

**THE TRUE NATURE OF MOURNING**

Rev. Glenn Turner, First UU Church, Auburn, ME (2008)

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING:

“Life turns like a slow river  
and suddenly you are there at the edge of the water  
with all the rest  
and the fire carries the  
feast and the laughter and in the darkness  
away from the fire  
the unspoken griefs  
that still  
make togetherness  
but then  
just as suddenly  
it has become a fireless  
friendless  
night again  
and you find yourself alone and you must speak to the stars  
or the rain-filled clouds  
or anything at hand  
to find your place.

When you are alone  
you must do anything  
to believe  
and when you are  
abandoned  
you must speak  
with everything  
you know  
and everything you are  
in order  
to belong.”

- from *This House of Belonging* by David Whyte, Many Rivers Press -

CHECK IN: (40 - 50 minutes)

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted, if time remaining, general response and conversation is welcome. Confidentiality.

FOCUS: The True Nature of Mourning

Here are a few excerpts from Meghan O'Rourke's essay on “The True Nature of Mourning.” It reflects her feelings following her mother's death from cancer.

“I feel that the world around me is deeply unprepared to deal with grief.”

“...I received emails from people who wrote: I hope you're doing well.” It's a kind sentiment, and yet sometimes it angered me. I am not okay.

...Mainly I feel one thing: My mother is dead, and I want her back. I really want her back - sometimes so intensely that I don't even want to heal. At least, not yet."

Meghan's father watched his family suffering and said: "Your mother is not there...and we are dealing with her absence. It makes us feel, I think, a loss of confidence - a general loss, an uncertainty about what we can rely on."

Meghan's healing began with the use of metaphor, imagining her mother as the wind, and she began to take comfort in nature. This passage is about going into the Big Bend National Park.

"Loss is so paradoxical: It is at once enormous and tiny. And this, too, I think, is why I am drawn to landscapes that juxtapose the minute and the splendor; the very contrast is what I felt. ... Here you drive along roads and can see rolling, rocky desert for many, many miles. The sky is as open as can be. Having my sense of smallness reflected back at me made me feel more at home in a majesty outside of my comprehension. It also led me to wonder: How could my loss matter in the midst of all this? Yet it does matter, to me, and in this setting that feels natural. The sheer sublimity of the landscape created room for the magnitude of my grief, while at the same time it helped me feel like a part - a small part - of a much larger creation. It was inclusive."

"In the midst of grief I also find myself wanting connection - wanting to be reminded that the sadness I feel is not just mine but ours."

Meghan quotes Marilynne Robinson who wrote in *The Paris Review*-

"...The valley of the shadow is part of (human experience), and you are depriving yourself if you do not experience what humankind has experienced, including doubt and sorrow. We experience pain and difficulty as failure instead of saying, I will pass through this, everyone I have ever admired has passed through this, music has come out of it, literature has come out of it. We should think of our humanity as a privilege."

Discussion:

There are so many facets to grief - the early anger at being comforted, the loss of confidence, the sense of our smallness juxtaposed at something much greater than ourselves, wanting connection, a shared grief, the larger connection with all those who have experienced loss. How is it for you?

LIKES AND WISHES

How did this session go for you? Is there anything you'd like to call particular attention to?

CLOSING WORDS: Let Evening Come - Jane Kenyon

Let the light of late afternoon  
shine through chinks in the barn, moving  
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing  
as a woman takes up her needles  
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned  
in long grass. Let the stars appear  
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.  
Let the wind die down. Let the shed  
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop  
in the oats, to air in the lung  
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't  
be afraid. God does not leave us  
comfortless, so let evening come.