

# Heavy Weather: Balancing Joy and Despair

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/heavy-weather-balancing-joy-and-despair>

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**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One, changing the conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment.

**Greg Dalton:** Anxiety about climate change can cast a cloud over our day-to-day lives.

**Mark Coleman:** We love this planet we love this earth we love all of the abundance and the beauty and the diversity and complexity. Because we love we feel the pain, we feel the grief.

**Greg Dalton:** But what happens when (our) grief turns to anger or despair?

**Mica Estrada:** If you're very justice oriented, you will deny the relationship in order to keep in order to maintain your sense of justice. And if you think the relationship is really important you will sometimes forego getting the justified outcome to maintain that relationship.

**Greg Dalton:** Is there a way to manage (our) climate anxiety?

**Mica Estrada:** The question is what's gonna serve us better, is it gonna be relationship with each other or is it gonna be being right.

**Greg Dalton:** Balancing Joy and Despair. Up next on Climate One.

**Greg Dalton:** Can we still find happiness in our daily lives without ignoring the dark reality of climate chaos? Climate One conversations feature oil companies and environmentalists, Republicans and Democrats, the exciting and the scary aspects of the climate challenge. I'm Greg Dalton.

**Greg Dalton:** The weather out there is getting ugly.

**Greg Dalton:** Living in a disrupted climate can make us anxious and sad.

**Mica Estrada:** I think we're finally growing up as a society to the point that we can grieve.

**Greg Dalton:** Mica Estrada is Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at UCSF. She holds a PhD in social psychology from Harvard and does research on social influence, identity, values, and well-being. Grief can be a natural, healthy immune system response to a problem like climate disruption.

**Mark Coleman:** Why are we grieving and why do we care? We care because we love.

**Greg Dalton:** Mark Coleman is a mindfulness and meditation teacher, and author of *Awake in the Wild: Mindfulness in Nature as a Path of Self-Discovery*. His latest book is *From Suffering to Peace: The True Promise of Mindfulness*. I began our conversation about climate anxiety by asking Mark about his connection to nature growing up in northern England, and after coming to the U.S. in his mid-twenties.

**Mark Coleman:** Yeah. So I grew up in Newcastle on a Scottish border and pretty rough working-class culture. And my refuge was really on the edge of farm fields, and my refuge was to go out and just crawl into the especially when the wheat and the barley crops were high and lie in the middle of the field and look up and I felt like it was a beautiful safe refuge. And that sort of, I look back at that time it's like the happiest time of my life that sweet playing in nature. And then fast-forward come 10, 15 years and I came to the States, and as beautiful as England is, it doesn't have the wildness and the wilderness that this land has. And something completely opened in me, the primal vast untamed lands and the beauty and the rawness of it, just it both woke me up and also from that point on I started to take my meditation practice outside during retreats outside and that was really where I want to spend most of my time.

**Greg Dalton:** And last year you were sitting in some mountain tops north of San Francisco on a ridge, and then smoke and fires came in so tell us about that experience, you know, being out there and then seeing the smoke from all of these fires in the West.

**Greg Dalton:** I began our conversation about climate anxiety by asking Mark about an experience he had on a ridgetop north of San Francisco during the wildfires of late 2018.

**Mark Coleman:** The irony was I just been asked to write an article on meditation and nature and I thought well, best place to write is to go to nature. So I took my laptop over the top of the hill on the ridge in Marin County which is north of San Francisco and this howling Pacific wind coming and which is very normal cooled foggy breeze and it was very invigorating. I was writing away and then suddenly I started look around the valleys and it started to show up smoke and I thought, that's weird. I'm getting fresh Pacific wind but the smoke coming in and suddenly the whole Bay Area is full of smoke. And I was mystified by that and also it was just such a poignant moment of one going into nature for refuge and solace and at the same time being reminded of the fires and the climate crisis. And what I found out was the smoke was coming in from these fires from British Columbia being blown downstream into the Bay Area. And then I traveled later that year, later that month actually to Colorado and into Europe and to the Alps and I was following or being present to a lot of forest fires everywhere I went in the mountains. And it was just really brought to light as it had for many of us in the last couple of years in California just how imminent the crisis is.

**Greg Dalton:** And I think there was really a breakthrough moment fires were really the story of 2018. There are some climate crisis that are outside of us, but the smoke and the fires are something that we actually breathed into our body. We are doing it for weeks. I don't know there's something for me about that internalization that was different than something that happens outside far away. Mica Estrada, when you were in college and afterwards climate was not your thing. You were into homelessness, and social justice issue and kind of but then you came to climate. Tell us that story.

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah. I was undergraduate at UC Berkeley and I was interested in issues of homelessness and how we can be poverty of solutioning conflict resolution work. And I was working with those homeless program that was with the PIRGs, Public Interest Research Group. And when I finished my degree it turned out that the PIRGs had jobs and so I took one and went to Boston and work for the Public Interest Research Groups there and got trust into environmental advocacy and learning about lobbying and all of that type of thing. But I have to say that it's still not my core issue like I have concern for the climate, you know, and I have my solar panels and all of those types of things to try and do what I can. But I have a deep heart for people suffering needlessly and is there a way for us to avoid people suffering needlessly. And what I have found is that over across time that there has been a convergence where you realized that most of the violence in the world is caused because of disputes over water, over resources and the use of those resources also contributing towards our climate change. And when the climate does change when we have this disruption happening the communities that are most impacted are the vulnerable populations. People who don't have air-conditioners who are living are working outside those are the populations that are getting, feeling the impacts of climate change more in the United States now than those who have air-conditioning and who live inside and work inside. And in the world that's also true, the vulnerable populations have lower socioeconomic status worldwide and they're feeling the impacts. So I see them as you can't take them apart from each other anymore. If we don't deal with one we're gonna have impacts and both reactions.

**Greg Dalton:** So climate is often an abstraction and what's becoming more of a human issue. Do you talk about climate with people who are concerned about homelessness or social justice issues because that's often seen as like climate is either, I don't know, it's an elite problem or it's far away it's abstract.

**Mica Estrada:** You know, I'll tell you a story. When I was working for the PIRGs, I was supposed to help organize this annual conference for all the people that are working for the PIRGs across the nation. And this was in 1985, '86 and at that time Cesar Chavez was starting to do some work where he was going to environmental groups which were predominantly white and he was trying to get them to support reducing pesticides because that was impacting the farmworkers. And so my job was to get him there and get him in the room. And I had met him a couple times because of my parents being involved in the United Farm Workers Movement, I'm a Latina, Mexican-American, and we have been involved in that. So we're sitting outside the room is filled with like 400 or 500 people, mostly all-white I would say, you know, 99% white. And we're sitting outside and we started talking and I was telling him about my family and, you know, he just looks up at me and he says, what are we doing here? What are we doing here? And I knew what he meant like what are we doing here, really. But I think that, you know, it's really important for us to be -- this is a big problem, it's not gonna be solved from one place or from one ethnic group. And in fact, I think the underrepresented groups most of the underrepresented groups in the United States have a different relationship with nature. And I would say for my own background as a Latina, nature is something that we feel as a part of us it's an extension of us and to exploit it is to really be doing harm to ourselves. So I feel like this is an issue where I feel like the people of color in our nation right now have a unique voice and opportunity to really solve some of these problems. And I actually believe that's where the solutions are gonna come from.

**Greg Dalton:** Mark Coleman. How do you talk about climate how's the way you talk about climate change over the last 5, 10 years?

**Mark Coleman:** Yes. So my work is mostly as a meditation teacher. So I'm teaching meditators my work is mostly done outside in nature in the wilderness. And we were talking earlier 10 years ago I talked about climate and I'd feel the whole room just glaze over the middle of the room glaze sort of gloom checking out and like, oh that's really, not landing very well. And then five years ago

it's like, it's a little more interest. Now, when I speak about it people wanna know, people want to engage, people want solutions they want to process how to feel how to navigate both personally socially communitywide. So for me many different sort of doorways in I try to speak about it as so my work is taking people out into nature as you are saying realizing we're not separate that we are the earth that polluting the water, whatever is harming ourselves. So the more that we can connect with that relationship with that understanding of our connection the more that we feel the more that we will care the more that we love. So there's an interesting, I'm using the reference from an Australian eco-psychologist uses his word "solastalgia" which is a combination of two Greek words. Basically what it means is grief of the place that we're in. And we used to go out into nature for solace, beauty, refuge, nourishment and of course we still do we still can. And yet when we go outdoors as we do when the fires we're seeing the degradation of the waters or whatever. There's also a sense of grief and despair or sadness or loss, especially if we love we're grieving for that which we're losing. And so I speak about how to hold the personal pain of that to feel it to allow it to notice the both the love and the grief and then also to listen for what's the response. What arises in you in that loving connection that makes you want to act in a more effective way first personally and also socially and politically.

**Greg Dalton:** A few years ago two women feeling that they and their peers didn't have an outlet for their heavy feelings founded the Good Grief Network they've created a 10-step program inspired by Alcoholics Anonymous. Groups of people coming together to talk about their fears and anxieties related to a world out of balance. We spoke to Aimee Lewis-Reau and LaUra Schmidt about how their model can help people come out of despair and process their climate anxiety.

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**Female Speaker:** What I think we're seeing a lot of is a new level of despair from folks who are not sure what to do and that could look like grief or depression. The problem of climate change is that we don't have a roadmap we don't have a picture of what it looks like to get us out of this mess and that terrifies many of us. We have a lot of parents come through our group who say they didn't really pay attention to these issues. And now that they have kids they're worried that their kids' future is not going to look like what they thought it would and it's causing an existential crisis if you will. We have grandparents who come in. We have tired activists who have been working their whole lives to affect change and realizing that climate change now maybe makes the work that they've been doing for their lifetime a moot point. We have people who are in careers right now and they're wondering if that's the best way to be spending their time because if it's not completely trying to tackle these predicaments that are facing us, why are they showing up to their 9 to 5? Our 10-step program is scalable and anybody can bring it home to their community. The most basic aspect of this program is that it brings people together in a safe space to talk about our fears. And once we mentioned our fears in a public way it doesn't have power over us anymore, or at least it has less power over us. We don't shy away from the hard stuff we don't say don't cry, and it's so important to be feeling what's happening in the world and to wake up to that despair and also not to be controlled by it. I can't even begin to express the amount of weight that's lifted off of our participant's shoulders when we give them permission that they solely don't have to save the world. Not only they don't have to, they can't. That's so hard for so many of us to accept. We want to believe we can be the superhero that saves the world. And plenty of people will point to great leaders and I always say yes and they didn't do it alone.

[End Playback]

**Greg Dalton:** That was Aimee Lewis-Reau and LaUra Schmidt cofounders of the Good Grief Network. So Mica Estrada, your thoughts there on -- relieving the burden of being the hero that saves the world and anything else you found moving in that piece.

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah, I think we're finally growing up as a society to the point that we can grieve. You know, I think for a long time that was seen as a weakness and I think we're finally hitting an age where grief is seen as a strength. If you have the power to allow yourself to grieve that is real power and to not feel that what does that mean. There's a lot of talk about the colonization of our minds, right, the colonization of our minds and how we've been -- when you think of that you think of kind of the movement of the white dominant culture into the new world and what that did. And part of that required people to do great harm to other people and to our land and to not hurt too much while doing it. And then the process of that that means to feel grief around that would be a weakness, right. If everybody who came over here and started doing all of that, started feeling all the grief of what they were actually perpetrating, there would have been great cost to that. And so I think we have lived in a time when the dominant culture says don't feel too much. And I do feel like we're finally growing up and saying listen, real strength is being able to feel what we're feeling. And from there, from really feeling and taking it in and holding it in your heart and knowing that pain and letting it, then it can move through you. And anybody who does work on grief knows that to go into denial and try not to feel it only gets you so far until you start getting sick and start feeling really badly about it. So to hold that and to find practices that allow you to feel it, but then to let it go I think is really powerful. And I'm hopeful that we are at an age now where we can recognize that that is a beautiful and powerful thing and necessary for us to do the next step which is to act.

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**Greg Dalton:** You're listening to a Climate One conversation about balancing joy and despair in a disrupted climate. Coming up, we'll learn more about how to both accept and confront the climate challenge.

**Mark Coleman:** It's about facing reality. It's about feeling your response to that and then taking that data the out and the data and then go well what's my response what's needed how can I serve what's most effective thing I can do with my time, energy, resources

**Greg Dalton:** That's up next, when Climate One continues.

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**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton, and we're talking about living in an age of climate anxiety with Mica Estrada, Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences at UCSF, and Mark Coleman, author of *Awake in the Wild: Mindfulness in Nature as a Path of Self-Discovery*. -- Now we turn to how to recognize being afraid of increasingly extreme weather without being paralyzed by that fear.

**Mark Coleman:** So let me take a step back. So why are we grieving and why do we care? We care because we love, right. We love this planet we love this earth we love all of the abundance and the beauty and the diversity and complexity because we love we feel the pain we feel the grief. The grief is a natural, healthy immune system response to a problem. So we're feeling the collective grief of a collective issue. And so grief is action natural, healthy step in that meeting that challenging situation. We can stop that but that does allow us to feel process and actually be more integrated in our action. Of course we need to respond quickly and efficiently but if we're lost and if we're reacting out of fear or anger, you know, as you said we don't, our prefrontal cortex goes off-line when we're triggered in fight or flight. So the more that we take a step back, feel grief, notice what's happening we're much more likely come up with a clear and effective responses. Also more sustainable when we keep shoving and stuffing the grief and anger and the rage, you know, I've worked with activists for 20 years now and a lot of environmental activists and I meet a lot of burned out environmental activists partly because of the immensity of the problem. Partly also because I

think people haven't been trained how to also do the inner work which I talk about is inner sustainability we need both the outer and the inner sustainability because this is a long-term marathon situation that we're in. It's not gonna be solved in 10 years.

**Greg Dalton:** So you remember like David Roberts who writes for Vox one time he took a sabbatical, he burned out walked away and he went away for some time. And now he's back strong and definitely read his writing. Mica Estrada, shame and blame is often a common tactic in environmentalism and our politics today. There's sort of these, you know, shame mobs on outrage mobs on social media, etc. and sometimes it can be very satisfying, let's admit it, but you think that that's really detrimental. Tell us about shame and blame.

**Mica Estrada:** Let's see. Well, I think shame and blame are another way of locking people down. So when you start to play this game of shaming and blaming what you're doing is you're breaking connection and relationship with another person and with your environment and with your group. And as Mark said, one of the things that we have that helps when we're feeling fear when we're feeling grief, when we're feeling these things is our social networks and our social connections. And to the extent that we can keep those connections going it helps us, I mean for instance, there are studies that if you put somebody into a high stress fearful situation and you put them in the room with one other person, they do better than if they're by themselves. So if you have another person that kind of share it with you. So I think the shame and blame what that does is it breaks relationships with people around you and it can lead to greater isolation. And in terms of groups doing that to each other this is a big problem this is a big global issue. And we are gonna have to solve it together. And when you shame and blame you're starting a divide and that means that we're not more interconnected and we're less able to solve these problems collectively.

**Greg Dalton:** And another aspect of that is blame is, you know, the retribution and forgiveness. So a lot of people want to, you know, hold oil companies accountable you devastated this ecosystem or is it the South Africa root of sort of acceptance and reconciliation.

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah. So I think what you're talking about is so when I was doing, I did some research on forgiveness. And one of the things that I found when I was looking at this was that when people have a conflict with somebody and they want to reconcile and they want to forgive, they weigh two things. They weigh how important is it to keep the relationship going and how important is it to be right or to get justice. And so, if you can think of a situation where you want to forgive somebody and you didn't, you can think about -- often people have the tension of like should I keep this relationship going and if I want to keep this relationship going, then I might not get the justified outcome that I want. Let's say, they didn't pay me back the money they owed or they didn't do something that I wanted that would make it right. If you're very justice oriented, you will deny the relationship in order to keep in order to maintain your sense of justice. And if you think the relationship is really important you will sometimes forego getting the justified outcome to maintain that relationship. So we weigh these things I think in our lives and so when you seek retribution you are saying I don't want relationship. I'm gonna choose, I need to be right more than I need to be in relationship with you. And the question is in solving the climate issues that we have what's gonna serve us better and is it gonna be relationship with each other or is it gonna be being right.

**Greg Dalton:** And do social media relationships count?

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah, I think they do. Absolutely and it's hard, you know, I'm terrible on Twitter. I got to admit it like I go in Twitter and I'm just like the worst-self comes out of me. And I think that's because it's more anonymous. So the more anonymous it is, the more angry and hateful we can be and we're not our best selves. And like I said earlier, I think we have to be our best selves to solve this problem. It's so big and it requires us to be our best selves.

**Greg Dalton:** If you're just joining us we're talking about climate anxiety. How you can hold the gravity of the science and still get out of bed and enjoy your day. Our guests on the show today suggest going inward to get calm and then getting active. Mark Coleman is a mindfulness meditation teacher and author of *Awake in the Wild*. And Mica Estrada is a social psychologist and associate professor at the University of California, San Francisco. I'm Greg Dalton. And we're gonna go to our lightning round. I just have some quick questions for you beginning with Mark Coleman. What's the first thing that comes to your mind when I mention flight shaming? Shaming people for flying.

**Mark Coleman:** Guilty. Well I get shamed a lot that's true.

**Greg Dalton:** Mica Estrada. What comes to mind when I say empathy for workers in the fossil fuel industry?

**Mica Estrada:** Our higher selves.

**Greg Dalton:** Mica, what comes to mind when I say empathy for executives of fossil fuel corporations?

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah, I think I'm still going to my higher self on that.

**Greg Dalton:** Even higher self, yeah.

**Mica Estrada:** Even higher self, yeah. And fashion. I feel badly for them actually. Yeah, because they are doing incredible harm and at some level I think they know it.

**Greg Dalton:** Mark Coleman. What comes to mind when I say Charles Koch?

**Mark Coleman:** A pain of misguided power and its destructiveness.

**Greg Dalton:** Mica Estrada. EPA Administrator, Andrew Wheeler?

**Mica Estrada:** I can't say what. Can you mind first?

Sad. I feel really sad.

**Greg Dalton:** True or false. Mica Estrada, you sometimes fantasize about escaping climate chaos and finding a haven far away?

**Mica Estrada:** About once a week. Yeah, I want to just move to the woods and go away. But my higher self says, I have some work to do in the world.

**Greg Dalton:** True or false. Mark Coleman, you sometimes a lot says about escaping climate chaos and finding a haven far away.

**Mark Coleman:** I do that regularly on my retreat.

**Greg Dalton:** More than once a week?

**Mark Coleman:** Probably couple times a month. So yes, true.

**Greg Dalton:** True or false. Mica Estrada, you're willing to share the location of your haven?

**Mica Estrada:** I don't have one right now. Well I guess, I go to Humboldt sometimes.

**Greg Dalton:** Mark, are you willing to share the location of your haven where should we go?

**Mark Coleman:** The closest place of nature. Nature is everywhere.

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah.

**Mark Coleman:** You know I felt it coming walking down Embarcadero looking at the trees listening to the blackbirds and a -- I forget the name of the birds in the city here.

**Mica Estrada:** Seagulls?

**Mark Coleman:** No.

**Greg Dalton:** Pigeons, that's what I call it. True or false. Mark Coleman, you sometimes tell people you are more optimistic about climate stabilizing the climate than you really are?

**Mark Coleman:** Yes. And at the end I'm actually agnostic. I maintain a don't know mind, like anything is possible and we can go in both directions and we don't know. That's why it's so amazing living at this time we have this potential to potentially resolve some of these crises. And we may step up in time as a species and we might not.

**Greg Dalton:** Mica Estrada. True or false, men are good at faking it.

**Mica Estrada:** I think men are rewarded for faking it.

**Greg Dalton:** Let's give a round of applause for them getting through that lightning round.

Mark Coleman. Conservation, you know, there's sort of a relationship to nature that we want it to be a certain way for us. I think about when a fire ripped through Yellowstone Park a couple decades ago people were devastated because Yellowstone was black and ugly it wasn't green like we wanted it to be for us. What are your thoughts about sort of wanting to have nature as we wanted for us which is for some other reason, sort of ego involve in conservation.

**Mark Coleman:** Yeah, yeah, like we want everything as we want it. Like life and people and wealth or in the earth, yeah for sure. You know, I think we bring an acquisitive consumer attitude to everything because that's our conditioning. And what's profound about nature which is why I do so much in my teaching out there and practice out there is that nature doesn't care what we want, doesn't care about our preferences doesn't care about us particularly it's just doing its wild thing. And so it's a great teacher and revealing to us our attachments our preferences our desires and then it's asking us that's all natural and human and can we actually be present with it as it is and learn from it as it is. So for example I was down in Big Sur few years ago teaching and the fires came right down to the creeks down to the coast. And there's this beautiful Redwood Creek that was charred by the fire wasn't destroyed because the redwoods is so old and so protected with the ten in the box. But the whole Valley was blackened and then it was this amazing green emerald shoots coming out of the blackened barks and of course I wanted to see a virgin redwood forest but I was seeing fire and resilience. And so we think I'm gonna be happy if I get what I want. Happiness comes in being able to be with what is and meet it and accept it and allow it. And when we can do that like walking through a charred forest as painful as that is we can also actually appreciate what its gift is or what it's teaching us or what it's telling us. So I think it's not about the experience it's about the attitude. I can have as a profound experience in Embarcadero Park with some of these trees as I can on my fantasy, you know, mountain escape in the Sierra Mountains depending on the quality and state of my mind. That's why the importance is what we do with our mind and not just expecting experience to be a certain way, but actually it's what we bring to it that really allows any



experience to be what it is.

**Greg Dalton:** So does that acceptance lead to resignation and passivity?

**Mark Coleman:** Yeah. Well, that's the concern, right. Oh I'm just gonna accept, oh, you know, there's more fires and there's the acidification in the oceans and there's, you know, whatever the date of that we're reading. No. The acceptance is just acknowledging this is what's happening. This is true, it's about not sticking a head in the sand it's about facing reality. It's about feeling your response to that and then taking that data the out and the data and then go well what's my response what's needed how can I serve what's most effective thing I can do with my time, energy, resources. So really actually the acceptance leads to clarity because what we're suffering from now is and we've been suffering for centuries as a lack of understanding about what's true. And so when we can bring that quality of acceptance we can see it understand it get to know it rests with it grab with it. And then okay, here's a possible path forward.

**Greg Dalton:** Some people feel such an urgency in climate and we keep hearing how many times that we heard, 11 years, 10 years, 12 years because of the recent IPCC report. And I don't think a lot of people concerned about climate feel that urgency and feel like we got to solve it fast. We got to go, go, go, go, go let's go. So how can that be and people might say this mindfulness thing sounds good but, you know, this takes too long. We don't have time to like sit and be quiet. We got to like get off our butts and get moving. So what do you say to that, Mark Coleman, like, yeah, that's nice if you're a coastal person but we got to get going and shutdown, you know, change, there's no time to like sit in the woods on your butt.

**Mark Coleman:** Well, there's definitely validity to that point of view. And we are in a crisis and it does require urgent action. And we don't have to go off to a cave for 10 years to meditate to be mindful and to deal with that we can take, you know, five minutes. Like I often say before a meeting, you know, take a minute where you just get quite just get clear about your intention. You take some breaths you feel your body. It doesn't take long to actually get present if we're just running on fear, panic time scarcity driven us we don't think the best. The brain needs a little bit of space a little bit of calm, a little bit of present that doesn't require a lot of training. It requires taking a minute or five minutes or walking outside taking a walk on the block feeling your breath. Just to get enough composure and clarity so the static, our brains are full of busy, restless, static and that's not where the deepest solutions come from. It comes from a deeper quite a present ability to access deeper parts of our intelligence our intuition our wisdom. And that requires a little bit of stillness and calm, as I say it doesn't require going off on a long, you know, sabbatical for five years but finding some basic simple tools that allow you to settle common ground. So then your brain can actually be more effective and you can actually make wiser clearer decisions. And that's accessible for anybody it's not esoteric.

**Greg Dalton:** Little books by Thich Nhat Hanh, you know, how to sit how to walk they're very useful it sort of like you don't have to go sit for hours or days there's ways you can kind of -- the books are really useful to sort of, yeah, just walking down -- sure, Mica.

**Mica Estrada:** I'm just gonna say that I think one of the most powerful things we can do is to figure out where our consciousness goes when we rest. Like in the pauses of our day where does your consciousness go. And if you can start to practice laying your consciousness in places like what Mark is talking about where your nervous system feels rested even if it means imagining one of your happiest places. If you do that for a minute or two or even less, 30 seconds in the pauses of your day, that starts to slow down your day, calms your nervous system lets your brain work a little more effectively. And so, that's just something we can practice everyday. Where does it go, do you start to worry about something immediately. When you have a pause where does your mind go, where

does your consciousness rest. I think that would be a powerful practice.

**Mark Coleman:** Yeah. And I think for me it comes back this idea of in the sustainability how do we sustain ourselves given we're living in times of climate emergency. So our mind can be spinning moment after moment on fear and panic and dread and we can ask ourselves is that the most effective place for my mind to be spinning or can as Mica saying shift our attention to like when I was walking towards here this building at 5 or 10 minutes where I could be worrying and planning and anxious about what, you know, how it's gonna go, what I'm gonna say, or I can actually be present look at the trees look at the sky. I was watching a beautiful flight of pelicans on the water, you know, above the traffic. And that was really calming and grounding like it didn't take any extra time didn't take any training. It's just about what are we doing with our attention and is it serving us, right. And we need to be looking and focusing on strategy and planning and action that's when we focus when that's not happening am I drowning in data and overwhelming myself or am I actually choosing things for my attention to focus on. Like the fact it's a beautiful summer's day here that actually allows me to feel sense of peace and calm. So then when I come in here at 6:30 I'm actually more ready for to engage in a clear way.

**Greg Dalton:** I wish I had that a few years ago when there are droughts in California and it didn't rain for some of the winters. There is some beautiful days during February I remember people be like, isn't this day great it's beautiful, February, whoa, you know, feels like summer. I'm like, yeah, you know, the climate really shouldn't be like this. Yeah, this is really bad news. And they're kind of, shut up don't be that guy you let people enjoy the day. And I was like, yeah, this is great but.

**Mark Coleman:** Right. Both are true.

**Mica Estrada:** Both are true, right. Both are true. It is a sign that things are not in great shape and it's a beautiful day. And I think if you can hold both of those things simultaneously that's a gift.

**Greg Dalton:** You're listening to a conversation about dealing with the anxiety of climate disruption. This is Climate One. Coming up, we'll hear more about how *community* can be the key to getting people to act on climate.

**Mica Estrada:** Our education process was not just about getting the facts but also making it visible the invisible which was that there was a lot of concern.

**Greg Dalton:** That's up next, when Climate One continues.

**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. We're talking about balancing joy and despair in the age of climate change with meditation and mindfulness teacher Mark Coleman, author of *Awake in the Wild*, and Mica Estrada, Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of California San Francisco.. Mica has worked with civic leaders in San Diego -- a city that leans to the political right -- to help guide them in their own climate conversations.

**Mica Estrada:** So I did work with leaders in San Diego and we had climate education partners. We were doing education for leaders in San Diego in a way that built community and integration. And the work with the docents had to do with the \_\_\_\_ [00:44:45] it's the program that did that. And I was friends with the people who did it but I didn't do it. But what they found was that the docents were being still in trauma learning about climate change and then they have to go tell other people about it. And that is just really, really hard.

**Greg Dalton:** Children often.

**Mica Estrada:** Children, right. And actually I was just talking to someone yesterday who was

saying that they were doing work with teachers. Because grade school teachers also that with the new science curriculum they have a lot of climate change science and there are teachers who are embracing that are telling the students about this. And when students learn it, it's just like Greta, right, they get it. They get that there's where we are in a situation. And so but the teachers are feeling traumatized by having to convey this information. The work that was done with the docents they found that by not only teaching them the facts about climate change but also helping them to walk through the grieving process enable them to better be able to communicate with people and not get locked down and not be able to talk to people about climate change. And so and it made them feel more agency in it.

**Greg Dalton:** And then tell us about your work with some leaders in San Diego in terms of, you know, how these are policy leaders often running large institutions. Tell us about that work and how because San Diego, pretty conservative place, Navy town.

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah. So it was really interesting when we started this project one of the things we did is we interviewed 80 leaders in San Diego. And we really had some pretty high tiered leaders that we met with. And one of the key things that we found in that initial interviews was that we asked them, do you feel like consider yourself a part of the community that's concerned about climate change. And in San Diego which is conservative, we have 90% say, yeah, I'm a part of that community that's concerned about climate change. And then we asked them, well, what do you think about the other leaders in San Diego, what percentage do you think of the other leaders are concerned about climate change, about 10%. And so what this told us was that the leaders didn't know about the other leaders that were concerned about climate change and that people weren't really recognizing that they had a community of leaders out there that they could be a part of. And so our education process was not just about getting the facts but also making it visible the invisible which was that there was a lot of concern. And so all of our videos and our reports and everything had leaders talking to other leaders. And I remember we had this video that you can find on YouTube that showed one of the mayors from Chula Vista stating that she was concerned about climate change and talking about it. And one of her aides was in the audience and said, I never thought she'd go on film with that. And so --

**Greg Dalton:** So normalizing it among peers.

**Mica Estrada:** Normalizing it around peers and recognizing that nobody is alone. And one of the exciting things that happened during our program was that San Diego passed a climate action plan and it was initially put together by a more liberal group and mayor and then the mayor switched and then we went to the Republicans. And the Republican mayor is the one who signed it. And it's a very aggressive and good, I think, climate action plan. So we see bipartisan support now in San Diego for reducing CO2 emissions.

**Greg Dalton:** And you've done research on identity, Mica, the importance of identity and the word environmentalist. Is that a dirty word still down there?

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah, it is I think it is. I remember having one of the interviews that I was doing, I was talking to somebody he's very high up, makes a lot of key decisions. I asked him about what things are you doing and he could list up a million things that you would consider good environmental behavior. So then at the very end when the question I asked, to what extent are you an environmentalist? I'm not an environmentalist, there's no way. And so, yeah, so what are we trying to identify with because that I think environmentalist there's a lot of evidence that has a real connotation. So even if you're concerned about climate change you might not be an environmentalist.

**Greg Dalton:** And Mica, you used to be a vegetarian but you're not now. So let's talk about sort of, you know, the personal actions we get to this oftentimes and we can debate whether the importance of personal action. But tell us about your path from vegetarian to no longer.

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah, it was bacon.

I don't know what to tell you. It was the last thing I gave up and my sweetheart likes bacon and one day I just couldn't say no and I had some, and it was kind of my slide back in. And I'm actually sliding back towards vegetarianism again. I think at this point I'm not, I haven't eaten beef for 30 years but I'm starting to move back towards pescatarian I think there's where I'm gonna land. And it's mostly when I stopped it was because initially when I became a vegetarian it was because of environmental issues. And I had written a report on solum when I was in college and that kind of knocked me out from the whole like beef industry. So, yeah, I think we all do this though, I mean which you're bringing up is the issue of how do we stay in alignment with our values and what we think is really important and what is the cost of not being in alignment and how hard is it to stay in alignment. And for me, my sons, I have three sons and they're teenagers and now they're older. But they wanted meat and I was like eating by myself all the time. But I think as my youngest graduates this year I can fly back into my vegetarianism will be easier.

**Greg Dalton:** Mark how about you? Obviously a lot of Buddhists are do no harm, vegetarians is that a requirement? Because there's this kind of this debate in climate world about virtue competition like purity competition, impurity police, right?

**Mark Coleman:** Yeah. Same in the world I move in. So I basically trying to as plant-based diet as possible. My body likes meat just does it functions but I have friends who --

**Greg Dalton:** English after all.

**Mark Coleman:** I'm English, you know, meat and veg is like the staple diet. So I was vegetarian for 15, 17 years I got really sick in India and I was traveling and studying in Asia a lot. And I found that I needed to eat meat then I went off for the -- so I'm really like as plant-based as possible and then when my body is craving something, I'll listen to that because who else is gonna take care of this, right? But I think if, I mean given how much meat people eat in this country for example, even if that was half, there would be like taking 7 million cars off the road or something. So if we can just think about do I actually really like I'm always amazed when I go like to a buffet or, you know, anywhere really and this just the choices chicken, pork and beef and it's like we do it so unconsciously. So I think when we bring awareness do I want it, does my body actually want to eat this meat. What about, you know, I'm just been teaching in Bhutan recently and they were talking about and it's mostly vegetarian culture and they were saying, you know, if I do eat meat I have to be really unmindful I have to be really unaware of what I'm doing. Because if I really think about it this is a chicken with a beautiful body of feathers, I'm not gonna eat it. So, you know, I think we have to listen to our body and we have to listen to the impact of what any action that we do.

**Greg Dalton:** Mica Estrada. We're overwhelmed with headlines these days it's story and now it's gonna -- keep waiting for the fires to come. There's a lot of conversation these days about how people consume news and what news they consume. How do you consume climate news and do you kind of, are you like a moth to the flame or do you like I know I guess we learned earlier climate is not your thing. Do you limit the amount that you intake and how do you intake it?

**Mica Estrada:** Yeah, I find it being less visual helps in hearing it or reading it is easier to my system.

**Greg Dalton:** Podcast.

**Mica Estrada:** Podcast, yeah. I was currently just reading this great book called Sacred Instructions and they had the 10-10-80 rule which I really, resonated with me which was to spend 10% of your time staying knowledgeable about what's happening in the world. Spend 10% of your time thinking about how do you or addressing kind some of the causes or the negative things that are happening so doing something to stop the negativity. And then spending 80% of your time working towards a solution or towards the good that you want to create so creating the good and not just stopping the bad. And I really like that idea of what not, well, I want to know what's happening in the world and sometimes it's through podcasts or sometimes it's listening to Democracy Now, sometimes it's reading. I actually like to go on Fox News and see what's going on there. So I like looking at kind of all the news online. But doing that on a small section. I also like the good news that has, and I like reading that in the morning because there's some a dose of good news in the morning it's good because there's a lot of good that happens. And what sells is negative and it's disproportionately shown because we attend to what's negative, that's how our brains work. They know that, we're more likely to attend if there's crisis than if something good is happening. So I break that and try and focus on what also good is happening.

**Greg Dalton:** If you're just joining us we're talking about climate anxiety with Mark Coleman and Mica Estrada. I'm Greg Dalton. We'll go to audience questions, welcome to Climate One.

**Female Participant:** Hi. I'm Lindsey. Thank you so much for the work that you both do. My question is I would love a recommendation for a specific practice. I teach in environmental philosophy and justice class for high students. And one of the activities that we do in class is students write an apology letter to the human or non-human entity of their choice. So they're really intense to read, they're really intense for students to write. So I've read apology letters to glaciers, to roadkill, to people whose homes are being washed away. And the work that we do, well, this idea came to me from an anthropologist named Deborah Bird Rose who's incredible. And she writes about Aboriginal Australians and the way that they think of themselves as descendants from dingoes and they will return to dingoes versus settler non-native Australians who see dingoes as an existential threat to their cattle and literally hang their bodies from trees. And she asked the question what would it be like if we apologize, if non-native Australians apologize to dingoes. And so this activity has been really powerful and I'm, you know, part of the work in this class is what you're talking about which is how do you get into the despair but also not succumb to it. And these are, you know, 16, 17, 18-year-olds. So I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about a ritual or short practice that can be done regularly or after an activity like this.

**Mark Coleman:** Well, one I just want to acknowledge what a profound and beautiful practice that you're offering to these kids. And I think we could all do with reflecting out for ourselves around what would we apologize or ask for forgiveness for. Because we're all, you know, implicit in everything that we do. What comes to mind is compassion some form of compassion practice of some kind of so does that asking forgiveness which can bring up a lot of shame and guilt and maybe self-hatred. And so I would suggest some kind of self-compassion practice that's allowing them to meet the pain of what comes up. The pain that's triggered the pain may be feeling complicit that allows them to hold that pain or sadness or loss or grief with some kindness. Because it's very easy to go from acknowledging complicity and actions, right to then judging and hating and that just shuts us down in so many different ways it doesn't lead to constructive actions. So if we can actually hold the suffering of that with care and kindness, it's actually more likely to lead to positive outcome and action. But first we need to feel the pain of that, right and have some practice, you know, sensing the body, sensing the heart, feeling what the emotion is. Ask them to really attune and also asking what's needed what will serve this pain or this difficulty or this distress. So to some sense of holding it and also some way to move with it. So there's lot of gray research around self-compassion

and efficacy. I point you to Kristin Neff's work and she has lots of good practices like for self-compassion.

**Greg Dalton:** Next question. Welcome to Climate One.

**Male Participant:** Hi my name is Carter Brooks. The avoidance of the despair in the general activist world is still very dramatic and very strong. And we talked about sort of climate hero thing and it's often giving with the ten things you can do and all kinds of things like. If you don't do this you're not gonna save the climate and be a climate hero. So I'm thinking about this conversation which is fantastic, by the way. If you would rewrite those ten things or just a few of them from a different perspective, you know, something more along the lines of being comfortable with uncertainty or practice engaging your grief or any those sort of things. What would be your top view?

**Mark Coleman:** Well, we can play but my first one would be to make sure, this is my bias, you're in very intimate living contact with the natural breathing world. Like you're actually, that's what fueling your care, your passion, your action. So I wouldn't stop there obviously but the first one be to have that alive connection. The second one, I mean I was just gonna echo, I wanna make these comments is focus on what positive constructive action movements organizations, initiatives that are happening. There's so much, as you said, negative bias in the media and there's so much amazing things happening. So it would be tapping into, you know, supporting in whatever way you can what's already happening. Because there's a tremendous amount happening we don't have to be the leader, we can also be the supporter or the, you know, just tap into the many, many sources.

**Mica Estrada:** Can I throw one in?

**Mark Coleman:** Please. I don't have ten.

**Mica Estrada:** Yes. So I will say that I wrote about this in a psychology day blog because I wanted to think about this before getting here. But one of the things that I thought was really important for people who are concerned about climate change and who have despair and really understand it, is to find practices that help you to relax your nervous system. And that allow you to let go of the fear for a little bit so that you can restore or action. So I think that with my experience working with environmentalist when I was younger was that people were really militant and just like wound up and they can only sustain it so long. And I think about the people I worked with when I was in my 20s the number of them that are still doing environmental work are just hardly at all because it's so hard to live like that. And so there was an old Chicano worker who told me once, you know, you got to wear good shoes because you're gonna be marching a long time. And that's true for people who are environmentalist or people who are concerned about this and who are working on this that what are the daily practices that help you to stay a balanced individual. Is it being in nature, is it meditating, is it writing, is it taking a hot bath. Is it doing exercise, is it eating well, is it being with somebody that you love and care of, you know, what are the things that restore you as a human being and help you to really listen to the truth that's inside of you so that you can lean into that truth and live it on a daily basis.

**Mark Coleman:** I'd add one last thing which is find your community, find people networks, you know. We can't do this alone, we need each other, we need the support, we need inspiration and it's just so much easier to do this work with others.

**Greg Dalton:** We've been talking about balancing joy and despair in an age of climate anxiety with Mica Estrada, a professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of California San Francisco, doing research on social influence, identity, values, and well-being. And Mark Coleman, a

mindfulness and meditation teacher, and author of *Awake in the Wild: Mindfulness in Nature as a Path of Self-Discovery*.

**Greg Dalton:** To hear more Climate One conversations, subscribe to our podcast at our website: [climateone.org](https://climateone.org), where you'll also find photos, video clips and more. Please help us get people to talk more about climate by giving us a review wherever you get your podcasts.

**Greg Dalton:** Kelli Pennington directs our audience engagement. Tyler Reed is our producer. Sara-Katherine Coxon is the strategy and content manager. The audio engineers are Mark Kirchner, Justin Norton, and Arnav Gupta. Devon Strolovitch edited the program. Dr. Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, where our program originates. [pause] I'm Greg Dalton.