Katharine Wilkinson (00:01):

Just an FYI before we get started, we're going to be talking about feelings today, specifically climate related feelings. So, if you're having a day when you're not quite ready for that, you might want to come back to this episode at another time.

Kritee Kanko (00:17):

The moment you allow in the enormity of the climate crisis and the larger ecological crisis, what's happening to our oceans, soils, coral reefs, you just naturally are bound to feel enormous grief.

Katharine Wilkinson (00:35):

On this show, we talk a lot about what we can do to address climate change, but today we want to talk about what climate change is doing to us emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

Leah Stokes (00:48):

The toll that climate change takes on our personal lives, on our emotions, it's growing, it's layering on top of all the other burdens that we have in our lives, in our communities and society.

Katharine Wilkinson (00:58):

In the miniseries that opened our season, we asked, what can we do? Today, we're asking a different but equally vital question, how can we cope?

Leah Stokes (01:10):

This is A Matter of Degrees, stories for the climate curious. I'm Dr. Leah Stokes.

Katharine Wilkinson (01:14):

And I'm Dr. Katharine Wilkinson. Today, we're sharing three stories of people who got swallowed up by difficult climate emotions and found a way through them.

Katharine Wilkinson (01:28):

The psychological impacts of the climate crisis aren't new, but as a society, we're just beginning to create language to name and describe them.

Leah Stokes (01:37):

The term ecological grief was first used by Aldo Leopold to describe the distress we feel when our lands become increasingly unrecognizable.

Katharine Wilkinson (01:46):

And Glenn Albrecht invented the word *terrafurie*, literally Earth rage to express the deep anger and resulting helplessness that we feel about ecological destruction.

Leah Stokes (01:57):

There's never going to be a single word or phrase that captures the avalanche of emotions we feel as the climate crisis worsens.

Katharine Wilkinson (02:04):

But all these new terms signify that more people are starting to connect mental health and the climate crisis, and more people are wanting to talk about it together. I know I am.

Leah Stokes (02:15):

You know, Katharine, you have a lot of interest in emotion, language, community in your work, and it's so important for this topic. I'd love to hear where you're taking us in this episode.

Katharine Wilkinson (02:25):

Well, Leah, each of our three guests today encountered deep distress. And what ultimately helped them begin to heal was having spaces to share and actually work with their emotions. And now they're all leading thinkers and practitioners who champion these kinds of collective spaces and practices for climate-related healing because it turns out that coping is something we can rarely, if ever, do alone.

Katharine Wilkinson (02:53):

Dr. Britt Wray studies the intersection of mental health and climate. She's the author of the book Generation Dread, which is an amazing resource for staying sane and even finding purpose in an age of climate crisis.

Leah Stokes (03:06):

And she writes from personal experience, which I think really connects with people.

Katharine Wilkinson (03:10):

It's really powerful. And like so many of us working in the climate space, Britt had a moment, a particular moment, that knocked the wind out of her.

Britt Wray (03:22):

I've been tuned in all my life and studied conservation biology in my undergrad and attended many climate marches, but it wasn't until I, a few years ago, with my partner, was starting to consider whether or not we were going to try and get pregnant. And it was something I realized I really wanted to do. But working as a science communicator and ingesting all of the grim reports, and papers, and evidence, and squaring that with the lack of effective action from our global leaders birthed this super painful dilemma.

Britt Wray (03:57):

And it then turned into an eruption of emotions that I had not felt before in such a visceral way. A lot of it was grief, grief about even being in a situation where I feel like I have to question the wisdom of whether or not it's okay to have a kid and put them into a world with climate chaos. Anger at the injustice of the fact that so many, I don't know, people my age, our age, and younger, are starting to feel like they have to prevent potential suffering at the cost of getting to know their own children. And anxiety about how bad this is going to get.

Katharine Wilkinson (04:36):

Britt began her career as a science communicator. She was often steeped in bad news as she worked to take wonky reports and make them accessible, but deciding whether or not to have a child flooded her with feelings in a way that her work simply hadn't. So Britt started to study what was arising within her.

Britt Wray (04:57):

I needed to find a way of integrating these emotions healthily into my life. And I thought, "Well, if this is the psychological impact this is all having on me, I'm sure there's much wider, more diverse forums for other people. What are they, and how are people coping, and what can we do to constructively work with these emotions?"

Britt Wray (05:14):

And I was also just pretty curious and troubled by the fact that we weren't talking about the emotional tool of what's going on when it is an existential matter that provokes really scary thoughts and feelings. And so, all of that was the motivation for

writing the book and trying to shed light on it for everyone because it's collective. But then, also, through that, finding ways to cope myself.

Katharine Wilkinson (05:35):

Britt is emphatic that our challenging emotions about the climate crisis are a healthy response to an existential threat, but sometimes they reach a boiling point.

Britt Wray (05:46):

When things get difficult in the disaster prone summers that we're having, and lots and lots of scary things are adding up, and loss of life, and just these terrifying scenarios, people can also spike with the anxiety and despairing sentiments. The intolerable feelings are that the climate crisis can really make us think of death, to put it quite frankly.

Leah Stokes (06:08):

Yeah. These emotions can be really heavy. They can even become debilitating.

Katharine Wilkinson (06:12):

Yeah. It's pretty dark sometimes. But Britt says that if we can process these emotions, they can give us critical information and even create an opening to compassion, motivation, and meaning.

Britt Wray (06:25):

When you know what it's like to be in the bottom of those trenches of despair, or hopelessness, or anger, or whatever it might be, then you can really care about how tough it is for others who might be there too. And that is super motivating. And we see it in all kinds of political movements and struggles throughout history, and it's just as relevant for this kind of new burgeoning conversation around climate emotions and how people are dealing with it. So yeah, I think that there's a lot to be said about how suffering can be transformed into meaning. And meaning is super motivating and it allows one to stay in the work when you can tap into what is then existentially fulfilling,

Leah Stokes (07:12):

Having such a heavy, emotional, and visceral reaction, it can be really difficult. It can be uncomfortable, but I agree with Brit. It's also a good sign. It shows that we care, that we are not detached from our reality.

Katharine Wilkinson (07:25):

Yeah. It would be weird not to have hard feelings arise, given the circumstances. And it's a good thing we aren't numb. Evolutionarily speaking, anxiety is a useful tool, right? It's an incoming signal that tells us something like, "Hey, Leah, get away from the pride of lions."

Leah Stokes (07:45):

But a threat like climate change isn't really the same thing. It doesn't come and go like you're being chased by an animal and then you're safe afterwards. Nowadays, we can be constantly submerged in these feelings of anxiety.

Katharine Wilkinson (07:58):

Absolutely. We've got headline after headline, broken record after broken record, and it can totally flood the system. It can even become a form of paralysis. So instead of fight or flight, we just freeze. That's what happened to Selin Nurgün, who is a climate-focused somatic practitioner, which means she works at the nexus of our emotions and our bodies.

Selin Nurgün (08:24):

My interest in somatics began after a period of severe burnout in particularly activist and organizing spaces. And I had no knowledge or idea of what could exist beyond urgent action. And that took me for a really tiring and disconnected and disembodied way of showing up to the world. I was disconnecting myself on purpose from whether it be news or people who had organizing ideas or were taking action. And I just knew that I was rejecting, rejecting, rejecting. I thought, "Well, I'm going to resign to a different type of work that I think is going to pedal me through." And I was not engaged. I was missing that passion and that fire. And the core of it was that I felt that I didn't love the cause anymore. And when I dig into that deeper, I was disconnected from possibility.

Katharine Wilkinson (09:28):

This sudden disembodiment and disconnection from something Selin used to pour so much of herself into it opened her eyes to these deep linkages between our minds and our bodies.

Leah Stokes (09:41):

It's such an easy thing to lose sight of. Those of us who work in the climate space, were often fighting against forces that have more power, more money, more resources. We're steeped in a mixture of grief, fatigue, and honestly, anger. It can really take a toll emotionally and physically.

Katharine Wilkinson (09:57):

And this link between the emotional and the physical, somatics tells us that is key. So to reconnect to possibility, Selin realized she needed to actually be in the environment she cared so much about to physically reconnect.

Selin Nurgün (10:14):

And so, I would say what brought me back to my body and feeling, and certainly that joy and that spark I had, was I became a kayak guide in the San Juan Islands maybe a little over two years ago. And I did that, both as a restart button for myself, and also, I wanted to discover and experience something different than a typical office space, and was very privileged to be able to do that. And I'm originally from Seattle, so the San Juan Islands off the coast was also very deeply embedded in me, the love for that land.

Selin Nurgün (10:54):

Along that journey, I innately started talking to people and asking people what they were noticing around the changing environment and their eyes lit up. They had lots of questions, and we deepened conversations. And they talked about their feelings, their fears, their hopes, their dreams, what grounds them. Of course, we all agreed that kayaking in the sea was one of those resilience practices. And it hit me one day when I was doing that work that I am meant to do this. I want to talk about what's happening in our world with people in a way that resources them and opens up pathways versus shutting it down.

Katharine Wilkinson (11:40):

Working as a guide helps Selin reconnect with the earth, her body, and with others. And she started to heal, but her critical turning point actually happened off the water. On something of a whim, she attended an experiential workshop where she could express her suffering in a circle of kindred community.

Selin Nurgün (12:00):

It finally gave me permission to break down, but the most important part for me was in front of people. Being witnessed was profoundly impactful to my body. My body was able to contact potential safety and trust. That was my aha moment.

Leah Stokes (12:22):

So often, we feel like we have to carry these burdens alone, but we can really gain a lot from grieving in community.

Katharine Wilkinson (12:31):

I agree. And when we realize that we are each profoundly part of a whole, a whole family, a whole community, a whole interconnected web of life, grieving together makes all the sense in the world actually. And when we get disconnected from the whole, that can lead to trouble too. That's what happened with our third guest, Dr. Kritee Kanko, whose voice you heard at the top of the show. She's a climate scientist and Zen Buddhist priest who leads ecological grief rituals. Before she did any of that, she was a young woman alone in a new country.

Kritee Kanko (13:06):

When I first came to this country a week before 9/11, I got depressed. I had come to study computational biology at the time, but as soon as I landed here, I was in difficulty with respect to my relationships. I couldn't make sense of who I was in this land away from my people. And I just felt terribly lost, and I think depression is the word. I wouldn't have used it back then. And a fellow Indian friend asked me, "Would you like to try meditation? There are free meditation classes being offered." So that was back in early 2002, where I was not able to continue my doctoral work, and truly felt a lack of meaning, lack of community. And I hadn't faced my own childhood trauma, and it was just hitting me and I was paralyzed. And that's when I started meditation.

Katharine Wilkinson (14:15):

For Kritee, meditation practice created the same kind of opening that kayaking provided for Selin, a way to loosen her sense of paralysis and begin to move forward. Kritee got deeper into meditation and Zen Buddhism, eventually getting ordained. Through her practice, she learned to have more empathy for herself and for others, and it fostered a profound sense of connection.

Leah Stokes (14:39):

Katherine, way back when, I studied Buddhism as an undergraduate in college, and I'm a practitioner myself. And it's such a crucial concept, the idea of inter being or interconnectedness. It's the idea that all living beings, we rely on one another, that we're not actually separate.

Katharine Wilkinson (14:55):

A metaphor known as Indra's net has always helped me picture it, Leah. In the realm of the God Indra, there is an infinitely wide ever-stretching net. And at every node there's a brilliant jewel, and each of those jewels reflects all the other jewels in the net. So like when you stand in between two mirrors and your reflection just goes on, and on. So whatever affects one jewel, one node, it affects all the others. It's like that definition of interbeing, one thing or one being contains everything else.

Leah Stokes (15:30):

That's right, all the good and all the bad.

Katharine Wilkinson (15:34):

That's such an important part of it. Kritee couldn't not see the problems inside that entire interconnected universe. I mean, she's a scientist painfully aware of the climate crisis. And in her research, she works with Indian farmers for whom the effects and injustices of climate and colonialism are a horrifying everyday reality. But it felt to her like these systemic pains, these problems of the world, they were a bit at arm's length from her practice as a Buddhist.

Kritee Kanko (16:06):

I was experiencing deep, deep compassion on meditation cushion, but it took a while to connect that compassion to climate crisis, to what is happening in our sociopolitical world. A lot of people can take the individual practice of Buddhism and keep it totally separate from what's happening in the sociopolitical world. What made them come together was, when I moved to Boulder, I ended up meeting Joanna Macy. Joanna Macy, beloved Buddhist eco philosopher leads these practices that fall under... She gives it a name, the work that reconnects. And in that spiral of practices, one of the key practices is allowing your grief for the ecological body, our larger earth body to flow through you. That was the missing piece that needed to be embodied and lived for me to connect Buddhism with the climate crisis work because the moment you allow the enormity of climate crisis and the larger ecological crisis, what's happening to our oceans, soils, coral reefs, you are just

naturally are bound to feel enormous grief. And my traditional training in a Zen lineage did not quite have the vocabulary and framework to talk about ecological grief.

Leah Stokes (17:48):

Joanna Macy is one of the thinkers that I encountered too as a young climate activist, and she made a big impact on me as well.

Katharine Wilkinson (17:55):

Same for me. And I also first read her work in a class in college. And what Kritee found in Joanna at this critical juncture in her path was a really great teacher. For those who don't know Joanna Macy's work, she is an author, an activist, a scholar of Buddhism in deep ecology, and quite an amazing translator of Rilke's poetry.

Leah Stokes (18:19):

That's right. Rilke of the widening circles.

Katharine Wilkinson (18:22):

Always coming back to the circles, Leah. And in some ways, it all comes back to Joanna. This would be a very different episode if not for her work on Planetary Grief. As you said, she was influential for you early on. That workshop that Selin went to, it was grounded in Joanna's work. When Britt was grappling with her big decision about parenthood, Joanna's videos helped her make sense of all the swirling overwhelming emotions. I mean, honestly, her work has been such a turning point for so many of us.

Leah Stokes (18:55):

And as Kritee mentioned, one of the things that Joanna is well known for is the work that reconnects. It's a kind of project that is for all of us, all people on earth, community circles that help us understand and move through our ecological grief.

Katharine Wilkinson (19:11):

And this experiential group work is structured like a spiral. So each phase of processing unfurls into the next. And one phase of that unfurling includes honoring our pain for the world, having the courage to experience it instead of just trying to shove it away.

Leah Stokes (19:30):

To quote Joanna, "The critical passage of the workshop happens when, instead of privatizing, repressing and pathologizing our pain for the world, be it grief, outrage, or despair, we honor it. We learn to reframe it as suffering with or compassion. This brings us back to life."

Katharine Wilkinson (19:50):

That act of truly feeling our pain, welcoming it with respect, warmth, support, that allows us to reconnect to possibility, and ultimately, move into action. And it's so important to remember that the work that reconnects is structured like a spiral. It is not a one time effort. This is ongoing work on a planet and turmoil, especially given the layers of intersecting harms and injustices that continue to unfold in human society.

Kritee Kanko (20:20):

Increasingly, people of color teachers are not looking at ecology just from the point of view of, okay, this is human and this is natural world. They are increasingly saying, you have to look at humans in the context of the natural world, which means don't forget the indigenous people from whom we stole this land or the Black labor we stole to create national parks. So don't just look superficially as natural ecosystems as ecology, but include human interactions in that ecology. It became crystal clear for me that any individual, Katherine, you sitting here, me sitting here, climate trauma, climate grief doesn't exist in isolation. It exists on top of your and my experience as female bodied people. It exists as layers on top of my racial trauma that my ancestors carried because they were enslaved by British Empire. It exists on top of me being a small bodied woman who's ridiculed around my size or my height or my shape. I cannot push out other traumas to deal with just climate trauma, especially for people of color and women, right? We have to look at the entire layer of this onion called trauma.

Katharine Wilkinson (21:59):

To understand climate change as a mental health problem, we must see the way it reflects and magnifies all the other social injustices that make it harder to cope.

Leah Stokes (22:09):

That's also why we can't single out how the future of the planet is making us feel and separate it from the past and the present.

Katharine Wilkinson (22:17):

It's essential to understand how we got here. And Selin points this out as a necessary shift in our public discourse about climate emotions.

Selin Nurgün (22:27):

Intersectionality invites us to understand that the climate crisis only exacerbates current and historical struggles and oppression. It is not new for many people, the Global South or frontline communities, the global majority to experience existential crisis. This is not new. And yet, in many of the articles I read that invite or talk about climate emotions is introducing it as a futuristic issue or an anticipated anxiety, right? Like the future I'm worried about versus the current I'm living.

Katharine Wilkinson (23:09):

The climate crisis is our present reality. It's not something that's going to happen, it's already happening. Much of the Global North took its sweet time waking up to that, but with so many climate impacts hitting all around us, it's become impossible to ignore.

Leah Stokes (23:25):

Just like climate change hits communities of color, low income folks, first and worse, in many ways, these mental health challenges that we're talking about that are wrapped up in the climate crisis, they're hitting these same communities really hard.

Katharine Wilkinson (23:39):

Absolutely. It's another layer of climate injustice. And there's also intergenerational injustice that's in the mix too. So for young people, folks likely to see the year 2100 or even beyond that, climate distress hits differently than it does for boomers who are headed into their twilight years. Britt and our colleagues have done some amazing research that illuminates the various dynamics at work.

Britt Wray (24:06):

We did this study of 10,000 16 to 25 year olds in 10 countries around the world. We were looking in places like India, Nigeria, and the Philippines, also the US, the UK, France, Finland, some other places. We wanted to understand the scope and burden of climate distress in this young population. And 45% of these youth said that their feelings about the climate crisis are impairing their daily functioning, disrupting their ability to eat, sleep, concentrate, go to school, go to work, play, be in relationships.

And 75% of them said that the future is frightening. 56% said they feel that humanity is doomed. And these are all, of course, really sad statistics. But when you look at who was reporting the most impaired functioning from their awareness of the climate crisis, their feelings about it, we saw that it was much higher in places like Nigeria, India, and Philippines than it was in the US, UK, France, for example.

Katharine Wilkinson (25:12):

We know that young people in lower and middle income countries are disproportionately exposed to climate hazards. So on top of these physical threats to their wellbeing, they, of course, experience more emotional threats too. And Britt's research shows that there's another real kicker to the climate trauma onion.

Britt Wray (25:30):

We found that the young people aren't just distressed because the environment isn't doing well, but specifically, all of this distress is really tightly correlated with feelings of being betrayed by governments and lied to by leaders, which introduces the concept of institutional betrayal and how it is psychologically injurious to be betrayed, abandoned, let down by people who you depend on for your own survival, wellbeing, and protection.

Leah Stokes (25:59):

As a professor, I spend a lot of time working with young people. And many of these young people, they feel like they have the weight of their world on their shoulders. And inaction or insufficient action from governments, from the powers that be, that stacks even more weight onto the load that they're carrying.

Katharine Wilkinson (26:17):

Even though Britt and her colleagues focus specifically on youth in that study, a lot of people experience leadership and institutional betrayal, particularly communities who've experienced that betrayal for generations. For them, none of this is new.

Britt Wray (26:33):

So there has been a knee-jerk reaction to say, Oh, climate anxiety, that's just for the worried well, and it's mainly a white phenomenon. And it's totally understandable and important to have that critical discourse because it can seem like this outpouring of distress is just coming from middle class enfranchised people who are often white voicing this despair. It's just that those might be the people for whom they're waking

up to the climate crisis as the first existential threat that makes them feel like the world is unsafe and that it's going to touch their lives. Whereas, it's just one more layer of that reminder of how unsafe the world is for so many others. And therefore, the language of climate anxiety isn't really encapsulating the full experience of their distress. But that doesn't mean that the feelings associated with climate anxiety aren't adding a huge impact to their mental health.

Katharine Wilkinson (27:27):

There's that language piece again, Leah. All these emotions keep defying our efforts to name them, but we can't let that derail the effort to normalize or support one another in these difficult feelings.

Leah Stokes (27:41):

Absolutely. Even if we don't have the perfect word for what we're feeling, we need to help each other, support one another to understand those emotions and work with them and through them.

Katharine Wilkinson (27:52):

That's something Kritee is trying to do by leading these grief rituals. They're trauma-informed and meditation-based spaces where folks can sit with and sift through what they're experiencing, and it's where they can finally face their grief.

Kritee Kanko (28:07):

We so have an obligation to slow down. And when we slow down and really feel what's happening, grief will come out naturally. That's what I believe is the core of my work as a grief ritual facilitator. It's like just give people the space where they can allow themselves to feel. Grief is real. Grief is natural, and we have an obligation to feel it fully. People like Joanna, Joanna is fierce. She says, "You absolutely have to feel this pain fully, otherwise, you're going to take shallow actions." You're going to want to put bandaid on things, but what is being called for here is deeper, and we don't get to come to that deeper set of actions, collective actions without, excuse my language, (beep) face our grief.

Leah Stokes (29:15):

That's such a powerful insight, that processing grief can be a gateway into action, really deep action.

Katharine Wilkinson (29:22):

And at the heart of Britt, Selin, and Kritee's work, at the heart of my work and your work, I think, Leah, is the desire for a stronger and more transformational climate movement.

Kritee Kanko (29:35):

We cannot separate an individual body's trauma from what that individual body exists in relationship with, which is that individual's body, friends, family, non-human community ecosystems. So if you're going to want to address my trauma, Kritee trauma, it cannot be separated from what my single mother faced. It cannot be separated from what my people faced back in India being enslaved by the British Empire. It cannot be separated from the ponderosa pine forest, or the other pines that are suffering because of climate crisis, and the repeated droughts, and beetle infestation. And in some ways, trying to deal with individual trauma without seeing in what relationship that body exists, undermines our work, lessens the power of the climate movement.

Leah Stokes (30:43):

Coping with these feelings, it's not just about feeling better, it's also key for the climate movement success.

Katharine Wilkinson (30:49):

Yeah, and that includes everyone, whether you are hip deep in activism or just brushing up against the fringes. Arguably, we need coping support for billions of people since climate change is already impacting every corner of the world.

Leah Stokes (31:07):

So what does that look like in practice, Katherine, meeting the emotional needs of all these people? I think a lot of us might think about one-on-one therapy at first, which is really important, but it's also quite expensive and inaccessible for a lot of people.

Katharine Wilkinson (31:22):

Absolutely. And the truth is that there simply aren't enough trained therapists and counselors to meet the need at scale, but Britt shared some emerging approaches that actually sound very promising.

Britt Wray (31:34):

So something needs to be done structurally to increase access. And fortunately, there are some great ideas about how to do this that have been rolled out from the field of global mental health, which is focused on trying to get healthcare provided in low resource settings. And so, what do you do when 98% of a country that has mental health problems has no access to a care provider? Well, you can do something called task shifting, which is where you take the psychiatrist or the psychotherapist or the other kind of expert and you turn them into a trainer. They train lay people who stand up and step in as peer support counselors.

Katharine Wilkinson (32:17):

I think task shifting and peer support counselors are going to be vital, and they help build strong communities at the same time because, with this model, right, you're working through all these complex emotions alongside people you already trust, and maybe even people who get you.

Britt Wray (32:34):

And even though they have zero psychological expertise, they can be trained to work with the interventions that are very effective for helping folks with things like anxiety and depression, for example. And they can go out into their community, and amongst their fellow residents who trust them because they're familiar, and they're in the same community centers, and schools, and they pass on these tools, and they do these interventions. And then, some clinical trials show that this can be even more effective than primary care, than if they had had a straight up psychiatrist, for example, or therapist helping them. This is really powerful because it means that you can take those who have the know-how and then just scale it and explode it in terms of how many people they're training at any one time, and then helping them infiltrate the locals on the ground where people are who need support.

Leah Stokes (33:24):

The idea of weaving this resource into our communities, it's really exciting, and it seems like it'll be indispensable for our collective healing.

Katharine Wilkinson (33:32):

I totally agree. And in her book, Generation Dread, Britt also writes about another scalable tool for climate healing, which might surprise some folks. It's public ritual. Britt says that our society is ritually deficient. We just don't have ways to publicly

mourn or process the losses that are happening on our planet. But when we do create these rituals, they can be incredibly powerful.

Leah Stokes (33:56):

Right.I'm thinking about the work that some of our colleagues did, Cymene Howe and Dominic Boyer, where they did a glacier funeral in Iceland. And we've seen that replicated in other places like Oregon and Switzerland. When these glaciers are declared dead by glaciologists, maybe that's a moment to actually mourn. People can sing songs, hold moments of silence, tell old stories about hiking or drinking from the glaciers. And all of these funerals include a serious call for climate action.

Katharine Wilkinson (34:28):

I also love the ritual that Britt writes about the Remembrance Day for Lost Species. So, similar, people dress up, sing, read poems, make offerings, and they burn a symbolic effigy of a particular species that has been lost in this era of great extinction.

Leah Stokes (34:45):

Yeah, it's a way to release some of these emotions that have been building up inside of us. But I can't help but think that probably peer support counselors and public rituals, these are more the exception than the rule. They're probably not really widely available right now, are they, Katherine?

Katharine Wilkinson (35:00):

Unfortunately, Leah, they're not yet, but there are actually a lot of options for climate healing to tap into and it feels to me like the resources are growing by the day. So what we wanted to do for our listeners is run through a roundup of some of the highlights of what's out there. And of course, we'll link to everything we mention, and probably then some in our show notes. So I think we should dive in. Are you ready, Leah?

Leah Stokes (35:26):

I'm ready.

Katharine Wilkinson (35:28):

So we touched on one-on-one therapy. And for folks who are interested in finding a therapist who could support them with our climate emotions, the Climate Psychology

Alliance has a directory of climate aware therapists, and I will certainly say that having a climate attuned practitioner has been really helpful for me.

Leah Stokes (35:48):

Yeah. Having a therapist is awesome. Having a therapist who gets it on climate is just next level.

Katharine Wilkinson (35:54):

There is also something called the Good Grief Network. It's a 10 step small group program that helps participants turn their emotion into action.

Leah Stokes (36:05):

Yeah, I remember this one from Britt's book. I think she talked about how it was really powerful for her.

Katharine Wilkinson (36:10):

It was. This was definitely a big step on Britt's journey, and so as an online meditation retreat that she did through Plum Village, which is a Buddhist center rooted in the teachings of the late activist and spiritual leader Thich Nhat Hanh.

Leah Stokes (36:23):

Yeah, there's a whole tradition in Buddhism called engaged Buddhism that really helps people connect their practice with their activism. And going to a meditation retreat, whether that's online or in person, can make a really big difference to help folks deepen their practice.

Katharine Wilkinson (36:39):

I love that idea of engaged Buddhism. And as we've mentioned, Kritee facilitates amazing grief rituals. And she does that through two different organizations, one called Boundless in Motion and the other is the Rocky Mountain Eco Dharma Retreat Center that has in-person retreats.

Leah Stokes (36:58):

That's awesome. And what about Selin? What were some resources that she shared?

Katharine Wilkinson (37:01):

Well, as you can gather, Selin is a fan of these body-based healing methodologies, and there's a great organization called Generative Somatics. They offer free classes, a free daily practice space online, and it's frequently led by and intended for people that come from historically oppressed communities.

Leah Stokes (37:21):

And what about if you're just looking for a space to connect with others for generous open climate conversation? I'm sure you've got options on that one, right, Katherine?

Katharine Wilkinson (37:30):

I do. Leah. I have to mention All We Can Save circles, which I designed back in 2020. They're like a souped up book club, but it's a self-led model that uses the All We Can Save anthology as a spark for conversation, community building, and what we might call relational organizing. And then, for connection in conversation, that's a little bit more bite sized. You might check out Climate Cafes or Climate Awakening, which was created by the clinical psychologist, Margaret Klein Salamon. And there are also practices that folks can do just to increase their own emotional elasticity, things that help ground us day-to-day. And Selin describes these really well.

Selin Nurgün (38:14):

One of the practices that is a part of my day-to-day living is what we call in somatics a resilience practice because resilience really is what turns up our aliveness. So that could look like first identifying what really feels good in your body, and it can also be a realization of, wow, I'm so interconnected with the world, and so, a part of everything. Sometimes people describe it as, "Wow, I look into this guy and I feel so small and insignificant, but really it brings me into gratitude." That's a resilience practice, feeling small, because that really means, whoa, I'm a part of something bigger.

Katharine Wilkinson (39:01):

I feel like I get this when I sit with my back against a big old tree, or I watch a sunset from a mountain that has seen sunsets for eons.

Leah Stokes (39:11):

It's such a simple and yet powerful practice. It's a sense of awe, really, that we can find in nature.

Katharine Wilkinson (39:17):

With all the resources and resilience practices we've talked about today, I think the through line is community ,connecting with other people and the beyond human world.

Leah Stokes (39:28):

The key thing that we just keep hearing again and again is that we cannot go it alone when it comes to coping with our emotions.

Katharine Wilkinson (39:35):

It's so, so important. And it's tough to overemphasize how much we need collective support to work with and through these challenging feelings, which might sometimes mean pumping up the volume.

Kritee Kanko (39:49):

We all have a primal scream. Our grief, our anger, our fear is packed into it. Every now and then, I invite people to make primal sounds, allow that cry, that scream to come in from within you. But if you are screaming about your pain, whatever kind of pain that is by yourself, that's retraumatizing yourself. But when that scream is held in a bigger calm container, that scream is seen and other people join you in your scream, they see you, hear you, honor you, that you release the blockages in your own system and the collective body. That's when clarity and courage can arise. If there is a bit of toxic chemical in a cup of water, the whole cup is poisoned, but same toxic chemical in an ocean can be held. And so, what something like meditation does for grief work is it provides a vast container for the community and for the individual so that expressing grief does not destabilize them, doesn't retraumatize them.

Katharine Wilkinson (41:12):

Kritee puts this so beautifully. And there's a quote from author and trauma specialist, Resmaa Menakem, that builds on why this work is absolutely vital to climate action. He says, "Attending to our own wellbeing is crucial, both for ourselves and the movement. If you intend to be part of social justice and or climate justice movements for the long term, it's necessary to tend to your wellbeing ,to face and feel your emotions. Otherwise, they'll show up inappropriately in the work."

Leah Stokes (41:45):

Climate work, it means constant encounters with difficult feelings, with things like that inner scream that Kritee mentioned. So if we're going to build a strong climate movement, we've got to create space for these emotions.

Katharine Wilkinson (41:59):

In the wise words of Dr. Susi Moser, burnt out people aren't equipped to serve a burning planet.

Leah Stokes (42:06):

Yeah. I also think it doesn't mean that there aren't burnt out folks in the climate movement or that we don't get tired or exhausted. All of us have faced that. But the thing is that we can step away. We can find practices even within the hurricane of these emotions, of the work. We can step back, center ourselves, and then keep fighting.

Katharine Wilkinson (42:27):

We can. And here's what I've learned about the ebb and the flow that I've experienced in climate work. This isn't just about policy or advocacy or research, although we desperately need all of those things. There's really important work that's happening out there in the world. But climate work is also about the work happening in here. It's about the inner work that we also need to do. Kritee calls this emotional composting.

Kritee Kanko (42:55):

We are not doing grief work to remember past pains and potential future pains and retraumatize ourselves. We want to share the grief in a way that it can be held and it can be composted, composting the grief and trauma to fuel our movement. We are not doing it to just keep scratching at a wound.

Katharine Wilkinson (43:24):

And Britt uses the term toggling.

Britt Wray (43:27):

One climate aware therapist I interviewed for my book, Leslie Davenport, described it as toggling. This is what it means to start coping with climate distress. It's not that we get our tools, we have an epiphany, a breakthrough, we're healed, and then we are resilient forever more. It's that we have to learn how to go through periods of

resilience and then periods of absolute devastation as we bear witness to more struggling, and suffering, and loss. Over time, you become familiar with the fact that you never stay in any one place and you can move, and this flexibility allows for a dance that you get to know. And that in itself, becoming familiar with your pattern is strengthening

Katharine Wilkinson (44:13):

For Selin, it's reentering.

Selin Nurgün (44:16):

When you say stay in the work, I'm also invoking this idea, this invitation that it's okay to leave, but just come back, and come back, and come back. And a lot of Buddhist philosophers talk about this return. And in somatics it's phrased more of like a recentering. So I talked earlier about being triggered and having triggers. And our world is full of triggers. That's never going to go away. But when I notice that I'm off center, off my dignity, off my lineage, everything that holds me up, I get to choose to recenter, and I can come back as many times as I want to, forever.

Leah Stokes (44:57):

Wow. Emotional composting, toggling, reentering. It's amazing how these three women are all kind of pointing at the same idea but coming at it in different ways.

Katharine Wilkinson (45:07):

Yeah, I think it's so helpful to have these different terms or images to conceptualize this idea. My therapist describes this as moving like a pendulum from the darkness to the light and back again, never quite getting stuck. And whatever helps you to hold onto this idea, just go with that and maybe begin to play with it a bit in practice.

Leah Stokes (45:32):

Katherine, we started off this episode by asking ourselves, how can we cope? As with a miniseries where we asked about what can I do, answering this question, really, it's a lifelong path. And whenever we get started on it, that's a good time to start.

Katharine Wilkinson (45:48):

And if you want to start ASAP, stick around until after the show credits and we'll do a guided meditation that could help with unearthing some of these climate feelings. Healing the climate crisis will be the work of our lifetimes, so we need to help each

other thrive for the long haul. Sometimes that means doing things that nourish us in this life, despite all the challenges we're facing.

Britt Wray (46:10):

I have an eight month old now. After many years of wrestling with this and feeling pretty certain on many occasions that I was not going to have a child, I ended up doing it. It wasn't that there was ever a single aha moment when it all fell into place and was like, yes, but it was just a long process of internalization and reckoning with what it would mean for me. And I want to be really clear about this being super subjective and there's no right or wrong answer. And just because I reason this out in one way, it doesn't mean that someone who decides the opposite is then aligning to some other kind of logic. It's just that, for me, all the calculations about not having a child and feeling really authentic in that was when I was activating my fear. And it was a really fear-based mindset for me that I didn't want to let take over my life. And it felt like a commitment to that part of myself, which is still there, by the way. She's still in there. But for me, the act of having a child was a commitment to joy, despite whatever may come.

Katharine Wilkinson (47:16):

I hear something really powerful in Britt's story, that what lies beneath all of this, under our fear, our rage, our grief, it's a ferocious love for this world and for our time in it.

Leah Stokes (47:29):

And that love, it's both what keeps us in the work and what makes it so hard to continue sometimes. That love, the other side of it, it can be pain.

Katharine Wilkinson (47:38):

My wise friend, the author and activist, Sherry Mitchell, teaches that this tingle of emotions isn't a sign of something wrong with us. It's a sign of something being righted within us, that we're finally coming to understand our profound and our connectedness with this planet. As you say, Leah, our broken open hearts may hurt, but they are actually the very thing we need most.

Leah Stokes (48:09):

A Matter of Degrees is co-hosted by me, Dr. Leah Stokes.

Katharine Wilkinson (48:12):

And me, Dr. Katherine Wilkinson.

Leah Stokes (48:14):

We are a production made in partnership with FRQNCY Media, the 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara, and the All We Can Save project.

Katharine Wilkinson (48:23):

Thanks to our funders and supporters who make the show possible, Energy Foundation, Northlight Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and the 11th Hour Project.

Leah Stokes (48:33):

If you're digging the show, please hop on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, and give us a five star rating or leave us a review.

Katharine Wilkinson (48:41):

Jordan Rizzieri is our producer. Catherine Devine is our associate producer. Enna Garkusha is our supervising producer. And Michelle Corey is our executive producer.

Leah Stokes (48:51):

William Cagel and Ellie Katz wrote the script. And Isabel Moncloa Daly and Becca Godwin were script editors. Matthew Ernest Filler is our lead audio engineer mixer and sound designer, with dialogue editing and additional mixing by Claire Bidigare-Curtis.

Katharine Wilkinson (49:07):

Rose Wong designed our new show art. And Sean [inaudible 00:49:10] composed our theme song. Additional music came from Blue Dot Sessions.

Leah Stokes (49:15):

Research fact checking and production support by [inaudible 00:49:18] and Daniela Schulman.

Katharine Wilkinson (49:20):

Come back soon as we tell more stories for the climate curious, and maybe tune in now for a guided meditation on climate emotions.

Katharine Wilkinson (49:30):

This meditation comes from the All We Can Save project's Climate Wayfinding program. It's designed to unearth the emotions that we bring with us to climate work, and to honor them as critical grounding, guidance, and fuel. You might want to do this in a quiet space and have a journal or notebook on hand to write afterward about what arises.

Katharine Wilkinson (49:52):

Begin by finding a comfortable position to be in for the next few minutes. You may want to be seated or to lie down, whatever feels best for your body. Once you're settled, shift your attention to your breath. Breathe in slowly and deeply. Allow a pause at the top of your full inhale, and then exhale slowly and long. Allow another pause at the bottom of your exhale. Repeat that a few times. Inhale, pause. Exhale, pause.

Katharine Wilkinson (50:53):

Now allow your breath to move into its natural rhythm, in and out. As you breathe, notice the way your body is making contact. Feel the ground beneath you. Feel the firmness and steadiness of the Earth, your bodily connection to the planet we call home. Notice how the Earth holds you.

Katharine Wilkinson (51:58):

Now invite your awareness to go to a physical place that feels secure and safe for you, for your heart. Maybe this is a place you know well, maybe it's one you're experiencing for the first time. What do you see in this safe place? What colors, textures, light are present? Perhaps there are sounds, smells, sensations on your skin. Are any other beings here with you? Keep breathing and allow yourself to nestle into this place and this sense of safety. Notice how you feel in your body as you inhale and exhale.

Katharine Wilkinson (53:25):

Now, from this place of safety, invite in the reality of the larger world in which we live. Invite the climate crisis we face to come into the center of your awareness. What images come into your mind? Who or what do you see? Are there particular beings, communities, or places that come into focus? Take another breath in and out. What sounds do you hear as you bring your attention to the climate crisis? Are there news

headlines that arise? Who or what do you not see? Bring your attention to what will be lost.

Katharine Wilkinson (54:59):

Notice what the climate crisis is already taking away. Notice these losses in the world, in your community, in your closest relations. Think about your loved ones, those you know and those who are yet to be born. Allow yourself to feel the impact of the way we're going. What do you see as you look to the future? Where do you not want to look?

Katharine Wilkinson (55:59):

Let a climate crisis fill the space of your awareness. Notice what emotions are filling your body. Where in your body do you feel the climate crisis? Is there a temperature, color, or sensation you notice? Keep breathing in and out as you explore the presence of climate emotions within you. Whatever emotions are rising, let them come. Whatever you are seeing or feeling is exactly right for today. Welcome and receive these emotions as a form of wisdom rising up from within you, you a singular and connected node within the web of life. You are threaded into Earth's magnificent living systems. You may be feeling Earth's pain, and you may also be feeling earth's power. That is wisdom too.

Katharine Wilkinson (57:53):

Keep breathing. Each breath is a moment of connection to the life force that circuits between us and all beings across space and time. Inhale and receive that interconnection. Exhale and extend that interconnection. Breathe in and feel how the Earth holds you. Breathe out and offer that holding to others. Bring your awareness back to your body and notice the steadiness of Earth still present beneath you. Bring one hand to your heart and one to your belly. Take another slow, deep inhale, and another slow, long exhale. Take one more deep inhale, pause at the top, and exhale. As you are ready, slowly open your eyes.