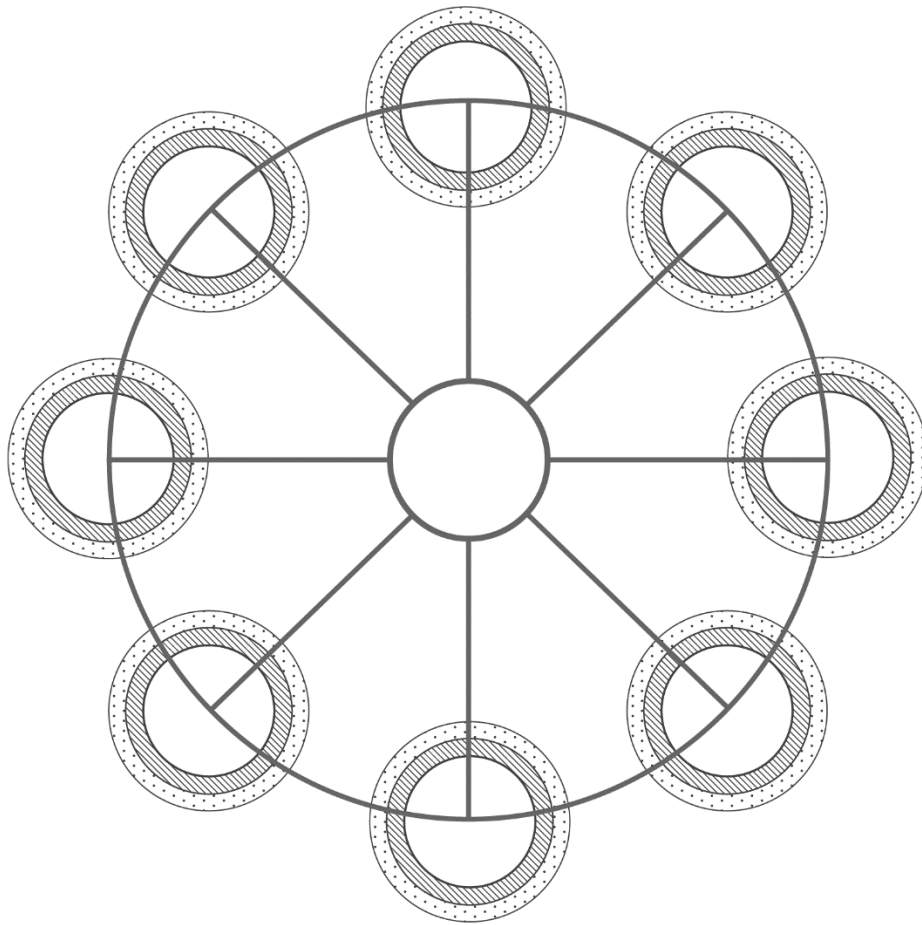


CONVERSATIONS FOR BOOK CIRCLES

By Karen Celeste Hilfman
From *The Mended Mirror*
www.AuthenticConnectionCulture

A CIRCLE OF CONNECTION
(HOLDING SPACE FOR MEANINGFUL CONVERSATION)



SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATIONS FOR BOOK CIRCLES

BASED ON HOW *THE MENDED MIRROR* INTERSECTS WITH YOUR LIFE

In Intentional Circles we create space for the wisdom within us and amongst us to emerge. When we gather in Circle it is an intentional time to ponder the intricacies of life based on our experiences, questions and wonderings. In Circle we do not engage in debate as though we expect there to be one right answer. Instead we listen deeply to the layers of insight and weave them together to continuously create a tapestry that is an expression of the beauty of life filled with complexities, joys, sorrows, possibilities.

The Conversation Starters below are an invitation to consider concepts, ideas, thoughts or experiences expressed in the book from the perspective of how they intersect with your life. Choose ones that nudge at you. Each person in the Circle can choose a different question or topic to share how it intersects with their life, or you can delve deeply into one topic.

As you enter into Circle, seek to hold space for each other so that you can each name your own insights, your own wonderings. Do not try to fix each other or correct each other. Simply hold the space and receive the gift of one another's sharing. Listen deeply with the purpose to understand rather than respond. Allow there to be silence in your midst rather than chatter to fill the spaces.

When it feels like you are ready to enter into Significant Conversation together you might invite one another to enter into Intentional Circle with the invitation:

We are invited to offer our names into the Circle
to indicate our willingness to be together in life-giving community
where we can trust that we can be authentic and honest,
where our stories will not be shared beyond this Circle,
where we will not criticize or correct each other but rather be curious together,
where we will hold space to listen deeply to the wisdom within us and amongst us.
If you are willing to be together in this way, offer your name into the Circle
(*offer your name into the Circle by going left around the circle*).

At the conclusion of the Book Circle there is the reading of the Commissioning Mom loved, offered as an invitation to say together to close your time in Circle. They are the words with which the book ends.

HOW DOES THIS STORY
INTERSECT WITH YOUR LIFE AND EXPERIENCE?

Pick a topic or topics that speak to you individually or as a group to reflect on how the concepts, memories or experiences in the book intersect with your life. Share a story or an experience from your life that connects with one of the themes in the book. For example:

- 1) Different stories in the book resonate with different people because they are familiar, like an echo of their experiences in life. If that is so for you, how do the stories, experiences or feelings described in the book align with your story? For example:
 - a) Have you ever felt like you were living behind a mask or a façade? If yes, what mask or façade have you lived behind and why?
 - b) Is there a core of strength within you that you keep a lid on in order to fit in? If yes, what is the strength you hide within you and what happened in your life that taught you it was wise to not share the fullness of your power?
 - c) Were there experiences in your childhood that have caused you to be passionate about something as an adult, and if so what is it you are passionate about and why? (An example is seen in the book of the passion to create healthy, life-giving community that first awakened through difficult experiences in kindergarten and grade two.)
- 2) Identify insights or concepts in the book that particularly make sense to you or express perspectives that align with your awareness of life.
- 3) Share an experience from your life when you felt like your style of intelligence was not appropriate or undervalued.
- 4) Have you had a person in your life who has struggled with mental health challenges? Have you had the experience of becoming aware of a mental health issue after simply coping with it for many years because it was not understood? If so, what was your experience like?
- 5) Have you had experiences that helped you to understand or identify the impact of DNA/genetic influences? If yes, in what ways have you experienced the impact of DNA awareness?
- 6) Do any of the memories in the story evoke memories for you? If yes, which ones? (For example, did you watch *Ed Sullivan* on Sunday night or wear go-go boots or find time alone as a kid to recharge yourself?)

- 7) What understandings or interpretations in the book are contrary to your wisdom about life? What is your perspective?
- 8) Does the concept of connecting to your “authentic self” or “true essence” resonate with your life? If so, share a story or an experience from your life.
- 9) Are there topics in the book that you want to know more about? If so, what?
- 10) Are there topics in the book that you know something about and want to share?

NOTICE WHAT YOU NOTICE

Notice what you notice is a process used in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises that encourages us to read until something catches our attention. We are then invited to sit with what has caught our attention to see what it is we are being nudged to notice.

Below are a series of quotes from the book. See if one section particularly draws you. Then slowly read what has caught your attention to notice what you notice. Trust that what jumps out at you is worth pondering. Allow insights, thoughts and perspectives to emerge.

As you read through the quotes and concepts, allow yourself to wonder:

- Do any quotes or words resonate with me?
- When I notice something, how does the word or thought or concept interact with my life?
- Do any of the statements align with my experience?
- Is this a thought or concept that cracks open my understanding, and if so how?
- Are there concepts I want to further explore?
- How is this word or thought speaking to me?

I remember choosing a story from the Bible that I had drawn on many times before to provide people with an experience of this way of being open to what Wisdom longs for us to know.

Normally when I use this particular story, what catches my attention is the moment when Jesus stands up to the storm and declares “Be still!” Those are words that often speak to my life, providing me with the reminder to be still in the midst of the whirling demands of life in order to centre myself.

But this time, when life is crashing apart in the church, the phrase in the story that catches my attention is “cushion.” Cushion? I sit with it, puzzled. Then I realize that in the story, in the middle of a raging storm, Jesus lays his head on a cushion. What I am being nudged to notice is that I am not sleeping well. I work until long past midnight night after night and then rise with the sun. I need to notice that I am definitely heading toward difficulty. I need to put my head on a cushion and sleep, even in the midst of a raging storm.

Listening for what speaks to you, even if it does not align with the fullness of the text, is an invitation to create space for your own wisdom about your life to emerge. Enjoy as you notice what you notice!

A) LIFE LESSONS

a) In my life's work and during the writing of this book, I identify lessons I have learned from my Mom about finding wholeness in the midst of brokenness.

13 Life Lessons that have emerged through my relationship with my Mom:

- Deal with issues when they arise.
- Follow the flow of energy. If you meet resistance, be like a river and keep searching for a place that allows you to move with ease so that you are flowing with the energy of life rather than fighting the underlying currents.
- Choose to see differently by shifting your focus.
- Listen for, and to, inner wisdom and intuition.
- Pause so that as many people as possible know where we are trying to go.
- Trust that there is goodness trying to emerge.
- Reconnect to your core essence and the Divine.
- See the light within yourself and others, even if you have to look beneath the rubble.
- Allow curiosity to lead you rather than judgment or expectations.
- Listen for the wisdom of all the perspectives.
- Stop 'shoulding' on yourself.
- Let gratitude and beauty fill you.
- Focus on what you want to grow.

b) Throughout the book, life lessons about self-care and spiritual well-being are identified. The quote below describes the impact of camping alone for nine days when I am completely done-in and need to be recharged.

As the days unfold, the power at my core has the opportunity to be charged. In this time of healing solitude I become aware that during the past many months, in the midst of the crashing and rumbling that felt as disruptive as an earthquake, there has been a sense of wholeness that never completely left me. Now, with my power reserves topped up, the wholeness within me is again filling the landscape of my soul rather than being diminished to a tiny still point in the middle of chaos.

B) THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF SHARING OUR STORIES

a) When we risk being open, vulnerable and honest about our struggles and our joys, the fullness of who we are emerges and connects us to one another at a profound, authentic

level. Sharing our stories allows us to take the risk of coming out from behind masks that separate us from one another and from ourselves. Experience has taught me that the pattern of hiding behind masks and disconnecting from authentically engaging in life is at the root of some of our greatest struggles in the times in which we live. We are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness rooted in the destructive powers of judgment, shame, blame and guilt. We are experiencing a culture that is numb to some of the deepest travesties of human history as we sooth ourselves with over-consumption of things, addictive substances and repeated mindless patterns. Too often, we are cut off from the roots of meaning at the core of our being as we strive to survive by fulfilling shallow expectations, rather than allowing ourselves to be nourished by the rich of wisdom and the vision of collaboration that is deep within us. Sharing our stories connects us at the deep level of our profound longing for community, creativity, compassion and acceptance.

b) I continue to be amazed at the power of untold stories. They create energetic havoc when we walk through this world carrying the burden of our silence.

c) The power of sharing our stories is a power that can change the world. Sharing our stories releases creative energy, which allows future possibilities to emerge rather than allowing untold and unexamined stories to quietly suck the life out of us by nursing unacknowledged wounds of the past.

d) Throughout my life, I have learned again and again that though life can be demanding and appear to be fractured or even crushed, somewhere in the midst of the rubble, there is goodness and a longing to be whole that yearns to emerge amongst us. This is a story about finding wholeness even in the midst of brokenness. It explores how to connect to the power of wholeness, the power of love, in the midst of the brokenness in our world today.

e) I am aware from experience that the weight of secrets is a burden that has the potential to become lighter when we can find a safe place to share. It's intriguing to me to notice how many people tell me one of their parents also lives with mental health challenges when I share my story. Sharing our stories connects us at the level of authenticity, which has the potential to dispel the feeling of being isolated and alone.

C) AUTHENTIC CONNECTION COMMUNITY

a) My central learnings that impact my life are the awareness that:

- 1) When we connect to our true essence, to our authentic self, we connect to a reservoir of power deep within us that is filled with love and creativity.
- 2) When we risk connecting to one another in a deeply authentic way, we see life differently; no longer are we bound by small-ego thinking that is rooted in limitations, entitlement and the compulsion to protect our territory, rather we see creative possibilities, abundance and incredible goodness.

3) When we connect at an authentic level as a community by creating a commons where everyone is respected and belongs, the wisdom within us and amongst us has the opportunity to emerge to enable us to recognize future possibilities that can enhance life if we work together.

b) One of my hopes for our world is that we awaken more fully to the transformational power of love, a power that longs to engage our passions, teaches us to celebrate diversity, and compels us to risk imagining a way of being together that leads to wholeness. Awakening to this power within equips us to co-create a world committed to the well-being of all. For me this story of connecting to wholeness even in the midst of brokenness, of experiencing resilience even when life shows up with difficulties, deepens our hope as we work together to mend the world.

c) We are to create the opportunity for love to expand and creativity and compassion to grow. We are to create space for the Kingdom or the Realm of God to emerge in our midst, which happens when the power that reigns is love. This intention needs to be at the core of the narrative that informs our lives. We need a narrative that sees the goodness, connects to the energy of love, and calls us to live as ones who are committed to the common good, where resources are shared, gifts are celebrated, the earth is respected and we listen deeply to the wisdom within us and amongst us. When we connect in community and really see one another, our inner capacities to cultivate the seeds of possibilities expand.

D) OUR SHARED JOURNEY

While this is the story of my ongoing journey home to who I am, rerouted by unexpected detours, it is also a glimpse into our shared story as humans as we seek to: 1) be in healthy relationship with ourselves, with each other and with the Earth; 2) create space for love to emerge, for acceptance to expand, for possibilities of an alternative vision to be considered, and for creativity to be our response when pathways to wholeness and the common good become obscured.

E) REACTING VERSUS RESPONDING

REACTING	vs.	RESPONDING
<i>Based on Middle Circle of External Expectations</i>		<i>Based on Centre Circle of Authentic Self</i>
Life reflex, not conscious		Conscious, aware of choices
Automatic		Grounded, genuine

Objective “you” statements that come from the head and disconnect us from our own story by speaking from a detached perspective	Connected “I/we” statements that come from head and heart and connect to our own story by speaking from a personal perspective
I know I can fix you	I honour the wisdom in you
A sense of entitlement that lacks ownership and blames	Takes responsibility for self and focuses on the well-being of all
Difficult to disengage from demands and worries	Easy flow of energy toward possibilities and passions

F) BOOK DEDICATION: TO ALL ON THE JOURNEY TO WHOLENESS

WHOLENESS:

Coming home to ourselves;
connecting to the Wisdom within us and amongst us
to create Community that reflects our True Essence,
imbuing the world with hope through the power
of the Universal Consciousness of Love
found deep within the centre of who we are.

Through Authentic Connection to Self, Community and the Earth,
through recognizing the Earth, one another and ourselves as Beloved,
through acknowledging and honouring our oneness with all of life,
through deep listening and deepening conversation,
through alignment with the flow of life-giving energy,
... we expand our capacity to create Community and the Commons
where together we imagine and engage possibilities
to journey toward a transformed way of being
rooted in and empowered by love
creating space for the emergence of
a lived vision of the well-being of all.

As a result of connecting in a deeply authentic way
we see life differently;
no longer are we bound by small-ego thinking that is rooted in
limitations, entitlement, blame and the compulsion to protect our territory;
rather we see creative possibilities, interconnection,

abundance and incredible goodness.
We shift from an ego to an ecological perspective
in order to become resilient and sustainable
in all aspects of life;
economics, ethics, academics, decision-making and politics
which all reflect the way we
engage in relationships
at personal, local and global levels.

The journey to wholeness awakens us
to the light that emanates from the centre of all of life,
which longs to illuminate a pathway forward that is empowered by love.

While this light is often covered over by
the demands, destruction, brokenness and noise of life,
it is not extinguished; it remains constant in its essence and presence.

The experience of wholeness,
arising from developing
an intentional Culture of Authentic Connection,
is a way of being
when we choose to see
our self, one another, the Earth, and all of life
with eyes of love and with hearts open to possibilities.

G) CREATING AUTHENTIC CULTURE THROUGH INTENTIONAL CIRCLES

a) Authentic Connection Culture emerges from an intentional way of being in which we:

- ✓ listen deeply;
- ✓ connect to Wisdom within us and amongst us;
- ✓ honour our own and each other's gifts;
- ✓ share laughter and tears, joys and struggles comfortably;
- ✓ create a safe space where we can be brave and speak
from our heart, mind, experience and soul;
- ✓ commit to action for ongoing transformation
as we respond to our life purpose and call;
- ✓ encourage, support and be accountable to one another
as we seek to live a vision of wholeness;
- ✓ honour creativity and discover clarity emerging in our midst;
- ✓ deal honestly and kindly with issues before they fester;

- ✓ follow the flow of energy to align ourselves with pathways that honour who we are and how the Spirit calls us to be.

This shift in culture away from
being consumers and individualistic emerges
as we connect to our core wisdom and creativity
at the centre of our authentic self
which compels us to develop healthy life-giving community.

b) From Disconnected To Connected:

A 13-Step Connection Strategy For Self And Community

13 Steps to Connect to the Power of Transformation, Meaning, Purpose and the Authenticity Within Each of Us to Enhance Our Life Together in Community:

- 1) Connect authentically with self and others.
Disconnect from expectations that are external or in opposition to your true self, disconnect from building walls within that separate you from *You* and from the people around you, disconnect from wearing masks to hide behind.
- 2) Develop intrinsic motivation.
Disconnect from insecurity, judgment and the need for external affirmation, which can destabilize our connection to our core.
- 3) Release, lament and claim the insights.
Disconnect from being a victim to old wounds.
- 4) See differently.
Disconnect from dumping energetic garbage on others or ourselves.
- 5) Expand compassion, curiosity and laughter.
Disconnect from our small-ego self, which focuses on defending territory, a sense of entitlement and personal desires as the highest goal.
- 6) Speak truth simply.
Disconnect from blame and judgment.
- 7) Listen for inner guidance.
Disconnect from dishonouring and ignoring inner wisdom.
- 8) Reclaim power and purpose.

Disconnect from wandering through life feeling powerless.

- 9) Energize the vision and longings that emerge from deep within.
Disconnect from focusing on and energizing what we don't want to grow.
- 10) Create authentic relationships of connection.
Disconnect from being fearful and phony.
- 11) Engage in significant conversations that include laughter and tears and lots of wonderings.
Disconnect from shallow, veneer-thin dialogue filled with catty comments and opinions that are declared as "the" answer.
- 12) Tap into the wisdom and creativity of future possibilities.
Disconnect from dependence on logic and past experience as the only valued guides.
- 13) Live your call: trust your intuition and gut response.
Disconnect from living the life you think you "should" live and start living the life your passion calls you to live.

CLOSING OF BOOK CIRCLE CONVERSATION

As Book Circle draws to a close,
consider saying together the commissioning Mom loved:

And now let us go forth into the world
with a daring and tender love.
The world is waiting.
Let us go in peace.
And in all that we do,
may we do it nourished by the power of love
that is deep within every one of us.

As we journey
may we see the face of Love in everyone we meet
and may everyone we meet see the face of Love in us.

May this be so
as we connect to our authentic power
and awaken the gifts amongst us
of creativity, resilience, wholeness and wisdom!