



a journal of positive futures

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discussion guide
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our planet, our selves

welcome to the yes! discussion guide series

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. We especially encourage you to use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people gather to talk with mutual respect and caring about the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

We've posted selected articles from this issue of YES! on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You're welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 1-800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.

Michael Soule describes in mythical form how our time will be remembered as the time of Great Dying. Such a picture is so appalling that many feel they can do nothing but ignore the devastation of the planet. Yet as more and more people suffer from a growing list of ominous ailments—cancer, birth defects, developmental disorders, infertility—and it becomes clearer and clearer that these rising epidemics are environmental, we begin to understand in our own bodies that our own health is intertwined with the planet's. There is a political opportunity in this growing awareness, as Michael Lerner points out, and an opportunity to turn to nature for its healing power.

This discussion guide centers on the following articles. You might want to discuss a different one at each session.

- Michael Lerner, "Surviving the Great Dying"
- Nancy Evans, "The Whispering Is Over"
- Anne Marie Carter, "Got Seeds?"
- Interview with Doug Rokke, "The War Against Ourselves"
- Francesca Lyman, "Restoring Nature, Restoring Yourself"

surviving the great dying

Michael Lerner says that nothing so motivates us as a danger to our own health or to the health of those we love—perhaps the latter most of all.

- What was your reaction to the Michael Soule "legend" about the great dying? What emotions did it bring

up? Do you believe this is a likely scenario? How did it affect your sense of what can be done?

- Who in your own life has experienced serious illness? What has it been like for those close to that person? What obligation do we have to keep an environment clean for other people? For example, wood stoves, car exhaust, lawn chemicals, and chemicals we put down the drain affect other people and other life forms. What are our obligations regarding personal forms of pollutants? What are you willing to pay in higher prices to get organic foods and other products produced without environmental harm?
- What environmental pollutants might be present in your community? How much do you know about the health consequences of these pollutants? What kind of action are people in your community taking to investigate the causes of common ailments?

the whispering is over

At one time breast cancer was an unspeakable subject. Then women began insisting on research into treatment. Now women have begun to mobilize to insist we deal with the causes of this epidemic.

- Do you know someone with breast cancer? When did you first become aware of the disease?
- What changes have you witnessed in the way people around you talk, or don't talk, about the issue?
- Have you participated in a "Run for the Cure," or other similar efforts? What was the experience like?
- The photograph on the first page of this article makes some people uncomfortable. What was your reaction? Should *YES!* have published this photo? This photo is a self-portrait—does that change your view of it? What does it mean to be intimate when we have experienced disfiguring illness? What role does intimacy have in our healing?
- Some people are testing the chemical contaminants they carry in their own bodies (their "body burdens") and discovering their bodies carry a number of chemicals associated with household products, cosmetics, industrial processes or agriculture. Would you want to know? Would you be interested in knowing the patterns of these chemical contaminants in your community?

got seeds?

Anne Marie Carter describes her experience helping bring gardens to Watts, California. The gardens brought fresh produce to neighborhoods that desperately lacked it and connected the community to the land and to the power to create something from it.

- Most people assume that cities are devoid of nature. In your experience, what difference does it make when plants and greenery are introduced into urban settings?
- What effect could urban gardens have on quality of life? Or is urban real estate too valuable to be used for gardening?

war against ourselves

Major Doug Rokke is a lifetime military man. Yet he is traveling the country to speak out about the effects of depleted uranium (DU) munitions on those the US has waged war on, and on our own soldiers, their children, and the planet. Because we are not prepared to provide medical care to those affected, nor clean up the contamination that lasts for millions of years, he says, war has become obsolete.

- Do you know anyone who served in the Gulf War, Kosovo, or Afghanistan, or who is being called up to the Persian Gulf now in preparation for a war on Iraq? How has their health been affected? What conversations have you had with them about the health consequences of warfare?
- Do you think the US has a long-term obligation to those whose health is affected by US military campaigns and whose environment is contaminated by our weapons, such as Iraqis or Kosovars? What does it



owe to soldiers?

- How do the long-term effects of modern weapons—particularly radiation effects—affect your views on the morality of war? How does it affect your judgment about when a country should go to war?

restoring nature, restoring ourselves

Years ago, John Beal surprised himself and his doctor by not dying. It was dedicating himself to restoring the polluted creek behind his house—and now an entire watershed—that returned him to health, he believes, and he has seen the same effect worked on hundreds of volunteers he has recruited to work with him.

- When have you turned to nature for restoration? What effects does the health or beauty of your environment have on you?
- When you are sick, depressed, or in need, what resources do you naturally turn to? What places are most restorative to you? Describe a particular place that has been meaningful to you.
- What experiences have you had of giving help, of restoring something, that have proved restorative to you? Why were they restorative?

We welcome feedback on your experience in using our discussion guides. Email comments to DiscussionGuides@futurenet.org. Download additional copies of this guide at www.yesmagazine.org. YES! is published by the Positive Futures Network, an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to support people's active engagement in creating a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world.

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