

# The Pentacle of The Great Turning

## The Great Work of these Turning Times

By *Riyana Moon*

Around the world, different ancient cultures have prophesied a time of great change: the sensation of time speeding up, mother earth becoming less and less able to support life, species going extinct by the thousands, the whole world being torn asunder by greed, ignorance, and lethargy. And in the midst of this, a great awakening – a turning, a rite of passage into a new, greater consciousness.

Ecospiritualist Thomas Berry calls this evolution of consciousness the “Great Work” of our era.

Joanna Macy, an elder of the Buddhist tradition and anti-nuclear activist for over thirty years, calls it the Great Turning. “It’s the essential adventure of our time: the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.”

### HEALING THE EARTH

For witches and other people who practice daily to root down and connect deeply with the Earth, we sometimes feel our own hearts and spirits torn apart by the devastation of our mother. Some of us feel the confusion of the many creatures whose homes and families are dying like a daze we can never quite shake off. Still others are haunted by the sorrowful songs of the dammed rivers and the salmon who cannot find their way back to their ancestral homes.

Healing the Earth and learning to live harmoniously with her ways as a culture may be the Great Work of our time, but it is hard work. Activists get burned out, earth-healers become

**Desire**  
**Surrender**  
**Transformation**  
**Solidarity**  
**Manifestation**

encumbered by their own wounds, and dreamers close their eyes to the visions they see, because it’s simply too much at times.

The Pentacle of The Great Turning is a tool that was created through a community visioning process by Free Activist Witchcamp 2007 to honor, inspire, and rebirth this Great Work. The points of the Pentacle were harvested from dreamings on Brigid Eve, visioning under the full moon, and, of course a series of seemingly endless consensus meetings, from which we emerged with a true witches’ tool: one that paradoxically works inwardly and outwardly at the same time – which is precisely the magic needed to bring about the awakening we dream of.

This pentacle, the work, begins in Desire. This is Desire in its multi-faceted, bright and shadowy sense: our deep, loving connection to the Mother, our irresistible attraction to life, our hunger for ecstasy, our yearning to know Her in our bodies, our hearts, our souls.

It is through deepening our connection with Her and with our love for life that we can viscerally understand the extent of the destruction facing our planet, and the intensity of the coming storms if we do not find another way of living.

The sheer enormity of what we have done and what we must learn to do in order to survive and ensure the survival of our brother and sister beings is overwhelming to think about – nuclear waste with a half-life over 300 million generations long, 50% of all species disappearing, an island of plastic waste twice the size of Texas floating in the Pacific Ocean. It’s tempting to turn away, to return to the much smaller and more manageable details of our private lives, but that’s not how the Great Turning is woven.

All we can do is Surrender to the fears that threaten to close our hearts like a stone, the sorrow that makes us feel brittle like dried leaves, the rage that thunders against the hollows of our stomachs like sticks, the apathy that feels like empty death. We Surrender into faith. We may not know if there’s anything we can do to the destruction in time, but we choose to try to do something about it rather than let our worry of personal failure hold us back. We open to the luminous, bright light of adventure.

In that opening, an amazing Transformation blossoms. Some traditions call this blossoming the inklings of enlightenment; some call it becoming indigenous, rewilding, or finding the primal self; some call it

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# Great Turning

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coming through the dark night of the soul into knowing the love of the divine. In the many names and forms of this Transformation, there is a common thread: we open up to the great web of life as our selves, we see how this web holds us, is within us, and that we are of it. We are nature, we are the land, we are nature and the land healing herself.

From this knowing, we can move into true Solidarity with all of our relations. Lila Watson, Aboriginal activist, once famously said, "If you have come to help me you are wasting my time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us struggle together." In the Great Turning, we extend Watson's insight beyond the boundary of species lines to include the salmon and the hazel trees, the orcas and the wild bunch grasses, the stray cats in our neighborhoods and the scrub jays that drive us crazy at 7AM with their scratchy cawing. We reach out with

our hearts and prayers to listen to the wisdom of all beings, knowing that we need the voices of all of them in order to create truly meaningful, culture-altering, save-the-world solutions.

The last point on the Pentacle is Manifestation: not only with the communal manifestation we are creating – The Great Turning – but also the unique callings of our individual lives that make up our own personal part of it. This brings us back to Desire – what we want to do with our lives to help the healing of the earth, the work that we are yearning to do, the visions we long to bring into fruition.

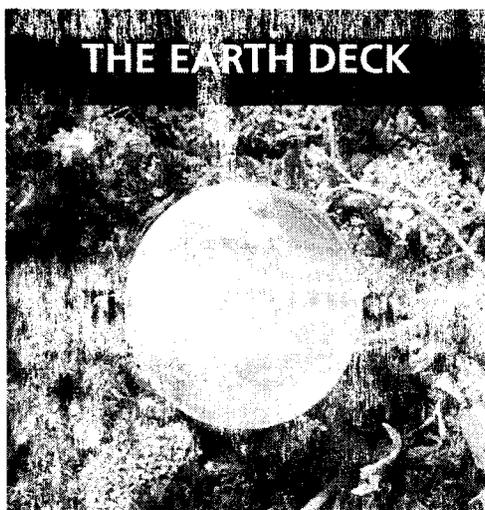
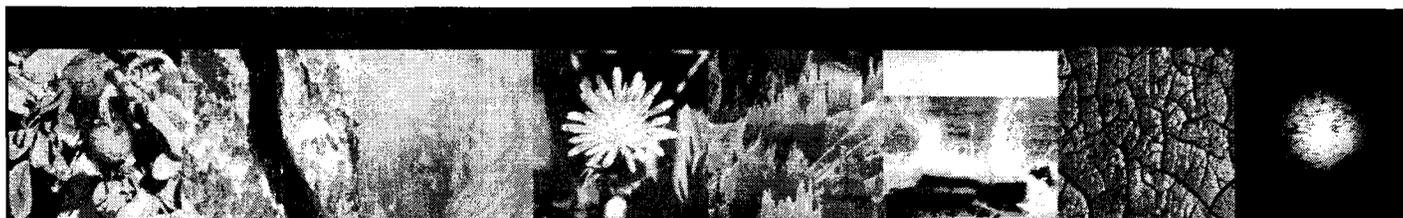
For some of us, a big part of the work of the Great Turning is our activism, whether in the streets or in community centers. For others, our work is as healers and artists and ritualists working to change the consciousness beneath the actions that are so detrimental to the planet. Still others are crafting new initiatives and new systems for our culture, finding visionary ways to manifest the Great Turning in the here and now. Most of us dance between

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— Joanna Macy

many different spheres of the work, following our hearts and minds and the wise words of our guides to find the right road for us. In all of these places, the points of the Pentacle of the Great Turning can help keep us grounded, inspired, and connected in the wider context of our work. May it be so.

*Riyana adores the magic of song, women's blood mysteries, herbalism, and incorporating the magic of other mystical traditions into her work. She has taught at Free Activist Witchcamp, Teen Earth Magic, Witchlets in the Woods, and within her local community in the Bay Area and in Black Rock City, Nevada.*



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—Starhawk

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*The Great Turning is a concept developed by author, activist and scholar Joanna Macy, who says that, "The Great Turning is a name for the essential adventure of our time: the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization."*

Most material from <http://joannamacy.net/thegreatturning.html>

The Great Turning is a name for the essential adventure of our time: the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.

The ecological and social crises we face are inflamed by an economic system dependent on accelerating growth. This self-destructing political economy sets its goals and measures its performance in terms of ever-increasing corporate profits--in other words by how fast materials can be extracted from Earth and turned into consumer products, weapons, and waste.

A revolution is underway because people are realizing that our needs can be met without destroying our world. We have the technical knowledge, the communication tools, and material resources to grow enough food, ensure clean air and water, and meet rational energy needs. Future generations, if there is a livable world for them, will look back at the epochal transition we are making to a life-sustaining society. And they may well call this the time of the Great Turning. It is happening now.

Whether or not it is recognized by corporate-controlled media, the Great Turning is a reality. Although we cannot know yet if it will take hold in time for humans and other complex life forms to survive, we can know that it is under way. And it is gaining momentum, through the actions of countless individuals and groups around the world. To see this as the larger context of our lives clears our vision and summons our courage.

### **3 Dimensions of the Great Turning:**

#### **1. Actions to slow the damage to Earth and its beings**

Perhaps the most visible dimension of the Great Turning, these activities include all the political, legislative, and legal work required to reduce the destruction, as well as direct actions--blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience, and other forms of refusal. A few examples:

- Documenting and the ecological and health effects of the Industrial Growth Society;
- Lobbying or protesting against the World Trade Organization and the international trade agreements that endanger ecosystems and undermine social and economic justice;
- Blowing the whistle on illegal and unethical corporate practices;
- Blockading and conducting vigils at places of ecological destruction, such as old-growth forests under threat of clear-cutting or at nuclear dumping grounds.

Work of this kind buys time. It saves some lives, and some ecosystems, species, and cultures, as well as some of the gene pool, for the sustainable society to come. But it is insufficient to bring that society about.

#### **2. Analysis of structural causes and the creation of structural alternatives**

The second dimension of the Great Turning is equally crucial. To free ourselves and our planet from the

damage being inflicted by the Industrial Growth Society, we must understand its dynamics. What are the tacit agreements that create obscene wealth for a few, while progressively impoverishing the rest of humanity? What interlocking causes indenture us to an insatiable economy that uses our Earth as supply house and sewer? It is not a pretty picture, and it takes courage and confidence in our own common sense to look at it with realism; but we are demystifying the workings of the global economy. When we see how this system operates, we are less tempted to demonize the politicians and corporate CEOs who are in bondage to it. And for all the apparent might of the Industrial Growth Society, we can also see its fragility--how dependent it is on our obedience, and how doomed it is to devour itself.

In addition to learning how the present system works, we are also creating structural alternatives. In countless localities, like green shoots pushing up through the rubble, new social and economic arrangements are sprouting. Not waiting for our national or state politicians to catch up with us, we are banding together, taking action in our own communities. Flowing from our creativity and collaboration on behalf of life, these actions may look marginal, but they hold the seeds for the future.

Some of the initiatives in this dimension:

- Teach-ins and study groups on the Industrial Growth Society;
- Strategies and programs for nonviolent, citizen-based defense;
- Reduction of reliance on fossil and nuclear fuels and conversion to renewable energy sources;
- Collaborative living arrangements such as co-housing and eco-villages;
- Community gardens, consumer cooperatives, community-supported agriculture, watershed restoration, local currencies...

### **3. Shift in Consciousness**

These structural alternatives cannot take root and survive without deeply ingrained values to sustain them. They must mirror what we want and how we relate to Earth and each other. They require, in other words, a profound shift in our perception of reality--and that shift is happening now, both as cognitive revolution and spiritual awakening.

The insights and experiences that enable us to make this shift are accelerating, and they take many forms. They arise as grief for our world, giving the lie to old paradigm notions of rugged individualism, the essential separateness of the self. They arise as glad response to breakthroughs in scientific thought, as reductionism and materialism give way to evidence of a living universe. And they arise in the resurgence of wisdom traditions, reminding us again that our world is a sacred whole, worthy of adoration and service.

The many forms and ingredients of this dimension include:

- general living systems theory;
- deep ecology and the deep, long-range ecology movement;
- Creation Spirituality and Liberation Theology;
- Engaged Buddhism and similar currents in other traditions;
- the resurgence of shamanic traditions;

- ecofeminism;
- ecopsychology;
- the simple living movement.

The realizations we make in the third dimension of the Great Turning save us from succumbing to either panic or paralysis. They help us resist the temptation to stick our heads in the sand, or to turn on each other, for scapegoats on whom to vent our fear and rage.

## **Personal Guidelines for the Great Turning:**

### ***Come from Gratitude***

To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe--to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it--is a wonder beyond words. Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions, the hallmark of the mystic, the source of all true art. Furthermore, it is a privilege to be alive in this time when we can choose to take part in the self-healing of our world.

### ***Don't be Afraid of the Dark***

This is a dark time, filled with suffering and uncertainty. Like living cells in a larger body, it is natural that we feel the trauma of our world. So don't be afraid of the anguish you feel, or the anger or fear, for these responses arise from the depth of your caring and the truth of your interconnectedness with all beings. To suffer with is the literal meaning of compassion.

### ***Dare to Vision***

Out of this darkness a new world can arise, not to be constructed by our minds so much as to emerge from our dreams. Even though we cannot see clearly how it's going to turn out, we are still called to let the future into our imagination. We will never be able to build what we have not first cherished in our hearts..

### ***Roll up your Sleeves***

Many people don't get involved in the Great Turning because there are so many different issues, which seem to compete with each other. Shall I save the whales or help battered children? The truth is that all aspects of the current crisis reflect the same mistake, setting ourselves apart and using others for our gain. So to heal one aspect helps the others to heal as well. Just find what you love to work on and take joy in that. Never try to do it alone. Link up with others; you'll spark each others' ideas and sustain each others' energy..

### ***Act your Age***

Since every particle in your body goes back to the first flaring forth of space and time, you're really as old as the universe. So when you are lobbying at your congressperson's office, or visiting your local utility, or testifying at a hearing on nuclear waste, or standing up to protect an old grove of redwoods, you are doing that not out of some personal whim, but in the full authority of your 15 billions years.