



Episode 10

Nature, Interconnectedness, and Reimagining Politics with John Philip Newell

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Katie: [00:00:00] Our guest today is John Philip Newell. John Philip is a Celtic teacher and author of Spirituality, who calls the modern world to reawaken to the sacredness of earth and every human being. He has authored over 15 books, including his award winning publication, Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul. Which was the 2022 gold winner of the Nautilus Book Award for Spirituality and Religious Thought.

In 2016, he began the Earth and Soul Initiative, which brings study, spiritual practice, and compassionate action together in retreats and pilgrimages designed to nurture a vision of Earth and every human being as sacred. Although John Philip has relinquished his ordination with the Church of Scotland, where he served as a minister for nearly 40 years, he continues to see himself as a grateful son of the Christian household, seeking to be in relationship with the wisdom of humanity's other great spiritual traditions.

He was the 2011 recipient of the Contemplative Voices Award from the Shalem Institute in Washington, D. C., and the [00:01:00] 2022 Sacred Universe from the Well Center for Spirituality in Chicago, Illinois. In his new book, The Great Search, John Philip explores the longing so many of us have for a new way of being. Using the lives of nine visionaries from multiple faith traditions, he challenges us to explore these longings so that we may live and act from our true depths for the wellbeing of earth and for one another. All of these visionaries, from Julian of Norwich to Rabindrath Tagore share a deep love of the natural world. They, like John Philip, found wisdom in the earth upon which we walk. And they allowed that wisdom to awaken them to the divine and all things.

As you all know, most of the guests on this podcast are people whose wisdom I discovered while running a homeless shelter during the pandemic, their wisdom helped me move forward with hope during really dark times. But as I reflected on what that part of my journey taught me about how to find hope. I realized that in the [00:02:00] most difficult moments. It wasn't a person that helped me. It was the ocean, the Florida bayou, the sun coming through the Spanish moss and the live oaks that graced our street. It was the waves and the pelicans and the shine of magnolia leaves that helped me hold the suffering that I witnessed with grace and love and honesty. John Phillips words helped me understand some of the mystery that happened on the neighborhood dock that I so often went to when things got hard. In today's conversation, we will explore that mystery. We'll explore the earth as a source of wisdom and healing, and we will explore how connecting with the earth can help us reimagine a new way of engaging politically.

John Philip, thank you so much for joining me today.

John Philip: Thank you, Katie. Very good to be with you.



Katie: So I start all of my conversations with the same question, and it is premised on this idea that we're trying to define politics in a new way, not just our party, not [00:03:00] just our policy preferences, but the way we engage with each other.

And so keeping that definition in mind, can you share an early political memory and what it taught you about how to engage?

John Philip: Yes, absolutely. And, as you say, politics is not just about party politics. It's about how we shape a sense of nationhood and community, how we shape a sense of, the one world, the one earth from which we are. But, I suppose my earliest political memory is of hearing about my grandfather, who in fact was a street fighting, communist politician in Canada. An, he died before I was born, I never met my grandfather. But, I did learn about him, not only through the family. The family was sometimes slightly embarrassed about the stories of the family of my grandfather. Here he was, a [00:04:00] street fighting communist and, and he was married to a very devout Plymouth Brethren woman. How on earth that marriage happened, I don't know, apart from the fact that opposites attract. But, he was known, not only for his, pretty aggressive style at times of, of party political activism. But he was known, especially, and this is what I love to hear not only from family, but from people that I later met in my life who had worked with him. And they remembered just how passionate he was about justice and how he was not a man of much, income or financial security, but the stories I heard about him were that often he would lend his own money or give his own money to families who were struggling to make it through, until payday,

John Philip: to keep food on the [00:05:00] table. So that was a really, important awareness that I grew up with, and my father was similarly a very passionate man, not in a party political sense, but in terms of a lot of work with international refugees. And I think what I saw in him was a passion around our interconnectedness as a world and a compassion of, especially for those who were seeking shelter, seeking sanctuary. I love to be attentive to both of these men somehow continuing to flow through me.

I, myself at one stage got involved, in terms of party politics in Canada. I ran as a member of parliament for, for a while. Ottawa, the, the place of the Canadian Parliament. I was not, in fact, successful. our, socialist party in [00:06:00] Canada had never, in fact, taken the seat that I was running in. It was a, quite a, prosperous university and constituency that had never gone very left politically. But what a great experience it was knocking on doors and getting to know people and, experiencing politics in that way.

Katie: mmm.hmm.

John Philip: I had a very interesting dream the night before that election in 1984. I dreamt that I had won the election, and I was being driven in a car to the victory party, and in the car I was writing my resignation speech. So somewhere in my unconscious, I think it was pretty clear that was not the path that would most suit my gifts.

So in that sense, I'm grateful that it didn't work out that I ended up in Ottawa, but, I have enormous sort of respect [00:07:00] for the political charism. we'll get into some of what that means, but, I've



always been very attentive to the relationship between spirituality and how we shape a sense of community and nationhood and world.

Katie: What a wonderful thing to get in the arena, And to try and to see what you learn about yourself and about others through there. I love just even your reflection that going door to door and meeting people like that in and of itself, teaches a lot.

John Philip: Absolutely. Yes. And to hear what people were needing, were hoping for, were envisaging. Yes. Very important.

Katie: So at the root of this election podcast project, is this yearning for a new way of doing politics. I like to use Parker Palmer's phrase about a politics worthy of the human spirit, which our current politics is not. And, your book, *The Great Search*, is about a yearning for a new type of spirituality. And so I was wondering if we could start the conversation, with your thoughts [00:08:00] on how those two longings are related.

John Philip: Yes. part of where I begin in the new book is to say that so many of our old systems of authority and religious belief are collapsing and so many of those systems have proved unequal to the task in terms of, really addressing some of the major challenges of humanity and earth today.

And, part of what we're seeing at this moment in time is that if we do not come back into true relationship with earth, then the very future of humanity is in doubt. and if we do not come back into true relationship with the spiritual essence of one another, not only as individuals, but collectively as nations, then we will continue to see the horror, the madness, the sort of genocide, that is happening, [00:09:00] because of conflict between nations and between races and religions.

So I see spirituality as, in part, a way of remembering that the essence of all things is spiritual, that, from the very beginning, from that great flaring forth of light. in the universe 13.8 billion years ago. that the universe has been both a spiritual reality as well as a physical reality.

And the, the tradition that I have felt Particularly blessed by, in my own journey and in my writings and teachings, is the lineage of Celtic wisdom, which I have, particularly pursued or studied and reflected on, within the Celtic Christian stream, really running from the second century right through to today. And part of the [00:10:00] beauty and strength of that tradition is that it has refused the dualism that has characterized so much of the Western world, Western thought, Western religion. And that is, a dualism, a division between spirit and matter. and I think That spirituality, as I understand it, is about looking for the spiritual deep within the material.

It's about me looking into your essence as spiritual, as well as, a physical being. And it's about, approaching every life form essentially in terms of a spiritual as well as physical relationship. by a new type of spirituality, I think I'm in part saying a new ancient spirituality because I think many of our spiritual traditions have had a much more sort of unitive vision of reality, not dividing between spirit and matter. And I think as soon as we begin to [00:11:00] see the spiritual deep in all things, then we're called to, political action and not just a party political action, but we're called to play our part in shaping, reshaping our communities, our nations, our world.



Katie: Yeah. And I, I think about our politics sometimes, and it is very dualistic. it's black and white and there's not room for nuance and grace, which makes it really hard. To come together creatively, compassionately, And so I think both in terms of seeing the spiritual in all things and that calling us to political action. I think the journey that you take us on, in the great search is also challenging this dualism that exists in some of our religious traditions, but also in our political traditions too.

John Philip: Yeah. yeah. and, you know, we've been speaking about the dualism between spirit and matter, heaven and earth, the divine and the [00:12:00] human. but there are also the, Tragic dualisms in relation to identifying, the so called enemy, as somehow evil and not also recognizing some of the seeds of evil in ourselves and in our own nations. And, so someone like Carl Jung, whom I, give a chapter to in the new book part of what he's saying is to see a type of liberation from that type of dualism so that when we're in a situation of conflict or disagreement, He very wisely is calling us to look for evil, not only in the so called other, but to look at it within our own culture, within our own societies, within our own political parties.

And to see good not only in us, but also the essence of the divine and the essence [00:13:00] of what is good in the other as well. And I think that invitation to remember that we are essentially brothers and sisters, is part of the way forward certainly.

Katie: So one of the other podcast pillars is this idea that there are spiritual practices that will help us heal the wounds that politics has inflicted on us and also prepare us to engage differently. and so today, most of the conversation, we're gonna be talking about nature as a spiritual practice, going into nature and being with nature and exploring it One of the common threads that I found in all of the visionaries that you profile in the book is this deep love of earth, and reverence for it and seeing it as sacred and as full of wisdom. And so my first question is, is this something that some of us are just born with the ability to see this, or is it something that we can cultivate?

John Philip: I think it's both, I love, John Muir, the [00:14:00] great sort of prophet of environmental ecological awareness, that I give a chapter to in, in my previous book, Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul. and one of the things he says is let your ancient mother love of Earth, rise again. And, I think, That is important on so many fronts. It's to know, that we are earthlings, we are of earth. And deep within us is this sense of love and deep connection to earth. So when we're calling for ecological change at this moment in time, and this is the great challenge facing, humanity today, I think it's really important to be able to see that love of earth is actually deep within even those who are denying climate change, or those who are behaving in ways [00:15:00] that, that lead to a further abuse, of the environment and of the life forms of Earth.

Rather than saying to them, You need to repent. You need to change and become like me. I'm a lover of earth and you need to become like me. Ecological action for change can slip into that sort of self righteousness. and end up undermining itself, I think, if we become self righteous, if we think, we're the only ones with a love of earth, I prefer on this and on other issues always to see that the essence of the other is divine, and the essence of the other is of earth. And, so when we're calling for change, we're really calling, the other as well as ourselves to become truly ourselves, that is to reconnect with what someone like mirror calls that ancient mother love of earth. Let it rise again. It's not [00:16:00] about, inviting people to become something other than their essence.



It's really about inviting us all to return to our essence. And part of that essence is a deep, um, rootedness in the very womb of earth.

Katie: Can you share a little bit about, Nan Shepard's relationship with the mountains and how it changed? I was so struck by, how she began. I feel like it's actually where I still am is where I'll go and I want that sensation of height. I want that, the exertion of effort, but she moved so far beyond that, right? can you talk a little bit about how her love of the earth evolved.

John Philip: Yeah. So, you know, there will be so many people who, aren't aware of Nan Shepard. She is being celebrated certainly in Scotland. she now appears on our Royal Bank of Scotland, five pound note, as the first woman poet writer to appear on our, [00:17:00] currency. Nan Shepard, grew up in, in a part of Aberdeenshire on the west side of that central mountain range called the Cairngorm Mountains. And it was her practice, from childhood to begin to glimpse these mountains and then to eventually end, enter them. and she wrote a book called *The Living Mountain*. she really allows the Cairngorm Mountains to be like a metaphor for the body of earth, and, she very beautifully describes her relationship with the mountain, the Cairngorm mountains and really sees it as a love affair. It's a relationship of great intimacy and much of her language is the intimacy of a lover for the beloved. And, is the way a lover comes to love the whole of the beloved, the [00:18:00] body of the beloved. and she says something very, very beautiful at one point in *The Living Mountain*. She says, anyone who has not slept with the mountain does not, truly know the mountain. And, that's a phrase that, It, of course, speaks of this intimacy of relationship that she has with the mountain.

And really importantly, one of the things that Nan points to is what she calls body knowing, not just mind knowing. And I think again, she's appealing to the way lover and beloved know one another. It's not just with our mind. it's with the whole, whole of our being. So she's really inviting us to, come back into relationship with Earth, as love affair. And it's that love affair with, the body of Earth that will really, provide the fuel and the passion, for the work of [00:19:00] change and the work of transformation and healing that needs to happen in humanity's relationship with Earth.

One of the beautiful things I love about that story of Nan Shepherd, she wrote *The Living Mountain* in the 1940s and she sent it off to a publisher and the publisher declined. because she was really way ahead of her times. she was like a prophetess of the of earth consciousness, before we, for the most part were there, as a Western world, certainly. It was declined by the publisher and, she tucked it away in her drawer, and she didn't take it out again for over 30 years. And when she was an older woman clearing out her house, She came across this manuscript again, and she read it again, and she thought, this is as important, maybe more important today than when I first wrote it.

And she sent it off, and this time it was [00:20:00] accepted and was fairly quietly published in the 1970s. but it's now something of an international bestseller. People all over the world are discovering Nan Shepard. And I think one of the sort of important things. that we see in Nan, but we see it in, in many of these other teachers as well. And that is a recovery, for a sense of the sacredness of earth goes hand in hand with a recovery of a sense of the sacredness of the feminine. the way Earth's body has been abused is often the way the feminine has been subordinated or abused in our Western culture and our Western religion.



So Nan Shepard is being celebrated today, by ecologists, but by feminists, by artists, and it's so lovely to see her on the five pound note here. if there is a type of consciousness. that happens after one's physical [00:21:00] death. I think she would be amazed.

Katie: So, I think A new politics requires that we see the dignity and protect the dignity of all people, including those with whom we disagree. and so I'm wondering how going to nature and seeing the sacred in nature helps us see the sacred in other people.

John Philip: Yeah, I think that, um, part, part of this earth consciousness that we're in the midst of is maybe a, it's a more sort of concentrated consciousness I think than, Humanity has known, although, our native traditions have known this deep sense of connection with Earth. But the Earth consciousness that we're in the midst of now is coming to us from nearly every great discipline of thought and study. nearly every great discipline is inviting us to look to Earth and to our relationship with Earth as an essential part of well being. [00:22:00] And so I think one of the things that we are learning through our Earth consciousness is just how interrelated all things are, on Earth and throughout the universe. this extraordinary law of attraction, that is deep in the atoms of the universe, at some level, every atom in the universe, longs to remain in relationship with every other atom.

Otherwise, the whole thing would spin off into unrelatedness. And scientists don't really claim to understand that law of attraction, they describe it, as the law of gravitation and so on. So we're, I think, at one level becoming increasingly conscious of just how interrelated everything is.

And, that's part of the experience of being in nature, is to remember not only the interrelatedness of all things out there, as it were, but is to know that [00:23:00] we are part of that interrelatedness. And, even though, we often live our lives in a type of separation from the natural world, we know, I think, at a very deep level that we are more well, when we are in true relationship with nature.

when I get to experience some sunshine on my skin, when I get to stand under, The full moon at night, when I get to feel the waves and wind of the sea along the seashore, when I bite into a crisp autumn apple at this time of year, all these things, we can know, oh, I feel more alive.

I feel more well. I feel more interconnected. So I think that great gift of knowing the essential oneness, knowing the essential interrelatedness of all things, and knowing that humanity is not some separate entity, but is very much part of this interwoven oneness of Earth. Kenneth [00:24:00] White, who I give a chapter to in the previous book, Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul, he says, put people in touch with nature, truly in touch with nature, and they will learn how to be truly in touch with one another again. it's our very ground. It's the ground from which we've come. And, and I think it can profoundly affect, how we come to see the interrelatedness of humanity and the soul of humanity as interwoven with the soul of earth.

Katie: Yeah, that's beautiful. in the chapter on Rumi, you write, the resurrection place of love expresses itself most truly in our lives through humility it is the path of humus living close to the ground. Rather than the way of hubris lifting ourselves above others, how does spending time in



nature cultivate humility and how might such humility change our [00:25:00] approach to both politics and spirituality?

John Philip: I think, Part of the experience of being truly immersed in nature is to know something of our size in relation to nature, and is to know something of the power of elemental energy. and I think that can be in and by itself, a very humbling experience in the best sense of the word. we see the proportion of our energy in relation to Earth's energy, or our significance in relation to this unfolding story of the universe that, That has been at work for billions of years. and we are this sort of tiny, tiny expression. So it sets us in perspective. There's words from the Quran that says, look to the mountains and you will remember just how small you are so that there's that.

And, then I, I love [00:26:00] to, to study or to reflect and learn through the etymology of language and these words like nature, natural, native, they all come from the same root NATOs, which is to do with birth. we are born of nature, and we're born of the earth. And native traditions tend to be traditions that are remembering that our birth, the boom from which would come is earth. As we come back into true relationship with Earth, we're remembering that we are Earthlings, as we've already been saying, that we are born of Earth. and that, is a way of remembering, not only with our mind, but with our whole being, That we belong to one another and that we are interrelated with all the life forms and that well being is not something that can be pursued in separation, but [00:27:00] together. And, we're being invited to remember that The human species will not be well if Earth is not well, when we see that wellness belongs to the whole, not to the part, that, you know, my nation, our nation cannot be well if we are wronging or exploiting other nations. And I cannot claim that my family can be well if I'm ignoring the health and education of the family down the road wellness is very interrelated.

And the other etymology that I think is really important is the word humility, and it comes from the root humus. Earth and soil and knowing again that is our essence. And I think, these experiences of knowing our rootedness in earth and knowing that we are of the soil of earth. and also that [00:28:00] we are made of stardust, reconnecting us not just to earth, but to the entire cosmos. has a way of, profoundly, leading us into what I like to speak of as a radical humility. and that is a stance that helps us. remember that wellness is something that we will find, together and not in isolation.

Katie: So in the chapter on Jung, you quote him as saying that humanity's worst sin is a lack of awareness. Why is that a sin and how can nature help make us more aware?

John Philip: one of the interesting things about the word sin, we're spending a lot of time on etymology here, but, one of the interesting things about the word sin is that the English version of it, is, is rooted in middle, German, and it's related to the words Sunda, uh, S U N D A, which also is [00:29:00] part of Sunder.

So anything that sunders What really belongs together is a type of sinning. to the extent that I'm sort of sundered from your essence, if I forget your essence in terms of how I think about you or speak about you or, relate to you, then I think I'm part of sundering. I'm part of, tearing apart what really, should be essentially one or should be in harmony.



And, when our actions are sundering the relationship between humanity and earth, or, when we're engaged in behavior that is sundering my relationship with my community and my neighbors. And when we're doing that between us as nations, then I see that as our sinning, our, our sundering of what is really, essentially one and should be revered as [00:30:00] interrelated. When Jung says that our worst sin is lack of awareness or lack of consciousness, I think he's pointing to that relationship. between, our behavior and staying in true relationship with earth and with our own depths and with one another. And, as we've already said, spoken of this being in true relationship with earth, keeps reminding us not just our minds, but our bodies, our whole essence, keeps reminding us of the essential oneness, essential interrelatedness of all things.

Carl Jung, I think is one of the great sort of, Prophets of the human soul and it's been so lovely, being able to spend time with him, time with his thoughts, his writings. I see this as being the case with all of these great teachers that I draw from. I feel so blessed, In the sort of development unfolding of a project [00:31:00] like this and, my hope, of course, my prayer is that my book might be a blessing for others, because I have certainly been blessed in spending time with these great prophetic figures of the human soul.

And one of the things I love about Carl Jung is, he speaks of, moon like consciousness and sun like consciousness. And it's a way of, inviting us back into this conjoining of so called opposites. So, you know, we've lived in a world in which there's the East and the West, there's the North and the South, there's the feminine, there's the masculine, we so often see things and experience things in limitation by living only in relation to one half of those.

So-called opposites and certainly in so much of our western world we are day creatures. We, we don't know the night so well, and, So much of our culture and religion has been [00:32:00] influenced by the sun and I'm a great lover of the sun. But, I also, have come more and more, back into relationship with the moon. On Iona recently, we were blessed with such clear skies that I was conscious of the moon, like I have never been conscious of the moon, for such a continuous, number of days and nights. when we walk Under the brightness of the midday sun, I think our consciousness, our attention is drawn much more to the, distinction of the parts. Whereas when we walk under the beautiful whiteness of the moon at night, I think we are more conscious of the oneness and the interrelatedness of everything that we're in the midst of. this fits in with so much of what we've already been touching on, we need this moon like consciousness again, [00:33:00] in order to see and experience the oneness, the essential oneness and interrelatedness of everything around us.

And yes, let's also be sure that we celebrate and reverence, the parts as well. But to forget the wholeness, to forget the oneness, is leading us only to live from this sort of one way of seeing, as it were the moonlight consciousness, as Jung calls it, is a seeing that takes us back into the interrelationship That we are a part of.

Katie: I just want to say that you were talking about how you have grown so much through this project and writing about these teachers, I feel like, as I read it, I gained mentors and friends and just people to journey with me. And, one of the, people that I fell in love with that I'd never heard about was, Eddie Hillison and, an image from that chapter that just keeps coming back to me. is the Jasmine in her [00:34:00] garden. can you tell us a little bit about her story?



and what her story tells us about our ability to access the beauty and wisdom of nature, even in the most horrible circumstances?

John Philip: Hmm. Yeah. So Etty was, a young Jewish woman in her early 30s when Nazi forces invaded her homeland of the Netherlands. and around the time of the Nazi invasion, she began to keep a diary. And she soon realized that this diary was a type of diary of soul, as well as speaking about what was happening around her and in her nation and in Europe. She increasingly found it a type of dialogue with that deepest. dimension within her, which she says, for the sake of convenience, I will call God.

She [00:35:00] says, that deepest part within us that, that of course cannot be named, that is beyond all names, but which we refer to as God or the divine. And, increasingly the diary, becomes a type of conversation with that deepest, presence of the divine within her. to enter into that, relationship with what is deepest in her, is not something that is taking her away from knowing the sorrow and the horror of what is happening to her people and which eventually happens to her. She is killed by the Nazis eventually at Auschwitz. this sort of inner journey relates very directly and in that sense I think she's such a perfect expression of what you're looking for in this podcast and that is the relationship between inner well being[00:36:00] and being committed to outward well being. She ends up spending some time in what is like a transit camp, a type of holding camp.but nearly everyone who enters, the holding camp or the transit camp will eventually be sent on to Auschwitz or to a place of an extermination camp.

Even before she has gone to do some work in the transit camp, and she volunteers to be with her people who have already been arrested and have been sent to the transit camp. even before that happens, she sees this unfolding story of horror, her people are no longer being allowed to shop, unless they're designated as only, for Jewish people to shop in. And as she sees people being. Dismissed from their work because they're Jewish when she sees that, people can no longer walk in parts of [00:37:00] Amsterdam and can't even enter the public parks,as Jews. she, She is knowing the horror of what is unfolding and she is beginning to see the implications even though they don't yet know explicitly about places like Auschwitz.

And, at one point in her diary, she speaks about sitting out on the balcony of her house and delighting in the beauty of the jasmine. and realizes how important it is, even in the midst of the horror of what is happening in Nazi occupied Holland. She sees that it's really important to also remember these beautiful expressions of blossoming that are around her.And I think at that point in her diary, she says, I'm going to linger here for a bit longer before I get the work of the day. Just allowing myself to be blessed by this beauty [00:38:00] that is around me. And then a number of weeks later,in the diary, by this stage, the Jasmine has faded, and the flowers, are either entirely off or about to fall.

and then she says, Within me, O God, is scented jasmine. it's very beautiful. It's very similar to what we read in Nan Shepard, for instance,she realizes the more she comes to know the essence of the mountain, the more she comes to know her own essence.

and we see something similar happening with Etj, so that even though the outward jasmine has lost its blossom, she sees that deep within herself is what she calls the scented jasmine. And she says to



God, there will always be in your house, meaning in her being, and in the being of every life form, there will always be scented jasmine [00:39:00] for you in your home, in your abode. And then later when she is in a transit camp. she very intentionally, it's like a sort of spiritual discipline, spiritual practice. seeing so much horror during the day, seeing people despairing and, weeping and fearing. she at one point in the day will always go to a fence on the far side of the transit camp and she looks out across the fields. to another flowering. I've forgotten what type of flower it is. It's maybe a blue iris or something that she's seeing on the other side of the fence. and that she continues that practice even in a transit camp. it's a very beautiful expression of, finding strength, finding beauty, in the natural world, and knowing that's a reflection, or that's related to the inner [00:40:00] sanctuary of our being.

And the most repeated phrase in her entire diary, and in some of her letters as well, which were preserved, is the phrase, I believe that life is meaningful, and life is beautiful. And the fact that she's able to say that in the midst of, the expressions of the Holocaust in the Netherlands speaks of an extraordinary, strength of soul, in accessing a place within her, from which she can truly draw strength. And, looking for the image of God, even in those who are perpetrating terrible, terrible wrong.

Katie: I loved at the end, she throws the postcard out as she's getting on the train. for Auschwitz, and like a farmer, someone finds it, and sends the postcard to her friends, and then there was another friend, I think, that, that witnessed her leaving, and, but [00:41:00] she still had so much light, so much love, that she was reflecting back to other people, even. In the midst of all of this, and so, you know, what that, that time lingering with nature can help us connect to ourselves, and to our deepest knowing, but then also that radiates out, even when things are as bad as they can be, you know.

John Philip: Yeah, yeah, truly. Yes, she says on that postcard that she throws out the train. when she's being deported to Auschwitz. On that postcard is a phrase like, we left the camp singing. we were actually singing. and this is extraordinary. This vision of reality is, is not armchair theology. this is not a sort of reflection from afar. these are utterances from the midst of the horror of what humanity is capable of doing to itself.

And, and I think it's for that reason [00:42:00] that she is so important a voice. she's a voice, that speaks into collective horror and there are places of collective horror and wrong. that we're so aware of in our world. And, it's a voice that speaks also into how we are being invited to see and live in the midst of sort of personal times of suffering or suffering in our families as well.

Katie: So you end the Great Search with a reminder that the awareness of the sacredness of earth and the human soul should make us both say the yes and the no of love. can you talk about what that means and what that looks like in the political sphere?

John Philip: I think first of all, I see all of these nine, figures as sort of prophetic figures and I think the role of the prophet. prophetic voice that we're all called to be part of is to [00:43:00] denounce what is false, to denounce the sundering or the sinning, to denounce the divisions and the abuse of power and the way power has so often arrayed itself up over against the earth and against the feminine, for instance, and against the powerless. So the prophet is there to denounce and in that sense to say no



to what is false, to what is destructive. but the prophet doesn't just denounce, the prophet also announces the prophet announces a vision that takes us to the true essence of life and to the true essence of our being. So it's in that context that I speak about the no and the yes, if we are truly, living, seeing, but also living and speaking, seeing the light of the divine in one another's eyes and deep in every life form. then that yes is going to [00:44:00] lead us to passionately, saying and speaking and living, no in the face of confronting anything that is assaulting that light of the divine, in all things.

part of what I'm pointing to in, in the conclusion is that the way of love is calling us into both. it's not just about saying yes to the beauty and the glory of the divine that we can glimpse in one another and all things. It's about. Passionately saying no and confronting, denouncing, and anything that violates that sacredness.

Katie: so the goal of this podcast is to empower, people to engage politically from a place of hope. I normally end Interviews by asking, how the guest is engaging this season and where they're finding hope. But Scotland is not in the middle of a, election season like we are in the U S. but I also know that politics doesn't [00:45:00] end with elections. And so, I'm wondering how you're engaging in the off season, and where you are finding hope.

John Philip: very consistent with everything we've been saying. together in this conversation is that, the spiritual and the political belong together. and that's always my hope. and again, I'm not speaking of the political in, simply a narrow party political sense, but in terms of Allowing that word to give expression to how we are shaping the world, the nation, the nations, the communities, the families that we are a part of. So this relationship between an inner grounding and an outward strength and passion for transformation and healing. To that extent, I see my spirituality teaching, my spirituality working as [00:46:00] feeding very directly into the political sphere. because that's, certainly always my desire and I think that, I try to be true to that desire in terms of how I teach and write.

So in, in that sense, I think I'm always quite engaged in the political even though, some people might just describe me as a spirituality writer, but I see true spirituality as deeply challenging, and inspiring how, how we live. I think on a more practical level as well.

I'd want to say that it's important to be in relationship, as much as we're able with those who are engaged with the nitty gritty of giving a shape to our nation and determining policies that's something I've tried to do. we spoke earlier about my own Little entry into party political activity. And one of the things that has been with me since that experience is wanting to find ways of [00:47:00] really honoring and supporting those who feel a call to, that sort of way of working for healing and transformation. so I, I, in my own life, try to make a point of being very, intentionally in relationship with politicians and party political people who are willing to be in relationship with me. Just a little example, here in Scotland this coming weekend, we're celebrating the publication of the new book, The Great Search. And The person who's proposing the toast for the, for the book is, Lord Wallace of Tancredness, and he was a member of Parliament. He was for many years the, Deputy First Minister of Scotland. And, he's now in the House of Lords with a sort of funny title like Lord Wallace of Tancredness. So I very intentionally invited him to be the one to speak to the book, rather than asking a [00:48:00] theologian Precisely because I believe in and want people to see the connection between spirituality and how we shape our nationhood and how we shape the world. I think I was well trained



by my own mentor in this field, George McLeod, the founder of the modern day Ayanna community. He also ended his life, as a member of the House of Lords. Prayer for him and politics for him were, inseparably interconnected. But one of the things I saw in George and have always deeply respected and have tried to follow in my own life is, to stay in relationship, with those who may appear to be politically opposite to us.

I think relationship. Relationship, relationship is, is part of key to true wholeness and to the possibility of healing in our nations. And I think the way, we sometimes demonize the so [00:49:00] called other is counterproductive. It doesn't go anywhere. It might feed one's own sense of self-righteousness, but if what we're talking about is change and healing, we need more than that. And so remaining open to trying to be in relationship is really important. That's one of the little ways in which I would say I continue to be political every day.

Katie: That's something that all of us can do, right? And we can all seek to be in relationship.

John Philip: Yeah.

Katie: I would love to end our conversation with one of the meditations from the book. So for our listeners, each chapter ends with a short reflection on the visionary who we've been reading about. And then there's a meditation, that John Philip invites us into. And then they're all collected at the end so that if you want to do a cycle of meditative practices, that appendix allows you to do that. And so, would you be willing to lead us in, the [00:50:00] meditation actually from Nan's, chapter on, the sacredness of earth?

John Philip: Yeah, yes, I'm delighted to, and thanks for ending this way, Katie, because, this book is filled with, ideas, hopefully nourishing and challenging ideas, and it's important that we're not just not just allow them to land in our mind, but to find their way into our hearts and souls as well. And that's one of the reasons why I write these meditative practices, at the end of each chapter. So here's the one from the end of the Nan chapter.

As the body longs to waken to all its senses,
So my soul longs to know earth again,
to breathe her in and touch her,
to taste her goodness and hear her song,
and forever to see [00:51:00] fresh shinnings of her life
and seek her healing as my own.

As the body longs to waken to all its senses,
So my soul longs to know earth again.

Katie: Thank you so much for this conversation, for this beautiful book that just invites all of us into a new way of being. I am, I'm so grateful.

John Philip: Thank you, Katie. So good to have been with you.