



Come Together with David Baum

EPISODE – Alexandra Wilson: Prophetess of Doom Tames the Fear of Death

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Part 1: <https://cometogether.me/alexandra-wilson-part-1-death-oppression-and-the-end-of-days/>

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Part 1: Death, Oppression, and the End of Days

DAVID: Hello everyone! I'm David Baum, in Seattle. I'm with Alexandra Wilson, who is with us from North Wales, in the UK. Hello, Alexandra.

ALEXANDRA: Hi, there!

DAVID: Alexandra, you wrote an amazing message to me, and to the [Positive Deep Adaptation](#) group, about a lot of things, but you started with death, because death is your profession. So I want to ask you, Alexandra: What is death?

ALEXANDRA: (Laughs.) Well death is inevitable. Death is woven into the fabric of birth. You cannot have a birth without a death, and a death without a birth, indeed. But death is essentially the conclusion of life. And apart from that, what can I profess to know? Beware anyone who thinks they know.

DAVID: And yet your work is with death. What kind of work do you do?

ALEXANDRA: I accompany the dying. I have done that in different capacities for over 20 years. My father died when I was a child. I very intuitively knew how to be with his body, how to bring a spiritual closure to the experience of his death.

Then I went on to have a career. I had a go at being normal, once. I did have a career

where I was paid, in a salary position, mostly youth work and social work. But I always ended up with people who were bereaved, and in the field of death and dying. But not necessarily in the palliative context, which lots of people associate with end-of-life care. People associate hospices and palliative settings as being where you might need a "soul midwife" or an "End-of-life doula," or whatever the phrase is that best suits people's needs.

And it was only when I left my career and started to embark on "going rogue" and just living life without a salary, that I found myself increasingly with the dying, sitting with the dying, sitting with the unloved, the unseen people who were dying, without friends or family. I started to really appreciate the importance of that accompaniment. I just did that because it felt right.

And then a couple of years ago, I realized that I was lonely in that work, and that the need for community development around that work was so pressing that I decided to start a "training." I suppose [that's the right word]. You'll find me struggling for language throughout the whole hour, because language – certainly English language – doesn't always serve me.

I don't believe in training people to sit with the dying. I think we are inherently good enough, and worthy, and it's part of our human.... Our human responsibility is actually to be with the dying. So it's not about achieving a standard and getting a certificate and being all professional about it. It's about unlearning all of the things that tell us that "Oh, this is a mysterious and dangerous space that only the very, very best qualified people should enter." And I like to unpack that as part of the preparation. So, for the last couple of years I've been "training" people, as well as sitting with the dying.

DAVID: If it's not mysterious and dangerous, what is it, the space around death?

ALEXANDRA: Exquisite. And excruciatingly raw, but sublime. Very human. Very divine and very human, at the same time. It's very real, very liminal.

DAVID: What does that mean: "liminal?"

ALEXANDRA: Liminal to me means the veils are very thin at that point. The illusions of life, and what we think we are, fall away in the face of death. And birth! I attend births as well and I have the same experience then. There's just this threshold moment of truth in that space. Everything becomes simultaneously clear and nothing, at the same time.

DAVID: I love that language: "simultaneously clear and nothing." You mentioned you can't have a birth without a death nor a death without a birth. I recently heard a Buddhist philosopher talking about the "Buddha-mind" as that which is never born and never

dies. It is outside of time. It's a different, a different.... Language is failing me!

ALEXANDRA: Exactly. We're off the map right now!

DAVID: We're off the map. I love it! Here we go. Here be dragons!

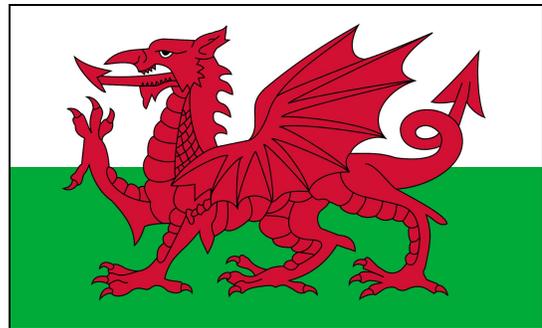
ALEXANDRA: Well, do you know? I actually saw a dragon when I was a child. I swear! I saw a dragon on my wanderings around Wales. And of course, they're steeped in legend here. There's an amazing pool that I swim in called Merlin's Pool. This is where Merlin prophesied – in the story, the legends of Arthur. Merlin made his first prophecy as a youth at the pool. He gestured to the pool and said "Beneath the pool there are two dragons." And when they checked, these two dragons spiraled up into the sky and declared that he was the prophet and the wizard Merlin.

It's just everywhere. It's on our flag! We have dragons on our flag!

DAVID: The flag of Wales has dragons, does it?

ALEXANDRA: It does! Well, just the one. One great big red dragon.

But I feel very protective of those dragons, given that they perhaps represent something very much oppressed by the dominant culture of English. The Welsh nation has been colonized and oppressed by the English, and continues to be so to this day, largely by people who move here with their four-by-fours and want to retire. They don't necessarily feel that they need to adapt to living in another country. They just bring their English with them, and just be English here.



The language is different. The culture is different. There's a relationship between the land and the language. So if you're going to occupy the land here, it's worth learning the language, because the two are very, very much related. The Celtic history isn't just Welsh, obviously. There's Scots and Manx and Irish and Cornish.

And all over the place there's the Celts. Their history was one of an indigenous connection to the land. The Celtic people were perhaps the indigenous tribes of Great Britain... so-called "Great Britain." (Not so much. Not so great anymore! Not that it ever was.) That indigenous culture has been largely eradicated. The eradication of the Welsh language is still in living memory, where the English establishment tried to eradicate the Welsh language. And so the dragon on the Welsh flag, to me, represents the cultural

annihilation of anything that wasn't the establishment. I'm very defensive of it. And it is of me!

DAVID: Well, speaking of that.... The origin of this call is an attempt to investigate social justice, and ideas of social justice in Deep Adaptation. So what you've said about oppression, and the oppression of the indigenous people of the place you live.... I think that has led you to larger meditations on oppression of people and natural culture around the world, as a seed of the crisis we're in.

ALEXANDRA: Exactly! Very well put. I believe whatever that force might have been – I mean, maybe it's hard to give it a name – but the same force that eradicated the indigenous culture of white Europe is the same force today that continues to oppress all of us, but some people disproportionately so.

I was raised to be very socially conscious. My parents were very much into civil and human rights. I was given a very good grounding in that. And yet, it was the work with death and dying that started to really crack me open around the topics of oppression and liberation from that oppression.

What does that look like? One of the most painful awakenings in that, for me, was to make the shift from conceiving of the problem as external, to understanding that I am part of that problem. That's not my fault. I went through the guilt. I've been through the shame. But out the other side of that guilt and shame is a profound responsibility to add my voice to the voices of those who are standing up and saying, "No! No more! This isn't okay. This isn't acceptable." It's not for me to speak on their behalf. I'm not here to be a white savior.

At the same time, it's not okay for me to stay silent in the face of continuing oppression. Not historical oppression, though you will have noticed in the posts that I put on Facebook that I made historical links. Because the continued discrepancies and inequalities that we see today are, very much the same forces at play that were to do with slavery and colonialization and "white supremacy." (I always put white supremacy in quotes, just in case anyone thinks white people are supreme. I don't, of course.)

But all of those forces appeared to be other than me, for many years. And I of course had been raised by my parents to "Don't be racist. Don't be homophobic. Don't be this, don't be that. That's a bad thing to be." And I understand this to be a prevailing thought amongst white folk, is that it's a bad thing to be racist. So when we get accused of racism, or somebody points out that our conduct is potentially racist, the first response is to defend against that, because it's saying you are a bad person. This thing that you've been brought up to think is wrong, racism; you are it.

In order for us to really be able to challenge that, we have to be able inhabit the role of "Yeah, I'm part of this system, this system that formed me, this system that has elevated me, this system that's given me everything – as well as beaten me down and taken the energy out of my step at times – I'm part of it, not separate from it."

And that is why I came to the conclusion – and I came to the conclusion early on with the Deep Adaptation movement – is [this]: We can't deeply adapt on our own. No individual can deeply adapt to what we're seeing in the world, but neither can an elite of people. An elite of people cannot deeply adapt. It cannot simply be just for those that have the privilege to wake up now. It's Deep Adaptation for everybody, or it's Deep Adaptation for nobody.

And as far as I'm concerned, two major blocks around that that I observe – perhaps it's within me, but I'm observing it within our community – is: First of all, people feel very challenged by that, because they want to protect themselves, their family, their children, their home, their standard of living. That's what it's about. The idea that we could possibly redistribute the wealth of the world is just so ludicrous that they stop at that. It's: They've got every right to defend themselves and their family, full stop.

And the second thing is perhaps that people perceive this to be purely an environmental crisis. That's what I saw, was that there are people who see this in environmental terms, the climate crisis. It's all to do with the changes in our environment. And they see that perhaps as separate from the political crisis and the political climate that we're sitting in. And so civil rights, human rights, social justice – not just human rights: our relationship with the earth and being in right relationship with the earth – all of that doesn't seem to sit squarely within the environmental field.

And to bring politics in I think is deeply challenging because for some people they want nothing to do with politics, because they perceive politics to be the party politics that we see on the television, not the systemic way that we as a society choose to live and govern ourselves.

DAVID: The first point you made is: People think "I have to defend my family and I have the right to do so no matter what." Do you disagree with that?

ALEXANDRA: Yes. No. I don't judge anybody. This is the thing. I know that for myself, the foray into commenting on the Facebook group has been very vulnerable for me, because I've got strong and controversial opinions, and I've got thin skin. I'm a very thin-skinned person. So for me to have controversial opinions, put them out there, be met by people kicking back, pushing back, is very, very difficult for me. It gives me a lot of sleepless nights sometimes if I put something on Facebook and I worry how it's being

received.

I don't disagree with what I think is a human, very, very human instinctual thing to do is to protect yourself, protect your family. It's just that I disagree that protectionism and isolationism is the way to do that.

DAVID: How should you do it, then?

ALEXANDRA: Well, I don't have the answers. I'm much better at asking questions than giving answers, because I don't proclaim to know the answers; I just know what my gut says. My gut has a really good way of responding. Like if I don't feel comfortable with something, there's a darn good reason for it.

I don't feel comfortable with the idea that – I wouldn't want to say "white" and preclude people of different races and colors from that – but if I'm talking about privilege, I don't feel comfortable with protecting the privileged at the expense of the oppressed. I feel that, whatever protection can be afforded by privilege is temporary and transitory, and only delays the inevitable, anyway. So we might get a couple of decades worth of comfort out of our privilege, but we're going to go the same way as the rest of the planet, anyway.

It seems to me that the response of wanting to protect the self is very much like you see in a dying person who's just received the news that they're dying. They want themselves – they, themselves; the "I;" the self – to survive. Of course they do. But that's not possible because in every dawn, there is a dusk. There has to be a closure. The very nature of life and the very nature of life on this planet is cyclical.

I was thinking about this this morning. I was preparing myself for this session, sitting with the trees this morning, my Oaks. And I was thinking "I wonder if the ancient peoples knew?" In fact, I know that the ancient peoples knew that these times would come, that there would be a natural cyclical returning to the nothingness from which we came. And I wonder if the whole – how long has it been? 5,000 years? More? I wouldn't want to put a timescale on it – but there has been this era of patriarchy, of growth, of religion, of institutions, capitalism, imperialism. All of those forces, I think, were born out of the fear of these days coming.

And here these days are, even though we've tried to pretend that we are permanent. We've tried to pretend that life will last forever and that everything that we've worked for will continue to flourish. We've really lived in the spring and the summer, and denied the autumn and the winter. And as the cycle turns, fear rises. "Oh my God, have I brought children into this world?" I don't have children. So I observe people going through this process of "Did I create these children to die?" But everybody in the history of humanity

that's ever created children, created them to die. It's just an illusion that we didn't.

Part 2: Grief, Joy, and Returning to the Source

DAVID: I personally am a little uncomfortable with how difficult it is to talk about death in our online community. For me, it seems like the first issue; it's the thing you have to deal with right off the bat. Deep Adaptation begins with the acknowledgement of loss, and then grieving, and then despair. But the revelation is that beyond despair there is truth and love, and you can build a life that is grounded in the new reality, and you can live in the here-and-now in an abundance of love. That's what I think.

But it's hard to do that, to get through all that, if you're scared to take the first step, which is to acknowledge death. And now not only personal death, but death of something much larger, that we hold very dear. What do you think?

ALEXANDRA: Well, you're talking my language. It's one of my favorite subjects. Because I like to be that person who talks about the things that people won't talk about.

And you know, if anyone's lonely and they struggle for people to talk to, start talking to people about death. You'll find that you'll get lots of people. I have people talk to me about death all the time without even knowing me: old ladies on buses and people in cafes will just start telling me about their losses and their grief and the people that they've loved who have died, or their dogs that died. It's a great subject. Never run out of things to talk about!

But I do understand that there is a massive cultural resistance that we have within our so-called developed societies. I actually think we are absolutely hamstrung – disabled – in our capacity to talk about death.

And that is one of the fundamental flaws, I think, in the whole system that we live in. If I just target capitalism, for example – the belief in infinite growth. And the lie that people bought into. This is what I think the great shock is to people. "Oh, we believe that if we gave our lives to working for the man – that we worked, worked, worked – and then we could retire and we could enjoy our retirement." Or, "We believed if we went to war to fight for peace, that our children would have a chance of a future." Actually, we were feeding the machine the whole time.

And actually, there isn't this promise coming true now, in retirement. There isn't this promise coming true for the children of the future. We have in fact reached the end of days for this iteration of our civilization. We have reached the end of days. And that's not to say that some people won't live through that. Maybe they will. But the reality, as

far as I see it, clear as day, is that we simply cannot sustain the lifestyle that we've built off the back of exploitation of resources, whether that has been off the earth or of humans. It can't be sustained.

DAVID: Isn't it cruel, though, to bring this discussion to the folks who are just trying to live their lives and take care of their families and tend their gardens? Aren't we being horrible by insisting that we talk about this?

ALEXANDRA: I am such a horrible, horrible person! (Laughs).

DAVID: You and me both!

ALEXANDRA: There is a phrase: "Cruel to be kind." If I'm sitting with a family, or I'm sitting with somebody who's dying and their family, and they will not use the word "death," they will not use the word "dying," and after the person's died, they will not use the word "dead," I will use those words. And more often than not, I get thanked. People say, "Thank you for being the one who's willing to use the "D-word," the "dead" word, the "death" word. But sometimes I get pushback, and people get very, very upset because I've used the word "dead," and they don't want to accept that this person's dead.

And I don't go around going "They're DEAD!" in their face: "They're DEAD! Come on, THEY'RE DEAD!!" No, I just... In very gentle conversation, I might say: "So were they at home when they died?" Not when they "passed," or you know, trying to fog around it. "Did they die in hospital? What did the death certificate say?" I'll just use the words very gently, very lovingly.

Because I'm in service of the soul. That's my belief system. What I mean by soul is the whole being. I'm in service of the whole being, not just the part of us that wants to live forever. Because there's a part of us that is really, really glad to die. Death is.... If we can transform how we think about death from a Grim Reaper, the very antithesis of capitalism.... We don't want this Grim Reaper to come and cut us down in our prime. If we can transform that into the lap of the Great Mother, or a sense of returning to where we came from, an opportunity to rest.

People are already beaten down, burnt out, working as hard as they can. Everybody is tired. They are tired. I'm tired. Everybody's tired. But it's not the kind of tiredness that a sleep will help. It's world weariness. It's soul weariness. And the effort that is expended in trying to deny death is exhausting. But it is the system that's ground people down to that point. And it is the raging against the dying of the light that is exhausting. There is great, great comfort in acknowledging the autumn and the winter, coming back into the

hibernation.

DAVID: Did you say that there's a part of us that wants to die?

ALEXANDRA: Yes. I believe there is a part of us that knows that death is inevitable. I believe there's a part of everybody that doesn't want to suffer, doesn't want to feel grief, doesn't want to be here. I believe that lives in everybody.

And because of the taboo around people taking their own lives, and suicide, that conversation doesn't get had. But in my experience, not only of my own journey, through ambivalence about life, suicidality for myself – but I'm not talking about suicide. I'm talking about that part of every human being that longs to return to the place that it came from. The grief of conception, of coming from the formless state into the form, is enough to sow the seed in many people of a longing to return home.

And when people actually are facing their own death square on, or people are practicing death consciousness daily, you can make peace with that force within us, that knows that one day it will get the chance to go home. It doesn't need to be denied. And I think the denial of it is what drives a lot of people to do things which are taboo, like take their own life. Because we won't talk about it. But I believe it's in everybody.

DAVID: I'll step in and say that in Taoism for example, a form of Buddhism, the "unmanifested," the ground of being, is indeed conceived of as female. And to return to the Valley – to the low Valley, as water does – is the prime virtue, or the path that you should be looking out for the opportunity to take. So, the return to the dark, formless, feminine origin of things. There's metaphysical language one can use to describe the same sort of impulse.

ALEXANDRA: For sure, for sure. I tread very carefully and gently around gendered language these days. I've learned that the hard way. Because of my journey with tackling oppression within, I've had to learn about my own problems around gendered language.

And at the same time, I absolutely see that particularly religions – and new age spirituality is just another iteration of religion, really – in terms of seeing spirituality as ascendant; that it's up there, it's this white light ascension, enlightenment, all of that talk around spirituality. All of that is in denial. That's trying to ascend out of the body and away from the earth. And that movement – that kind of idea of intellectualism, enlightenment, that movement away from the body, and away from the earth – has been part of these forces of patriarchy and capitalism and white supremacy. All of that has been denying the earth and the body, which in many cases one could describe as

feminine.

But that's still born of language where we see Father God and Mother Earth. But maybe that language needs challenging into the future for people who don't identify with those binaries of gender.

DAVID: I will admit to being a prisoner of patriarchal language. No question. It's my training. I'm learning.

ALEXANDRA: Yeah, me too. Me too. And I am humbly open to being challenged.

DAVID: We are in the dark place now, which is great! Love to explore the dark place. However, on our way toward the end... What can give us joy now? We believe we're dying. We believe we are returning home to the dark, and yet we are alive day by day. Where's our joy, Alexandra?

ALEXANDRA: Just that very concept gives me joy! (Laughs.) The idea, the idea that we are turning into the autumn and the winter; this part of the cycle of this iteration of humanity. Because I've sat with death, and because I've sat with my own death and I've sat... I've grieved. I can't tell you how much grief has passed through me in my lifetime. Because I've intimately come to know grief and death – as best I can and still know nothing – I see joy in everything!

When the fear of death dissipates, death itself is a joy. When the fear of loss dissipates, then loss itself contains joy. The invitation is into a full life. The total full life of everything, has joy in it. Joy and grief and not two separate things.

I was saying before that resisting the reality of death is exhausting. Resisting grieving is exhausting. I mean, grieving is tiring. Trying to stave off grief is utterly, utterly exhausting. And when one surrenders to grief, well, it might ruin your life. "I can't show up to work. I can't go and work, when I'm grieving the loss of all of these species. I can't continue to prop up the patriarchy." (Laughs.) "I need time. I need space. I need to break down." The invitation to break down is strong from me.

Again, this comes back to this idea of "Can we do that alone? Can we do that in a homogenous elite?" No, because diverse communities enable breakdown. It enables us to be challenged. It enables us to think differently. And when well-held, communities enable grief to flow and to progress, other than sticking and becoming illness, mental illness, dark depressions, suicidality. All of this is a consequence of repressing grief.

DAVID: Amazing! Well I hear you telling the truth. I think you're telling truths that are going to be very difficult for some people to hear.

ALEXANDRA: The frustration in me is.... I'm like "God, there isn't time!" There isn't time! When I look at what I can see in the world, the trajectory of what's happening to our world at the moment, and the pace at which consciousness within the broader collective is moving, I just go, "Oh God, we are going to awaken, collectively, after the fact." This is going to hit us and people are going to, you know.... The understanding, the awakening, will happen after the shift.

So be it. So be it. But people are going to be really shocked!

DAVID: Indeed. Would you accept the title "Prophetess of Doom?" Does that resonate with you? (Laughs.)

ALEXANDRA: No. (Laughs.)

DAVID: Does it offend you?

ALEXANDRA: Not at all. It doesn't offend me. I like it.

DAVID: In that case, let me say: Everyone, we have just spent some time with Alexandra Wilson, Prophetess of Doom!

ALEXANDRA: (Laughs.) I'm still laughing. There's still joy in me. If I can be the Prophetess of Doom and still be joyous, then maybe other people might join me.

Because, as far as I can see, it's like.... Imagine somebody that you love but you haven't seen for a very long time, they died and you didn't know. Right? And you find out three months after they died, that they've died. When you find out they're dead, then you grieve. But actually they've been dead three months.

So it's not the moment of death that creates grief. It's consciousness. It's when you come to know it, then you grieve it. I often find myself saying to people, there's a difference between grief and bereavement. Bereavement is a process of adjustment.

So when you find out your friend has been dead for three months, you start grieving the moment you find out, because your psyche, or soul, is trying to adjust to this shocking news. And there will come a point in the future where you do accept that they've died, and then the grief is integrated back into everyday life at that point.

But that period between the shock and acceptance is bereavement. And I think adaptation is like that. There's the shocking wake-up. The news permeates consciousness. "Shit! Like really, this is terrible!" And then we have to process that to a point where we can live in that. It's a bereavement. It's not the same as grief, which permeates all things, and is the fabric of our being, love and grief being the same thing.

It's a bereavement process.

And if what I'm saying sounds like a prophet thing – the Prophetess of Doom, saying "The end is nigh!" – then if I'm that person, a person, who brings that truth to consciousness, which enables the process of grieving such that we can collectively accept and be with the reality of what is, I'll take that. I'll take that: "Prophetess of Doom."

DAVID: Very well. Well, it's been wonderful to talk to you and I hope we will talk again.

ALEXANDRA: I'm sure we will.

DAVID: Very good.

ALEXANDRA: Thank you.

DAVID: That's Alexandra Wilson. What an extraordinary person! I think what impresses me most is the idea that the same energy we use to deny death is the energy that drives colonialism and imperialism and white supremacy and capitalism. Drawing a connection among those high level phenomena based on an understanding of the fear of death is really quite a breakthrough. And I'm grateful to have heard it from her. For more information about Alexandra and my other interviews, please visit my website at <https://cometogether.me/>. This is David Baum, in Seattle. Until we meet again, farewell!

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