

Session 8 Guide
Deepening Practices and Questions
Chapter 7: The New Stories of Our Souls

This week focuses on **Chapter 7** 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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Paradoxically, in addition to the spiritual practice of awakening to our true nature, which is one with the undivided Whole, each of us must also discover and live our unique reason for being born, incarnate our unique genius, and give our unique gift. Thus, "soul work"—which involves discovering and being in full relationship to one's life purpose—is also essential to practice. It involves the life journeys, tests, and adventures that are unique to each of us and reflect archetypal stories. This kind of practice is profound and lifelong, just like the spiritual practice described in Chapter 6 "Life As Practice".

In most dharmas these two types of practice are often embraced in exclusion of one another, so it is unusual and profound to integrate them as we do here. Understood rightly each dimension of practice complements the other, immanent and transcendent, self-transcendence and self-actualization. Soul work plunges "down" into the deep psyche and the natural world instead of ascending "up" into a self-transcending samadhi of nonseparateness.

Deepening Questions:

1. *What is Soul Work? How, to this point in your life, have you come into contact with a deep source of guidance in making key life choices? What is real for you about the premise that you can come into deeper contact with a profound, divine "soul" dimension of your own being? Have you worked to clarify your life purpose? What do you understand about such soul work? What questions about it are you still contemplating? (See pages 175-180.)*
2. On page 183 it is said, "At this point in the journey of the human species, an integral revolution of the heart asks us to reclaim and reopen our connection not only to radical consciousness but also to the embodied heart and soul, and not only to ourselves but also to the vital energies and intelligence of the living earth." *In what ways are you allowing nature, the living earth and indigenous wisdom to inform your heart's understanding? What more is possible?*

3. This book argues that soul work must be informed by the kind of self-transcending spiritual practice described in the previous chapter, or else it risks becoming “a profoundly deluded “spirituality” based on ego-inflation”. *What are some of the delusions that can arise if a powerful self-transcending intuition of radical wholeness is not present? What is the most pervasive illusion of all? Do you recognize the potential for falling into such errors yourself? How can you account for them? (See pages 183–84.)*
4. Re-read the five paragraphs on pages 185-186 under the subhead “The Hidden Narratives of Our Lives”. They summarize the reasons why soul work is important even for advanced practitioners of transcendental spirituality. And vice-versa. It says “spirituality” is analogous to space, and “soul work” is analogous to time. *Feel into each of these trajectories of growth and awakening, and describe how they live in your direct felt experience, and how they have unfolded over time.*
5. Read about Terry’s personal soul work (p 193-196) and then consider how you would tell your own essential archetypal story. Write it out or share it with your group.
6. Consider the story of the Lindwurm as told by Martin Shaw. You can view it here: <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-lindworm/> Then re-read the lessons Terry gleaned from a (much more elaborate) telling of this same story. *Does this speak to your journey too? What does it have to say?*
7. Read pages 199-202 “From Yin to Yang” and consider the profound relationship of doing and being, agency and communion, expressiveness and receptivity, movement and stillness as it relates to your life, right now. Reread the excerpt from Nietzsche several times. Endeavor to deeply encounter and understand the most profound levels of your current relationship to life and death, in both yin and yang expressions. *Describe them and use them to shine light on your current growth and practice.*
8. Discovering the “narrative thrust and arc of your own life” involves a very deep process. The way it’s articulated here, we must “ask” from the heart for help or grace, in becoming deeply aligned to our soul. This is profound and existential, deeper than any “method”. *Is your heart now asking for help from your soul? How do you feel that?* A useful practice is possible; consider, in metaphorical terms, how your “current way of being” expresses itself, and how this expression can be transformed in your journey to a “new way of being” (see pages 201–206). *Consider an archetypal metaphor that describes your current way of being, and then consider a metaphor for a new way of being, a way of being that your soul seems to be asking you to mature into. (For examples, see page 205.)* Personal practice: Notice

whenever there are opportunities for shifting to a “new way of being” present themselves at random moments throughout each day.

9. Collective traumas at the level of nations and cultures live in the subtle field. (pages 206–208). These traumas involve every one of us on an individual level as well. *Consider the cultural and intergenerational traumas that affect you and your world, and discuss what it might take for them to begin to heal.*
10. Re-read the final subsection of this chapter, titled “Death and Rebirth.” *How have human attempts to achieve a “higher good” produced terrible evil in the past? Consider the compensatory motivations that underlie most great “immortality projects.” Does this invalidate your inspiration to do good now? How does it shine new light on and deepen your sense of purpose? What might it take to transmute your good intentions into truly auspicious outcomes?*

Group Practice:

- 1) Begin your book group meeting with a reading that evokes a felt sense of contact with the nature of soul work. Choose anything you are drawn to. Or you can use this section from Chapter 7:

How can you come to know the narrative thrust and arc of your own life? You begin by awakening beyond your narrow preoccupation with petty egoic concerns. But that is just the first step. What follows is a visioning process in which you allow your soul, or daemon, to assert its dominion over your destiny, and to connect you with your collective soul destiny.

You begin this process by dropping down into whatever it is that glows in your bone marrow, and asking from the heart, and from the very depth of your being, for help with aligning you to your soul, to help you learn to hear its voice. Knowing that you cannot come to know its unique contours simply via awakening as wholeness or the aliveness of pure awareness (as absolutely essential as that is), you begin to feel into the pulse of the sap that rises through your body and soul. You wait to hear a new, deeper, previously hidden voice. You ask, and then you fall silent and faithfully keep a vigil of listening, until you are able to discern the still- small voice of your soul.

You open your feeling further, to learn what is being said to you by the DNA of the protoplasmic informational energy that surges, nurtures, and replenishes your very consciousness, the actual nerve spark in

your cerebrospinal fluid. Your soul or daemon is recognizable because it speaks in chorus with your heart and blood. Life wants to live. That which has always animated evolutionary emergence is still alive in you and wants to keep evolving. And it has a particular way it wants to more fully express this right now through your body, your emotions, your mind, your imagination, your relationships, and your creativity.

- 2) Then, take turns sharing. Speak candidly about this moment of your life, and consider if you are transitioning from your current way of being to another way of being. Consider the pairs of metaphors on page 205, and feel free to imagine others. What is the story and metaphor you are tending to enact? What might be a new story that you could grow into? What new capacities will you have to develop in order to fulfill that role? Share about this for 5-10 minutes, and then invite reflections and insights from your partners. Make sure to end your turn with your own statement of what resonates as authentic and truly real for you about this consideration.
- 3) Five to ten minutes before your end time, take turns sharing a “last round” of appreciations and questions you are taking from your meeting.

Personal Practice

1. Write a Soul Work Statement. What follows is a deep version of this practice. We are moving very fast through a series of rich considerations in this book and course, so you might need to do a simpler and quicker version. Don't worry. This is something to which you can return later.

A “Soul Work Statement” responds to the question, “What exactly do you need to do, in order to actually encounter and deeply connect with and hear the voice of your soul?”

We can ask. By making our whole self into a deeply authentic invitation, we can channel our longing with pure sincerity, and let our heart sound a call. We can recognize, *our soul has always been there*. You have always had a relationship with your soul. It may have escaped your notice. It may even be something that is hard to swallow. But it's true. You have had a relationship with your soul your whole life. Always, there has been some invisible presence that has been there, ready for you to trust enough to take its hand and open to a relationship with your own sacred soul being.

Recognizing this, we can *ask*, deeply and authentically from the depths of our being.

- We can ask for a deeper more vivid and alive relationship with our soul.
- We can ask to live more deeply, to live a more soulful existence.
- We can ask our soul to “turn up the volume”.
- We can ask that the “ear of the heart” be opened to hear the voice of our soul.

And/or we can ask a question from the core of our being:

- What am I here for (in this life, or just at this moment of my life)?
- What is the gift I am here to give next?
- What is it that the world will not have if I don't wake up and show up most fully in the ways that only I can?
- What is asked of me? (Or what is offered to me?)
- How can I help? How can I serve? How can I love? Celebrate? Worship?
- How can I fulfill the evolutionary impulse of my soul? Of the world?
- How can the larger Divine Will, That which powers evolution, flow more powerfully through me?

And then

- We can wait patiently for an answer.
- We can trust the process of asking and waiting...

But it is not enough to just ask. There is an art and a science and perhaps an ordeal and an opportunity for heroism in asking. One can ask in a way that is more or less authentic, essential, and truly powerful.

We can honor the process of asking. We can sculpt the question or the request: In fact, sculpting our inquiry is an essential part of the ritual act.

It's a mystical path, an art, a science, a journey, a world. You may notice many things about the inner work of asking. Here are some that come to mind for me:

Our very way of asking can deepen us. We can ask in a way that sanctifies the journey we are beckoning. We can ask in a way that makes real an understanding, that makes real our actual situation. Our asking can implicitly make a declaration like the following:

“I'm serious. I've lived enough wandering incarnations. Now my soul is claiming all of me.
 “My intent is all-consuming. I can feel when I've got the larger forces of the cosmos paying

attention to me, and when I'm merely at the effect of those forces. And I care to pay attention to those differences, from the very bottom of my heart. And I will trust the process here. I will forgive myself for whatever is in the way and needs to be purified in the process. And I will trust the total process and continually re-dedicate myself to it.

"I know I am in a world in which I am exposed to an elaborate mosaic of different teachings and influences and transmissions and wisdom streams and lineages and initiatory sources, none of which I can embrace and submit to exclusively, to the exclusion of all the others. So I realize that I must take responsibility. I must summon catalytic energies to awaken my inner Guru, my Soul-nature.

And I must recognize that my Soul is with me, always, connecting me to a vast retinue that includes all the meaningful outer gurus and siddhas and prophets and sages and saints and yogis and saviors and lineages and helpers and angels. So I trust that there is Help. There is Grace. And I trust that when I am aligned, the universe will destroy or dissolve or rearrange whatever is in the way of what I need to next become. And I trust that to whatever degree I am aligned, the universe will create or rearrange whatever synchronicities or meetings or openings or healing or graces will open the way into whatever I need to next become, and whatever I need to next do."

And the invitation described above, begins by you finding your way to the existential seriousness, the "stand", that coincides with "my soul claiming all of me", and articulating that as a request or by asking a question in the most real and powerful way you can.

Please write as much or as little as feels right to you.

2. 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.

If you are in the United States and you have no ready connection to how you can help, consider going to <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.