

Daily Meditation 7-21-25

Joanna Macy: A Note of Gratitude

Good morning.

In today's daily meditation, we are remembering with gratitude the life and work, commitment and passion of Joanna Macy. And today, I'd like to share with you two of her writings, one from her autobiography, called *A Memoir, Widening Circles*. It came out in the year 2000, a couple of her teachings from there.

And then, I'd like to share some of her teachings from this book called *Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime*, which came together when she and I, and a number of my faculty taught for a week in a workshop on creation spirituality in Australia. So she has an article, very fine article, in that book. But here, in a book called *Widening Circles*, she shares a passage called "Prayers for 1000 Years" that she wrote, actually the book was called "Prayers for 1000 Years."

You inside us, beings of the future, in the spiral ribbons of ourselves, you are here. In our rage for the burning forests, poisoned fields, the oil-drowned seals, you are here. You beat in our hearts through late night meetings. You accompany us to clear-cut some toxic dumps in the halls of the lawmakers. It is you who drive our dogged labors to save what is left. O you who will walk this earth when we are gone, stir us awake. Stir us awake. Behold through our eyes the beauty of this world. Let us feel your breath in our lungs, your cry in our throat. Let us see you in the poor, the homeless, the sick. Haunt us with your hunger. Hound us with your claims, that we may honor the life that links us. You have, as yet, no faces we can see, no names we can say. But we need only hold you in our mind, and you teach us patience. You attune us to measures of time where healing can happen, where soil and souls can mend. You reveal courage within us, we had not suspected, love we had not owned. O you who come after, help us remember, we are your ancestors. Fill us with gladness for the work that must be done.

This book was written, came out in the year 2000. And its very last page, she writes about the title of the book, which is called *Widening Circles*, which she got from Rilke, the poet Rilke, whom she translated, in some fine translations from German to English. And one of his poems is about "I live my life in widening circles." And Rilke says, "I circle around God."

And she picks up on that phrase, and she says (this is very last page of her memoir): *Whatever that meant to Rilke, the widening circles of my life have not had as their center the big papa, God of my preacher forebears.* She was from a family of Calvinist preachers, and she turned her back on that as a young woman. *I walked out on that belief when I was 20. What authority now holds me in orbit? It is not Fran (her husband) whom I circle, nor my children, or even Julian and Elisa. It is not Rinpoche or Mummy, my honored sister, Karma Khechog Palmo, who brought me into the Dharma practice. It is not Adekimba or Ocean of Wisdom, showing me as they did my heart's capacity. Nor my dear colleagues in Germany, Australia, Japan, Chernobyl, showing me as they do, the promise of our work together. Is it my love for them all, that holds me in orbit? Or is it the fate awaiting my planet's people in this harsh, momentous time?*

So her answer is a question, many questions. And now I'd like to share with you part of her essay in this book, published by the Australians, edited by Catherine Hammond, *Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime*, where she gathered some of my faculty and had them write an essay or give a talk. My article is the first article, "Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime." And Joanna Macy's is the second article. And the title of hers is "Waking Up in the Turning Time." She begins,

This last decade of the millennium is a turning time for us, a turning time for our planet. I want to reflect with you about what it is like for us to be alive in this time, not only to hear its summons, to see the promise, but to be fully present to what is happening to our world now. Along with Liberation, Matthew Fox often uses the word Awakening. Waking up is what the Buddha did. He woke up. The name of the Sarvodaya movement that I worked with in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist self-help movement that has been active in over 5000 villages, means waking up together. This is what we do. We too are challenged to do, to wake up together.

And she talks about her waking up, and stopping in Germany in 1989, when everyone was so excited about the walls were coming down.

I was moved and enlightened to hear from my friends and acquaintances, how this extraordinary turning in Eastern Europe, this rejection of 40 years of totalitarian regimes, in such a quick and mostly bloodless way, had as a key emphasis the destruction of the environment. In country after country, city after city where this great turning came, it was love for the environment and determination to prevent its destruction, that was rallying people as much as demand for political freedom. It was a threat to the natural world, entire regional ecosystems, that brought people out on the streets: the poisoning of their rivers, the deforestation, the turning of the once-beautiful land into a moonscape. It's what got these people marching, waking up together, she writes.

And she cites President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, who said, *The state, which calls itself a state of workers, is humiliating and exploiting them. Our outmoded economy wastes energy. We've spoiled our land, rivers and forests inherited from our ancestors.* And Macy interjects, *Oh, aye! If we could only hear an American president saying something like that.* And, says Havel, *"we have today the worst environment in the whole of Europe. The worst of it is, that we live in a spoiled moral environment. We have become morally ill, because we are used to saying one thing and thinking another. And speaking about our spoiled moral atmosphere, and I'm not referring only to our masters. I'm speaking about all of us."*

She says, *As Havel talks about the same healthy, invigorating willingness to acknowledge what isn't pretty, it's a time for saying, yes, we know how to suffer with our world. Once we're ready to do that, we will find out who we are. I think of something we've inherited from the last 2000 years of patriarchy -- that something is the fear and loathing of matter. It is time now to outgrow that outlook. As Matthew Fox so beautifully invites us to do, enter into the mystery of flesh and tree and rock. It is time to experience the awe and beauty of what we can call Deep Materialism.*

So she is calling for a spirituality of wakefulness, and of recovering a love of matter, and therefore a love of the Earth, a passion for its survival. This is just some of the gifts that Joanna Macy has left for us.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.

Copyright © by Matthew Fox, 2025