

## **Study Guide for *Coming Back to Life***

By Molly Brown and Joanna Macy

*Here are questions for reflection, journaling, and study group exploration. We hope they will help you deepen your understanding of the Work That Reconnects and its underlying worldview and paradigms. We suggest you read through the questions and notice which ones speak to you; we don't expect everyone to respond to every question. (This is not a test!)*

*Instead of questions for Chapter 13- Meditations for the Great Turning, we offer some guidelines for guiding meditations in groups.*

### **Chapter One: To Choose Life**

1. What is your understanding of the term "Industrial Growth Society" and how do you see it operating in the world?
2. How are the three causes of suffering (as articulated in Buddhist teachings) institutionalized in the Industrial Growth Society?
3. How have you experienced the impacts of the Industrial Growth Society in your own life and community?
4. What is your vision of a Life Sustaining Society?
5. How do you see each of the "three stories" playing out in your life, community, and the world around you?
6. Which of the listed *holding actions* for the Great Turning have you participated in or supported in some way? What would you add to this list?
7. What emotional responses arise as you read the list of targets for holding actions on pp. 7-8? Would you add anything to this list?
8. How have you participated in or supported the second and third dimensions of the Great Turning? Would you add anything to either list?

## **Chapter Two: The Greatest Danger: The Deadening of Heart and Mind**

1. How have you experienced and witnessed pain for the world?
2. How does Business As Usual deaden our hearts and minds?
3. What are some of the ways you have deadened your own heart and mind in the past—or even now?
4. What effects of this deadening have you experienced yourself or witnessed in people around you? How have you attempted to counteract these effects?

## **Chapter Three: The Basic Miracle: Our True Nature and Power**

1. In the past, have you held the worldview Bateson describes in the quotation on p. 38 and if so, what helped you change it? Have you witnessed this worldview in others?
2. In what ways does the lens of systems thinking help you see the world and life differently? How does this perspective interest or excite you?
3. What are some of the deeper questions that you find yourself wanting to explore, prompted by concepts like Gaia Theory, deep ecology, anthropocentrism, and the ecological self?
4. Which of the spiritual traditions mentioned in the book have been particularly meaningful and inspiring to you, and in what ways?
5. What life choices have you made that ended up helping you better understand who you are?
6. What has been your experience of “positive disintegration” in your life, and what has been born from this experience?
7. Have you experienced collective choice-making as described on pages 54-55? What was it like?
8. How have you experienced “power over” in your life, either as the power wielder or the recipient? In what ways has it been damaging? In what ways has it been helpful in some way?

9. Recall times when you have experienced “power with” others; what enabled it to happen? What was it like for you?
10. Have you been able to unblock feedback in an organization or social system through education, disclosure, protest, or other means? How was that challenging and/or empowering?
11. How have synergy and grace manifested in your life and work, and in the world around you?

#### **Chapter Four: What is the Work That Reconnects?**

1. As you read through the “Aims of the Work,” reflect on how you have experienced each aim in workshops you have attended or led.
2. How would you express the six basic assumptions underlying the Work in your own words?
3. Similarly, how would you describe the Spiral of the Work in your own words?
4. How do you relate the Shambhala Prophecy to today’s world?
5. If you have any experience bringing the Work That Reconnects into corporate settings, what challenges have you faced in doing so?

#### **Chapter Five: Guiding the Work That Reconnects**

1. Reflecting on your own experience as a participant in workshops, what value how you found in working in groups?
2. As you read through the tasks, skills, and capacities of a facilitator/guide, make note of those you feel competent in. How might you acquire greater competence in areas where you feel less confident?
3. What are some of the challenges you have faced in engaging full participation in a workshop or class? What has worked for you?
4. What concerns do you have about working with strong emotions in a group? Do any of the suggestions on pp. 79-81 seem helpful to you? How else might you enhance your capacities to work with strong emotions?

5. Consider your experience with participating in and leading rituals. What approaches have worked for you as participant and/or leader? What has felt awkward or uncomfortable?
6. Describe your ideal physical setting for a workshop. What physical characteristics would you want to especially avoid? How do you like to enhance the setting?
7. Explore your perspective on money related to leading workshops or groups.
8. Reflecting on your experiences in workshops (as leader or participant), what do you want to emulate in opening and closing your workshops?
9. Respond to these Open Sentences:
  - a. The idea of my facilitating the Work That Reconnects is totally absurd, because...
  - b. The idea of me as a facilitator of the Work That Reconnects is the most natural thing in the world, because...
10. What are some of the ways you have thought of adapting the Work That Reconnects to different audiences or situations?

### **Chapter Six: Coming from Gratitude**

1. Why does the Spiral of the Work That Reconnects begin with gratitude? What are some of the benefits of feeling and expressing gratitude?
2. Compose some Open Sentences of your own for gratitude. Which of those listed in the book do you particularly like to use, and why?

### **Chapter Seven: Honoring Our Pain for the World**

1. How do you understand the phrase “allowed to surface” in reference to our inner responses to suffering and destruction in the world (on page 106)?
2. How might you respond to someone suggesting that honoring our pain is “negative thinking”?
3. Which of these practices have you experienced in a workshop? What were the effects of these practices on you, emotionally, cognitively, spiritually?

4. What would you need to feel confident to lead these exercises?
5. How could you respond to someone who seems to be freaking out during the Truth Mandala or the Despair Ritual?

### **Chapter Eight: Seeing with New Eyes**

1. How have you experienced and come to understand the shift to seeing with new eyes that occurs when we honor our pain for the world? What metaphors best reflect your understanding?
2. What examples come to mind for how the premises of the Industrial Growth Society result in the destruction of biological, ecological, and cultural systems (e.g. unlimited economic growth, maximizing profit, externalizing costs)?
3. What is the shift in perception that can help us create a Life-Sustaining society and economy, and what are some of its practical applications?
4. What has been your experience trying to convey this new way of seeing the world?
5. Which of the Seeing With New Eyes practices have you experienced in a workshop? What were the effects of these practices on you, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually?

### **Chapter Nine: Deep Time—Reconnecting with Past and Future Generations**

1. What does it mean that we are “marooned in the present” in the Industrial Growth Society and what are the effects of that?
2. How has the Work That Reconnects helped you to “re-inhabit time”?
3. Which Deep Time practices have you found most helpful and why?

### **Chapter Ten: Going Forth**

1. Which of the “discoveries” listed on pp. 192-3 have been most transformative in your life, and how?

2. Why is it often so difficult to share our concerns for the world? Which of the common difficulties (p. 195) have you struggled with? Would you add anything to this list or to the guidelines that follow (pp. 195-196)?
3. Which of the Going Forth practices have you experienced in a workshop? What were the effects of these practices on you, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually?
4. Have you participated in a study-action group? If so, what worked and what difficulties did you encounter?
5. How do you respond to the Five Vows on p. 214? If you have taken them (either at a workshop or on your own), how have they served you?

### **Chapter Eleven: The Work That Reconnects with Children and Teens**

1. How have you worked with the dilemma of wanting to protect our children's innocence and positive outlook while being honest about the huge challenges we all face in the world today?
2. As a child, how did you feel about adult silence regarding important and challenging situations in your family, community, or in the larger world? How did adults communicate with you about these issues in helpful ways?
3. How have you communicated with children about the threats to life in the world today? What has seemed to be helpful, and what has seemed to "make things worse"?
4. What benefits do you see (or have experienced) to doing the Work That Reconnects with children?
5. Which practices have you used with children, and with what results?

### **Chapter Twelve: Learning with Communities of Color**

1. How has your own life been limited or affected by the dominant culture's racial and ethnic prejudices?

2. What strength, skill, and experience do you bring to organizing and facilitating the Work That Reconnects in and with communities of color?
3. What gifts for the Great Turning can be brought forward now by communities that have suffered oppression?
4. What have you yearned to experience in finding community across racial/ethnic lines?
5. Are you willing to feel discomfort in hearing the experience of others?
6. If you are an American, how do you see your country's history of conquest, slavery, and misogyny reflected in your own life experience?
7. How can the Work That Reconnects help us find clarity, humility, and honesty in exploring our own racism and internalized oppression?
8. What aspects of indigenous and non-white cultures do you most treasure and wish to bring to the Great Turning?
9. What historical realities, up to and including today's mass incarceration, contribute to what is now known as post-traumatic slave syndrome (p. 253-4)?

### **Chapter Thirteen: Meditations on the Great Turning**

#### *Do's and Don'ts for Guiding Meditations*

Begin with gentle suggestions for relaxation and focusing. Following the breath for two or three minutes can be very helpful.

Use a natural, rather matter-of-fact tone of voice, without any special inflection or dreamy tone. Speak clearly with sufficient volume so that people can hear easily.

Avoid referring to yourself, as in "I want you to see ..."

Pause between suggestions to allow people to explore their inner imagery, but not so long that their minds wander or they go to sleep. You can follow your own imagery in response to the prompts as a way to measure the time.

Keep the entire session to 10 minutes at most, especially if people are seated or lying down. Exceptions to this are practices that incorporate movement, such as

“Harvesting the Gifts of the Ancestors” or a Milling. Movement helps keep people awake and focused.

At the end, give people time to “come back” and open their eyes slowly. It is often helpful to allow time for journaling or drawing before sharing in pairs or triads.