



Connected Learning

Heeding the Call?

August 10, 2020

This anthology has been prepared in draft form for use in a special seminar curriculum and are provided for private, non-commercial use in extraordinary times. Additional information about the seminar and this volume is available from The Aspen Institute, 2300 N Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20037.

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Other resources,

including daily meditations, periodic podcasts, on-line seminars and discussions, and occasional on-line conversations about this week's curriculum, are available at:

aspeninstitute.org/programs/executive-leadership-development/resources-for-living-and-leading/

How to Use this Curriculum

Connected Learning in Times of Confinement is designed to support people and their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and networks by building upon the Aspen Institute's unique expertise in facilitating meaningful conversations in a seminar setting.

We envisage a weekly curriculum that can be used in pieces, or all at once, or in various combinations. Our hope is that these readings and guidance will allow you and others to reflect on fundamental human questions in ways that nourish our hearts, minds, and fellowship in a time of confinement. A curriculum (from the Latin *currere*, to run) is a path, an exploration, not something to be mastered but an invitation to discovery and wonder. These materials are curated to intrigue and delight you, and we invite you to reflect upon them on your own, and to share them—with family, friends, neighbors, teams, networks. In this, the journey itself is the destination, a call to thought, dialogue, and action.

In a journey it is often helpful to have a guide, and in this curriculum you will find three guides:

First, the authors themselves—

we do not need to follow the authors, but we do well to understand what they are saying;

Second, guiding questions—

for each reading, there is a set of guiding questions designed for individual and collective reflection; they are not the only (or even most important) questions, but a way of getting started; these may be found at the back of the packet and are best read after you have read the texts;

Third, general guidance—

for each discussion, participants and discussion leaders may want to remind themselves of some best practices; these may be found at the back of this packet.

We invite you to share these readings widely and encourage others to engage in conversation. As you do so, know that fellow seminar graduates and their families, friends, and colleagues are doing the same. We all contribute to a global chorus of conversation about ideas worth sharing and acting upon.

**—Todd Breyfogle, PhD
Managing Director, Aspen
Executive Leadership Seminars**

About Aspen Institute Seminars

The Aspen Institute Executive Leadership Seminars Department drives change through reflection, dialogue, and action in service of a more free, just, and equitable society. We do this by: curating brave spaces of shared meaning which help people become more self-aware, more self-correcting, and more self-fulfilling; deepening participants' humane sensibilities and capacities for moral judgment through an examination of the humanistic traditions; establishing meaningful connections among diverse people and organizations in service of a better society.

For more information, including information about customized programs for companies and other organizations, please contact Kalissa Hendrickson, PhD, Director, at Kalissa.Hendrickson@aspennst.org or 202-736-3586. [Learn more.](#)

Philosophical Basis

The Aspen Institute starts from an act of faith in the humanistic tradition: one must be reflective in order to insure that all human activity – political, scientific, economic, intellectual or artistic – will serve the needs of human beings and enrich and deepen their lives.

The Institute believes in the value both of the “Great Ideas” of the past as well as the importance of the sometimes inelegant and highly controversial ideas of the present.

The Institute is dedicated to the fundamental educational value of dialogue for mature men and women from different nations and cultures -- intercommunications between people of comparable competence from various backgrounds and specialized fields of experience.

The Aspen idea recognizes that the processes by which persons learn and develop or change their ideas are not mechanical or even purely rational. As there is a mystery at the edge of human thought, so there is a magic about human relationships, and the magic we attempt to invoke in Aspen is that of the sheer beauty of this area of the Rocky Mountains.

With Erasmus, we hold that “nothing human is alien” to the inquiring purposes of the Aspen Institute. The Institute intends to be, in sum, a place of excellence and excitement where men and women of the finest qualities of mind and spirit from all walks of life in the United States and abroad can meet to learn from one another through serious discussion of and work on significant problems facing society and the greatest ideas which have been expressed throughout history and today concerning these problems.

—J. E. Slater, President, The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1972

Readings

- 5 Guo Jianqiang, "Something Is Calling You"
- 7 Vaclav Havel, "Hope"

Something Is Calling You

by Guo Jianqiang
(1971–)

1 Something is calling you, calling you,
 calling you to go down Prosperity Place, Courthouse Street, Mojia
 Street Market, down the office blocks, the Arts Museum,
 down the various metaphorical windows on memory lane.

5 Something is calling you, calling you to enter a different city,
 to mingle with a different crowd, whose airs and graces remind you of
 those in your dream.

 Something is calling you, calling you to enter even more different cities,
 10 to wine and dine and sing or keep mum with even more people,
 and afterwards to exit into the wilderness, farther and farther away,
 into the grasslands, into the adjacent Gobi Desert,
 into a different desert, and the snowy mountains and the glaciers by
 that desert,

15 into the forests farther and farther away.

 Something is calling you, calling you to sleep on a flowerhead, on an
 ascending bird song,
 on a cloud, and on the sky above the clouds, on even higher skies.

 Something is calling you, calling you to descend from the sky, to wake
 20 up on the sea,
 to wake up on a scale of a fish in the Pacific.

 Something is calling you, calling you to walk into the great west coast,
 and then farther and farther away,
 into the wilderness, into the grasslands, into the adjacent Gobi Desert,
 25 into a different desert, and the snowy mountains and the glaciers by
 that desert,
 into the forests farther and farther away,
 into the shadow in front of your footsteps, into the sleepless, blood-red
 sunset,

30 into morning dew as light as a sigh.

 Something is calling you, calling you
 to walk into different layers of silky winds, into rough bags of winds,
 into fencing winds,

Guo Jianqiang, "Something is Calling You". Translated by Duck Yard Lyricists (Meifu Wang, Michael Soper, Peter Micic, and Johan Ramaekers). Available online at *21st Century Chinese Poetry*, http://modernchinese poetry.com/shikan.php#guo_jianqiang.

1 into fox and rabbit tracks, into the arcs drawn by migratory birds,
into the minute details of pictographs and the labyrinth of letters,
into this lifetime of yours stacked and stacked with memories
when the spirits, being revived and poured into the chalice, is gradually
5 looking amber.

Something is calling you, calling you.
Among mists everywhere and flowers in every corner,
you are a long-distance traveler through this world and one communing
10 with the ghosts.

Hope

by Vaclav Havel
(1936–2011)

1 The kind of hope I often think about (especially in situations that are particularly
hopeless, such as prison) I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of
the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the
soul; it's not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world
5 or estimate of the situation. Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of
the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately
experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.

 Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are
going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for
10 early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not
just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unpropitious the situation in
which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is. Hope is definitely not the
same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well,
but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. In
15 short, I think that the deepest and most important form of hope, the only one that
can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of
the breathtaking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we
get, as it were, from "elsewhere." It is also this hope, above all, which gives us the
strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as
20 hopeless as ours do, here and now.

Notes

Image of the Week



Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day*, (1927)

Notes

Guiding Questions

The best questions arise from careful listening (to the author, oneself, and others), and from the spontaneity of wonder

Guo Jianqiang, "Something Is Calling You"

- Read the poem aloud: What words, images, and/or feelings does the poem evoke in you?
- How would you describe the succession of things calling to you in the poem?
- Do you see yourself on a journey, a journey in response to a call?
- How do you understand the last line of the poem?

Vaclav Havel, "Hope"

- What does it mean to think of hope as a "dimension of the soul"?
- How does Havel describe the difference between hope and optimism? Is he correct?
- What gives you hope when things all around seem hopeless?

Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day*

- Set a timer and look at the image for 3 minutes: What do you see? What feelings does the image evoke?
- Is this a call of resurrection or resistance?
- In what ways do the figures heed the call, or not?
- Is this an image of hope?

General questions for the week

- Do you see your living and leading as expressions of a plan or as responses to a calling? Both? Neither? What are the differences between the two?
- When does optimism get in the way of hope?
- If you were to draw (or imagine) a picture of hope, what would it look like?
- What call are you not heeding?

Notes

Short Guide to Leading a Discussion

General Principles for Participants

- Read the text(s) to be discussed in their entirety (ideally twice)
- Make notes about what you understand, don't understand, agree or disagree with
- Focus comments and conversation on the ideas expressed in the shared text(s), not on outside
- knowledge
- Seek to understand your fellow participants, not to persuade them
- Be freely authentic and morally present
- Listen to the text, to others, and to yourself

General principles for discussion leaders:

- Hold the space for honesty and vulnerability: be honest and vulnerable yourself
- Ask questions, don't teach: the aim is shared understanding and meaning, not agreement
- Be attached to the conversation: avoid rigidly following your planned order of questions
- Make sure every voice is heard: don't move too quickly to fill the silence
- Start and end on time: end not with conclusions but with questions you're taking away

Format:

- Match the texts to the time allotted (*Each text can productively stimulate 20-40 minutes of discussion, and can be read discussed individually or together in one sitting, depending on the time available; it is better to end with more to be said, rather than straining to fill the time*)
- Begin with introductions:
 - name (if not everyone is well known to one another)

- what is on your heart and mind?
- the person speaking chooses the next person
- Set the frame:
 - remind participants to enjoy the gift of time and conversation by avoiding other
 - distractions
 - revisit the key general principles above
- It always helps to read a passage aloud
- Layer your questions: be patient, each layer builds upon the next
 - What does the text say? (sometimes we read the same thing different ways)
 - What does the text mean? (sometimes we interpret the text differently)
 - What does the text mean to me? (sometimes we apply the texts to ourselves differently)
 - What does the text mean for us? (we may have different understandings of what the text means for living in community)
 - What does the text mean for society? (we may have different approaches to what the text implies for action in society)

Some helpful tips to keep the conversation going (for discussion leaders and participants):

- "say more about that"
- "where do you see that in the text?"
- "how is that related to what N said earlier?"
- "do you think that's true?"
- "do others see it the same way?"
- "what did you see in the text that we haven't addressed?"



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