

Getting a Grip2
Conversation Guide for Groups or Classes
Five Sessions for Greater Clarity, Creativity and the Courage to Act
Frances Moore Lappé

I learn best through talking with others about what matters most to me. I trust that this is true for many of us. The following questions and suggestions are a starting point. I know you will create what works for you. Please send us guidelines you devise so we can share them with others. Onward! Frances Moore Lappé

Session One: SO WHY ARE WE CREATING A WORLD THAT NONE OF US WANTS? Asking the Biggest Questions (Chapters 1 and 2)

In welcoming and introducing, encourage each person to share why they are drawn to the discussion and what they hope to get from it. Encourage each person to read one or two passages from the book that had particular meaning for them. (Consider handing out the one-page overview of the five sessions found below at the end of this Guide.)

Get started by exploring our core assumptions about how the world works by discussing:

- In what ways do we agree or disagree with *Getting a Grip2's* premise that human beings create the world according to ideas we hold?
- How, briefly, do we personally answer Lappé's core question of why we're creating as societies a world that we as individuals abhor?

Then, everyone silently reviews the *Spiral of Powerlessness* inside the front cover, starting from a premise of "lack" and the *Spiral of Empowerment* inside the back cover, starting from the premise of "possibility."

Break into twos or threes to explore:

- Do these spirals and their consequences reflect our experience of the world?
- How would we alter the spirals to make them more accurately reflect our own understanding of both negative and positive cycles?

Everyone reconvenes to share insights from the smaller groups.

Now, in the whole group, directly discuss our core assumptions about human nature.

- Do we find valuable the new anthropological evidence suggesting why we may have evolved to be the most cooperative primates? What might its implications be?
- If the evidence of our pro-social nature is compelling, why do we think these qualities don't show up more today? What stands in the way?

Then probe this question:

- How does Lappé's framing of root causes differ from those widely held in our society? For example, the common view that the core problem is the less ethical people--those *others*, be they politicians, corporate leaders, or terrorists--who are manipulating or hurting the rest of us? And from there, that the answer must be to displace or get rid of them?
- How does Lappé's understanding differ? And, if we were operating from a frame that did not blame the evil other but focused on transforming anti-democratic economic and political structures that bring out the worst in humans, what difference might it make?

Activities before the next session:

- Ask friends and families what they believe are the deepest roots of our crises? And share with them the answers in *Getting a Grip2* and in the group discussion.
- Try redrawing the two spirals inside the front and back covers so that they reflect your reality.

Session Two. LIVING DEMOCRACY EMERGING What Democracy Feels Like (Chapter 3 and 4)

Greetings and brief reflections on key themes emerging from Session One experiences participants have had in sharing their learning with others.

Everyone silently reviews *Idea 1: Thin Democracy vs. Living Democracy* and then discusses:

- Did you grow up absorbing the Thin Democracy definition of democracy outlined in *Idea 1*? What are other messages you've picked up about democracy and what it expects of you?
- Lappé sees Living Democracy emerging as five qualities permeating a culture. It's a big shift from democracy defined as fixed institutions toward democracy as a culture of dynamic relationships that reflect certain deeply rooted human values? (She mentions inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability.) Does her view make intuitive sense to you? What is missing, and what would you change?

As a whole group, share stories of Living Democracy you've experienced or read about.

Then in twos or threes, discuss:

- What Living Democracy stories in Chapters 3 and 4 were most surprising and interesting to us? Which do we think are most important in shifting our culture positively?
- What seems to make these initiatives effective?
- How do they jibe, or not, with the core assumptions about the root causes of our global crises and human nature discussed in Session One?

Reconvene the whole group for conversation about:

- Which dimensions of Living Democracy mentioned in Chapter 4 are already underway in our community and which might be most likely to take root? What's missing? What would we most want to see?
- Consider the four revolutions that could be “winds in the sails” of Living Democracy that close Chapter 4. Then brainstorm together: What big changes do we think can make, or are making, possible the emergence of Living Democracy?

Activities before the next session:

- Bring a story of Living Democracy you've experienced or learned about, and be ready to share those qualities that explain its success you see.
- Ask friends and family to tell you the first words that come to mind when you say “power.” What do those associations suggest to you? Consider sources of power in your own life.

Session Three. RETHINKING POWER, CO-CREATING POWER (Chapters 5-7)

Greetings and brief reflections on key themes emerging from Session Two.

As a whole group, silently review *Idea 3: Rethinking Power*. Then respond:

- What responses did you get when asking others to react to the word “power”?
- Do you share the negative associations with power that Lappé says are common? Why or why not? Do you agree that these negative assumptions can obstruct our effectiveness?
- What does relational power – the creating of power together- mean to you?

Then in twos or threes, explore one or both of the following:

- Each recount a moment in our lives in community when we felt especially powerful. Why? What enabled these feelings of efficacy? How does it relate to the concept of “relational power”?
- Ask one another to identify one assumption about the limits of her or his power. Ask: How might we recast this limit to free ourselves to realize our power?

Reconvene the group to share highlights from the small groups and respond to the question:

- What are contemporary social initiatives we care about—from those in our community to the global level? How do they, or how do they not, build relational power?

As a whole group, silently review *Idea 4: Ten Arts of Democracy*. Then consider together:

- Which of these arts do you find most challenging? Why?
- Share stories of individuals using these arts effectively.
- Which art(s) do you most want to hone and share to use with your family or in your workplace or other associations?

In twos or threes, according to which arts interest participants, ask each to:

- Reflect on opportunities you have right in your life now to consciously develop one or two arts of democracy. Share your hunches about the rewards you would gain by improving these skills.
- Identify one first step you want to take, and consider a partner who might want to ask to pursue the goal with you.

Reconvene the group to share highlights of small group discussion.

Activities before next session:

- Pick one democratic art you would like especially to hone, and reflect on how you practice it. Use the guide, *Doing Democracy, Ten Practical Arts*, for suggestions. Look for examples in the news and in the experiences of people you know that clarify, challenge, or deepen your view of power and ways to enhance one's own power.
- Trying incorporating the terms you like in *Idea 5* about the "language of democracy." Try them or others in your everyday conversations
- One or more participants may want to volunteer to review the *Doing Democracy* guide and bring back stories and lessons to the next discussion.

Session Four. RETHINKING FEAR, CULTIVATING CIVIL COURAGE (Chapter 8 and 9)

Greetings and brief reflections on key themes emerging from Session Three.

As a whole group, review *Idea 6: The Inner World of Living Democracy: Moments of Dissonance* in silence.

- Does the Spiral of Fear, the bottom half, ring true? Have you experienced yourself or others in such a negative cycle?
- Does the upward Spiral of Hope ring true? What does Lappé mean by "embrace new tribes"? And how is this possible without getting stuck in new forms of "group-think" and "othering"?

In twos or threes, explore the following:

- Moments of dissonance in our lives and the choices we've made in their wake.

- Discuss what the discovery of “mirror neurons” might mean for using these moments of dissonance to move from “stuckness” in fear’s grip to the embrace of new life.

As a whole group, explore:

- Why does Lappé argue that how we respond to fear may be the most critical choice in our lives? Explore why we agree or disagree.
- Thinking practically, what do we need to make it more likely that we, and those close to us, can move from the spiral of fear to the spiral of hope?

As a whole group, silently review *Idea 7: Seven Ways to Rethink Fear*.

In twos or threes, consider the seven old thoughts/new thoughts, exploring:

- Which of the seven thoughts most resonate in your life experience? Share stories that these thoughts cause to surface.
- Do we feel we can learn to rethink fear as a signal, not a verdict? What difference would this shift make in our lives now?

Reconvene the group to discuss:

- How is fear being manipulated for political and commercial ends? What are ways we try to escape (and succeed in escaping!) being manipulated?
- Who and what could help us move from fear into power? *Idea 7* suggests one key is finding a “tribe” reinforcing your new insights. Discuss what this might mean to us.
- Share an empowering moment when we’ve learned that fear need not stop us.

Possible activities before next session:

- Discuss with friends and loved ones our own moments of dissonance—when long-held assumptions crack--and theirs and where these feelings have led us.
- Seek out at least one new source of learning about positive developments and courageous action. (See suggestions at the end of *Getting a Grip2*.)
- Be aware of, and record, fears that inhibit us and moments when we realize that we can “walk tall with fear.”

Session Five. SANITY IN MOTION—TAKING MEANINGFUL, SATISFYING ACTION FOR THE WORLD WE REALLY WANT (Chapter 10)

Greetings and brief reflections on key themes emerging from Session Four.

Then in the whole group, discuss:

Lappé' distinguishes between “issues” that can overwhelm us and “entry points” that help us to interrupt a whole pattern of causation.

- Is this distinction useful? What important entry points do we see now in our country or your community?

Lappé groups such entry points into three “course changers,” shifts powerful enough to create norms and institutions that bring out the best in us and protect us from the worst.

- Do these three make sense? Are there others we see as more important?

In twos or threes:

- Review *Idea 8: Living Democracy’s Checklist*. Share some of the most meaningful choices we are now making to live according to our values, and then apply the checklist’s questions to them.
- Also share personal or group actions we might want to take, and explore how they might fuel the positive *Spiral of Empowerment* inside the back cover.

Getting a Grip 2 ends with the possibility of a movement of people all over the world embracing a more active understanding of democracy and moving from opposition and blame to engagement in problem solving.

In whole group, discuss,

- What does such a movement means to us? What existing groups are already trying to do this?

Closure of the five sessions.

Discuss possibilities for staying in touch as a group or in twos or threes to provide ongoing support for making the changes we desire.

If participants are all members of of a larger group, such as a congregation or citizen organization, consider:

- Choosing at least one entry point the larger group can begin acting on now; then decide on how to introduce the suggestion.
- Selecting participants or a team to share key lessons from this series with the larger group.

In closing, reflect as a whole group on what you have learned from *Getting a Grip2*, sharing which *specific* messages you will take forward.

Also, please consider offering feedback to the author on the Getting a Grip blog about how to strengthen the book. She welcomes suggestions and will continue to integrate ideas from readers.)

Thank you.

Getting a Grip2 OVERVIEW:

Discussion Guide for Groups or Classes

Five Sessions to Gain Clarity, Creativity and the Courage to Act

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Session One. SO WHY ARE WE CREATING A WORLD THAT NONE OF US WANT? Asking the Biggest Questions (Chapters 1 and 2)

- Examine the *Spiral of Powerlessness & the Spiral of Empowerment*
- Discuss our core assumptions about human nature.
- Explore Lappé's reframing of root causes and clarify our own

Session Two. LIVING DEMOCRACY EMERGING What Democracy Feels Like (Chapters 3 and 4)

- Explore the difference between *Thin Democracy vs. Living Democracy*
- Discuss examples of Living Democracy within our community
- Consider the forces pushing for, and blocking, Living Democracy

Session Three. RETHINKING POWER, CO-CREATING POWER (Chapters 5-7)

- Examine ways to rethink power
- Understand relational power
- Identify ways to practice the *Ten Arts of Democracy*
- Examine our politically charged language and consider using new terms to better communicate our values and vision

Session Four. RETHINKING FEAR, BUILDING COURAGE (Chapters 8 and 9)

- Explore the Spiral of Fear vs. Spiral of Hope
- Discuss the 7 ways to rethink fear
- Share "moments of dissonance" and experiences of fear transformed into power

Session Five. SANITY IN MOTION—TAKING SATISFYING ACTION FOR THE WORLD WE REALLY WANT (Chapter 10)

- Distinguish between "issues" that can overwhelm us and "entry points" that empower
- Examine and discuss the book's three "course changers"
- Explore how *Idea 8: Living Democracy's Checklist* relates to actions we are now taking or are considering
- Explore the idea of a social movement in which justice and democracy meet. How might we be part of a movement shifting the culture from protest to problem solving?