



# Question of the Day

An audio montage of on-the-spot answers to LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS.

QuestionPodcast.com | Rebekah Smith, Host

## *Episode I: What does it mean to be grounded?*

### WE DON'T KNOW

- AA: Usually I hear it in the context of someone who has had struggles but at getting more... they're getting better with themselves. But I still wonder. I still kind of ponder that. Like, what does that mean?
- BB: Sometimes our hunger for groundedness is unspeakable in our terms. We don't even quite know what that is. We don't know.
- CC: I wish I had more intellectual rigor and a better vocabulary.
- DD: It's hard to articulate certain things, isn't it?
- EE: I never thought about it before. It's kind of a hard term to explain.
- FF: Why weren't we taught this as children? Because culturally we just weren't.
- GG: It's kind of an interpretive question.
- DD: Yeah, I'm kind of stuck there. But... It's, you know. It's kind of one of those things. You know it. You know it when you see it. And sometimes it's hard to put that in a nice little sentence.

### INTRODUCTION

- RJS: This is Rebekah Smith. You're listening to Question of the Day, an audio montage of on-the-spot answers to life's big questions. Plus, a few found objects here and there. In this episode we ask, "What does it mean to be grounded?" Hours of conversation with over 20 people were chopped up and reassembled into the piece you're about to hear. Thank you for listening.

### UNBEARABLE

- HH: Have you ever read *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*? Milan Kundera? The hardest thing is life is not being... feeling weighted down, but not being weighted down at all. It's the lightness of like not having anything to hold on to, or not having anything

holding you down. And that's the, the more... that's the thing that causes a person to panic.

GG: Panic.

AA: Worry.

FF: Depressed!

HH: Feeling grounded. Feeling weighted down is actually much better than feeling too light, like you have nothing to hold on to like you're kind of floating away.

AA: Floating in air not...

II: Flying off into space.

BB: Most people dream of flying.

JJ: Flights of fancy.

KK: Flitt'n' Float'n '

AA: ...with no... no direction.

JJ: Flying off the handle.

LL: Head up in the clouds.

MM: In the clouds.

AA: Just kind of float'n' around.

DD: Pie in the sky.

MM: Pie in the sky.

KK: Pie in the sky.

LL: Starry night.

II: Airy and flighty.

HH: It's the opposite of the feeling of that unbearable... you know... It's his phrase with "The Unbearable Lightness." You know the, the, the feeling that you're just not anchored. Groundedness would be the opposite of that.

II: Anchored to your time and place. You're totally in the here and now.

RJS: Why do we associate the sky with being unstable? Unrealistic? Unreasonable? Why do I suddenly want to reach up and touch it, even as you tell me about the virtues of

groundedness? Next, you'll try to persuade me to reach for the stars. Isn't that a contradiction? How can I feel homesick in my own house?

BB: We as human beings are star stuff.

MM: Making up things on the fly.

BB: A constant tension between the world that exists in my mind that I'm always creating – that's my intellect and even my emotions – and then the part of me that is on the ground, you know, that has my hands in the sink...

LL: Washing dishes right and left.

BB: Doing the dishes.

JJ: The dishes.

BB: That is vacuuming that is carrying the groceries...

LL: Cooking dinner.

BB: That, you know, all of that. We're kind of always in tension between that presence that involves being here on Earth and that ephemeral nature of... at least humanity... probably other things too.

MM: You need both, right?

KK: There's a time and a place for that.

MM: What you learn in kindergarten is that there is a time and a place for imagination and that there's an appropriate imagination and... like a productive imagination and an unproductive imagination.

KK: You know you got to have... you got to have a little bit of a balance of both.

MM: And I understand why that's important but it's also heartbreaking.

BB: Human beings and, you know, probably dogs and maybe trees, who knows? All have this dual nature of being both there and not there, which is grounded and not grounded. Absent in mind if not in body or

NN: Again it's about balancing out all of the range of human needs. You know, in each direction.

#### PLANTED

RJS: What does this have to do with flying kites?

OO: The Earth is sort of a solid foundation and when you're grounded, it means you're...

PP: Solid.

II: A solid part of his or her environment, affixed to the earth.

LL: Well, I just think it means they got their feet on the ground.

OO: You're somewhat planted, you're solid.

HH: Solid in their own values.

OO: But you're not stuck.

AA: They're planted to the ground like they have a direction.

BB: They have their feet firmly on the ground.

LL: Firmly on the ground!

BB: They're acquainted with gravity...yeah... In a positive way...

II: You're centered in yourself and on the ground on which you stand. I'm answering a metaphor with several metaphors.

BB: Who hasn't had the experience of walking barefoot or standing in mud? I think that is actually a very literal experience of, you know, wanting to be on the ground.

DD: Down to earth.

BB: I think...You notice that some people are people that sit on chairs and other people are people that sit on the ground.

DD: Salt of the Earth, good folks.

BB: And we have people that have basements and people that live in high-rises and... In a very... really literal way, people's relationship to the ground is in some ways both a metaphor and an actual functional expression of how they're living.

QQ: I don't know. I had a woman that I was seeing, a healer that I was seeing tell me that I should go out and get barefoot and be on the Earth. And that comes to mind when you think about grounded. It has to do with a spirituality thing, being connected with Earth.

#### STABLE

FF: Feet on the ground and when we're grounded and we are... you know, we have the bottom of our feet open and have access to Earth's energy, we feel more stable.

RR: Stable and reliable and dependable.

LL: They're stable.

- AA: More stable, maybe.
- RR: Emotionally stable.
- PP: Stable.
- FF: Like a tree and then that stabilizes you so that you can sway in the wind. But for me it means, then having the ability to... no matter what is going on around you, no matter who's angry or who's yelling or upset about something or trying to convince you of something, you have the ability then to stand with your feet planted on the ground and know your own truth.
- RJS: When I was a kid, I'd tramp out to the fields up the road past the goats to the north where there were horses, prairie dogs and one tree that had been claimed with a couple of steps nailed to its trunk.
- I'd send up a kite and let it go until it appeared no bigger than my thumb. Dancing against the backdrop of the western Dakota sky, it would dodge in and out of sight, threatening to crash into the horizon should I fail to respond to the tug or the give of the line, fishing wire. I was a kid. It took some effort to stay on my feet.

## HONEST

- QQ: Grounded people are truthful.
- SS: Someone who is true to themselves.
- KK: Does what they have to do and says what they have to say and...
- HH: Comfortable in your own skin.
- DD: Comfortable in their own skin.
- TT: Being honest with yourself about how you approach situations.
- SS: Everybody has the capacity to be grounded. But, you just have to be honest with yourself. Be honest with yourself and, you know, be real.
- TT: Being honest about your behavior.
- KK: Goes about their business and tries to do it without hurting anybody.
- SS: Don't bs yourself. Don't bs anybody else. Yeah, you definitely have the capacity.
- QQ: They're truthful about what's really going on for them.
- SS: They're not trying to be someone else.

- JJ: Knowing what size you are. Being right sized. Not being too grandiose. Not being too morose.
- KK: Knowing who they are, what their values are and, you know kind of, stick'n', stick'n' with 'em.
- QQ: Being in touch with themselves. Knowing who they are.
- JJ: Someone who knows who they are.
- DD: They're just well-rounded people that know themselves and easy to know and to like.
- LL: Knows, knows who he is.
- SS: It's kind of like, "What you see is what you get."
- LL: Knows what he can do.
- RR: Somebody who is, like, living out their values.
- TT: Acting from their own principles and...
- OO: You need wisdom.
- TT: Wisdom.
- EE: It's kind of like you have the same base to go out of every day but you come back to that same base. You've got things of who you are that don't change every day.
- DD: They know who they are.
- JJ: I know how I connect to the universe.
- CC: You understand your own capacity to understand your place in the world and how you should be in it.
- TT: Have a clear view of how you're behaving and what your contribution is.
- SS: There's times, there's times that, you know, you'll bs yourself, or like you're not honest with yourself. You know what? Be honest with yourself. Being honest with yourself and being grounded... What that does is allow you to fix things. Fix your internal self.
- JJ: The universe is always showing me who I am.
- RJS: Had I not been absolutely terrified, I might have let myself go. I might have let the kite lift me up and away. And I wonder, even today, I wonder what would it be like to fall into the sun? To be consumed by it?
- FF: If you're truly grounded, you feel safe.

AA: You don't worry.

FF: You know that you exist in the unconditional love of the universe. You know this gift of being here.

II: Totally in the here and now.

FF: And you don't

DD: Feel less than.

FF: Struggle anymore with,

EE: "Am I as good as they are?" Or...

FF: "Well, what's wrong with me?" and I don't have to prove myself because I'm just here...

JJ: And I'm just part of it.

SS: I'm just a guy.

DD: Everyday person.

EE: I'm just a regular Joe Schmuck.

FF: Having this experience in this moment. So matter what you're saying or doing, I don't have to take that personally.

KK: We all take things personally from time to time,

TT: Personalize things.

KK: but... It's easy to turn everything into it's about you...

TT: Think that it's me.

KK: And sometimes you have to stop yourself from going...

TT: I'm a failure.

KK: You know what; it really isn't about me...

FF: Flexibility is an aspect of groundedness. If the tree doesn't bend, it means... In a sense, I suppose you could say it's taking the wind personally. But if it bends, it's not taking it personally. It's just bending in the storm and then it goes back to its regular position and height. It just lets it blow by. In a sense, taking things personally is a way of not bending but instead standing there and then ending up being broken as a result of having no flexibility.

JJ: So what am I doing to be aware of what's going on around me?

## AWARE

- BB: Being grounded pre-supposes a willingness to look reality in the face in some way. And if you can't handle it, or don't... feel like you'll be broken by knowing the full range of how we operate in the world then you are not gonna be able to become grounded because you have to be willing to be aware – I think – and also willing to let it pass without taking it in. I mean, that's the nature of being grounded, right? It goes into the, it goes into the Earth and is absorbed into the great wholeness of it.
- RJS: Does it come down to what we choose to pay attention to? Where we put our energy? Why does it make me nervous to trust your version of reality?
- II: What was the term they used to use in psychology? It was uhh... situational awareness.
- SS: They're very aware of themselves.
- UU: They have some sort of effective perception of, of...things around them, the life that they're leading.
- SS: They're very aware of their surroundings and who they interact with.
- JJ: How do I interact with people and places and situations?
- II: They have situational awareness. They're in the, the only reality that counts, the here and now.
- EE: You live in the real world.
- JJ: Spirits and the elements and the air and the water and everything that swirls around me in every moment.
- KK: Someone's who's got a reasonable perspective on things and understands how the world works.
- GG: Understands how the world works.
- JJ: Living in a fact-based world.
- MM: Somebody who has their head set in reality.
- II: Comfortable in it.
- MM: They have realistic expectations.
- VV: Realistic.
- LL: They might have a goal and they know how to get there and what they got to do to get there.

- KK: Clear about what it is that they're trying to do, why they're trying to do it and how they're going to go about it.
- MM: Making goals for themselves that are doable... or life decisions that are accomplishable.
- KK: Within the framework of what's realistic and what resources they have.
- UU: Being grounded is... has something to do with being able to hold both of those things at once. Kind of the aspirational and uh... and the real. And be conscious of the fact that they're, they're not necessarily the same thing. Or maybe they're never the same thing.
- TT: Somebody who knows what they actually have power over and they act on that.
- EE: You understand what's going on and what needs to be done.
- GG: Somebody who's fairly grounded, they should be level-headed, self-sufficient and responsible.
- EE: The guy who pays his rent, takes care of his family...
- GG: Life skills!
- EE: Goes to work. Figures out what needs to be done.
- JJ: Introspection.
- TT: Self-reflection.
- JJ: Cooperation.
- RR: Reflection.
- JJ: Polishing the mirror.
- II: Aware of your immediate surroundings and your place in it.
- JJ: The mirror is that of the universe that's reflected back to me. It is a function of my ability to perceive what is the lesson, the gift, the perception of the present moment.
- UU: Self-awareness. Awareness of others. Awareness of your reality.
- JJ: So I'm as aware of myself as I am aware of my surroundings.
- OPEN**
- RJS: How are we to reconcile our different perceptions of what deserves our focused attention? How much attention? And at the expense of what?
- JJ: I'm open to the idea that I don't have all the answers.

TT: Open to changing behavior.

UU: Really keep striving for improvement.

SS: Fix things.

JJ: Improve on that.

OO: To listen to others. To listen...

EE: To listen to what other people have to say, even when, you know, they disagree with you.

OO: To entertain other ideas.

JJ: Be open to other people's interpretations of things.

DD: My reality base isn't always somebody else's.

TT: Open to change.

JJ: To consciously living life differently, in order to move in the direction of being more at peace.

TT: Open to knowing...

FF: What meaning do I make of the moment I'm in?

TT: That there's a different way to look at things.

KK: Perspective is a big part of it.

JJ: If today I didn't live up to my expectations.

FF: You forgive yourself.

TT: Self-forgiveness.

JJ: Or if I was consumed with selfishness.

TT: Self-responsibility.

SS: I fricken screwed up. I'm sorry. You know, I did. And I will try not to make that happen again.

FF: And you just go back to your practice, instead of getting

JJ: So caught up.

FF: Caught up in all of the shame and blame game that most of us have been taught.

JJ: What can I do differently?

DD: Just for today, I will accept what is. I will face reality. I will correct those things I can correct and accept those I cannot.

TT: Help me to...

EE: See things as they really are.

TT: To know the things that I can change, myself and my actions.

EE: Accept things as they are.

TT: And the things that I can't change, other people and their actions.

EE: Change things that need to be changed.

PP: Make it better.

JJ: Be gentle enough that I don't think I'm always right.

TT: We're here!

FF: In this time and in this space.

TT: And we either can be miserable or we can be happy and... What do we want?

DK: I wonder if that's part of the trick of surviving, is getting through the realization that life is just what it is and not what you hoped, that each day is just what that day is, regardless of what your plans were for that day. And you have sway over that day, which is not to say that you're the victim of that day, but rather that day simply is that day, and that year that year and that lifetime that lifetime.

#### SURE

AA: I think grounded kind of implies to me like you're sure of yourself.

HH: Sure of themselves but not cocky...

SS: Cocky, arrogant, condescending, all those things like that.

HH: Or, narcissistic.

OO: You can be uncertain about various questions and issues. But, it does not become a personal weakness.

AA: You know where you're going. You know what you want.

LL: And has a sense of purpose and they know what they want and they do it. They get it.

- NN: Pick a course of action and do it. You said, "I'm gonna do this." And so you have to kind of push, push other things out of the way and stay the course.
- LL: Steady on the course.
- PP: You know who you are.
- LL: Steadfast.
- PP: You know what you want.
- NN: Put the blinders up. Say, "I'm gonna do this. Every day I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna be just determined."
- OO: Calmness, confidence and a bit of openness. Is my first iteration of what that means.
- PP: Calm.
- JJ: Calm temperament and demeanor.
- KK: It's a lower stress level.
- OO: With confidence comes resilience. If you're not sure of yourself, if you don't have confidence, you can be blown about.
- FF: You can get pushed over in the slightest wind, right?
- OO: Yeah, it's like having a good foundation. You're on the ground and... when things push on you, you're not going to just topple over right away.
- RJS: Perceived first as an imposing aberration rising on the plains to the south, the creature swelled exponentially until two blackish stones bobbed to the surface and took watch from just above the sod. Advancing toward civilization with time collapsing between each swing of the hammer, the monster inhaled cattle, lakes, cornfields and entire townships as it dispassionately cleaved the land with a loosely cracked maw. The behemoth would not be wooed...It would seem that the monster couldn't tell the difference between delusional power and the ground, even as bits of it spilled from its own teeth. Why is there a whale in the middle of a prairie? It does not make any sense!

## DECISIONS

- GG: They don't panic easily.
- RR: Clarity is also a feature of being grounded.
- AA: It probably means more that you're making better decisions.

RR: A grounded person isn't racked by indecision.

LL: He can make decisions.

GG: They should have the capability to make a sound decision under a stressful environment.

DD: You are fretting about envelopes and paper?

RR: I'm a slow decision maker. I made a lot of pro-con lists.

GG: Pretty soon you've gotta make a decision. You can't sit and wonder about it too long.

AA: You don't second-guess your decision.

GG: Is this going to be the right decision? Who knows?

AA: You don't third-guess them. How about that?

RR: I would agonize.

DD: Agonize and lament.

RR: And make slow decisions, but I made good decisions.

AA: Grounded kind of implies that you don't worry.

GG: Sit there and worry about it and wonder about.

DD: Honestly, what's the worst that could happen?

RR: Frequently

MM: Somebody who's grounded thinks through decisions.

GG: To rationally look at a situation and come up with a decision that's, you know, that's going to suit you.

JJ: We are bombarded with choices every day.

GG: It's a large purchase, you know, more than a dozen of eggs and a gallon of milk.

RR: Quitting college.

GG: Buying a house. What's it cost to maintain a house?

MM: They're thinking about the past and the future.

JJ: To make meaningless choices.

MM: Calculated risks.

JJ: What kind of clothes am I going to wear today?

RR: Dump or stay, dump or stay... a lot of lists go by.

JJ: Should I stop at this red light?

GG: Is it the right decision to buy a car at this point in your life?

PP: Know what your priorities are.

KK: Make the best decision that you can and...

RR: When I got married I never made a pro-con list.

KK: Don't look back.

GG: You can make a good decision at that time because you made

TT: Decisions that everybody all thought was a horrible decision but it turned out to be the right one for me.

RR: I remember thinking this in my mid-twenties that I was pretty happy with most of the decisions I had made.

TT: Thank the young woman who made those good decisions.

RR: I was pretty pleased with them so I kind of got more confident in my decisions.

FF: You can hear your truth even though others are blowing their truth at you.

RR: I would get very upset by things and having to make big decisions would just unnerve me.

FF: You don't feel judged, or you don't get swayed. But you stay in your truth.

TT: Really listening to your own intuition and voice.

RR: The best thing I could do was go for a long walk or bike ride just to get some clarity.

FF: And then you make your choice from that position.

GG: And not just taking the path of least resistance.

#### HOW DO WE KNOW?

RJS Can we tell if somebody is grounded?

BB: How do we know when people are grounded in our presence?

RR: You can tell pretty quickly.

MM: You can see the thought process.

JJ: I think I can tell.

RR: The way they, they look you right in the eye.

JJ: Perceive and be sympathetic or empathetic to the emotions that are shared by others.

RR: The way they notice you.

MM: If they have an opinion or if they have an idea, that they can back that up with some kind of...

KK: You know, a little bit of logic.

MM: Logic.

RR: They're not self-absorbed.

SS: That's where you get in trouble. You just think about yourself but not, you know, other people.

RR: And how do you notice all of those things? I don't know. Where their attention is.

VV: Sometimes we probably all get wrapped up in our own goings on in our life and don't realize maybe, what's going on with people around us.

BB: You know people are grounded when you feel them as being grounded.

CC: I don't think I have any intuitive feelings about things like that. And I think I need...

JJ: After a little bit of conversation

CC: Use words mostly to connect with people over a long enough time.

BB: I think we perceive it somewhere in the solar plexus.

QQ: A sign of being grounded would be

RR: In touch with deeper levels of their emotion.

OO: I see emotional healthiness as part of it.

QQ: Often, I think someone who pauses. They're not reactive.

RR: Not just reactive. But, um... kind of a deeper more thoughtful person.

OO: Somebody who gets upset over things that aren't really a big deal.

VV: And when they don't get what they want when they want and how they want it, they have a completely irrational response.

JJ: Flying off the handle.

OO: That doesn't seem very grounded.

NN: The reactionary brain, that thing we grow up with, the individual's survival. It's reactionary. You've got to react quickly.

BB: The way people breathe is a clue to their current state of groundedness.

FF: Breathing is a master state changer. You can change your own emotional state instead of waiting for somebody else...

JJ: The other, the outside, the spectacular, the shiny...

FF: To do something nice to you or for you...

JJ: To the detriment of what's within.

FF: So that you can feel better. You can do it yourself.

QQ: If you say something, for example, that they don't like, they wouldn't snap back at me.

NN: And then there's the responsive brain. The one that is part of a family where we're always thinking of how other people will be affected by how we respond. And we're trying to respond to who they are. The mirror neurons are firing.

MM: That's how you know that they're grounded.

QQ: They would maybe pause for a minute and you would realize, "Okay, that person is reacting to what I said and they're thinking about their response."

LL: I had to stop and think.

QQ: Thinking about it. Thoughtful.

RR: Being able to identify the emotions you're feeling.

QQ: And, maybe not so much in the head as it is...

DD: Based on your gut.

QQ: In the gut. When I think about what that means to me, I would think that maybe that person is kind of trying to feel...

RR: Well, maybe it means just quieting down sometimes and feeling what's inside.

QQ: What their real response is and how they want to, how they want to deal with whatever just came up.

#### WHY ARE WE DRAWN TO GROUNDED PEOPLE?

RJS: So why are we drawn to grounded people?

BB: Just like a bolt of lightning seeks the ground.

DD: You know, you're kind of drawn to it.

LL: It's like a lightning rod.

KK: There's some people who have an energy that make you feel energetic... you know, that kind of energize you.

BB: You can tell, sometimes tell the groundedness of an individual by, how what's shooting off of other people toward them.

KK: And then there's other people that have an energy that sucks the energy out of you.

SS: It's tough to be around someone like that.

BB: You don't want to be too big a conduit, you know. Like a big tree can take a huge lightning strike, like the one that's right outside my, my house here. It took a big lightning strike at some point, probably half a century ago. And it... you know it's still standing there. It's fine but it's got a wound.

KK: You're like exhausted after you've been around them. And you don't really know that it's happening until it's over.

BB: No human being can be, always be the ground. And if somebody is freaking out, you know, in some form, which I think is a form of extreme ungroundedness, you cannot offer yourself as a ground... um injudiciously.

SS: It doesn't matter whether you're grounded or not. I'm just going to do my thing.

BB: Because no human being can take, you know, too much ungrounded energy coming at you from someone else.

HH: Grounded by osmosis.

KK: Sometimes I think being around someone's who's grounded makes you feel more grounded.

PP: Comforting.

HH: I think a person who's grounded is generally pleasant to be around.

UU: More tolerant of imperfections.

SS: You don't feel so on edge.

DD: They give you that ease and comfort.

JJ: Comforted.

SS: You feel comfortable.

DD: They don't put on any airs and consequently, you don't have to. I mean, you can just kind of be yourself and...

SS: Feel relaxed. You feel like you can relate to someone like that.

DD: And just enjoy their company.

FF: They're not into judgment.

UU: And that probably just makes people a little more, like... I don't want to say happy

DD: They're kind. They're giving.

BB: Humble.

RR: Kind and considerate.

UU: There probably is some element of that. But like um... okay with the world, you know, to be an imperfect place and everything.

RR: Grounded people tend to look you right in the eye and they tend to see you.

UU: They're constantly perceiving the perfect reality and the aspiration. And so yeah, they wouldn't be surprised by um... my imperfection.

RR: And I think of people who are not grounded are kind of living more internally in that they can't see you because of the emotional baggage that kind of blinds them to other people.

HH: I think I'd recognize that.

## GOOD QUESTION

- DD: Does that answer your question?
- GG: Well, does that take care of the question?
- KK: Are you finding a common thread at all?
- RR: It's a good question, basically.
- SS: Okay, this is more than one question.
- FF: You're asking big questions.
- OO: And you are successfully slightly confusing me.
- RJS: What do you mean?
- OO: Maybe I'm becoming less grounded.
- II: My gosh. My neighbor is running into her building with her car. I'll have to go away from the window.
- OO: Grounded... The path I was going down verses grounded as really knowing something... um... okay. I'll stand my ground for now, try to be grounded and stick to what I had said.
- MM: I'm getting off track, but I'm going to say it.
- RJS: That's okay.
- UU: Well it's been years since I've started a bowl of oatmeal on fire that way but I did that once.
- KK: So anyway, that's a little bit off topic. So...
- BB: That's not the topic.
- FF: What was your question again? I think I sidetracked myself.
- AA: But, I don't even know if I'm describing this correctly. I don't think I am.
- OO: You're on the ground. You're stable. You have some... not strength but some convictions of some sort... Well maybe not that.
- BB: When I say something somewhat meaningless, I wonder if it's deep.
- KK: I mean you're talking to somebody who isn't necessarily um a super creative, artistic type of person.

RJS: Do you recall a time when specifically you sort of learned about operating under stress?

GG: Well... military, fire department, things like that.

UU: So I changed my routine and I now, you know, have made it an ironclad habit to always put the water in the bowl first.

BB: I shouldn't say "we" and I'll just say "me".

KK: What kind of response are you getting? Am I anywhere close to that?

LL: Curious if I was on the right track.

DD: It is somewhat cultural.

GG: Different backgrounds are definitely gonna effect your answers.

DD: It means different things to different people.

MM: Thinking outside the box.

II: I have an email.

MM: I hate that phrase. I'm sorry about that.

II: ... saying I should vote for her friend Hillary. Now that was an example of not being in the here and now.

KK: You're not getting much out of me. I can't really think it through.

CC: I must be too old for this question.

FF: Do you see what I'm saying?

SS: Does that make sense?

AA: I think grounded kind of implies to me like you're sure of yourself.

RS: Okay.

AA: But I don't know what it means.

RS: What does "Sure of yourself" mean?

AA: Grounded.

DD: That's a good question of the day.

SS: Maybe we should have this more often.

## FACADES

- RJS: It's pretty clear that we're attracted to people who are comfortable with themselves and who can trust they can be who they are in our presence. We want to be accepted too. So what happened? How did we get off track? Why don't we trust each other enough to give up the act?
- SS: Everybody wants to be part of a pack.
- JJ: I lose my sense of self.
- HH: Constantly seeking validation.
- SS: You have to be liked to be a part of that pack.
- TT: Yeah, I'd like people to like be because
- NN: If one was, for example, deprived of approval, of social approval
- SS: People put on those fake personas.
- NN: Then that will skew the way you behave.
- RR: No, I must have been in ninth grade because we stayed overnight at a hotel in Winnipeg and played, you know, like at nursing homes and stuff with the band. And the first morning, um, down at the hotel breakfast, um bunches of people were sitting around eating breakfast and I joined one. And I was kind of nervous because, um, I didn't have that many friends and I wanted to impress everyone. And I saw that there was a pretty little pitcher on the table. And my mom collected pottery and I knew a few things about pottery. And one of the few things I knew was that you looked on the underside to read the label. So I took a pitcher of cream and dumped it in my lap, looking at the bottom of it. And it was embarrassing.
- DD: It kind of stung a little bit.
- RS: That's a perfect story.
- RR: Well, being in the ninth grade, I was absolutely mortified.
- SS: Because they're afraid. Afraid to show who they really are.
- FF: If you really feel inadequate, you're a little touchy.
- KK: Everybody feels like a fish out of water with a new job.
- JJ: So caught up in the other...
- NN: Who out of social insecurity...

KK: Social anxiety.

NN: uh, look around them.

JJ: The outside.

FF: So on a journey of 10,000 steps , even if you're at 50

DD: One step behind you.

FF: You should be at 500.

JJ: The spectacular, the shiny.

FF: And if you're at 500, why aren't you at 5000 yet?

NN: And see what other people are doing and then.

FF: Then we compare.

NN: Concerned about what other people might think.

EE: Am I as good as they are?

PP: It's hard to be a perfectionist.

FF: Push yourself harder and faster.

JJ: Swim in the fantasy of what's out there.

FF: Stop making mistakes and do it right.

DD: Do more.

PP: Be on top of things.

FF: Compare.

JJ: The grass is always greener, right?

NN: Because they're afraid.

SS: Afraid of being made fun of.

FF: You should know better!

DD: Fear of doing the wrong thing.

FF: What's wrong with you!

SS: Afraid of failure.

FF: Grow up!

DD: Fear of making the wrong choice.

FF: Act your age!

SS: Fear of not fitting in.

TT: I'd like people to want me to be there.

SS: Being excluded.

DD: Fear of falling on my face.

FF: That's actually how it works. Life is really like that. So isn't odd that, you know, coming to improv taught me something that I had been trying to learn in another way. And it was really improv that showed me that I couldn't do it perfectly. You're always making mistakes in improv and that was part of the fun of it. Seeing what was going to come up next and what were you going to make of that last mistake that you made.

RJS: Right.

FF: I still remember the night on stage when Mike Fotis jumped out on stage and the person he was doing the scene with looked at him. He just said something. And Mike looked at him and he said to him, he said "I've got nothing." It wasn't for the laugh, he really meant it. He just drew a blank. The whole audience broke up in laughter and we were laughing. And then as soon as he said, "I've got nothing", he had something. That was profound to me. I've never forgotten it.

RJS: Right. Because he was just saying what was true at the moment. He was kind of... being honest.

FF: He was able to... you know in a sense he was confident or grounded enough or loved himself or... skilled enough –in the moment– that he could just admit "I'm drawing a blank". And by admitting that, then he got a surge of new information and he was able to then jump back into the scene go from there and take that statement into the scene. It was astounding to me. Because I'd been so worried for long about, you know, not being good enough and making a mistake and all of those things that I had learned growing up. And we all try to cover it up as much as we can. But you know, we just live with it. And there it was, right in front of me.

EE: I don't care anymore. I could live next door to the president.

SS: When you start getting older, you start not giving a shit about what anybody thinks about you.

FF: I don't have to judge myself or judge you.

JJ: Self doubt.

EE: The older I get, I learn not to be judgmental of other people.

JJ: Critique of others.

KK: Not knowing him, you know it just came across as somebody who was just a little bit arrogant, almost. And he wasn't.

DD: You don't know. You just don't know.

FF: There is nothing wrong with me. There never was.

RJS: To what extent does openly struggling with being here put us in touch with our humanity and therefore able to feel connected with each other?

### I'M NOT GROUNDED

LL: You know, I provide a house, keep it clean and cook and all of that. But I...

AA: I am not grounded.

II: Not in the here and now. Not anchored. Not acclimated to their environment.

DD: That's what they know. That's what they see. That's what they're comfortable with.

II: They are always trying to escape, go somewhere else.

DD: That's what they know.

II: With their cell phones and their i-pads

TT: I fall into that just as much as anybody.

II: They're travelling in their mind.

PP: I don't know if anyone is ever totally grounded.

AA: I think grounded is a matter of um... it's a fluid state.

KK: Seems like a well grounded individual for, for the most part. You know, she's like the rest of us. Not all the time.

II: They're not fully engaged in their immediate surroundings.

BB: It is a...

JJ: Capacity to understand the world.

BB: Capacity and not necessarily a quality of an individual. So it's a place that... I don't to say that person is a characteristic of being grounded, as opposed to that person is presenting themselves as grounded in this moment.

AA: Sometimes you're floatin... you're lost and you're crazy and sometimes you've got it together.

PP: Together.

AA: And you're focused.

LL: Focussed.

PP: But then you also have times of doubt.

JJ: Self doubt.

FF: I'm depressed! I'm anxious! I hate myself! Those are just forms of not being grounded.

BB: I don't think it's like a... some people are grounded and some aren't.

JJ: The doubt is just an insecurity within yourself.

AA: I think a lot of people are like that. They've got two sides. They've got the responsible side and then the insecure side.

PP: There's always something that may pop in your head of something you feel like you didn't do right or something that didn't happen the way it should of.

FF: We don't do anything but make mistakes here. It's part of the fun. And we just learn to judge that as something we shouldn't be doing.

PP: Just that little piece of insecurity, I think that everybody has.

AA: You have responsibilities that you know you have to do, but you still are kind of a train wreck on the side.

FF: You can't even make a meal without chaos. You're gonna make a mess. You're gonna dirty dishes. What if instead of fighting that we just embraced it as a beautiful natural part of being a member of this universe in this time and in this space?

CC: Philosophically grounded.

JJ: Grounded in the moment. Grounded in his or her self. Grounded in wisdom

PP: It could be career, grounded in their family...

OO: You could be grounded in s subject.

- PP: In their community.
- CC: You're biologically grounded. You're physically grounded. You're mentally grounded.
- JJ: Grounded in helpfulness. Grounded in spirituality.
- CC: You're intellectually grounded.
- SS: Everybody has the capacity to be grounded.
- BB: I think we all have that capacity and we probably all are at different times.

## THE CULTURE

- RJS: We instinctively step out of a noisy room so we can hear the voice at the other end of the phone. Where is the impulse to step out of a noisy culture so that we can hear our own voice?
- QQ: We have a great shortage of grounded people.
- II: A lot of people don't find it natural to be grounded. Because there are so many diversions.
- LL: Constant talk of war.
- II: So many distractions.
- LL: Instability.
- JJ: Commercial television.
- NN: Materialism has taken over our, our thinking.
- JJ: Commercial radio.
- LL: You don't know one minute if you're gonna have a job or you're not going to have a job.
- KK: Times were tough.
- JJ: In life there's always something to creep up that's going to try to throw you off.
- SB: She's trying to find a way to take care of her kids.
- AA: I know I'm gett'n' laid off.
- NN: Individually and collectively.
- SB: Money can alter your perception of things or put you, put you in surroundings that take you out of touch with the rest of the world.

II: Driven by new technology and our fascination with new technology,

QQ: I think our culture helps, helps people be ungrounded.

II: Has kind of uh, destroyed the possibility, the easy possibility of a lot of people to be grounded.

LL: The Berlin Wall went up. The Cold War started.

QQ: Let's be entertained. Let's have music or TV or noise.

II: You know, they're all escaping.

NN: You know, then there's all the noise of culture out there.

LL: We had the Korean War and that went forever. It's just like one thing after another. How can anybody be grounded?

QQ: Fifteen-second commercials blasting at us constantly.

NN: Pushing you to overreact. So, buy! Buy! Buy!

QQ: And that takes you away from yourself.

II: What's so horrible about this world that you have to escape it?

LL: I was born right after WWI and the beginning of WWII and that's all I've ever heard about is war from the time I was a kid. We were born of war and we've been warring ever since.

QQ: Our culture would rather have us buy something if we're feeling like we need something, rather than settling in and finding what it is that we really need. You know. I think that maybe I need a Coke.

VV: The big house. The fast cars. The 500-dollar purses.

JJ: There's a real temptation to look outward for answers.

FF: You might go out and drink too much.

QQ: The addictive process is all about trying to make yourself feel better in the moment, at some cost to yourself, to your health and your well-being.

TT: Being self-righteous is kind of like chocolate.

JJ: It can show up as obsessive behavior and addiction problems.

TT: It feels good in the moment but it actually doesn't help you in the long run.

- QQ: Otherwise it would be self-care. Doing something that's bad for you that makes you feel good in the moment.
- TT: But it's a good rush.
- JK: You justify it. The mind says, "You deserve it!" Or you might eat too much and your mind says, "You deserve it!" because you were treated badly. But you go home and you look in the mirror and, you know, you look terrible. Your eyes are all baggy and your face is puffy and... Your body tells you the truth that drinking all of that or eating all of that really wasn't the solution.
- JJ: It's driven by a disconnect from somebody knowing who they are and being at peace in the world and helpful to others instead of being compulsively drawn outwards for answers.
- NN: The word I really like is discernment. Discernment is basically the process by which we discover and hone our ability to use that inner compass. And what discernment seems to me to be is the ability to gradually sort out the noise from the signal. And it doesn't happen overnight. You have to work at it. You have to cultivate it. It's a skill to be learned, how to discern.

#### PRACTICE

- RJS It took me half the afternoon to bring that kite in.
- QQ: It takes time and quiet and practice.
- NN: We need to have space for quiet, for meditation.
- QQ: To be grounded. It takes a force of will.
- FF: It takes practice.
- BB: As a practice...
- RR: Take time for reflection.
- PP: Exercise and meditate.
- RR: Or mediation.
- II: Mediation.
- AA: Rum, Rum, Rum. You bring it back to...just keep saying that over and over and over again.
- RR: Or meditative activities.
- JJ: Make a practice of...

BB: Sitting on the floor.

JJ: Being more curious.

RR: Going for a walk.

BB: Walking.

RR: Without talking on the phone

BB: Walking barefoot

RR: Walking in nature.

QQ: Get barefoot.

NN: Get out and walk. Get out and dance.

AA: Just keeping doing it. His big thing is just keep doing it. Just keep doing it.

JJ: More open.

NN: Get out and sing.

RR: Getting really absorbed in

QQ: Breathing

AA: Breathing exercises

FF: Breathe diaphragmatically

RR: A solitary activity.

NN: Singing in harmony.

JJ: More forgiving.

PP: Let go of things.

RR: The classic stamp collectors or...

BB: Swimming.

RR: Building a ship in a bottle.

BB: Bury yourself in sand.

QQ: Be on the Earth.

HH: Live honestly.

BB: Laying on the ground.

HH: Live with integrity.

BB: Literally laying on the ground.

DD: Figure out something that, that is yours.

RR: One reason people like hobbies is because it lets them slow down and get absorbed in something.

SS: There is something greater in life than just you.

QQ: Being connected with Earth.

JJ: Being more tabula rasa.

II: Yoga would be one way of doing it.

QQ: Basic yoga moves.

RR: Taking a yoga class.

JJ: Minimize distractions.

RR: Putting yourself in situations with limited stimulation.

NN: Avoid stimulation.

AA: Pray and meditate.

JJ: Make meaningful choices in the moment.

QQ: Thinking of things I'm grateful for

TT: Spend a lot of time being grateful.

JJ: Grateful.

TT: Gratitude for your own being.

DD: Really grateful.

FF: Gratitude.

TT: Not just what you have but who you are.

JJ: Having a sense of gratitude even when things don't seem like they're working out exactly right.

NN: Cooling it.

JJ: Being more childlike.

NN: Counting to ten.

RR: Sitting in silence with your eyes closed.

JJ: Having more wonder.

RR: Doing something quiet where you can feel what's going on inside of you.

BB: Be careful about who you surround yourself with, especially on your closest level.

CC: There are great ideas to be found in all sorts of places, of course. Music and poetry and fiction and actual philosophical writings.

FF: After the ecstasy the laundry.

HH: I put my head down and slogged through it is the honest truth.

LL: I had about ten things going in my head and I couldn't think of which one I should be doing. And so then I just picked the one and then I went from there. So I think that's kind of grounding.

KK: Organize your stuff organize your thoughts.

LL: Get organized. Regroup.

KK: It could be something as ridiculous as making a list.

NN: Step back.

LL: Be calm! Be calm!

HH: Tried not to worry too much.

KK: Or checking things off of a list.

HH: I just did the work.

KK: Paying your stack of bills.

HH: I tried not to look either side, I just put my head down and did the work.

NN: You have to suck it up.

RR: Just suck it up.

NN: Pick a course of action and do it.

HH: Because I knew it had to get done and I knew it was going to be good when it was done.

KK: Going through that pile of mail.

HH: I cannot claim any higher knowledge or, you know, spiritual practice. I just did the work.

KK: To me it's an organizational thing, is part of it. Where, you know, it frees, it frees your mind up from the clutter.

#### BEING PRESENT

HH: Work is like a meditation.

JJ: Washing the dishes when I'm washing the dishes.

HH: Focus by itself.

LL: Focus.

HH: When I'm working on something

JJ: When I'm really living in the moment and letting myself not have a lot of expectations about what's happening right now but I'm just

II: Fully engaged.

JJ: Living in the moment.

RR: In the moment.

HH: And getting something done.

II: Attentive.

HH: Whether or not it's something really enjoyable, it's all encompassing and

JJ: I can find great peace in that.

HH: I wouldn't say it's always fun. But it's kind of all enveloping in a way that... It's kind of enjoyable even though it leaves you exhausted. It leaves me exhausted. And makes me irritated when I think about all the stuff I have to do. Once I'm doing it, I enjoy being in that state.

II: Totally in the here and now.

FF: Being any kind of an artist or being into something, when you're passionate about it, you're on the spine. You're in it. You're in the moment. You're present. So compassion com, "with" passion really means "with presence". It means I'm just with you. I'm with you.

- BB: To be spontaneous you're kind of agreeing to be present, um, to the moment, at least in that moment. Sometimes people are kind of sequentially spontaneous and they're never there, you know. They're always spontaning from one thing to the next. But I think, yes, I think, that to be spontaneous you have to be present, at least in that moment. And to be present is to be grounded, in my book. Whenever I'm trying to get myself grounded, I'm pushing myself into the present in some way.
- DK: Hopefully we can live in the present and still hope for the future and not get too weighed down by disappointments of the past. We'll see. We'll see.

#### TAPED TO MY KITCHEN WALL

- AA: I'm starting to meditate more, actually.
- HH: Have you ever read "The Unbearable Lightness of being"?
- AA: I read a book about meditation. It was a quick book. I read it over Thanksgiving. It's actually pretty interesting. I'm gonna just see how long it takes or, to see where it takes me.
- CC: I have a quote that I've kept close to me for a long time.
- TT: I actually have an advice column hanging up at work.
- DD: Printed out and taped on my medicine chest.
- CC: Taped on my kitchen wall.
- FF: Can I recite a poem of mine?
- RS: Sure.
- CC: "Stare. It is the only way to educate you eye and more. Stare. Pry. Listen. Eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long." That is from Walker Evans.
- AA: I don't know if I'm doing it right. I don't think it's hard. I just don't know if I'm doing it right.
- SS: I ain't gotten there yet, but I'm working on it.
- MM: I need to get more serious about writing things down and fleshing them out.
- JJ: I want to make sure that I'm doing something about that every day.
- GG: It's never done.
- FF: We're picking up skills as we go.
- AA: I'm trying to do research. Like, how do I know I'm doing this right?

TT: I can recommit myself to

JJ: Consciously living life differently.

TT: Being the kind of person that I really want to be.

AA: They want you to do it, like, twice a day for 20 minutes. But I've been doing it once a day for 20 minutes. So I figured I'd start with that and see where it goes.

HH: Yeah, I guess that's the best a person can do.