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The Great Turning

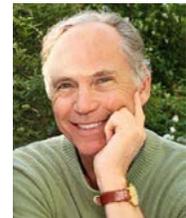
A Conversation Between Joanna Macy and John Robbins



*John Robbins and Joanna Macy, who have been friends for thirty years, are both crusaders for a life-sustaining world. In this conversation, both intimate and visionary, they explore ways they have continued over the years to move and inspire each other. John Robbins is a leader in the movement to reclaim healthy and abundant food for all. He is the author of the international bestseller *Diet for a New America*, and with his son, Ocean Robbins, *The Food Revolution: How Your Diet Can Help Save Your Life and Our World*.*

*Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy is an author and a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. Her most recent title, with Molly Brown, is *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work That Reconnects*. In June 2014, *Inquiring Mind* editors Barbara Gates and Wes Nisker joined Joanna Macy in her home in Berkeley, California, for this uplifting exchange with John Robbins, who participated by phone. These excerpts, from *Inquiring Mind*, Fall 2014, are used with permission of the publisher and of John Robbins and Joanna Macy.*

JOANNA MACY: *Your own book [Diet for a New America] suddenly catapulted you into a position where millions of people all over the world were listening to what you had to say. What do you think it was that touched so many minds and hearts?*



Joanna Macy: Your own book [Diet for a New America] suddenly catapulted you into a position where millions of people all over the world were listening to what you had to say. What do you think it was that touched so many minds and hearts?

John Robbins: The main message was that by eating lower on the food chain and eating less industrial meat, factory-farmed meat, we could do a lot of good things at once. Our bodies would be healthier. Our cardiovascular systems would be healthier. Our immune systems would be healthier. Really we would be more vibrant and resilient people. We would also be making a statement of significant compassion for animals, because animals are primarily raised today in confinement and in misery. If we take seriously that we are here to alleviate suffering or prevent suffering, and if we include in our circle of compassion the animals of this world who draw breath from the same source as we do, then by eating less meat or no meat or pulling away from factory-farmed meat, we have the opportunity to spare animals tremendous suffering while making ourselves healthier. We will also be lowering our ecological footprint, causing less air pollution, water pollution, soil erosion and deforestation—a tremendous benefit to the planet. So it is a win-win-win.

As we see in the world today, as people start to become a little more affluent, they want to eat more meat. That means using an extravagant amount of our food resource base to grow grain to feed the animals so that we, in turn, can eat them. But there is not enough rangeland on earth to produce the amount of meat that people want to eat. So it's got to be done in feedlots and that means feeding them grain. Frances Moore Lappé revealed that it takes sixteen pounds of grain to make a single pound of feedlot beef. It's a very inefficient feed conversion ratio. If we eat the grain or plant foods directly, we can feed a whole lot more people.

John RobbinsJM: I remember, John, how shocked I was to learn from you how much water is used to create a pound of meat.

JR: Yes, just think that if you took a shower every day for a full year, you would use about the same amount of water as it takes to produce a pound of beef. Eating less beef leads to the conservation of enormous amounts of water. It also leads to the conservation of topsoil and the reduction of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Our system of producing industrial meat is an ecological nightmare.

JM: As I look at your work, John, I find myself seeing its similarities to the work I've been engaged in over these decades. We call it the Great Turning, by which we mean the transition from an industrial-growth society to a life-sustaining society. What has been helpful to us and the many people we work with is to see that the Great Turning involves three dimensions. The first is to block what's destroying us and resist such policies and practices as those that corrupt our food system and cause hunger and illness. The second is bringing in new ways of doing things, including new ways of food distribution, encouraging community-supported agriculture and permaculture, and fostering sustainable and socially just patterns of food production and food choices. The third dimension is a shift in consciousness that lets us see ourselves and our planet in a new light. That is where we came together, John, and where we all come together, in the deep ecological work where we feel our inter-being with all life, including our animal brothers and sisters.

We are very lucky to be alive at this time because we have a chance to link up with each other for the sake of life, a connection that will not only make life more possible for the future ones, but imbue our daily lives with a lot of warmth and excitement and steadiness. The Lord Buddha talked about the causes of suffering as being greed, hatred and delusion, and it has become clear that what we're facing in the industrial-growth society are institutionalized forms of greed, hatred and delusion. And you've been battling organized forms of greed in dealing with the industrial food giants.

JR: Yes, because the industrial food giants have created the most addictive and most nutritionally inferior food in the world. They keep making it cheaper and more addictive. Some companies actually have scientists on their staff who are called "craveability experts." That is their language. I couldn't make that up. So they hire these so-called craveability experts whose job it is to tweak the food—not just the flavors but also the ingredients that trigger metabolic and physiological responses of the human body in order to make people crave that food. They are literally building addiction into the food. We saw this with tobacco. Eventually people recognized that the tobacco companies were intentionally selling an addictive product and wanting it to be addictive, because that was their business model. Big food today is doing the exact same thing.

Right now I and my son, Ocean, and the Food Revolution Network are all working very hard to require labeling of genetically engineered foods in this country. That is part of our effort to stop Monsanto, a company that wants to control the world's food supply. We feel that if we could get labeling of genetically modified food required in the United States, what would happen is that people wouldn't buy it. Why? Because after all these years the giant agrochemical companies haven't been able to produce a single

genetically engineered food that has any benefit to the consumer. No better taste, no higher nutrient profile, no enhanced protein levels, no nothing. But what they have been able to do is produce genetically engineered plants that can withstand massive doses of the toxic herbicides that they sell. Farmers are buying and using Roundup, this toxic herbicide, in incredible quantities, and Monsanto is making tens of billions of dollars on it and using the money to buy up the world's seed companies.

Up until very recently, nobody on earth ever ate herbicides. Farmers had to spray herbicides carefully around the plant to kill the weeds, but they couldn't get it onto the plant itself, because it would kill the plant. Now, with genetically engineered plants, they spray entire fields of corn, soy, canola, cotton and sugar beets with herbicides such as Roundup, again and again and again throughout the growing season. The plants literally soak it up and yet it doesn't kill them, because they've been genetically engineered to tolerate massive amounts of herbicides. So now, for the first time, herbicides are in the food supply and in all of our bodies. Scientists are finding glyphosate, which is the active ingredient in the herbicide Roundup, in umbilical cord blood, in the blood of newborns and in the blood of pregnant women. They're finding it in the bloodstreams of humans everywhere on the planet. So we're poisoning ourselves and the wildlife of the planet, all for the profit of a company that wants to control the world's food supply. This is counter to everything that I believe the human heart yearns for on earth.

JM: So for you and the Food Revolution Network, this is the "resistance" work, the first dimension of the Great Turning, which in this case is about revealing the horrific practices of these agrochemical companies, shining the light of truth on what is taking place.

JR: And the second dimension that you mentioned, Joanna, has to do with new ways of doing things and engaging people in sustainable and healthy practices. That is already happening everywhere, with farmers markets and the sales of organic and non-GMO food. Just to give one example, Whole Foods Market reports that if a food product adds "non-GMO certified" to its label, sales of that product go up 15% to 20% immediately. That means people are waking up and saying, "I don't want to buy GMOs. I don't want to eat them. I don't want to support the companies that are making these things. I don't want Monsanto or McDonald's or Burger King or Coca-Cola to dictate what I consume, what I think, or what I am allowed to know." There is a growing recognition that we are part of each other, and we don't want our success or prosperity to be built on the backs of others, or built on exploiting other people or the suffering of animals or ecosystems.

JM: You are talking about people waking up, John, and that indicates that we are in the third dimension of the Great Turning, which involves a shift in consciousness.

JR: Many people are becoming more conscious. They are debating. They are arguing about how much raw food you should eat. Should we be vegan or just plant-strong; should we be eating any dairy? Underlying all of those conversations, there is a churning going on. There is a recognition that we must move away from big food, industrial meat, factory farming and GMOs. We need to move toward locally sourced, sustainably grown, fair-trade, socially just foods—in order that our spirits can be fulfilled on earth, in order that we can be part of the Great Turning. Whether enough of us will awaken in time to turn the tide, that's yet to be seen. The forces—the Koch brothers and Exxon and Monsanto—they've got a lot of power. But there is a power they don't have and that's the power of the human soul. What we're going to find out is how much power we do have collectively when we really live from our souls and connect with each other at a soul level. And then, however it plays out, we'll be in an optimum position to love each other and love ourselves through whatever happens.

JM: Oh, John, thank you. What deep good news that is. You are speaking out of your work with your son, Ocean, and your family, and you're speaking for me and many others. It is a call to wake up to who we really are and our capacity to love and care for our earth, so all of that life can bloom through us.

One by One - Transforming Lives and Villages

By Jessie Benjamin

A student who chooses to study law also chooses an ambitious and challenging academic life. This endeavor is impressive when undertaken in the United States where the student's basic needs are usually met. This goal is even more ambitious when the student's family is struggling to put food on the table and family members have to leave the country to find employment.



Yann Sinath, a third year law student in Cambodia, aspires to work for the Ministry of Justice in service of those living in poverty and oppressed by inequality. Ten years ago, her father died and her mother independently supported the family by working on their small rice farm. When her sisters were old enough, they helped their mother on the farm. Sinath's brother migrated to Thailand to find employment and sends money home to his family. Yann intended to do the same until her mother encouraged her to apply to the university. An outstanding student, she received a scholarship to study law from *Lotus Outreach International's* GATEways program, a post-secondary scholarship program that BGR supports as a partner. In addition to her studies, she has worked as a kindergarten teacher and data collector and is currently an intern with the New Hope Project. Yann Sinath has worked hard to accomplish something that less than one percent of Cambodian women achieve – a higher education.

Saing Somnang's dream is to become a teacher. In her short life, she has experienced many hardships. Forced to drop out of school because her mother wanted her to escape the abuse of her violent, drunken father, she was forced to work as a dishwasher. Because Saing wanted more than anything to attend school, she disobeyed her mother and returned home. A teacher helped her to apply for a GATE (Girls Access to Education) scholarship sponsored by *Lotus Outreach International* and supported by BGR. She won the scholarship, which compensated her for materials, uniform and transportation costs, and provided a monthly stipend of rice for her family on condition she remain in school. Since achieving the scholarship, Saing's mother died. This left her and her siblings with their jobless and abusive father, who after re-marrying refused to support his children. When he became gravely ill, Saing returned to care for him. In spite of these challenges, she has continued to attend school and is currently working as a part-time teacher at an elementary school. Saing Somnang has achieved her dream.



BGR's partnership with *Lotus Outreach International's* GATE and GATEways scholarship programs provides support to young Cambodian women like Saing Somnang and Yann Sinath. Despite the hardships of poverty, these young women dare to dream that they can obtain a secondary education, go to a university, become a teacher, or work for the Ministry of Justice. They aspire to use their education to serve others who struggle with the real and degrading problems of poverty and gender inequality. Their success offers the light of hope to many other young women.

BGR at the People's Climate March

By Ven. Santussika Bhikkhuni



On Sunday, September 21, nearly 400,000 people in New York City marched down the streets of midtown Manhattan at the People's Climate March. The march, the largest climate demonstration in history, was timed to precede the climate summit that was held at the UN the following week, called by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. The march was a signal that the people of the world can no longer accept the delays and denial that have allowed climate disruption to worsen, approaching dangerous tipping points that could drive the climate into full-scale chaos. The huge turnout for the march was a visible demonstration of just how concerned and committed people in the US and beyond have become about taking decisive action on climate change.

Faith communities played a major role at the march, coordinated and guided by Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of Green Faith. I myself helped to organize a Buddhist contingent for the People's Climate Train, which brought people from the West Coast to New York City to join the march. The train trip, from September 15 to 18, featured workshops from early morning to late at night. Workshop themes ranged from political strategies like "Putting a Tax on Carbon," "Divestment," and "Money in Politics," to such topics as direct action, skills training, leadership models, and creative expression. Indigenous elders on board spoke with a profound depth and great heart about our true place in the natural world and the imperative to connect to Spirit.

The train reached New York on Thursday, September 18. On September 20, the Saturday before the march, about 200 people gathered at New York Insight Meditation Center to hear inspiring words from Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi on transforming fear into a sense of urgency and desire into fearless compassion; from David Loy about shifting our relationship to the body, self, and the Earth; from Ayya Santacitta on the reality and immediacy of climate chaos; and from Rev. T.K. Nakagaki, who compared our pollution of the planet by nuclear waste to a house without a toilet. I myself reported on the Climate Train and encouraged investigation into the [Pledge to Mobilize](#).

The organizers allocated a full block, on 58th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues, for various faith groups to gather in preparation for the march. Each faith had a section of the street to itself. Buddhists were a prominent presence. Participating Buddhist groups included Buddhist Global Relief, Chuang Yen Monastery, New York Insight Meditation Center, the Newark Meditation Center, and the Brooklyn Zen Center. There was also a rich diversity of Christian, Jewish, Unitarian, Muslim, Hindu, and Pagan congregations on the march. All meet on this one issue: our care about the future of humanity and all beings on Earth.



At the same time as the march, more than 2,600 parallel events took place in 162 countries. For every person who participated, ten or more would have liked to have come but could not make the trip. This weekend in September was not the end but really just the beginning of a global awakening to the need to preserve a climate congenial to higher life forms on Earth. To succeed, we'll need to keep up the action, to put pressure on governments to change to a clean-energy economy and to reach binding agreements on sharp reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We act on behalf of everyone that Buddhist Global

Relief supports, many of whom are on the front lines of climate chaos. We act out of compassion for all children and for all living beings, and we need everyone's help to do it.

Ayya Santussika is a board member of Buddhist Global Relief and the founder of [Karuna Buddhist Vihara](#) in Mountain View, California.

BGR at the People's Climate March

By Kim Behan and Carla Prater



The 2014 Walk to Feed the Hungry season has now ended, and we had a wonderful year of fun and fundraising! The many volunteers who put the events together had the opportunity for good fellowship, which the Buddha said was "the whole of the holy life," while serving the needy by raising funds to support BGR projects around the world.

The first walk of the year took place in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area on March 23, and the last two were on November 22, in Houston, Texas, and Sacramento, California. There were fifteen walks this year, including a solidarity walk held by project participants in Nagpur, India, and a walk on Puttenham Common in Surrey, UK. Our Founder and Chair, Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, attended five walks this year: in Escondido, Los Angeles, and San Jose in California; in New York City; and in Willington, Connecticut. Other monastics participated in the walks, including Ven. Dhammadipa, Ven. Ajahn Bounlieng, Ayya Santussika, and over thirty monastics in the walk in Escondido, held in conjunction with the yearly Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering. Partner organizations sent representatives to talk about their projects. People sang, laughed, and mostly talked as they walked! The connections we made will last for years and form the basis for more work on behalf of those in need all around the world.

We send a big thank you to all the walk coordinators; to their local teams, who put in a lot of time and effort to make each walk a success; and to all the donors and participants, whose donations helped to fulfill the purpose for which the walks are held. We also owe a great debt of gratitude for the many temples and other organizations that served as meeting points or end points for the walks, provided walkers, staff and facilities, assisting in many ways to ensure the success of these events. The funds raised will help support existing BGR projects as well as new projects in 2015.



Watch the BGR website for news of our walks and other events next year. The folks at [New Buddha Way](#) in the UK are already planning their walk for next spring! We hope you will join us in any way you can, by organizing, fundraising, spreading the word, or best of all, walking with us to share the joy of the Dharma.

BGR at the NYC Combined Federal Campaign

By Sylvie Sun



This fall, BGR participated in the 2014–2015 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), described as “the most successful charitable campaign in the world.” This outreach program is conducted throughout all federal agencies in the United States Government. In New York CFC held twenty-six charity fairs across the five boroughs of the city. The US Post Office is the biggest federal bureau, with approximate 13,000 employees in New York City. As the BGR representative, I attended most of these charity fairs held in their processing and distribution centers, gaining great support from their generous employees. During these events, I gave short presentations every 30-60 minutes to introduce BGR's work to all the employees who attended.

BGR is just one of many organizations at these events. The federal employees decide which organizations have the most appeal to them. Most often, employees choose to donate to more than one organization. Once they pledge their donation, that amount is automatically deducted from their weekly or biweekly paycheck. Besides attending CFC Charity Fairs at the US Postal Service, I also participated in charity fairs held at the Federal Aviation Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Transportation Security Administration.

On Tuesday morning, December 2, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, on behalf of BGR, joined in an interfaith Twitter chat as part of the “Giving Tuesday” campaign held under #GRPchallenge. According to the organizing team, the #GRPChallenge received an overwhelming response.

Sylvie Sun is a board member of BGR and chair of the fundraising committee.

How You Can Help

Opportunities are available now to assist with Walks to Feed the Hungry in many locations this fall, and to do outreach for the 2014 Combined Federal Campaign. If you are interested in helping out with these or other efforts, check out the list of [Volunteer Opportunities](#) on our website. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please contact us at info@buddhistglobalrelief.org for further information.

As always, donations to BGR are welcome. You can donate by PayPal or credit card on the [website](#), on Facebook, or by check to:

Buddhist Global Relief
PO Box 1611
Sparta, New Jersey 07871 USA

Thank you for your help!
