

## **LOVE LETTERS TO PLANET EARTH: A PODCAST AND PRACTICE FOR OUR PLANETARY EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

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### Abstract

In partnership studies, the configuration of the partnership model supports relations of mutual respect, accountability, and benefit, as well as hierarchies of actualization in which power is employed to empower rather than to disempower others in all relations, from intimate to international. What is possible when this approach is used to address eco-anxiety and pre-traumatic stress related to climate change? This article describes a new podcast and practice designed to nurture partnership with other humans and nature.

Keywords: podcast; planetary crisis; planetary healing; emotional health; humans and nature; interconnectedness; grief and joy cycle; pre-traumatic stress; eco-anxiety; intersectional healing

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### INTRODUCTION

In partnership studies, “[T]he configuration of the partnership model supports relations of mutual respect, accountability, and benefit, as well as hierarchies of actualization in which power is employed to empower rather than to disempower others in all relations, from intimate to international” ([pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/ijps/about](https://pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/ijps/about)). What is possible when this approach is used to address eco-anxiety and pre-traumatic stress related to climate change? This article describes a new podcast and practice designed

to nurture partnership with other humans and nature. The *Love Letters to Planet Earth* podcast is located at <https://www.loveletterstoplanetearth.com/> The audience is anyone who is looking for support to cope with eco-anxiety and pre-traumatic stress related to climate change.

## **VISION OF THE PODCAST**

The vision of *Love Letters to Planet Earth* is to recapture the essence of connection and collaboration between humans and the planet, with the goal of growing long-term planetary healing endurance for times ahead. In this article I pay special attention to how our emotional health is linked to our planet's health and to our ability to collaborate with each other to find equanimity so that we can work through this moment of planetary crisis.

## **MISSION OF THE PODCAST**

*Love Letters to Planet Earth* is a place to come and listen to interviews with humans who are finding their way to emotional buoyancy and belonging with nature. It is also a practice space where I then take their recommendations and materialize the work. It is structured as a podcast in which I interview people doing planetary healing work; the conversations focus on their emotional struggles and triumphs, and highlight their efforts to grow long-term planetary healing endurance by moving past using power in individualistic ways that are based in harmful practices, to find mutual respect, accountability, and benefit. The purpose of the podcast is to provide a roadmap for listeners to, not necessarily 'get back' to some idealistic time, but to find a modern and effective way to use what we've known before and forgotten (our more intimate and cooperative relationship with life on earth), along with the insights that science has created and the technological tools (both positive and problematic) that we have created or will create.

Another aspect of the podcast is learning from and partnering with the people I interview, to help shift the power dynamics around the intersections of planetary healing work. The goal is to find a more balanced and curious emotional space to live in, where being degraded and isolated from life on earth is not the most forceful outcome, then to build on this new emotional muscle tone while engaging in community practices based on the recommendations and lessons learned from my interviewees.

I wish to use this experience to create pathways to a planetary healing practice by reigniting our numbed and forgotten emotional nature. These pathways include normalizing and building expertise about the cycle of grief and joy, and many other emotions that are a part of humans' emotional instincts - instincts that are needed to help end the mainstream cycle of apathy and doom that have led to planetary devastation.

## **PERSONAL HISTORY**

I have been a practicing trauma therapist in Minneapolis for almost 20 years. I love being a therapist and always will, but more recently I have wanted to extend my care for others to the non-human aspects of nature, so in 2017 I became a Minnesota Water Steward. I learned what watersheds are and how important they are in mitigating runoff. This was a pivotal moment for me. I was able to literally get my hands dirty, building rain gardens and adopting storm drains to keep the phosphorus-filled leaves out of our rivers to prevent algae blooms and other forms of pollution that are detrimental to life in my shared watershed. Caring for nature while getting knee-deep in living, breathing, microbe-filled dirt has greatly reduced my eco-anxiety and pre-traumatic stress related to climate change.

I wanted to put these two parts of myself together in a way that felt more satisfying, by building meaningful partnerships around planetary healing work. I was curious about how people doing long-term planetary healing work found success and didn't give up through moments of apathy, disappointment, and failure. At this point we are all fairly

aware of how apathy around climate change is debilitating but is so hard to stop. The idea that we could find emotional buoyancy and work our way past the paralyzing dread to a healing planetary place made me curious to know more. I wanted to find a way to combine my skills in supporting humans' emotional healing after grief and trauma with my novice practice of regenerative ecological work, creating a collaboration of these parts of me to support the larger movement of planetary healing work.

I discovered people who were already exploring the deep interconnectedness of all aspects of our living, breathing nature, and were doing this in connected communities. I learned how issues I had once thought were disparate were strikingly one and the same. And I also wanted to work less solo; the work of a trauma therapist can be isolating, and bringing a partnership balance to my work and life was really appealing.

I know planetary healing work is a topic of great interest, with an existing and growing language, but at times the limitations of the language that exists to understand planetary healing work make it really hard to decipher, and I noticed myself wanting to value one problem (climate) more than others (e.g. isolation, loss of community, racism, poverty, and political and cultural divides). I knew these problems all needed our attention, but I would get overwhelmed with the idea that they all had to be addressed at the same time. I was already pretty tired.

But something shifted as my understanding and curiosity grew. My exhaustion began to dissipate, and I had renewed energy for the work. Much of this new energy was because of the partnerships that were revealed as I progressed. Finding new community connections around planetary healing work became an exciting and enlightening experience. I stopped being terrified and ashamed of my human feelings related to this moment, and began to feel curious about just seeing the grief and pain and joy and possibility unfold. Finding ways to resolve my feelings in this moment of climate crisis felt more doable as I connected with other human and non-human aspects of nature and continued learning from others how to expand my limited understanding of what doing this work can look like. Despite the discomfort of having to tolerate the grief and

pain from the awareness of the destructive patterns I and other modern humans are complicit in, I was finding new insights each time I went through an apathy or grief spiral and worked my way to the other emotional side.

What is most striking about this experience is the level of interest from others, and their willingness to partner in this work. I felt instantly accepted in this planetary healing work, and many partnerships have grown out of it. I have built lasting connections and have begun to collaborate with humans around our growing sense of belonging with nature. Being open to building relationships and partnerships has led to an increased sense of belonging already. I notice a growing willingness in myself and others for partnerships across the myriad of disciplines of planetary health in their different but equally important ways, while being deliberate about avoiding the hierarchical power structures that have led us to this moment of crisis.

I am learning how to practice my new and growing skills around planetary intersectional healing work. An immediate realization during the early production of the podcast was the larger community's need and excitement for intersectional training for humans from a variety of viewpoints: planetary health in general; centering Indigenous and Black voices; and focusing on different fields such as nursing, psychology, trauma, grief, food systems work, ecology, botany, social services, and spirituality. I am now in the process of partnering with a number of different academic, ecological, and non-profit organizations to bring a planetary healing event to Minneapolis in the spring of 2023. A number of speakers whom I have interviewed for my podcast, and others in the world of planetary healing, are willing to speak at the event.

I'm learning how to value my community (humans and nature as kin) in ways I did not know how to do before, to practice forgiveness and humility, and to be compassionate and understanding about how wild our emotional terrain can be as we try to make sense of how to be humans with nature in this moment in time.

Feeling hopeless about the world used to be easier; it felt easier to melt back into old comforts of consumption and waste, and to intellectualize about why the things we might dream of trying to do aren't possible. I don't feel this way anymore, and it is getting harder for me to go back to that old story. The old story of dominance and isolation doesn't feel so true to me now, and this is directly related to building a planetary healing practice in my life. It has given me a deeper sense of belonging around the intersections of planetary healing work. I have never felt so connected and excited about where life can go, even in a wild, or rather, especially in a wild moment like this!

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE PODCAST**

- Listen to our built-in emotional instincts around the cycles of grief and joy (including all the emotions in between) that can help us feel the immensity of this moment and how to resolve this planetary crisis.
- Address human grief in a more systematic and collective way that encourages connection and strength through a community healing approach.
- Drive home the repetitive nature of grief, and normalize its usefulness and the spectrum of grief and joy in order to ease human apathy and numbness and gain momentum in planetary healing work.
- Find ways to feel more connected with and protective of any and all nature, a particular challenge in urban environments.
- Provide examples through others' experiences, creating an emotionally cathartic space that leads to planetary connection and healing.
- Re-center Indigenous and Black experts who have been communicating planetary health for ages, taking care to not objectify but finding culturally respectful ways to emulate and create appropriate practices built on and guided by aged wisdom.
- Connect this earth-centered wisdom to scientific insights.
- Create shared rituals and ceremonies around the extinction of species and ecosystems.
- Continue to destigmatize mental health issues, and make the importance of humans' emotional health as it relates to planetary healing work common knowledge.

- Practice gratefulness for the generosity of the Earth. Everything we are and have is a direct result of the Earth's love towards us. Model the practice of relational generosity by taking care of the Earth in return.

## SUMMARY

Taking a partnership approach to addressing eco-anxiety and pre-traumatic stress allows us to move away from patterns of domination in our behaviors and beliefs that have brought us to the brink of extinction. The partnership paradigm can restore our hope and support action to co-create planetary health for future generations.

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