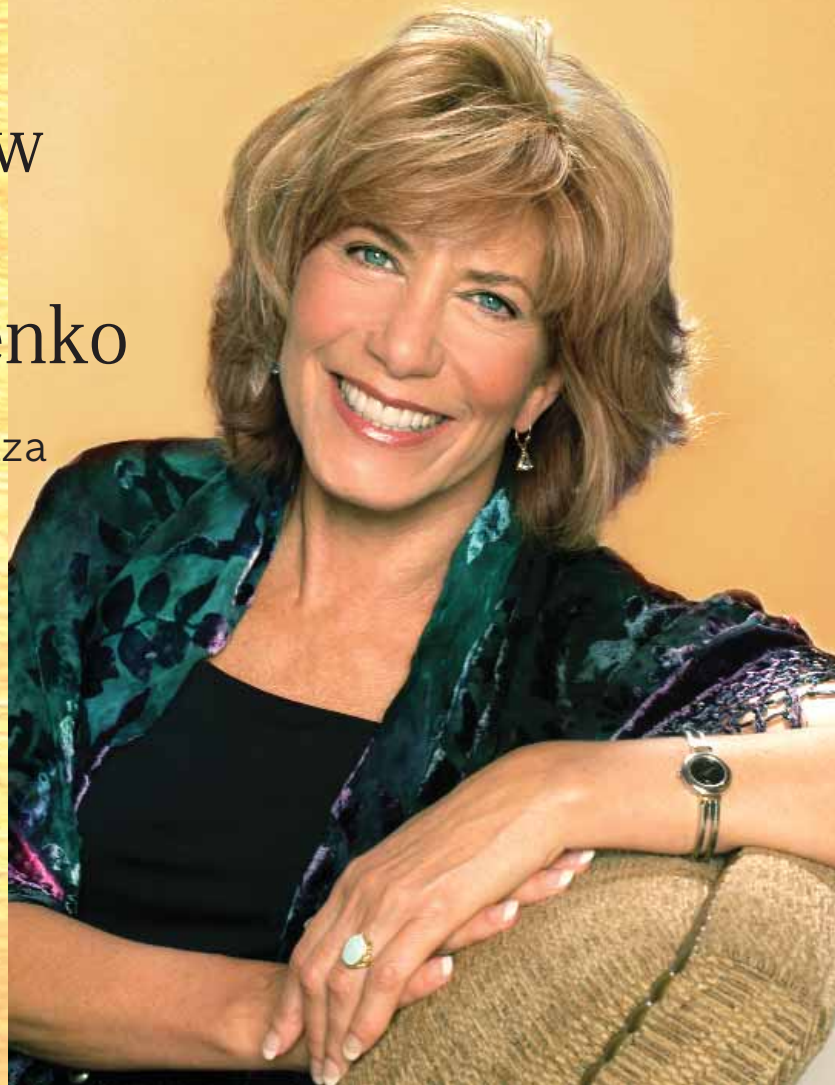


Five Skills for Finding Your Soul's Compass in Times of Change

An Interview with Joan Borysenko

Corinne L. Casazza



Joan Borysenko is a pioneer in integrative medicine and a world-renowned expert in the mind/body connection. Her first *New York Times* best-seller *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* was published in 1987 and has sold over 400,000 copies. She has written or co-authored 14 books, most recently *Your Soul's Compass: What Is Spiritual Guidance?* We caught up with Joan and asked her specifically about receiving guidance in times of change.

Joan began our conversation by telling me that she was in pain. She had ice packs on her eyes and couldn't see. I immediately asked her if she wanted to reschedule. She refused, saying her time is limited.

Four Corners: I'm sorry you're in pain. What happened?

Joan Borysenko: I was multi-tasking: putting on make-up, putting in my contact lenses and deciding what work to do for the day. I got exfoliant on my lenses which got into my eyes. I eroded off my corneas. If I had been paying attention this wouldn't have happened.

FC: Okay, I have to ask, what is the guidance in that?

JB: We cannot afford to slide into mindlessness in this time of change. The Universe is telling me to slow down. You are not following your soul's compass when you're multi-tasking. It takes you out of the present moment and puts you in the future.

FC: How do we remember to ask for guidance when we are overwhelmed in the moment?

JB: (Laughs). That's the question isn't it? People are always more interested in being open to guidance when things aren't going well. When there's no ground beneath their feet and everything is shifting. It somehow doesn't seem so important when everything is going well. It's a matter of personal choice whether we decide to be present and open to guidance, or instead hide behind what's safe and known. However, there are certain characteristics that are common to people who do well in challenging times.

FC: Can you talk about those?

We can despair or hide in the known, or we can do our work, walk into the wisdom of uncertainty and emerge transformed.

JB: Stress hardy people have the 3Cs * in common:

1. Challenge – Those who function well see challenge not as a threat to the status quo, but as an opportunity to grow.

2. Control – We must maintain a reasonable amount of control over what we can; like our health habits, diet and exercise, and let go of what we can't. I lost half my retirement in the last three weeks. I wanted to cut back at work when I'm 70; I'll be 63 next week. I can't control my finances completely. I can't control the stock market, but I can choose to focus on the things I can control like spending less and saving more.

3. Commitment – toward a larger vision, engaging with that vision and moving toward it instead of withdrawing and disengaging. I asked myself what can I do about the economy in my role as a teacher. I came up with writing a short book on how to manage stress in times of change by the end of this year.

For *Finding Your Soul's Compass*, Joan interviewed 27 sages about receiving spiritual guidance. Since this is most difficult in times of change, Joan explained the three stages of change. *Saying Yes to Change*, written with her husband, Gordon Dveirin, describes these stages as separation from the known, the liminal period when we're on the verge of the new, but it hasn't materialized yet, and the return – return to a new life.

"All of us are always in liminal space, living in the unknown, in some part of our life. We need skills to emerge transformed from the liminal space instead of withdrawing in despair."

Coincidentally or not, the skills to deal with the liminal space are the same skills used for receiving spiritual guidance. Here is some of what the sages of *Your Soul's Compass* had to say:

Five Skills to Receive Spiritual Guidance in Changing times

1. Take the attitude that you simply don't know – surrender to the unknown. If you think you know, this restricts the scope of possibility. When you notice the synchronicities of the unknown, you'll be

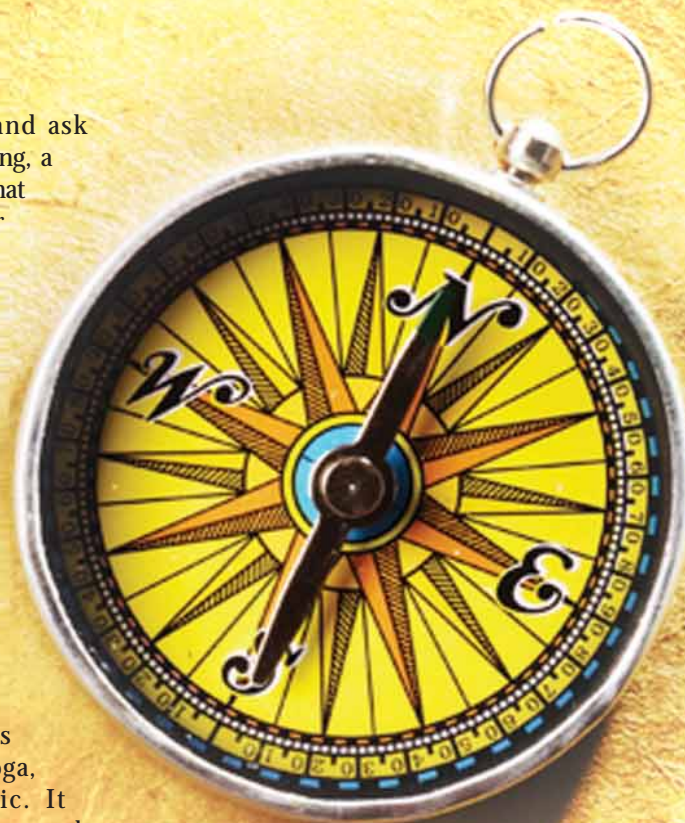
more willing to follow and ask questions. Sir Thomas Keating, a Catholic priest and monk that Joan interviewed for *Your Soul's Compass*, said "Life is a journey into the unknown. If you think you know where you're going, you're on the wrong track." All 27 sages who were interviewed for the book said we must be comfortable with mystery.

2. Be present – If we're not present, we can miss what's right in front of us. We need a centering practice to focus the mind. This can be yoga, chi gong, or even music. It doesn't necessarily have to be meditation; it's whatever resonates with you. Walking in nature can be very meditative.

3. Cope with strong emotions – People are stressed, not sleeping; they're afraid of the future, their job security and whether they can keep their business afloat. Emotion is a big issue because fear blocks the possibility of hearing guidance. We must welcome fear. Allow ourselves to feel it, stay with it until it transforms. We should listen, tolerate and transform our emotions.

4. Have a sense of humor – this is a great strategy. Joan has been privileged enough to spend a good deal of time with the Dalai Lama. He's always laughing. He sees the absurdities of life with great compassion.

5. Develop Discernment – when you encounter synchronicities do you view them as guidance or coincidence? To tell the difference between ego and guidance, you have to feel into the situation. Is it peaceful, exciting, compassionate? Does your energy feel expanded? Or are you closing up and feeling tense? This requires the daily practice of noticing your energy body. Moment by moment we must know what is going on in our energy. Discernment is the ultimate practice of presence.



Moving Forward

One of three things can happen to each of us in this tremendous time of change. We can fall into despair and become easily depressed. It's very important to get professional help if this happens to you. We can fall into Fundamentalism, seeking refuge in the known. There are all types of fundamentalism – religious, economic, political etc. Hiding in the known doesn't help during times of change.

Finally we can be cracked open to have the shell of our ego break away. This is when we are transformed. Jean Houston called it "jump time" when we move into a higher level of harmony worldwide; get rid of the old and welcome in the new. The choice is ours. We can despair or hide in the known and avert change and evolution, or we can do our work, walk into the wisdom of uncertainty and emerge transformed in our return to a new life.

* This information is from a study by Suzanne Kobasa and Salvatore Maddi. They studied AT&T executives in the middle of reorganization to see who could function well and who would fall apart.

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