

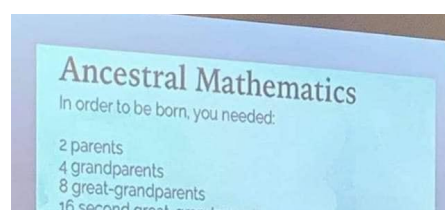
Dear _____,

This period of time seems to be a collective processing of grief, and an opening to its opposite and companion, gratitude. We cannot answer the great mystery of suffering and death with our minds, we must turn to expressions of the body and soul, like art and spiritual practice. Our culture is lacking in the rituals that help us process suffering and so we must help each other rediscover them.



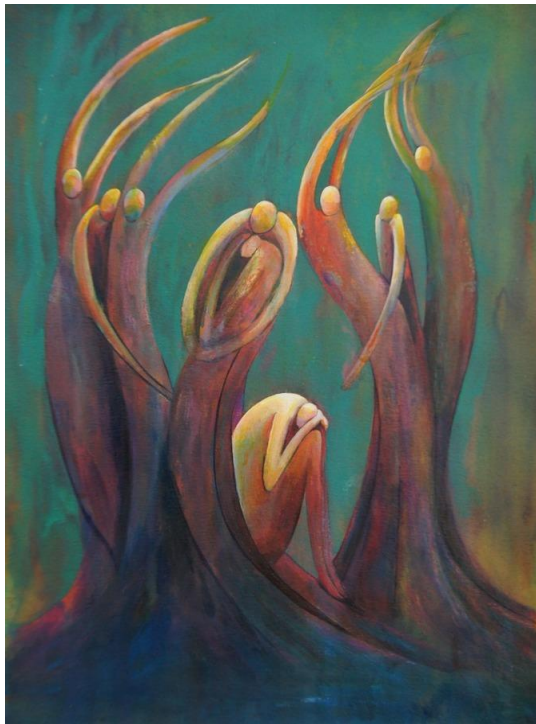
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I just finished a Buddhist workshop with Zenju Earthlyn Manuel about her book “The Shamanic Bones of Zen”. She had some beautiful wisdom about loss and our relationship to our ancestors (meaning human, animal, and the earth). She said that our body currently holds all of our ancestors and it took at least 4,000 people to bring us to being here at this moment.



This really stuck with me. And gave me a strong feeling of rootedness and gratitude.

To be human is to suffer and witness suffering. And this can feel so overwhelming at times. "What kind of a world have I been dropped into?!" I have found working with water can really help me try to release feelings of control and resistance to the pain and let life unfold as it will. Baths, going to the ocean, standing in the rain...



There are layers to your loss - the global unsteadiness of our world, your shifting work and family life, the loss of beloved dogs, the death of young people. You are in the process of reconstructing your understanding of the world.

We will work together to help make a safe room to feel deeply into the loss around you and to feel the constant loving presence of all those who have connected with you in some way, whether it has been a friend, a relative, or a dog companion.

Creative

- Continue to create works of art of word and image to describe how a day or moment feels to you. If you feel anxiety rising while making art, have a piece of paper where you can return to making a slow spiral or a figure 8 drawing to help bring a feeling of calm.
- Begin by creating a single image of pain and grief in whatever form it comes forward. Then ask yourself 'what comes next?' and make another image. Continue like this and watch a story unfold through you. Don't think about what it means while you are making the images.
- Make an image using colors of what your heart feels like right now.
- Make an altar for your loss - somewhere you can visit, light a candle or incense. Offer flowers, special rocks, images. Invite your loss to have a place to live and a place to talk to those no longer here. When my dad died when I was 25, I created an altar out of a big beech tree in our woods and I still visit it every day.

Resources

- When Things Fall Apart by Pema Chodron (a book or audiobook)
- Talks and meditations on grief by Tara Brach
<https://www.tarabrach.com/grief/>
- Bereavement Group at Brattleboro Area Hospice
Contact: Lars Hunter lars.hunter@brattleborohospice.org
(they also have an awesome grief lending library!)
- Grief is a thing with feathers by Max Porter (a short novel)

Practices

- Qigong movement for stress and emotional release
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxnRrQscmVVw5DrHzV41OgsH2RekCZugA>
- The car is a great place to let loose big emotions. In mourning, sadness is often expressed through the lungs. Sobbing, crying, sighing, moaning, howling are natural ways to express sadness over loss and can help us move through grief.

- Take a very slow walk in nature- an approach called Forest Bathing (shinrin yoku). Move very slow with your focus on the parts of your foot touching the earth. No thought of where you are heading. Open your senses - What do you smell? What colors do you see? Do you hear birds? If you start to think or speed up, just invite yourself back to the slow steps. One step at a time.



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Let me know which of these experiences resonate with you and share images or writings when you are ready.

Warmly,
Jess