The Great Assembly
Chao-juan
8th Century, China

"In the great Assembly of the Lotos all are present—without divisions. Grass, trees, the soil on which these grow—all have the same kinds of atoms. Some are barely in motion while others make haste along the Path, but they will all in time reach the Precious Island of Nirvana.... Who can really maintain that things immanently lack buddhahood?"

From Thinking Like a Mountain, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, PA.

I Am a Savage
Chief Seattle, Circa 1854

Our ways are different from your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. But perhaps it is because the red man is a savage and does not understand.

There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the unfruiting of leaves in the spring or the rustle of insects' wings. But perhaps it is because I am a savage and do not understand. The clatter only seems to irritate the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at night? I am a red man and do not understand.

The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond, and the smell of the wind itself, cleansed by a midnight rain or scented with the pika's pine.

The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath—he, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not seem to realize the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the snitch. But if we sell you our land, you must remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his breath also receives his last sigh. And the wind must also give our children the spirit of life. And if we sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where even the white man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow's flowers.

So we will consider your offer to buy the land. If we decide to accept, I will make one condition. The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers. I am a savage and I do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand rotting carcasses of beasts, left by the white man who shot them from a passing train. I am a savage and do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts soon happens to the man.

All things are connected. You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men plant upon the ground, they shall reap.

This we know. The earth does not belong to man, but is his

Guarding the Earth
An Interview with Joanna Macy

EDITED BY
BARBARA GATES

Buddhist scholar and deep ecologist Joanna Macy expresses her understanding of Buddhist teachings through her creative activism. All of her work—her courses, her workshops, her writing, her organizing—is rooted in the teaching of dependent co-arising, an understanding that all things are interconnected and mutually responsible. Her writings include Deep Time and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age (New Society Publishers, 1983), and Thinking Like a Mountain: Toward a Council of All Beings, co-authored with John Seed (New Society Publishers, 1988). Two books are coming out this year: World as Lover, World as Self (Parallax Press) in May and Mutual Causality: The Dharma of Natural Systems (SUNY Press) in June.

Joanna Macy is currently focusing on the Nuclear Guardianship Project, which she initiated in 1988. The Guardianship Project calls for community-controlled, ground-level care of radioactive waste instead of transporting it to deep geologic burial sites as the government now proposes to do. Presently, wastes are in temporary storage—some in leaking tanks and drums, unlined trenches and pools and even cardboard boxes. The two designated "burial" repositories are already presenting problems: salt brine is leaking into the New Mexico site, and the Yucca Mountain project is geologically at risk because it borders the Nevada test site.

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ECOLOGY ISSUE

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INQUIRING MIND

we have begun using recycled paper. We felt we could no longer conscience to do otherwise. May all beings be happy.

THIS ISSUE HAS SAVED:
8 TREES 3005 KILO- 
WATT HOURS OF ENERGY 
$3,500 GALLONS OF WATER 30 POUNDS AIR 
POLLUTION 15 CUBIC YARDS OF SOLID WASTE

continued on page 6

continued on page 4
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The concept of guardianship is an extension of mindfulness. As Joanna Macy explained to us, "It deftly and dramatically reverses our habitual approach to a problem by making it clear that we mustn't bury what we don't like, out of sight and out of mind, whether it's radioactive waste or the truth of what's going on in the Persian Gulf War. But we can take care of it, if we just keep it where we can see it, and continue to look at it."

In describing its goals, the Nuclear Guardianship Project states:
To curtail rampant radioactive contamination, the Project calls for a halt to the production and transportation of nuclear wastes, and for citizen involvement in the responsible care of the wastes.

continued on page 4

INQUIRING MIND
P.O. Box 9999
North Berkeley Station
Berkeley, CA 94709

A Publication of the Dharma Foundation
Guarding from page 1
produced to date. It promotes the guardian-
ship of the wastes at their points of genera-
tion and disposal, retrievable storage facili-
ties. And it develops educational programs
which include spiritual practice to begin the
training in technical knowledge and moral
vigilance required to establish and maintain
these Guardian Sites.

Joanna Macy’s unwavering guardian
courage stands as a beneficial example of
the responsibilities we are called on to take-
up, and inspires hope where there is
despair or denial. Whatever our intentions,
how are we being mindful about. Whatever
we do, it will help a lot in being present to it.

How are the teachings of mindfulness incor-
porated into guardianship training to help us
and future generations participate in the
guardianship of the waste?

M: What is a potential scenario for guarding it and containing it?

J: We need to come to terms with the fact that the nuclear
waste is a toxic waste. It has to be contained and
made safe, and we have never done that. The
citizens’ lawsuit to stop faulty storage of
radioactive waste in Washington, D.C. in 1978 I engaged in
a lawsuit to stop faulty storage of high-level waste at a
nuclear reactor. While our citizens’ group lost this case
against the Virginia Electric Power Com-
pany, working on the suit taught me a lot.
Night after night, to substantiate our legal
case, I had to learn to read the statistics,
and trying to understand the phenomenon
called ionizing radiation. Not only does radiation cause
diseases, still births, sterility, and genetic
mutation, but the wastes that release this
radioactivity are frighteningly mismanaged.

This introduction to the enormity of
the problem also led me to develop the
Dharma and Empowerment training that I
have conducted around the world during
the intervening years. I tried to confront
outward toxicity for denial. I could see how
we as a society were ready to turn our faces
away from the radioactive waste, as well as
other horrors we didn’t want to see. For
millions of years.

Now statistics about the waste are misleading because of what they don’t
include: Everything contained in the fuel cycle and nuclear weapons pro-
duction becomes radioactive. Nuclear waste is not just the byproduct of every
truck, pipe, every piece of equipment.

Nocturnal testing, watching, testing the soil, testing the water
and air. It means to repair as
honored the extraordinary

The guardian sites—Rancho Seco,
Three Mile Island, Hanford, etc.—would
become places of attention and remember-
ing the story that produced the
dioxic poison fire. You might go on
a pilgrimage to say, Seabrook or Rocky Flats
to the guardians or for the spiritual
renewal involved in this act of
hormony. You might go for the great
Remembrance. So is it true? The stories are told about how we almost
destroyed our planet with nuclear weapons
and our ability to create.

When I think about how being part of the future will relate to our
radioactive legacy, an unexpected danger occurs to me: the
danger that they may not take serious. The be-
gings of the future need to believe the danger,
that is, because the human communities
produced plutonium that cripples and kills for one quarter of a million years.
They will have to come to terms with this.

M: And the future generations need to remember that the
future will not wash its hands of us. The past could easily convince themselves that no one
could ever have unleashed something so
terrible.

J: Yes. We cannot unravel the myths and stories and bring
wit the truth of what happened at
But to unravel these myths, we must
be aware of the truth. We must
be informed in our collective memory so that
we can learn from it and be vigilant.

So these sites will be places of remem-
bering, of acceptance and forgiveness.

M: Inquiring Mind:

What is the potential scenario for guarding it and containing it?

J: We need to find a way of de-
scribing it that we can digest or relate to.
Ralph Nader’s organization stated in
a recent overview: the radioactivity
generated by nuclear waste every year in
the United States alone—and we only have
a quarter of a million years left—will exceed
240 times the radioactivity released by
the Chernobyl disaster. And don’t forget that
this radiation has a hazardous life of up to
250,000 years. Some of it, like the nickel
in reactor containment, lasts for

M: It’s difficult to find a way of de-
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M: Can you give us a hint as to the
dimensions of the problem?

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M: What is the potential scenario for guarding it and containing it?
harness the technology, so to speak, of cultivating vigilant awareness. I don't see the practice of vipassana as being undercuts individual freedom. It's just about cultivating a particular field or site. Quite the contrary. There would be times of intensive practice, watching what arises in the mind and then you go out and sweep the temple compound. You sweep up every piece of trash and you do that very, very attentively.

So this poison fire would be watched, and that very act of attention and commitment to life would not be that different from the spiritual practice that people have seen as valuable over the millennia.

In the coming times, I imagine, people will look back at our religious traditions and notice how much they feature fire. In the Old Testament, there's Moses and the burning bush; you can't get too close to the fire. In the Bhagavad Gita, there are the great flames of Vishnu when Krishna rises in a sweeping curve like giant vases.

The guardianship of this poison fire can continue through generations that will wonder if perhaps this was a sacred gift given to us to help us wake up.

So perhaps the shape of the nuclear cooling tower will become the shape of the new temple...

After the Guardianship idea took hold in my mind, I went on a pilgrimage to Three Mile Island. It was in 1984, five years after the accident there. As I was coming down from our summer cabin in Central New York into the Susquehanna Valley, I imagined bands of future pilgrims coming down to the great monastery at Three Mile Island. I came over the hill and looked down to the river. My god! I saw the island in the Susquehanna and those enormous cooling towers. They take your breath away. I experienced a rush of awe, the cooling tower will become the shape of the new temple.

They sent a car for me and I went and spent the day.

It was an amazing day. They began showing me more and more. They had taken the lid off the reactor where the accident had occurred and lowered a video camera in. They had just screened the video for the first time. So they said, "Come on, you've got to watch this!" On the screen I could see a landscape of cliffs and rubble. My guide pointed: "Now, those are the remaining fuel rods, and this shows it really was a meltdown...." I said, "This experience that you are accumulating is so important for all of us, because you are among the first to deal with the problem of cleanup, and this is going to be the big preoccupation of generations to come. I hope that you realize how valuable your work is and let us all know about it."

I recognized then that the people working to clean up the utility were guardians, but they weren't treated as such. And right near here, in Sacramento, there is a guardian site at the Rancho Seco nuclear plant even though its employees don't know it. They're sitting there guarding the highly radioactive fuel rods because the reactor has been closed down by popular vote.

But these nuclear technicians haven't been through your Guardianship Training. In addition to mindfulness practice, what other training is important for guardianship?

At our guardian group meetings we use imagination to help us get our minds around the nature of this waste. For example, at our last meeting, one of the members had made a huge map of the United States. It filled our living room. We moved back the furniture, spread it out, took off our shoes, and walked around on it. On the map you could see all the nuclear reactors, the uranium mines, the radioactive dumps and the transportation routes to bring the waste to Yucca Mountain and Carlsbad, etc. We did a drama right on the map, where we identified with the poison fire in a particular site. This was such an amazing learning tool. In the process, we were building our moral imagination. That has to be trained as well. We have to build the moral imagination to imagine what is already at hand. We must imagine the real because the world we've created is so outrageous that we have to use our imagination to even believe what is so.

We must also use our imaginations to encompass the time span of the poison fire and its effects. In our guardian group, we've become interested in the question of time itself and in those philosophers and mystics who were looking beyond chronological time to other dimensions where things are simultaneous. We've discussed the way chronological time is a function of our kind of consciousness. When we develop packets for organizing guardian groups around the country and around the world, we plan to include ways of exploring this. I've already been doing workshops on time, or, as we call it, "deep time." We're going from deep ecology to deep time. Deep ecology occurs in deep time; it means that we not only dependently co-arise with other beings now, but with beings of the past and future as well.

With radioactive waste and the war in the Persian Gulf and the effects of these on beings of the future...the whole space-time continuum is like a guardian site...

Yes. I have come to see that the guardian stance, the intention to sustain the gaze, is necessary to the guardianship of our earth, at every stage. One of the things that has scared me...
the most about the war in the Persian Gulf is how ready we humans are to lie to each other. As they say, "the first casualty of war is truth." We see this in the administration’s speeches and press conferences, and we see it in ourselves; it’s easier to accept a lie than to look at our own doubts, our own pangs, our own sense of dread about what this war might be. So we ride along with the Pentagon’s reports and the current spasms of patriotism, but inside us is a yearning for fresh air.

Truth is as precious as air when someone has got a pillow over your face or is holding your head under water. And if we do nothing else but just protect our capacity to see truth, we’re doing crucial work. We’re never going to be able to self-correct from our disastrous course if we don’t keep the feedback loop open. We need to maintain true contact with the world out there, so we don’t get mesmerized in our own dream.

IM: What an incredible task. If we’re going to really look at nuclear waste or at the war, then the enormity of our greed, hatred, and delusion is exposed. This could be extremely painful.

JM: Yes, but we can reframe our pain as compassion. As we open to our anguish, we can see it as our ability to share in the suffering of our world. And that is the literal meaning of compassion: to suffer with. This transmutes the pain into the power to act.

At a conference in New Mexico, a psychiatrist who had been at a presentation of the Nuclear Guardianship Project made this comment: "Just to hear about the possibility of relating to nuclear waste in this way is healing, regardless of what the practical steps may be – that is because we have, until now, felt such a deep unconscious shame about what we have created that will poison the world and the DNA of future beings for the next three million years. It has cut us off from our future – from a spiritual relationship with future generations. So when we hear about the Guardianship Project, then intention springs up – the intention to be responsible – and we think, 'Yeah, I can watch the radioactive waste.' That moved me a lot, because it put into words what I’ve felt – and what has been motivating me all along.

The Nuclear Guardianship Project welcomes your financial contributions, volunteer hours, ideas and prayers.

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