

GETTING A GRIP

handouts for group discussion

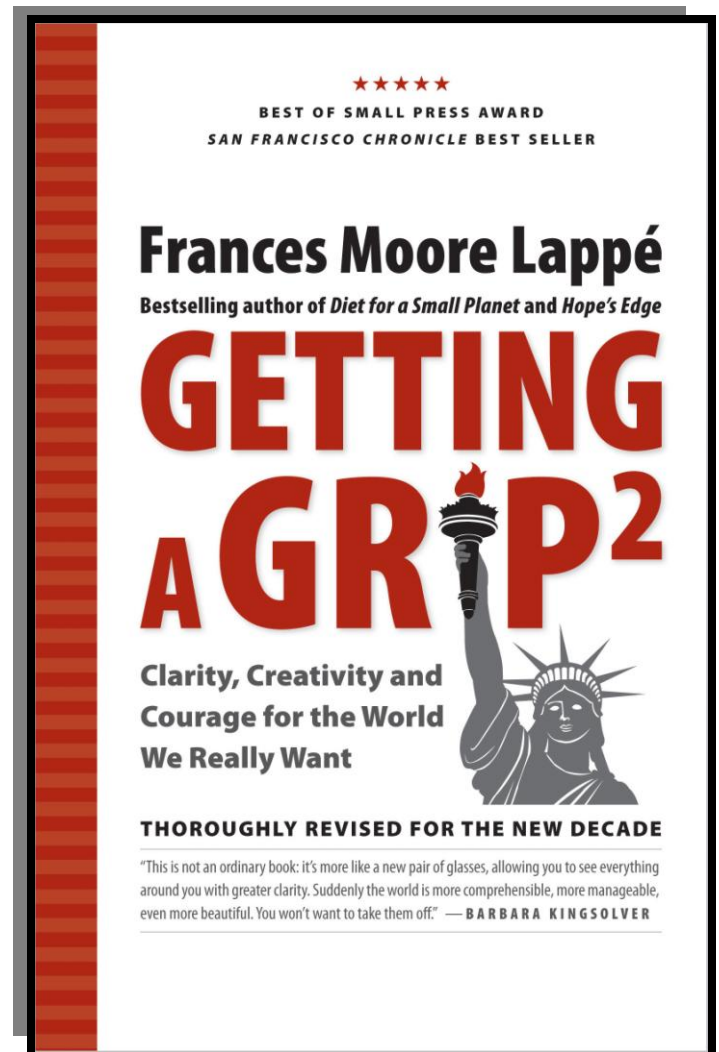
Eight Ideas for Living Democracy

Frances Moore Lappé, bestselling author of *Diet for a Small Planet*, distills decades of work in her eighteenth book, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Creativity, and Courage for the World We Really Want*. Many people feel our world is spinning out of control and yearn to know how they can help reverse our decline before it's too late. If you are among them, *Getting a Grip* is for you—to help you grasp the underlying causes of disempowerment and find a place of power in creating the world you want. But to get there we may have to let go of big, familiar ideas that keep us from seeing the solutions right before us: ideas about democracy, power, fear, and even our ideas about evil. Only by escaping the straightjacket of dominant dogma can we participate in an invigorating new stage of democracy that's already emerging—our planet's best hope for survival and our own best hope for happiness.

In *Getting a Grip 2*, Frances uses eight graphics/charts as pivotal ideas along this path of discovery. These are paired with text selections from the book on the following pages.

These handouts are provided by Small Planet Media for group and/or individual study of the materials and ideas presented in *Getting a Grip 2*. We are always interested in how these materials are being used, and how we might improve them.

To keep in touch, share ideas, or learn more about Frances' work, visit us at GettingaGrip.org or SmallPlanet.org



Thin Democracy vs. Living Democracy

Democracy? Why start there?

Democracy is *the* problem-solving device much of the world now embraces as the way to meet common needs and solve common problems. So if our definition of democracy is flawed, we are in big trouble.

The Living Democracy that I see emerging is not merely a formal government setup—elected bodies and countervailing centers of power. It is embedded in a wide range of human relationships. So—and here's the vital part—its values and practices apply just as much in economic life or cultural life as in political life. We don't have to leave our humanity behind when, for instance, we enter the workplace.

Put very practically, Living Democracy means infusing the power of citizens' voices and values into every part of our public lives and removing the highly concentrated power of money from governance.

Rest assured, Living Democracy isn't a new, fixed "ism," blueprint, or utopian end-state. It continually evolves, incorporating new experience as more and more people reject the view that democracy is a set system and begin to work with the idea that democracy is a set of system qualities, *driven by core human values*.

Idea 1 contrasts the assumptions behind the dominant and failing Thin Democracy with those motivating a richer practice of democracy, one that may become democracy's next historical stage.

So here's a question for you: As you skim *Idea 1*, does Living Democracy strike you as naïve or utopian, even if you don't want it to? If so, perhaps your reaction reflects assumptions about human nature itself.

Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity in a World Gone Mad* (Small Planet Media, 2007), pages 97 - 105.

IDEA 1: Thin Democracy vs. Living Democracy	
THIN DEMOCRACY	LIVING DEMOCRACY
What is it	
Democracy is a set system: elected government plus a market economy. We may have to keep cleaning it up around the edges, but our democracy is basically complete—it's the culmination of human history.	Living Democracy is a set of system-qualities that shape daily life. Its values of inclusion, fairness, and mutual accountability infuse not only political life but economic and cultural life as well. Living Democracy is always evolving; it's never finished.
How does it work	
The free market, along with government and corporate executives and experts, determines what happens. Citizens vote, work, and shop. A single rule—highest return to shareholders—drives the market, which does tend to concentrate wealth and power...and then influence the political process. But there's no other way; tampering with the market would kill its efficiencies and our way of life.	Citizens use their voices and values to shape public choices. They set rules to keep wealth continually circulating and to keep its influence out of politics. They decide what is a market commodity and what is a right of citizenship because it is essential to life. Moving beyond a one-rule economy (highest return to existing wealth), "values boundaries" guide the market, from environmental protections to anti-monopoly laws. Citizens' conscious shopping choices also foster healthy communities.
Who gets involved	
Only officials and celebrities have public lives.	All citizens have public lives. As buyers, savers, investors, voters, advocates, students, employers, workers, and members of social benefit organizations, our actions create the quality of our communities and the wider world.
What's required for effectiveness	
Public life is ugly and alienating. No special learning is needed, just thick skins and big egos! (Plus access to big bucks.)	Democracy is learned, and we practice its arts—active listening, creative conflict, negotiation, mediation, mentoring and other relational skills—we reap the joy of effectiveness.
What motivates people to engage?	
Self-defense. Getting involved in public affairs is a necessary hassle to defend our private lives and interests. It is the burden a free people must bear to earn our liberties.	We humans know our own well-being depends on healthy communities and that only in public engagement can we fulfill our need to connect with others in common purpose, to make a difference, to express our values and to fully respect ourselves. Engagement is part of the good life.

We All Have Public Lives

In Living Democracy, it's possible to align our inner selves. We don't have to chop ourselves in pieces and leave some of the best of us at home as we venture into our public lives.

What a boon to sanity.

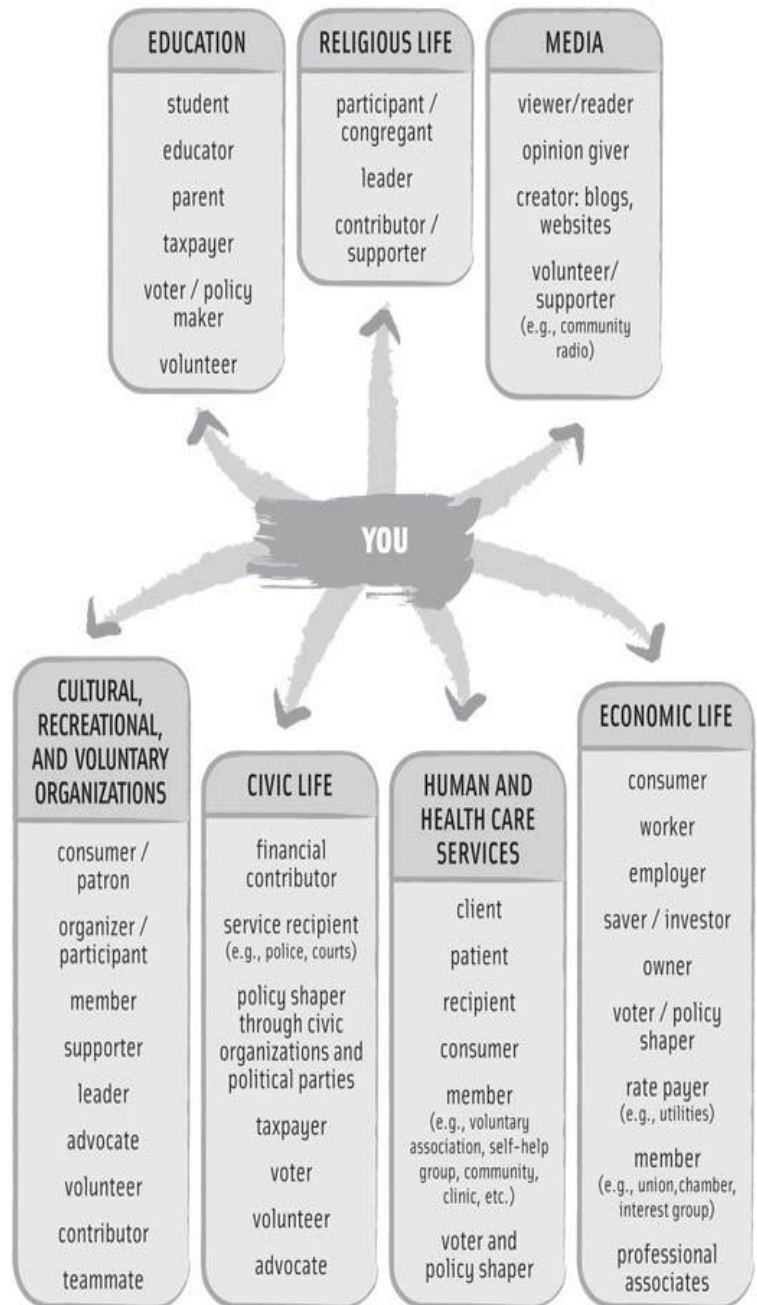
Living democracy's values of fairness, inclusion, and mutual accountability "work" throughout the many dimensions of our lives. In political life, for example, it starts with removing power of concentrated wealth and creating avenues even beyond voting for citizens' views to be developed and heard. But it doesn't stop there.

Notice that I'm using public life to refer not just to what officials have but to all the roles we play—including voter, buyer, employer, investor, saver, worker, and volunteer, as *Idea 2* suggests. **Living Democracy's values apply in diverse settings, from politics and economics to education, policing, the media, and more. This is what I mean by "everywhere."**

But trickiest to grasp is democracy emerging in economic life, so I'll dwell here a moment.

The ecological worldview in which Living Democracy is emerging enables us to see ourselves not as isolated atoms but as nodes in networks of relationships. Corporations then become just one channel we create to organize relationship networks. This means that corporations are *neither independent of us nor unchangeable monoliths*. A lot shifts: We wake up to our own power, the multitude of ways in which we already *do* shape corporations and *can* redirect them to life-serving ends.

IDEA 2: We All Have Public Lives



Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity for the World We Really Want* (Small Planet Media, 2010), pages 71-72.

Rethinking Power

Power isn't a four letter word. Power is an idea. And in our culture it's a stifling idea. We're taught to see power as something fixed—we either have it, or we don't. But if power is our capacity to get things done, then even a moment's reflection tells us we can't create much alone. From there, power becomes something we human beings develop together—*relational power*. And it's a lot more fun.

“Relational” suggests that power can expand for many people simultaneously. It's no longer a harsh, zero-sum concept—the more for you, the less for me. Growth in one person's power can enhance the power of others. *Idea 3* contrasts our limited, negative view of power with a freeing, relational view.

Sadly, though, many of us remain blind to such a promising reframing of possibility. **Imagining ourselves powerless, we disparage our acts as mere drops in the bucket or as, well, useless. But think about it: Buckets fill up really fast on a rainy night.** Feelings of powerlessness come *not* from seeing oneself as a drop; they arise when we can't perceive the bucket at all. Thus, to uproot feelings of powerlessness, we can work to define and shape the bucket—to *consciously construct a frame that gives meaning to our actions*.

As you now know, for me a “bucket” that both contains and gives meaning to our creative, positive acts is Living Democracy. It springs from and meets humanity's common and deep emotional and spiritual needs. So, I wonder: In a world torn apart by sectarian division, could Living Democracy become a uniting *civic* vision complementing our religious and spiritual convictions—a nonsectarian yet soul-satisfying pathway out of the current morass?

I can't be certain, of course, but I think so.

And then again, I ask myself often: *Whatever* the odds of reversing our global catastrophe, is there a more invigorating way to live than that of making democracy a way of life?

In answering that question negatively, I *am* certain.

IDEA 3: Rethinking Power

POWER IS	POWER CAN BE
Zero-sum. It strengthens some people at the expense of others. It divides what already exists.	Mutually expanding. It builds the capacities of all involved. It is creative, generating new strengths and new possibilities.
A one-way force: either you have it, or you don't. Life boils down to the powerful versus the powerless.	A give-and-take, two-way relationship. No one is ever completely powerless because each person's actions affect others.
Limiting, intimidating, and scary.	Freeing.
Controlling.	Collaborative.
Rigid, static.	Dynamic, always changing.
Derived mostly from laws, status, force, and wealth.	Derived from relationships, knowledge, experience, numbers, organization, creativity, vision, perseverance, discipline, humor, and more.
About what I can do or get <i>right now</i> .	Mindful of creating and sustaining relational power over time.

Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity for the World We Really Want* (Small Planet Media, 2010), pages 122 - 128.

Ten Arts of Democracy

People from all walks of life are shaping a democratic culture offering them much greater rewards. At the same time they're strengthening personal qualities that, in turn, make them even more effective. Skills that make possible this self-reinforcing pattern I call the arts of democracy. *Idea 4* lists ten of these. At smallplanet.org you'll find a fuller "how-to" guide, *Doing Democracy*.

I choose the term "art" quite deliberately, seeking to elevate the notion of democratic practice to something that is prized. **"Art" doesn't have to be something at which only the talented few can succeed. Developing an art is possible for each of us, but it can't be learned by rote or formula.** In any art, individuals add their own twists; and its practice calls on not one but many of our faculties.

Most important, an art can be learned. In fact, there is no end to the learning.

Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity for the World We Really Want* (Small Planet Media, 2010), pages 131 - 132.

IDEA 4: Ten Arts of Democracy

1. ACTIVE LISTENING

Encouraging the speaker and searching for meaning

2. CREATIVE CONFLICT

Confronting others in ways that produce growth for all

3. MEDIATION

Facilitating interaction to help people in conflict hear one

4. NEGOTIATION

Problem solving that meets some key interests of all involved

5. POLITICAL IMAGINATION

Re-imagining our futures according to our values

6. PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Public talk on matters that concern us all

7. PUBLIC JUDGMENT

Public decision making that allows citizens to make choices they are willing to help implement

8. CELEBRATION

Expressing joy and gratitude for what we learn as well as what we achieve

9. EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

Assessing and incorporating the lessons we learn through action

10. MENTORING

Supportively guiding others in learning these arts of public life



For more information, download our 54 page handbook guide, *Doing Democracy: 10 Practical Arts* at

http://www.smallplanet.org/images/uploads/doing_democracy_10_practical_arts_handbook.pdf

Learn More @ www.GettingaGrip.org

Toward a Language of Democracy

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.

—RUDYARD KIPLING

In “getting a grip,” a big piece of the challenge is disciplining ourselves to find and use words that convey a new frame, one that spreads a sense of possibility and helps people see emerging signs of Living Democracy fueling a Spiral of Empowerment. I fear that, too often, terms used by those striving to live democracy fail to communicate a positive alternative to our Thin Democracy.

Worse, they can be heard by others to mean the opposite of what the speaker intends. To underscore why I believe language is so important, let me toss out a few current, deadly terms, and propose alternatives. In Idea 5 you’ll find many more examples to mull over. My goal is to get us thinking, arguing, defining and ultimately determined to stick to words that communicate what we really mean.

Talking democracy is, of course, not just about challenging ourselves and others to choose specific words to better convey what we mean. It is about engaging in conversation about what matters most to us—and with people holding widely diverse perspectives. That’s why I love the motto of Conversation Cafés: “Tired of small talk? Try some big talk.” Check it out at conversationcafe.org. Everyday Democracy, which opened Chapter 4, helps communities use deep dialogue to solve problems. To explore this rich world of democratic dialogue, a great place to start is the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, at thataway.org.

At this moment of assault on civil discourse, let’s be really clear: We cannot get beyond band-aids to find real solutions to any of the huge problems facing our world without a functioning democracy. Grasping this, we can embed every action to move policy forward in an enlivening, inclusive, and fair process of engagement, always asking whether we are furthering the Spiral of Empowerment.



Toward a Language of Democracy

Idea 5: Toward a Language of Democracy

"How forcible are right words." –Job 16:25

WIDELY USED TERMS	CONFUSING CONNOTATIONS	★ ALTERNATIVES TO COMMUNICATE MORE ACCURATELY & POWERFULLY ★
Activist	Rabble-rouser, extremist with own agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged citizen • Active citizen • Empowered citizen
Anti-globalization	Backward, selfish, isolationist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-democracy • Pro-strong communities • Anti-corporate control • Anti-economic concentration
Capitalism—current economic system	Often equated with positive "free market" system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-rule economy • Plutonomy • Monopoly capitalism
Citizenship	Burden, duty, boring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public engagement • Community building
Conventional farming	Sounds benign and time-tested, when it is neither	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemically-dependent farming • Polluting agriculture • Factory farming
Conservatives	Implies devotion to preserving the environment and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those defending one-rule economics • Anti-democratic Right (when it applies)
Democracy	Limited to voting and government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Democracy: a way of living in which the democratic values of fairness, inclusion, and mutual accountability infuse all dimensions of our public lives.
Free trade	Implies absence of government control, an automatic mechanism. It doesn't exist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporation-favoring trade • Unfair trade
Globalization	Implies interdependence, more connection, free trade, cheaper goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global corporate control • Global corporatism • Economic centralization • Downward pressure on global wages
Government, as in U.S. today	Assumed to answer to citizens when it doesn't	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privately held government • Corporate-dominated government

Social justice	Associated with radical Left, forced equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairness • Fair opportunity • Freedom
Liberal	Favoring big government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressive • Favoring accountable government
Minimum wage	Fails to convey human impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty wage vs. living wage
National debt, per person	Lacks meaning to most people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Birth tax"—share of nation's debt each newborn faces¹²³
Nonprofit organization	Defined in negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Benefit Organization • Citizens' organization
Organic farming, Low-input	Focuses only on the absence of things—synthetic pesticides and fertilizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological farming: using the science of ecology to increase productivity and quality, while enhancing the environment • Knowledge-intensive farming
Pro-choice	Sounds trivial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-conscience*
Pro-life	Misleads: making abortion illegal doesn't lessen it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For criminalizing abortion
Protest, demonstration	Limited, defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Civic obedience"—a positive act to defend democratic values
Public life	Restricted to officials and celebrities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What we each do as buyer, worker, employer, parent, voter, investor, and in all the other roles we play daily making huge ripples
Regulation	Big Brother, top-down intrusive government, inefficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards protecting ownership diversity, competition, health, and the environment • Public protections; "values boundaries" within which the market serves community
Right to same-sex marriage	Focuses on sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to marry • Equal marriage
Taxes	Burden, rip-off of "our" money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership dues for a strong, healthy society • "The price of civilization," as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., put it
Welfare state	Coddling people, big bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair-opportunity state

*My gratitude to Kathleen Kennedy Townsend for this term, which she reports was suggested by a nun.

Inner World of Living Democracy

This book suggests that many of us are trapped in the *Spiral of Powerlessness* you can find inside the front cover. It suggests that our materialistic, competitive culture denies deep needs that live within virtually all of us. (Perhaps one sign is that more than half of us are unhappy with our work.) **Many of us learn to deny that we're squelching such needs—needs for cooperation and efficacy and fairness. Maybe it is just too painful to acknowledge how much of ourselves we're giving up. But if these needs aren't met, most of us don't just roll over and pretend we don't have them; we seek their satisfaction in less-than-ideal ways—moving us into the *cycle of fear*, in the lower half of *Idea 6*.**

Unable to satisfy our yearning for connection through common endeavor, we try the next best thing—feeling included because of our outer identities: wearing what's "in" or choosing work we think will please our parents or bring us status.

Our yearning for power gets twisted, too. Power, as I've said, means our "capacity to act." But if we feel we can't make a dent positively, we go for control. If we feel put down at work or at home, not heard or seen, we're tempted to try to exert control over something—maybe our child, our spouse. In its extreme form, the response to thwarting our innate need for power is violence.

A vicious cycle moves into high gear as we strive harder, causing the gap between our inner needs and the reality outside to expand into a chasm. The bigger it gets, the more we cling to our ways, for at least they're familiar. No wonder it can seem impossible to break free of this destructive cycle.

IDEA 6: Inner World of Living Democracy



Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity for the World We Really Want* (Small Planet Media, 2010), pages 158-160.

Seven Ways to Rethink Fear

We are to learn about fear, not how to escape from it.

—JIDDU KRI SHNA MURTI

It is an extraordinary era: We alive today may be the first in human evolution able to look at how our biology serves us—or does not serve us—and then choose: We can respond in old, programmed ways—flee, fight, freeze—or we can know fear simply as information. It may well be information showing that we’re pushing our growth edge, making fear’s energy now available for creative ends.

Instead of robbing us of power, I came to see fear as a resource we use to create the world we want. I’ve always imagined Reverend Njoya’s attackers as seven swordsmen at his door, and now I realize that, like him, we each will meet our seven swordsmen. Only for us, they are our culture’s dangerous ideas about fear. *Idea 7* contrasts seven limiting thoughts about fear that I’ve experienced and seven new, freeing ones.

Each of these ideas frames a chapter in *You Have the Power: Choosing Courage in a Culture of Fear*, which Jeffrey Perkins and I wrote together.

I now believe that, like Reverend Njoya, we can transform these assailants into that which can save us.

Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity for the World We Really Want* (Small Planet Media, 2010), pages 173-174, 176.

Idea 7: Seven Ways to Rethink Fear

OLD THOUGHTS	NEW THOUGHTS
Fear means I'm in danger. Something's wrong. I must escape and seek safety.	Fear is pure energy. It's a signal. It might not mean stop, it could mean go!
If I stop what I'm doing, I'll be lost. I'll never start again.	Sometimes we have to stop in order to find our path.
I have to figure it all out before I can do anything.	We don't have to believe we can do it to do it; the decision to act itself has power.
If I act on what I believe, conflict will break out. I'll be humiliated, ineffective, and rejected.	Conflict means engagement. Something real is in motion. It's an opening, not a closing.
Our greatest fears are our worst enemies; they drag us down and hold us back.	Our worst fears can be our greatest teachers.
If I'm really myself, I'll be excluded. If I break connection, I'll be alone forever.	To find genuine connection, we must risk disconnection. The new light we shine draws others toward us, and we become conscious choosers.
I'm just a drop in the bucket. My effort might make me feel better, but it can't do much.	Every time we act, even with fear, we make room for others to do the same. Courage is contagious.

From *You Have the Power: Choosing Courage in a Culture of Fear*
by Frances Moore Lappé and Jeffrey Perkins, Tarcher/Penguin 2004.

Living Democracy's Checklist

Joyful living, I'm convinced, happens when we hit that spot where a potent entry point that touches root causes also fires our own deep passions. I know that, once I discovered that spot—by asking, “Why hunger amidst plenty?” in my twenties—it set off a personal revolution, and I've been forever grateful.

To find that spot, a critical first step may be to recognize that the negative spiral can start deep inside us. If a feeling of “lack” lurks at the center of our pain, pain that we then project out and create in the world, we can start within ourselves to reverse it. Right now, we can focus on the strengths in ourselves and our loved ones and the possibilities right in front of our noses.


Think of something you are doing right now that makes you feel strong. Maybe you are engaged in your children's schools to make them more empowering for students; or helping to shift our society's failing frame by posting your opinions on a blog or your Facebook page; or sending off an email to the newspaper shaping your community's views. (Remember that even if it's not printed, someone has read it and registered a reader's concerns.)

Maybe you just became a supporter of your community radio station, or you are exploring whether your congregation might join the three million Americans working for basic fairness in our society through their faith communities. Maybe you've chosen to convert your home to solar energy, or to join in “community-supported agriculture” by buying a share in a nearby farm's produce. Or you are finally speaking out about discrimination you see at work.

Then think about what you've always wanted to do as you mull over the three “course changers” here, asking how your own passions align or don't align with the frame I'm proposing.

In figuring out how best to use my own capacities, it helps me to keep asking, *“How do I know Living Democracy when I see it?”*

So I've developed *Idea 8*, Living Democracy's Checklist, organized around five big questions. I hope it can help you weigh whether a given approach is interrupting the destructive causal flow and speeding the life-enhancing *Spiral of Empowerment*.

	Idea 8: Living Democracy's Checklist as we probe deeply, identify causal patterns, & choose entry points
AM I EXPANDING AND SPREADING POWER?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Does my action create new power, greater awareness, and strengthening of my own and others' capacities? Does it reduce power imbalances?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Is my effort contributing to a one-time correction, or does it generate ongoing, fairer and more effective decision making?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Does accountability flow one-way, or are multiple parties taking responsibility and being held accountable?	
AM I EASING FEAR OF CHANGE AND FEAR OF THE OTHER?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Am I modeling that it's okay to be afraid as we face the new?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Does my effort replace stereotyping with valuing and welcoming diversity?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Am I helping to build group bonds that strengthen courage without excluding others?	
AM I LEARNING AND TEACHING THE ARTS OF DEMOCRACY?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Does my effort teach and practice active listening, the creative use of conflict, ongoing evaluation, mentoring, and other essential skills for effectiveness?	
AM I CREATING MOVEMENT THAT IS SUSTAINABLE?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Is the initiative made inherently rewarding with big doses of real learning, humor, beauty, celebration, and camaraderie?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Is it being made widely visible so that those beyond the inner circle are motivated to act? (Don't forget our mirror neurons!)	
AM I REPLACING THE LIMITING FRAME WITH AN EMPOWERING ONE?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Am I helping to replace the core presumption of “lack” with that of “possibility”?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Am I helping to replace belief in fixed economic laws with confidence in human creativity?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Am I refocusing us on the goodness “in” human nature—our needs for connection, fairness, and effectiveness—we can tap to heal our beautiful planet?	

Adapted from Frances Moore Lappé, *Getting a Grip 2: Clarity, Courage, and Creativity for the World We Really Want* (Small Planet Media, 2010), pages 210-212.