



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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## Episode #7: On Top of Things?

*Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.*

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades]
- Martha Beck: Hi, I'm Martha Beck.
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan, and this is episode seven of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. So you guys, I've been here with my calculators for a couple of hours, quite honestly, trying to figure it out to the best of my ability, and I've gotten nowhere, but I did see Marty skulking around earlier with her abacus, and I'm hoping maybe she's got the answer for us.
- Martha Beck: Oh no, that's an uncompleted project. I think you're talking about my ceremonial headdress. I've been beading it.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, it was not an abacus but a headdress.
- Martha Beck: A ceremonial headdress, yes.
- Rowan Mangan: I see. Do you want to expand?
- Martha Beck: I need more self-esteem. You know online when you see pictures of people in ceremonial headdresses, they seem very, very solid and grounded in themselves.



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Rowan

Mangan: I've

often heard that if kids are being bullied at school or anything and having trouble with self-esteem, they just bring in a ceremonial headdress, bead-work. You'll be the coolest kid.

Martha Beck: It is, in fact, the answer to everything.

Rowan Mangan: We've got it. We've figured it out.

Martha Beck: Being universally loved. No, it's not working. It all fell apart, so I'm just going to wear a top hat.

Rowan Mangan: I wondered why the top hat today.

Martha Beck: It's kind of Lincoln-esque.

Rowan Mangan: It's working for you. I don't know about the tux. It's surprising.

Martha Beck: It's helping. I will say that for it. Anyway, Ro, what are you trying to figure out these days?

Rowan Mangan: You know what I'm trying to figure out as we head into a kind of election primary kind of season, I'm thinking a lot about how much news do I let into my little noggin? There's a point at which it's like a sports game. You're in, and you're going for the team. Then there's a bit where it starts to suck your soul out of your body and make you feel poisoned and sick.

Martha Beck: Yeah, I think from what I'm observed, it's a little like a pub crawl through the sewers of our society. First you get drunk and excited. You have a few fist fights in the alley. Then you just start to wobble into walls. Then-

Rowan Mangan: Oh, my misspent youth!

Martha Beck: I wouldn't know. I was raised Mormon. It was kind of the equivalent actually. I can understand trying to figure that out. You're going to have to just see when you feel drunk but not pukey.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I've got to put myself in a cab at some point.

Martha Beck: That's it.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah.



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Martha Beck: We'll pin a little note to your clothes that say, "If I'm too involved in the election, put me in a cab and send me to, I don't know, the Cayman Islands."

Rowan Mangan: Perfect. All right. Well, that's good. What are you trying to figure out, Marty?

Martha Beck: I got up this morning and thought, "I feel so well rested after eleven hours of sleep." Why do I need so much sleep?

Rowan Mangan: Abacus.

Martha Beck: I've always... I need so much sleep. I'm admitting it here. It's shameful to need that much sleep.

Rowan Mangan: I don't think it's shameful at all. I think your brain works so hard during the day compared to most of us.

Martha Beck: I don't think so, but they have shown people that people who are learning extra hard, who are in immersion language classes or whatever, have to sleep extra hours.

Rowan Mangan: Isn't life an immersion class really when you think about it?

Martha Beck: For me, life is an immersion class, and I'm always trying to figure it out, so I need 10, 11, 19 hours of sleep at night.

Rowan Mangan: Well, it's interesting that you should say that because maybe what you're feeling is the need during the day to stay on top of things. This, in fact, is the topic of the podcast today.

Martha Beck: I see what you did.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I did a little segue. I'm pleased.

Martha Beck: You are a clever minx. Whoa. Look at that segue.

Rowan Mangan: How to stay on top of everything. It is a tough thing that many, many, many of us, perhaps most of us dare I say it, are trying to figure out. There's this feeling that if you don't stay on top of all your things, they're going to get on top of you. I'm talking about exercising enough, eating well. Yes, staying on top of work.

Martha Beck: Meditation is a big one for me. Have I meditated? Have I meditated enough?



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Rowan

Mangan: Has

it been good enough meditation? The house work. House work. Have we kept, am I keeping my house nice enough.

Martha Beck:

There's always a junk drawer somewhere, isn't there? It's usually right on the floor. Yeah, but the same thing with kids and dogs and people to take care of. Friends and emotional need, elderly parents.

Rowan Mangan:

Am I doing enough? Am I doing enough?

Martha Beck:

Yeah.

Rowan Mangan:

I think we can start to feel squished as things start to get on top of us. I think for me, it's like the analogy of playing Tetris where you're on top of it. You're on top of it. There are all the little holes being filled by all the little pieces. You're turning the pieces around. It's all going great. Then all of a sudden you get one of those long pieces, and you're not prepared or you take your eye off for a second and then, bam, you've got a gigantic hole in the middle of your screen. They start to move faster. The pieces, they're falling down. Before you know it, it's at the top, and everything's on top of you. Game over. Game over.

Martha Beck:

I know what you're talking about because I have watched people play Tetris. It makes me so anxious. I literally have never played it myself.

Rowan Mangan:

Oh, my misspent youth.

Martha Beck:

For those of you who do not know Tetris, just Google it. Watch people play. It's very soothing if it's not you playing it. You're right. It gets to that point where the big sideways one comes down and suddenly everything is piling up. It is catastrophe, and my heart leaps out of my body. It's awful. It's a lot like the feeling of trying to stay on top of everything. It really is.

Martha Beck:

For me, it's just overwhelmed, flooded, defeated. At first you get really anxiety, and I try and I try and then I just get tired and drained and stop moving at all and go into complete despair.



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Rowan

Mangan:

Yeah, it's almost like then you're trying to play catch up, and there's not even the satisfaction of "I'm on top of things." You're just frantically throwing pieces wherever they can go.

Martha Beck: Yeah, exactly. You catch up on everything, and you get to it, and you're like, "I'm on top of everything! I am so exhausted," and then things start to pile again. [crosstalk]

Rowan Mangan: Just when you think you've got it all solved, then you get a square piece out of nowhere, and that's it. That's just the end.

Martha Beck: That's the end. I don't know if I can even go on. Rowan, help me.

Rowan Mangan: Let's try and figure this out. Let's try and figure this out because as you know, in this podcast we help people from the bewilderment, that we've just been discussing, into be-wild-erment. To their true wild selves and their wild nature.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Speaking of nature, one of the things is that nothing in nature runs like these Tetris-style games. Nothing demands... The trees out there aren't trying to keep up with anything. The animals aren't trying to stay on top of their lives, so far as I know. They look pretty mellow to me. Nothing fits neatly.

Martha Beck: Nothing fits neatly.

Rowan Mangan: Nothing needs to.

Martha Beck: It's like we have this weird idea in our heads that everything should be ordered. When I used to teach art at Harvard, you can drink because I said Harvard, one of the things that the professor I worked with would always tell people when they were doing landscape or portrait or anything is, "Don't make things line up neatly. That is not the way things look. They don't line up neatly." Yet, he used to say we have an [inaudible] tendency to go for arithmetic progressions. Equal spaces. Equal timing. Have it clean cut. The hardest thing is to come from our culture and draw something that actually picks up the non-alignment of nature, which is so much more beautiful and long lasting.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about how the culture distorts that natural order.
- Martha Beck: Well, the first thing I think of is the cultures that we've described as weird, economists, sociologists call them weird. It stands for Western, educated, industrialized, rich, developed countries. Those are the Western civilizations and the colonies. The whole push towards colonization was happening at the same time as people got really obsessed with controlling nature.
- Martha Beck: Like the court of Louis XIV. No flower was allowed to grow at an angle that wasn't perfectly right angle. All the bushes were trimmed to absolute smoothness and absolute symmetry.
- Rowan Mangan: Chaos must be civilized.
- Martha Beck: There are descriptions. If you look at the Grimm fairytales, Grimms brothers I mean.
- Rowan Mangan: They're all pretty grim.
- Martha Beck: They describe things like wolves and forests and things as hideous. You read that a lot. That it's hideous if it's not perfectly trimmed and ordered. It's almost as if there was this terrible fear of nature being a place of savagery and we have to control, control, control.
- Rowan Mangan: Which I'm sure is born of fear of nature, right? I think we might have even talked about this before. If you can't... What did our dear leader say about sweeping the forests. If we just swept, raked the leaves-
- Martha Beck: Raked the forest the way we do in Finland, we would have no forest fires in California.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Easy solution. My god.
- Martha Beck: Oh my god.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I think there's a fear of the unknown that we have turned into this mentality of civilizing. It will be civilized. That's the colonial mentality is go out and civilize the savages. It has to be that nature culture thing, I'm sure we talked about it before. Just that that's a huge dichotomy in our thinking.



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- Martha Beck: It's nowhere more obvious than in the issue of trying to order our lives so that they're absolutely perfect and right angled and set within grids and everything. I was talking about this as being a purely enlightenment phenomenon, coming from the 18th century. You, classics girl, brought up the fact that it goes way way back, further than that.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I mean I think, I was talking to you about ancient Greece and the idea of the city-state was very much something built on a Apollo, Apollonian order against Dionysian chaos and that sort of, the danger of the Bacchanalia and all that sort of thing that we've talked about before, I'm sure.
- Rowan Mangan: In there, it was the same thing. The state will be ordered out there as the wild beyond the city's limits.
- Martha Beck: Right. Civilization good, nature bad. It got driven underground during the Middle Ages because of obsessions with religion and whatever, but then the whole push of the enlightenment was we're going to come out of this mystical world, the religious theocracy, and we're going to go back to what the Greeks had. We're going to make it even more linear and even more perfect.
- Rowan Mangan: What's something that we can tell about all these societies who believed in this?
- Martha Beck: This is what we realized when we were chatting about this prior to the recording. It just so happens that I once worked with a professor at Harvard-
- Rowan Mangan: Drink!
- Martha Beck: Who was the world's greatest authority on slavery. I noticed as we were talking about all the societies that are obsessed with controlling nature, they all had slaves.
- Rowan Mangan: Check it.
- Martha Beck: Why did they all have slaves? Because you have to have an unlimited free workforce to even try to make it look like your life is completely ordered. You have to have a massive group of people working for free to make you think that you're on top of it all.



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Rowan Mangan: Right. That you can create this edifice of culture, right angles, Tetris life. The slaves are hauling in those L-shapes.

Martha Beck: It's not funny.

Rowan Mangan: It's not funny. It was not a funny situation.

Martha Beck: The Tetris is kind of funny, I have to say.

Rowan Mangan: I'm not laughing at the concept of slavery.

Martha Beck: Oh, I don't think you were. I got worried. Will people think we're laughing-

Rowan Mangan: Laughing at slavery. No. For the record, just let me just state I'm categorically against slavery. I can't stop laughing because it's-

Martha Beck: I'm so glad to know that about you. It reminds me though about the course I was teaching with this teacher was on Caribbean society-

Rowan Mangan: Where was that you were teaching again? Sorry?

Martha Beck: It was at this university where I went for a while.

Rowan Mangan: Just some university course. Got it.

Martha Beck: It's called Harvard!

Rowan Mangan: Harvard?

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: Drink.

Martha Beck: What you'd read as you read the accounts of the slaves who were being set free by emancipation and various different islands of the Caribbean, they would be replaced, the slaves would be replaced by a system of overseers. Supposedly they were working, but they had to go by the clock suddenly. They had to punch a clock. One of the sayings in Haiti was "The white man's wrist shackles have been replaced by his wristwatches." They saw the obsession with time and with doing certain work at a certain time as being akin to their total captivity. They saw white people as being enslaved in their own way.



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- Rowan Mangan: Again, what we're seeing is the efforts that we go to in this culture to overcome nature in order to maintain this imagined ideal of culture as something that's made of right angles.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I think maybe this need to stay on top of everything. It maybe reflects our need to control the universe, to control our lives.
- Rowan Mangan: 100%.
- Martha Beck: When the church was controlling everything and all you had to do was do what the priest said and live a good life and stay in your place in society and then die young of plague or whatever, it was like okay, God will control everything. I got a bit of that growing up Mormon.
- Rowan Mangan: Or gods if we go back further.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. See ceremonial headdress above.
- Rowan Mangan: See top hat right now, right angles.
- Martha Beck: I don't think it's a coincidence that right at the time when the enlightenment was mowing down the idea of a religious basis for everything, they were also starting to measure everything and become very scientific about the world. This is when Laplace, the great mathematician showed his theory of everything to Louis XIV, I believe it was.
- Rowan Mangan: That's me. I'm trying to figure everything out with my calculator.
- Martha Beck: The king... I don't think it was Louis XIV. I don't know who it was, but it was a France king. He said, "Well, where is God in your equations?" Laplace said, "I have no need of God in my equations." So, they let go of the tyranny of religion, but what are you doing then? You're just ticking down towards entropy, and you know, as the Tibetans say, "Death is certain, and the hour of death is uncertain." I think that creates a massive anxiety.
- Martha Beck: There's something about that anxiety in our locking into things. We've got to stay on top of everything. It's our illusion that we can control everything.



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Rowan Mangan: It's almost a colonial thing. I will civilize my life. I will civilize these pieces of my life.

Martha Beck:

Right. Yeah. They talked about it really explicitly. The forest must be cleared. Your calendar must be set very rigidly. I do think it was a compensatory thing as people let go of thinking that prayer would work, for example.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's so ironic because it's that feeling of impending chaos is a consequence of trying to outrun chaos in the first place. You're setting up these artificial right angle systems in a world that doesn't have that, like you were saying with the drawing. It's not how nature functions. What we get is this sense of being chased by chaos as we try to hold it at bay.

Martha Beck: It's like the monsters in the forest were chasing us again, but now they're made of the obsession with order that we carry in our own minds. It turns on that same amygdala response. It goes, "Something me is after me, and it's always after me."

Rowan Mangan: "And it always will be."

Martha Beck: Always will be, folks. Enjoy. Yeah. Both of us have felt this a lot.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: For example, you told me about the time you humbly set out to eliminate AIDS in the third world.

Rowan Mangan: You know me. I like to stay busy before lunch. Yeah. I think this was the time where I felt like things got on top of me a lot, and it was particularly noticeable because I was living in a foreign country. I went to Thailand as a volunteer when I finished my masters degree at Melbourne University.

Martha Beck: Drink, drink!

Rowan Mangan: I was there working in an HIV/AIDS organization that was a Thai organization. Many of the people that I went over with on this volunteer program were all working at the UN, so it was very expat heavy environment. I moved into an apartment in an apartment building that was called Brad Pitt House.



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- Martha Beck: Of course it was.
- Rowan Mangan: It was really quite shambolic apartment. It had a bit of a cockroach problem. You used a combination lock to lock your apartment.
- Martha Beck: It was like a pit, but when you put Brad in front of it it sounds better?
- Rowan Mangan: Honestly, there was a guy from Hawaii who was married to a Thai woman who ran the place. He had called it Brad Pitt House, he explained to me, with great devilish delight at his own wit because people Google Brad Pitt all the time. As you know, you're sitting at your home in San Diego. You Google Brad Pitt. Somehow Brad Pitt House appears, and you think, "I want to live in the outer suburbs of Bangkok."
- Martha Beck: Of course. As long as it's in Brad Pitt House.
- Rowan Mangan: Exactly. There I was in Brad Pitt House. 27 years old. Heading out to work every day by walking to the end of my street where the canal was and jumping on a boat that wouldn't stop at the little pier at the end of my street. It was slow.
- Martha Beck: Talk about get on top of things.
- Rowan Mangan: What I'd do... This is not relevant really. I would roll up my pants because there's this big bow wave that you get as the boat comes up. I will say the canal, you will often see dead monitor lizards floating in there. Dead dogs. There's a lot of stray dogs in Bangkok. A lot of fetid matter flows in there. It's a bit on the nose. Kids swimming in there.
- Martha Beck: That's the worst of all.
- Rowan Mangan: It's quite... There's an odor of that canal. The boat comes, the bow wave hits me. I leap onto the boat as it slows. I sit down on this boat that's full of... It's like a sort of ferry. It's got all these rows of seats. There was often a baby. This was the hardest thing about my life in Thailand. There would often be a baby, with its mother, in one of the seats in front of me. The little head would be facing towards me.

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Rowan Mangan: I love babies. I would be like, "Hello." I would be waving, the one white person on this boat on commuters. I tell you what, there was not a baby I saw in that year in Thailand that did not take one look at my giant pink face and just start screaming.

As I get off the boat, I get on a little truck that you had to pull over on the highway. Then I'd get into work. It's a Thai office, and there's a lot cultural stuff that you have to be aware of. These things include how rude it is to sneeze. No, no, wait. Not sneeze. Blow your nose. Very rude to blow your nose. I got sick a lot that year, so I would run away and hide to blow my nose. You couldn't have your feet pointing at other people. All these things were really offensive.

One of the tricky things was that you shouldn't ever have your head above anyone who's senior to you. This was tricky for me because I was the tallest person and the most junior person in the office. It was like this hunchbacked thing-

Martha Beck: Staying on top by crouching down.

Rowan Mangan: Literally, this is just the atmospherics of the year where I felt like my Tetris game was going to hell in my life. Any one of those things could pile on me, and then the work that I did was unmanageable. I'd rush home. I'd feed... I took it on myself to feed the stray dogs on my street and keep their territory. There would be all of that. I'd try and have a shower to get the smell of the canal off myself skin.

Rowan Mangan: Then I would go and jump on the back of a motorbike taxi and go to have a drink with some of the volunteers that I knew. I felt like I was coming out of this foreign world. They had been working the gleaming UN buildings with this amazing international glamorous crowd, and I would just feel like everything was on top of me. It was terrible.

Martha Beck: You start to compare yourself then with others as well. They all seem to be more on top of it than you are. When you're in a foreign country it really is clear how much you're trying to stay on top of. It's not inbred from one month old.



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- Rowan Mangan: That's it. Just the impact of culture and cultural expectations where they haven't been trained into early. The level of stress that that creates.
- Martha Beck: You have to do it consciously. It's not bred to the bone.
- Rowan Mangan: Exactly.
- Martha Beck: I'm just trying to figure out how not to keep my feet from pointing at someone.
- Rowan Mangan: Exactly.
- Martha Beck: I can't even go there.
- Rowan Mangan: Then once you realize you've done it accidentally, like unconsciously just gotten out a Kleenex and blown your nose, and just the silence in the office. Everything starts piling up.
- Martha Beck: I've had that exact experience. Well, not exactly, but I've had very similar experiences in foreign cultures just finding out I was not on top of it when I should have been.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it's hard to stay on top of it sometimes. What's a time where you haven't felt on top of it?
- Martha Beck: Well for me, the apex of this came when I was... When you were 27, you were trying to heal AIDS in the third world. When I was 27, I was just whelping out children like there was no tomorrow. I had three of them. I was trying to get my doctorate. I was trying to teach.
- Rowan Mangan: Overachiever.
- Martha Beck: I had really bad fibromyalgia and a whole lot of other illnesses. I was in a back brace, so I couldn't bend down. I just remember children create what I would think is this sedimentation rate is beyond belief because they're always throwing things, dropping things, messing things up.
- Rowan Mangan: They're literally creating sediment on the floor.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, literal sediment. Geologists study the way sand piles up. I would look around, and I would be knee deep in crap my kids threw on the floor.



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- Rowan Mangan: It was literally getting on top of you?
- Martha Beck: Literally. Then kind of like you and the office, because of my back brace every few hours I would get down on my hands and knees and crawl all over the house putting objects on chairs and tables. Then I would haul myself up by a doorframe until I was in a standing position and then go put it all away, by which time my children would have sedimented the house up to my knees again. I was not on top of anything.
- Rowan Mangan: I feel stressed just hearing about that.
- Martha Beck: Fun ways to spend your 20s, guys.
- Rowan Mangan: With Ro and Marty. All right. We've kind of sketched out a kind of cultural framework.
- Martha Beck: The horror!
- Rowan Mangan: The horror. That's the consensus. The consensus is stay on top of nature. Make right angles. Make a Tetris board of your life. How do we come to our senses, Marty? How do we come back to nature?
- Martha Beck: My very favorite way of conceptualizing this. The one grace of my struggles to live abroad was that I encountered Taoism. I'm going to tell you a little story from Taoism. First of all, people think Confucianism is a religion. It's not. It's just a set of social codes that were so tiny explicit, like every single thing you did had to be exactly according to the rules. People got so sick of it because they couldn't keep on top of it.
- Martha Beck: Taoism came out of that kind of a rigid thing. It went completely the other way.
- Rowan Mangan: Is Taoism Chinese as well?
- Martha Beck: The word Tao means "the way". Taoism, you follow the way of things. It's very fluid. It's very natural. They started making those beautiful Chinese paintings where the people are really tiny and the wilderness is huge and beautiful. Here's my favorite story about Taoism.
- Rowan Mangan: Tell me. Tell me now.



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- Martha Beck: They told a lot of little stories, and they were always digs at Confucianism. It's always a group of Confucius scholars.
- Rowan Mangan: I like a story with an agenda.
- Martha Beck: It's like, a rabbi and priest walk into a bar. No, in China it's always a group of Confucian scholars are walking along-
- Rowan Mangan: Being stupid.
- Martha Beck: Being very much on top of everything.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh right.
- Martha Beck: This one story, they're walking by a big river. They come to a huge waterfall. There's lots of white water. They're admiring the immensity of the waterfall when they see a body bobbing around under the waterfall. Ordinarily this wouldn't bother them because they're Confucianists, and all they care about is the rules, but in this case there are rules about how to deal with a dead body. They were like, "We have to do the rules. How do we get the body out?" They didn't know what to do. They were calculating and strategizing, thank you George W... They were strategizing about how to get the body out and give it a proper ritual burial when a little old man pops out of the water near them.
- Rowan Mangan: Different man? Same man?
- Martha Beck: Same man. Towels himself off. Starts heading home to the village. They run after him, and they say, "How did you do that? How did you survive that?"
- Rowan Mangan: He went over the waterfall?
- Martha Beck: He was under the waterfall. We don't know where he came from. He could have jumped down like in the movies. I think the fact that he had a towel by the side means he just went for a swim in this massive whitewater that would literally peel you alive.
- Martha Beck: He's walking home. The Confucianists are like, "How did you survive that?" He said, "It's very easy really. You go up when the water goes up, and you go down when the water goes down."
- Rowan Mangan: That sounds relaxing.



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- Martha Beck: It is. That's the big message to the Confucianists. Stop this obsession with control and start to go by the rhythms of nature. Start to follow the power that comes from all around us and within us.
- Rowan Mangan: Go up when the water goes up. Go down when the water goes down.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, that's so beautiful. It just makes me feel good.
- Martha Beck: It makes me feel good too because sometimes you're on top and sometimes you're not. If the water's on top, okay. If the water's underneath, okay. It's all good.
- Rowan Mangan: I feel like there's really something there in terms of how we get bewildered around this particular issue is learning to shift from that rigidity of the Confucian or our culture. We didn't talk about Confucianism. I was talking about the Greeks. Anyway... All humans are going to try to create order, right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Anyway. Shifting from that rigidity to fluid, like in the story. Wherever the water is going. Water is a beautiful kind of guiding thing, right. The power isn't in the stasis but in choosing the movement and the variety over the uniformity, right.
- Martha Beck: I've seen so many people in my lifetime, so many people have tried to help me get on top of it all. I would look at things online, download an app. Get it all done.
- Rowan Mangan: There's no organizer.
- Martha Beck: Get it all done! Not one of them said, "Your problem is rigidity. You need to let go and be more fluid." Not a single one. It was all about, you can make it even more rigid. I remember getting this one book that was going to help me get it all done. It said you make lists and lists of things to do, and you never get through it all. That's because you've been doing this wrong. There's one process that will work. I was all excited. Then it says, "Get all those lists and put them in one huge list. Then just work off that one." That was the big revelation.



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- Rowan Mangan: That's like my inner monologue.
- Martha Beck: There was nothing about, "Hey, maybe you just go up when the water goes up and go down when the water goes down." That's anathema to the civilized mind.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah well, it is. The thing is that part of the problem with a lot of these structures that our cultures builds is that the only way we believe from that same mentality that the only way to solve it is to double down and double down. It's not to rethink it or step back. We face that fear again of if we do think about the whole thing differently, there's the fear of the wild comes back in.
- Martha Beck: The question here is what would the day be for you if you thought of your schedule not as solid or rigid but as completely fluid?
- Rowan Mangan: I think that's confronting.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, I feel a little buzz of fear when I say that. It's like, "Whaaa." I've been with periods of my life where I could do that with my day after my kids grew up and I as basically just writing books and coaching.
- Rowan Mangan: We have a lot of that freedom.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, we do. We have it built into our lives now, but at first and even still sometimes, a totally fluid approach to your own schedule is actually terrifying.
- Rowan Mangan: It is. I know a lot of you guys will be thinking, "Yeah, but other people. I can't just..." We'll get to that.
- Martha Beck: We will, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Just flag that.
- Martha Beck: First of all, just notice even in us, we have the most fluid work life imaginable. We're fluid around almost everything except our insistence, Adam, our child's insistence that at five o'clock every single day we congregate for wine time.
- Rowan Mangan: I think we've told about wine time before.



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Martha Beck: That's the one rigid thing in our lives, and it's not very doggone rigid. Even to us, the moment you say total fluidity, it's like, but I need rules to keep my arms and legs from flying off. Again, you look out in nature, and everything is peaceful. Everything is harmonious. Nothing is rigid. It's all going on just fine.

Rowan Mangan: I guess the word that comes up for me is trust. From a cultural standpoint, I cannot trust myself that if I take away the tyranny of my calendar, which is mostly things I schedule myself for myself. This time you must work on this because it needs to get done. That without that, there's no trust that I will do anything.

Martha Beck: You've replaced your shackles with your wristwatch.

Rowan Mangan: I have.

Martha Beck: Who wants... I mean, you stated earlier the controversial opinion that slavery is bad. Even as we're talking this though, I'm thinking, "I'm enslaving myself to my damn watch."

Rowan Mangan: It is. Yeah, I mean, it's almost like with this way of thinking, the only natural consequence of it is rake the forests and enslave something.

Martha Beck: Yeah. It's not working because nothing in nature ever goes without stopping. Nothing in nature continues without an ebb and a flow.

Rowan Mangan: We know this. We know this as well, that we're all subject to natural rhythms. Most of us sleep at night, to have a really obvious one. We haven't been able to civilize that part of ourselves to just be-

Martha Beck: Although we're trying.

Rowan Mangan: We are trying, yeah.

Martha Beck: Yeah, it's really interesting.

Rowan Mangan: You're feeling guilty about sleeping too much, for instance.

Martha Beck: Exactly.

Rowan Mangan: Resisting the natural-



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- Martha Beck: I was just thinking about that this morning. Why would I resist it? It's very interesting because there's something besides. There's rhythm, and then there's the acceptance of entropy that everything ultimately gets slowed down and stop. That does not sound good to us when we're in our highly acculturated, wristwatch obsessed state.
- Rowan Mangan: I bet just for a minute, I'm talking to the listeners as well as you, just those words, "Slow down and stop", if someone says that to you in a confident voice, boy that sounds good.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, but they don't. They say other things. I have to bring up a little comment about my beloved friend, Liz Gilbert. She came to our house one day. I was busy writing my book. She had just finished writing her 600 page novel in six weeks. She would get on every day and put on really nice clothes and sit bolt upright at her little desk and chair in the beautiful church where she was writing.
- Rowan Mangan: Those of you who follow Liz on social media will know that she strongly believes that this is what you do.
- Martha Beck: You show up for your writing the way that you'd show up with great respect for your minister or your date or whatever. By god, you write it with respect. She came in on my in my usual writing posture, which is flat on my back, with my legs draped over the side of large chair.
- Rowan Mangan: In your pajamas.
- Martha Beck: In my pajamas.
- Rowan Mangan: And robe.
- Martha Beck: Always with the robe.
- Rowan Mangan: Didn't even wear the top hat that day.
- Martha Beck: No, it would have fallen off. With my computer on my lap. She just came in and went, "What are you doing?" I mean, I might as well have been attending a children's career day buck naked except for my ceremonial headdress and doing really violent dances in my baggy skin suit for the kids. She was genuinely horrified.



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Rowan Mangan: That's because what works for Liz and what works for you are different. That's another thing that is in the uniformity that we have of the cultural kind of model is also that humans will be the same as each other.

Martha Beck: That's right. We all have to fit equally in arithmetic progression. Nobody gets to be any different. The fact is, the only way I've ever been able to write with all the diseases and back brace and whatever is on my back.

Rowan Mangan: If that changed, if your body changed, you could change with it.

Martha Beck: Yeah, but I don't know if I would. I kind of like writing that way.

Rowan Mangan: Then you'd be imposing an idea onto your body. If your body decided that it wanted to sit up-

Martha Beck: There you go. That's true. Again, I'm trying to do this top down control thing, where my intellect is going to make a decision and then inflict it on my body. [crosstalk] There's a right and a wrong.

Rowan Mangan: Constantly.

Martha Beck: A right and a wrong. If you're swimming underneath the waterfall, you're not doing it right or doing it wrong. You're just suffering or not suffering. You suffer to the extent you don't relax.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, exactly. This idea of rhythms.

Martha Beck: Can I ask you a question? Have you ever been body surfing in the ocean, you Aussie, you?

Rowan Mangan: I have, yeah.

Martha Beck: Have you ever been body surfing when a wave catches you and really picks you up like a giant hand and beats you against the bottom? Your legs and arms are falling off, as I said earlier. I have asked so many people about this, but I have never asked you. What do you do when that happens?

Rowan Mangan: I love that feeling.

Martha Beck: I do too.



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- Rowan Mangan: I mean, I got myself properly injured that way once. I got scratched along the bottom of the ocean and got some skin off my face and everything. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: What is your reaction when you realize the wave is in total control, and I am like a rag doll?
- Rowan Mangan: You just go limp. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: This is what you and I both do. We've never talked about this. We haven't even prepped before or anything. It's so interesting because I've asked dozens of people that, and they say, "That is the horrible experience. I've never body surfed since that happened to me." Then the ones who were brave enough to keep going in, nine out of ten will tell me, "You just fight with every ounce of strength you have in your body."
- Rowan Mangan: Good luck with that.
- Martha Beck: Straight and rigid. Straight and rigid. They hate it. I've got to tell you, at the moments when waves have caught me and picked me up and started pounding me against the bottom and scraping my skin off and everything, I relax so completely, and I feel this tremendous delight. It's joyful to give up control.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it's like fully realizing what is true all the time, which is control is an illusion.
- Martha Beck: This is true, except on airplanes where I alone keep the plane in flight by pulling up on the arms of my chair.
- Rowan Mangan: Thank god you do, Marty.
- Martha Beck: No, you're absolutely right. I think when the wave takes me, I give myself permission to go with the rhythm of nature. I go into the wave itself, and all of me [inaudible 00:37:27] in waves. When I relax into the wave, in some odd way I believe that whether it kills me or surrenders me, I'm finished. I don't have to do anything right then. It's blissful.
- Rowan Mangan: Maybe it's like an easy way to get into that witness mode.



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- Martha Beck: Maybe that's why people love extreme sports so much. I mean, it feels a little different for me skiing. I hit a river once and bounced into a tree, and that wasn't as much fun.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, I want to talk about this rhythm thing. In our coaching program, Wayfinder Coach Training-
- Rowan Mangan: Wayfinder Life Coach Training.
- Martha Beck: I can never remember. I'm going with the rhythm of what I'm feeling.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Just try to [crosstalk]
- Martha Beck: Wayfinder Life Coach Training. The whole thing is based on a model of change, how we're always changing. In Western culture, we want to change in a linear way. We want to start small, weak and vulnerable. We want to get progressively stronger and more in control. We fight to maintain that illusion. We fight on Instagram. We fight when we're talking to friends at parties. The truth is no one changes that way.
- Martha Beck: There's always a cycle like the cycle of seasons. There's a death and rebirth cycle where you let go of your old identity. Anytime a major change happens in your life, your identity has to let go of the old model. Then you go through a period of feeling very chaotic. Then your dreams start to come in, both night dreams and day dreams. You start to imagine a different future. Then you enact the different future that feels good. Then you perfect it. Then, sure as you're born, another wave of change will come in, and you'll do it all again. Each time you go around, you go forward like in a screw or a vortex pattern. There's that rhythm. There's a rhythm of change. When I stopped fighting that, my whole life just became doable for the first time.
- Rowan Mangan: That's so interesting just to do that reframe of it's not something you do. You don't decide, "Now I'm going to go into the dreaming part of it." No. It happens to you like the wave's got you.

Martha Beck:

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It happens  
like the  
crocuses  
pushing up

under the snow in the spring around our house. Then there are these big big rhythms, but then there are very well known minor rhythms.

Martha Beck:

Science knows about them, but we don't really honor them. Circadian rhythm. Again, why do I sleep so much? Why don't I sleep? Without medication, I don't fall asleep until three in the morning. With medication, I can fall asleep at a time that is deemed appropriate by the culture. I've been fighting my bio-clock my whole life. Did you have that same thing with Circadian?

Rowan Mangan:

Oh yeah. We're both insomniacs. I had a terrible time with school because of insomnia.

Martha Beck:

Yeah, you're all supposed to need the same amount of sleep at the same time. Teenagers they know get in all kinds of car accidents when they're driving to school because teenagers need to sleep later in the day. We know this. Why don't we let them go to school later and maybe not get killed? Because farming schedules demanded that they be home to help with the harvest at two in the afternoon.

Rowan Mangan:

Then what we get stuck with now is because that's how it's done, and that's what we worship.

Martha Beck:

Yes, and that's most of culture right there.

Rowan Mangan:

There it is. What about ultradian rhythms? This is something else which you taught me about, which I find fascinating.

Martha Beck:

I basically read out loud something I was reading from Harvard Business Review. It's about this thing called ultradian rhythm, which is a surge and release of energy that goes on throughout the day, about every 90 minutes.

Rowan Mangan:

This is a natural thing like a Circadian rhythm.

Martha Beck:



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Yeah, and  
everybody has  
it. You'll feel  
really

energetic for maybe an hour to an hour and a half. Then if you use your energy, it will start to ebb away, and you'll have about an hour or hour and a half of wanting to be very restful and quiet. Then it will rise again. Then it will fall again.

Rowan Mangan:

That's not how we work as a rule in this culture.

Martha Beck:

No, and the guy who wrote the article, Tony Schwartz, said that he read about this, and he's been a writer for a long time. His thing was you get up at seven a.m., and you work until five p.m. Every single day, he would write straight through. Super overachiever. Barely stopped for lunch.

Rowan Mangan:

Weird. Harvard, you say?

Martha Beck:

Yeah. That's familiar.

Rowan Mangan:

I was just noticing that.

Martha Beck:

It's a familiar sound that makes me want to drink.

Rowan Mangan:

It makes me want to drink too, girl.

Martha Beck:

He found out about ultradian rhythm, so he decided he was going to write a book according to his ultradian rhythm. He wrote for an hour and a half in the morning. Stopped for an hour and a half to kick back, relax, do things that he enjoyed. Come back for another hour and a half. He wrote the book much faster in terms of how many days it took him, and he also felt that it was much higher quality than anything he'd ever written before.

Martha Beck:

It's so funny because we read this. We were like, "Let's do that. We have the freedom to." When we do, it works really well.

Rowan Mangan:

And we still don't do it all the time.

Martha Beck:

We still don't do it.

Rowan Mangan:

Yeah.



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Martha Beck:

Rowan

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Yeah.

Mangan: No.  
It's fascinating.  
The weird

thing is that the courage that you have to harness to stop working and take time off, even if you know that your productivity increases, which is supposed to be our goal in this culture, but actually we get outcomes and processes so mixed up sometimes because we get so obsessed with the process. It's sort of like shows like The Office or anyone who's worked in an office will know how we can just turn into little mice that are obsessed with the policy, the process, the document. Update the process. Document everything.

Rowan Mangan:

We forget why we're trying to do something. This guy actually wrote the book really fast by resting every hour and a half.

Martha Beck:

I'm more productive when I go by my ultradian rhythms, but I'll interrupt them when I'm thinking, "Oh, I have to blend in with the culture," which is like going rigid under a wave or waterfall. You're just going to get beaten up and not feel like you're on top of things.

Rowan Mangan:

It also seems to me that unless you've got a book to write, there's also something that we have to take on our bewildering of the choices that we make where the rhythms want to take us in terms of what are we focusing on. We'll immediately go into, "Is it more important that I do the house work or spend quality time with my child?" All of that comes back into the head and into the culture.

Rowan Mangan:

One thing I love is that my mum said to me once, hello Mum, said when I was caught up in some sort of decision-making thing. She just said, "Go where the heat is." It's an obvious idea that whatever has the most juice in it for you at that time, whatever seems to be calling you, follow that. I found it very profound.

Martha Beck:

Yeah, it is. That phrase she says, "Go where the heat is," if you start to allow yourself to do that, and I've done it experimentally



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many many  
times, but I've  
never done it  
permanently.

When I go where the heat is, I find this rhythms. They're sequential, and they're similar. They're like waves in the ocean, but they're never identical and they're never linear, so I need to stay loose.

Martha Beck:

I think they knew it way back when because that famous beautiful line in Ecclesiastes that did deserve to become a song, "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under Heaven." I think what it's saying is be in the rhythm of nature. That is your nature. For every purpose under Heaven there's a time and a season. If you're fluid and if you're relaxed, you'll know what that is because you're part of nature.

Rowan Mangan:

Right. As wonderful as it all is, what we return to and what I'm sure a lot of our listeners are thinking at this moment, is that's all very well, but we live in this culture. We do still have to go to work. Meetings are still until 3:30 in the afternoon. How do we realistically bring these principles in while still unavoidably living in a Tetris culture?

Martha Beck:

I think it's mainly in the commitment to be willing to feel what's actually happening in our nature, even as we go through culture.

Rowan Mangan:

Interesting.

Martha Beck:

I always start every client I've ever coached, thousands if you count crowds and conference centers, they always need to tune into their bodies to get the wisest information about what to do next. How do you know where the heat is? You feel it in the body.

Rowan Mangan:

Yeah, you don't decide it with the mind. We were talking about this when we were preparing for this podcast. I keep thinking, "Wow, how simple it is to go back to our intellects when we're



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trying to listen  
to our bodies  
and not even  
realize we're

doing it." You have to really make a commitment to listen to your body and not let the reasoning part override it.

Martha Beck: Speaking of making commitments, we don't have meetings that just fall out of the blue on everyone. We agree to them. There are certain systems that are very, very contradictory to our true natures. Maybe you can't do that in the system you're in. If it's bad for you, then you'll end up getting out of that system, because it will destroy you.

Martha Beck: When you're making your commitments, setting up the management time, one thing we do in our little company is we feel into it. People feel into what works for them. It's not nobody is doing it 100%. Maybe we should shoot for that. You can actually say in our company that feels really pushed. "That's a push for me. I've got a class to teach right after that. No, I'd really like that a half hour earlier." People are receptive to that.

Martha Beck: Here's the interesting thing. Every time I've worked this way in a group, people find the rhythm together somehow somewhere. It may not be perfect, but it's just so much better than saying, "We're just going to sit down here. We're going to do it from this time to that time," and nobody gets to feel into it.

Rowan Mangan: For people that this is a new idea, can you talk us through what that might be? You're going to make a commitment, and you're feeling for exactly what's comfortable. What process do you go through, Marty, to find that?

Martha Beck: Okay. The first thing you do is consider the thing you're planning to do at the time you're planning to do it. Look at the calendar. Look at the scheduling. Think about it. Then get really relaxed. Breathe deeply. Notice whether there's tension anywhere in your body or whether there is an emotional resistance to doing it at that time. I actually, if I schedule a meeting at a time that's



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wrong for me  
and I'm not  
thinking about  
it, and then I

let myself relax and think about that meeting, I become so despondent I almost weep. I am so sick of trying to get on top of everything by the clock and by rigid conformity.

Martha Beck: I feel a strong emotion, and a lot of research shows that our best decisions are not made with the intellect. When the intellect center is damaged in the brain, people can make decisions just fine. If their emotional regulation or their emotional sensation is gone, they can't make decisions. The intellect can't choose anything.

Rowan Mangan: That is a huge point.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: We're actually, whether we think we're using our brains or not, we're actually still making decisions with our minds and with our bodies.

Martha Beck: For those of you who think this is all mushy, squishy, hyper feminine, one of the places this comes up most is for football quarterbacks.

Martha Beck: They found that these guys have to be very bright, but they're actually making decisions about what to do on the field with emotional reactions. That's in real-time, very quickly, trying to work with a whole bunch of other guys. The emotional part feels, I think, the emotional part of everybody else. There's a kind of harmony that is natural and not imposed.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, absolutely. That's sort of we're talking about scheduling type things. What about when we're feeling that we need to get on top of relationships and more qualitative things like that?

Martha Beck: Again, it's go to the emotional part of it. Sit with the other person and allow everyone to fill into it. That requires some communication. If it's a loving relationship, you'll be able to talk



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about it. When my kids were two, four and six, they would

not go to bed. Since their punishment for bad deeds was to go into their bedrooms for time out, I had no options for how to punish them. One day I sat them all down, two, four and six.

Martha Beck:

I said, "You guys are not going to bed. You're bouncing out of bed like a jack in the box. I don't know how to punish you for it. What do you think I should do?" They had a little conference and agreed that I should spank them. I was like, "That is corporal punishment. I would never hit my children." They were like, "No, we think you should spank us." I was like, "Okay."

Martha Beck:

They all went to bed. Adam popped up. I whacked him on the diaper very lightly. He went to bed. They never got up again. It was the most bizarre scenario. I'm sitting here with these tiny people, and they're going, "Yeah, we think physical brutality would be our preferred way of getting this message that we should sleep."

Rowan Mangan:

Oh dear, I don't know if that proves your point or contradicts your point, but I love it.

Martha Beck:

The point is that everybody's feeling through this together. Our nature, we are social creatures.

Martha Beck:

We are meant to cooperate. There are many other social animals that cooperate just fine without ever having clocks and calendars and schedules. They do it by connecting with each other.

Rowan Mangan:

In the case of relationships, it's more a case of feeling what's loving for everyone.

Martha Beck:

Absolutely.

Rowan Mangan:

What's a loving solution to it.

Martha Beck:



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Just saying,  
"Scheduling  
shouldn't be  
rigid. Let's go

up when the water goes up and down when the water goes down." Maybe you need to go. Maybe you need to stop. Maybe you need to rest. Just saying that is love because it recognizes the reality of the other person, where we're going to do this from seven to nine does not recognize the reality of the other person as a natural being.

Rowan Mangan: Right, right. Absolutely.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Seeing each other as love. There's a rhythm that comes out in everything if we just decide to live this way. The more I follow that rhythm the more productive, the more loving, the more healthy, the more everything I am. It makes me think about this wonderful quote from Melody Beattie, who was a codependency specialist. I had this on the wall for so long. She said, "At no day, no hour, no time are you required to do more than you can do in peace."

Rowan Mangan: There it is.

Martha Beck: Peace is what we're really meant to be in, and it's not on top of or underneath anything.

Rowan Mangan: No, it's just going up when the water goes up and going down when the water goes down.

Martha Beck: There you have it.

Rowan Mangan: I love it. That's how we stay wild.

Martha Beck: Absolutely. You guys, stay wild.

Rowan Mangan: Stay wild.

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