

From Coming Back to Life by Joanna Macy

From this present moment on [date] in [place], begin to walk slowly backwards in time. Move back through the events of this day ... to your waking up Walk back through the last week, the last month ... the times at home, and at work, and in your wider community Move back through the months to the turn of the year. Now you are walking back through last year through its seasons and encounters

Keep moving back through the decades of your adult life — many decades for some of us, or less than one for others — back through the journeys you made, the places you lived, the work you undertook. See perhaps the loss of someone close, perhaps the birth of a child, or children Encounter again the passions and adventures, disappointments and accomplishments

Walk back into to your teenage years with their hopes and heart-ache... back through the surprises and anguish of your adolescence You're entering your childhood, seeing the places and faces you knew, the lessons in school, the games, the lonely times Your body is getting smaller and smaller, and pretty soon the grown-ups are so tall,

continued

you have to reach up to hold their hands. Soon you're so small you're carried in arms And soon so small that you're inside your mother under the beat of her heart, your body simplifying fewer and fewer cells ... until you are just one cell and you've reached the moment of your conception.

Yet the life that is in you did not begin with your conception. It was there in your mother and your father. And even if you do not know your birth mother, your birth father, you can step back into their lives now Walk back now through their young adulthood, the choices they faced, the dreams they held. Move back with them into their adolescence, their childhood, their infancy

Continue walking back, back into the lives of your grandparents and your great-grandparents ... back through the 20th century and beyond, back before the automobile, the telephone, before electricity. In the shadows of gas lamps, move into the lives of ancestors whose names you no longer know, but a gesture of theirs, a smile or turn of the head, lives on in you.

Moving back along this river of life, back through the industrial revolution, through the dark factories and teeming city streets, into lives of your people The generations move by more swiftly as you walk back through the centuries ... through wars and upheavals, and the steady rhythms of tilling the earth

You're walking back through ancestors' lives as peasants, as magistrates, scholars, artisans, thieves, beggars, slaves and slaveholders, generals and foot soldiers Even then they carried you within them like a seed

You're moving back through ancient empires, through the rise and fall of entire civilizations back through the mists of time You come now into the longest chapter of our human journey, when we moved in small groups across the face of Gaia, gathering and hunting what we could, and no more than we needed Keep walking back through the millennia when we were nomads, treading with each footstep the soil and rock, the desert and forests of our planet home, through a time unmarked by wars

Keep walking back to our beginnings, some thirty thousand generations ago. Can you remember, was it in the heartland of Africa?

And now you stop. Now with the very first ones, you're standing at the edge of the forest, looking out over the savanna. The journey of your people lies ahead. You and your kin don't have the strength and speed of the other animals, or the fangs or claws, or the heavy pelts to protect from cold and heat. You're naked. All you have is each other — and throats that can call out to each other.

You cannot imagine what your journey together will bring or the challenges you will face

Walk forward on that journey now. Enter the long treks of your ancestors across the continents, their voyages on rafts, the long marches in the ages of ice. You come from an unbroken line of survivors and each has gifts to bestow. Open your arms and hands to receive these gifts; gather them in.

Take their physical endurance ... take gifts of the one with the courage to lead, sending out scouts, choosing the way to go, keeping an eye on the little ones, the aging ones, those heavy with child; keeping the group together.

Take the gifts of the storytellers around the fire at night ... those who watched how the stars moved, so clear, so mysterious.

Walking with these ancestors, harvest their keen senses — their observant eyes, their knowing fingers gathering leaves and roots for fever and for childbirth. Harvest the knowledge of the healers and midwives

Harvest the wild knowing of the shaman who dances between realities, between seen and unseen worlds, and brings back instructions for the people Harvest the beating of the drum and the chants as we buried the dead and welcomed the newborn

Walking up through the centuries, see trust in the eyes of the children, the passion in the eyes of the young ... See the wisdom in the eyes of the aged Hear the laughter of two young girls splashing in a stream

Harvest our kinship with the other animals, watching and learning their ways — our teachers, our totems

Receive the ingenuity of your ancestors: making tools, weaving cloth, fashioning homes Know their love of beauty, music of a flute coming from the hills, hands carving jewelry, feet dancing on the packed earth

We are entering the time when we start to settle down, sowing seeds and returning to harvest. Then staying to cultivate, perhaps at the