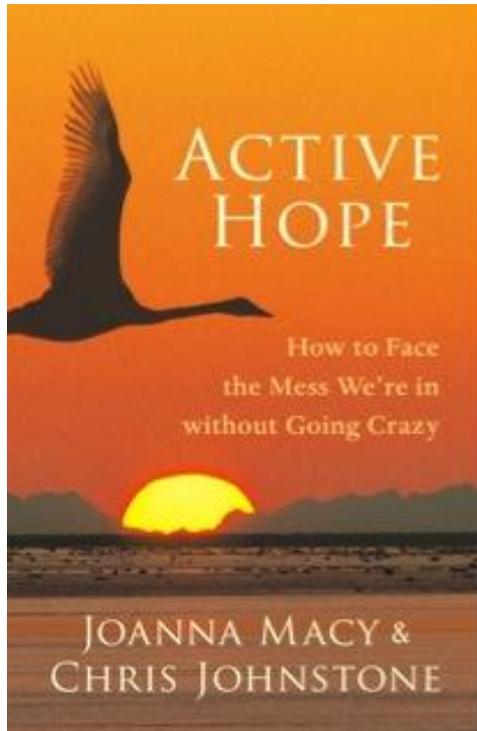


Book Brief: Active Hope by Macy and Johnstone

An excellent guide to personal resilience

I have taken part in workshops led by both Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, and regard them as two of the best teachers on personal resilience in a full sense of the phrase. This book is a clear, concise guide to their approach, and has the authority and richness that comes from their many years of teaching.



Their work is known by various names, including Deep Ecology, and the Work That Reconnects. It draws from a range of sources, including Buddhist teachings and general systems theory.

One of their key ideas is that there are three 'stories of our time', and it is empowering to name them, and choose the one we live by:

- *Business as Usual*: this is the story that governments and business would like us to trust in them. There's nothing basically wrong, and a bit more economic growth and technology will sort things out soon.
- *The Great Unravelling*: worsening climate change is only one of several huge problems which show that the world is falling apart and it's too late to save it.
- *The Great Turning*: whilst this story is less visible in mass media it is already happening in many ways across the globe.

To some extent, all three stories are happening, but only the third one encourages us to act and believe we can make a difference. The book highlights three Dimensions of the Great Turning:

- *1. Holding actions*: this means actions to reduce or stop the damage caused by Business as Usual to the climate, ecosystems and lots more. Whilst some of the big changes need to come from government and business, we can change our own lifestyle, and participate in campaigns, boycotts and more.
- *2. Life-sustaining systems and practices*: in every sector, including banking, food and transport, sustainable approaches are already available. Individuals can choose to make such changes now. But it requires big changes to spending priorities and to the patterns of Business as Usual, which will require much wider popular pressure on governments.
- *3. Shift in Consciousness*: this is a sense of belonging and connectedness with all life on Earth. As we deepen this, it brings a sense of urgency, and a passion for positive change.

Much of the book is about how to achieve this change in consciousness, and act upon it. Central to this is a four-stage process which Joanna and Chris have evolved over years: I have led it with several groups, and found it very effective. This process, the Work that Reconnects, recognises that many people feel pain and distress at the state of the world and the way things are going, but don't know how to handle it, so deny it, stuff it down, which keeps them in tension and inertia.

Their four-stage process offers a safe, supportive way to help people face their pain, move through it, and find ways to engage actively with positive change. The process is described in the book, but is best done in facilitated groups, since witnessing and support from others is a key element.

The book has a whole chapter on each of the four steps in this process, plus valuable chapters on such topics as Catching an Inspiring Vision, Building Support around you, and Maintaining energy

and enthusiasm. Unlike some books in this sector, this one is well written, and pretty concise at 238 pages. The passion, wisdom and huge experience of both authors shines through, and I can wholeheartedly recommend it. It gracefully interweaves large perspectives, wisdom from great teachers, real-life examples, and self-help exercises.

