

4th March 2023

Enlightens

"It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question."

Eugene Ionesco, as quoted by Chris Clarke-Epstein in
'78 Important Questions Every Leader Should Ask and Answer'

Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India at various time from the 1960s to the 1980s, is quoted as having said this:

The power to question is the basis of all human progress.

I like that. So, before I leave my musings on questions and questioning, I offer you a reflection from Gautama Buddha from 5 centuries BC, on whom much of Buddhist teachings is based. In *Sutta Pitaka*, we find this:

There are these four ways of answering questions. There are questions that should be answered straightforwardly [yes, no, this, that] ... questions that should be answered with an analytical answer ... questions that should be answered with a counter-question ... and questions that should be put aside.

This makes demands on both the questioner and the person being questioned. It's too easy to blunder into aggressive questioning, to disrupt, destabilise, embarrass or confuse. To create a climate of dignified debate, and to move towards a greater understanding of truth, here is the responsibility of the questioner – to work out, in advance, whether a question needs to be asked, or whether it would be better to put it aside.

But the person being questioned also has a responsibility: to respond with a "yes", "no", and the like, when that is the honest response; to be ready with an analytical answer when it's required; to offer an appropriate counter-question, with the questioner prepare to work with that too; and *not* to put aside the question when it clearly should not be put aside. Would it not be better in the media, for example, if both the questioner *and* the person being questioned were aware of the "rules of engagement" as the Buddha lays them out for us?

And in questioning our faith? Let's keep asking our questions. But let us also distinguish one kind of question from another: the yes/no question; the analytical-exploration question; the question which will raise even more questions; and the should-be-put-aside-because-it-didn't-need-to-be-asked question. If "it's not the answer that enlightens, but the question", let's work harder at getting *that* part right.

A prayer for today

Lord, even in my questioning, I'm close to you. And that's even before any answers. Amen