Grief and Loss as Initiation
Main class transcripts

I’m glad everybody’s here. Let’s take a little bit of a deep breath and land, and connect, and really tune in to all of your wonderful hearts sitting on the ends of all these different lines of computer connections.

I want to start by acknowledging where I am, which is on Treaty 7 Territory in Calgary, on the Eastern slopes, the foothills, of the Rocky Mountains. It’s a beautiful land, it’s deeply important to me. I was born here, this has been my home place all my life. Really, the work I do is anchored in this space. I acknowledge this, and that it is Treaty 7 territory. I also acknowledge my own ancestors who stand behind me in this work. And I thank them for making my life possible and allowing me to be here with you.

I want to welcome all of you. I know a little bit about some of you from the forms, and I can assume wonderful things about all of you because that's generally who shows up at events like this. So, thanks to the folks who are here on the live call, and a hello and a greeting to people who will be listening later. Welcome to you as well.

Just to really name that it's a tender time. And there are many, many people in this call who are holding very, very tender losses. Very tender losses, some very recent, some very old, and it’s still all very tender. So, we’ll create a space that holds that tenderness. And we’ll welcome and honor that pain.

There are people here who are reeling from recent loss, and there are also people, and sometimes those groups overlap, who are curious about how to support others. Maybe you’re practicing death doulas, hospice workers, volunteers, shamanic practitioners, various end of life professionals. Or maybe you are curious about stepping onto that path.

We'll have two focuses, foci, today. One for working with our own experience of loss, and another for how to support dying people and their families.

In terms of the questionnaire, there were so many great things people wanted to talk about. I think I'm going to hit most of the core things. There were a few things people brought up that we won't be dealing with in the main aspect of the class, but there’ll be lots of Q&A time. If you had a topic that didn't get raised, someone mentioned ecological grief, accumulated grief, sudden death, dreamwork, what else? Dreamwork, grief rituals, any of those things, we’ll have time for that. Those are not on our agenda for today, but we can certainly address them in the context of this topic in the Q&A.
Again, welcome to you all.

I’ve been a death doula since 2012 and I came to it through a variety of different streams. First through my own experience of my dad’s debilitating stroke. It was a social death. And then his seven years of long-term care and eventual death. When he had the stroke, I realized I just didn't have any idea how to meet this and that I’d never been taught. I wanted to do something about that, and to help others.

My training and my educational background: I have a master's in environmental studies and a doctorate in transformative learning and change. I really feel like the work I'm doing with death is educational, and we'll talk a lot about meaning making and how enlarging the meaning, the frame of meaning we hold something in, gives us a new way to hold it. That's really the focus of transformative learning as an academic discipline.

Then I've always just had a lot of fluidity and relationship with the non-physical world. So that boundary is quite permeable for me. Death and dead and dying people feel very familiar to me. Those things altogether are a bit about what I do. I now practice and see clients (online these days) and teach. That gives you a bit of sense of where I’m coming from. And there's lots more information on my website if you’re curious.

The intention of today's class is to explore this idea that if we learn how to meet death well, it can grow us into stronger and more capable people. It's an entirely different way of understanding how death and loss impact our lives. We'll be looking at the archetype of initiation as a map for this process.

My personal intention is to be in service to you, and to the spirits, and the muses, and the field, and all the forces and the teachers who have informed me, including, enormously, my clients. I want to serve as an intermediary to help deliver this, in hopes that you will take it out and do good things with it in the world.

I invite you to think a little bit, just to yourselves, about your own intention, and to articulate that a bit in the next few minutes, maybe as I'm speaking, because naming that does something in the field. It acts as a tuning fork. When people are clear about their intentions, the field organizes around that.

In terms of our class, I really feel that teaching and learning are two halves of a collaborative dance. Neither of us could do this alone, I can't do this without you, and you can't without me. It's like a choreographer and a dance company, or a conductor and the symphony. We’re doing this together. And your presence, your questions, your attention, all really matter.
I'm going to ask people not to use the chat except if you need to connect with Aerin. It's fine if you've been doing it so far. As we get in though, it starts to take people's attention, and I certainly won't be following anything in there. I can't multitask that way. So just keep everything here. Keep your videos on if you're able to, if you're not, that's fine too, but we always love to see you. If you have questions, connect with Aerin.

Because we're not in the same place and we can't have that full, physical body language felt sense of each other, I'm going to introduce a few hand signals that can amplify that body language. It's a way to deepen... So much of healing is about deepening threads of connection and weaving.

The first signal is this, and it was introduced to me as American sign language for clapping. It means, "Oh wow, what you said really resonates with me." It's an affirmation. Everyone give a little twinkle. There we go. See, isn't it fun to do that? So that's a twinkle and anytime someone says that, you're welcome to twinkle.

The other thing is, as I say, there's lots of tenderness, lots of grief in this space, and lots of love and lots of beauty and grace, too. If someone says something that really touches you, put your hand on your heart. You might have to do it high enough up that we can see on the screen. That says to the person who is speaking, "I'm with you, I'm really with you at a heart level," and it does something, too. Those are tools that we can use to deepen this field.

In terms of our agenda today, in a minute we're going to break out into breakout rooms for a little introduction, get to know each other. We'll do that for a few minutes. Then we'll come back and I'll teach for more or less an hour. We'll have another set of short breakout rooms, with groups of three or four, and then a Q&A, and we'll aim to wrap up pretty much at the two hour mark, which is six o'clock mountain time. That's when the class will formally close.

If you need to need to, or want to leave then, that's fine. If you'd like to stay, there'll be a completely optional Q&A that's a little more freeform, less structured, and less time bound, that might go on for another half an hour or 45 minutes or so. You're welcome to stay for that. That will be recorded, so if you don't stay for it, you'll still get the recording of it.

Then later, tonight you'll get an email with information about how to download your certificate of completion for this course. And if you're listening later, that will be available in your web access. I think that should answer the logistical questions. We need those clear before we can settle in.

< Breakout rooms >

From Grief and Loss as Initiation, an online class by Sarah Kerr, PhD. Nov 23, 2020. Please do not share or distribute this document.
Okay, so let's have a show of hands out of 10, how was the experience of the breakout room? Give us your numbers. Okay, good. Oh, all right, and they're becoming twinkles, excellent. Okay, so I'm glad to have people connect. I think in this work, we're often a bit isolated from other people who think and feel these ways. So I really appreciate these classes as an opportunity to help people connect with each other. I'm glad you enjoyed it. And like I said, we'll have one more opportunity for that.

What I'm going to do now is move into a teaching space.

So, grief and loss as initiation. I talked a little bit at the beginning about this idea that grief and loss can be a profound catalyst for growth. And in fact, in some ways I think that may be what they're for. We don't learn and grow when things are easy, we learn and grow when things are hard. And when we are able to connect with that initiatory power, a lot more can happen.

Every loss is different, but there are commonalities in how we process loss, and in my work with dying people and their families, I see this more and more. This map, this map of the archetypal process of initiation, is an incredible tool because we're not taught how to deal with this.

Very often we suffer more than we need to because we don't understand what's happening. It's this overwhelming, confusing, chaotic mess. Yes, there is a part of it that's overwhelming and confusing and chaotic, but there is actually still an internal logic, an archetypal pathway through that that we can follow.

So just a little bit about archetypes. Archetypes come from the work of Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung, who identified these organizing patterns that are wired into us. They're fundamental laws that govern our psyche and our soul. In a way, they're our spiritual or emotional DNA. They're observed cross-culturally, and they might be more than human.

Archetypes are innate, universal, unlearned tendencies, and they both live within us and express themselves through us, and we live within them. They operate on us from the outside and the inside at the same time. We can acknowledge them or not, but it doesn't change their existence, and life gets easier if we understand them because then we can align ourselves with their natural laws and the natural systems that are evolving around us. If we ignore them, it often increases our soul suffering.

The archetype of initiation is a map of the soul's journey through transformative loss, death, grief, bereavement. The archetype is based on these three principles of death of the old, an in-between space where we're neither here nor there, and that's often called the liminal zone, and birth of the new.
Limen is the word for the little piece of wood that goes across the threshold of a doorway. When you're in a liminal zone, you're understood to have one foot in one room and one foot in another. You're neither here nor there. And then the third phase is the rebirth or the return. Every death ends one thing and makes way for something else. And that's in its heart, the archetype of initiation.

That three-part process is often called the triphasic process. And in every change in our life, we have to let go of the old before we can move in to the new. When you get married, you have to let go of and let die the single person. When you have children, the childless person dies. When you start a new job, the person who was identified with that old job has to die. It's an internal practice to learn how to let the old die so we can be present to the new.

It's a lifelong practice. We do it every day when we end our day. If we can let that day be done and begin the next one, we start clean. When we reach the end of our lives, the more we've been able to do that, the less baggage we're dragging behind us. It's about not hauling a bag of rocks of unfinished business. That's what it is to finish your business. To let go what's gone.

There's a key relationship between loss and growth. If we don't let go of the old, we can't grow into the new, it's just the laws of physics. And this practice of learning what it feels like - and it is not easy, sometimes it's brutally difficult and painful - but as we go through that process there's opportunity for growth.

So that's an overview of the archetype. I'm going to share my screen now and talk a bit about this map, which is one that I use a lot with my clients.

There are a few different things happening on this map. We'll start with the bigger structures, and then we'll move more deeply.

You'll see there's a circle with a top half and a bottom half. That's the big organizing structure. The top half is the ordinary world. That's as normal as normal ever gets. When we're living our lives and trundling along and more or less feel like we're in step with things, we know how things are going to turn out, there's a bit of order, we feel connected to life.

The lower half is the non-ordinary world, it's the unknown, we're confused. This is the place of death. And when we enter a space of great loss, we drop from the ordinary to the non-ordinary, and we do it at three o'clock on the map.

If you start up on the right, we're trundling along and then something happens and we come down - and that something may be sudden or it may be gradual - but something happens and everything changes, here at 3:00.
The image I often use to describe this is the sense of being in a grocery store and you're pushing your cart, you're buying your vegetables, and you feel like you're connected. And then a week later, suddenly someone you love has been given a terminal diagnosis and you're walking through the same grocery store and you don't feel connected at all. The rest of the world seems to be on a completely different track and different path. You've dropped down into that non-ordinary world, into that chaos, unknown space. It's sometimes a very quick shift. Sometimes it's slower, sometimes there's aging or progressive illness, but at some point, we drop down below.

And so, the second big organizing structure here, are the three words separation, transformation, and integration. Separation is the movement away. That's the death of the old, when the way you've lived and the things you've known and the path your life has been on completely changes. You leave the ordinary community. We drop down here.

Transformation is the liminal zone. We're changing. We don't know who we are, we don't know who we will become, we're neither here nor there, we're in the in-between. And then the cycle goes around and we come back over here and we integrate. That's the birth of the new, that's the return to community. So those three core structures are the main elements that guide this process.

And I'm going to walk through this cycle for a few different scenarios that we might encounter in our lives. And I invite you to see what resonates for you and really rings true.

The first one I'm going to do is getting a cancer diagnosis that someone survives, because it is still a brush with death, even though you continue to live. So, life is ordinary and suddenly there's this moment where it's not ordinary anymore. In this phase, the most radical experience is shock. All the known order and life path you've had ahead of you is completely taken away.

I was diagnosed with cancer July, 2019, and while I'm in very good shape now, I remember this experience clearly. The image for me, and someone shared this with me, was of being in a room and someone opened the door, pushed me out of the room, and slammed the door again. And you can never go back. Once that's happened, there's no return.

So there's a shock, and it's a shock because our old identity is torn from us. It's ripped from us. And as we go further down, we have this experience of dismemberment, and that dismemberment happens in two different ways. There are two meanings for that word. One is literally this feeling of being torn limb from limb, that the parts of us that we knew and relied on are being ripped from us, we're being torn to bits. That's one aspect of it. The other is dismemberment in that we're getting further and further from membership in our community. We're further and further from the normal life that we've been used to.
We go down here and as we go down we experience loss after loss after loss. One of the first ones is, suddenly my time is not what it was. I'm in doctor's appointments, I'm in treatment, I'm here, I'm there. Suddenly I'm reading new books, I'm changing my life. Who we were, what we used to do, is lost. There's the shock process. How do I tell people? What's going to happen now? How are people going to respond?

As we go down further and further, sometimes it comes with profound physical losses. I'm compromised in ways I wasn't, I'm in pain, I can't do what I could do, I can't drive, I can't see. Each of these losses is another aspect of dismemberment. And we go down and down and down. This arrow is important to notice because the journey has a curve in it, but the arrow is straight. As we're going down, we can only see in a straight line. We can't see around the corner. When we're here, we look, and we look down, and all we see is darkness, darkness, darkness. We think it's never going to end. There's no light. It feels like there will never be light again.

As we go down and down and down. And often, let's say in this cancer experience, the treatment is an incredible aspect of the loss and the pain and the physical compromise that comes with the treatment. It is to serve our health, but it's very difficult to endure.

People go down and down and down and it's hard, and there's loss. And at some point, in this scenario, we turn a corner where the going down stops. Usually that's the end of treatment, or coming out of the other side of recovering from treatment, where you can look around and see the world again.

Then there's a process of returning and coming up again. And it is, I don't know whether it's the inverse or the reverse or something, it's the opposite, the reciprocal of coming down. What we lost as we came down, and what we had to say goodbye to, are things that are no longer true. Maybe it's no longer true that I can ski the way I used to. Maybe it's no longer true that I can work a 40-hour week. Maybe it's no longer true that I can drive myself. I'm not the person I thought I was or I used to be. There's a huge emotional, internal identity loss.

As we come up again, we start to rebuild who we are and we start to reorient towards life. The transformative opportunity in this is that we have choices we can make as we come up. If we have been able to let go of everything on the way down, to let it go so we're not dragging it with us, really say goodbye to these things that were so dear and true to us, then as we come up, there's a little bit of a blank slate, and we get to make choices about who we are now.

Many times, a serious diagnosis is an opportunity for someone to have a whole life change. What happens is that, because the coming down was a brush with death, as people come up, they develop this fierceness about their commitment to life and their life. And as we come up, when
we can really align with this model, we start to choose things that are absolutely true for us which may not be about going back to who we were. It may be something entirely new.

As we go up, we re-member, which means we remember who we are at a soul level, remember the truth of our essence. And we make choices that serve our soul.

Just as coming down we can only see in a straight line, as we go up we can only see in a straight line. I work with people a lot who are in this situation. They've been through the fire, but they're not quite up yet. And this can be a very difficult place to be, because people are impatient. They feel like they should be back but they're not yet.

This is like all cycles of nature and processes of nature, it takes the time it takes. A huge part of the journey is being patient and following your soul's intuition as you choose who the new you you’re going to build is.

My sister has two kids and I remember the second one was maybe a year old, first one was probably three by this point. And Julie said to me, "Oh my God, I made a lasagna yesterday." And that was such a signifier. She's an incredible cook, she can juggle all sorts of things, but she was so engaged with kids that it was more than she could handle. But making lasagna was a sign, "I'm here, I'm starting to come back up."

This return to community, we know that. Down here, people say “I hit bottom.” You know what that feels like. That's the archetype speaking through us. Return to community is, "I'm back. It was intense, it was a rough journey, but I'm back." And there's this sense of peeking our head back above into the world above this dark, transformative, difficult space, and coming back.

This model, to credit it, comes from a few different places. Arnold van Gennep is an anthropologist who looked at rites of passage rituals around the world. Cultures that understood that this transition needed to be ritualized. We go through this transition developmentally from a child to an adult, from adult to an elder. And in all those processes, this is the map of the ritual process to support that. Separation, transformation, integration, that's from Gennep. Some version of those three words. He named that.

People will also know Joseph Campbell, who's a mythologist, who took that, plus some more and named this “the monomyth” or the universal story that's at the root of every myth, which is death of the old, some form of transformation, and birth of the new. All these traditional stories teach us this again and again and again. "Star Wars" is the classic expression of the hero's journey as a model.
That's where this comes from. I've put it together in this way, in a way I haven't seen before to use in this situation, but it's deeply rooted in that.

So back here, when we come back, Joseph Campbell talks about the hero's journey. The hero sails away, leaves community, goes on this complicated, difficult journey, slays his dragons, and then sails home with the treasure, the golden fleece, and returns to community. And the statement here is, "being the boon." A boon is a blessing or a gift.

What Campbell understood is that it's not the object the hero returns with that is the blessing or the gift, it's who the hero has become as they have gone through this journey. That transformation, they return as a stronger, more capable, more reliant, wiser and, in many ways, more useful, member of the community. We return as the boon.

Then we're back and we're above the line, but it's not the same ordinary it was. It's an expanded ordinary. We're bigger. We've had to get bigger by this process. And what we can navigate and experience in the world is bigger.

Then the beautiful irony and, I don't know, cyclical nature of it all is that we get to the top and then it happens again, and then it happens again, and it happens in big ways and in small ways. If we're lucky, it doesn't compound on top of itself. And sometimes losses do that and that's why they're so difficult, because we're at different places at the same time and it's harder to swim through the process.

So that's a walkthrough in that first situation. You can take a divorce through this. Instead of having the door open and being kicked through and having it slammed, you can choose, "I need a transformation in my life. "My old identity isn't big enough to hold me anymore. "I'm leaving the known and I'm going on a trip. "I'm going to quit my job." All of these things take us down into the unknown and the chaos. We burn off what's no longer true on the downhill slide and we rebuild more true to our selves.

I'll walk through it now in the experience of let's say a spouse, to someone whose spouse has died? That's another version of it. Let's say this is a slow, progressive dying, not a sudden death. Sudden deaths are particularly difficult because they happen so fast. We're way up here, fully in the ordinary, and suddenly we're catapulted down below and it is incredibly shocking. We'll talk about how the soul is shocked when the changes are too big as we go on.

Let's say, someone's getting sick. Someone hasn't been healthy and they get a cancer diagnosis. It's a huge shock. It's a shock for the person who gets a diagnosis. It's a shock for their partner. Then things start to change. The losses I've talked about as they go down and down and down.
Let's say, the person continues to get ill, they get sicker and sicker, you can't do the things you could do. Who do I have dinner with? Who's mowing the lawn while I shovel the snow?

Especially in really close spousal relationships and partnerships, we become two halves of the same brain. One person is dying, and a part of the other person is also dying.

As we go down, down, down, at this point, in this scenario, the complete death of what was is the death of the person who's dying, 6:00. The heartbreak of this process is that for the person who remains here, they go back up to 3:00 and start again.

There's another set of losses. What is it to be without them? How do I survive? Who am I? All the way down. So in these situations, you have to live this quarter of the circle, from three o'clock to six o'clock, twice.

And then people start to come up again. Choices like, "Well, I think I'm going to sell the family house and move into a condo." Or, "She was sick for so long we couldn't travel. Now I'm going to start to travel, or join a choir, or I've always wanted to take an art class." There's an upward movement.

And at some point, we return to community. Again, wiser.

This, in a way, is a way of describing what it is to develop as an elder. There's a poignancy to people who have seen hard times and who've been able to make their way through this process. Not everybody travels this. This is not an automatic pathway. This is an ideal, but it doesn't happen automatically.

We'll walk through it one more time. This time it's for the person who's dying. If we have some warning, and we're approaching our death as consciously as we can, we're able to say goodbye to the things that need to be said goodbye to, ending relationships, letting go of the things in our world, leaving things for the people we love who are behind us. All of those steps leave us clearer and clearer and clearer. Again, it's letting go of what's no longer true as we come down here. It's not who we are anymore. We're not the person we were, a living person, we're getting ready to be a dead person.

And for that person, the complete death of what was, 6:00, is the death of the physical body. But we're more than physical beings.

What happens for the person who's dying is, at this point, there's a phase shift, and their body goes back to the earth but their soul starts to "remember". It starts to reconnect with the truth of who it is. And we cross the river to the village of the ancestors, to join everyone else who's died.
There's a return to community, but that community isn't in the physical world. It's in the non-physical world. And that's what we mean when we say “rest in peace”, or that someone has been “ancestralized”, or is landed, or well-seated on the other side.

Having a body is not the operating requirement of this archetype. It exists beyond that. Folks who took my class “What Happens After We Die” will recognize that this is actually the same map we discussed there. It's a birth into one reality, a life in that reality, a death in that reality, and a birth into another reality. And then again, the cycle goes around. And just as in that map, it's not a flat circle, it's a spiral.

If you imagine this diagram to be laid flat on a table, each time we go around this, even in one lifetime, we move up a level. It's like a conical mountain. We take the same path, but we're at a different level as we do it. This transformative process is for everybody, the living, the dying, and the dead.

And what's so critical for me about this is that it's not an individual journey. At any given point, let's just say in the physical world with people who are in bodies right now, at any given point, some of us are up here, where life's okay, it's ordinary, and some of us are down here. And the people who are down here, you can imagine that they're on a pilgrimage on behalf of the rest of us, as well as on their own soul's behalf.

If they can be fully supported (and that's a huge aspect of this, is this is not a journey we can make alone, and we need lots of support, I'll talk about that.) If they're supported to make this journey, they come back and they're stronger and more capable. And just as they come back, reeling, because their child has died. If they were able to navigate this journey, they're a boon to the community. They know something about what it is to lose a child. When someone else loses their child and begins this, the people up here have skills and resources to support them.

In a way, it's not only individual consciousness that's evolving, it's our collective consciousness that's evolving. It's how we, as cultures, get stronger and more capable, by people taking these deep journeys.

It looks like a nice, tidy line diagram. It's anything but that. As we're coming down, there are little micro versions of this journey happening all the time. Something's ending, something's beginning, something's ending, something's beginning. But the larger arc is this.

And we can also be in different versions. There can be different things happening in our life at the same time, and we're in different places, in different situations. So there might be a place where you are at the bottom of the pit of the difficulty, but in some other situation, things in
your life are going pretty well, and you are actually a resource for other people. But down here, you need them to be a resource for you.

I love permaculture. It talks about needs and yields and how they balance each other. And what we have as a culture when it's met well, balances. The ones above and the ones below. We just need to align with the map.

There are a few pitfalls where we can get stuck on this process. One is, we don't want to go down. It feels too difficult. It feels like it's going to kill us. The pain and the grief, they seem unendurable. That's the experience of looking down this straight line. There is nothing but darkness.

And culturally, we're not at all supported to do that. We get two days bereavement leave. Your friends want to know when the old you is going to be back again. There's a tribe in the Pacific Northwest where, when someone experiences a close death, they get to live for a year in the ashes, which means, in the long house, their only job is to sit beside the fire. That's all they have to do because it's understood that they're on this journey. We don't make space for that, and we don't support each other for that.

When people get stuck in this process, there's some individual responsibility, but there's also a huge cultural responsibility, that we're failing people. And that is, I think, why we have so much grief and so much heartbreak.

So one of the things is that people don't want to go down, and they do everything they can not to go into those depths because they don't understand that this is actually where the healing happens. Developing the capacity to be with the pain is the healing journey.

And sometimes people get part way and stop. The classic story of someone who was divorced 20 years ago, maybe her husband's been dead for 10 of those years, and she's still angry at him that he wasn't who she needed him to be. That's getting stuck. There was an opportunity in that divorce for a transformative change. Let go of the old, become someone new. But for lots of reasons, people get stuck, and we can stay stuck in these places for a long, long time.

There are ways to get out, but it requires support and it requires help. We don't get stuck because we're recalcitrant, we get stuck because it is too hard to let go and we don't have tools. So, one example of this is, I went to a family friend's funeral and it was a cocktail party. There were no chairs and you weren't allowed to wear black. It was called a celebration of life, it wasn't called a funeral. And she had been full of life and energy and laughter, and so the intention was that the funeral was full of life and energy and laughter. And there wasn't any space for grief.
Bless them, the intention was to do what would be healing, but it's a misguided understanding of what actually heals.

This funeral was short and shallow. It didn't go deep, it just stayed on the surface. And there was no opportunity to feel this loss as a community. They wanted to just dip down, skip across and pop back up again. We'll just barely put our toe in this darkness and come back again. And it's an admirable intention but it doesn't work. Funerals don't make you sad. We are sad, and a good funeral makes space for that sadness.

The other thing that happens is that people are encouraged to jump across. That's when your friend says, "So, when are you going to start dating again?" And for people who've heard that and it's too early, it's like a punch in the stomach. It is just so unattuned to where they are in the journey. There has to be a letting go. These things will come in their own good time.

This is social pressure, and four days bereavement leave. "Okay, we want you back again, back on the capitalist assembly line, start working." Cheerful, no space for internal growth. Internal growth does not profit make. It makes internal profit and community profit, but not financial profit.

I explained this to one woman who was about here on the map. In this going down process, we need a container. We need to be held. We are coming apart, we are being dismembered. And so the there's a crucible of suffering. In alchemy, when lead is turned to gold, there's a vessel, that alchemical vessel. Starhawk says you need a pot to boil water in, you need a container in which to come undone.

Where this maps onto the natural world, of course, is the butterfly. The caterpillar's here and suddenly it leaves, or slowly, at whatever stage, it leaves community and it goes down, and the little bits of the caterpillar literally dissolve. It is the epitome of dismemberment. But if it were dissolved with no container, it'd be, I don't know what it would be, but it wouldn't be becoming a butterfly. The container is what we need.

And so we need to be held by our community, by healing practitioners, by this archetype, by our commitment to our own soul, by our spiritual practices. Those are holding structures - and key amongst those is ritual- hold us as we go down and we come back up.

I explained this to this woman and the lights just went on in her face and she said, "You know, six weeks after my husband died, I started a new relationship with one of his best friends because I just needed to be held."
There was some aspect of her that understood this cycle, that knew she needed a holding structure, but she didn't have a cultural support network that said, "Oh, you can live in the ashes for a year and do these rituals." And so she went the only place she could think, which was literally to be held.

We can get stuck on the way down, we can try and skip the underneath because we don't understand. We're taught that pain has no value, that suffering is wrong and that we should avoid it at all costs. In fact, suffering is how we grow, suffering is, and hard times are, what build us. If it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger. When we can live through these things, we become much more capable people.

The other one is trying to move up too quickly. And I talked a bit about that. You are where you are, and the art is really attuning to each stage in the process and being where we are.

I want to talk about the difference between change and transition, because this is a big aspect of what's happening here. Change is an outward event. You change residences, you change jobs, you get a divorce, you get fired, you get sick, you get old, you die, those are change. You go through puberty and you're no longer a child, you're an adolescent, then you're an adult. These are changes. These happen whether we like them or not. We have no control over those things. I mean, sometimes we do. We can choose to move houses or get divorces, but they happen. Change is an outward event.

Transition is the inward evolution that happens in response to that change. And often it's talked about in terms of metabolizing the change, or integrating what's happened, digesting. It's something that has to happen in the inside to take in and let that change grow us into someone else.

And in the developmental process, you can become an adult in body and still be an adolescent in your behavior. One way of understanding contemporary Western culture is that we don't have the rites of passage that bring people into adulthood, so we are a bit of an adolescent culture. That's another story, but it's the understanding that humans are not born, we're made, and it's the ritual practices, that make us. Just living life doesn't grow you. It's what you do inside in response to life that grows you.

So change is body, transition is soul. And when we're integrated, body and soul are together. I talked about a sudden death, you're here and suddenly you're shot down here at a change level. Someone dies. But your soul gets spiritual whiplash.

You'll hear people say this: "I just, I can't believe this has happened." "I don't know what's going on, nothing makes sense." It's that we haven't caught up in the inside. And it can happen with
good things. You win the lottery. Become a celebrity instantly. It doesn't always get integrated well, it's not always a good process.

One of the definitions of trauma is “too much too quickly”. If something happens that's more than we can assimilate. (There are other aspects of trauma too, but in this situation, that's really the one that rings.) When what happens on the outside overwhelms the ability of the inside to catch up. And coming through this and staying whole is about keeping body and soul together. And that's where rituals come in, because what rituals do is slow down what's happening on the outside so that the inside can catch up.

So, someone gets diagnosed with cancer. It's an incredible shock. Sometimes what I do with families is have a community gathering. We'll have just a community circle to talk about it. And it's one conversation, not this person talking to that person, this one that one, it's everybody together. We take this diagnosis and the person who's been diagnosed and all the people who love them, and we have a meeting, and everybody gets to look at this cancer together and gets to integrate it and catch up and talk about it.

Partly it's hearing the story of the reality of what's happening, but partly it's that people need to talk themselves. They need to say how it's impacting them. And it's a process of getting everybody on the same page, because, sometimes what happens is the person who's had the diagnosis understands how serious it is, and the rest of the world doesn't. And this gathering not only helps body and soul catch up in individual people, it helps the community catch up so that they're all in the same place. Instead of all staring at this from different directions, people stand together, and we look at this future that's coming, and we can make decisions about how to meet it together.

So there's a catching up that a ritual does. When my dad died, he had been ill for a long time. We had been with him for four or five days, the whole family. It was a very peaceful and in ways, beautiful and graceful death. I know about death, I knew he was dying, I had my hands on his shoulder and I was looking in his eyes when he took his last breath. I knew he was dead. And we kept his body for three days in the long-term care center where he was, and we bathed him and we laid him out in honor, and we had all these rituals.

I knew he was dead. And it still took me two days to get to the point where I could look over and not do a double-take and think, "Oh, he's not sleeping, he's dead." It's just the nature of the psyche that we can't assimilate big things that fast.

So that ritual, that extended period of time with his death, with his body, got us to the point, and I see this all the time with families, they get to the point where they're ready. And if a body is taken away before someone's ready, it's another wrenching and it's unnecessary. Some things
happen. The person died, we can't help that. But we don't have to keep wrenching people apart and tearing them from where they are.

What rituals do is slow things down and take this moment that might've been just a moment, and we stretch it out. Sometimes after someone dies and I go to the hospice or the hospital or their house at three in the morning, I'll do a ritual that may take two or three or four or five or six hours, that gets to the point. Say they're not keeping the body, that gets to the point where the husband or the wife can take the sheet and pull it over someone's head.

A ritual is a physical gesture and we don't do it until they're ready, because when their insides and their outsides have caught up, there's integrity, they're together. It's just one step. They've just landed that she's dead. But when you're there, then you can take the next step and the next step.

So after a death, these steps in here, I will sometimes do four or five or six rituals with the family and various members of that community between the last breath and the funeral. Because what happens if you're in the hospital room and someone dies, then what do you do? You don't know what to do, so you do something, and then at some point you go home, and then after you're gone, the transfer service comes and the body is taken away. And then you're at home. And then suddenly you're in a massive organizing process for a funeral.

And a week later, you're in a room with all of the people who are closest in your world. From the last breath to the funeral incredible jump. What the rituals do is slow things down, so we do the ritual with the sheet over the head, and then we do another one, and another one, and then the family gathering, and then a larger family gathering. People can process their grief so that by the time they get to the funeral, they're ready to receive what the funeral has to offer.

The funeral is not a grief ritual for the family, the funeral is a community ceremony where we come together on behalf of this loss and we say, "This was really important, and we hold you in this." But it's not a place for the family to experience and process their own grief. People understand the experience of being in a funeral, wide-eyed and in shock and having to be nice and make small talk when really, their soul is nowhere near being ready to do that.

So this is why I say we suffer more than we need to because we don't understand this map. Hard things happen. We can't avoid those, but if we can learn to meet them in a way that allows us to integrate each of the changes, they're not so hard.

Okay, so here's the same cycle (next images). Here's the caterpillar living its ordinary life. And suddenly it's not so ordinary anymore. It goes into the chrysalis, it dissolves. Sometimes people
talk about being in the goo. That's another way to describe being under that center line. And then it emerges as the butterfly.

The word psyche is the Greek word for soul, which is the word for butterfly. The understanding is that the nature of the soul is this transformative journey, to come back as a gift to the culture. So here is an image of the caterpillar to butterfly process, because I'd never seen this before, and the first time I saw it, I remember being quite moved. The caterpillar understands that it needs to spin a cocoon around itself. It needs to separate and be alone, but be held and build this cocoon. And it goes deep and deep, and slowly you can see this is the upward half of the cycle. You can't crack the egg to see if the chick is ready yet. You have to let this process happen. If you open this cocoon too early, the butterfly has not used its wing muscles to release itself and when it comes out, it can't survive because its wing muscles haven't developed. That difficult aspect of the journey is part of it.

Here's another other version of the same thing. "Ah, this is the life. I could stay here forever. Wait, wait, what's happening to me? Oh god, the pain, the pain, kill me now." Well, the old makes way for the new. Can you see how that's the same cycle?

And this pattern is so incredibly reliable. It's the cycle of the seasons. It's summer, everything's lovely, then things get dark, oh, and then it's winter and it feels like winter's never going to end. And then spring happens and it comes again.

If we can start to align ourselves with this cycle, we get a taste for what it's like. We know it's hard, but we know we can keep moving through it.

Here's the other version of it. We are the psyche, the soul is a butterfly.

Just a bit more about how I use this with people. I give them a handout and I walk them through it. This is where I talked about my work being as much about education as about being a healing practitioner. When people understand this, there's a penny drop, lights go on experience. And then I ask people, where are they? And people usually know, they usually know where they are. Sometimes they think they're further ahead than they are because they want to be further ahead than they are, but they're pretty good at being able to evaluate.

So once they know where they are, they know, okay, this is the place where it looks dark. That's the nature of being in this place, it looks dark. Or yes, I'm facing my death, and I can't quite see around the corner. Or maybe they can. Sometimes as people get closer and closer to death they are able to see the light that's on the other side. They have visions, they have visitations, they have dreams. That's starting to have a sense of the light of the next phase.
And so people can relax a little bit, because when we’re taught that pain is wrong, then we can’t find any reason or meaning in being in pain. But pain is part of this. It’s that the old identity isn’t big enough to hold us anymore. We have to get bigger. We have to expand our frame of meaning. We have to be able to be with the hardness of it and let it transform us.

It's a choice. We can choose to walk into it. We can't choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we meet it.

I worked with a woman whose mother was dying. She was in her mid-nineties in a long-term care center, not dying right away, but she was in her mid-nineties, so it was coming. This client said to me, and people give you the images to tell you where they are all the time. It’s amazing how people speak and use metaphoric language that describes this cycle, even if they've never heard of it. That's the archetypal power within us. And she said, "I feel like I'm running backwards on a conveyor belt." She said, "I know what's coming, but I just can't... and I'm running backwards, running backwards, running backwards."

And that image, of course, symbols like that are encoded with so much more energy, it carries so much teaching in it. She understood that the conveyor belt was going to win, that no matter how fast she ran backwards on it, it was going where it was going and her mother was going to die. You can run backwards as fast as you can, as fast as you can, and then when the conveyor belt takes you where it’s going, you slam into that wall way harder than you need to.

I say to people, "Don't have a sudden death if you don't have to." Running backwards on the conveyor belt is avoiding looking at it. People often come to me, they've been through a series of treatments and they've been fighting for life and fighting for life and it becomes clear it's not going to work. And so, if they have the wherewithal, they turn and they say, "Oh, that's where I'm going. I'm going to die. I can see where this conveyor belt is taking me. And I have no idea how to be with that process."

That's where this work comes in. There are ways to do this. There are ways to cooperate with the process. Running backwards on the conveyor belt is one approach. There's a phrase "acknowledge, accept and agree." Sometimes people don’t even want to acknowledge it. The next step is they're ready to accept it, but they're not quite agreeing with it yet. They're grudging. Agree is, "Okay, this is where the conveyor belt is taking me. I want to have as much agency and choice over what this journey is like as possible, and denying is not going to give me agency and choice. Denying is going to slam me into the wall." So I agree.

And then there must be some other A that comes after that, but it’s what happens if I actually actively engage with and collaborate with this process and say, "Yes my body's dying, but my soul has enormous opportunities for growth and healing." And when I meet clients like that and we
can work with it, there's incredible beauty that can open up when we start to name where they are in the cycle and name what the ritual practices are and name what it is as body and soul are doing a little bit of this.

And so with this woman with the conveyor belt image, we did a ceremony with her friends, and this was pre-COVID, we got together with, there were maybe 12 women friends of hers, and some whose mothers had died, some whose mothers hadn't died, but all who had mothers and all who had had people die. Already here's a community that gathers in heart around this.

I'm trying remember exactly how we did it now. We created a space on the floor where there was a threshold line, and that threshold, what was on the other side of the threshold line represented the conveyor belt. And we all sang and played instruments, made this beautiful improvisational sound magic, as this woman stood where she was and slowly stepped forward towards and eventually across the line. It probably took her five minutes to walk three feet. But what was happening was the inside and the outside were lining up. She was really feeling her mother's impending death, she was really registering what was happening, and she was making a choice to be able to be with it.

And as she crossed that line, she crossed out of the running backwards onto the conveyor belt and into, "I agree, and I'm going to act in a way that makes this as beautiful a process as it can be." There is incredible learning and growth and healing and magic that can happen if we go into a death open to what it can teach us.

People say, "Isn't it hard to work with dying people?" The beauty that I experience every day with people who are doing this because we understand the map.... it's so much harder when we don't understand this map.

Another version of this is when there's a sudden death, it's shocking. When there's a sudden death, I always recommend that people have three funerals. You still need that series of rituals leading up to the funeral, but even the community needs three funerals. You need a funeral after they die. And then you need a funeral two months later when people, are not reeling anymore and they can actually be present for what a funeral is, because with a sudden death, no matter how much preparation you do, people are still so disjointed. They just haven't caught up.

And then you do another funeral a year later. And hopefully by that third one, there's a little more alignment and people are able to catch up. The intention of each of those ceremonies would be different, but they would each be about getting people to the place where they are, and getting them caught up where they are, because it's just too fast.
I'm going to close now, but to just say that death is not a bug in the system, difficult things are not wrong. When things happen, we have an opportunity to choose our story. Rather than "This happening to me," what if we were to understand it is "happening for me?" Or what if we were to look at and say, "What is this asking of me?"

Campbell talks about the hero's call, the call to adventure, the call to grow. Here is this really hard set of cards that I've been dealt. How is this asking me to grow? And what's possible here? Then we shift from having a victim mentality, which is how it's perceived in this culture. Death happens to you, cancer kills you. Well, you can be killed by cancer and it's something done to you. Or you can say, "I have cancer and I am dying." I am the active subject in that sentence. I am choosing what is happening, and I am choosing how I'm going to die. It changes everything.

There's an author named Robert Grant who has a book called "The Way of the Wound," which I'd tell you about, but it's basically un-gettable. I happened to get a pre-copy 10 years ago, so I credit him, but it's almost impossible to get the book.

He talks about what he calls the second law of traumadynamics, which is that those who are hurt the worst can become the strongest if they're able to survive. That trauma creates this deepening potential for expanded awareness and spiritual growth. When we can see it as that, when we have this map, when we have the ritual practices, when we have the cultural and community support, that's when half of us can go down while the other half are up and we grow as individuals and as a community.

There are a number of different organizing principles that I use when I'm diagnosing and prescribing rituals, and this is one of them. This gives me tools for figuring out where people are, where they need to be, what are the practices that are going to help them get to next step? There's much more that could be said around designing rituals and how that map itself is actually a map of the ritual process. Every ritual can be mapped onto that, too. It happens at a micro level and a meta level.

I think what we'll do now is let people get together in small groups. I just want to name that this is a lot to hold. It's a lot to hold. It's a lot to hold in the context of all the loss that we're holding in this group. You're hearing what I'm saying, but everybody's running it through their own experiences and their own filters of where they are and what they've experienced. And so there's a lot of energy and intensity running in this.

And sometimes it's even hard to talk after this, because it touches so deeply in us. We think about the funerals we've been to that didn't happen this way. So just to name that there's a lot of that and also to say that, in order to really integrate this and make it part of who we are, being able to speak about it is a way to land it. Because when we name it and we hear our voice speak
it, something in our neural circuitry happens, and it lands itself deeper in us than it does when you just look at me talk about it.

< Breakout groups>

We have some time now to do some wider Q&A, and as I said, there'll be more of that afterwards, but we're going to do it old-school. Just wave your hand and I will pick you, you can unmute yourself, and we will address whatever's coming up. So, I'm curious about things that weren't clear or really anything you'd like to share or ask.

- Great, hi, thanks very much. In our last breakout, it was just brought to mind that a trick or a difficult moment is recognizing that the people in the room are all at different places and that it's not necessarily going to work to have a ritual that's going to meet the needs of all of the players. So, being able to stage it out, or step it out, or just do what you need to do for you and they might get a tickle of it around the edges. So it was a good reminder that really, we do need those three funerals, those multi-layers, depending on who the players are. Thank you for that.

- You're welcome. That's a really important point. I appreciate you raising that. Sometimes the purpose of the ritual is just to get people on the same page, and that is the purpose of the ritual. And then you can move forward when people are together.

I talked about a series of ceremonies between a death and a funeral, the first one is with the people who are at the death bed. That's the closest, closest inner circle. So there is a ceremony with the death at the deathbed and then another ceremony with the next people out and another ceremony with the next people out. And when you think of them in terms of concentric circles, you bring in the layers of people who are at that stage, and then the layers of people who are at the next stage and the next stage.

So there might be the death bed, and then I'm there again the next night, and we're helping process, and then something else, and then maybe two days later family starts flying in, and so we do a ceremony for that group, and then there's this group of friends that overlaps with family and they need a ceremony.

- My mother had been ill for quite a while and we had a small, very small, intimate family, but we had our conflicts. And so she died at home, we modeled the family deathbed similar to what you were referring to, Sarah, like under a shamanic platform of my training that I had been exposed to. And I knew that it was a good place when my neuroscience major daughter said, "Mom, is this the time to open up the door, to open the window?"
Thinking it was going to be easier than it was, we did ashes, the ashes were not interred immediately. And so we suggested a family get together, because we were all in different parts of the country. My aunt said, "Why don't you do something as the healer-identified person of our family to help us reintegrate in a family context now that we are without a significant part?"

So with such enthusiasm, I constructed this whole process, everybody could elect to be a part of a ritual process. And my brother and my uncle, the two males of the group, completely flipped out, and I felt like I was completely a failure, which obviously I wasn't, but it just became so deep rooted. So my words of support and encouragement are don't take it personally if the rituals don't resonate with everybody, because even if you're in the same family context, people are in different places of their re-integration within their cycle of initiation. Thank you.

- Yes, thank you for that. And my heart goes out to you. That sounds like it was a hard process, but I'm glad you're holding it well. There are lots of ways I could go with that.

One is what a ritual is, and the definition I have for ritual is an action that means something. It is completely not tied to what Catholics call "Bells and smells," the theatrics, the candles, or drums, or sage, or Orthodox Christian hats, whatever. All of those are parts of ritual, but they are not required. Most of the rituals that I do with families involve sitting around living room tables, and maybe a stone, or a candle, or maybe a bowl of flowers. Sometimes I'll have a Tibetan singing bowl. And if they're really radical, sometimes I can bring in rattles, but that doesn't have anything to do with how effective these rituals are.

The clients who come to me are usually into the singing bowls and rattles and all that stuff. That's their language. But often they're the only one in their family who does that. So I call it the "Thai restaurant metric." You know when you go for Thai food, and they have those little chili peppers beside the dishes, how hot is it?

I ask them to tell me in their family how many shamanic chili peppers each person in their family has. And we figure out what the lowest number of shamanic chili peppers is, and that's how we organize the ritual. Because it can be incredibly successful at any level. It's how you hold the space, it's how safe people feel. If people are pushed to chili peppers beyond where they feel safe, there's no point to the ritual. It just does not do anything useful.

And so what happens with some regularity is somebody comes to me and they love what I do, we have a conversation, they want to do this for their family, and they go back to their family and someone says, "Nope, nope, nope, nope. "Don't like her, don't like what she does, don't like her website, don't like whatever."

And I think that sometimes it's that my ritual gestures don't resonate with them, and sometimes it's that what I'm offering is to help people go into and through the fire. And sometimes people
just don't want to do that. They want to get through this death as fast as they can, as changed as little as possible, and out the other side. That's their option, that's their prerogative.

It's about why people don't choose me, but also that the rituals can be incredibly powerful and everybody could be wearing three-piece navy blue suits and sitting in a corporate boardroom. Well, I don't know, maybe it couldn't, there are some things that need to be in place. Nature helps and a beautiful place helps, but people need to feel safe and can't be pushed outside their boundaries.

When I'm facilitating rituals. I'll say, "Now find something that you hold sacred "and we're going to pray, but you're going to pray to what you hold sacred, not what I'm saying is sacred. And if you don't like what I'm saying in your head, just change the words. I give people all the permission in the world to shift things. People have already been pushed and jarred more than they can handle. Making it as safe as possible, as non-threatening, is what allows them to actually center.

And when we talked about trauma as too much change, we need to make it so that they can be safe. You don't grow when you're in your comfort zone, you grow when you're in your discomfort zone, which is the next level.

I'm making the concentric circles with my hands. You don't grow in your comfort zone, you grow in your discomfort zone, but there's a panic zone, a terror zone, that is outside that. That's too much. You don't grow out there either.

So the art is to keep everybody in their comfort zone, or even their zone of discomfort, but not in their zone of panic. That's where change can happen, where they're invited to step a little further than they might normally step, but there's no pressure and it feels incredibly safe.

It happens often with caring for bodies. A family will bring me on, and they're like, "Okay, Margaret's the spiritual one, she's brought you." "I like you, you seem like a reasonable person, but I don't know, I don't think I want to wash a dead body. That seems to weird." And fair enough. We've had lots of programming that that's scary or it's dangerous, and you can't and shouldn't push people where they aren't ready to go.

So what I say, again and again is, we'll make each decision in the moment. You don't have to decide now if you're going to want that or not, and you never have to decide in advance about what's going to happen. What happens is step-by-step. She dies and then we look around and we say, "Should we spend an hour with her body?" Then maybe we spend another hour. Then maybe it's time for more. Maybe we'll wait till the morning. And then we'll decide what we do in the morning.
Each step, people have to be really secure that they're never going to be forced to do anything they're not ready to do. Because that's where body and soul get torn apart. Where they're suddenly washing a body and it freaks them out, it's no good, no healing comes of that. But if the decisions and the choices are made in the moment, it's amazing how far people will come if they feel safe.

- Okay, so I was a doula for an unexpected death. I was on vacation, found out someone was dying, a dear friend was dying, and five of us were coming together to hold space. Five of us from completely different backgrounds, completely different religions, and I was wondering how to bring us all together symbolically.

So I found at the airport in Tucson beaded bracelets, and since her favorite color was pink, I bought five beaded bracelets in pink and handed them out to the people that were going to be holding space at different times. So it created a connection, but it also allowed them, if they wanted to pray in whatever their religion was while they held space for her, and while people were coming in and out, it was perfectly fine.

And then I read from the book when we decided to have a ceremony with everyone there, I read from the book, "The Next Place," which is very, just, "What will the next place be?" And it listed all these possibilities of wonderful things. And then I also provided space at that time for each person that was there to say what they wanted to say, pray how they wanted to pray. And it gave everybody a chance to just be who they were and reflect their relationship that they had with her. And it was just so peaceful and loving. It turned out well.

- Oh, thank you for that. That's a beautiful example of how this can work. It's a balance between structure and flow. If you have too much structure, there's no opportunity for flow, and if it's the wrong structure, things can't flow. If you have no structure, it's like a river with no banks. There's nothing to guide and shape the energy.

I had a dream once that said rituals create a channel through which energy can flow. And there's a balance between structure and flow. This archetypal map offers a structure, and an understanding of who's there and how to keep it in their comfort zone gives you a structure. And when you have the right structure, all you have to do is hold that structure and the healing flows in it.

That’s what it is to hold space, to hold a structure that can contain that energy so that the healing energy can flow.
So, this is where I can publicly thank you, Sarah. Because when you went through the death of your father and you were so gracious to share all of that with us, I watched everything that you did. I am not a death doula, I do not have that background, and I said to myself, when my aunt dies, I'm going to do the same thing for her.

And so I cared for her for 10 years. And when she died, because I was really the only family member, we bathed the body, we prayed. Auntie's body was placed on a massage table, and we had this beautiful blue cover over the massage table, her favorite color, put her in her opera clothes. And there she lay in state for three days in her own home.

I invited people over, lots of different people, people from my death cafes that come, people from all different areas, and it was really interesting to me that a couple of people that walked in said, "I don't know how to do this." And I said, "Well, this is my first time too." And, basically, I was saying, "I'm the one grieving here, you work it out."

But it was the most amazing experience I've had in my life based upon the fact that after that death, I was not traumatized. And that's what blew me away the most right there. Because of you.

- Oh, I'm very moved to hear that, and I send a thank you to my dad who played a big role in me learning to do what I do. And so glad that was helpful for you.

You've just named it so perfectly, that when we can do it in a timing that honors the soul's journey, and it's not just the soul of the living, your aunt's soul was involved in this question too, timing that honors her, we can walk through in one piece. We don't leave part of us behind. We walk through, we get to the end, and we're like, "Okay, that was a memory, but it's not a triggered, activated, raw open wound anymore."

Beautiful.

And I just want to name that you said, "I'm not a death doula." I think we can get a little bit worked up with the idea of having “had the training” or “having a business card” or anything that we think might define what is a death doula.

My vision is of a death doula in every house, in every family, in every community. A death doula is someone who supports the dying and the dead. And my invitation is not to get worked up about certifications or trainings.

Take the training you need to be able to do the thing you want to do, but that this is not something that is a specialty or an expertise. We've just forgotten how to do it, and so we need
to relearn. Some of us are learning a little bit ahead of other people. And sometimes there are hard things that you keep learning from other people, but we have all got access to this and we can all do this for each other.

Okay, we are going to wrap this up. But before we go, again, if we were in a big circle, we would have an opportunity to check out. Because if the process has been successful, we’re different, we’re changed.

I’m going to invite you in the chat to name what you’re taking away with you from here and what you’re leaving behind. You can just write taking and leaving.

So what kinds of beliefs or assumptions can you let go of? They don’t serve you anymore, you can leave them here. They’re no longer necessary. And what have you got that’s new, that will serve you? What are you taking and what are you leaving? And just pop it in the chat.


Taking ideas, leaving fear, taking flow, leaving stuckness, listening to death, taking paying attention to process, leaving love for all. Taking tenderness, leaving expectation.

Taking the second law of traumadynamics. You know, he never talked about what the first law of traumadynamics was. I was curious about that.

Taking support, leaving grief. Calm and embracing death. Leaving questions behind, they’ve all been answered. Well, I’m happy to hear that. I can imagine there will be some more questions. I certainly have more to say. Do three funerals.

Taking ancestral wisdom, leaving ego. This journey is about the death of the ego. The ego wants to be in control, wants to get it all figured out so it’ll be happy and everything will be organized and good. It’s when the ego learns that hard things happen and they actually happen for a reason.

Taking wisdom, leaving fear. Taking confirmation that everything leading up to this point is of purpose.

Leaving fear of embarking on a totally different path in life than I ever imagined. We cannot see around the corners, but our souls know and we can rely on the archetypes. This archetypal path,
this archetype type of initiation is my deepest ally in this work. I lean into it more than anything. We can trust it.

Leaving fear about not doing it right. Great, we can all let that go. Sending love to all you great people. Rituals heal.

Okay, thank you all so much. We are at 5:59, we win the timing bell.

I'm happy to stick around because there are lots of other things to talk about. It's just like pushing a button. If you give me one little thing to riff off I can do something with it. So if you're curious about anything, stick around and we will have another opportunity for some conversations.

But in the meantime, we'll close now. Goodbye to everyone, big virtual hug to you all. Thank you so much.