If you look at -- I got this understanding when I was looking at some tadpoles, this pond full of wriggling tadpoles and it hit me that every single one of them is in ecstasy. Every single one of them is completely in the joy of movement, even though if it could see into the future it would know that it was probably going to get devoured by something. I mean how many tadpoles actually make it to mature froghood? Not very many. But in that moment they are just bursting with life, bursting with joy, bursting with energy, just like the plants, the insects, everything. Most of the time, except for maybe a few gruesome moments, most of them are in a state of bliss most of the time. And humans in earlier times and maybe today even in some places of the world experienced much higher levels of joy than we are used to in this culture. I'm reading a book by Cynthia Jurs, a dear friend. I looked at it intending to write the foreword to it so I got an early version of the book. And she tells a story of this pilgrimage to India that she took a bunch of people on and one of the women was quite wealthy, I think a physician or something and it was getting hard. You know, people were uncomfortable, there were bugs, it was hot, their feet were tired, just everything. She was getting overwhelmed, this woman, and they were sitting in some public plaza and she was just losing it and crying and just really in quite a state of unhappiness. And then from the distance they see a woman walking toward the group and this woman is wearing a tattered sari. She's obviously very very poor. Doesn't have shoes. Very poor woman. And she comes up to this woman who's crying and she sits right next to her and starts stroking her hair and says, "Don't be sad. You have everything. We have nothing. We're happy. Don't be sad," and just kept telling her don't be sad, don't be sad. Be happy like us. And so from the Western view this woman in India, this woman who couldn't even afford clothes, who couldn't afford shoes, who probably didn't know where tomorrow's meal is coming from -- she was so -- from our perspective we'd say well, she must be really suffering. But that wasn't her experience. So that's

the first thing I have to say to that. And that so much of our suffering comes from our way of seeing the world and the way of seeing ourselves. Second -- and that's not to deny that there is very real suffering, just like that tadpole probably suffers too when it's in the beak of the bird that's plucking it out of the water. But the default state of life, from which we occasionally depart, is joy. That occasional departure could be many years or even most of a lifetime but the underlying state of joy is still available to us. It's where we came from and it's where we return to. On the way -- this is the second part of my response -- on the way, every storyline that can be lived must be lived in order for the Age of Separation to fulfill itself. Everything that could happen has to happen, otherwise it won't be complete. And some of those storylines for our collective being to fully experience all of the different threads and timelines and narratives that can happen -- some of those are pretty horrible. And I feel grateful to the generous souls who have taken on those really hard walks on behalf of our collective being. So yeah, I hope that wasn't too spiritually bypassy. What do you think, Rachel?

Rachel: Yeah. I love what you said about the tadpoles in ecstasy. It really rings true to me. Yeah, I was going to ask -- so I know that the world is alive and conscious. But what kind of alive and conscious being is it? Is it benevolent, does it care about us? I guess. And I'm not sure from what you said, if you're saying the universe cares or is it neutral or what?

C.E.: Yeah, that's a good question, isn't it? Sometimes I have moments where I directly experience that the universe is incredibly loving and the planet is incredibly loving. I think that the love of Earth for humanity is like the love of a mother to a child. That's the only thing that makes sense to me. Yeah. And so I say that on theoretical grounds but also I sometimes experience it, just like with my feet on the ground, barefoot especially. You can tap into that and you can get the answer to that question experientially. And in that moment it's so obvious and then you -- that doesn't prove it to anybody but yourself. You can't go to your uncle or your brother-in-law and say, well I can prove that it's a loving universe because when I stood with my bare feet on the ground I felt such incredible love in the earth supporting me. But you can invite him to have that experience too, if his soul has reached a point where it's ready to have that experience integrated into his stream of life -- and maybe he's not ready. Maybe there is still more of this Story of Separation that needs to be explored for that being. But when you have that experience you can become an invitation to others, as we all wrap up some of the threads and wrap up some of the storylines of suffering that you talked about.

Rachel: Thank you.

C.E.: Thank you Rachel. So maybe I'll move on to the next person. I mean, you know any one of these questions we can follow the thread probably for an entire hour and a half session. So the next one here is from Adam. Adam N.? "The idea of synchronicity and an alive reality and also taking/not taking meanings of experience at face value all have strong connections to mental health. Often an excess of meaning-making and finding abundant connections is associated with mania, ideas or delusions of reference and even psychosis. Any thoughts on differentiating between healthy or unhealthy experiences of this sort? Or is there a difference?" So yeah, you know, probably we've all run into people who are making meaning where it seems pretty obvious there is none, even to the point of paranoid fantasies. So this brought up in me a passage from a book I wrote a number of years ago, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. Now I'm going to read it to you because it's just so relevant to this question. OK. "A number of years ago I became acquainted with a man whom I'll call Frank. Frank was highly intellectual, with more than a cursory knowledge of several scientific fields. But his life's work, on which he spent eight or ten hours a day, was to cut out words from product packaging and magazines. From these clues he teased out a vast, all-encompassing conspiracy theory. He believed that by rearranging the words with scissors and glue he could disrupt the conspiracy and change reality on behalf of all beings. He brought the most fascinating connections to light. A

cereal box might have General Mills on the front. Mills contains mil, short for military and look, the text on the back of the box has sentences of 19 and 13 words respectively. That comes to 1913, the year the Federal Reserve was created. Aha. The pattern begins to emerge. So this example barely hints at the labyrinthine complexity of Frank's theories, which tie together packaging logos, numerology and more. Everybody thought Frank was deranged but I seriously considered, how am I any different from him? It seems like a trivial question but I found it fruitful. Both of us uphold an explanation for the workings of the world that seriously violates consensus reality. Both of us are rearranging words drawn from an existing linguistic and conceptual substrate, hoping thereby to alter reality. I'm doing the same thing. I'm taking words, putting them on a page and hoping that something in the world is going to change in my delusion. Both of us are seen by many as deviant and therefore must persevere indefinitely without much financial support or social affirmation. At the time I was as broke and unknown as he was. Sometimes I titillate my brain with the thought that maybe this guy Frank really is right, that he is the greatest and bravest genius in history, working on this magical symbolic level to save the world. Maybe if I only set the time to delve into his work I would see it too. Don't you sometimes wish that your friends and relatives would just take the time to read so-and-so's book, watch such and such a documentary, open their minds and stop dismissing your world view out of hand? If only they'd look into it then they'd get it." OK. I never kept in touch with Frank and he might be doing his labors on behalf of all sentient beings to this day. And so that brings up the same question that Adam asked here. What I can say is, to hold a separate reality as this guy Frank was doing and as I kind of was feeling myself to be doing for a number of years -- that can only be sustained at great effort. And I don't think I could have sustained it if eventually people hadn't started to read my work, to resonate with it, to reflect it back at me, to hold me in the story of the world that I was speaking. Because just because I can speak it doesn't mean I'm always there. So there was a larger reality that was holding me in it. A coherent reality that was attractive to other people too. So maybe there isn't actually that much of a difference between me and Frank or between the psychotic person and the person ordinarily making meaning. Maybe it's all kind of the same thing on a continuum. And it's a matter of which of these realities is ready to happen. Which of them is enrolling us, enrolling enough of us in it in order to autogenerate itself, if that makes sense. And the key here -- and this comes up in a later question as well, so I'll revisit this -- but the key is to understand that it's not just that we create stories. It's also that stories create us. The paradoxes that this question exemplifies arise from anthropocentrism. They are inevitable if we think that we are the only conscious, sentient story-making beings and then if that's true, of course the world is meaningless and we just impose meaning on it. I got a message through my contact form saying Charles, don't you know that it's all just atoms and void and meaning is something that is created by human beings? And like, yeah, I used to think that. So, to give agency to the stories themselves and all that comes with them, the archetypes for example -- that resolves some of these paradoxes. And to give meaning or to give beingness to the stories, that's part of a new story, it's part of a new and ancient story that the universe is alive in every filament. Oh, I forgot to check if we had Adam on. I don't think we got him on though.

Jason: Adam doesn't seem to be with us today.

C.E.: All right. Well I will just assume that that was a satisfying enough explanation or response and I will trundle forward here. This one is from Tina Haveker, is that it? Tina Haveker. "Charles, are you consciously sharing information you receive from a higher source? Watching you speak, you appear to be connecting to something or someone outside of yourself, searching for the most important information or best answer. Has this evolved for you as you become more connected to others through your work, though the answers to all of our questions exist within us?" Yeah. I personally don't have the experience of channeling something. For me it's more of connecting and standing in a field of information and embodying that field of information that I have a long friendship with. Because I'm holding these questions in my mind for years and decades and I still wouldn't say that -- I mean, is it inside of me, you know, is it outside of me? This distinction is part of the confusion. I would maybe say that the part of ourselves that is confused, that doesn't have the answers or the information or the knowledge can access that knowledge. And it could be accessing some other part of ourselves. Maybe all the answers are within, or maybe all

the answers are outside of ourselves. And I would just affirm the power of the question. To hold a question uncomfortably and let it always worry the boundaries of the meaning you make of the world. Because the question is usually something that doesn't fit into the story that you've created or that has created you of the world. It doesn't quite fit inside, so it bothers you a little bit. And to be okay with being bothered, not to say OK I'm just going to allow that to be bothered, I'm not going to let it bother me. But to actually hold that discomfort that generates the question, rather than sequestering it off into some psychic cyst. But to be present to the discomfort of incongruity, that is what summons the information. So that's one thing that's going on. Did we find Tina for that?

Jason: Tina's house is a little crazy today so she's going to decline to join us.

C.E.: All right. Okay. All right. So, let's see. Moving on. From Cecilia. Oh yeah, this is a cool one. "Any thoughts on the interplay of choice, agency and predetermination? The Mandelbrot set pointed to the predictability of the infinite creativity of life, raising unsettling questions in me around whether that means that all of the surplus suffering we create is an unavoidable part of the process. Part of the pre-existing, albeit infinitely complex design is our evolution into different dominant stories already on a predetermined timeline. How does that impact ideas of agency and responsibility?" Okay, so very astute observation here by Cecilia. Is she coming on? If so not yet.

Jason: She doesn't seem to be with us today.

C.E.: Excuse me. Yeah. So, yes. The Mandelbrot set is deterministic. There is no randomness, in that it could be calculated whether a point is in the set or not in the set, and whether you've performed the calculation or not, there already is a fact of whether it is in or not in the set. The shape of that set depends purely on this very simple formula iterated again and again and again. So on that level it's deterministic. But I'll say two things here. First, physical reality is not necessarily like that. Because quantum mechanics does have randomness or acausality built into it. Or you could say, if you look at quantum mechanics more poetically or mythologically, you would say that it has choice built into it. When the photon goes through the slit in the single slit experiment, why does one photon go to one place and the other goes to some other place, when they are subject to the exact same configuration of forces? It's because, poetically speaking, it's because this one chose to go this way and that one chose to go that way. Which means that choice is elemental. It's foundational. So the Mandelbrot set doesn't necessarily say anything about physical reality. What it does say is that order, organization and beauty are built into the fabric of reality. But there is also an element of choice in our engagement with the Mandelbrot set. And it has to do with its infinity, too. Because if you watched that Mandelbrot zoom video -- and if you didn't I encourage you to watch it. I just trip out on it every time. It blows my mind every time that this thing could exist. So if you knew that what you saw on that video is what happens if you zoom in on that very very very specific point. If you zoomed in on another point that could be point zero zero zero zero 100 zero zero zero zero ones away, you would get a completely different zoom journey. And there are infinitely many points that you can zoom into and each one gives you a completely different -- well, not completely different but potentially a different journey. The set has a lot of self-similarity too. The part of infinite reality that you experience does depend on the choice of entry. Or you could say the choice of where you put your attention, and the mathematical tool that you use to zoom into that point is analogous to the way that you can focus your attention, and through the focus of attention you can enter any part of the labyrinth of reality and as you go into it, all of the traumas, all of the human possibilities -- there they are. Sometimes the same as they are in other places on earth and sometimes very different. So the world of the corporate boardroom: you're going to have some of the same psychological dynamics, some of the same relationships, some of the same patterns of dominance and submission, the different roles that come out. You're going to have the same thing happen in that corporate boardroom as you're going to have in a street gang in Los Angeles or a hunter-gatherer band. It'll be the same in certain ways and also very very different in certain ways. So there's a self-similarity as you zoom in on very

different parts of the set. And then there's also an infinite difference as you zoom in on different parts of the set. And this is one of the ways that I was talking about earlier, that every storyline that can be played out does get played out for our age to be fulfilled. So you can go into the most obscure little corner of the universe and discover endless complexity, endless drama, endless interest even contemplating the smallest little thing. OK, so I feel like I'm doing a lot of talking here. I wonder -- let's see. I'm just going to go on to the next one because it's short and I can answer it quickly. Brenda, is Brenda on?

Jason: It doesn't seem so.

C.E.: Okay. So I think what I'm going to do guys -- I'll run through these quickly, I think. Let's see what time it is -- oh yeah, we've still got some time. So I'm going to run through these last quickly and then maybe just take wildcards. If anyone, something's really moving in you, you can -- what do you do exactly, Jason, if you want to get your attention?

Jason: People can say hi in the chat, that they'd like to join us on screen and then we can pull them up from there.

C.E.: So while I do these last couple questions, the last three -- if you have something burning in you that you'd like to just come up and ask as a wildcard, then reach out in the chat and we'll try to pick that up. Okay. So this question from Brenda: "In a living universe, who or what is in control of synchronicities and occurrences? In some belief systems it is an outside deity and in some it's intention or a law of attraction. What do you feel guides or creates the reality we live in?" So again, I already mentioned a little bit about how it's a co-creation. We create reality, reality creates us. I would also ask who is in control of the Mandelbrot set? That's the mind blowing thing about it. Nothing's in control, it's just like that. Synchronicity, coordination, order -- that's just baked into the cake. It doesn't need something external to administer it. The body is the same way, the brain is the same way. It used to be thought that there was some central controller of the brain (a CPU), or a central controller of the body (the information of the DNA). But now we're understanding that that model is a projection onto biology of our centralized social and political systems and economic systems and that the world does not really work that way, but everything is part of everything else. Everything mirrors everything else, and order and this coordination, the synchronicities -- these are simply part of the fabric, the implicate order, as David Bohm put it. So this -- I want you to take in how counterintuitive that is to anyone who has grown up and become accustomed to a command and control based system or a top down or a hierarchical or centralized system. And in the Story of Separation where there is no order out there, that must be imposed by humans or by the anthropomorphized deity that we call God. Because reality itself couldn't be like that. It couldn't be alive in and of itself, could it? That is the realization that changed my life when I first saw the Mandelbrot set when I was 22. OK. Moving on to number six which would be John. "In order to evolve consciously from the old story (domineering, colonial, sociopathic, capitalist) toward a new story (holistic, interconnected, respect and love of all life) we need to emotionally be aware and feel empathy and compassion. But how do we do that? How do we do that when the ability to empathize is completely missing in some people? How can this divide ever be overcome, moving forward into the new story?" Yeah. So this is a question about psychopaths that I get from time to time. I wrote about that in *The More Beautiful World* a little bit. And so I want to say that it's similar to the story of the pancreas or the autoimmune story in the essay that Courtney referred to. What I said is that autoimmunity is essentially the self treating part of itself as Other which is a mirror of what humans are doing to the planet. This whole planet is actually part of our own bodies but we are attacking and degrading and treating as not-self what is really self. And so what we do to the world on the macrocosm then manifests in our own bodies. It could be because of some psychological self-rejection. In the case of diabetes, some kind of not taking in all of the sweetness. Maybe that would be a natural response to having an alcoholic father. Like, we could psychoanalyze it like that. But those can get really formulaic and I would say that -- because

sometimes it just doesn't make any sense. And so I think that also what's happening is that some people are kind of canaries in the coal mine or they just embody on behalf of the collective some feature of the collective that's diffuse and it comes into this person's body in a more distilled form. So they are the representative or the proxy for the whole of self-rejection, for example. And so psychopathy is the same thing. It's an extreme, distilled form located in a person of something that is general to the whole culture. Lack of empathy, the cut-off of ourselves from all of the other people and all of the other beings that is built into our economic system, built into our language even, built into scientific thinking. It's the reduction of the Other to something less than sacred. That is culture-wide, civilization-wide. Civilization is built on that. The conversion of nature into commodities, the conversion of people into markets, into clients, into a labor force, exploitation, dehumanization. Racism is another example of it. Anything that makes the Other into less, that is a less extreme form of psychopathy. So of course it is going to also manifest in concentrated form in certain people. They are in a way symptoms of a collective condition. And as the underlying condition changes, as the story that separates us and dulls our empathy and compassion -- as that story dissolves we will see fewer and fewer psychopaths. And we will have a system that doesn't incentivize psychopathic behavior and reward it, which our economic system basically does. If you have a soft heart often you won't do as well in business. You won't be able to ruthlessly maximize profits as well as somebody who had well-developed psychopathic traits. So when we change the economic system we'll see the psychopathic part of people who express that way get less nourishment. Yeah, I could say more. Should I? I don't want to use up all the time. I'm going to say one more thing about that. In one of Starhawk's books there is a character who is quite psychopathic. I'm trying to remember his name. It was in the sequel to *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. Livingston or something maybe. And anyway he's living in the bad guy territory of Southern California and he's very very manipulative and ruthless and heartless and gets what he wants and has no compunctions about exploiting or even killing other people. And then the good guys win. And he ends up -- totally out of self-interest he betrays his own side and he ends up in Northern California with all the hippies and he's like, huh. My self-interested ruthless behavior isn't very useful here because it doesn't do me any good and I have everything I need. I don't have to compete. And there's nothing to do. Maybe I will take up art. Maybe I will do something else. That was kind of an illustration that a lot of psychopathy is encouraged by the field that we are in. I'm not saying that all of it is. I think some people are, as I said, just these distilled symptoms of our culture. OK. Did we try to get John for that or did we not? OK, I guess not.

Jason: I didn't see John here. Josh is with us if you'd like him to join you for the next question.

C.E.: Oh, good. OK. Yeah. It'll be good to see you, Josh. Josh has been to a couple of events with me. And this one actually is probably bigger than I want to go into fully but I'll just read it. "I grapple with a conflict between two views. There is no fixed reality, on the one hand, and our thoughts, intentions and expectations can affect what is real. How to reconcile with the fact that there's so much we can agree on. I can say to you, let's have lunch tomorrow, Susanna Foo's, 17th and Sansom street. And it usually works. Or even if you measure the heat of fusion of water you'll get 80 calories per gram. What is the ontological status of consensus reality?" OK. So for one thing -- OK, I'll start by saying I don't know. What I do know is that there is a mysterious intimate connection between reality and self, between story and fact, between inner and outer. I don't think that it resolves into anything as simple as the law of attraction. Yet it's also not merely this objective mechanistic world upon which we impose meaning. That is clear from -- I'm not going to even go into the evidence. So it's neither one of these two things, so what is it? That is a good question. And I hope that we hold that question and don't jump too quickly into tidy metaphysical answers. But we stay in the question. So all I can say is that it's mysterious and it's intimate. And I would repeat again that stories create us as much as we create them. Even the constants of nature are in a co-creative dance with human consciousness and could -- and also because they are all in co-relation to each other, when one shifts then the others shift. And this shift ends up creating different rules of physical reality that could coincide with a different state of human consciousness as we transition, to use unabashedly New Age terminology, as we transition out of the third dimension into whatever dimensions must come next. They keep saying fifth dimension but why not fourth

dimension; I think four usually comes after three. But anyway. So I'm not saying that our shift in consciousness will cause the constants of the universe to shift, but I'm saying that these are together part of a Gestalt, these are part of a larger system that if one changes, the other has to change so that they're not in conflict, and until one changes the other cannot change very much or very consistently. But sometimes in the border between two realities there's some messiness. There's some fuzzy edges and we get invasions of one into the other. And so sometimes you can't find Susanna Foo's and you knew where it was. So yeah, Josh. I have a feeling that that probably generates more questions than it answers. Hey, there you are. Good to see you Josh. Do you have anything to say about it? OK, are you muted? I can't hear you. Cannot hear you.

Jason: I can see that your mic isn't muted on Crowdcast, but that microphone is just not connected to your computer right now on your end.

C.E.: Actually I muted him because I didn't want to bear the brunt of his philosophical riposte. [pause] So if you could somehow get your audio working I'm sure it would be an interesting conversation. Yeah, I've had quite a few interesting conversations with Josh on quantum mechanics and biology and -- I can't remember what his PhD is in. Biology, right? Biochemistry? Something. Well, since you can't talk, I'll just make it up. OK. Well, I don't see anything else we can do here. Sorry it didn't work but it's good to see you. Maybe somebody else will speak on your behalf. Did we get any burning questions from the group here?

Jason: Yeah, there's one from Katie that requested to jump on board. I'll bring her up now.

C.E.: Awesome. Thanks. You know, one thing I'm noticing -- I'm kind of scanning the comments sometimes. There is an awful lot of wisdom on this course. Quite an embarrassment of riches. I mean it seems like -- it's so rich that it's like, what are we going to do with this, you know? Incredible. Hi.

Katie: Hi Charles. Can you hear me?

C.E.: Yes, I can.

Katie: Hi. Pleasure to meet you.

C.E.: Likewise. Katie, was it?

Katie: Katie, yeah. Yeah, I have one of the burning questions in chat. So happy to be a wild card. The way I described it on chat, it kind of feels like, you know, one of those icy hot patches where it's like these contrasting sensations all at once? So I feel this irony watching and enjoying your course, that my understanding of one of the recent origins of the Story of Separation is in, like, Western European patriarchy and colonization, right? And like even in Disney's Pocahontas movie there's lyrics like, "You think you own whatever land you land on, the Earth is just a dead thing you can claim, but I know every rock and tree and creature has a life and a spirit and a name." Like, indigenous societies have known something other than the Story of Separation for a very long time. And there's been a really violent colonization that has repressed a story of oneness and replaced it with the Story of Separation. So I'm just curious, how has it been for you occupying this place, speaking of individuals who need to symbolize something that has to happen on a larger systemic level? What is your role as a white cisgender man describing this

breakthrough, which I imagine that some people kind of see as Columbus-ing, like discovering or rediscovering something that has already been known to a lot of people of color.

C.E.: Yeah. Yeah, the reason I call it a new and ancient story when I remember to do so is, I guess, to avoid repeating the mistake that was made by calling the Americas the “New World.” What it is, so it is a new story for civilization, for a mass civilization, because not only Western civilization but pretty much any place that developed anything called civilization began to walk the same path that European civilization took to its extreme. So whether it was China or South America or sub-Saharan Africa, bla bla bla bla --- Egypt, sub-Saharan Africa, India. All the places where civilization developed, you had division of labor, concentration of population, social classes, money, slavery, patriarchy. You had all the bad things -- and literature, writing, that could be considered a good thing. You had all the same developments happening, so that built on each other and some civilizations took them farther than others. And there is a whole lot of scholarship around, like, what enables or what are the conditions by which one takes it to further extremes than the others. But -- so yeah, so what has not happened as far as I know is that a group of people, a civilization, has taken that path to its extreme and then followed a path of reunion. So the way I understand the contribution, or one way I can understand the contribution of indigenous people -- and I like to use Orland Bishop's term for it, “cultures of memory,” by which he means indigenous people, traditional people and the esoteric lineages within the dominant culture. So cultures of memory are posting information from the past to the future, that when the dominant civilization -- which even itself is a problematic concept, because “dominant” through our own lens. But there might be ways in which we're not at all dominant. But anyway, I'm not going to do a disclaimer for every word I say. So when the dominant civilization reaches an impasse, reaches a point where to repeat the solutions that got us here only makes things worse and we don't know what to do and we realize we don't know what to do, then there is knowledge that has been transmitted from the past that is still embodied in cultures that for one reason or another were able to escape the full brunt of patriarchy, colonization capitalism, etc. etc. They carry this information that then is like a seed crystal that comes in for the metamorphosis of the whole. And I perceive that on the level of the oversoul of all humanity that this was intended from the very start and that wise people ten thousand years ago saw the whole thing happening. And they thought, OK. Everything beautiful is going to be lost. All knowledge is going to be -- all of our knowledge is going to be crushed. How are we going to help people ten thousand years in the future? So what they did is they coded key knowledge within stories, ceremonies, and physical monuments, to transmit not just intellectual knowledge but transmit codes, transmit information to the time when it was needed for healing. And what the Tibetans call *terma*, which are these kind of esoteric implants into the earth, that when somebody is in the appropriate state of consciousness and the need of the world is present, that these things blossom back into consciousness so that it's a lineage that goes underground and then comes back up again. So this is, I think, a different mentality than Columbus-ing or cultural appropriation because it's not to take these treasures of other cultures and use them as grist for the money-making machine. They're not being used as natural resources to take patriarchy, capitalism, etc. etc. to new heights, but they are for the healing of patriarchy and capitalism, healing of the Story of Separation. So that's my relationship to it. And you know, in my conversations with indigenous people it has a lot of resonance, what I've just said, and -- with most, not all though. Some people were just like, yeah you're just, you know, whitesplaining it and you're excusing, you're trying to excuse yourself and get off the hook as a perpetrator of something. I get a little bit of that. But it is what it is. That's my relationship to it.

Katie: Thanks. Thanks for sharing.

C.E.: Do you have any reflections you want to run off or on it?

Katie: Honestly like, I'm still processing it. You know, like I said, I have like really contradictory feelings about it. And that's why I wanted to ask you like, what your experience was before I just continue to riff on my own feelings.

C.E.: Yeah. Well, thanks. I hope I offered even more confusion into the mix for you to chew on. You seem to have frozen. But anyway, yeah. Thank you very much for that provocative question and let me see what I'm doing on time here. Wow, I used up all the time for wildcards on one person. So I would like to wrap it up soon because we said an hour and a half. So I'll say -- yeah, I know that I gave a very oversimplified explanation of a *terma*. Cynthia, my dear friend I mentioned who does the earth treasure vase work and has studied this deeply -- and I can say a lot more about them but I think I'm going to leave it at that for now. And I'll say that as soon as we hang up the call, you'll be able to -- or a few minutes after -- the recording of this session will be available if there's any parts that you wanted to listen to again. Oh yeah, I was supposed to offer a meditation or something like that. And I was just so wrapped up in the questions and the conversation that I didn't think about it. But maybe if you want to hang on I'll see what I can offer. Not so much a meditation but just a little reflection. Yeah, I just want to point something out. You know this idea that what we're really seeking isn't the philosophical answers to the questions. Someone pointed out in the comments section on YouTube or somewhere, and also we've noticed this on Tribe, on the conversation there. Someone said this is like, the most loving corner of the Internet. And I'm feeling that vibe here as well. And I'm really hoping that what I've shared and what the others who have come on and sent their questions and shared their stories -- I hope that you're receiving some of this love vibration that has brought us all together and that answers us on a much deeper level than any philosophy could. I feel really really grateful for it. I mean even the questions -- they were all generously asked. Respectful, polite, not assuming things. [inaudible] If somebody was tweaked by something they didn't just translate that onto blame. Or Katie's question just now: that could have easily been framed as an accusation but it was very much in the place of curiosity, of wow, I'm dealing with these contradictions. So people are really taking ownership and expressing themselves in a way that generates a field, a very loving field. And I just want to, as the meditation or the assignment for the week, I just want to invite people to pick up on that. Another way is possible. I hope that the vibration of our interaction -- and we have a couple thousand people now on this course, each one of them contributing something to the feeling and the field of our collective. I think it's really extraordinary and I want to acknowledge everybody who's contributed to that and thank them for bringing that, bringing that in. It's what I'm riding, to do this. Yeah. Yeah. So thank you so much. I'm looking forward already to our next live session, and in between there's some good recorded stuff. So thank you, and thank you Laurie. Thank you Jason. Thank you Patsy. Thank you everybody on the team and I'll see you next time.