

## **“Planetary Ethics and Nuclear Disarmament”**

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### **Abstract**

The poem “Mysteries, yes” by Mary Oliver reflects on awe, the deep astonishment about the miracles of life. We become aware how many miracles make the life system “Sun- Earth” possible. Joanna Macy’s, teacher for deep ecology, describes our present situation as a transition from an old to the new paradigm. She defines our double function: to become palliative caretaker and midwife at the same time. The development of Planetary Ethics during the last 250 years is described. This value system will help our species to become Earth compatible. The lecture ends with a metaphor – the metamorphosis of the butterfly as a symbol for the evolution of humankind and the imminent breakthroughs.



## Joy – brothers and sisters

The day before I put this lecture together I saw the movie “Dancing Beethoven”. It showed a dance performance of Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> symphony “Ode to Joy” in Tokyo. The dancers were the Bejart Ballet from Lausanne and the Tokyo Ballet. The music was played by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Zubin Mehta. When I left the movie theater I felt so energized, so deeply happy, alive, grateful, and deeply motivated to write this lecture – the fantastic dancers, performers from all over the world, the splendid orchestra with its conductor whom I know since the sixties when I was an usher, the wonderful music expressing the joy of life and the connectedness of all human beings, connected as brothers and sisters. This experience reminded me of the following poem:

### MYSTERIES, YES

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous  
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in  
the mouths of the lambs.

How rivers and stones are  
forever in allegiance with gravity  
while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds  
will never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the  
scars of damage,  
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from  
those who think they have the answers.  
Let me keep company always with those who  
say "Look!" and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads."

— Mary Oliver, Evidence: Poems

## **Abundance of Miracles – Awe**

The topic of Mary Oliver's poem is: To be awed, in German "das Staunen", awed by the mysteries, the miracles of our Creation.

Mary Oliver chooses some miracles: How grass can be nourishing in the mouth of the lambs; how rivers and stones follow the laws of gravity; the miracle of relationship – "How two hands touch and the bonds will never be broken"; and how a poem, just a composition of words, can touch people so deeply.

Mary Oliver's four examples stand for the billions and billions of miracles that surround us, that are made possible by the life system of our unique Earth, driven by the amazing star of the Sun. There are so many reasons to be deeply awed: Our globe has exactly the right size, so that – thanks to gravity – the water doesn't disperse into the universe. The perfect distance between the Sun and the Earth – 150 million km – makes it possible that we don't burn and don't freeze. We are also awed by the atmosphere, the amazing skin of life that contains oxygen. It is only about 8 km thick, a distance that can be walked in about two hours. And this thin film of life enables all the miracles we know, the beauty of a rose, the majesty of an old tree, all the animals, the jumping dolphin, the awesome elephant, and also our species, about 1'360'000 species that live now on this planet. Awed also by the fact that we can eat and digest, that we can regenerate through sleep, that we can talk and communicate with each other; awed by what happens when we cut our finger, the cooperation between the cellular hemostasis of the thrombocytes and the plasmatic hemostasis, a cascade of about a dozen activating steps performed by the coagulation factors.

After three congress days of being confronted with the nuclear threat in all its forms let's find back to the awe, to the deep astonishment of a child – having "company with those who say

‘Look!’ and laugh in astonishment, and bow their heads” – as Mary Oliver puts it.

### **Joanna Macy – the Old and the New Paradigm**

Joanna Macy (born in 1929), the teacher for deep ecology, describes our situation today as a transformation from an old paradigm to a new one. The old one is characterized by exploitation, greed, the priority of making profit out of everything, rooted in the fear of not having enough, not having enough goods, not having enough power, rooted in the lack of love, lack of trust. This old paradigm made all this madness possible, the nuclear bomb, wars, arms sales, nuclear power plants, deforestation, overfishing of the oceans, and the poisoning of air, soil, and water. The new paradigm stands for solidarity, deep respect for all brothers and sisters on this planet, respect for all other creatures, for the old trees, for the animals, and for the beauty of landscapes. And it includes the responsibility for the wellbeing of all future generations that will come after us and also find healthy and intact life conditions. According to Joanna Macy we have two jobs during this transition time – at one hand we are palliative caretakers for the old paradigm, and at the same time midwives for the new one. Actually, our Congress here reflects well these two duties, dealing with overcoming the nuclear shadows of the old paradigm and preparing the future that is freed from nuclear threats.

### **Planetary Ethics**

Planetary Ethics can become a useful tool for our midwife job – a value system that includes and promotes all the aspects of the new paradigm. Planetary Ethics will enable our species to become Earth compatible. It will make the survival of our species on our planet

Earth possible.

The idea of Planetary Ethics is not at all new. Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804, Königsberg, today Kaliningrad) described the „Categorical Imperative“ in 1785 – „Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law“. This statement gives a moral guideline. It puts our deeds into a wider ethical context and gives a basis for global responsibility.

The German-born US philosopher Hans Jonas (1903 – 1993) was aware that the development of technology threatens human survival. In his book “The Principle of Responsibility” he formulated the following ethical guideline: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life."

The Swiss theologian Hans Küng (born in 1928) sees a “World Ethic” as a precondition for dealing with the multiple threats that humankind is facing. He sees the dialogue between the religions as the path to peace between the religions and world peace.

Ervin László, a Hungarian science philosopher (born in 1932) describes – like Joanna Macy – the transformation from the old to the new paradigm. He is observing deep changes in the collective human consciousness, also in connection with the development of elementary particle physics. He is convinced: If planetary ethics become the predominant value system, it will become possible to solve all the survival issues of humankind, including the fulfillment of our dream – complete nuclear abolition and shutdown of all nuclear powerplants.

Mitsuhei Murata, former Ambassador of Japan in Switzerland, is a passionate antinuclear activist and promoter of solar energy. In order to popularize the concept of planetary ethics he suggested to

the United Nations to make the 11th of March – the day of the Fukushima disaster – the „International Day of Global Ethics“.

### **The Metamorphosis of the Butterfly**

Joanna Macy compares the present transformation from the old to the new paradigm with the metamorphosis of the butterfly.

During this amazing process the caterpillar eats and eats. It grows. It can shed, and it can pupate and become a butterfly, but only when the time of the butterfly has come. The metamorphosis is regulated by two hormones, the Ecdysterone and the Juvenile hormone. If both levels are high, metamorphosis is not possible – the Juvenile Hormone blocks the Ecdysterone. If the time of the butterfly approaches the level of the Juvenile Hormone goes down, and the Ecdysterone catalyzes the metamorphosis. The representatives of the old paradigm could be compared with the Juvenile Hormone. They are still necessary to block the process until the time of the butterfly has come.

Let's look forward to this time, to the breakthroughs to a humankind that lives fully its potential of a peaceful, respectful, and responsible global family of brothers and sisters. Let's prepare it with joy, with our own deeds that reflect the planetary ethics, and with deep awe experiencing the miracles of life.

I am ending with another poem written by Mary Oliver – yes, living together peacefully, not only all human beings, but all creatures on this planet:

When I found the seal pup alone on the far beach, not  
sleeping but looking all around,  
I didn't reason it out,  
for reason would have sent me away. I  
just went close but not too close, and lay  
down on the sand  
with my back toward it,  
and pretty soon it rolled over, and rolled over until the length of its body lay along  
the length of my body, and so we touched, and maybe our breathing together  
was some kind of heavenly conversation in God's delicate and magnifying  
language, the one we don't dare speak out  
loud, not yet.

### **Lit.:**

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