

“Sometimes we don’t get the right answers, simply because we haven’t asked the right questions. Not anymore. Debbie Ford tells us what we should really ask, in order to get what we really want.”

— MARIANNE WILLIAMSON, author of *Everyday Grace*


# THE RIGHT QUESTIONS



*Ten Essential Questions to Guide  
You to an Extraordinary Life*

## DEBBIE FORD

The #1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author





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You  
to an Extraordinary Life

Debbie Ford

 HarperCollins e-books

To my beloved father in heaven, the  
Honorable Judge Harvey Ford, who taught me the power  
and the potency of asking the right questions.

Your wisdom lives on in my heart.

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# 1 The Moment of Choice

Every day, each of us makes a multitude of choices that will impact our lives. Some of these choices are minor and will only impact the next few minutes, hours, or days, while others will completely change the direction of our lives. Some choices are easy to make; some are more difficult. Some will lead us straight to success, while others will bring us face-to-face with failure. Some will seem earthshakingly important, while others will seem completely insignificant. But what's imperative for each of us to know is that, no matter how large or small, easy or difficult, each choice that we make, individually or collectively, alters the direction of our lives. The quality of our choices will dictate whether we will struggle in frustration or live an extraordinary life—the life of our dreams.

Our ability to make choices implies certain rights and freedoms. If we can choose, then we can determine which decisions we will make about our bodies, our health, our relationships, our finances, our careers, our social lives, and our spiritual beliefs. Choice allows us to pick, to select, to decide between paths. To go right or left. To move forward or backward, be happy or sad, loving or hateful, satisfied or discontent. Choice gives us the power to be successful or unfulfilled, to be good or great, to feel pleasure or pain. We can have chocolate or vanilla; we can work or play, save or spend, be responsible or be a victim. We can keep busy or slow down, be faithful or unfaithful, be disciplined or lazy. We can pursue a path that reflects our highest selves or one that reflects our lowest selves. Ultimately, we are the ones who get to choose.

What makes each of us special and distinguishes us from all other forms of life is our capacity to weigh our options and make conscious, deliberate choices. Choice might just be our most precious gift. When we were younger, we eagerly anticipated the moment when we no longer had to do what others told us. We saw our ability to choose for ourselves as a priceless gift. We anxiously waited for the day when we could get out from under years of our parents' rules

and finally take control of our lives. We longed for the time when we could step out and become the masters of our own destinies, savoring that defining moment when we could decide when to wake up, when and what to eat, when to go to bed—or not. As young adults, the right to choose equaled freedom. Our ability to choose for ourselves unleashed the limitless possibility of creating a future filled with our dreams and desires. Choice offered us hope. It promised us an exciting life—a life where we were free to design and create whatever we pleased. As young adults we made choices because they were exciting, because they felt good, because they held the promise of satisfaction and gratification.

In our youth it's easy to say, "I'll make my dreams happen later" or "Next year will be my year." Youth affords us the luxury of believing that "one day" we will magically arrive at the destination of our dreams. But then something happens. Adulthood catches up with us and a sobering reality sets in: the day we've been waiting for will not magically arrive.

Our todays are based on the choices we made yesterday, and the ones we made three days ago, three months ago, and three years ago. We don't wind up fifty thousand dollars in debt because of one choice. We don't put on thirty



unwanted pounds as a result of a couple of poor choices. And our relationships usually don't fall apart overnight because of one bad decision. We are where we are because of repeated unconscious or unhealthy choices that we've made day after day after day that add up to the reality we find ourselves in.

If we want to understand why and how we created our present reality, all we need to do is look at the choices we made in the past. Examining our present circumstances will show us that we got where we are as a result of decisions we made yesterday and the days before that. Likewise, if we want to know what our lives will look like in the future, we have to examine the choices we are making today. Maybe we've never considered our lives in this way. But the fact is that our futures are determined by the choices we are making right in this moment. So why, then, do most of us spend so little time really thinking about our choices? Why do we often fail to look both ways before we forge ahead, never considering all of our options and their consequences? Our lives are not a crapshoot, bad luck, or our parents', husband's, or boss's fault. Inherent in this fact is both good news and bad news. The bad news is that we are solely responsible for the condition of our lives. The very good

news is that we and we alone have the power to change our lives, and we can choose to do so at any moment.

It's really quite simple: if we want our lives to be different, all we have to do is make different choices. Most of us continue to make the same choices out of habit, comfort, fear, or laziness and then wonder why we don't get different results. The truth is, we're so busy trying to survive life that we don't even realize that our choices and actions aren't translating into our hopes and dreams. We're too distracted with the "doingness" of our daily lives, so we take the easiest, most accustomed route or the path of least resistance, even if it leads us somewhere we don't really want to go. Many of us stumble through each day doing the best we can, without the awareness and the tools we need to change the course of our lives. Then we're shocked when we wake up and discover that we have been working toward the same goals and desires for years and still we aren't where we'd like to be in our lives.

Most of us have lost sight of the relationship between our choices, our actions, and their outcomes. Instead of taking responsibility for our current state of affairs, we become masters at assigning blame, pretending that everything is someone else's fault when our lives turn out not to be the

wonderlands we want them to be. We may even point fingers at others instead of looking at the choices we've made that have landed us exactly where we are today. Without bringing conscious awareness to our choices, we can't help but repeat the patterns of our past.

## THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

If you are going to reach your goals and create the life you desire, you will have to make new choices that will lead you to new actions. This book is your road map. The ten simple questions you will find within these pages—what I have chosen to call the “Right Questions”—will give you the power and inspiration to consciously create a life you feel good about, one choice at a time. They will help you to become aware of the important choices and their consequences. They will guide you and support you in making the right choices. And there you will find the most direct route to your dreams.

The Right Questions consist of ten powerful inquiries designed to reveal what is motivating your actions. The answers to these questions will immediately clarify your thinking and support you in making the choices that are in

your highest and best interest. They are deceptively simple but incredibly powerful and can be used in any situation or at any crossroads. Here, then, are the Right Questions:

- Will this choice propel me toward an inspiring future or will it keep me stuck in the past?
- Will this choice bring me long-term fulfillment or will it bring me short-term gratification?
- Am I standing in my power or am I trying to please another?
- Am I looking for what's right or am I looking for what's wrong?

Will this choice add to my life force or will it rob me of my energy?

Will I use this situation as a catalyst to grow and evolve or will I use it to beat myself up?

- Does this choice empower me or does it disempower me?
- Is this an act of self-love or is it an act of self-sabotage?

Is this an act of faith or is it an act of fear?

Am I choosing from my divinity or am I choosing from my humanity?

Why these particular questions? I once heard the motivational speaker Tony Robbins say, “Quality questions create a quality life.” The quality of our lives is made up of the sum of all our decisions. To make quality decisions, we need to see clearly. Asking either-or questions heightens our awareness and clarifies the results that we can expect from our actions. When you ask these questions in the decision-making process, you immediately see whether the choice you are about to make is an expression of your light or your darkness, whether the choice comes from your vision and dreams or from your fears and doubts. These questions supply you with the wisdom you need to make what was previously unconscious, conscious, so that you can choose with all the power that comes from being fully aware.

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF OUR CHOICES

Our choices affect our mood and the way we feel about ourselves. They influence the quality of our relationships with ourselves, others, and the world. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction; this is the law of cause and effect. No action goes unnoticed. We may fool ourselves into believing that our actions do not matter, particularly if we think no one will know or that no one is watching. But all of our choices impact our futures. If we look at the people who have made a great difference in the world, we see that they all made courageous choices. We see that they came to their decisions with clarity, certainty, and focus. They disciplined themselves to make the choices that were not always comfortable or easy. They took the actions that fed their life force, their purposes, and their dreams. Every time we make a choice that is inconsistent with our heart's desires, we are not only moving away from what we say we want in life but actually dampening our life force—that unique inner power that keeps us alive spiritually and physically.

When we ask the right questions and make the right choices, we feed our life force. Several years ago, during a weekend retreat led by Ammachi, an Indian woman who is a spiritual leader to many people around the world, I came to understand this life force as I never had before. I had been feeling totally exhausted, and I decided to take my son, Beau, with me to Amma's retreat with the intention of doing some deep inner work. I knew I needed to make some changes in my life, but I wasn't sure what was wrong, what I should do, or in which direction to head. A weekend of prayer and meditation seemed to be just the tonic I needed to get clear on what changes I should make.

When I arrived at the retreat I proceeded into a huge hotel ballroom. I sat down with the other several hundred retreat participants and began to meditate. It was difficult for me to concentrate. The truth was that I was so out of balance I couldn't sit still. Rather than rustle around inside, I began wandering through the grounds of the hotel. It felt so good to be outdoors. Listening to the birds sing and feeling the wind cross my face and hearing it brush through the trees were just what my soul longed for. Slowly I began to unwind and settle into the natural rhythm of the retreat. Then I noticed that everyone was moving outside for an

early-evening meditation. I found a place on a bench and joined the others in the group.

As I closed my eyes and turned my attention to my breathing, I felt how shallow my breath was, and I could hear only a faint whisper of what I knew should be a strong, fluid flow of air. I relaxed further and gave myself permission to surrender all that I knew and all that I felt. My only prayer was to get out of my own way in order to receive the guidance that I knew was available for me in the presence of this divine woman and a group of other spiritual seekers. As I finally let go, a wonderful vision occurred. Inside my mind I saw Ammachi enter into my consciousness. I breathed in deeply to absorb the wisdom I was receiving, and I could feel my heart opening wide to the truth of her words.

In my meditation, I heard her say that I would not be able to continue to carry out my teaching if I did not make some major changes in my life. She told me that I was burned out, that I lacked the strength and vitality to keep up the fast pace I was living. And then she showed me an image that has forever changed my life. In my meditation, she pointed to my lower abdomen and said, “We each carry a flame. Your flame is very small. It’s only a flicker.” She said that the choices I was making were not feeding my internal fire but



rather diminishing its strength. I then saw an image of a healthy flame. It was a bold, roaring fire. Its essence was strong, bright, and powerful, with the colors of gold, amber, and red. This healthy, vital internal flame was much different from the one I had just seen in myself, which was dim, short, and weak. My fire's essence was faint, timid, and tired. It looked like if I didn't feed it some logs it would go out soon. As I listened more deeply I heard what I believe today to be the most important information I have ever received.

Each of us has an internal flame that is the keeper of our life force. Each choice we make either adds to this force, making it stronger, igniting and feeding our flame, or diminishes the force, dampening our internal flame, reducing its power.

When our internal fire roars, we feel strong, powerful, and confident. We have the strength and courage to speak truthfully and the humility and clarity to ask for what we need. A healthy flame fills our minds with vision and inspiration and gives us the stamina to envision our dreams and go after them. When we nurture our internal fires we see with great clarity and act with undeviating focus. A

strong flame propels us into higher states of consciousness, where self-love and emotional freedom reside.

When our flames are low, however, we are vulnerable, frail, and weak. We feel scared and apprehensive and are filled with worry and self-doubt. When our flames have not been cared for and fed, we hunger for things outside ourselves to make us feel better. We withhold our communications to others, fearing that we are not worthy of love and happiness. When our flames are low, we are skeptical and cynical. We worry that others will want something from us and we fear that we have so little to give. When our flames are weak we don't have the defenses to fight off disease, doubt, worry, self-loathing, addiction, or criticism. When our flames are low we look to others to feed our fires because we haven't fed them ourselves. A weak fire is needy and falls prey to the ongoing negative dialogues that permeate our minds.

What's important to know is that the size and the health of our flames also affect those around us. A small flame causes others to worry about it, just as we would feel compelled to tend a fire that is threatening to extinguish itself. A sputtering internal flame demands that we pay attention to it and look for ways to make it strong and

revitalize it. Can we ever leave a weak fire unattended? Can we ignore it for more than a few minutes? Not if we want it to keep going. A small flame sputters and is always in danger of being extinguished, whereas a healthy flame stands tall and burns brightly, with enough power to sustain itself in a strong wind.

Our flames are our essence. When they are well fed, they hold all the power of that roaring

fire. But our internal flames must be looked after and protected. We must honor them and care for them, tend them and nourish them, if they are to stay strong. Our job is to protect these flames, knowing that they are our life force, our spirit, and the keeper of our divinity.

Now I'll give you the sobering news: our choices inform our behaviors and our actions. Every choice we make either brings wood to our internal fires or sprinkles a little water on them, diminishing their power. If we wish to stand in all of our light, if we wish to express ourselves authentically, and if we want the power to bring our purpose to the world, our first commitment must be to keeping our internal fires—our life force—strong.

Now I'd like you to imagine that your only job in life is tending to that inner flame, keeping it vital and roaring. Imagine that there is absolutely nothing you need to do except make the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly choices that will protect that flame. Imagine how you would care for that flame's power, knowing that it and it alone can give you all the love, money, health, security, fulfillment, and peace of mind that you desire. Most likely you would take very, very good care of that flame and make empowering, life-enhancing choices to keep your life force strong.

Here are some examples of choices that dim your light, and then some examples of those that make your flame strong and healthy.

### *Choices That Dim Your Light*