



Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future

Margaret J. Wheatley

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"I believe we can change the world if we start talking to one another again." With this simple declaration, Margaret Wheatley proposes that people band together with their colleagues and friends to create the solutions for real social change, both locally and globally, that are so badly needed. Such change will not come from governments or corporations, she argues, but from the ageless process of thinking together in conversation. Turning to One Another encourages this process. Part I explores the power of conversation and the conditions-simplicity, personal courage, real listening, and diversity-that support it. Part II contains quotes and images to encourage the reader to pause and reflect, and to prepare for the work ahead-convening truly meaningful conversations. Part III provides ten "conversation starters"-questions that in Wheatley's experience have led people to share their deepest beliefs, fears, and hopes.

Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future Details

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Sahana says

Time to begin talking again

A book whose time has come. A must read if we dream of bringing about true change and having courageous conversations...

Billicarole Evans says

This book is about is about communicating with one another. Wheatley writes how talking, face to face, is the easiest way of communication. This book is a great conversation starter. It inspires you to want to talk more, to make a difference. She explains how most of this world problems can be solved, by simply talking. I liked this book, because it inspired me to want to talk more when working out problems. After reading her book, it changed the way that I start conversations, and the content within them.

I did not like this book, because it was very repetitive. I felt as if I had read the same paragraph several times throughout the book.

WR says

Lovely book advocating good deep conversations. And suggesting broad topics that can be used as conversation starters. I liked the concept/idea. Just that I don't think I would be able to use them in large groups or with many people.

Judy says

Our adult class at church studied this book that encourages active listening.

Katherine says

This book shares some of the author's ideas about community and conversation, and promotes the concept that by changing how we think and engage with others we can change the world for good. While I did enjoy the book--particularly the collected stories, quotes, and poems on the subject--there was really nothing here that I haven't read elsewhere. If you don't mind a little repetitive writing it does provide the reader an opportunity to consider their own mode of thinking and communication.

Caleb Winebrenner says

Among books on community engagement, Margaret Wheatley's *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* is incredibly unique. It is not a book on facilitation, or pedagogy, or community building -- and yet dives to the heart of all three: dialogue with others. With all of the incredible tools and methods at our fingertips for engaging communities, working with young people, and creating spaces for learning, Wheatley asks us to go back to the basics, and have a conversation around the issues and questions that matter most to us and the people around us.

The book is not something I expect that every community builder, educator, or teaching artist will immediately think to read. This is partly why the book intrigued me. Wheatley is deeply influenced by Paulo Freire, and quotes from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education for Critical Consciousness* throughout the book, saying that conversations are the starting point for empowerment, engagement, and education. Sharing her commitment to education through dialogue and sharing of personal stories, early in the book I thought, "Okay, so how can I deepen the conversations that guide my practice?"

This question led me to love portions of the book, and have mixed feelings about other parts. On the one hand, since Wheatley is someone who can recommend practical and actionable tools for dialogue, and clearly knows the world of organizational development and leadership, I was left wanting a bit more of the how-to. On the other hand, Wheatley clearly doesn't intend this to be a book on how to have those dialogues. She even says that, "once something becomes a technique, it gets too complicated." She wants something simple and straightforward -- having genuine conversations around the issues that matter in our communities. I found that keeping this goal in mind was especially helpful.

We live in a world where too often issues are delegated to "leaders" to solve because of their "expertise." Wheatley's book is a humble reminder that expertise is an outgrowth of experience, something that everyone has in a community. Therefore, genuine conversations around the issues that inspire or anger us are what really brings a community together for change. In Part 1, Wheatley makes a case for why this should be done, and the healing potential it has for communities. In Part 2, she asks us to pause and reflect, offering artwork and key phrases from the book. I saw this part as inviting us away from our notions of expertise and finding outside solutions to intervene, and toward a more asset-based approach -- the primary asset here being a community's innate gifts of being with one another in dialogue.

The conversation starters in the book help with this, daunting as it can be to not have "methods.". Part 3 is a collection of essays and poems organized around twelve different thoughtful questions that can start conversations anywhere, with anyone. This is also where the most powerful feature of the book is found -- the quality and depth of the questions. Conversations are guided by questions like, "What do I believe to be true about others?" "What is my role in creating change?" "When have I experienced deep listening?" "Can I be fearless?" In other words, they are questions that indeed invite us to turn to one another and have a conversation -- no methods, no goals, no outside expertise. Just genuine sharing for the health and wholesomeness of our lives, and how we affect each other in community.

All in all I found the book to be very nourishing, and a rewarding read. It affirmed what many of us who engage communities through the arts and civic dialogue are trying to do, but left it up to the reader as to how to proceed in ways that felt the most authentic and giving.

Since reading the book, I've used several of the poems and portions of the essays as prompts for my students, as they create poetry and theatre around the issues important in their lives. What I found is that the book does

not call us to simple answers, or quick chats. It asks that we take time to think about the crucial conversations in our communities, and then, with the essays and poems as possible starting points, we begin that journey. It is not something that can get packaged up as a neat "teachable moment." Those conversations form an ongoing process, one that each of us as citizens and artists concerned with the life and well-being of our communities, would do well to partake in.

Karen Jordan says

This book was the closest thing to a spiritual renewal I have experienced in a long while. Wheatley argues convincingly that we need to restore the practice of conversation. That our state of exhaustion, frustration, and anxiety are built upon a foundation of quick, dispassionate, joyless exchanges. I would encourage anyone who is feeling a bit disheartened about our world and consider Wheatley's position that human connectedness is the place from which we can find solutions, hope, and faith in each other. Really wonderful.

Frank says

Margaret Wheatley believes that we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. I agree with her and liked this book. She advocates real conversation. As she writes:

"Not mediation, negotiation, problem solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well."

Or as she puts it plainly, "We can turn away, or we can turn toward. Those are the only two choices we have."

Along the way she has some good thoughts about how to go about this. For example, she challenges the reader to listen for what surprises or disturbs him or her in a conversation.

I did not find her ten discussion starters helpful starters for discussion. They are profound jumping off places for thought supported by some well selected quotations, poems, and stories. They do not, however, help me in what her stated goals are, which is to change the world by getting people talking and in the process discovering solutions to shared concerns. She writes, "Reality doesn't change itself. It needs us to act."

I agree. And while I did like this book, I found more help in the overly aggressively titled *Fierce Conversations*.

Rev. Linda says

During our Connections Week at TCC, a speaker mentioned this book by Margaret Wheatley. I remembered

reading her first edition in 2002, and this one was a nice refresher of her wonderful writing style. This second edition added two new conversations: What is my role in creating change? and Can I be fearless? One of my favorite sections was a poem that Wheatley included by Ina Hughes titled "A Prayer for Children", in particular the last two verses:

"And we pray for those Whose nightmares come in the daytime, Who will eat anything, Who have never seen a dentist, Who are never spoiled by anyone, Who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep, Who live and move, but have no being.

We pray for children Who want to be carried And for those who must, For those we never give up on And for those who never get a second chance, For those we smother. And for those who will grab the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it.

We pray for children. Amen." (Wheatley, 2009, 89)

Laura says

I want my lessons to be more specific.

Peter Van says

Here we go, my first book finished this year. A great book about conversations, reaching out and building relationships as a way to overcome fear, become fearless.

Not a very practical book, but enough food for thought to be interesting till the end. Beautiful words.

Val Brown says

Very quick read - I finished the meat of it in a few hours. It's part motivational part reminder about what is possible. It will be particularly helpful for me because it really gets to the "why" of my preferred way of building community. As always I'm looking forward to hosting many conversations.

V says

A must read! I'm so glad I reread this assume book. It's very timely and could have been written today. I'm planning on continuing to use in my work and in helping to make our world a better place a better place.

V

Cathy says

This is a book that everyone should read. Meg Wheatley writes about human behavior and communication. This book, originally written in 2002 and augmented in 2008, speaks to the need for us to slow down, spend time in conversation and dialogue, and thereby build community.

Like Margaret Mead, she argues that great change happens when two or more people engage in meaningful conversations.

The book is short and full of inspirational ideas, poetry and 10 conversation starters.

Very highly recommended.

Maulida Ayudhanti says

The style of the book is motivational, very optimistic, and more inspiring than practical. I like that she presents her insight pretty cohesively. The poems surely complete the aesthetic experience.

I think anyone can benefit from reading this book.
