

Transcript: Embracing Climate Change Uncertainty: A Practice for Impossible Questions

Jessica David: I'm Jessica David. This is the Climate Changed podcast Behind the Scenes Edition. Hello, friends. I need to know, how do you stay grounded when it comes to our climate catastrophe, especially when you're feeling overwhelmed, bewildered, and dispirited? Madeline Bugeau-Heartt is a program associate at The BTS Center. And in this episode, Madeline is going to guide us through a practice. Hi, Madeline. Welcome back.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Yay. Thank you so much, Jessica. I'm very glad to be back and talking to you.

Jessica David: I am very glad to have you back. Listeners may remember Madeline from a previous episode, where we talked with Ben Yosua-Davis about hope and how complicated it is.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Super complicated. It hasn't changed.

Jessica David: Yeah, spoiler alert. If you haven't listened to that one, it is complicated. So, Madeline, before we get into your practice itself, tell me. Tell me about your intentions for this practice.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Yes, I was thinking about my intentions for this practice, and a story came to mind of something that happened to me recently. I was out on a jog, and I ran into this woman in our community. She is a poet and amazing and like an old guard feminist. And I said, how are you doing?" And she said, you know, I know the truth now, and nothing in my life has changed. And it feels awful. And I said, right. It feels like a medieval torture, like you're suspended between two things. And she said, yes, yes. And so I think my intention for this practice today is, so many of the conversations I'm having with people these days are around this really excruciating tension that we are holding within ourselves, both individually and collectively. There's so much uncertainty, so many questions that seem impossible to answer right now, and so much at stake. And I wanted to make a practice where we could sit with that usually unbearable feeling together to give enough space and, dare I say, respect in order to see what might emerge from those questions.

Jessica David: Oh, my goodness. I'm really looking forward to this now. I feel the need for it. It's in myself, even as you're describing it. So what do you have for us?

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: So I'm calling this a practice for sitting with impossible questions. On the nose.

Jessica David: Yes. Call it what it is.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: I think just so often the impossible questions we're holding, as I said, just feel so uncomfortable. And I certainly try to push them away, but I really do believe that they're trying to get our attention and that they could even be whispers from a better future. So my hope for this practice is to reframe this profound uncertainty as a sacred Gift. And I thought I would squeeze in a quote which I think sums this up pretty well, by Rainer Maria Rilke. He writes, "be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue, do not now seek the answers which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer." I mean, thank you. Rilke sums it up.

Jessica David: Yeah. Although I think you summed it up just as beautifully, saying, profound uncertainty as a sacred gift. I love that. Okay, so, last question before we get into it. Let's say we love this practice. What, what do we do next? What do we do after?

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Yeah, it's a great question, I would say, to share your impossible questions with others. It's only when we get together, at least in my experience I found this, that we're able to cross these beckoning thresholds. And I found that the movements, at least within me, usually start with a question that no one has an answer to. I would also say to think about the other things in your life or the things that live within you, that usually feel too painful or too uncomfortable to face, and perhaps consider them as portals in and of themselves.

Jessica David: Oh, this idea that developing this practice, what we called in our conversation a few episodes ago, you know, this muscle gives us bravery and skill to also look into other spaces and other corners maybe, that we wouldn't have been thinking about at the moment. Oh, beautiful.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Yeah. Bravery, Jessica, let's practice bravery as a muscle is so beautiful.

Jessica David: Well, we certainly, certainly could use that. All right, Madeline, lead us in.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Okay, so here is a practice for sitting with impossible questions. First, and if you are able, go outside. Try to place your good creature body alongside a more than human being. And if you don't have access to an outside space, that's okay too. Just try to tuck

yourself into a place that's just yours for the next few minutes. If you are outside, perhaps you lean against a tree or press your spine into the ground. Perhaps you wiggle your toes on rocks. Think of the question living inside of you that feels impossible right now. Whether that means impossible to answer or impossible to live with. Amidst our climate changed world, I often feel racked with uncertainty. I spend my days throwing myself at questions I so desperately want the answers to. How do we heal this? How can we cross the threshold into the world we're longing for? How do I keep despair at bay? How can I release all outcomes? Let your own impossible question rise to the surface.

Instead of trying to figure it out, instead of wrestling with it or pushing it away, imagine that it is in fact a sacred unknowing, glittering like an unwrapped gift instilled within you as a wholly indiscernible whisper. As you feel your heart beating in this moment that will soon be gone, as you feel your lungs doing their inherent work of giving and receiving air, open your palms so that they face upwards. Or press them into the good dirt, or rest them gently over your eyes. Whatever position feels like a gesture of acceptance to you. You are a vessel for this deep unknowing, a dynamic dwelling. For this question to live in. Ask whomever it is you pray to. God or the trees or your inner light, the great mystery. Ask whomever it is you love that you know loves you. In return for the ability to hold this impossible question with grace, ask that its slow reveal, its mysterious untangling, come only in its own due time. Ask that you may create within yourself a nest of trust to hold this profound uncertainty. Ask that you may stay awake enough so that when the time comes, you can move from this question's release with courage. I bless this impossible question within you just as I bless the impossible questions within me. We cannot manhandle our way into their unfolding, cannot force the cracking of these codes. Instead, let us hold them as if we have been entrusted as their divine keepers. And when we meet again, you and I, let us draw them back out into the light and wonder at them together and with reference.

Jessica David: Wow. What a gift that was, Madeline. I know that you didn't write that just for me, but it felt like it.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: I a little bit did, though. Jessica. Whenever I do, I'm always like, this is just for you. So I a little bit did.

Jessica David: I felt it. I hope, listeners, I hope you feel that way too, with Madeline's voice in your ear. Such a gift for us. Just thank you, thank you, thank you.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Thank you for sitting with me in the impossible questions. It's good.

Jessica David: I love this notion of just acceptance and just kind of dwelling. Dwelling with the unknowing and the deep centering.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Like, I so often feel like I have to control everything. Like, if I just think hard enough and if I just make the right decision, somehow I'll be able to quote, figure it out. I had a dear friend once who was in a 12 step program and he was laughing. I said, I'm going to figure it out. I'm going to figure it out. And he said, laughing, laughing, he said, Madeline, when you figure it out, give me a call because I'd love to hear how you did it. And so I love to think that these questions have power in and of themselves and that they are doing their own work to unfold within us in their own due time. It de-centers my own gripping little fingers.

Jessica David: Yes, yes, the gripping. Oh, the gripping.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: All right, I'll grip till my fingers bleed. Yeah, I gotta learn how to practice myself out of that.

Jessica David: Yes, well, I think you've done that. You've done that for me. I feel much less gripped. I feel much less, you know, like I'm hanging on just with this. So thank you. Thank you.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: Thank you. Thanks.

Jessica David: Okay, listeners, now it is your turn. What did you think of Madeline's practice? Tell us about your experience with this or any other exercise that brings you strength and peace. Please email us at podcast@thebtscenter.org that address again is podcast@thebtscenter.org or you can leave a voicemail at 207-200-6986. That's 207-200-6986. You can also text that number, 207-200-6986. We would love to hear from you, however you'd like to get in touch. For more on this or any other episode, please visit climatechangedpodcast.org That website again is climatechangedpodcast.org Thank you for listening to the Climate Changed Podcast Behind the Scenes edition with me, Jessica David. Coming up in our next episode, I am going to do my best to offer a practice. Feels maybe like I should have gone first instead of last. Many thanks to Madeline Bugeau-Heartt for guiding us through today's practice and thanks to producer Peterson Toscano for producing this episode. To Nicole Diroff for your assistance and support. Climate Changed Podcast is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine. Learn about the many resources we offer along with our in person and online programs. Visit our website thebtscenter.org that's thebtscenter.org Take good care my friends.