

## Daily Meditation 8-25-25

### Joanna Macy on Original Blessing: A Practice in Deep Ecumenism

Good morning.

In the daily meditation this morning, I shared with you an amazing passage from Joanna Macy. She told me that she found it folded up in her book -- that is, the book I wrote, called *Original Blessing*. And she found it 20 years after she had written it, and she mailed it to me, and that was 10 years ago.

But I was very moved by that teaching of hers, in the wonderful way that she brought into the discussion her own life as a practicing Buddhist, and the Dharma Wheel, and all of that. And then near the end, there's this one short sentence that I think is so stunning, and so Joanna-like. She says, she quotes Buckminster Fuller about "I seem to be a verb."

She says, "As verbs, we want trajectories, ways to go, paths for exploring and unfolding." And of course, I think of the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality, and also of her Four Spirals, she calls them, of the work that reconnects, because they're absolutely parallel.

But then she has a short sentence: "Consonant with science and crisis." Consonant with science and crisis. I've never seen that sentence before from anyone! But it is so full of her mentality, of her way of seeing the world. Science, in addition to her Buddhism, in addition to spirituality of a deep kind, wherever, whatever tradition we derive from, there is science, yes -- and crisis. How she puts them back to back just amuses me, because it's so stunningly direct, and it's so her.

Because, you know, her first book was on despair. She was always dealing with crisis, and she was inviting us to enter crisis and not be afraid of it, to face it, in fear and despair. And as she said, "when your heart breaks, the whole universe can pour through." So this was her way of seeing the world: spirituality, science, and crisis.

So no wonder she was a saint for the 21st Century, because we're certainly living with all those dynamics, aren't we? Can't escape them. But she was at home with them, and that's one of the biggest lessons I learned from these people who knew her so well, and spoke about her yesterday was the playfulness that came out, and the wonder and the childlikeness in her.

I tended to see her on more serious occasions, when we were teaching together and so forth. But they brought stories in. So what I want to do is to share with you some of the stories that people shared yesterday. Now I want to give credit to Jonathan Guston, who organized this event, and did a very fine job in doing so. And he was the first to speak, and he talked about how he had known Joanna for over 40 years, and they took a lot of walks together.

And he said, “walking with Joanna in the neighborhood was like walking your dog.” I just laughed out loud, because I have a dog, I know what he means. When you walk your dog, you have to stop so often, they’ve got to sniff so much. That’s exactly what he was saying: that Joanna insisted on stopping every time she saw a flower that drew her attention, or a plant or a tree or an animal or a bird. And he said, “You never got anywhere when you walked with her, you needed a lot of time.” And that she constantly praised when she walked, praised, whether a plant, she would address them: “Oh, you are so beautiful,” she was saying. “Oh, you are so beautiful.”

He said, “she walked with a perfume of awe, that she was all about awe, the excitement of admiration. And it was so sensual. She would pick up a leaf and interact with it. And she was full of ripe gratitude,” he said. So that was a beautiful story to hear, and I’m so grateful for it.

And another speaker, Jane Hirshfield, quoted her as saying that “ordinary people whose love for life is greater than their fear, hold the healing to the world.” This was a quote she heard personally from Joanna Macy. Ordinary people who love their life greater than their fear: These are the ones who hold the future of the world in their hands.

And of course, we all know that Joanna was very close to Rilke, translated his poetry twice. And of course, Rilke has marvelous poems about praise as well.

But her son Jack, Joanna Macy’s son Jack, who’s 65, he really opened my eyes about his mother and had me laughing again. First of all, that she was a woman of tremendous adventure: that by the time he was 10 years old, he had lived in five different cultures, including Lagos, Nigeria. By the time he was 10 years old, they had moved to five different cultures, and he talked about, as a 10 year old, they were flying into Lagos, and as he looked out the window, his mother said, that’s your new home. And he remembers that moment. She was full of adventure, and part of the adventure was living in other cultures.

He says, “she was fun and silly and audacious. She would lead to invent games such as Hares and Hounds. The girls in the family would go out as Hares with red tape ribbons,

and tie it on cars and doorknobs and tree branches and hide it as well. And then the boys, who were the Hounds, had to go and find them all.” And he says how there was no limit to her fun, her creativity. You can imagine what Easter was like, with Easter eggs and all the rest. And he said, “as adults, the more he relates to his mother in terms of her work.” And because she herself was grappling with despair, with the environmental crisis and so forth. And this is what drove her to write, and to lead workshops, that in many ways it was very personal to her to keep her hope going.

And he told the story about the last meeting before she died, and how she confronted one person who was very broken up about things. And she said to him in very stern language: “You Matter.” You matter. And that person related to him later, that statement and direct address from Joanna was very, very important to him at that time. She had, he said, “a strong and loving presence, and a humorous one.”

And then Joanna’s daughter, Peggy, shared and picked up on this whole theme of playfulness and silliness. And Joanna loved to play charades, and she loved to draw together, draw odd animals and hybrids of animals and so forth. And she would even bring Legos with her to a doctor’s office, so that while they were waiting to get into their appointment, they would play with Legos. And for their father’s 50th birthday, Fran’s 50th birthday, they had a Renaissance Party. Everyone had to dress up in Renaissance outfits, and they actually made the old formula for mince pie.

And once, they played a game when they were in an airport, and she convinced the family to pretend that they were sprinting to get to the airplane, so that and everyone would get out of the way and feel sorry for them because they were obviously on a dash to get the airplane. But really it was all sport. It was all fun that Joanna arranged. “Animals and plants and trees, she would create names for us. She would talk to them.”

I told the story about previously, something I wrote about Joanna, how when I first met her in her home, there was a note on the front porch to the wasps, telling them to please find someplace else to live! She didn’t want to kill them. She wanted to honor their existence, but they had to go.

And she told the parallel story about ants. She actually pulled out a note from Joanna, written in longhand on her stationery, to ants, telling the ants to please go to the backyard, that there’s plenty of dirt to live in, and living things, and to get off the front porch!

And I don’t know if either of those notes actually worked, but that was part of her Buddhist practice, as well as her humor, I think. She said she had a thing about things

sometimes, like she was very attached to her shoehorn, and she felt there was something magical about her shoehorn that gifted her, by not forcing her to bend over to put her feet in her shoes.

And in Nigeria, when they were in Nigeria, she adopted a baby baboon, telling no one. They came home from school one day, and they had a brother in the house, and it was a baby baboon! “She was adventurous. She was filled with childlikeness, and living the moment to its max,” said her daughter. And I didn’t hear the end of that story. How long did the baboon stay with them? How did they stay with her baboon? I do not know. If I see her again. I’ll surely want to ask.

Well, there’s so many contributions, but that’s enough for today. I just want you to know that this woman, Joanna Macy, to me, without a doubt, was a 21st-century saint. And as you who read my daily meditations know, just being with her when she died, it triggered this whole question that we have been meditating on: how many other saints have we run into, in our lifetime? And it’s important that we acknowledge that: that there is this goodness going on in the world, so many good people. At the same time, that there’s a lot of evil going on in the world. And that, of course, is consonant with Joanna’s philosophy of spirituality, science and crisis.

Thank you. We’ll see you next week.