

## **The Soul's Challenge**

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The annual Summer School of the European Federation of Psychosynthesis Psychotherapists (EFPP) took place in August this year in Canterbury, England. The theme was “the soul’s challenge between hope and anguish in a time of planetary crisis.” I was invited to write a statement to be read during the opening evening, which I would like to share with the AAP community.

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With the chaotic effects of global climate change impacting life around the Earth, we know that radical change is upon us, along with the suffering that such change can bring. We may have to endure years and years of intermingled catastrophes, one after another, as our oil-dependent economy unravels and collapses, natural disasters and epidemics sweep through the land, and civil society struggles to survive. Many will react with fear and denial, as people all too often do. As our lives change radically, how can we best respond?

I recently read a letter on Joanna Macy’s Web site, [www.joannamacy.net](http://www.joannamacy.net), that gave me some clues. Joanna is an ecophilosopher and social change activist, and a dear friend and mentor of mine. She writes of three gifts coming to us in these times.

The first is the gift of uncertainty. When we look honestly and directly at the challenges we face, we see both the peril and the promise inherent in them all, with no way of knowing how things will unfold. We all would prefer a happy ending, but we have no such guarantees. We are like people who live with a diagnosis of a terminal disease; we know full well we may die of it, and yet we can still hold the possibility that we might be healed.

However, when we let go of our attachment to “a happy ending,” something wonderful happens: we become more alive in the moment, more open to the wonder and beauty of the world. Uncertainty can also bring forth our creativity and ingenuity in responding to change. Life self-organizes in amazing and unpredictable ways. When we know what will happen, we tend to get into ruts of behavior and perception. In times of uncertainty, all bets are off, and we can come alive in creative new ways.

The second gift Joanna describes is intention. This is something we can count on—not the outcome, but the motivation we bring, the vision we hold, the path we choose to follow—the will of psychosynthesis. Firm resolve can save us from getting lost in fear or grief or despair. We can choose to live our lives according to our deepest moral values, no matter what the circumstances—and that choice can carry us through the most difficult of times. Our intention can be to bring love and healing to bear in every situation. As Gandhi said, “You must be the change you want in the world.”

And finally, Joanna speaks of the gift of devotion. Our love for one another and for the Earth and all its life forms nourishes and illuminates our intention. In times of uncertainty and peril, we are impelled to reach into the wellsprings of our devotion, whatever that may be, to both sustain and guide us. Dark times invite us to go within and find the light, so it can illuminate our inner path—and often our outer path as well.

I would like to add two more gifts to this list: the gift of service, and the gift of community. I believe the changes that lie ahead will call upon each of us to serve one another in ways we may never have thought possible. Such service will prove to be the most fulfilling experience many of us will ever have in our lives. It may not be “fun,” but it will be meaningful and rewarding to our souls. We may be called upon to listen to and support people going through trauma, strangers as well as friends—and we may never know in advance when we will be needed. We will be called to serve in our neighborhoods, on the street, in our work places. At other times, we ourselves may need help, receiving the same kind of support we have given. We are all in this together.

Which leads us to the gift of community. In the hard times ahead, we cannot survive alone, individual by individual, family by family. We can only survive by helping each other, bringing our varied skills and gifts to bear, sharing what we have, and planning together to meet our common needs. I believe our neighborhoods and towns can be transformed in the process into more friendly, vibrant, sustainable communities.

At this pivotal time in human history, we walk into the unknown together, as into an initiation, a collective encounter with the human soul. We in the industrialized world have reached the end of our collective adolescence; it is time now to grow up, to move fully into true adulthood, with a broader, more encompassing sense of responsibility to the Earth, all its peoples, and all its life forms.

Global climate change can be a rite of passage for humanity. We can do more than endure the dark times ahead; we can actively embrace them, armed with the gifts of uncertainty, intention, devotion, service, and community.

We can work together to create a healthy, sustainable world for the next seven generations, for our children, grandchildren, and their grandchildren. Each one of us has a unique role to play in creating that world for them, according to our own gifts and circumstances. May all our endeavors in psychosynthesis contribute to a Great Turning towards a life-sustaining civilization.

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