

## Deep Ecology Online: Practices for Awakening & Resilience in a Changing World

I've been part of a team of 7 facilitators of a zoom deep ecology workshop, 6 consecutive Sunday mornings.

One of the facilitators was my old friend and colleague Dr Eshana Bragg. To-day she wrote on her Facebook page:

Just completed an amazing 6 weeks of Deep Ecology Online with a great team of co-facilitators: [Skye Cielita Flor](#), Miraz, Br Tenzin, Inna Alex, Patrick Anderson, myself, and the inimitable [John Seed](#) who initiated not only this collaborative venture, but the whole movement itself!

In my preparation, I came across my evaluation of the original versions of these deep ecology workshops (aka Council of All Beings) written in 1995 as part of my PhD research into Ecological Self.

### 3.1 Origins

The Council of All Beings movement began in 1985, with the creation of the workshop by Joanna Macy and John Seed. This event marked the coming together of two social movements - the 'human potential movement' (Shaffer, 1978) and 'environmentalism' (O'Riordan, 1981) - both of which had their origins in the 'counterculture' of the 1960's and 70's (Roszak, 1969), but had grown progressively apart. The Interhelp network, with which Joanna Macy was involved, had been running workshops since 1979 under the name of "despair and empowerment work", in which thousands of men and women across the country and abroad have been meeting to deal with the full range of their responses to the planetary crisis. In this work they are drawing resourcefully from general systems theory, humanistic psychology and spiritual teachings. By means of structured exercises, bodywork, guided meditations, rituals and plain talk, they have broken the taboos against expressing their pain for the world, and discovered that they can use this pain in ways which affirm their basic gifts and common humanity. (Macy, 1983, p.xiv)

While one of the aims of these workshops was to build commitment to social and environmental action, it was not until John Seed, environmental activist and proponent of the philosophy of deep ecology, met Joanna Macy that 'radical environmentalism' and the 'human potential movement' met in full force to produce the set of experiences which now comprises the Council of All Beings. As facilitator of a workshop, Seed uses this story of his first experience of a Despair and Empowerment workshop, as a part of his introduction to the Council of All Beings: ... "and it was kind of like any New Age therapy workshop, except that people were crying out about what was happening to the Earth and I had never seen that before. It wasn't just about themselves, and it was a very powerful experience. But still there was this human centeredness. When people cried about the threat of nuclear war, it was very much about the effects of nuclear war upon one species, the humans, and future generations of that species, and only lip service was paid to the ten million other species that would be affected. Somehow, we were still the centre of everything. ... It seemed as though there was something important missing - deep ecology. " (23 October 1992)

Seed and Macy "walked and talked in the forests", developing a new series of group processes, and the first Council of All Beings workshop was held the following weekend in a rural setting outside Sydney, with about forty participants.

July 4 she had posted the following:

If you're feeling a bit "unstuck" by all that is happening around us right now (including but not only climate change!), I highly recommend this recording of a recent webinar I attended in the wee hours of the morning: "Climate Change as Spiritual Practice" with Joanna Macy, David Schenck & Larry Churchill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M43SSN-WOs&t=425s>

One of my favourite bits is around one and three quarter hours in, where Joanna (now in her nineties) shares this about Deep Ecology and how it came to her via [John Seed](#) in the 1980's.

“What I’m aware of is how many people are showing up now, and often, kids and young people too, and then people more like my age too, that there is a deep love of Earth. See, what science is showing is that our Earth is a living system and that along with that systems thinking, deep ecology helps you live and own these larger realms of who you are and be able to be so grateful for that, that you can feel them working through you.

So, the preposition for this moment of human life seems to be “through”. Things can work through you. The living Earth, if you take a sense of identity, identify with it, can work through you so that its not my power, its not my smarts, its not my cleverness or my devotion, its because it comes from the living Earth. You become an agent of something much vaster. If you trust. So, this is so incredible.

This came to me in my mid-40’s I guess, when I encountered a deep ecologist, rainforest activist in Australia named John Seed, he’s still alive. The rest of us caught it from him. Because he was defending the rainforest from logging and he was able to stand there facing the police and the loggers and it changed the sense of who he was. He was the rainforest defending itself. Now once you have that shift in identity, that this larger identity acts through you, because the Earth needs human hands, the Earth needs human voices, and we’re at a time when, as humans, I can talk to other humans, we’re the ones who are acting like idiots”

How extraordinary to get Eshana’s and Joanna’s perspectives and memories from times that I have long forgotten.

Here’s one of my contributions to that online zoom workshop,

Drew Dellinger’s “Word to the Mother” <https://youtu.be/WV5-0fDIYms>

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