

Community Circles
February 3, 2021

Transforming Grief, with Melody LeBaron

Aired 01/31/2021 – [Watch on YouTube](#) (high-speed available)



There inevitably comes a moment in each of our lives, after which everything changes, after which we walk on the earth a little bit differently, and we feel our place here with a heightened kind of awareness. Usually this moment is some kind of suffering. It might be a divorce, or the loss of a job, or being diagnosed with a terminal illness, or we lose someone dear to us—a parent or, God forbid, a child. And, after that moment, the way that we are on the earth is changed forever.

Wayne Muller, Legacy of the Heart: The Spiritual Advantages of a Painful Childhood .

Something will happen in each of our lives that will change us. Perhaps, for you, it has already happened. Quoting author Wayne Muller, our Sunday speaker, Melody LeBaron, described this moment as one “after which everything changes, after which we walk on the earth a little bit differently, and we feel our place here with a heightened kind of awareness...” Frequently these changes visit us through suffering.

As Melody pointed out, here in the west we resist the idea of suffering – we don’t want to talk about grief or loss. We move right past it. We bounce right back! A week off after the death of a loved one? That’s plenty – time to get back to work. What’s the problem with this approach? If we don’t let grief do its work within us, if we block it off or hold it away from us, we never move past it or gain the wisdom that arises on the other side of deep suffering. As psychologist James Hillman taught, what begins as great suffering becomes our deepest wisdom.

If, on the other hand, we have the courage (and that’s what it takes) to engage with grief, we emerge with a greater capacity to feel and embody love for ourselves and for others. We move past our old illusions into the truth of our deep connection with others and all of life. Simply put, we are transformed. What would have been a block, an ending, becomes a source of life and vitality.

As Khalil Gibran wrote, “the deeper that sorrow carves within your being , the more joy it can contain.”

Have you found this to be true for you?

Melody spoke of the idea called “anima mundi” – the soul of the world. In older times, communities would have means and rituals to share grief, to mourn losses together. When one suffered a loss, the soul of the community, indeed the world, suffered the loss, and, acknowledging this connection, the community grieved together. Our view is different now – the only soul that matters, or indeed that even exists, is our individual soul, and we mourn alone. ***What have we lost?*** We no longer celebrate, or even recognize, the *anima mundi* which surrounds and sustains us.

So when we sustain a loss, we have no true language in which to feel it, or share it. And, as Melody points out, “if you can’t feel it, you can’t see it. And, if you can’t see it, you can’t heal it.”

We must share our grief as much as we must share our joy. Here we apply the concept of Ubuntu, meaning in the Bantu language “I am, because you are.” I am human because you are as well – we are connected and interdependent.ⁱ

Melody also shared “the five gates of grief,” conceptualized by author and teacher Francis Weller.ⁱⁱ Each is a portal to greater wisdom.

As I list these five gates, remain aware of the sensations that arise in you at each one. As Melody asked, in how many ways are you experiencing, or resisting, these gates?

Here are the five gates of grief.

1. Everything I love, I will lose.
2. My shadow.
Those parts of myself about which I feel shame, which I hide.
3. The sorrows of the world.
This encapsulates the idea of *anima mundi*, the soul of the world. We are all affected by harms to our world.
4. What I expected, but did not receive.

What did I have the right to expect, as a human born in this world?
The support and love of community, a place I am welcomed no
matter what. Where do I belong?

5. Ancestral grief.

This is a new gate, only recently realized here in the west. We grieve
the losses passed down to us in our very DNA. ⁱⁱⁱ

What is your response to this list? Does it touch your experience?

*Do you have any other responses to or thoughts on Melody's talk? During our
discussion, we will touch on other concepts she discussed not included above, so bring
your ideas.*

We are so grateful to Melody for sharing her time and great wisdom with us. For
more resources from Melody on transforming loss and grief or to learn about upcoming
workshops, please visit her website at www.transformingspace.com.

ⁱ Melody's reference here is the book *Everyday Ubuntu*, by Mungi Ngomane.

ⁱⁱ Francis Weller's book referenced here is *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*

ⁱⁱⁱ Melody's reference here is the book *My Grandmother's Hands*, by Resmaa Menakem.