

Session 11 Guide
Deepening Practices and Questions
Chapter 10: Conversations That Matter

This week focuses on **Chapter 10** 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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This chapter delves more deeply into “conversations that matter.” It begins by setting forth three different categories of conversation that have particular importance: (1) deep transformative conversations (among practitioners); (2) Intertribal dialogue (across tribal boundaries, ethnic and cultural, including America’s red/blue divide); and (3) humanity’s most serious and intelligent conversations about the human future (which tend to divide into three primary conversations, those among “innovators”, “ecologists” and “evolutionaries”. It begins by considering the context of our conversations and the barriers to the deep, generative exchanges we need if we are to radically transform the ways we relate to one another and make collective decisions. It also considers the factors that make conversations *across* boundaries difficult.

Most of this chapter is devoted to conversations between three “communities of discourse,” I refer to as *innovators*, *ecologists*, and *evolutionaries* (page 298). Each of these conversations is seriously and intelligently considering and preparing for the human future, and each has its own unique genius and contributions. Unfortunately, each group also has its own blind spots, and the principle voices of each group talk mainly among themselves, usually failing to fully appreciate the important insights and even the legitimacy of the other conversations. At this tipping point in the human experiment, it is important to initiate serious and fruitful conversations *across the boundaries* that divide these three conversations.

Deepening Questions:

1. Among all of us, a common social consensus tends to keep conversations superficial. And, when conversations turn to serious issues we face, they tend to degenerate into soliloquies and one-upsmanship in which polarized positions harden and become ever more entrenched, if not extreme. We begin to get beyond this impasse when we and our conversation partners practice *epistemic humility*, knowing our knowledge is incomplete, imperfect, and evolving. Consider your own experience. *Is there someone in your world with whom you cannot talk productively? What do you understand about why dialogue breaks down? How do they usually contribute to the breakdown? How do you behave that tends to keep things stuck? Do you see an opportunity to transcend your own perspective (and your resistance to other perspectives) in order to open up new avenues for conversational synergy? (See pages 301-303.)*

2. *What kinds of shared agreements (or “terms of discourse”) do we need in order to maintain a productive focus in our conversations? Identify a body of conversation you monitor or participate in. What are some of its key terms of discourse? How do they keep this conversation closed to perspectives that might illuminate and evolve it? Can you imagine and identify a few modifications of those terms of discourse that would make the conversation more open and productive? (See pages 301–305.)*
3. It is helpful to ask the question, “Who are you refusing to listen to?” Consider yourself —identify one or more of the descriptions of not-listening on pages 306–307 that apply to you. Note how your interests align with these characteristics, and how you tend to dismiss, downplay, or ignore others’ concerns. Consider how you might open up to these people, their perspectives, and their concerns in a way that is productive and that won’t overwhelm your own capacities to take multiple perspectives.
4. Describe in your own words the importance of the work being done by each of the three conversations among serious thinkers described on pages 308–20: innovators, ecologists, and evolutionaries. Identify why each point of view is essential to our larger conversation. Describe also what tends to be limited and limiting about them. Then, choose any two of these three conversations. *How might a real dialogue between them enhance and transform both perspectives? How might the third conversation make further contributions?*

Group Practice:

- 1) It’s ideal if the book group facilitator chooses a question (from those above, or from his/her own reading of the chapter) and sends it to the other members of the group beforehand.
- 2) Begin your book group with brief hellos.
- 3) Then read the 5 principles of evolutionary dialogue from the previous chapter, summarized very briefly here:
 1. Real dialogue arises when we are more interested in what we do not yet know rather than in what we already know.
 2. It is easy to be too intellectual or too personal. Dialogue comes alive through our shared interest in what emerges, between us, in our developing understanding and in the field of consciousness.
 3. Really listening to each other enables us to develop a conversation that builds on each other’s contributions. Really listening allows us to come together in an ever-opening comprehension. “
 4. Every conversation lives through our active participation. Even when you are not speaking at the moment, stay with the others and be with the conversation. Bring yourself fully in.
 5. Each dialogue finds its true meaning in recognizing itself as part of a larger dialogue.

- 4) Then, conduct brief check-ins of no longer than 5 minutes each. Bring yourself fully in, speaking about “what you’re experiencing and feeling right now” and then speak to your “top of the head” responses to the question.
- 5) Then speak, in a free unstructured way, “popcorn style” (pop when you’re ready) for the bulk of your time together, intending to allow the conversation to deepen, progress, and open up new understanding. Let yourself receive and be influenced by others’ sharing and let your sharing reflect a shared understanding that develops as it progresses. Participate also in a way that allows the we-space field to deepen as you share.
- 6) Towards the end, take 10 minutes to speak spontaneously, popcorn style, completing the open sentence, “What WE are experiencing now is...”
- 7) Then, five to ten minutes before your end time, take turns sharing about your experience of this process of evolutionary dialogue in we-space.

Personal Practice

Continue to do the practices we have been doing:

1. If you have not already done so, please re-read page 281 and then, engage this exercise first shared in last week’s deepening practices: dare to open up a conversation with a smart, sincere, deep friend, in which you say something to the effect of, “I realize that it is possible for our relationship to become even more alive and fruitful, and for us to edge into something new. I greatly value our connection, and I wonder what else might be possible. Where can we go where we haven’t gone before? Where are the limits here, and how can we go beyond them?” Explore what it takes to venture towards creating new depths of intimacy in a trusted relationship.
2. Continue to pay attention to your “Moments” practice, sometimes practicing mindfulness, sometimes adjusting your posture, sometimes remembering to recognize the Mystery of existence, sometimes breathing to and from the heart in random moments throughout the day, and remembering and enjoying the radical “okayness” of existence.
3. Continue to practice and refresh your “Mornings” practice. Include, if possible, at least 10 minutes conscious movement and 10 more minutes of conscious stillness (meditation). Prepare space in your home and agreements with others in your household as necessary. Consider a level of commitment that you can sustain for the duration of this course.
4. Continue to engage conscious activism. Reach out and do something (however small) that is practical and concrete to positively influence politics in the place where you live.

This is the last week before the US midterm elections — it is a time to canvass, phone-bank, donate, and make your voice heard!

If you live outside the USA and would like to influence US politics (which are in crisis and influence the whole world) even though you can't donate to candidates or parties, you can consider donating to US nonprofit organizations focused on the environment, civil liberties, gun control, indigenous communities, women's rights, racial justice, and/or many other key issues. You can also phonebank at <https://www.democratsabroad.org/phonebanking>

If you are in the United States and you have no ready connection to how you can help, consider going to <https://demvolctr.org/events/category/phone-bank/> for phone banking and register. It is almost too late to send postcards, but here are two ways to reach out in writing as well: <https://postcardstovoters.org> and register. Or work with another such program, called [Vote Forward](#).

Do you know anyone whose vote might help make a difference but who might NOT vote? Reach out such people. See if you can get them to commit to voting formally on <https://iwillvote.com>. Make a bigger or more regular political donation than you otherwise would. In whatever ways are congruent for you, start doing something, moving your body through time and space, to make a difference to our upcoming midterm elections. This will not only make a difference in the world, it will change your relationship to the larger issues we are discussing.