

# Discussion Guide for THE WISDOM TO SURVIVE, *Climate Change, Capitalism & Community*

Note to discussion leader: these questions invite thoughtful reflection. You may want to select just a few for one class period, or you may want to spread them out over a number of class periods.

- 1) What was your overall response to this film? What struck you most? Who impressed you most?
- 2) The first words of the film are a quote from Dostoevsky; *"The world will be saved by beauty."* What does Dostoevsky mean by this? Do you think it's just a romantic notion or is there truth in it?
- 3) Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy says *"Mainstream society doesn't want to hear about our sorrow for what's happening to life on earth; that gets reduced to a personal pathology."* Do you feel sorrow for what's happening to life on earth? If so, how does that sorrow manifest? Do you feel free to express it? How do you manage it?
- 4) Biologist Stephanie Kaza says that if we look directly at the suffering in the world and really take it in, the *"opportunities for action will arise."* The implication of this statement is that if we continue to "look away" or detach from the suffering all around us, there will be no opportunity for action. What does she mean? Do you agree with her? Why?
- 5) Activist Bill McKibben says *"Everything we do all day relies on fossil fuel; it's what made us rich. The problem is the same fossil fuel is now killing us."* Is there a solution to such a vast problem? What will it take for humans to change course? Do you see a way for you to be personally involved in some aspect of the change that needs to happen?
- 6) Whale Biologist Roger Payne says *"I fear you can just kiss goodbye the beauty of coral reefs; I don't think that is something that our great grandchildren will see except in films."* Does that matter to you? Why? Is it realistic to think we can address something that will happen in the future when our lives are so full and challenging in the present?
- 7) Bill McKibben says that rich nations will have to provide money and technology for emerging nations like India and China, so that they will be

able to develop without the use of coal and other fossil fuels. Do you think that the rich nations will do this? What will it take to have the developed world come to the aid of the developing world in this way?

8) McKibben also says *"I am always well aware that the world around us is not going to be any more beautiful or in tact than it is right now."* What is he really saying here? How does his statement make you feel?

9) Joanna Macy has said that the flaw in our thinking that has led us to where we are now is "imagining that we are separate from nature." And energy scholar Richard Heinberg says that the antidote to killing ourselves and killing *"the ground of our being"* is to get back in touch *"with our deep, primary, fundamental connection to what it is that makes us living beings."* What do they mean? What is that we have lost connection with? Do you lose touch with it? How do you reconnect? How could it be that the disconnection is *"killing us"*?

10) Do you feel, as Rev. Daniel Jantos says," that it is the young people who will be able to *"bring us around as quickly as it can be done."* Do you share his faith in the next generation? How can we support them? How can you support them?

11) We see in the film (in India, South America and Africa) that the people suffering most from the impact of climate change are the poor, the people who did not cause the problem. What can be done about this injustice? What can you do about it?

12) There is a growing consensus among the interviewees in this film (and in the wider society) that it is the economic system of Capitalism, with its need to expand at all costs, that is destroying nature faster than nature can recover. Do you agree with this? If not, why? If so, what can be done about it? What can you do about it?

13) Joanna Macy believes that Capitalism is destroying itself *"at the core,"* and that we need to build new systems *"in the shell of the old."* Do you think we can build new systems that will change the way we live on earth? What will it take? Will we do it? How can you be involved in that change?

14) What do we learn from the Native American view of life that is expressed in this film? What do they seem to have that we non-indigenous people need?

15) Stephanie Kaza speaks about the “Deep View” of life, using Chinese scroll paintings to illustrate her point – that what we cannot see “ *in the realm of the imagination is infinite. It has all possibility in it.*” What is she getting at? Do you think that the imagination is an essential “tool” that can be used to “save us”? Say more about this if you will.

16) Permaculturist Ben Falk implies that it’s just a matter of time before we will not be able to feed ourselves in the way we have done (by shipping food to supermarkets from all over the world.) Is your community preparing for this change? How can you be involved in securing food for your region?

17) Activist Anya Kamanskaya and the other young people from Occupy the Farm are “planting illegally” because the University of California will not allow them to use the land for urban agriculture. They believe that public land administered by a public institution should be available for needed projects. Anya quotes a colleague who says, “ *If it’s the right thing to do, you have every right to do it.*” Do you agree with this?

18) How do you think this story is going to end? Do we really have any control over the outcome? Do you think about what is “coming down the pike?” How do you integrate those thoughts? Is there need for revolution? Do you think there will be one? Will you be part of it?

19) Do you feel changed by anything you saw or heard in this film?