

# **Conversations With A Stone**

By Steve Cavin

# 1. Meeting

Not long ago, a man was walking along the road. His foot struck a stone, and he fell on his face in the dirt. Annoyed, he sat up and searched the ground until his eyes fell upon a small, rounded stone protruding from the surface of the road. He glared intently at it.

"You!" he said, rubbing his foot. "What are you doing there?"

"I am." said the stone.

"You tripped me." said the man.

"Did I?" asked the stone.

"Yes." said the man. "I was walking along the road when you tripped me."

"I did not move." said the stone.

"Maybe not", said the man, rubbing his foot some more, "but you've hurt my foot. Do you see this bruise?" He lifted his foot up.

The stone said nothing.

"It is all your fault", said the man. "If you were not here, my foot would be well."

"Are you lost?" said the stone.

"Certainly not!" said the man.

"You chose to come this way?" said the stone.

"Of course I did." said the man.

"I did not." said the stone.

The man stopped rubbing his foot and looked at the stone. "This is the road to the market." said the man. "I must come this way today."

The stone said nothing.

"It is your fault, all the same." said the man. "You are too hard. You have bruised my foot."

"I am a stone." said the stone.

Forgetting his pain for a moment, the man looked at the stone. It was chipped and worn and bore the mark of wheel and foot.

"How long have you been here?" asked the man.

"Not long." said the stone.

"Not long?", said the man. "By the look of you, you must have been here for years!"

"So it seems." said the stone.

"If I had been here all that time, I should think it very long indeed!" exclaimed the man.

The stone said nothing.

"How many have passed this way and trod upon you?" asked the man.

"Many." said the stone.

"And how many have taken full notice of your strength, your color, your size?" asked the man.

"I am a stone." said the stone.

"So humble!" said the man. "Great stone, you have served the wheels of man all these years. You have borne his burdens and received his mark without complaint. Noble stone, grow tiny and insignificant by comparison."

The stone said nothing.

"Do you hear me?" said the man.

The stone said nothing.

"Are you there?" said the man.

"I am." said the stone.

"I was talking to you" said the man.

"You were talking." said the stone.

The man stood and dusted himself off. Aside from a few scratches and bruises, he was all right. His foot was already beginning to feel better.

"You care nothing for yourself?" he said.

"I do not require care." said the stone.

"You are a mess! All scratched and dirty. Can you not improve yourself?" said the man.

"What is improvement?" said the stone.

"You know. Tidy up, learn a better way. Make something of yourself." said the man.

"There are many stones." said the stone. "I am this one".

"Can you not change?" said the man.

"Once I lay deep, a part of the earth." said the stone. "Once I was part of a garden wall. Many times have I been a toy in a child's hand, preciously carried or carelessly tossed aside.

I have been burden and bearer, creator and destroyer."

"But you yourself do nothing." said the man.

"I am." said the stone.

"And it is enough, just to be?" said the man.

"I am." said the stone.

"We are very different indeed, you and I." said the man. "Why, at a very young age I learned to make myself useful".

"I am useful." said the stone.

"I carried water. I chopped wood. When I grew older, I learned to cut and build houses to shelter people and to earn my living." said the man.

"What is living?" said the stone.

"Living is hard work", said the man, "at least an honest living is."

"And what is work?" said the stone.

"Work is what you do in order to get what you want." said the man. He was beginning to think this stone rather ignorant.

"What do you want?" said the stone.

When he heard this the man felt a bit strange, and he sat down in the road. Try as he might, he could not reach the end of his wanting.

"And is there nothing that you want?" said the man, avoiding the question.



"The same." said the stone.

The man stood and began walking around the stone in a circle, keeping his eyes on the stone and his hand on his chin.

"A man must have a purpose." said the man, finally.

"There are many purposes." said the stone.

"Many purposes!" said the man. "I was on my way to market today and now I've wasted half the morning talking to a stone."

The stone said nothing.

"Without purpose, life has no meaning." said the man.

"Life is." said the stone. "Meaning is extra".

"But, everything has meaning." said the man.

"Books have meaning. Words have meaning." said the stone. "What is the meaning of a tree?"

"I don't intend to just sit around all day" said the man.

"What do you intend?" said the stone.

"To get on with my life" said the man. He started off down the road.

"Where do you keep it?" said the stone.

The man stopped. "What?" he said.

"Your life." said the stone.

"What do you mean?" said the man, edging back.

"Where were you going, just now?" said the stone.

"To the market" said the man.

"The road goes to the market." said the stone. "Where were you going?"

"To get on with my life" said the man.

"Has your life stopped?" said the stone.

"No" said the man.

"Do you have it with you now?" asked the stone.

"Of course!" said the man.

"Show it to me." said the stone.

"It's not something I show" said the man. It's something I do."

"Do you do it, or does it do you?" said the stone.

The man sat down again. It was true he responded to life. He saw his life rather like a story, full of moments and meaning and history. He was poised at the juncture of years of personal history and an unfinished future.

"I have a past, a present, and a future." said the man. That is my life."

"About the past. What is it for?" said the stone.

"I get everything I know from the past." said the man. "How to do things, where to get things, my relationships with others. The past tells me who I am."

"Sounds like you'd be better off without it." said the stone.

"Maybe, but what about the future? Without the future there would be no planning no goals, no direction. I need the future to know when to do things."

"Are things as you imagined they would be?" said the stone.

"Not exactly." said the man.

"Can you tell me what will happen next?" said the stone.

"Not exactly." said the man.

"Not at all." said the stone.

"Then at least there must be a present." said the man. "Without the present nothing would exist at all".

"The present does not exist." said the stone.

"What?" said the man.

"All things were. Nothing is."

"Nonsense", said the man. "We are here right now talking."

"See for yourself." said the stone.

The man looked carefully around him. It took a while, but he began to notice that there WAS a delay between an event and his awareness of it. As he strained closer to the now, he felt classification crumble. Still nearer, he felt even interpretation begin to fail. At last he got so close to experiencing things as they were happening that everything began to flow into one vast, free flowing rush of incoming perception.



"This is great" said the man. "But what good is it?"

"What good?" said the stone.

"Yes." said the man. "How can I apply this to daily life?"

"Is it not daily life?" said the stone.

"Not the way I see it." said the man.

"Life is." said the stone. "What you see is your own doing."

"And what do you see?" said the man.

"There is no way for you to know." said the stone.

"Why not?" said the man.

"You are that way." said the stone.

"What way?" said the man.

"You hold that you are a certain way, do you not?" said the stone.



The man stopped to consider this. He was a man. He liked certain things, disliked others. He had a name, a set of parents, friends, relatives. He had opinions, beliefs, hopes, dreams, attitudes. He knew what was so and what was not.

"Yes," said the man, "I am this way."

"So long as you are that way, you can not be another." said the stone.

"I can always change." said the man.

"You can never change." said the stone.

"Certainly I can!" said the man.

"What would you change to?" said the stone.

"I could become an artist." said the man.

"You mean change your occupation." said the stone.

"I could become a beggar." said the man.

"A change in your point of view." said the stone.

"I could become a blind man." said the man.

"A change in physical circumstances." said the stone. "For even that poor, blind, begging artist would be you, only you, and no other." said the stone.

The man thought about what the stone had said.

"Then is improvement possible?" said the man.

"Yes." said the stone.

"But I cannot change." said the man.

"The change will come from that which is other than you." said the stone.

"What change?" said the man.

"A change in what is and what is not." said the stone.

"How can I change what is?" said the man.

"You will change what you are capable of." said the stone.

"It has already been decided" said the man.

"You decided." said the stone.

"Decided what?" said the man.

"You decided what you are capable of, and you defend your incapacities." said the stone.

The man could not believe what he'd heard. This stone had finally said something so ridiculous that he felt sure it was a mistake. He hadn't decided to be incapable of flying. He hadn't decided to be incapable of getting rich.

"This world is not of my choosing" said the man. "I didn't make it this way. It just is".

"You are." said the stone. "All else is rumor".