

**Reading 5-1:
Radical Questions for Critical Times**
by Sam Keen, PhD

from the Seven Challenges Workbook at the
www.NewConversations.net web site

Rumor has it that on leaving the Garden of Eden, Adam said to Eve: "My dear, we are living in an age of transition." Ordinarily, life proceeds ordinarily. We dwell securely within the garden of the protective myths, values, and paradigms of our society; our questions are about making a living, purchasing the things we have been taught to desire, raising our children, and keeping up with the neighbors. But times of crisis challenge our comfortable assumptions about who we are and force us to ask more radical questions. Carl Jung reached such a point at midlife when he realized that he didn't know what myth he had been living.

Since permanent change is here to stay and crises and transitions are an inevitable part of the human condition, a wise person will hone some of the skills necessary for thriving in troubled times. Think of the crises every Adam and Eve must negotiate as composed of three interlocking circles: identity crises, love crises, social crises. It follows that the radical questions we most need to ask in times of transition (when our world is burning) are those addressed to the solitary self, those concerning the intimate relationship between I and thou, and those that have to do with the commonwealth within which we live and move and have our being.

Herewith, a selection to get you started. (Please send others that trouble, challenge, and inspire you to: Sam Keen, 16331 Norrbom Rd. Sonoma, California 95476)



Cross-Examining the Self

What is happening to me?
What comes next for me?
What is the source and meaning of my
restlessness, dissatisfaction, longing,
anxiety?
What do I really desire?
What have I not brought forth that is within me?
What have I contributed to life?
What are my gifts? My vocation?
What ought I to do? Who says?
What does my dream-self know that "I" don't?
What story, myth, values, authorities,
institutions inform my life?
What is my ultimate concern?
How faithful am I to my best vision of myself?
At whose expense has my wealth, security, and
happiness been purchased?

Questions for I and Thou

Whom do I love?
By whom am I loved?
Am I more loved or loving?
How intimate are we?
How close is close enough?
What are we doing together?
Do we help each other broaden and deepen the
reach of our caring, to become more
compassionate?
What clandestine emotions fear, anger,
resentment, guilt, shame, sorrow, desire for
revenge - keep us from being authentic with
each other?
When do our vows and promises become a
prison from which I and thou must escape
to preserve the integrity of our separate
beings?
How can we renew our passion for and
commitment to one another?
When is it time to say goodbye?

Probing the Commonwealth

Who is included within the "we," the
community, the polls that encompasses and
defines my being?

Who is my neighbor?
For whom, beyond the circle of my family, do I care?
Who are my enemies?
To what extremes would I go to defend my country?
Can I be just, loving, merciful, and be loyal to my profession, my corporation, my country?
If we were to measure our success by Gross National Happiness (the national standard of Bhutan) how would our economic, political, educational, and religious institutions change?
What would have to happen to convince sovereign nations to wage peace rather than expending their wealth and creativity in producing more deadly and genocidal weapons?

If you doubt that asking a new question is a royal road to revolution, transformation, and renewal, consider what happened when Descartes asked, "Of what may I be certain?" or when Newton asked, "How is a falling apple like a rising moon?" or when Marx asked, "Why were men born free but are everywhere in chains?" or when Freud asked, "What is the meaning of dreams?"

Your question is the quest you're on. No questions — no journey. Timid questions — timid trips. Radical questions — an expedition to the root of your being. Bon voyage.

Sam Keen, philosopher, teacher and author, has written many books about being human, including *Apology for Wonder*, *Fire in the Belly*, *To Love and Be Loved*, and *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. The above article is reprinted here with the author's permission. (*The Cooperative Communication Skills Extended Learning Community thanks Dr. Keen for contributing this exercise to the Workbook and the www.NewConversations.net online library. For information on Sam Keen's latest workshops, books and projects visit www.samkeen.com.)*

Suggested additional readings on the topic of questioning more creatively (includes hyperlinks to Human Development Books global online bookstore).

[The 7 Powers of Questions: Secrets to Successful Communication in Life and at Work](#)

by Dorothy Leeds

This unique book reveals the seven powers of questions -- and shows how to use them most effectively. Learn how questions can improve relationships, help determine what people really want, uncover opportunities, persuade others, and get more out of every business or personal encounter.

[Questions That Work: How to Ask Questions That Will Help You Succeed in Any Business Situation](#) by Andrew Finlayson

Written by a seasoned business reporter and TV news manager, this provocative "questioning manifesto" and practical "how-to" book gives people the insights and tools to ask effective questions that get results in every realm of their professional lives. It is also a powerful tool that will help business leaders create a progressive environment where questions flow freely and creatively-boosting knowledge and performance increase at all levels of the organization.

[Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 7 Powerful Tools for Life and Work](#)

by Marilee G. Adams, Ph.D.

Written as an engaging fable, *Change Your Questions* inspires readers to take charge of their thinking in order to accomplish goals, improve relationships, advance careers, investigate new territories, and in general gain greater life satisfaction. This book explains how to "be your own coach," outlines the author's Question Thinking Model, and lists the top 12 questions for change