**Compassion & Suffering**



I saw the river over which every soul must pass to reach the kingdom of heaven, and the name of that river was suffering… and I saw the boat which carries souls across the river and the name of that boat was love.

***(St. John of the Cross)***

**How Our Approach to Suffering Can Lead to Transformation**

* How we respond to our own suffering influences how we respond to the suffering of others.
* If we ourselves have suffered and handled it healthy then that determines how we respond.

I saw grief drinking a cup of sorrow

and called out,

It tastes sweet, does it not?

You have caught me, grief answered,

and you have ruined my business.

How can I sell sorrow,

when you know it’s a blessing?

**(Rumi)**

**Kindness**

Before you know what kindness really is

you must lose things,

feel the future dissolve in a moment

like salt in 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 of the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,

you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho

lies dead at 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 sense anymore,

Only kindness that ties your shoes

And sends you out into 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.

**~ Naomi Shihab Nye**

**Suffering Can Lead to Spiritual Transformation**

* Ram Dass – Polishing the Mirror
* Barbara Taylor Brown quote

Pain originates in the body…

Suffering happens in the mind…

~ *Barbara Brown Taylor*

* Jack Kornfield story
* Louisiana tornado
* *Hope’s Boy* – Andrew Bridge

Meaning does not change the particulars of our lives; it changes the experience of those particulars. *~Rachel Naomi Remen*

* *An Interrupted Life* by Etty Hillsum
* *Sentinel of Strength* poem (in handouts)

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
       flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

*-Langston Hughes*

**Need to get Gandhi Quote from DVD**

**Pause: What has struck you so far – that is new or a confirmation of what you have known?**

 **Could you write a story of suffering? Or add a personal quote from your experience?**

***Metaphors for Transformation Process***

* The Bardo (bar = in-between / do = suspended)
* Bear enters the cave (a gestation period)
* The Tomb time of Holy Saturday (waiting in darkness)
* The night sea journey (uncertainty, not seeing clearly)
* Grain of wheat sheds husk in soil (letting go)
* Chrysalis stage of the butterfly (overcome fear)
* Journey to the Underworld (enter the unknown)
* The dark night of the soul (lost sense of faith and trust)
* Into the belly of the whale (swallowed, stuck)
* The Wilderness of the Exodus (lost, round-about way, takes a long time)

**How Suffering Happens**

**The Five Gates of Grief** – Francis Weller (Enter the Healing Ground)

Francis Weller’s Five 5 Gates of Grief are a profound inquiry. Identify your losses in

each of the gates. Provide Emotional support for yourself and those facing death

 and loss.

1. Everything we love, we will lose
2. The places we have not known
3. Sorrows of the world
4. What we expected and did not receive
5. Ancestral grief - bodily holding from grief of our ancestors

**Pause: What do you relate to from this sharing on how suffering happens?**

 **What is the challenge for you?**

**What metaphor speaks to you?**

**The Process**

* **Attachment** (we value something or someone)
* **Loss**
* **Suffering**
* **Grief** (the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual response to the loss)
* **Mourning**
* **Let go/recovery/healing** (We slowly grow beyond the loss) loses its intensity
* **Elixer** (the gift, the catalyst for growth)

**The Response To Suffering**

* Personality
* Family history and ethnicity
* Cultural conditioning
* Life experience
* Religious beliefs
* Education
* Current state of health

***The Grace in Dying,*** Kathleen Dowling Singh

Suffering (can) serve as a crucible of transformation in levels of consciousness…

Suffering can create an opening, the space, in the psyche’s structure that allows self-transcendence, that allows the release of our own Essential splendor.

**Where I Find Meaning and Acceptance in Suffering**

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**The Pattern of Spiritual and Psychological Growth**

* Life – Death – Resurrection
* Remember the refuge of the Holy One, lean on this beloved presence
* Keep the cycle of life/death/rebirth in mind
* Be patient, be kind to self and others
* Be willing to be vulnerable/receive help
* Yield to the unknown
* Maintain hope
* Have a spiritual practice

**Liminality**

* Limen… a spiritual or psychological threshold
* limen = the centerline in the doorway
* the “don’t know” area of change
* non-clarity, confusion, fear, mistrust, anxiety
* the place of possibilities, growth, hope

What we resist – persists (Christopher Germer)

**Hope**

Either we have hope within us or we don’t. It is a dimension of the soul… Hope in this deep and powerful sense is the ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed… It is this hope, above all, that gives us the strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do here and now. ~ Vaclav Have**l**

**Add Rabbi Shapiro quote**

**The Gifts of Suffering**

1. Pushes us into searching, asking deeper questions, we re-vision what we believe
2. Helps us clarify what we want to do with our life, what is our value, purpose, direction

3. Moves us toward greater appreciation of kinship

4. Assists the ego become healthier

5. Leads us to be more compassionate

1. Helps us see how much we need to lean on the Holy One, where perpetual strength lies

That which masquerades as a trial

to my life today

will dress as the teacher

of my life tomorrow.

 ~ **Mary Anne Radmacher**

** “The Mothers”**

 **Käthe Kollwitz**

Heather Hess, [German Expressionist Digital Archive Project](http://www.moma.org/germanexpressionism), German Expressionism: Works from the Collection. 2011.

In 1919, Käthe Kollwitz began work on *Krieg* (War), her response to the tragedies endured during what she called those “unspeakably difficult years” of World War I and its aftermath. The portfolio’s seven woodcuts focus on the sorrows of those left behind—mothers, widows, and children. Kollwitz had struggled to find the appropriate means of expression until she saw an exhibition of Ernst Barlach’s woodcuts in 1920. Revising each print through as many as nine preparatory drawings and states, Kollwitz radically simplified the compositions. The large-format, stark black-and-white woodcuts feature women left to face their grief and fears alone, with their partners, or with each other.

Only one print, *Die Freiwilligen* (The volunteers), shows the combatants. In it, Kollwitz’s younger son, Peter, takes his place next to Death, who leads the troops in an ecstatic procession to war. Peter was killed in action just two months later. Kollwitz wanted these works to be widely viewed. By eliminating references to a specific time or place, she created universally legible indictments of the real sacrifices demanded in exchange for abstract concepts of honor and glory. The prints were exhibited in 1924 at the newly founded International Anti-War Museum in Berlin.

1. What gives you the courage to go on?
2. What keeps you from caving in completely?
3. Where do you find your rootedness in times of suffering?
4. What brings you meaning or a purpose to go on after significant suffering?

**Extras:**

**Handouts in Packet**

* River of Suffering – this could be an exercise done in reflection or done on their own
* Psalms of Shelter
* Sentinel of Strength
* Kindness poem
* Handout on Loss
* Transition Chart
* Art of Being a Healing Presence

**Meditation**

* From Joyce’s prayers
* Maybe a song or video

**Music**

* Carrie Newcomer
	+ You Can DO This Hard Thing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRGnftH_g4I>
	+ Help In Hard Times: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFebLK0T7w4&list=PL9mpr8caC9_uo-o9epz8otfQ1Vvl7BlIF&index=22>
	+ The Only Way Through is In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYAtWQB25JY&list=RDvtjR6eW0aMU&index=2>
	+ Learning to Sit with Not Knowing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_t8WqgKL3I&list=RDvtjR6eW0aMU&index=3>
	+ Leaves Don’t Drop They Let Go: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c4mW9MRe-k>
* Karen Drucker
	+ Healing Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAocwPRVFsg>
* Leonard Cohen
	+ Come Healing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUB1O2cT2gM>
* Calm Me Lord: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POnw69M456E> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBwIm6znDYk>

**Video’s**

Etty Hillesum

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TypHiwajagE>
* Brief Introduction to Etty: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zfy8LJM0rlE>
* Railroad from Amsterdam to Auschwitz: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lF7kmwe0SrA>

TedTalks

* Hope IS the Most Powerful Force in the World: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i63givEPq7E>
* What I Learned From My Husbands Suicide: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb_1IklnhaU>
* The Mothers Who Found Forgiveness: <https://www.ted.com/talks/aicha_el_wafi_phyllis_rodriguez_the_mothers_who_found_forgiveness_friendship>
* I Am The Son of a Terrorist: <https://www.ted.com/talks/zak_ebrahim_i_am_the_son_of_a_terrorist_here_s_how_i_chose_peace>

David Kessler (A lot more on his website)

* Healing the Five Areas of Grief: <https://www.davidkesslertraining.com/Understanding-Loss-Video?cid=e4846f99-7f9c-4f5a-953b-9d6778be552a>

**Comments:**

1. There are a few quotes and such to find in the DVD and add to the handout.
2. I use something from Joyce’s prayers for meditation/prayer
3. I use music, as usual, for prayer too.
4. There is lots of other music available too.

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