

A Handbook for co-  
support within the  
Psychology of Now



OF  
MUTUAL  
BENEFIT  
Part Two

By Mary Good Imft #97461

# OF MUTUAL BENEFIT

## Part Two

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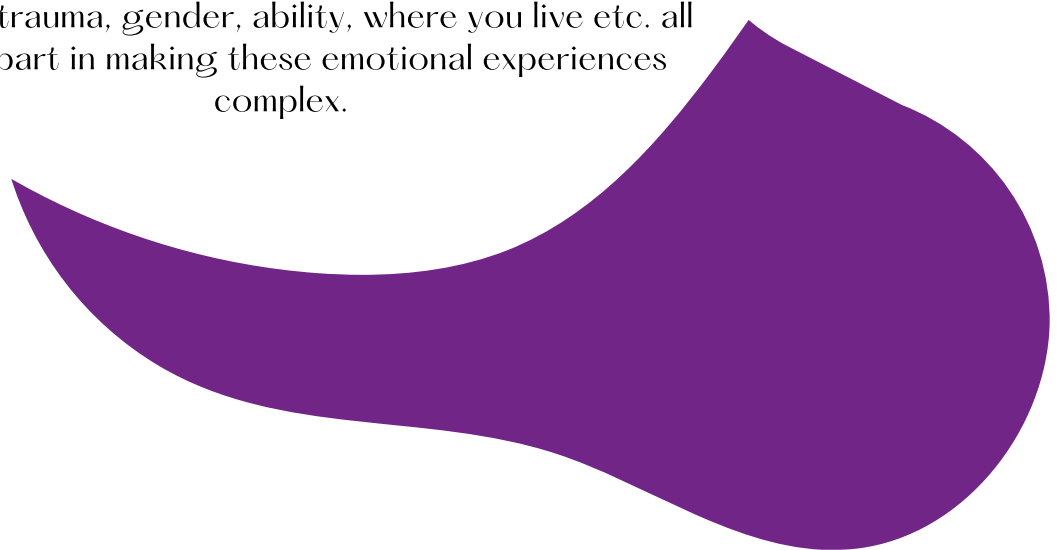


## ABOUT PART TWO

Earth grief is our individual and collective response of sorrow, despair and/or rage in relationship to climate change, environmental degradation and social/racial injustice when and where it intersects with climate change and the part that government, politics and corporate malpractice play.

Ecological anxiety is an experience of anxiety, fear or worry about the future impact(s) of climate change and/or climate driven weather events (wildfires, hurricanes, droughts). Ecoanxiety can manifest as manic levels of activism, an oversized sense of personal responsibility, paralyzation, overwhelm and denial. Ecoanxiety is almost always about the future and is based on thoughts we have about what that future will be like as a lived experience.

The question I am asked most frequently is “How do I deal with my climate anxiety and/or grief?”. I know that the answer desired is one that is simplistic and easy, akin to the bumper sticker wisdom we see on Instagram slideshows or TikToks. However, emotional states like grief and anxiety are entirely dependent on diverse factors that make oversimplification not only difficult, but also insulting. Considerations such as age, race, socio-economic status, historical and/or present trauma, gender, ability, where you live etc. all play a part in making these emotional experiences complex.



# SOME CONSIDERATIONS

As much as I'd like to give you a one-size-fits-all approach, the truth is – you deserve more. Regard these suggestions as stepping stones that do not represent the entire landscape that is You, but are invitations of where to put your feet. Know that this may be ongoing work for you, and the nuance that arises with self knowledge is valid and vital.

## **When you find yourself in a state of hyper-arousal** (otherwise known as FTFO – Freaking the F\*ck Out)

**Resource** – get back to baseline by supporting yourself in ways that help you to move from feeling overwhelmed in fight/flight/freeze to feeling safe and in the present moment. Lean on your supports / utilize self care / tend to the body. “Let’s get you some comfort” has some suggestions for this.

**Observe your thinking** – notice if you are catastrophizing, imagining what-ifs, predicting the future or hijacked by all-or-nothing thinking. Remind yourself that you cannot predict how the future will be nor what will happen between now and then. A great challenge to “what-ifs” is “What if everything works out? What if I am ok?”

**Titrate your media intake** – Stop doomscrolling, choose a less inflammatory source (like CalFire reports for wildfire instead of the local paper) and vet your information. Vetting means consider the source – Is it false or sensationalized news? Is it coming straight from the source (like the IPCC Report itself) or a news article ABOUT the source (news report with the headline “IPCC Says We’re Screwed”)?

**We don't need another hero** – Western culture has an entrenched mythos of The Hero, a single individual who can solely take on a monumental, complex problem and provide The Solution. The Hero Complex can create feelings of guilt, shame and "never doing enough", which in turn leads to paralyzation and overwhelm. This is perpetuated through another myth – that individual, consumer action (recycling, buying only certain products, cutting out single use plastics) will topple systemic culprits from the ground up. It's not that these efforts are not worthwhile, but the onus of real responsibility needs to migrate – the compass needle turning from the self to the powers that be – systems, governments and corporations. You are not meant to be the hero, and you are not alone.

We are all in this together. Change is a symphony that requires many instruments  
– the part that you play is enough.

We hear anxiety and grief spoken about as being separate, but in my work I have found that they are often parts of a whole. Anxiety can stem from a desire to fix the intolerable, flee perceived danger or is an internal alarm set off by fear...and often what is intolerable, perceived as dangerous, what we are afraid of...is our grief. Grief is a dynamic force that catalyzes the emotional aspects of loss to the surface of our awareness so that they may be released. Very few of us have been given guidance for this process, and naturally we may feel apprehension or avoidance when we feel the tidal wave coming. Learning to do grief work has signaled the return of joy and vitality to my own life and the life of my clients. There are many ways to do this, and the Practice for Working with Grief in this module is one.

# LET'S BRING YOU SOME COMFORT

These two practices will help you down regulate when anxiety has taken hold. They can be done for stress relief, and also in the case of a panic attack.

## The Butterfly's Kiss

Part One: With your arms crossed over your chest and your fingertips resting on your collarbone, tap just firmly enough that you can feel a tiny bit of reverberation throughout your rib cage. As you tap, bring attention to your breath and invite it to slow and deepen. Do part one for 1–5 minutes.

Part two: You will notice a shift in your breathing. Once this happens, think of a positive, but realistic thought, such as “Right now, in this moment, I am safe.” Say this to yourself out loud. Take a look around where you are and notice this safe place that you are in.

Do part two for 1–5 minutes.

## The Dive Reflex

We have a mammalian dive reflex that happens automatically, whenever our face is submerged in water. It is a complex physiological reaction that our bodies do to conserve oxygen. In terms of anxiety, it flips a switch and reverses the feeling of fight or flight. The heart rate slows down, blood flow is brought back into the core from the extremities and oxygen is increased to the brain.

We feel calmer and can think more clearly.

Fill a large bowl with COLD water, and keep a towel at hand. Submerge your face. Hold your breath for 10 seconds. Repeat multiple times until you feel a shift.

# Journal prompts for Part Two

This week's journaling is all about getting wise to ourselves. Illuminating the spells our minds cast on us, whether it's our survival style, keeping us safe in response to perceived threat, or the unspoken but powerful cultural norms we absorbed re: "dark" or "negative" emotions.

## **Identifying your beliefs about grief\***

For these prompts, it might be tempting to respond with how you think you "should", but I encourage you to risk sounding "unconscious". You may find some of your responses are not grief affirming, and others are, or a spectrum in between. You are invited to be as authentic as possible. Your answers need not be long, and can even be one word.

**I think of grief (fear, despair) as...**

**What my grief (fear, despair) says about me is...**

**When I see other people demonstrating grief (fear, despair) I think...**

**If I fully experienced my grief (fear, despair) I would...**

After you complete the prompts, notice which of your responses are more negative. Chances are, these are your internalized cultural beliefs.

## **Identifying the impact of media on your anxiety.**

Think of this exercise as a scavenger hunt.

Before beginning, resource yourself and take note of your baseline. Check your heart rate, notice the felt sense in your chest and stomach (or wherever you notice a somatic response when you are anxious.)

Check your preferred news source, and look for articles on topics that are of concern to you. But rather than allowing yourself to just absorb headlines, images and information, bring forward a discerning mindfulness. Acting as detective, write down all the sensationalized headlines, words or descriptions of images that you see. Here's an example of words pulled from headlines after checking the "California Wildfires" section of the NYTimes for just 5 minutes.

Threaten. Thousands flee. Raging. Destroys. Ravages. Severe.

As you read headlines and see images, notice what happens in your body. Has your baseline changed? How about your thoughts – was it easy to stay with the discerning perspective, or did you find yourself jumping to catastrophic predictions about the future? Did you notice certain topics, words or images that set you off? Pay attention to what they were – these are possibly triggers for you, and may be something to be aware of as part of your self care around media.

\*Based on prompts from "Healing Through the Dark Emotions:

## A Practice for Working with Grief and other challenging emotional states

This practice is supported by our ability to befriend ourselves. In my work as a psychotherapist, so much of the work is about this concept alone. It sounds so simple, yet because of the wounds we may have, it can feel so difficult.

When we experience emotions that we find uncomfortable, or distressing, we push them away – through those ways we all have of avoiding or distracting. One of the most common ways is something that may seem like we don't have an option when it happens – and that's trying to figure it out. We process, we hash it out, we talk to our friends, we grasp at solutions, we search for the antidote and the irony of all this activity is the one thing that we don't do – **allow** for the feelings and **feel** them.

When I was younger, despite intellectually understanding this idea, it took me years to really get it, because my emotional experience was so strong, so loud. Feel my feelings? It's all I ever did! I wanted relief, to escape. One day a distinction dawned on me – that I wasn't **actively** feeling. Imagine you close your eyes and someone places something in your hands and asks you to describe it. Using your sense of touch, you notice texture, temperature, size, and shape. If it makes a sound you might feel a vibration, or hear it. If you opened your eyes you might notice a color. This practice for working with difficult emotions uses somatic mindfulness and the imagination to explore emotions in our body in a similar way.

Rather than thinking about our feelings, the story, content or meaning about them, we connect with our capacity to **notice** – to internally observe what qualities our emotions might have. Warming up the heart, we also bring in the capacity to be curious and friendly with our noticing.

For this week's work together, you can go short or long. The following two pages give instructions for this week's work together, and a layout of the practice itself.

### **Short version:**

After taking some time together, settle in and resource by practicing the breathwork from week one or the meditation in this week's comfort session.

Take turns leading each other through the Practice for Working with Difficult Emotions. It's recommended that you familiarize yourself by reading through the practice a couple times first. Using a timer, allot 10–15 minutes per person.

### **Long version:**

Taking 3–5 minutes each, and utilizing council style, share how this week's journal exercise was for you.

After taking some time together, settle in and resource by practicing the breathwork from week one or the meditation in this week's comfort session.

Take turns leading each other through the Practice for Working with Difficult Emotions. It's recommended that you familiarize yourself by reading through the practice a couple times first. Using a timer, allot 20–30 minutes per person.

Depending on your own familiarity with your emotional landscape, or history of trauma work, you may want to pick a feeling state in the body that feels more mild than your broken heart or the pit of despair in the belly. (You need not be afraid of these places, but because they may indicate a great deal of stored up, unprocessed emotions, you may want to enlist the support of a therapist to explore them if you never have before.)



## **A Practice for Working with Grief And other challenging emotional states**

Begin by identifying your Resource – a breathwork pattern that works for you, recalling a memory that brings warmth and comfort, a favorite prayer or saying etc. Remember that you can take a break at anytime and return to this Resource for as long as you need.

You may close your eyes, or look down with a soft gaze.

We have a part of ourselves that can be a friendly, warm and curious witness. Our inner best friend and advocate. Our wise self or kind, inner parent. Invite this part of you forward now.  
"See" yourself and your experience through this perspective.

Through the eyes of this inner witness, we attend to the body and NOTICE. Get curious. At our own pace, we explore our inner landscape, and notice physical sensations and emotional energy. We remember that thoughts are the sensations of the mind, and we "just notice" them too.

What we notice, we allow for, instead of trying to push it away or fix it.

For this practice, find the energetic expression in the body that you'd like to work with.

We bring awareness to the felt sense by noticing the qualities (such as: size, shape, color, movement, temperature, texture) We ask ourselves and see what arises. "This feeling, what size is it? What shape? Does it have a texture? A color? A temperature? Is it moving?" etc.  
Let this questioning be gentle and slow.

We allow it to be whatever and however it is without judging or trying to change it.

As we bring attention to our felt sense, it may want to move.  
If we'd like, we let it move through us without trying to stop it.

As we bring attention to our felt sense, this part of our body may feel relieved and begin to release the emotions held in place.  
If we need to cry, we may cry. Tears are healing

As best we can, we stay with the felt sense and stay out of the story.  
As best we can, we stick with the sensation, rather than jumping into our heads to explain, fix, or understand.

We remind ourselves that emotional energy moves in waves, with the crest feeling the most intense. When we are in the thick of it, it is normal to have thoughts like "This is endless"  
"This will never end" "If I really let myself feel this, I'll go crazy".  
These are just thoughts. This too shall pass.

We return to the Resource when we need a break or to complete



## In Closing

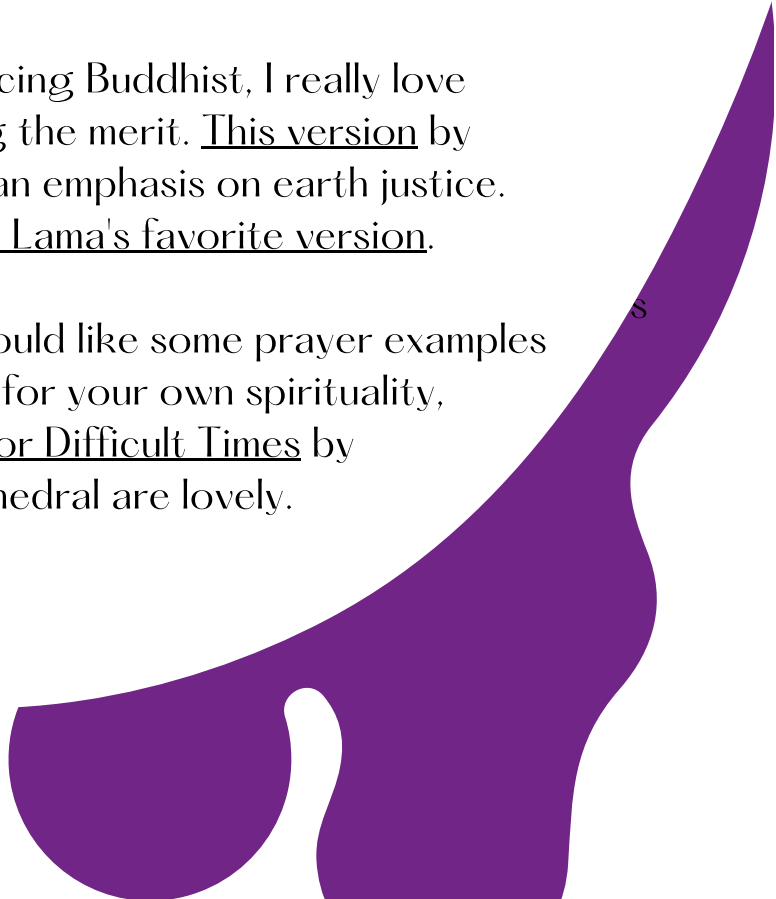
How you'd like to close your time together is up to you, but closing with intention is recommended. This contains the work you have done together and puts a period at the end of the sentence before you move back out into the world.

Taking a moment of silence to reflect, or practice the breathwork from this week, is enough.  
So is simply saying "Thank you".

Many folk have their own personal spiritual relationship with the anima mundi of the land they live on, more-than-human-others, ancestors, spirit guides etc. Inviting them into this work with you can be integrative.

As a long time practicing Buddhist, I really love the idea of dedicating the merit. This version by One Earth Sangha has an emphasis on earth justice.  
And here is the Dali Lama's favorite version.

If you are Christian, or would like some prayer examples to use as templates for your own spirituality, these Prayers for Difficult Times by Grace Cathedral are lovely.



# This week's book recommendations

The authors of these first two books are both teachers, who began witnessing hopelessness and despair over climate change in their students. As someone who works with people experiencing the same, I was reassured to discover that their approach and conclusions were nearly identical to my own. These are the books I felt obligated to write, and now I don't have to. Highly recommend.

A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety

Sarah Jacquette Ray

Hope Matters

Elin Kelsey

The next two books are good companions for changing our relationship to emotions we previously shunned.

The Wild Edge of Sorrow

Francis Weller

Healing Through the Dark Emotions

Miriam Greenspan

# SOURCES

Greenspan, Miriam. Healing Through the Dark Emotions: the wisdom of fear, grief and despair. Boulder, Shambhala, 2004

If you'd like to connect on Instagram with others doing the program,  
use the hashtag #ofmutualbenefit  
and  
you may also tag me @the\_splendor\_and\_travail