

Healing Conversations 2011 – Session One – 4 November 2011

What is the Heartbreak? (ELEA)

WORKSHEET

1. Chalice Lighting/Opening Words: 2 minutes.

In My Two Hands
(A poem by Thich Nhat Hanh)

I hold my face
in my two hands
No I am not crying
I hold my face in my two hands
to keep my loneliness warm
to cradle my hunger
shelter my heart
from the rain and the thunder
Two hands protecting
Two hands nourishing
Two hands preventing
my soul from flying
in anger.

I hold my face
in my two hands My hands cupped
to catch what might fall
from within me
Deeper than crying
no, I am not crying
I am in my two hands

2. Welcome from Coaches with words of introduction from each coach: 4 minutes

3. Check-in/Sharing: up to 30 minutes. (Coaches should divide up the time by number of participants present; allow time for short interval of silence in between sharing).

What is the loss or grief that brings you to our group? Hopefully, you got our invitation to bring with you today an object that represents your loss, such as an item which represents your loved one in some way. Or you might have brought an object which symbolizes or represents your grief. If you did bring an object, please share it with us. You can place it on the table in the center if you wish. If you didn't or forgot, which is a totally normal part of grieving, you are welcome to tell us what you would have brought.

4. Small Group Covenant: 10 mins.

Take turns reading out loud. Stop to discuss as needed.

5. Topic: What is the Heart Break? TOTAL TIME 50 minutes.

A. Introduction and Questions: 10 minutes.

The current week's questions should either be posted on large paper or have copies for each participant on a sheet of paper. Writing utensils and crayons or markers should also be provided along with blank paper if needed.

This reading is excerpted from the memoir *Here If You Need Me* by Kate Braestrup, a UU minister and chaplain with the Maine Warden Service, which conducts wilderness search and rescue missions among other tasks. Kate Braestrup's book tells about her decision to become a minister after her husband, a Maine State Trooper, who was planning to attend seminary, was killed in a car accident in April 1996, leaving his wife, Kate, and their four young children. She writes:

My children asked me Why did Dad die? I told them it was an accident. There are small accidents, like knocking over your milk at the dinner table. And there are large accidents, like the one your dad was in. No one meant it to happen. It just happened. And his body was too badly damaged in the accident for his soul to stay in it anymore, and so he died.

(I tell them) God does not spill milk. God did not bash the truck into your father's car. Nowhere in scripture does it say, God is car accident, or God is death. God is justice and kindness, mercy and always –always love. So if you want to know where God is in this or in anything, look for love....

Once in conversation with a very nice Baptist classmate at the seminary, I admitted that if Drew hadn't died I probably never would have become a minister. "You see!" she responded brightly. "God knew what he was doing!"..."Surely God was not so urgently in need of Unitarian Universalist ministers that he needed to kill a father of four in order to make one?" I retorted in what was probably an unnecessarily icy voice.

Death alters the reality of our lives; the death of an intimate changes it completely. No part of my life, from my most ethereal notions of God to the most mundane detail of tooth brushing, was the same after Drew died. Life consisted of one rending novelty after another...Still as time went on, some of those novelties proved to be blessings. And life anyone who has survived the death of an intimate, I had to learn to live with a paradox. If Drew had lived, I would not have gone to seminary, would not be ordained, would not have become the warden service chaplain. There are places that would have gone unvisited and friends I would never have met, friends I now can't imagine doing without. So while on the one hand there is my darling Drew, whom I will never cease to love and never cease to long for, on the other hand, there is a wonderful life that I enjoy and am grateful for. I can't make these two realities – what I've lost and what I've found – fit together in some tidy pattern of divine causality. I just have to hold them on the one hand

and on the other, just like that. As it happens, not as it was planned, but as it turned out, this is my life.

Jan Richardson writes in a poem called Desert Prayer:

I am not asking you

To take this wilderness from me,

To remove this place of starkness

Where I come to know

The wildness within me,

Where I learn to call the names

Of the ravenous beasts

That pace inside me,

To finger the brambles

That snake through my veins,

To taste the thirst

That tugs at my tongue.

But send me

Tough angels,

Sweet wine,

Strong bread;

Just enough.

This reading is from a book called “Seasons of Grief and Grace: A Sister’s Story of AIDS” by Susan Ford Wiltshire. The book is written from a journal that the author kept over the three years her younger brother and best friend John Ford was living and dying

with AIDS. She writes:

I think of a biscuit hot from the oven on Sunday mornings, how we break it open to butter it on both halves. The more surface space, the more honey it will hold. The jagged edges along the break in one's hart expose more surfaces to pain. They also offer more surfaces to connect with the pain of others. A heart scored by grief is a heart prepared to know and hold the grief of others.

Rumi writes:

Don't turn your head.

Keep looking at the bandaged place.

That's where the light enters you.

B. Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing: up to 10 minutes.

Invite the group into 5-10 minutes of silence during which time they are asked to reflect on the questions. Participants are invited to use this time for writing and drawing their responses to the questions if they wish. If another question/aspect of the topic comes up for them, they are welcome to respond to that.

What do you know about your grief so far? What are some words or images you can use to describe it?

Where do you feel your grief in your body and what does it feel like?

What has surprised you about this experience? Does anything about this feel familiar?

When you don't turn your head, but keep looking at the bandaged place, as Rumi suggests, what do you see? What you experienced anything of what he suggests when he says, "That's where the light enters you"?

C. Sharing: 30 minutes or 3-4 mins. each

Coaches should invite each person to share their response as they feel moved, rather than clockwise. Give each person equal time to share. If there is time after each person has shared, invite people into a more free flowing discussion of the theme. Coaches may need to repeat the questions, direct the conversation back to the questions, or gently ask how something relates to the questions/theme of the meeting.

6. Check-out: 10 minutes.

Encourage people to check out with a final thought or reflection about the theme (or any other thoughts or reflections about the session) and how having shared and learned

about this might impact their life in the week ahead. (Coaches can encourage participants to make a connection between the topic and actions, steps, new directions they might take in their daily lives by going first with the check out for the first couple of weeks and modeling this sort of check-out if they wish.)

Is there anything anyone said today which particularly moved you? What are you going to take with you from today's session into your week?

7. Introducing Next Session's Topic and Sharing Handouts

7. Blessing and Extinguish the Chalice: 2 mins.

John O'Donohue: A Blessing for Grief

When you lose someone you love,
Your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you becomes fragile,
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence
Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or undone.

There are days when you wake up happy;
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back
Onto the black tide of loss.
Days when you have your heart back,
You are able to function well
Until in the middle of work or encounter,
Suddenly with no warning,
You are ambushed by grief.

It becomes hard to trust yourself.
All you can depend on now is that
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself.
More than you, it knows its way

And will find the right time
To pull and pull the rope of grief
Until that coiled hill of tears
Has reduced to its last drop.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance
With the invisible form of your departed;
And when the work of grief is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time.

***Total Session Time: 110 minutes** (Sessions are scheduled for 120 minutes so you have a little time for a bathroom break or some wiggle room if one section takes longer. We also assume that you will start about 5 minutes past the hour not exactly on time.)*

HANDOUTS: **JOURNEY OF GRIEF (THE DIAGRAM)**
 COVENANT
 KEEPING A JOURNAL
 RECONCILIATION OF GRIEF QUESTIONS

HEALING CONVERSATIONS SESSION 1

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION: WHAT IS THE HEART BREAK?

You are welcome to respond to one, all or any of the questions. If none of these questions speak to your experience, please create your own question and respond to that.

What do you know about your grief so far? What are some words or images you can use to describe it?

Where do you feel your grief in your body and what does it feel like?

What has surprised you about this experience? Does anything about this feel familiar?

When you don't turn your head, but keep looking at the bandaged place, as Rumi suggests, what do you see? What you experienced anything of what he suggests when he says, "That's where the light enters you"?