

*A Course in Crescendo:  
The Extended Reader's Guide*

1. The book opens with the concept of souls planning their lives before birth, as the husband and the woman select certain experiences and people to be part of their lives. Do you believe that such planning takes place prior to incarnation? How detailed do you believe this planning to be?

2. Think about the important people in your life. Could your souls have met and made certain agreements before your lives began? What might these people be here to teach you? Why might you have wanted them to be a part of your life? Does your answer change depending on whether a person has had a positive or negative impact on you? If you chose to interact with these people in order to learn and to grow, is there such a thing as a “negative” impact?

3. The woman suggests having an unpleasant experience (in her case, the loss of one's child). Why would someone's soul purposely choose to undergo a painful event? Do you think that your soul might have done this? What difficult experiences or obstacles in your life might your soul have chosen for itself, and why? What are you learning from these experiences? How would your life be different if they were not there? Do you think you would be learning as much, or would you simply be learning different things? If you consider that your soul decided to have these experiences before you were born, how might you look at certain events or encounters in your life differently?

4. Although the woman plans her life before it begins, she states these plans can be altered. What are your thoughts about free will? How does it interact with destiny? Do they both exist? Can they both exist at the same time? Is one more dominant than the other, and if so, which one?

5. As the woman listens to her husband's heartbeat, she has a feeling of unease about her family coming to an end. Although this makes little sense to her at the time, it soon proves accurate. Have you had a premonition about events that happened in your own life? What was your premonition about? Did you pay attention to it or ignore it? Could premonitions allow us to prevent certain scenarios from occurring? From where do you think these premonitions originate?

6. Is it a coincidence that the woman found *Music Lessons* on the same day that she lost her husband and child? Have you ever “found” something (a book, a person, a sign, an experience) that has helped you

through a difficult time in your life? What was it? How did it help you? Who do you think put it there?

7. What is the ant-like creature? Have you encountered it yourself? What kinds of things has it made you do, or not do, against your will?

8. A powerful connection exists between humans and animals, both wild and domesticated. The mare is intuitively aware of the woman's feelings and thoughts. Do you feel that the animals and/or pets in your life share this same ability? What have they taught you? What have they shown you about yourself that you otherwise might not have known? In what ways might an animal's consciousness be more limited than that of humans, and in what ways might it be more expansive?

9. The woman feels that death has nothing to teach her. What, if anything, has death or mourning taught you? Did it make you learn something, even if you did not want to? How has it transformed you?

10. The woman envisions death as stone-like and hard. If you had to depict death as a character or physical object, how would you depict it? What attributes would you give it? Is it capable of compassion or emotion?

11. Imagine that you, like the woman, could have a conversation with death. What would you tell it or ask it? Now imagine that you could hear death's responses to you. What would they be?

12. "If only," the woman thinks to herself. If only she could have taken or not taken certain actions, then her husband would still be alive. Knowing what you do now, what in your past would you do differently? If you were able to undo or redo these actions, how would your life look? Would you still be the same person you are today? What about yourself or your life would change? What would stay the same?

13. Have you ever sensed the presence of someone who has died? How did this make you feel? Do you believe that people who have died can still be around you? How close do you think they are?

14. The woman and the old man watch a diver enter the water over and over. He dives in for different reasons: to swim alongside another person; to be of service to others, and ensure their well-being; and to delight in the sensation of swimming. Why do you think that you have "dived" into this particular life?

15. When the woman complains about the pain of being incarnate and wonders why she would have agreed to such a thing, the old man offers several reasons: sensual pleasure, enjoyment of the natural world,

love. What reasons would you give her? What can the experience of having a physical body offer us? Are there specific advantages to being in the physical state as opposed to the spiritual state, and vice versa? Who do you agree with more, the woman or the old man?

16. The woman uses the lake of time to become aware of her past lives. There are other methods that you can use to become aware of your own. Past-life regression typically uses hypnosis to access these memories. This can be done with a licensed, trained therapist who is familiar with this method, or you can try it yourself with guided scripts or CDs/videos. Past lives may also surface in dreams. People often ask how they can know whether a memory is from a past-life or from imagination or fantasy. The past-life memory tends to be emotional, as opposed to the content of your typical daydreams. It can also include historical details and even foreign languages with which you were previously unfamiliar.

17. Do you think that animals have past lives too? Why or why not? Are there any animals with whom you have felt an unusually strong connection? Could you both have lived a prior life together?

18. The old man states that soul-mate relationships may be romantic, but that may take on other forms as well. For example, soul mates could be siblings, a parent and child, friends, etc. What is your definition of a soul mate? Do you believe that you have only one? Must a relationship be enduring for it to be a soul-mate relationship? Could a soul mate be someone who comes into your life temporarily, yet influences it profoundly? Do you think that soul-mate relationships are always easy, or might they be the most difficult ones you have? What do you think the soul mate(s) in your life are here to teach you? What are you teaching them?

19. The old man suggests that life is like a school in which our souls learn and evolve. Where would you place yourself within this school? Which subjects or lessons do you think your soul has already learned, and which does it still have to learn more about? Who might your teachers and tutors be? How does seeing the world as a school, complete with kindergarteners and doctorate-level students alike, affect your understanding of human behavior or your empathy for others? What do you think happens when someone graduates this school?

20. Encounters with a deceased loved one frequently occur in dreams, and are called *visitations*. Have you ever had a visitation? What messages did your loved one communicate to you? How did the visitation make you feel?

21. Imagine that you could have a conversation with a loved one who has died, just as you did earlier with death. Are there things left unsaid that you wish to express to them? Say them. Ask any questions that

you might have. Now imagine hearing your loved one's responses. What do they need to tell you or say to you?

22. "In one lifetime, you came into this world simply to take pleasure in a summer night. . . Never mind the years and tears you shed before that night, or after; that life existed for that moment," the husband says to the woman. What do you feel is the purpose of your life? Could it be something that has nothing to do with your relationships, your career, etc., such as appreciating the beauty of a warm summer night? Now close your eyes. Visualize the presence of a guide or a higher spiritual being who loves you very much and who is always with you. Sit with this being for a while. Ask it to share your life's purpose with you. Listen to the answer. Is it different than the answer you gave?

23. To what degree is your future based upon your past? Does it have to be this way? If you could compose a new future, just as the old man tells the woman to do, how would you like it to look? What is preventing this ideal future from occurring? In what ways are you allowing your past to limit your future? Do these limitations truly exist now, or are they merely part of your "story"? What would happen if you got rid of them?

24. The woman discovers that she was once a violent warrior who harmed others, and she is instructed to revise the past. Think of a moment in your own life when you hurt another person, caused someone pain, or acted unkindly, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Now visualize yourself moving back in time and being in that moment again. Be present; see, hear, and sense the details of the scene as much as you can. Let your heart fill with forgiveness for yourself for how you acted then. Embrace the you of the past with compassion. You were doing the best you could. Hold the you of the past in your arms and tell him or her that now that you know better, you will do things differently. Picture yourself choosing an alternate behavior, one that comes from a place of love. Really see or feel yourself performing the desired behavior. Imagine what happens as a consequence, both to you and to the others involved; there may be a very different result than the original one. If you feel guided to, repeat this exercise with other events that you wish you could have done differently.

25. The old man tells the woman that "the Earth turns on a kindness." Was there a time in your life when someone showed a kindness to you, whether small or large, that touched you deeply? How did this kindness transform your day, your thoughts, or your emotions?

26. What do you think about the idea of parallel universes? Do they exist? Do we come into contact with them? What might your life be like in a parallel universe?

27. People who are near death often report seeing their lives flash before their eyes, which is known as a *life review*. When this happens to the woman, she recalls a particular scene from her childhood when she was on a beach with her parents. Using the first thing that comes to your mind as you read this, what moment or moments would appear for you? What do these moments illustrate about your life as a whole? Why are they important?

28. In your opinion, what happens after you die?

29. Dr. Raymond Moody coined the phrase “near-death experience” (NDE) in his book *Life After Life*. Common features of an NDE include an out-of-body experience; a feeling of safety, peace, and love; a tunnel or other structure made of light; and encounters with others who have already died. Personal and anecdotal accounts as well as research studies of NDEs, both in children and adults, are widely available for those who are interested in learning more about this phenomenon.

30. Therapeutic musicians are certified, trained professionals who bring music to the bedsides of hospital and hospice patients, as well as a variety of other healthcare settings. The musicians may play for the critically or chronically ill; patients undergoing surgery; patients with Alzheimer’s disease; women in labor; premature babies; and the dying. Even animals in need of relaxation and healing benefit from this type of therapy. Its effectiveness has been documented in numerous scientific research studies, and has been shown to affect depressed mood; normalize heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing; lower anxiety and pain levels; regulate body temperature; and strengthen the immune system. A beautiful example of healing music is harpist Amy Camie’s CD *The Magic Mirror*, the therapeutic effects of which has been measured in several studies involving cancer patients.

31. The woman feels like she has taken the wrong path and become lost, but then learns that “impassable—and even impossible—is not the same as wrong.” When have you felt like you were on a wrong path in your life, one in which further progress seemed impossible? Did this path teach you something, even if you could not proceed along it as you might have wanted to? Could it in fact have been the perfect path to take to teach you this lesson? Would you still consider it “wrong”?

32. After the woman stops moving and becomes still, she finally finds herself, as well as the guidance she has been seeking. Meditation is a practice used to quiet the mind and access higher wisdom. There are many different kind of meditation practices, such as mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness meditation, mantra meditation, and chanting. Have you tried any of these? What was your experience with them? Were you able to connect with a wiser version of yourself, one who could offer you insight? In what ways did this insight differ from your typical conscious thoughts?

33. Lucid dreaming, such as the higher self describes, can occur spontaneously, but it is also a skill that can be developed with practice. Books, videos, and Internet sites offer techniques to guide you through the process. If you were able to design your dreams, what would you do in them? Who would you meet? Where would you travel?

34. Do you believe that you create your own reality? To what degree is your reality created by your thoughts, beliefs, desires, and emotions? How is your outer reality a reflection of your inner reality? When has changing one changed the other?

35. The woman learns that the most important moment of her life was a kindness that she doesn't even remember performing. What if life were measured in kindnesses rather than wealth, titles, and achievements? How would your definition of a successful life change? Would you consider yourself successful under this definition? What could you do to be more successful?

36. Think of an occasion when you showed a person, animal, or plant unconditional love, if only briefly. Imagine how it must have felt for the other to receive your love. How did this help the soul of that person, animal, or plant? How did it help your own soul?

37. The technique that the woman uses to astrally project herself is called a body scan. The body scan is a mindfulness meditation that involves bringing focused, loving attention to each part of your body. In *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn writes: "If you think of your body as a musical instrument, the body scan is a way of tuning it." An excellent body scan meditation is available as part of Dr. Kabat-Zinn's series *Guided Mindfulness Meditation*, which is available on CD and as a digital download, if you would like to try it for yourself.

38. When do you think your soul began? Has it been around since the beginning of the universe? Did it originate with other souls? How do you think your soul is connected to these other souls? Could this planet be one of many on which your soul has lived?

39. If your life were a song, what kind of song would it be (a pop song, the blues, a classical symphony, etc.)? What would it sound like? Could you make it a different kind of song, if you wanted? What would you change it to? What would the lyrics be? Who is composing your song?

40. What would you want to learn in your next life? What circumstances would you choose to facilitate that lesson?