



Generation Waking Up!

**Joshua Gorman
Berkeley, California**

Joshua grew up in suburbs of Washington, D.C. His was a world wholly influenced by the dominant aspects of American culture. From a young age, nothing felt like enough. By his mid-teens, he started to become conscious of the troubled world he was born into. “I was a really sensitive young person. And I was really troubled by the state of the world. I had a broken family, which caused internal struggles. I was from a broken community. I was aware of the climate crisis we were in. It was overwhelming, I was lost. Alone. Most of my peers were in the mainstream flow of things, and I was just sitting there alone, with these big questions. And wondering, how do we do something about it?”

He didn’t know. But he’d read authors like Hermann Hesse, Jack Kerouac, and Joseph Campbell, whose work awoke in him the call to adventure. “I felt like that archetypal character who had the same big questions. And so I dropped out of high school, left my family and friends, and went to the West Coast. This wasn’t a healthy thing to do. I’d taken the wrong message, in a way. It put me in a deep existential crisis. I was very depressed. I felt no hope or meaning. I felt like I was born to watch the world fall apart.”

At 21, Joshua went to visit a friend on the Big Island in Hawaii. He planned to stay two weeks. But it would be three full years before he boarded a flight back home to D.C.

“In Hawaii, I found myself in the middle of an age-old story – a back to nature experience. I was taken in by a local farmer. I lived on his farm and worked the land. Learned how to grow things. Mainly, I got out of my head. I had all these negative thought patterns my whole life that I couldn’t escape. Working on the land helped me to drop out of my head and into my body. To connect with the natural world, which is so majestic! The Big Island is like it’s from a fantasy book. It’s an island resting on a volcano. There I could feel the world was alive, healing, restorative. I learned about other healing things too, like vegetarianism. I had a total ecological awakening. Everything that my soul was longing for, I found in Hawaii.”

There in Hawaii Joshua saw that there is much to learn from those who came before us. In ancient Hawaiian culture, there was a guiding principle of harmony and unity called *lokahi* that governed the land and the people. This concept promotes a balance of body, mind, spirit, community, and nature, as a way of approaching life. Living with this concept was the basis for a wise, advanced culture where people lived in perfect balance with the land and with each other.

With this grounding in nature, Joshua began to explore other spiritual paths and traditions. He started to meditate. Spent time in solitude and in nature. And slowly, through this spiritual awakening, he started to experience moments of happiness and inner peace. “I didn’t know those things were possible, coming from a culture with a lot of darkness. I saw a whole different side of life. And I woke up to a larger historical process at play. It helped me realize that we’re at a turning point in the world. An old paradigm is dying, and a new world can be born.”

One day Joshua was taking a stroll, and he had his epiphany. “I realized the young people of our generation have a purpose like no generation before. To be the bridge from an old world into this new world. On one hand, it’s one of the hardest times for young people. But we can look at these times in a different light. What a gift and a privilege it is to be the ones that get to make that leap! Young people today have the opportunity to lead social movements, and make sweeping changes on our planet like we’ve never seen before. In that moment, I really believed, in the depth of myself, that we are going to make it. And this was when the vision of Generation Waking Up came into my life.

Joshua returned home and enrolled in George Mason University, knowing that he had to further hone his leadership skills. He had a vision, but he knew he needed the proper training in order to fulfill it. But it was hard to find: so he created his own major – Global Youth and Social Change. And he began working, learning, volunteering, and mentoring with all types of nonprofits, youth programs, and social justice organizations.

He says that he approached this work with a bias. “We don’t need environmental, political, or economic change. We needed a *systems* change. A complete cultural shift in our values and structure.”

In trying to answer the question of how to encourage this larger, systemic change came Joshua’s idea for Generation Waking Up. Its mission: to ignite a generation of young people to bring forth a “thriving, just, and sustainable world.” The WakeUp Experience is Joshua’s flagship workshop. It’s a 2-3 hour multimedia experience that explores four specific questions: Who are we? Where are we? What has to change? What do we do now?

“It’s a framework for an all-encompassing curriculum,” Joshua explains. “We are training spiritual activists, systemic change makers, and holistic change makers too. There’s a lot of personal and interpersonal leadership training involved, which is so often lacking in workshops. It really helps, to connect the dots between the inner work and the outer work. This connection is essential for any individual to be at their most effective.”

Addressing these complicated social issues can be daunting. This holistic worldview is important to Joshua because it’s precisely this understanding that he himself lacked as a youth. “There’s this notion around urgency that I think is incomplete. Yes, we need to be out there taking action against these big problems. Mobilizing and spreading awareness. Because it’s true, our times are urgent times. But sometimes we also need to take a step back. Retreat. Take some time alone in nature. Meditate. And listen. Just listen. Maybe to the wisdom that comes from that deeper place in nature. Or from a spiritual advisor or mentor. We need to tap into that deeper well of meaning that is necessary in order to sustain social change work, which can be daunting. Without that grounding, it’s easy to get overwhelmed, or to burn out. And of course, without that grounding, it’s impossible to come from a place of full power and potential.”

It is here that Joshua’s message of oneness and cooperation can guide the way to a healthy path forward for youth who are seeking to be change makers. “It’s a delicate dance, trying to lift young people up while understanding the scale of the change that’s required. Even if they are uniquely gifted, as with all things, there needs to be collaboration and connection. Especially with elders. Young people have amazing energy. But it’s important to remember that our elders have another kind of energy in wisdom, which is complementary. We have to make this journey together. Synergy and possibility emerge from cross-generational cooperation. The journey shouldn’t be made alone. So I think we need to shift our focus. Let’s not think that this young, heroic generation is going to swoop in and save us all by themselves. Let’s come together in service of a future that we all know is possible.”

Joshua believes that we are all playing a part in a larger story. And in his version of the story, young people are the protagonists. “A concept like *lokahi* is sorely needed today, as our actions have thrown us, and the very earth that sustains us, entirely out of balance,” says Joshua. “Thankfully, leaders who understand the transformative power of *lokahi* are emerging, because they’ve experienced it in Hawaii firsthand.”

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I am convinced it will be by ordinary people,
people whose love for this life is even greater than their fear.*

Joanna Macy

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