

If A Tree Falls.

The man was sitting, letting the heat from the morning fire warm him. The old question: If a tree falls and no one hears it, does it make a sound? had recently been brought to his attention again. The man thought, “When I first heard that question, five decades ago, I thought it was silly, yet people still earnestly debated the answer. Recently, a poet I follow changed the question from a tree falling to her poetry not getting read. In a poem, she asks, and I paraphrase, if no one reads her poems, would she have “made a sound”? It’s a question that, at least initially, seemed to deserve attention.”

He put another log in the wood stove and, sitting in his recliner again, he continued, “I think a little differently about life and questions like hers. I believe her question isn’t my question, but her question brought clarity to my own; I believe what truly matters are the answers to the questions our minds ask us. We constantly receive answers to questions our minds generate: as we drive, as we work, as we listen to those we love and to those we must listen to. Outside, abstract questions can only generate opinions because there is no factual answer.”

The man remembered when, as a brash nine-year-old, he asked a priest: “If God is perfect, can he make a rock bigger than he can lift?” The priest seemed slightly annoyed, and the boy continued: “If God can’t make the rock bigger than he can lift, he’s not perfect; if he can make a rock bigger than he can lift, he’s still not perfect because he can’t lift the rock”. The man remembered himself as that young boy, wearing his altar boy cassock and feeling so smart. The priest, standing tall and looking down at the boy, walked away without answering.

Decades later, the man knew without doubt that his truth, his truths, were in the answers he gave to the questions he asked, and not to the myriad questions asked by those around him. Those questions were not his to answer and served as mere distractions.

His youth was, in many ways, a time when he, and society in general, were left alone. He played for hours, and there were no rings from phone calls, or dings from text messages, or dongs from social media posts. When he got home, there were no telephone answer machines to check, nor anything else demanding his immediate attention. He wasn't bombarded with information that overloaded his ability to enjoy life. Earlier in his life, he believed that the government and advertisers were truthful.

When he learned the government, advertisers, and so many others lied, he began to ask himself, “Where’d you learn that?” about beliefs he held and assumed were correct.

As his mind learned the questions to ask, the answers became intuitive.

As he answered more questions, his mind became calmer and quieter. He even noticed quiet spaces between his thoughts, which was relaxing to learn.

Written by Peter Skeels © 10-3-2026