Reweaving Ourselves: Leadership in a World on Fire:

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Draft Syllabus Spring 2027

Wednesday evenings from 4-7pm in Cambridge, MA

Introduction

Our world is falling apart.

What does it mean to be alive and to be human right now? What should we devote our lives to?

How did we get here? How can we bear the grief, rage, and powerlessness that opening ourselves up to what is happening often entails? What can we do that might make a difference?

I do not, of course, know the answers to these questions, but this class is for you if you're looking for a highly interdisciplinary, collective conversation about them, bringing together students from across the university and leading-edge practitioners from a wide variety of fields. My experience has been that you are likely to learn at least as much from the other students in the room as from me.

Drawing on a mix of readings, experiential practices, and class visits with leading-edge practitioners, we will explore the idea that a loss of connection – to ourselves, to each other, and to the natural world – is at the root of our current crisis, and that doing the inner work necessary to address this disconnection could not only support us as individuals and communities but might also play a central role in driving broader, transformative systemic change.

Throughout the class, we will explore what all this might mean for you – how you experience yourself, how you frame the meaning and purpose of your life, and how you decide to engage with the world. My hope is that you will leave the class with a supportive personal practice, a much richer sense of the levers that might drive transformative systemic change, and some ideas about what you might do with your own life.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance at every class is mandatory except in the case of pre-approved absences or genuine emergencies.

2. Six short papers (500 words max) responding to the week's readings, one due approximately every other week on the Monday evening before Wednesday's class. Prompts for these papers will be shared a week in advance.

3. Membership in a small (coached, probably virtual) learning circle that will meet for an hour every week. Your goal will be to support each other's learning and to explore together how you might implement what you are learning in your own life.

4. A commitment to spending at least fifteen minutes a day following some kind of centering or grounding practice. We will offer you a wide range of options to explore – from walking in nature to journaling to practicing gratitude to Tai Chi to meditation and more.

A Note on Experiential Practice

We will invest a significant amount of time in shared experiential practices. We will, for example, practice deep listening, holding grief and other difficult emotions, perspective-seeking and perspective-taking and exploring our reactivity when we are confronted with difficult ideas and different opinions. Participation in all the exercises will be entirely voluntary, but there will be challenging moments. We will do my best to support the creation of a "good enough" container – but we will be relying on you to actively participate in holding whatever emerges in ways that can support a transformational process for all of us. If at any time you feel unsafe or uncomfortable please reach out to me or another member of the teaching team so that we can find a way to support you going forward.

Required Books

a) *Reimagining Capitalism*, Rebecca Henderson
b) *Incorruptible*, Eric Ries
c) *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Amitav Ghosh

(There is a small scholarship fund available for those who might need support in acquiring these books. Please contact Ray Carp, Prof Henderson's assistant, if you need help on this front.)

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1) January 27: Introduction: what is going on?

- Case: "Richard Phillips: Spiritual Grounding in Times of Crisis," HBS Case 325-091
- "Belovedness as Alchemy," Amy Elizabeth Fox
- Case: "The Push to Save the Great Salt Lake," Nicole Marie and Rebecca Henderson

Recommended but not required:

- Review of *Don't Even Think About It*, George Marshall
- Or watch: "The Greatest Story Never Told," George Marshall
- *Governing the Commons*, Elinor Ostrom
- *Why Liberalism Failed*, Patrick Deneen, preface (pages xxv–xxvii) and introduction (pages 1–20)

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2) February 3: The polycrisis is with us: but we could fix it if we chose to

- "Key Findings," pages 7–12 in *Global Risks Report 2026*, World Economic Forum
- Climate maps, Probable Futures: https://probablefutures.org/climate-maps/
- "The Urgency of Building Systemic Risk Capacity in a Polycrisis World," Ajay Gambhir et al., *One Earth* 9, no. 4 (April 17, 2026), pages 1–3 only
- "Introduction: On Climate, Ecological and Societal Breakdown," chapter X in *Why Climate Breakdown Matters*, Rupert Read
- "The Love of Thousands," chapter 2 in *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*, Sherri Mitchell
- Readings on solutions by topic will be provided; choose a topic
    - Four major solution areas: climate, food, water, and ecosystems/rewilding

Recommended but not required:

- "This Is the New Disorder," *New York Times*, September 1, 2026
- Listen: Nate Hagens with Sarah Wilson on *The Great Simplification*
- "Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement," Michael Lawrence et al., *Global Sustainability* (2024)
- The six papers listed here: https://bsky.app/profile/thierryaaron.bsky.social/post/3mhx2pijvek2v

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3) February 10: Reimagining organizations & their governance structures

- Case: "Nehemiah Mfg. Co.: Providing a Second Chance," Brian Trelstad, HBS Case 9-320-008
- Case: "Reimagining Ashley Stewart (A)," Jack Brookes, Rebecca Henderson, and James Rhee
- Case: "Turning Ashley Stewart Around?" Jack Brookes, Rebecca Henderson, and James Rhee
- "Innovation in the 21st Century: Architectural Change, Purpose, and the Challenges of Our Time," Rebecca Henderson, *Management Science* 67, no. 9 (2021): 5479–5488
- *Incorruptible*, Eric Ries, introduction and chapters 3 and 5
- Case: "1worker1vote: MONDRAGON in the U.S.," Rebecca Henderson and Michael Norris

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4) February 17: Why are we so stuck?

- *Hospicing Modernity*, Vanessa Machado de Oliveira: "Prep Work 1: Who the Heck Is Modernity?" (pages 15–29), "Prep Work 3: The Most Important Chapter" (pages 41–61), and "Chapter 3: The House of Modernity" (pages 105–121)

- "Bonds of Earth," chapter 6 in *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, Amitav Ghosh
- "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," Kyle Whyte, *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 9 (2018): 125–144
- "Skywoman Falling" (pages 3–10) and "Asters and Goldenrod" (pages 37–45) in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer
- "Prefixing the World," part 1 (up until "Permacrisis Enter the Afterparty"), Jonathan Rowson
- *The Blind Spot*, Adam Frank, Evan Thompson, and Marcelo Gleiser (2024), introduction

Recommended but not required:

- "The Science of Life: A Study in Left Hemisphere Dominance," chapter 12 in *The Matter with Things*, Iain McGilchrist
- *The Blind Spot*, Adam Frank, Evan Thompson, and Marcelo Gleiser (2024), chapters 6 and 8

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5) February 24: Facing grief & despair, cultivating the self

- *Night Vision: Seeing Ourselves through Dark Moods*, Mariana Alessandri, selected chapters
- *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, Francis Weller, selected chapters
- *See No Stranger*, Valarie Kaur, selected chapters
- Watch: "The Long Journey to Becoming 10% Happier," Dan Harris
- Listen: "The Science of Awe," Dacher Keltner (February 2023)
- *The System Within: Addressing the Inner Dimensions of Sustainability and Systems Transformation*, Jamie Bristow and Rosie Bell, introduction and sections 1 and 2 (section 3 is highly recommended but not required)
- "The Ecology of Magic," chapter 1 in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram (1997), from page 3 to the break at the top of page 11

Recommended but not required:

- Technical note: "What Is 'Inner Work' and How Does One Do It?" Jack Brookes and Rebecca Henderson
- Technical note: "An Introduction to Adult Development," Jamie Bristow and Rebecca Henderson

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6) March 3: What might change look like?

- "The End of the World," Lakota legend
- "Deactivating the H2 Vortex," Jonathan Rowson
- "What Is the Two Loops Model?" Berkana Institute, via Visible Network Labs

- *How Minds Change*, David McRaney, selected chapters
- *Change: How to Make Big Things Happen*, Damon Centola, selected chapters
- Watch: "An Economic Reality Check," Tim Jackson (TED talk; transcript available); or read "The Myth of Growth," pages 1–16 in *Post Growth: Life after Capitalism*, Tim Jackson
- *Wellbeing: Science and Policy*, Richard Layard and Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, introduction and summary (pages 1–14)
- *A Cooperative Species*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, selected chapters

Recommended but not required:

- "Ethics at the Horizon," chapter 2 in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Jonathan Lear

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7) March 10: Is real change possible? Unpacking the dynamics of power

- Case: "Brazil: Resistance and Re-democratization after the 1964 Military Coup," Zairo Cheibub, Rebecca Henderson, and Channing Spencer
- *This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century*, Mark Engler and Paul Engler, introduction and "The Hybrid" (pages 87–97)
- *Power, for All: How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business*, Julie Battilana and Tiziana Casciaro, selected chapters
- "The Compassion of Fierceness," chapter 2 (pages 45–67) in *Fierce Vulnerability*, Kazu Haga

Recommended but not required:

- *Radical Help*, Hilary Cottam, experiments 1 and 5
- "The Danish Spring," chapter 7 in *The Nordic Secret*, Lene Rachel Andersen and Tomas Björkman
- "Bildung in the 21st Century," Jonathan Rowson
- "The Making of Social Democracy," Daron Acemoglu et al., *Journal of the European Economic Association* (2025)
- "Practicing Democracy," chapter 1 in *People, Power, Change: Organizing for Democratic Renewal*, Marshall Ganz; or watch "Fighting for Change," Marshall Ganz (YouTube)
- "How Not to Do Activism," Michael Gecan, *Boston Review*, December 4, 2019

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8) March 24: Is real change possible? Unpacking the dynamics of love

- Case: "Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Black Voting Rights," David Moss
- "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King Jr.
- *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman, selected chapter

- *See No Stranger*, Valarie Kaur, selected chapter
- *Salvation: Black People and Love*, bell hooks, selected chapter
- "Kin Relationality and Ecological Belonging: A Cultural Psychology of Indigenous Transcendence," Yuria Celidwen and Dacher Keltner, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2023)
- "The Story before the Story," chapter 1 in *Descent into Love: How Recovery Café Came to Be*, Killian Noe

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9) March 31: Reimagining the future while driving change on the ground

- Case: "Leading and Learning from the Emerging Future: The Presencing Institute at a Crossroads," Nicole Marie and Rebecca Henderson
- Markets Built for Humans, Eric Beinhocker and Nick Hanauer (marketsbuiltforhumans.org)
- "To Boldly Know When No One Has Known Before," chapter 1 in *Everyday Utopia*, Kristen R. Ghodsee
- "Changing Politics," chapter 7 in *Reimagining Capitalism*, Rebecca Henderson
- Watch: "A Crash Course in Making Political Change," Katie Fahey (TED talk)
- "Critical Connections: Trust-Building as a Prerequisite to Systems Change," Susan M. Glisson, *Du Bois Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 181–188
- "Teaching Patriotism" (pages 204–225) and "How Love Matters for Justice" (pages 387–397) in *Political Emotions*, Martha Nussbaum

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10) April 7: Love and power in action

- Case on regenerative agriculture
- Case on climate change: Ørsted?
- Case: "Shorefast: A Strange and Familiar Way to Reimagine Capitalism," Brian Trelstad

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11) April 14: Reimagining DemocracyThe human side of change

- *Plurality*, Glen Weyl and Audrey Tang, selected chapters
- Piece on Irish deliberative democracy
- The Interfaith Popular Education Case Study (interfaithcasestudy.com)
- "What Is Economic Democracy?" section V, "Criticisms from the Left," J. Phillip Thompson (voicesfornewdemocracy.wordpress.com)
- *Habits of Heart and Mind: How to Fortify Civic Culture*, American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2024)

12) <u>April 21: What is mine to do?</u>

- Revisiting the Great Salt Lake