Eco-Anxiety

Replacing Fear of the Future by Hope

International Environment Forum

Youth Discourse - Anxiety

Eco-anxiety

The ongoing ecological and climate crisis affects all life on Earth—human and more than human. Because so many factors are involved that include the destruction of ecosystems and loss of species as well as social, economic, and political issues, this is now being called the “polycrisis.”

(Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, https://fore.yale.edu/Resources/Eco-anxiety-Resources)

Eco-anxiety

In the face of this global crisis, some humans are experiencing both acute and chronic mental health impacts broadly known as climate or eco-anxiety. There are several sources of eco-anxiety, from the unrelenting day-by-day despair that can occur during droughts to the stress that comes from watching the slow and seemingly irrevocable impacts of climate change unfold, and worrying about the future for oneself, children, and later generations.

(Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, https://fore.yale.edu/Resources/Eco-anxiety-Resources)

Eco-anxiety

Victims of climate change are especially vulnerable and many have become climate refugees. Some people in the developed world may feel eco-anxiety because they are deeply affected by feelings of loss, helplessness, and frustration due to their inability to feel like they are making a difference in stopping climate change.

(Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, https://fore.yale.edu/Resources/Eco-anxiety-Resources)

Eco-anxiety

This might develop into guilt as they consider how their own actions may have contributed to the current state of the environment. Psychologists are now acknowledging the extent to which internalizing ecological concerns and experiences truly affects human well-being.

(Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, https://fore.yale.edu/Resources/Eco-anxiety-Resources)

Climate Anxiety

Climate anxiety comes from the vicious circle between climate change and mental health. How badly we feel interferes with our ability to build a better world. There are direct and indirect stressors in extreme events, both physical effects on health, and the stress of our awareness of what is coming. Even climate professionals suffer a psychological toll of outrage, depression, burnout, suppression and guilt, and need psychological help.

(Frontiers Forum presentation by Professor Britt Wray of Stanford University 28 April 2023 https://iefworld.org/node/1396)

Climate Anxiety

Climate anxiety is not a mental health condition but a legitimate reaction to sources of danger. It can lead to everything from panic attacks to avoidance, but also to pro-environmental behaviour and activism, such as by Greta Thunberg. It takes effort to align our actions with our values.

(Frontiers Forum presentation by Professor Britt Wray of Stanford University 28 April 2023 https://iefworld.org/node/1396)

Climate March

Climate March

Climate Anxiety

A global survey of 10,000 young people showed that 45% said climate anxiety interfered with daily life, 59% were very or extremely worried, 75% found the future frightening, 56% said humanity is doomed, and 39% hesitated to have children. They felt they have been betrayed by governments and lied to by leaders. The poor may also have climate concerns, but they also have more immediate priorities.

(Frontiers Forum presentation by Professor Britt Wray of Stanford University 28 April 2023 https://iefworld.org/node/1396)

Climate scientists on the future

2024 survey of 843 scientists leading IPCC since 2018, with 380 responding:

77% believe global temperature increase will reach 2.5°C

42% expect more than 3°C

Only 6% think 1.5°C will be achieved, most say it is dead

Source: Damian Carrington, *The Guardian Weekly*, 17 May 2024, pp. 34-39

Flood

Climate scientists also anxious

The future will be harrowing: famines, mass migration, conflict.

Feelings of fear, frustration, distress, overwhelmed.

Good science did not make a difference to policy.

Humanity is heading for destruction, the climate emergency is already here.

Climate change is the biggest threat humanity has faced.

Societies will be forced to change from severe suffering and damage.

Source: Damian Carrington, *The Guardian Weekly*, 17 May 2024, pp. 34-39

Hurricane

Hopelessness

Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

Hopelessness

One result is a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense of hopelessness in the ranks of those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

We were warned over 100 years ago

The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities...

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXIV, p. 342-343)

California Wildfire

Transformation of society

Against the backdrop of climate change, environmental degradation, and the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty, the transformation from a culture of unfettered consumerism to a culture of sustainability has gained momentum.... ...it is a transformation that will require an earnest examination of our understanding of human nature and of the cultural frameworks driving institutions of government, business, education, and media around the world.

(Bahá'í International Community, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

Transformation of society

Questions of what is natural and just will need to be critically re-examined. The issue... will need to be considered in the broader context of an ailing social order —one characterized by competition, violence, conflict and insecurity—of which it is a part.

(Bahá'í International Community, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

A shift in perspective - values

To alleviate a variety of problems born of the economic inequalities so prevalent in the world today, social and economic development will require, especially among the younger generations, a fundamental shift in perspective, one that changes the way in which certain essential concepts are viewed--the true purpose of life, the nature of progress, the meaning of true happiness and well-being, and the place that material pursuits should assume in one's individual and family life.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

How to protect mental health?

Professor Wray said we should apply win-win solutions: energy efficiency, active transport, green and blue spaces, reduce inequality, community cohesion, and governance based on trust, transparency and participation. Respect our anxiety rather than fight it. Work at the community level to build a sense of solidarity, community and belonging. Ecological grief and anxiety can be the start of a healthy response to climate change.

(Frontiers Forum presentation by Professor Britt Wray of Stanford University 28 April 2023 https://iefworld.org/node/1396)

The Bahá'í response

In the Bahá'í community we foster community cohesion, connectedness and participation, reduce inequality, build social capital with shared goals, while we undertake social actions including to address environmental problems where we live.

Living a Bahá'í life

Let those who meet you know, without your proclaiming the fact, that you are indeed a Bahá'í.

Put into practice the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, that of kindness to all nations. Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 1, The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy towards Strangers and Foreigners, 16 October 1911)

The Bahá’í response

It is important to work against feelings of helplessness, such as by listening to people who have overcome adversity, or find meaning in suffering, just as the Bahá’ís describe the spiritual growth that comes from tests and difficulties. Even if doom comes, there is no such thing as too late. Baha’is have a vision of the ever-advancing civilization to come after the difficulties ahead.

The Bahá'í response

This turns climate anxiety from a stressor to a resource. We can generate meaning and purpose to create the active hope that we need.

Prayer and meditation can also help to address feelings of anxiety.

Prayer for Hope

O Thou beloved of my heart and soul! I have no refuge save Thee. I raise no voice at dawn save in Thy commemoration and praise. Thy love encompasseth me and Thy grace is perfect. My hope is in Thee.

O God, give me a new life at every instant and bestow upon me the breaths of the Holy Spirit at every moment, in order that I may remain steadfast in Thy love, attain unto great felicity, perceive the manifest light and be in the state of utmost tranquillity and submissiveness.

Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver, the Compassionate.

Additional Prayers revealed by ‘Abdu’l–Bahá

Deeds, not words

The wrong in the world continues to exist just because people talk only of their ideals, and do not strive to put them into practice. If actions took the place of words, the world's misery would very soon be changed into comfort.

A man who does great good, and talks not of it, is on the way to perfection.

The man who has accomplished a small good and magnifies it in his speech is worth very little.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 1, The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy towards Strangers and Foreigners, 16 October 1911)

Things you can do

- Walk, bicycle or use public transport
- Make your personal residence energy efficient (light bulbs, appliances, no standby, heating/cooling, etc.)
- Choose electricity from renewable sources if available
- Consume less, buy local
- Consider the energy implications of everything you do

Voluntary simplicity

Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceedeth them.

(Bahá'u'lláh)

Contentment

[The true seeker] should be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 193-194)

Focus on Hope

- focus on hope, a rare commodity today
- be positive, full of creative imagination
- draw on the fantastic potential hiding within all of us
- youth are the hope of the future
- today will only be a start
- tomorrow is already the future
- the more we build forward, the more that future will open up

Hope

Set all thy hope in God, and cleave tenaciously to His unfailing mercy. Who else but Him can enrich the destitute, and deliver the fallen from his abasement?

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 323)

Hope

Be thou hopeful and be thou happy and rejoiced. ...so thou mayest overcome the self and perform charitable deeds and that human perfections may appear from thee; that thou mayest be endowed with lofty gifts; find thy way to divine wisdom and show forth the manners and conduct of those who are favored in the Threshold of the Almighty.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* v3, p. 545)

Hope

The bright day is coming. The nucleus of the new race is forming. The harbinger of the new ideals of international justice is appearing. The trees of hope will become verdant; the copper of scorn and derision will be transmuted into the gold of honour and praise; the arid desert of ignorance will be transformed into the luxuriant garden of knowledge, the threatening clouds shall be dispelled and the stars of faith and charity will again twinkle in the clear heaven of human consciousness.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, v 5, p. 141)

Hope

We wish to address some additional words to those of you... who long for change. Have hope. It will not always be so. Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers–young or old–or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes?

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan Message 2015)

Prayer for tests and difficulties

Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! Every man of insight confesseth Thy sovereignty and Thy dominion, and every discerning eye perceiveth the greatness of Thy majesty and the compelling power of Thy might. The winds of tests are powerless to hold back them that enjoy near access to Thee from setting their faces towards the horizon of Thy glory, and the tempests of trials must fail to draw away and hinder such as are wholly devoted to Thy will from approaching Thy court.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*)

Prayer for tests and difficulties

Methinks, the lamp of Thy love is burning in their hearts, and the light of Thy tenderness is lit within their breasts. Adversities are incapable of estranging them from Thy Cause, and the vicissitudes of fortune can never cause them to stray from Thy pleasure.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*)

Prayer for tests and difficulties

I beseech Thee, O my God, by them and by the sighs which their hearts utter in their separation from Thee, to keep them safe from the mischief of Thine adversaries, and to nourish their souls with what Thou hast ordained for Thy loved ones on whom shall come no fear and who shall not be put to grief.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*)