

UNITED WISDOM

The Cost of Discipleship and Asking Questions

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *In every affair consider what precedes and follows, and then undertake it.*

Epictetus, Enchiridion 29, first complete sentence; displayed English labelled translated by Elizabeth Carter.

What this article is about

The cost of discipleship includes more than money. It can affect time, discipline, relationships, and promises made to yourself and others. This article helps examine specific requirements before agreement and distinguish difficult teaching from conditions left unexplained. Asking questions does not mean a teacher must immediately answer everything; it preserves a substantive conversation about what is currently offered. Epictetus, Luke's Gospel, and the Analects retain their different frames, without assigning readers a religion or turning historical texts into rules for contemporary contracts. Respect for a demanding path can coexist with clarifying its content. The discussion concerns meaningful participation, changed agreements, and the limits of personal decisions rather than a legal conclusion, a valuation of donations, or a test of the learner's spiritual worth.

I. Cost extends beyond a fee

When discussing the cost of discipleship, it is easy to think first of payment for sessions. An offer may also affect time, daily routines, relationships, household responsibilities, and willingness to accept particular teachings. These requirements are different. Knowing a meeting's fee does not mean understanding the whole path, and a free meeting does not mean an absence of commitments. Examine a specific invitation through its content: what you would do, what you would be asked to relinquish, and how far your agreement extends. This does not declare every requirement suspicious. Learning may genuinely involve effort and an established form. The question is whether you know that form before deciding and distinguish a temporary introduction, sustained participation, and commitments regarded as belonging to the tradition itself.

Consider a hypothetical example: someone is invited to a weekly reading group. They understand this as an opportunity to encounter a teaching. After several meetings, participants are also expected to attend other events and discuss significant decisions with the facilitator.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Even if someone considers each expectation reasonable, the initial agreement did not disclose their combination. Clarification addresses this difference without immediately judging an entire school or a teacher’s character. You can accept the reading while leaving additional relationships undecided. You can ask whether they are recommendations or conditions of continuing. Understanding participation matters after the beginning too: a new requirement reopens the question of what is now being proposed and on which grounds.

Your own desire can also make conditions less visible. When an encounter feels deeply significant, you may hope everything else will work itself out. Hope nevertheless does not arrange time with people close to you, clarify rules for absences, or explain a promised form of obedience. Examining the cost openly preserves desire’s significance while giving it a definite subject. What effort are you freely accepting, and which consequences remain unexamined? This is not a calculation of spiritual value in monetary units or a universal rule about acceptable fees. It provides no way to price faith. Its more limited purpose is to keep a path’s appeal distinct from agreement to every condition that might be attached to it.

II. Understand a path’s demands before entering

In Enchiridion 29, Epictetus asks readers to consider what precedes and follows an undertaking before entering it. His athlete example includes not only a desired victory but restrictions during preparation, difficulties in competition, and the possibility of losing. The image supplies no contemporary training programme and should not become a prescription for bodily deprivation. It distinguishes admiration for an outcome from understanding the undertaking associated with it. In a contemporary discussion of discipleship, this distinction supports asking which actions constitute the path and which merely accompany an attractive account of its results. If participation requires discipline, hear what that discipline means. A general appeal to seriousness does not specify a fulfilled commitment or its limits.

Luke 14:25–35 also presents images of prior consideration: a tower builder considers sufficient resources, and a king compares forces before war. Their context is the radical demands of Christian discipleship, including bearing a cross and relinquishing possessions. The passage cannot become a neutral buyer’s checklist with its religious meaning removed. Its image of reckoning nevertheless distinguishes beginning from being able to continue. A person encounters both a path’s significance and the question of what they are actually prepared to undertake. Here that question concerns examining a specific contemporary offer. The Gospel’s demands are not presented as permission for a facilitator to require transfer of property, broken relationships, or abandonment of ordinary care.

Understanding a requirement and accepting it remain separate decisions. A condition can be clear while you are unwilling to accept it; willingness can exist while the condition remains insufficiently explained. In the first case, you may acknowledge the path’s seriousness and

choose another way of encountering it. In the second, its content still needs discussion. Declining an indefinite promise does not mean rejecting all effort, while recognising a traditional demand does not automatically make it your own commitment. Preserve the sequence: hear, understand, consider consequences, then accept or decline. This guarantees no flawless choice, but prevents agreement from being declared complete merely because someone has expressed respect or interest.

III. Clarification can belong to respect itself

In Analects III.15, Confucius enters the grand temple and asks about everything. His knowledge is questioned precisely because he asks; his reply places such questioning within propriety itself. This is a particular ritual scene, not a declaration of contemporary learners' rights across all communities. It nevertheless shows that respect and clarification need not oppose each other. Someone may ask because they do not want to handle what matters to others arbitrarily. Such a question has a subject: an action, the meaning of a form, or the order of participation. It differs from demanding that every tradition admit error beforehand, or trying to establish superiority through endless objections rather than understanding the actual proposal.

For a contemporary conversation, specify what needs clarifying. A question about mandatory attendance differs from a question about a practice's theological grounds. A facilitator may respond differently: they know a schedule directly, while a difficult passage may require reading an established commentary together. Being able to ask does not require an immediate exhaustive answer to every subject. An honest admission that an answer is unknown or needs another source nevertheless differs from treating clarification itself as misconduct. If a condition affects whether to join, postponing its explanation indefinitely leaves agreement incomplete. You can take that uncertainty into account when deciding your next step, without claiming that every difficult question must be settled at once.

Tone also matters, yet it does not replace content. You can ask calmly without accusing anyone and still receive no information about a condition. You can hear an abrupt response and later recognise that the requirement was explained precisely. Neither a pleasant manner nor an unpleasant impression settles the whole matter automatically. Distinguish the relationship expressed in a conversation from whether participation became clearer. This prevents rejecting a substantive explanation because of one awkward exchange, while also preventing friendly avoidance from being mistaken for clarity. Independent judgment remains possible when you can name what is now known, what remains unknown, and which commitments you therefore accept or leave undecided.

IV. Material clarity and the meaning of giving

Payment, a donation, and voluntary assistance can mean different things within different communities. Money’s presence establishes neither spiritual value nor its absence. For a specific decision, understand what payment concerns, which expenses are named, what is required, and what remains voluntary. If a gift is described as a condition of belonging, hear that explicitly rather than assuming voluntariness from the word itself. If payment covers teaching work or arranging a space, that limited agreement does not certify a teaching’s truth. These distinctions allow practical matters to be discussed without reducing every religious relationship to a transaction. Questions about payment clarify participation rather than setting a general tariff for spiritual knowledge or a norm for donations.

Difficulty arises when material conditions change meaning after agreement. In a hypothetical group, the initially stated sum covers meetings, while an additional contribution is later declared evidence of trust. A different proposal now exists: not merely paying for defined work but demonstrating a personal quality by transferring funds. Return the conversation to what was stated beforehand and what is being proposed now. This need not assert hidden intentions. Identifying the changed condition is enough. Earlier agreement does not automatically disclose a new obligation, and previous expenditure does not make an additional demand intelligible. Further participation can be considered separately from wanting to justify money already spent or preserve an image of personal generosity.

Clarity does not remove every uncertainty either. An accurately stated fee guarantees no meaningful experience, and gratitude creates no unconditional duty to continue. You can value what you received while reconsidering the next commitment of time or money. Discuss the limits of a particular meeting and future participation. This article does not determine contractual validity, refund rights, a donation’s tax status, or a reasonable level of spending; those questions need suitable subject-specific sources. It preserves a simpler boundary: a material action should have an understood meaning within your own decision. Promised spiritual depth does not replace disclosure of required conditions or allow a facilitator to speak on behalf of your willingness.

V. Difficulty in learning differs from preventing understanding

Not everything in a teaching is immediately intelligible. Difficult language, an unfamiliar form, and attentive reading can belong to real learning. Initial difficulty therefore establishes neither poor organisation nor a teacher’s dishonesty. It also does not establish that every unclear condition should be accepted. Distinguish a subject’s complexity from a commitment left unexplained. Understanding a philosophical concept may require time; communicating a schedule usually requires a direct answer. Encountering a ritual context may call for introductory reading, yet this does not make an undisclosed requirement concerning personal life already accepted. The next-step question is not whether all difficulties have vanished. It is what you currently understand sufficiently to participate with a definite meaning.

In Analects III.8, a question about a poetic image leads to clarification concerning ceremony. The teacher recognises the student’s response as making further discussion of the odes possible. This supplies no template for every teaching conversation, but illustrates understanding developing through question and response. In contemporary reading, separate an unfamiliar word from your own assumption about it, ask for its source, and restate what you heard. This helps show whether both people are discussing the same subject. Such clarification does not require equal knowledge between teacher and learner. It preserves their different roles while preventing uncertainty from becoming evidence of personal incapacity or a reason to accept an unexamined demand as already explained.

Another response may be that only an introduction is currently available, while detailed explanation belongs to later study. Such a sequence can exist; what remains preliminary should be understood. You may agree to read an introductory text without yet accepting a commitment whose meaning will be disclosed later. If an unconditional promise is required before its cost is explained, the question changes. It concerns the order of agreement rather than the material’s difficulty. You need not decide what motives necessarily underlie that sequence. Identify your own boundary: which action is accepted now, which is not, and which explanation is needed for the next decision. Limited agreement can be more honest than a broad promise made to preserve a facilitator’s approval.

VI. Obedience has a subject rather than unlimited scope

Some traditions genuinely include obedience and acceptance of an established form within discipleship. Respecting this fact requires neither concealing it nor extending it beyond what has been stated. Obedience while studying a text, following a meeting’s procedure, and handing over decisions concerning an entire life are different relationships. Before promising one of them, hear which actions the demand concerns and how its grounds are explained. This article cannot assign readers a single permissible spiritual form. It can preserve their understanding of agreement: respect for a role’s name does not disclose its scope. When scope is unclear, asking about it remains substantive even if the respondent regards the tradition itself as entirely trustworthy.

Enchiridion 29 describes readiness for instruction within demanding conditions of philosophical choice. The athlete comparison includes submitting to a trainer as to a physician, alongside restrictions and possible losses. A contemporary reader receives neither medical advice nor permission for any teacher to govern a learner’s body. The image belongs to specific Stoic reasoning that discloses the undertaking’s severity in advance. Its relevant aspect here is examining the undertaking before entering. When a contemporary facilitator invokes discipline, the subject of that discipline remains a question. Quoting an ancient text does not explain what agreement is requested today or establish the speaker’s competence in every affected field.

Distinguish trust in a role from trust in every individual instruction. You may recognise a teacher’s experience in reading a particular source without entrusting questions outside the original offer. This need not deny spiritual authority; it clarifies the relationship within which that authority is accepted. If a teacher names the limits of their explanation, precision can support conversation: you know which answer they provide and which subject needs another source. If an appeal to trust erases those limits, the learner faces a new uncertainty. Their decision concerning it should be named separately rather than attributed retrospectively through a first meeting, general interest, or an earlier expression of gratitude.

VII. Personal choice also affects shared life

Participation’s cost sometimes falls on people besides the learner. A new daily schedule may change household work; travel may leave someone else with promised responsibilities; continual availability to a group may affect shared time. These consequences do not prohibit personal spiritual inquiry. They mean that your agreement and other affected people’s agreement differ. You can choose a practice for yourself without thereby declaring someone else’s additional work accepted. Name existing commitments and agreements needing revision. A conversation with people close to you need not become a vote on faith. It can concern specific shared matters: time, care, expenses, or promised assistance whose practical consequences involve more than one person.

Not every objection establishes that a path is unacceptable. Someone close to you may disagree with the teaching yet be willing to arrange a changed schedule, or share your interest while being unable to assume additional duties. The response’s content matters. Mistaking agreement with beliefs for agreement to all consequences leaves an important arrangement unexamined. Interpreting every difficulty as hostility to spiritual development removes the concrete subject of discussion. Ask what would change and who is prepared to accept it. This guarantees no resolution of conflict. It helps avoid explaining an ordinary practical limitation through another person’s supposed spiritual deficiency or attributing commitments to their choice that it never contained.

The radical language of Luke 14:26, 33 cannot be hidden to obtain a convenient contemporary conclusion. The read passage connects discipleship with demands reaching far beyond a class timetable. It would also be wrong for a contemporary organiser to assume the addressee’s place without explanation. This article does not settle difficult theological questions through one English translation. It preserves a boundary of use: the religious text must retain its context, while contemporary conditions must be named as contemporary conditions. The former yields no arbitrary instruction to abandon people close to you or shift consequences onto them. Actual relationships and accepted promises need separate consideration even when a spiritual path matters most in someone’s life.

VIII. Reconsideration does not erase what has happened

After encountering a path, someone may understand its cost differently. A requirement's meaning can become clearer, or the chosen form can prove incompatible with actual responsibilities. Reconsideration does not allow earlier promises simply to be declared nonexistent, yet it does not make continuing the only permissible decision. Separate what was received, what was already accepted, and what is now proposed. Gratitude can concern completed work while a next step remains open. Changing a specific promised action requires communication with those relying on it. When a new commitment is being discussed, earlier gratitude supplies no answer in place of agreement. This distinction supports honesty even when the participants' subsequent paths diverge.

Examining cost should not become indefinite postponement. Conditions may already be understood, a question asked, and an answer received, while the decision remains unnamed. The next useful step can then be limited agreement or a clear refusal. Independence includes responsibility for your response, not only finding further grounds against an offer. You can recognise that a format requires effort and honestly decline to enter. You can accept that effort without promising additional relationships. Leaving the other person confident of wider agreement that does not actually exist preserves uncertainty from the other side. Clarity matters to organisers too: it lets them understand which participation has genuinely been promised rather than inferred from politeness.

The sources are demanding; their demands should not be replaced with a gentle formula validating every convenient choice. Epictetus's Stoic path, Luke's Christian discipleship, and Confucian ritual learning have their own grounds and norms. They do not reduce to a contemporary rule of trying a little of everything. Recognising their differences nevertheless supports honest inquiry: do not promise compatibility that a source never asserts, or treat another person's resolve as your completed decision. Reconsideration may lead to continuing, pausing, or choosing another introductory form. Name the subject of that decision. It should rest on requirements genuinely understood rather than fear of seeming unserious, previous expenditure, or a supposed duty never to ask questions again.

IX. Accept effort while preserving understanding

Meaningful discipleship need not be comfortable. Someone may voluntarily accept demanding discipline, sustained reading, an unfamiliar order, and learning from another person. Respecting that choice does not require attributing an abandonment of understanding to it. Effort becomes a personal commitment when its subject and grounds are sufficiently clear. You need not first receive answers to every possible question. Distinguish what is currently offered from what remains to be discussed. This preserves room for further study: difficult content can still be questioned after entering, and significant changes of conditions do not disappear behind the initial promise. An accepted step has a definite scope that can be communicated to yourself and others.

Asking about cost therefore need not mean searching only for a hidden threat. It can express taking an important path seriously. If reading takes time, you want to understand how to make room for it; if a practice has religious meaning, you want to hear which meaning; if discipleship involves relationships, you want to distinguish their responsibilities. These questions prevent entering merely to inhabit an image of unusual devotion. They return to content. Questioning likewise is not intended to prove superiority over every teacher. You need not be ashamed of not knowing, but should acknowledge it. Learning and clarification support each other when directed towards an actual subject rather than a competition over status.

A calm, limited decision can be a sufficient result. You know what you accept for the next stage, which demands you do not yet accept, and what needs clarifying before continuing. This certifies neither a tradition’s truth nor every meeting’s quality. It makes participation clearer and preserves respect without an unlimited promise. A changed agreement can be discussed; incomplete reading can be acknowledged; a format demanding more than you are willing to accept can be named directly. Discipleship’s cost ceases to be an examination of personal worth. It becomes part of a substantive conversation about a path in which effort, agreement, questions, and responsibility have distinct places rather than replacing one another.

What this means in practice

Choose one actual offer of study or practice. Name its requirements: an action, time, payment, participation rules, and an expected relationship with the teacher. Separate what is known from the available wording from your assumptions. If a condition remains unclear, formulate one specific question: what a stated payment covers, which promise is required, or when additional participation is voluntary. You need not accuse the organiser beforehand or prove an account of all spiritual life. Understand the invitation sufficiently for your next decision. If an answer needs reading, name the text; if it remains unknown, leave that particular point open.

Then identify existing duties affected by the offer. Do not attribute agreement to additional work to people close to you merely because they respect your inquiry. Distinguish your readiness, a possible change in shared arrangements, and the next question for the facilitator. Formulate a limited response: what you accept now and what you do not yet accept. Communicate changes to promised participation to those relying on it. This is an editorial exercise for decision clarity, not a religious test, legal procedure, or method of established developmental efficacy. A sufficient result may be agreement to defined reading, a request to explain one important condition, or declining a format whose cost you do not currently accept. Gratitude for what was received and freedom to consider the next step can remain together; neither should quietly speak in place of the other.

Key quotation

> *This is a rule of propriety.*

Confucius, Analects III.15, final reply concerning asking in the temple; James Legge translation.

Connections between traditions

1. **Examine a path before entering.** Enchiridion 29 links philosophical choice with considering what precedes and follows; Luke 14:28–32 presents prior consideration through a tower and a comparison of forces. The shared mechanism distinguishes an appealing beginning from the demands of continuing. A contemporary invitation can therefore be discussed before a broad promise is made. The boundary is that Stoic formation of the governing faculty and Christian discipleship have different aims. The Gospel frame is not a financial plan, and the athletic image supplies no health instructions. Neither source certifies a contemporary school's conditions or facilitator.

2. **Respect and a question with a subject.** In Analects III.15, asking in the temple belongs to propriety; Enchiridion 29 requires examining an undertaking before philosophical choice. The comparable area is attention to a form rather than admiration for its name alone. A contemporary question can express taking participation seriously. Ritual clarification and Stoic decision nevertheless differ in subject and norms. Confucius's scene establishes no universal entitlement to every answer, while Epictetus describes no contemporary consent procedure. The comparison supports understanding requirements without erasing teacher–learner differences or declaring every difficulty suspicious.

3. **A form's meaning and demands that remain.** Analects III.8 clarifies a poetic image and ceremony through the student's response; Luke 14:27, 33 places reckoning within demanding discipleship. Their comparable area is a form whose meaning matters beyond outward participation. This permits asking what is being accepted in a contemporary format. The

boundary is specific: Confucian ritual conversation differs from following Christ. Clarification does not make every demand comfortable, while radical Gospel language gives an organiser no authority to require any sacrifice on another person's behalf.

4. **Uncertainty and grounds sufficient for a next step.** Analects III.11 retains an admission of not knowing about the great sacrifice; Enchiridion 29 distinguishes unexamined attraction from considered entry. The comparison concerns not presenting absent understanding as completed grounds for action. A contemporary conversation can name an unknown answer and account for it in a limited decision. The ritual response does not define every limit of a teacher's knowledge, and the Stoic text requires no completely predictable life. Uncertainty proves no deception, yet it also does not mean unconditional agreement has already occurred.

5. **Different decisions while recognising a form.** Enchiridion 29 allows not entering when philosophy's demands are not accepted; Luke 14:31–32 distinguishes advancing from seeking terms of peace within its military image. The similarity is limited to considering action in light of its conditions. It helps a contemporary learner distinguish respect from a promise they are unprepared to make. Stoic choice and the Gospel image establish no common rule of changing traditions for convenience. They settle no contemporary contractual consequences and cancel no accepted duties. What is now accepted and what is being reconsidered require separate words.

Primary sources

1. **Epictetus, Enchiridion 29.** Checked text; the page names Elizabeth Carter. The exact print basis of the modernised wording is not established. Epigraph: first complete sentence. The athletic image supplies no medical directions.

2. **Luke 14:25–35.** KJV, all selected verses read. Tower-building and comparing forces retain radical Christian discipleship context, without telling contemporary readers to transfer property or leave their families.

3. **Confucius, Analects III.8, 11, 15.** James Legge translation; complete selected chapters and file header read. Key quotation: III.15 final reply. Chinese and Legge's notes are in other files and were not collated. English quotations use the named displayed translations; RU quotations and paraphrases are United Wisdom's own renderings through English.

Tags

discipleship, participation costs, spiritual practice, path requirements, questions for teachers, independent judgment, agreement, commitments, discipline, respect, learning, spiritual inquiry, payment, donation, gift, time, relationships, participation rules, obedience, role limits, clarity, difficult texts, reconsideration, gratitude, responsibility, Epictetus, Enchiridion, Confucius, Analects, Gospel of Luke

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.