

**OCTOBER 2020 QUESTION OF THE MONTH**  
**THE GROWING EDGE CONVERSATION STARTER**



**EPISODE 26:**

From Heartland to White House and Back  
A Dialogue on Democracy with Preeta Bansal

In this Growing Edge Podcast, we talk with Preeta Bansal—Harvard Law graduate, constitutional lawyer, former General Counsel in the Obama White House—who has returned to her hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, to do grassroots work.

(1) Preeta speaks of growing up with cultural expectations about assimilation and achievement that helped her develop tools to survive and thrive, but eventually needed to be transcended in order to serve others well. Does that ring bells in your own life?

(2) Preeta describes how this country's founders created a system designed to “control vice” (e.g., corruption and the abuse of power), but wonders if we might also create structures to “cultivate virtue” (e.g., altruism and service). What might such structures look like? How might we move toward that goal? What would love look like as public policy?

(3) Preeta speaks about the importance of doing “the inner work of democracy.” In our culture, we often think of external action as the engine of social change. How might inner work, such as self-care or self-examination for racism, also be a path to positive change? How can more people be engaged in work of that sort?

(4) Preeta points out that the founders, many of whom were farmers, created an "extraction model" of government. But we live in a time when survival depends on creating a "regenerative model"—regenerative in personal, communal, and environmental terms. What does it mean to you to live either an "extractive" or "regenerative" life? What do those ideas suggest to you about entering what Preeta calls the possibility of "a new founding moment" in the U.S.A.?

### **Some Approaches to this Month's Question**

You may want to explore the podcast and Questions of the Month privately, through journaling and silent reflection. But we urge you to consider gathering online for an exploration with one or more family members or friends. If that idea appeals to you, look into using Zoom, Facetime, Skype or some other video platform or talk with each other while practicing safe social distancing.

If you aren't familiar with Zoom, it's easy to learn and has proven a wonderful way to host "face to face" conversations during the pandemic. A full-featured Basic Plan with unlimited meetings is free. There's a 40 minute time limit on conversations among three or more, but you can log right back on for another 40 minutes. If the technology baffles you, check for online instructions, or get on the phone and ask any middle-schooler you know!

For group explorations, we first listen to the podcast individually or together. Then, before you meet, review the Circle of Trust Touchstones from the Center for Courage & Renewal. They're designed to create safe space for open-hearted dialogue on a wide range of topics.

As convener, read the Touchstones aloud—or ask others to read them aloud—and let people comment on them if they wish. Remind people of how important it is to make sure everyone gets ample time to speak and be heard. Then take a moment of quiet before inviting people to speak.

Begin the conversation by reading the Questions of the Month, then inviting people to respond whenever they are ready. No "forced marches" around the circle! As the Touchstones advise, listen to what people have to say without any cross-talk. Ask honest and open questions to help them say more, if they wish, but avoid trying to "fix, save, advise, or correct each other."

We need to find every way we can to reweave community during these hard times—and one of those ways is gathering online for conversations about things that matter. Give it a try!