

Navigating grief and the sorrows of our time

The Five Gates of Grief - From Francis Weller.

The First Gate: Everything We Love, We will Lose

The Second Gate: The Places That Have Not Known Love

The Third Gate: The Sorrows of the World

The Fourth Gate: What We Expected and Did Not Receive

The Fifth Gate: Ancestral Grief

"So modern people are not bad or lost. They are stuck in a blast furnace of banality where all of that technology and so-called advancement have been purchased at the price of losing the most basic of human prerogatives: the art of being deliciously out of control to grieve their dead. It is a terrible source of grief in itself not to be able to grieve".

~Martin Prechtel, The Smell of Rain on Dust~

"Grief has always been communal, always been shared and regarded as a sacred process. Too often in modern times our grief becomes private, carrying an invisible mantle of shame forcing our sorrow underground, hidden from the eyes that would offer healing. We need to restore the conversation we need about the place of mourning in our lives. Each of us must undertake a learning with loss" Francis Weller

"In today's world, most of us carry grief and do not even know it. We have been trained at a very young age how not to feel. In the West we are often taught that to be good girls and boys we have to "suck it up."

The consequences are that even with your most intimate and trustworthy friends you might feel like, "I am burdening them." Crying in front of others is too often a forbidden fruit.

We learn to compartmentalize our grief because expressing it in an unwelcoming place will only lead to more grief. We are taught that the people who are closest to us have no way of holding us when we fall apart.

Yet we are born fully knowing how to grieve. We cry naturally to feel better, to unburden ourselves and take a few pounds off our shoulders and souls.

If there is a way for everyone to grieve openly, I believe it will also diminish the blaming and shaming that goes on between the races. When you are in the presence of someone grieving you don't see color anymore, it is a universal language. We are all in pain. There is no need to blame others.

Blame, shame, and guilt come from being unable to express our grief properly. How can we pretend to be happy, peaceful and loving when we have so much pain and grief?"

Navigating grief and the sorrows of our time

Communal grieving offers something that we cannot get when we grieve by ourselves. Through acknowledgement, validation and witnessing, communal grieving allows us to experience a level of healing that is deeply and profoundly freeing.” Sobonfu Somé

Quotes not included but helpful.

“Though now addicted to security, comfort and managing uncertainty, our culture could learn to honour, teach and live grief as a skill, as vital to our personal, community and spiritual life as the skill of loving.” Stephen Jenkinson

“Whilst many of us suffered mightily because of unconscious parenting, we must remember that our parents were participants in a society that failed to offer them what they needed in order to become solid individuals and good parents. They needed a village around them and so did we. Of course we were disappointed with our parents. We expected forty pairs of eyes greeting us in the morning, and all we got was one or two pairs looking back at us. We needed the full range of masculine and feminine expressions to surround us and grant us knowledge of how these potencies move in the world. We needed to have many hands holding us and offering us the attention that one beleaguered human being could not possibly offer consistently. It is to our deep grief that the village did not appear.”

From “the wild edge of sorrow” Francis Weller.

“Grief is subversive, undermining the quiet agreement to behave and be in control of our emotions. It is an act of protest that declares our refusal to live numb and small. There is something feral about grief, something essentially outside the ordained and sanctioned behaviours of our culture. Because of that, grief is necessary to the vitality of the soul. Contrary to our fears, grief is suffused with life-force.... It is not a state of deadness or emotional flatness. Grief is alive, wild, untamed and cannot be domesticated. It resists the demands to remain passive and still. We move in jangled, unsettled, and riotous ways when grief takes hold of us. It is truly an emotion that rises from the soul.” Francis Weller

“To alter the amnesia of our times, we must be willing to look into the face of the loss and keep it nearby. In this way, we may be able to honor the losses and live our lives as carriers of their unfinished stories. This is an ancient thought - how we tend the dead is as important as how we tend the living”

From “the wild edge of sorrow” Francis Weller.

Navigating grief and the sorrows of our time

Poems

The Peace of Wild Things - by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief.
I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light.
For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Kindness - by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes any sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and send you out in the day to mail letters and
purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

Navigating grief and the sorrows of our time

(Verse from the poem Colemans Bed, by David Whyte)

Be taught now, among the trees and rocks,
how the discarded is woven into shelter,
learn the way things hidden and unspoken
slowly proclaim their voice in the world.
Find that far inward symmetry
to all outward appearances, apprentice
yourself to yourself, begin to welcome back
all you sent away, be a new annunciation,
make yourself a door through which
to be hospitable, even to the stranger in you.

Further links:

My website: <https://www.livingfocusing.co.uk>

The work of Francis Weller: <https://www.francisweller.net>

The work of Sobonfu Some: <http://www.sobonfu.com/bookstore/>

Further learning with me:

The Landscapes of grief: 10th February 2020 6-8.15 pm GM. Daytime for US. (Six Monday evenings)

For many of us grief is something we turn away from yet so often, when we pay kind attention to the body... it remembers, or it asks us to remember. It holds both the knowing about what was lost and the key to its healing. Our task is to open a space and listen. This six week course, for those who know Focusing, will open a space to explore these landscapes. It will offer us a sacred space to deeply listen to ourselves and each other in this transformative landscape.

Some of the themes we will explore:

- The gatekeepers of grief - what keeps us away
- The five gates of grief (from Francis Weller)
- What the body knows about loss and healing
- Tending grief in community

This course is not just about the grief of losing a loved one. We live with many kinds of grief and all are welcome here.

Open to anyone who has knows the basics of Focusing and Listening in paired practice.
Costs: £120 (NOTE: I have a few concessionary places available, contact me for more details)

<https://www.livingfocusing.co.uk/grief.html>