

## Interhelp Newsletter, Fall 2012

Dear Interhelpers and Friends,

The Interhelp community gathered in October, exploring the themes of resilience and community through ritual, art, conversation and play. For a taste of the weekend, read below about our process on Saturday afternoon. We have reserved Woolman Hill again for next year's Gathering on November 8-10, 2013. Mark your calendars!

Also see below for upcoming events, a thoughtful piece by Rosalie Anders about *Ecomind* by Frances Moore Lappe and *Active Hope* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, and a poem of blessing by John O'Donohue.

Please be in touch if you have something directly related to The Work That Reconnects to contribute to this newsletter.

Wishing all of you well,

Paula Hendrick  
[interhelpeditor@gmail.com](mailto:interhelpeditor@gmail.com)

### GATHERING 2012: SATURDAY AFTERNOON

After Honoring our Pain for the World during the morning Truth Mandala, and enjoying walks and naps and conversations after lunch, we invited new vision and new possibilities to arise in our relationships with our various communities. Craig Richards opened this Seeing with New Eyes part of the Spiral with open sentences, eliciting fresh insight into our lived experiences in community. Then Abigail Tischler guided us in an art project. We each created an artifact, or talisman—embedded with the beauty of nature—to remind us of our fresh insights, perhaps focusing on a particular area of potential transformation.

Abigail placed Vermont river rocks on a winding purple path of Logwood-dyed silk. Walking around this path, we softened our eyes and sang in the tradition of the Navaho prayer: “I walk in beauty, beauty walks in front of me. Beauty walks behind me,” until we each felt drawn to a particular rock. The chosen rock became the base of a sculptural collage-symbol. Other collage materials included paper, cloth, and yarn, painted with earth pigments, such as sienna, ocher and mica, or naturally dyed with materials from trees, such as walnut, Osage orange, and Brazilwood. The materials, painted and dyed by Abigail, added a lush and subtle texture to the process.

To end the afternoon session, we shared with each other our artwork and its symbolism.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

In MA and Rhode Island:

Emily Johns and Karina Lutz offer their second New Bedford, MA Work That Reconnects workshop on Saturday, November 10, 2012 at the Unitarian Church. See <http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=uydq4jjab&oeidk=a07e6fp0e13715aad5a>

Karina, with Jim Tull, has two one-day workshops coming up at the beautiful Spirit Log Tipi in Exeter, RI on Sunday Oct. 28 and Sunday Dec. 2. A carpool will travel from Providence. See <http://yogaforpeace.messageplanet.com/index.php?p=229360>

This from Emily: “Since this healing work always inspires us, no matter how much of it we’ve done already, we sincerely hope you’ll join us again, join us for the first time, or tell a friend about what promises to be an enjoyable, engaging and healing journey for us all.”

Early warning: JOANNA MACY returns to Hartland, VT next fall:

The Great Unraveling and Active Hope

Friday, October 18, 2013 - Sunday, October 20, 2013

Contact edie (a) [sustainabilityleadersnetwork.org](mailto:edie@sustainabilityleadersnetwork.org)

## BOOKS

*Active Hope and Ecomind: Everything is Connected*  
by Rosalie Anders

I’ve just read two complementary books that have, I believe, the potential to transform work for the great turning: Joanna Macy’s latest, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy*, written with Chris Johnstone, and *Ecomind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want*, by Frances Moore Lappe. The authors agree that the key to making the great turning happen is to profoundly change the way we experience the world; we need to experience all of life as our community (*Active Hope*) or, as Lappe puts it, to understand, through the lens of ecology, that we and everything else are “co-created moment to moment in relation to all else.” (p. 15)

All three authors—who are activists as well as writers and thinkers—emphasize how crucial this shift in perception is for our work, and how through it we can gain more effective direction and even hope.

None of them glosses over awful realities or the unlikeliness of success. They share similar

perspectives on what is wrong—the brokenness of our systems—and the need to realign our relationships within our ecological home. Lappe goes into more depth on the economic and political facets of our system failure, and focuses on political/structural/economic actions, while Macy/Johnstone emphasize the emotional costs of the failure and focus on individual and group work and spiritual practice as a basis for deep understanding and action.

Both books reject the idea that human nature will never change. Macy/Johnstone say that life is never static. Lappe asserts that humans have many positive, as well as negative, qualities, and the kind of society we create can determine which aspects of our natures prevail.

They differ somewhat on dealing with despair. Lappe sees despair as a negative force that we can't afford to "give in" to. Macy and Johnstone talk about recognizing and transforming the despair.

*Active Hope* is a detailed discussion of the spiral that is familiar to people who have taken part in Macy's work; why it really is "work that reconnects," and the importance of each aspect. She advocates experiencing the spiral over and over—from gratitude to honoring our pain for the world to seeing with new eyes to going forth and taking action. As a veteran of many group experiences of the spiral, the book didn't hold a lot of surprises for me, but it deepened my understanding of its depths and power, especially what it means to see with new eyes. The book includes both group exercises and individual exercises that encourage readers to pause and think, and write personal responses to the questions that the book raises. Some of these I had done as part of a group process, but I found it well worth doing them again, and I sometimes surprised myself with what I wrote. It felt a bit like picking up an object, or hearing a piece of music, and perceiving it in a new and deeper way.

While Macy's earlier *Coming Back to Life* is the best source for detailed descriptions of group exercises and how to facilitate them, for a narrative about the power of each part of the spiral, and as an introduction to the Work that Reconnects, I'd choose *Active Hope*. And if, like me, you're a veteran of this work, I think *Active Hope* will deepen your understanding and appreciation of the work.

In *Ecomind* Lappe takes apart seven "thought traps" that get in the way of effective action, and turns them around using the lens of an ecomind. For example, the thought trap "we've hit the limits of our finite earth" is not a message that resonates with people who haven't been part of the consumption party, and it is misleading because it doesn't recognize how exceedingly wasteful we have been, or how much positive quality of life is non-material. Ecological thinking is not so much about more or less, but about alignment, about acting in harmony with the rest of the natural world. She would, for example, change the Transition Town motto from "carbon descent" to "carbon freedom," finding ways to live better and carbon-free.

Lappe urges us to look behind facile descriptions of problems. For example, we can tell overweight children to exercise more and eat less. We can also look at what's behind the obesity

epidemic, and among other causes see how profits are made in the food industry and decide to work on the problem through direct action.

I didn't agree with every one of Lappe's points, but she is well worth arguing with, and she offers an economic and political perspective that complements Macy's and Johnstone's.

Neither book soft-pedals the mess we're in and the inevitability of disasters, and parts of both books are painful to read. Passive hope, which Macy and Johnstone define as a wish, is not the same as active hope, which is working toward the world you want to see, even if the odds of success are very small. Courage, for all three authors, is what we need to turn our new perspectives into action. Plus, I think, wise understanding, which these books provide.

### POEM

Thank to Joyce Reeves, for sending this poem by the late John O'Donohue. Learn more about Father O'Donohue at [www.johndonohue.com](http://www.johndonohue.com)

*Banon\**

*On that day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you stumble,  
May the clay dance to balance you.  
When your eyes freeze behind the grey curtain  
and the ghost of loss gets into you,  
May a flock of colors - indigo, red, green, and azure blue  
come to awaken in you a meadow of delight.  
When the canvas frays in the corak\* of thought  
and a stain of ocean blackens beneath you,  
May there come across the waters  
a path of yellow moonlight  
to bring you home.  
May the nourishment of the earth be yours.  
May the clarity of light be yours.  
May the protection of the ancestors be yours.  
And may a slow wind  
work these words of love around you,  
an invisible cloak  
to mind your life.*

\*Banon - Irish word for blessing, to bless an outer as well as an inner journey.

\*corak - canoe