

Session 4 Guide
Deepening Practices and Questions
Chapter 3: Wholeness and Fragmentation

This week focuses on **Chapter 3** of *A New Republic of the Heart*. As always, there are more questions here than you'll have time to discuss, so I suggest you select a manageable few to deeply consider, journal about and/or discuss.

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Our true nature, and the nature of everything around us, is inseparable from the Whole of all existence. And yet our sensory experience often focuses our attention on the perspective of the separated body mind self. And this separated perspective is foundational to our "consensus trance." Sometimes though we can experience states of consciousness in which absolute non-separation seems obvious. In some of these states it seems obvious that nothing is threatened and we rest, at least for a time, in a state of uncaused happiness and love. Most of us have experienced intuitions of non-separation. By doing practices that help us stay in touch with wholeness, we are better able to think "from the whole to the parts" instead of only being able to think "from the parts to the whole". This is an important aspect of the kind of consciousness necessary for us to be a force for the healing of our planetary life-support system.

Deepening Questions:

1. The first sections of this chapter emphasize the paradoxical nature of wholeness. *What does it take to internalize and live on the basis of its diverse meanings?* This might begin conceptually, but it would then, as you grow, necessarily extend to an embodied, felt intuition. So consider how you experience some of the diverse definitions of wholeness.

How are you related to the *boundless totality* of everything? How are you related to the ultimate *Source* of you and all things? How are you related to the radical *essence*, the divine *nature* of existence itself? How are you related to the *Omega point*, the *teleological destination* toward which all things seem to be evolving? How are you related to the *present-moment unfolding* of the implicate divine (Deus Implicitus)? How are you related to the unfathomable *Mystery* of existence that is present in every fractal fragment of experience?

In theory, your deepening experience of wholeness is pointing toward a dramatic transition to a new stage of human function, capacity and intelligence. *In what ways do you understand, intuit and feel this as a real potential?*

2. This chapter argues that wholeness has *agency*. It posits a *telos* or attractive power of wholeness. It claims that wholeness altogether (including relative forms of health and integrity and wholeness as well as radical prior wholeness) exerts an influence on conditional "parts" of

reality, making things “more whole” or “less fragmented”. It argues, “wholeness is...always reasserting itself...There is a tendency for disturbed energy to regain the continuous flow or circuit that is original to it. Thus, the innate wholeness that is the nature and form of reality always tends to reassert, resume, or reinforce itself.”

Many rational observers are skeptical about this claim. There’s a fierce rationalist critique of Wilber’s “Eros” by Frank Visser and others [on his website](#). I’ve recently explored and learned from an even more sophisticated critique in the book [The Listening Society](#). However, I remain confident of my direct experience, even as I am impressed by the seemingly nearly endless capacity for rationalists to deny their direct experience (of consciousness, free will, meaning, grace, and an evolutionary impulse.)

Do you recognize “the agency of wholeness”? Do you doubt it? If it were real, and pervaded even your own being, how would it show up in your interior experience? Do you notice those qualities? How would it show up in the interiors of others? Do you observe it in your life? What evidence supports or questions this? To what degree can you infer the reality of wholeness as a force in the world? In what ways can we count on it? In what ways would it be foolish to “count on” it?

3. From page 69:

“We can think of wholeness in many ways, and none are final or complete. We have considered it as the boundless totality of everything. We can also think of it as source—that from which all of life, all existence, springs. Or, borrowing more from Western thought, we can think of it in a teleological sense—as that final omega point toward which everything is heading. We can consider its integrative qualities of bringing everything together (much as integral theory attempts to do). And we can certainly think of it as radical, meaning literally at the root.

“Perhaps wholeness is so paradoxically all of the above at once that it interrupts every distinction with a reunification. Therefore, by its nature it can never be fully known in the terms of conventional subject- object consciousness. It is a radical mystery, perhaps intuitively grokkable only when there is no difference between the knower and that which is known. Our mind tends to want to “grasp” things. But it can only relax in the presence of radical wholeness—in a state of “mind- blown” amazement. Once the whole is apprehended to that degree, perhaps we might begin to learn to think “from the whole to the parts” in a way that gives birth to a very different worldview.”

Consider how deepening such a felt knowing of and as wholeness might facilitate your development and maturation. How might it enable you to more effectively make a positive difference in the world and be of benefit to the whole?

4. In the subsection, “Wholeness, Science and Spirituality” on pp 70-75, I appreciate the unique importance of objective scientific knowledge “of the parts”, and also appreciate contemplative

knowledge “of the whole”. I also distinguish *pre*-rational superstition from *trans*-rational intuitions of the nature of reality. And I critique the over-broad rejection of non-rational knowing by scientific skeptics. Toward the end I point to the heart as the center of human intelligence that most directly intuits the nature of wholeness. *Is this wholly convincing to you? To what degree are you unconvinced?* Each of us multiple voices within, often including an “inner atheist / skeptic” and an “inner mystic / lover”. *In what ways does this discussion resonate as true for the range of voices within you? What further questions or objections or key points might some of these voices (mainly your inner skeptic or inner mystic) want to bring forward?* Imagine how I might respond to those objections. *Are there additional nuances that might emerge from such a discussion? What might they be?*

5. In an earlier draft I had given Part I the title, “**How Can Wholeness Be in Crisis?**” I find this simple question to be a poignant riddle that goes right to the heart of the discussion in this chapter. Please consider deeply how both these things can be simultaneously true — a civilizational crisis, inclusive of all our culture and knowledge and history and future, and implicating a huge proportion of the Earth’s other complex creatures — and the profound unblemished non-separate wholeness, the seamless unity underlying all conditional experience, the conscious light that is the good, true, beautiful, divine nature of all things and all moments. *Do these two truths arise for you as “state-specific” cognitions? (That is, do you find that you can’t fully grok the crisis except in a mind of separation, and you can’t fully grok wholeness except in a relaxed, open higher state of consciousness?)* Try to integrate these two apparently contradictory intuitions about the “truth” of what is fundamental. *How can they both be true simultaneously? What understandings arise? What questions arise?*
6. At the end of this chapter I describe how and why activism and practice are both necessary expressions of the agency of wholeness as it expresses itself in individuals. (see pages 81–84). Please consider this for yourself. *Do you agree? Describe any questions you have; or describe the inseparability of the inner work and the outer work in your own words.*

Group Practice:

Begin your book group meeting with a reading (from this chapter or from another source) that evokes a felt sense of wholeness.

Then, sit in silence together, eyes closed, deepening into a felt experience of wholeness for ~3 minutes.

Then, if you are meeting in person or via a video link, open your eyes, and gaze for ~3 minutes into the eyes of one another, opening to wholeness as it expresses itself in your book group partners.

Then, take turns “speaking as” wholeness itself, as you intuit it. As much as possible, build on whatever resonates in what others have said. Appreciate what resonates, and for the purpose of this exercise, refrain from pointing out what doesn’t. With everything you say and even in the way you listen to others, lean toward harmonious wholeness and emphasize the intensification of the collective experience of depth and wholeness.