

art journal prompt: Telling My Grief Story One Cup at a Time

Imagine you are sitting at your kitchen table. Your favorite teapot is there, steeping your favorite tea, the steam trailing upwards. The sun is warming you while you wait for the tea to be just right. You become aware of one particular ray of sunlight spreading across your table, lighting up your empty teacup. Close your eyes and imagine that.

It is not uncommon to become overwhelmed by the enormity of our grief. Profound loss may feel wider than the sea, deeper than the Marianas Trench. Our stories are full of details of what and who we loved and lost and how, when and where. Our hearts are cracking under the pressure of all the emotions we are feeling.

Not to mention, we generally do not have just one grief story. We have many, accrued over the course of a lifetime. Each one shaping us, making its mark on our hearts, minds, memories, and bodies. And with each new grief, each old grief gets stirred up.

And so, when I say, "Tell your grief story," you might feel the words rush right out of your mind. How can you even contemplate beginning that tale? It's just too much.

Let's go back to that kitchen table. The ray of sunlight spreading across the table, your teapot and your cup.

I'd like to invite you today, and over the course of this week, to imagine that **that teapot holds all of your grief stories**. And today I invite you to pour out **just one cup**, one cup of your story. Perhaps it's just one story or part of one longer, deeper, larger story, but **only one story at a time**.

Here's why: One cup of tea, one bite-sized piece, one chapter at a time we will begin this process. It's less daunting, less overwhelming.

Make an art journal page about this **one** story. And when/if you feel ready, make another one. And another...until you feel complete.

And here's another thought: This is an opportunity. An opportunity to get to know something about your loss that maybe you haven't allowed up to the surface yet. Make sure to quiet your mind to give some space to your wordless heart. That's your intuition and your deep wisdom. And it has much to share with you. And some of that may even be about your loss, a treasure or a truth that needs to be seen.



I'd like to note that I'm NOT saying: TELL YOUR STORY WITH WORDS.

With art journaling, my intention is to always encourage you to **amplify the non-verbal part of your expression**. So, my invitation is to start this process with your wordless heart. (My #1 mantra for art journaling: Get out of your head, into your heart and onto the page.) Hold your story in your heart, let go of the images that arise in your mind, and let the colors and images guide the way. What colors are calling to you? What images jump out at you? Scribble. Fingerprint.

And...*then* use words! I'm not banning words. I'm just suggesting **you can let go of words as the only way to tell the story**.

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Start by brewing your favorite tea, pouring a cup and sitting at your kitchen table, in quiet.
- Use the visual metaphor of the teapot and teacup and see where that takes you in unravelling your story.
- Use photos of yourself and anything or anyone that you'd like to represent or honor on the page. (Don't use actual photos unless you're willing to let them go to the process, photo copies or printer copies are fine, laser prints work best.) And/or use your Me Stencil.
- Paint your page with tea. Use your teabag in the collage. Open it and glue the tea leaves on the page.
- When you're done, and if you feel up to it, go ahead and pour another cup and make another page.

Quotes to inspire you

*"We bury things so deep we no longer remember there was anything to bury.
Our bodies remember. Our neurotic states remember. But we don't."*

~ Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

~ Maya Angelou, poet

"...[E]ven though it doesn't seem possible, you can always get to know another person differently than you think you can, even if they're already dead, whether it's through someone who knew them, finding something they wrote, etc., it's never too late to get to know someone differently and even more deeply."

~ Kirsten Johnson, *filmmaker*

"It takes enormous trust and courage to allow yourself to remember."

~ Bessel Van der Kolk

worksheet: Grounding Affirmations

An affirmation is a strong, positive statement that something is already so.

~ Shakti Gawain

There are times in our grief journeys when we feel rather untethered. The feeling of floating or spinning or falling is reasonable. Our life is in transition and it's a time of indeterminacy as we reorient ourselves to the new reality.

During these times I like to make sure I am completely anchored to the earth. That's why I often begin my guided meditation with an exercise in *coming down into your body, all the way to your seat, noticing your weight in the chair*. This practice helps me come back into my body when otherwise I might be spinning out in the atmosphere, unanchored.

A meditation teacher once shared with me that in times of stress, anxiety or sadness she reassured herself with her grandmother's words, *"It's going to be okay, bubbeleh."* And as she thought those words (or even said them aloud to herself), she would wrap one arm across herself and pat herself on the shoulder, just as her grandmother had done.

Lesson: We can comfort and ground ourselves.

But what do we say when we need that help?

It's nice to have a little toolkit to dip into for this. Below, you have several lines to brainstorm some affirming sayings for yourself. It's your Go-To Grounding Affirmations list. You can even cut it off the page and put it in your wallet or backpack or up on your refrigerator. Keep it where you can refer to it...when you have one of those moments in the grocery store where you break down in tears...or when you are waking up first thing in the morning and you remember...or when something exciting or hard happens and you go to call your person to tell them, only to remember they're not there anymore.

You may have heard:

This too, shall pass.

Breathe.

Be Here Now.

You can use those...and come up with some of your own as well.

My Grounding Affirmations

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art journal prompt: Mapping My Heart

*I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow.
Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process.*

~ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Some say love is the flip side of loss. Love and loss, that's what life is all about.

When you have lost someone or something dear, love is part of the picture. Whether it was a love received and returned in kind or a love never fulfilled, love plays a part in the story.

And sometimes, the risk of that loss, the experience of the loss itself, our anticipated grief or our anger closes our heart off, shutting the door on love, sometimes even to the memories of love that carried us this far.

Our grief is a grueling journey, especially for our hearts. Like the winding roads on a map, our hearts are etched with the scars of our many loves, our many dreams, our many hopes and plans, and our many losses. Scars, like cracks, cover every inch of our grieving hearts.

Some say it is a metaphor, the broken heart. And yet, I, personally, have *felt* my heart shatter over and over again as I've grieved, remembered, and let go of my loves. So, if you ask me, hearts can truly break.

If I took my heart out and laid it on a table, spread its flesh out fully to inspect its story, I believe I would see the lines of those scars all across its surface. I would place my index finger gently on the beginning of one line and trace its path. It would intersect with another and another and as I did so I believe I would begin to see the journey unfold. The journey of my heart, my love and my loss.

What comes up for you when you trace the map of your heart's story?

Another story: My cousin, Hesh Halper, was known as the New York Romantic. For years he was famous (infamous?) for drawing chalk hearts all over Manhattan. He had quite the following. And he was, as his sister Sarah said, "...a sensitive empath who struggled to make sense of the complexities of life." Hesh threw himself off the Brooklyn Bridge on June 11, 2021 at age 41. He left behind many people who are heartbroken by his absence, and many who were not surprised. He was not an easy person to be with and yet he radiated love. A conundrum. A unique soul. A tortured being. The world is a harsh place for sensitive empaths like Hesh.

A friend wrote this: "Hesh — the New York Romantic, had the biggest heart we ever knew. It breathed out of him, on the walls, the sidewalks, anywhere he could etch it. It was a treasure map all throughout SoHo, LES, the village, these chalk hearts that mirrored the one he wore on his sleeve cascading to the streets. As if to say, we walk these streets together. We are many hearts but can be one. Many hearts, yet but one soul. Hesh slept with a blue CareBear Till he was 10. He was that CareBear embodied, a lifeguard, a healer. We admired this unabashed vulnerability; how present he was in a moment. It didn't matter if you were descended from Habsburg royalty, a celebrity A-lister, or struggling on the street — it was all the same to Hesh; you were a creature of infinite light and present possibility. You received equal care and attention. He'd give his last shirt off his back to shelter you. Hesh was a wonder force of no past, no future, just the

beauty of now. You would witness him sitting on a hydrant, holding court on Prince Street. He was both the Shakespearean fool full of wise saws and the King of black who learned them hard. Infinite energy radiated out of him, the corner of his grin and harlequin of devilish charm and angel concern. We are broken without you, Hesh. But your heart will remake us."

For more about Hesh's story: [NYTimes article](#)

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Use one of the vintage heart images as the first layer on your page.
- Use a symbolic heart shape instead. Put them all over the page.
- Hold the feeling of your loves and losses in your heart and start there, without a plan or a picture in mind.
- Use chalk or pastel and draw hearts all over your page. How does that feel?

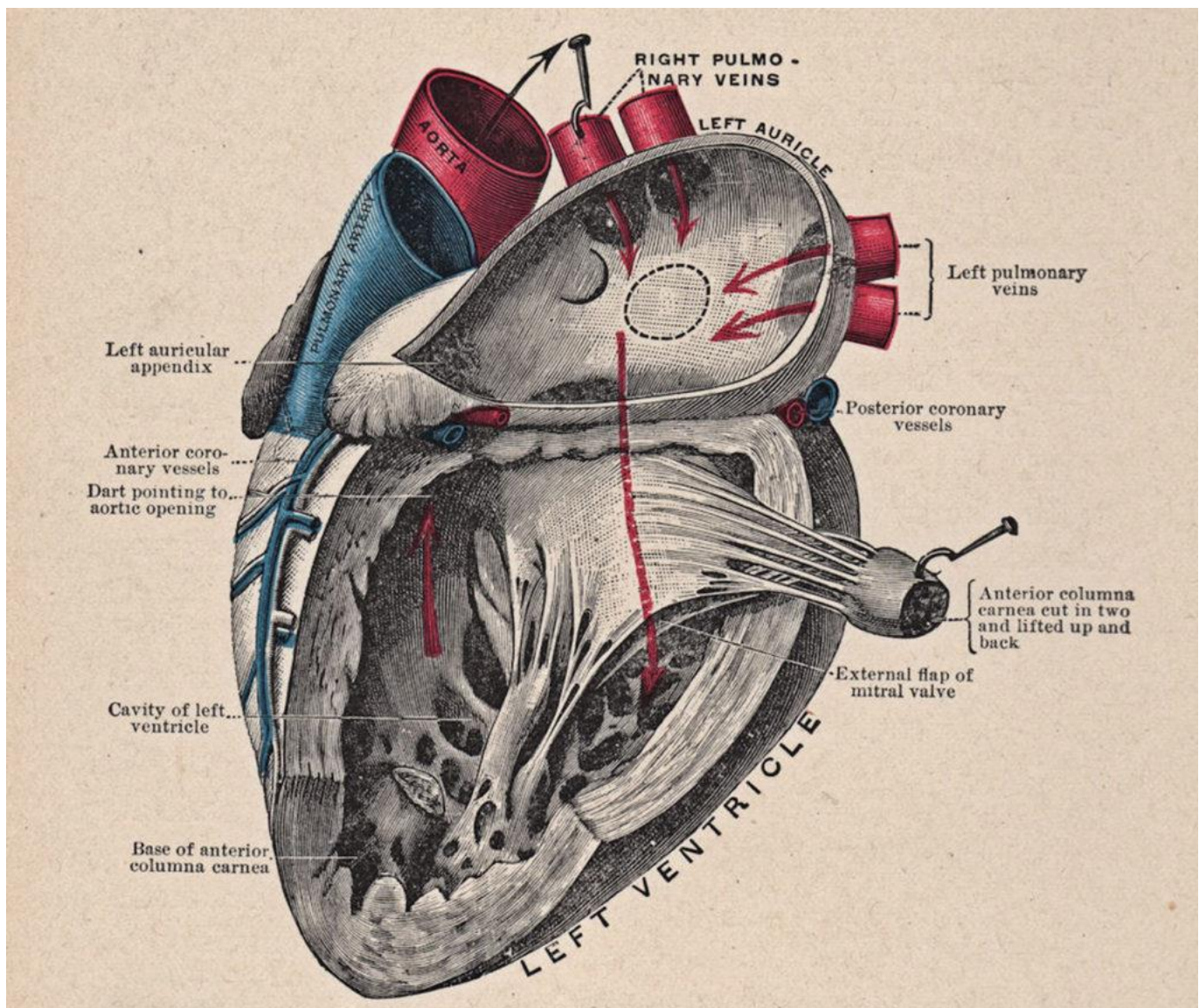


Fig. 37.

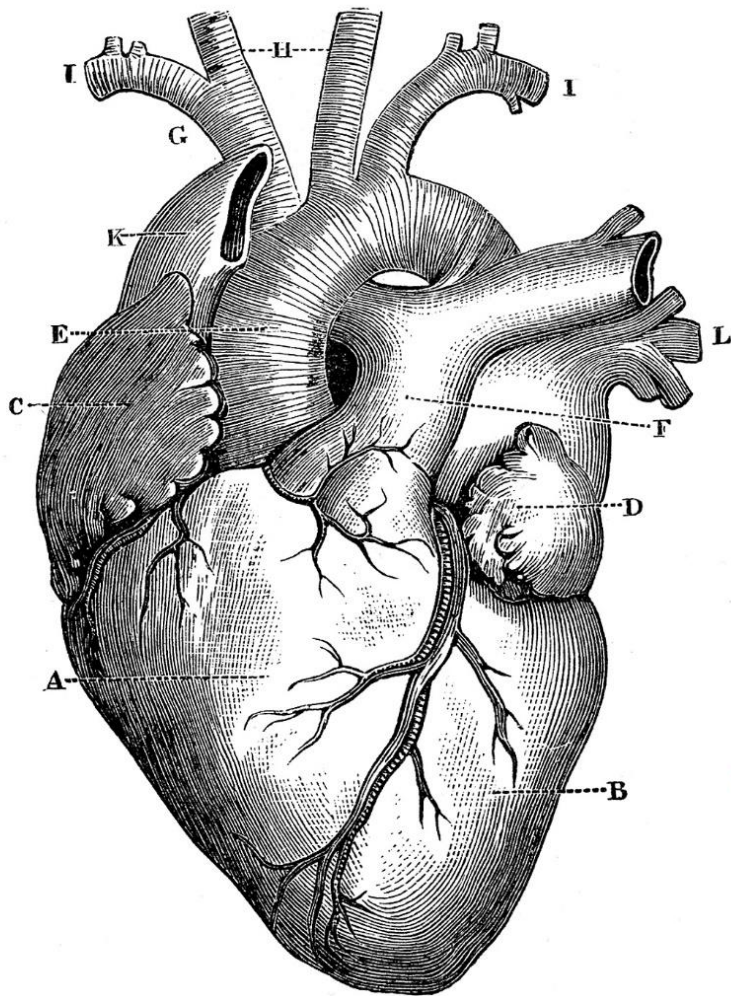
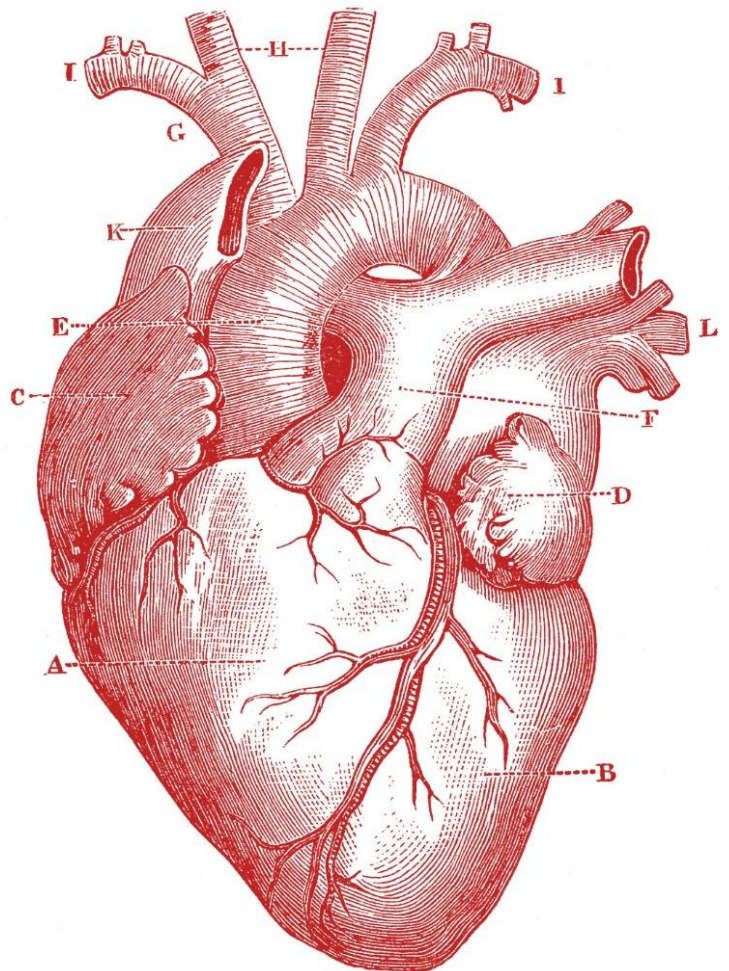


Fig. 37.



art journal prompt: Maps, an Invitation

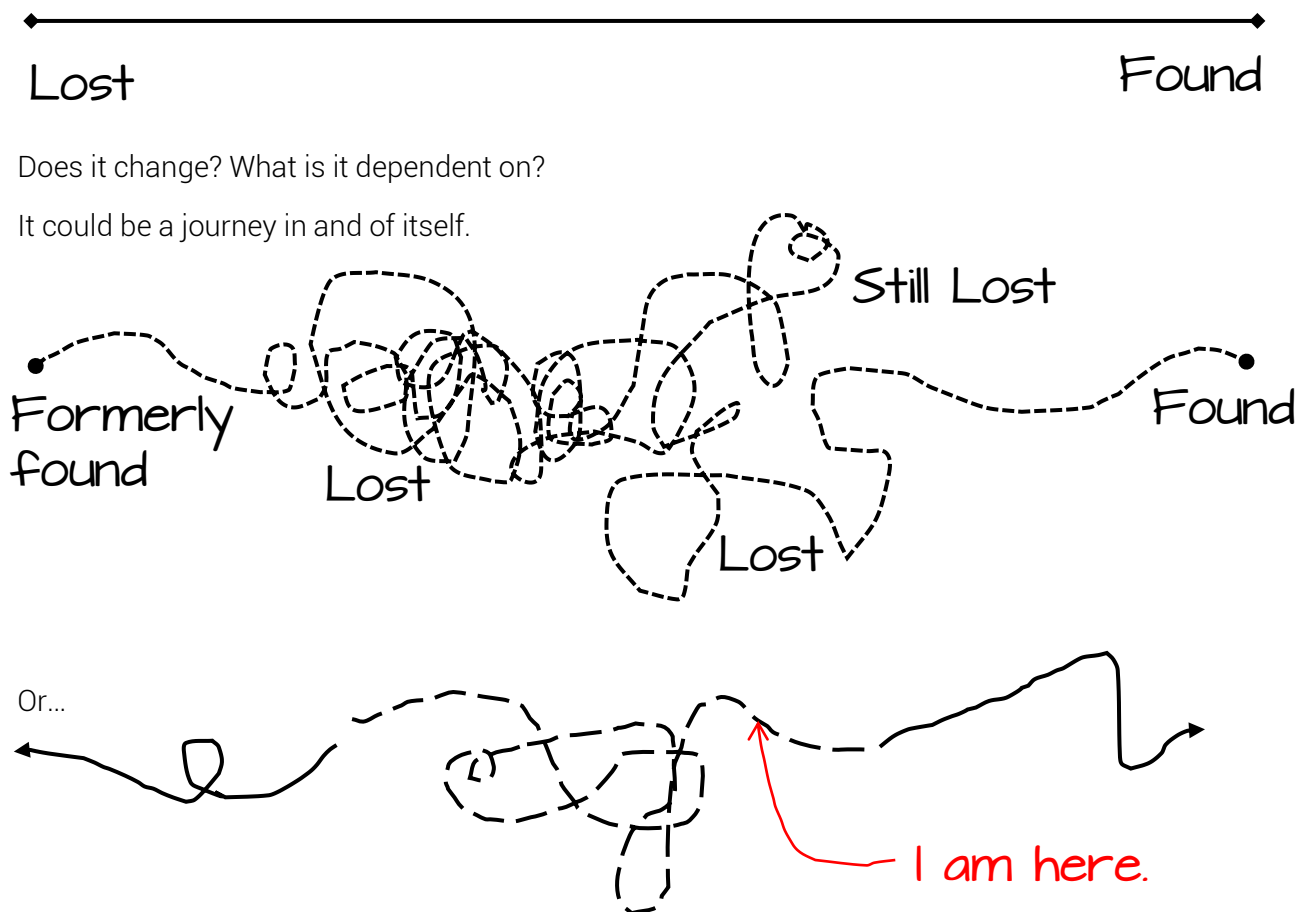
"You can't use an old map to explore a new world."

~ Albert Einstein

When we use a map we need to orient ourselves to it. We find the compass rose and locate north, south, east and west. We look for places we recognize. We find ourselves on the map, if possible ("I am here").

Using a map is a way to find ourselves. But what about being lost? Maybe that is the place to begin.

On this spectrum from lost to found, where do you place yourself?



Maps are rich with symbols. We can use maps as metaphors for all kinds of journeys into our stories about life and grief.

The Maps Resource Sheet has many ways that you could begin this creative exploration. Ask yourself:

What is intriguing me? What is inspiring ideas in me?

What speaks to me about my own experience and grief journey?

There is no one answer. No correct way to look at this. Keep yourself open to the many possibilities that may show up when you enter into your creative process.

Suggestions for approaching the page (use any or all or none!)

- First of all, be open to anything that wants to show up.
- Start with old map pages. Use them as the first layer on your art journal page.
- Draw a loose map image on your page (maybe start with something familiar, like a road map or a geographic map), holding your grief story inside your heart. What are the "places of interest" on your map? What are the mountains and valleys named?
- Me, on the map: Use your Me Stencil to put yourself on or in the map. You could also trace your body shape onto a piece of a map, cut it out and use that on the page.



Quotes to inspire you

"Getting lost was not a matter of geography so much as identity, a passionate desire, even an urgent need, to become no one and anyone, to shake off the shackles that remind you who you are, who others think you are."

~ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

"Learn your way around loneliness. Make a map of it. Sit with it, for once in your life. Welcome to the human experience."

~ Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

"True navigation begins in the human heart. It's the most important map of all."

~ Dr. Elizabeth Kapu'uwaitani Lindsey

"Regular maps have few surprises: their contour lines reveal where the Andes are and are reasonably clear. More precious, though, are the unpublished maps we make ourselves, of our city, our place, our daily world, our life; those maps of our private world we use every day."

~ Alexander McCall Smith

"To lose yourself: a voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in

what is present so that its surroundings fade away. In [Walter] Benjamin's terms, to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery."

~ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

resource sheet:

Working with the Metaphors and Symbolism of Maps

There are lots of kinds of maps.

- **Topographic map:** topology of the land, peaks and valleys, rugged, smooth, steep, flat, natural
- **Geographic map:** road map/physical map/political map showing geographic space with emphasis either on landforms, roads or political boundaries
- **Bathymetric (sonar, of the ocean floor) map:** made by using sonar to detect the topography of the floor of an ocean, pond, or lake
- **Satellite map:** a map made from satellite imagery of land features
- **Geologic strata map or cross-section:** a diagram or map showing the geologic strata of an area
- **Climate map:** depiction of prevailing weather patterns in an area
- **Current maps:** Oceanic currents

There are lots of kinds of maps, and each one is a special kind of invitation to our stories and self-discovery. Here are some examples (adapted from Patti Digh's *The Geography of Loss*):

- **Topographic map:** the landscape of your grief
- **Geographic map:** the roadmap of your grief or the political zones of your grief story
- **Bathymetric (sonar, of the ocean floor) map:** map the echoes of losses, the ocean floor of your grief
- **Satellite map:** looking at your grief from a great distance
- **Geologic map:** the layers of grief inside you, a cutaway view
- **Climate map:** the temperatures of grief within you and your life
- **Current maps:** the ebbs and flows, the push and pull and tides of grief
- **Timeline/life history map:** break into 7 year segments starting when you were born.
- **Grief map:** Leave it open to the process...actual places or invented places
- **Body map:** Map the grief as it resides in your body...where do you find/feel it? Use your Me Stencil to outline your body on a map, then mark the points where different emotions/memories reside

Let's consider some other metaphors when working with maps as our inspiration:

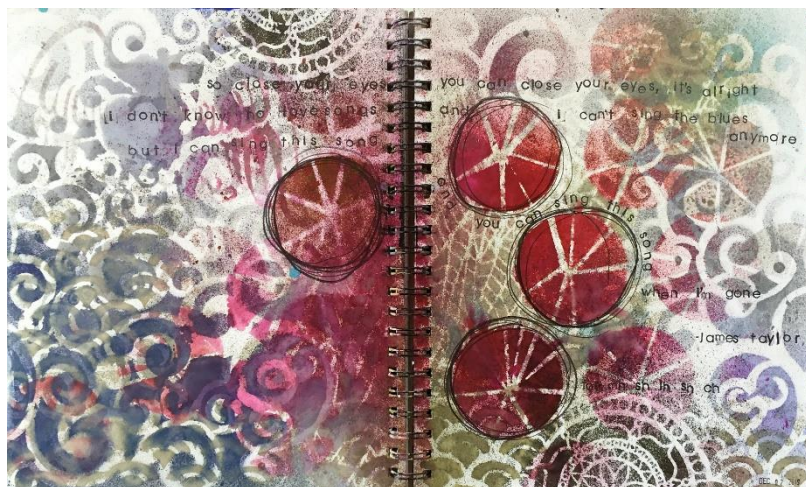
- Compass rose
- Key
- Index of cities, streets or places of interest

And how about the metaphors of geography and landforms (an abbreviated list):

- | | | | |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| • Archipelago | • Cape | • Island | • Ocean |
| • Bay | • Channel | • Isthmus | • Peninsula |
| • Beach | • Gulf | • Lake | • Plateau |
| • Canyon | • Hill | • Mountain | • River |

Keep this sheet for your reference during the program. You can always come to it for art journal inspiration.

art journal prompt: Circles, Spirals and Grief



*"A blessing is a circle of light
drawn around a person to
protect, heal and strengthen."*

~ John O'Donohue, poet

The circle as a metaphor holds so many possibilities when we are using it to explore our grief stories.

- Cycle/circle of grief that is difficult to escape
- Spiral of healing
- Spinning
- Coming full circle
- Back to a place of love
- Beginning again and again
- Embracing and comforting one another
- Cycles of life
- Overlapping circles of grief/lives
- Compounded grief
- Knot in the stomach
- Lump in the throat
- Pain in the heart
- Being a part of everything in life, the earth, the galaxy, beyond
- Circles of friends, support, family
- Seasons, years, anniversaries of births and deaths
- Completion
- Wholeness and balance
- Venn diagram (middle road) one side is life before the loss and the other side is life now, merging place is where I live in peace
- The mandala, the center of which (in Jungian terms) is the absolute seat of the self.

There are more possibilities. When you think of them, please share in our Flickr group.



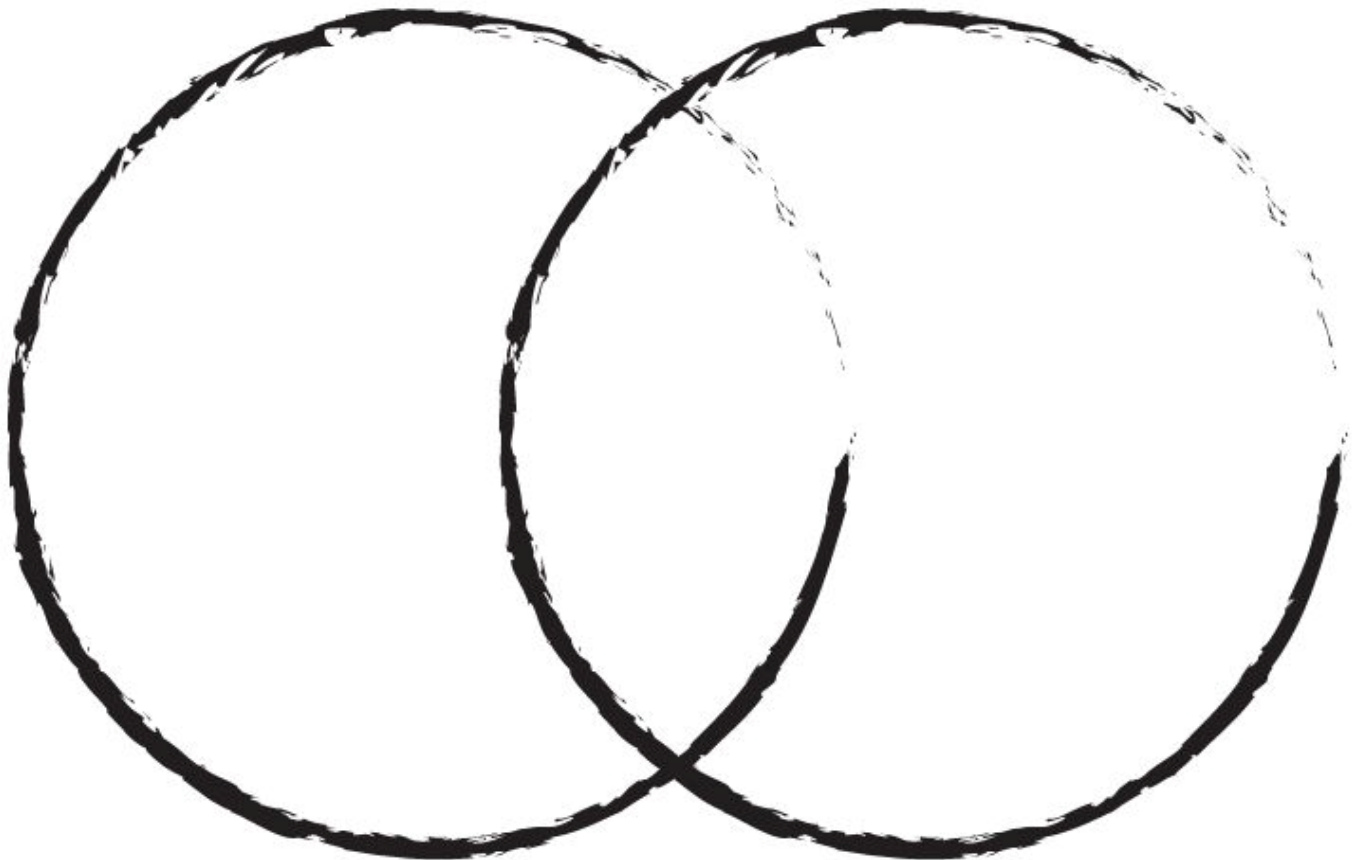
What rises up for you when you think of your grief and circles or spirals? Explore this.

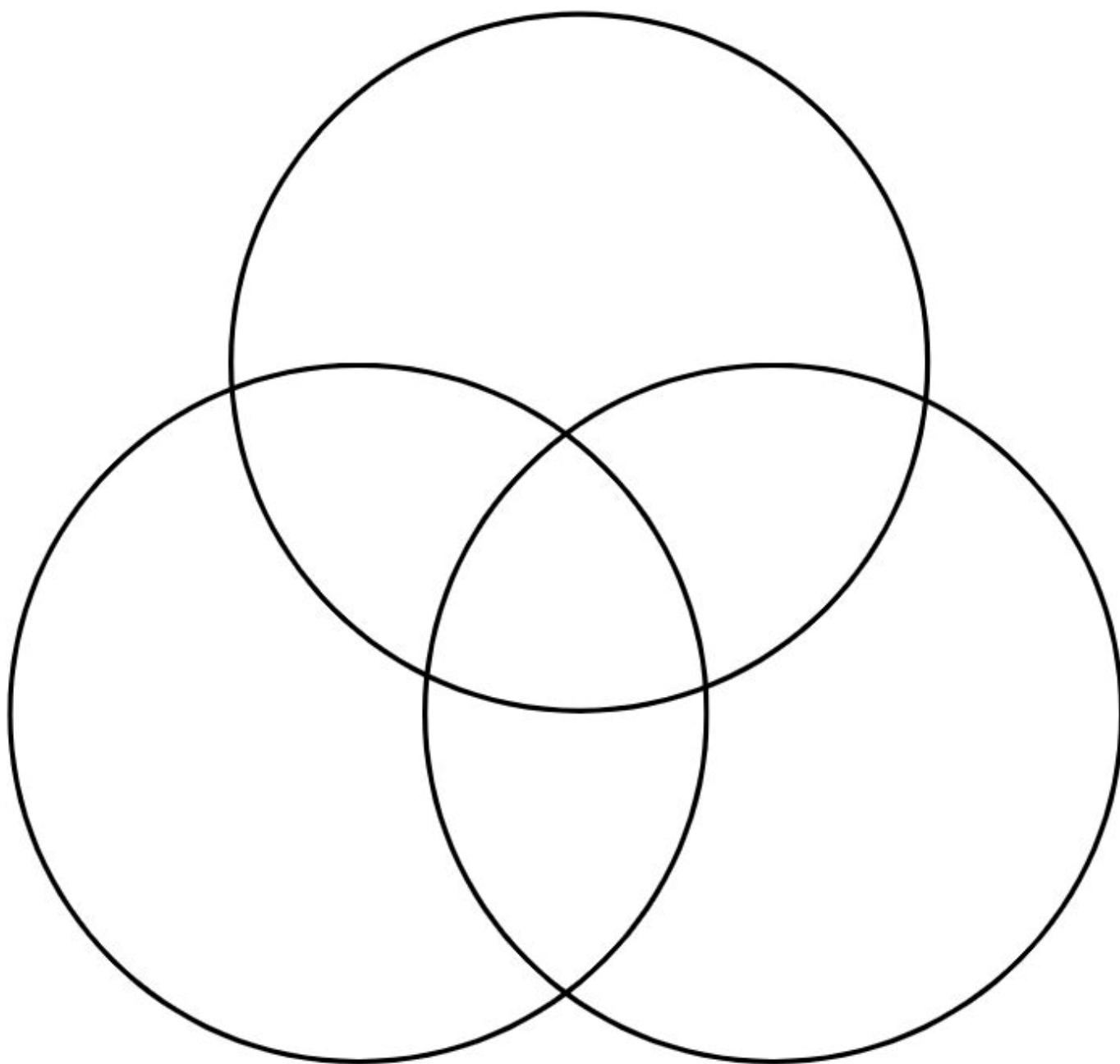
Use a variety of circles in your home as templates (such as a plate, a lid to a jar, a tape roll, a stencil) to create your page and explore your experience of grief and circles. **Don't stop at just one page. Make multiple, approaching different meanings of circles and spirals in your story.**

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Peruse the list above. Find one circle metaphor that resonates with you. Hold that in your heart as you approach the page.
- Get out a bunch of different sized circle templates (suggestions above) and draw many circles on the page. Then bring color. See where it goes. You don't have to know what you're going to express until it is ready to be expressed.
- Look through magazines to find images that are circles. Cut them out and use on the page.
- Use the following pages with Venn diagrams and a labyrinth if you choose.

Venn diagrams





Labyrinth (this one is from Chartres Cathedral)



art journal prompt: A Radius Map

Deep grief sometimes is almost like a specific location, a coordinate on a map of time. When you are standing in that forest of sorrow, you cannot imagine that you could ever find your way to a better place. But if someone can assure you that they themselves have stood in that same place, and now have moved on, sometimes this will bring hope.

~ Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

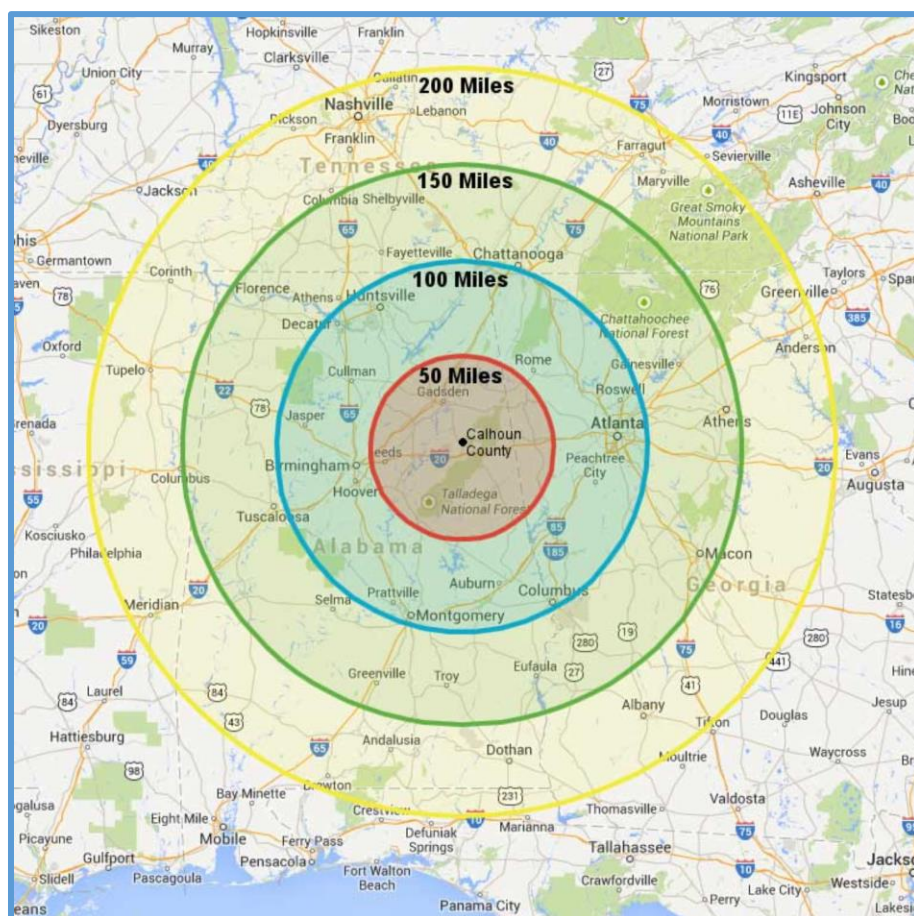
Background info

Looking back on a loss we measure our memories, our pain, our tears. We measure the number of times we stop to think about the person gone. We count the number of anniversaries they've missed. We pause to note the number of days it's been since we reached for the phone to call them.

If we're grieving a lost part of our life, we do the same kinds of calculations, only the epicenter is the event or the day things changed or the *time before* it all changed.

In some ways, we can think of this measuring like the ever-expanding radius of distance measured from a point on a map.

A radius map looks like this:



A radius map can help us reflect on how things have changed in our lives (and how things have not changed) since our loss.

What is your distance from your loss or losses?

What do you measure in ever-widening circles from the epicenter of your loss?

What has changed with time/distance? What has stayed the same?

Measure the distance with a circle radius map.

One way to approach the page

1. Start with a layer of old maps as a background.
2. Get your circle templates together and arrange by size.
3. Decide where your epicenter on the map will be.
4. Mark and label the epicenter.
5. Trace circles around it, getting bigger with each one.
6. Place points on the circles and label them with whatever feels right.

NOTE: The points on the circles closest to the epicenter will (likely) be things you did or thought about or experienced more frequently when the loss was fresher. The points on the circles farther from the center will mark experiences and thoughts you've had as time has gone by.

Use the space below to take some notes about what you might put in your radius rings.

art journal prompt: Telling the Story Again and Again

I was walking the dogs in the park when a couple recognized Tim and Joe and came up to ask how Patti was doing, saying they hadn't seen her in months. I explained why. They were stunned, saying they saw her every morning in the park, couldn't believe that someone so full of life could be gone. I was reserved, stoic, absorbing their shock.

It has been a while since I last had to deliver this news, and it is harder to plunge into the intensity of it, to share the strength of their grieving. I don't know these people but within seconds we are all plunged together into this raw, overwhelming emotion.

The next day, I got a card from them: "We can honestly say she was the bright spot in our day and an inspiration. We looked forward to seeing her every morning."

Me, too.

~Danny Gregory, *A Kiss Before You Go*

Background info

Another kind of circle/cycle/spiral of our grief

A reality of our life is that we tell our story of loss over and over.

Sometimes, it is a cathartic act. The telling is a way of reliving the time before the loss. Or it's a way of being seen around the loss, including the enormity of the loss. Sometimes, telling our story is a way to make it feel more real to us (there is so much about grief that puts us into an altered space), grounding us in the truth of the story.

And yet the cycling around to retell the story again and again can be very hard. A reopening of the wound. A plunging back into the raw, overwhelming emotions, as Danny Gregory says in his book about surviving his wife's death, *A Kiss Before You Go*.

There can be both beauty and pain in the retelling. It can be both something we want to avoid and something we long for.

Have you had this experience? How has it landed with you?

What do you want to express about the retelling?

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Use circle forms to begin this page.
- Tell the story again but from a different perspective. What comes up?
- Do you feel caught in a vortex or spiral, an emotional tornado? Explore the spiraling of the retelling with spirals on the page.
- Put yourself in the spiral.

art journal prompt: **Body Map of My Grief**

You feel the loss of the body of your person in your body...How could it be otherwise?

~ Rebecca Soffer, *The Modern Loss Handbook*

Background info

Grief shows up and is held in the body. Even though so much of our emotional experience is thoughts, every emotion we experience, we also experience in our bodies. I invite you to consider your body as a map of your experience.

If we think of our bodies as maps, where on our body map do our emotions exist?

- What is the physical longitude and latitude of each emotion?
- What takes up residence in the head, the heart, the belly, the pelvis, the hands, the feet?
- And how do they connect?
- What are the pathways between these Points of Interest and our stories?

As you locate the different emotions in your body, consider the stories that are associated with each one.

- Are there ways that these stories trace a path in your life?
- Or do you experience them as separate, discrete events/feelings?

(There is no right or wrong way to approach this, by the way.)

Explore your body as a map and find a way to tell one part of your grief story with that.

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Use real paper maps as the background or a layer on your page
- Use your Me Stencil or the body outline on the next page to create your body image
- Use a photo of a naked body (yours or someone else's...here is a fantastic resource for that: www.modelsociety.com)
- Use your nondominant hand to draw a simple outline of your body
- Use different colors to express different emotions felt in the body.

Quotes to inspire you

"Storing your feelings does not work. The energy of those emotions does not go away. Feelings will just hang around until we acknowledge them—and where they hang out is in the body. It's the only closet we have. So, we may park all of some of our feelings there in storage lockers called body parts for years on end, but eventually they will burst out in the language of the body: physical sensations, aches, pains, low energy, and illness (either chronic or acute)."

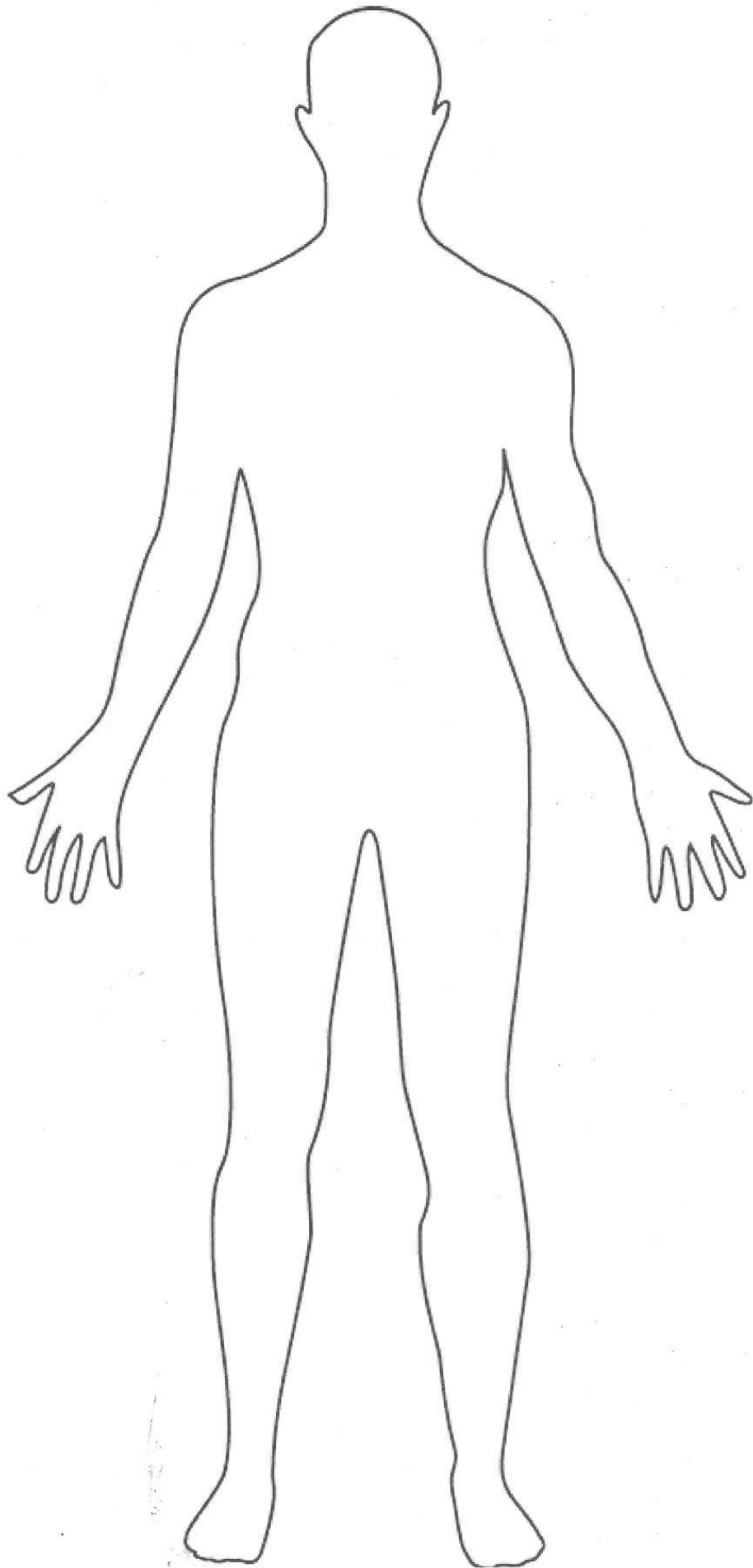
~ Lucia Capacchione, PhD

"To have a soul separate from the body is to have a body separate from other bodies."

~ Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body*

"We experience our lives through our bodies whether we are aware of it or not."

~ Tara Brach, *Radical Acceptance*



art journal prompt:

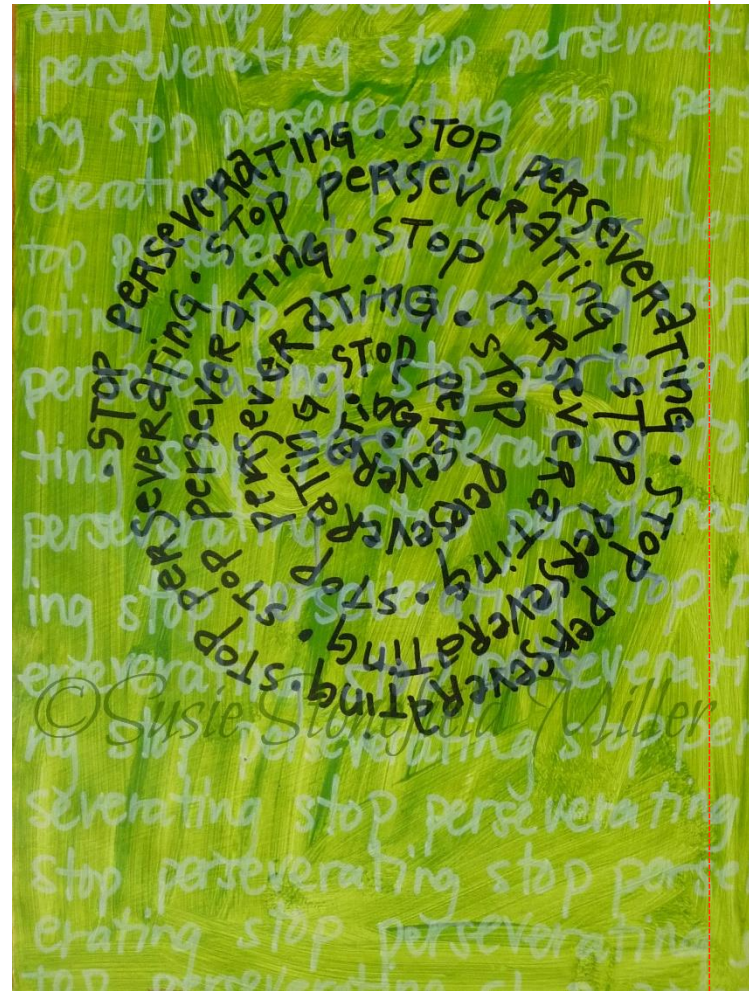
Coming Home to the Body

When we bring our mind back to our body we come home. We could consider this state as our true home. This home inside of us is a home no one can take away from us, and it cannot be damaged or destroyed. No matter what happens around us, if we can find this home inside of us, we are always safe.

~ Kaira Jewel Lingo, dharma teacher and student of
Thich Nhat Hanh

Background info

During emotionally and physically challenging times we can get so tangled in the weeds of our thoughts that we forget we have bodies. When we are suffering, in pain, and/or going through emotionally charged times we get easily caught up in our thoughts: our worries, fantasies, memories, fears, and more. We are all about those perseverating questions and those disturbing answers.



But it's in those times, in particular, that returning **home** to our bodies is so helpful.

It's understandable, of course, that in a time of grief we are distracted by our thoughts. In those times our thoughts are so painful, formidable, and uncomfortable. To avoid those thoughts, we tend to go to other thoughts, hoping the latter will drown out the former. Does that happen? Sometimes, yes. But, what also tends to happen is our anxiety, sadness, fear, disconnectedness, loneliness, and irritability also show up and *increase*.

The more we are caught up in those distressing thoughts, the more we are disconnected from **home**.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the great Zen Buddhist teacher, taught that being present in the moment was the way to come **home** to one's body.

*There is nowhere we need to run to or be, other than right here in the present moment. And we experience ourselves at **home**, no longer looking for some refuge outside of us, in some other place or time, when we touch the truth that all that we long for and search after is here inside of us.*

~ Kaira Jewel Lingo

A mindfulness practice can help us come back to ourselves. Just the simple act of breathing can remind us that we actually exist inside our bodies, rather than inside our thoughts. Noticing that we are not in danger, giving ourselves compassion, and becoming aware of exactly where we are in the moment can help us to land at home.

The invitation today is to consider and try out some of the "Coming Home to Your Body" practices outlined below and then, to art journal about how you felt before, during and after.

Consider the way your thoughts have taken you away from home, from your body.

Are you feeling a desire to come back home?

What does it feel like when you've abandoned your home?

What does it feel like in your body when you come back?

1. Mindful breathing practice

[Click here to listen to a mindful breathing practice to help you get into your breath and into your body.](#)

2. Engage your senses: Three things

Look around you. Notice three things you can see in your space. Listen. Notice three things you hear. Inhale through your nose. Notice three smells. Touch something. Notice three textures in your environment.

3. Take a soothing bath or shower

Make time for a bath with Epsom salts, fragrant essential oils (if you like them), candles, bubbles. Scrub your body with a washcloth to bring your attention to your skin and limbs. When you get out, take your time with drying off and then applying your favorite lotion all over. Arrange your schedule so you can go into a relaxing next activity, either rest or sleep. Try not to have to jump back into a busy day.

4. Try a stress release movement exercise

[Click here to learn a qigong technique to release stress.](#)

5. Move your body in ways that feel good

Dance, sway, exercise, take a walk or a hike, swim. You know what your body likes to do, so go do that. Pay attention to how you feel before, during and after.

A couple more quotes...

"Here's what we sometimes forget: we are not pure intellect locked in a physical cage, capable of controlling everything that goes on in our nervous system if we just use enough rational thought. We are embodied beings. Though we talk about our bodies as if they were separate from our minds, they are not.

We bring our bodies with us. Always."

~ MC McDonald, *Unbroken: The Trauma Response is Never Wrong*

"All of us to some degree disconnect from our bodies, but when we live bound in fear of perceived ever-present danger, finding our way back can be a long and delicate process."

~ Tara Brach, *Radical Acceptance*

art journal prompt: Tears

*"Tears are the silent language
of grief."*

~ Voltaire

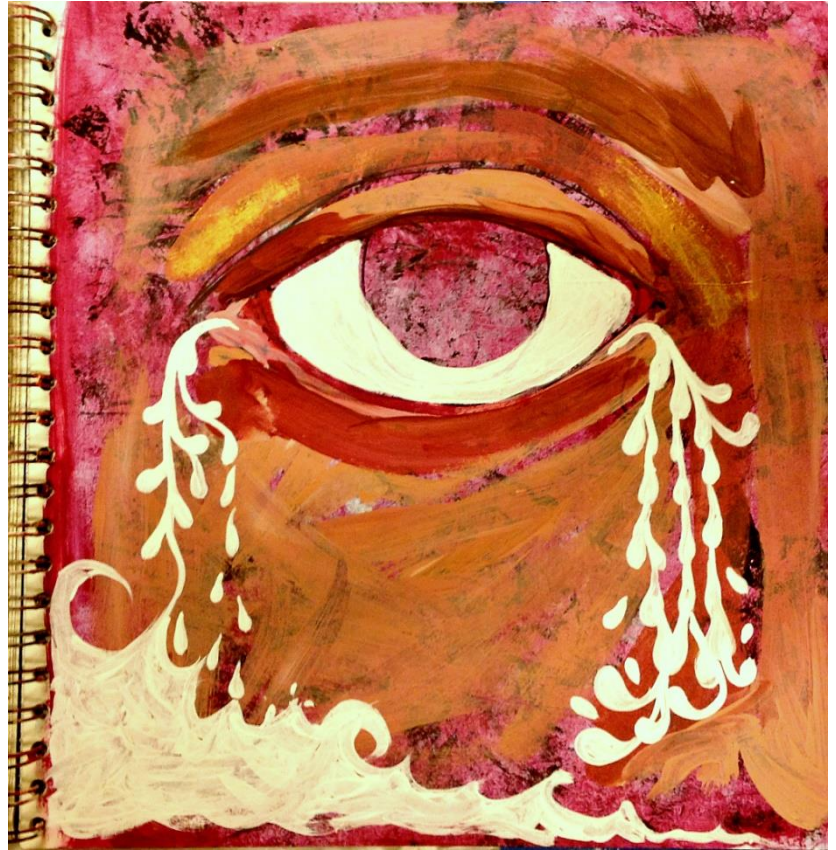
Background info

Tears. When we think of grief, we think of tears.

Tears are the emblem of sadness.

They are also a stress reliever, a kind of emotional release valve unleashing sadness, frustration, grief, anxiety, and more.

For some of us, our tears flowed freely when we began our mourning. For some, the tears never came. And for others, our tears are still coming.



Tears and how many we shed are not a measure of our sadness or the depth of our love or loss. They are just a natural, biological expression of our emotions.

Jurian Hughes, faculty member of the Kripalu School of Yoga says, "The physical act of crying or laughing activates the energy centers. We're using the respiratory, abdominal, and diaphragm muscles—the heart chakra and the solar plexus area, or third chakra, which is the center of communication, power, and joy." Additionally, these tears, inspired by emotion, are full of stress hormones that get excreted from the body when crying. A deep benefit.

As you navigate your journey of grief, tears—or their absence—have been an element of your story.

I invite you to give yourself some extra love around your tears. And if they come up while you work on this prompt, hug yourself a little tighter.

"Tears are words that need to be written."

~ Paulo Coelho, author

Let your tears be your inspiration today.

How have tears felt, shown up and affected your grief journey?

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Use watercolors or spray inks. Drip or splatter the watery paint onto your page.
- Turn on some sad music. Dance, move and then paint your tears onto the page.
- What **water metaphors** feel resonant to you? Start with one of those (the ocean, a waterfall, a dam breaking, etc.).
- Get a soft blanket or large shawl. Wrap yourself in that like a big hug. Focus on your grief and let the tears flow. As you cry, pull the shawl tighter around yourself. Lean into any movement that wants to come forth. Continue to focus on letting go, releasing, and inviting in your tears. When you feel complete, open your art journal and see what wants to come forth on the page.

Quotes to inspire you

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition and of unspeakable love."

~ Washington Irving, author

"I love talking about her, by the way, so if I cry, it's only a beautiful thing. This is all the unexpressed love, the grief that will remain with us until we pass because we never get enough time with each other, no matter if someone lives till 60, 15, or 99... So I hope this grief stays with me because it's all the unexpressed love that I didn't get to tell her. And I told her every day. We all told her every day. She was the best of us."

~ Andrew Garfield, actor

"But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer. Only very few realized that."

~ Viktor Frankel, psychologist and Holocaust survivor

"But a mermaid has no tears, and therefore she suffers so much more."

~ Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid*

"It is such a mysterious place, the land of tears."

~ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

"Every time we make the decision to love someone, we open ourselves to great suffering, because those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. The greatest pain comes from leaving. When the child leaves home, when the husband or wife leaves for a long period of time or for good, when the beloved friend departs to another country or dies ... the pain of the leaving can tear us apart."

Still, if we want to avoid the suffering of leaving, we will never experience the joy of loving. And love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking."

~ Henri Nouwen, priest and author

"You cannot die of grief, though it feels as if you can. A heart does not actually break, though sometimes your chest aches as if it is breaking. Grief dims with time. It is the way of things. There comes a day when you smile again, and you feel like a traitor. How dare I feel happy. How dare I be glad in a world where my father is no more. And then you cry fresh tears, because you do not miss him as much as you once did, and giving up your grief is another kind of death."

~ Laurell K. Hamilton, author

"The sea is nothing but a library of all the tears in history."

~ Lemony Snicket, author

worksheet: Body Care Practices

This week we are focusing on our bodies and our bodily experience of grieving. This worksheet offers several invitations to turn your attention to your body.

Background info

We live in our bodies. Or do we? Even though we know we'd be nowhere without our bodies, we tend to go through life up in our minds, disconnected from our "sacks of flesh."

Can't live with it, can't live without it.

And yet.

And yet that disconnection that happens is a survival mechanism. Removing our awareness of our body experience "helps" us to **not** feel...when feeling feels overwhelming and terrifying in its enormity

Ultimately, when we come to the work, the work of grieving, ready to dip our toes in or even dive in fully, we come to it because we become aware of the depth of our disconnection. And that disconnection feels off, or our longing for connection to our bodies wins out.

But how do we access our body experience?

One method is what you've already begun to do...art journaling, authentic movement, sharing of your stories. Getting out of your head, into your heart and onto the page. That's the best first step. For some folks that is the key that unlocks the door to their feelings and body experience.

If you want to do more to connect with your body there are some suggestions below. Feel free to make them daily or weekly practices. The more you give yourself invitations to feel, likely the more you *will* feel. And with that will be release, relief and new insights.

Try This (live links are highlighted):

- **Breathe:** Get some [dot stickers](#) at an office supply store and place about 8 around your home (over your front door, on the fridge, on your computer screen, on your bathroom mirror, for example).

Every time you notice one, take the opportunity to breathe, deeply. Truly pause, breathe in slowly and deeply, and then breathe out slowly and fully. Do this 3-5 times.

- **Body Scan Meditation:** A meditative body scan is a fantastic way to get grounded in your body experience. Here's a link to Tara Brach's Living Presence Body Scan meditation. It's about 11 minutes long and worth your time! Feel free to use it every day this week or as often as you'd like. Also, use it before art journaling. [Living Presence Body Scan Guided Meditation](#)
- **Pat Down:** When was the last time you felt your body? What I mean is, when was the last time you spent time touching and getting to know each inch of your **self** in a loving and exploratory way? Probably, not in a long time. Well, let's change that!

Try this: Sit on a chair, couch or your bed. Get comfortable. Now, take your hands and slowly pat yourself on top of your head, then on your ears, then your face, etc., down your whole body to your toes. Spend as much time as you'd like doing this and do it multiple times this week, if you'd like.

As much as possible, turn the volume down on your thoughts and be present in each part of the hand on each inch of your body.

- **Light a candle** for yourself and say a prayer or an intention
- **Pull an oracle or tarot card** daily and journal about it
- Review your **grounding affirmations**
- **Drink water**, keep hydrated
- **Take a bath** by candlelight with Epsom salts and essential oils
- **Get a massage or soak in a hot tub or sauna**, and make an appointment to do it again
- **Go to sleep earlier** (and practice good sleep hygiene) nightly
- **Give yourself TIME**...to rest, to play, to make art, to feel whatever comes up...
- **Explore qigong, yoga, tai chi** and other movement practices that help you get into your body
- **Take a walk**
- **Get out in nature**

More ideas or personal practices that you'd like to share with our circle? Head to the Flickr group and add them to the list!

Journal about this. What practices did you try? How did they feel? How do you feel more or less connected to your body now?

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art journal prompt: Rituals and My Grief

"Entrances to holiness are everywhere. The possibility of ascent is all the time, even at unlikely times and through unlikely places. There is no place on earth without the Presence."

~ Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

Background info

Rituals are opportunities to make a distinction between the day to day part of our lives and the holy.

Even if you're not a spiritual person, rituals can bring attention to moments, events or feelings that might get bypassed or trivialized. Rituals offer us opportunities to pause to notice and create order in a chaotic world.

For this week's art journaling here are a few invitations:

- Think about the rituals you've engaged in, if any, since your grief journey began. Hold those in your heart and body and see what comes up about them on the page.
- Think about aspects of your grief journey that are calling for some ritual. Use your art journal to explore what to put into a ritual.
- After you create a ritual for your grief journey, art journal about the experience.
- Create some art to put on your grief journey altar.

Are you feeling resistance to this whole theme? Are you feeling uninspired or uncomfortable? THAT is a fantastic place to work from! You don't have to embrace this. Be curious about what pushes you away from this topic. Art journal about that!

Suggestions for Approaching the Page

- Look at the lists on the Ritual and Altar worksheets. Let some of those lists inspire images on the page.
- Take poetry or other readings/writings used in your rituals and use them on the page.
- Feeling resistance? Start with authentic movement. Feel into what comes to the surface and art journal about that!
- Start from a completely open place and see what comes up.



Incorporating Maps into the Page

- Thinking about your grief journey, consider where your rituals took you (for example, from isolated to held in community or from afraid to experience an anniversary to having a deeply meaningful time reflecting and remembering on a specific date) and use maps to help represent that.
- Make a **geologic/cutaway map** of a grief ritual to represent the different layers of experience that you had going through that process.
- Make a **climate map** of the temperatures of grief in relationship to a ritual.
- Make a **chronology or timeline map** chronicling your grief rituals on your journey.
- Make a **satellite map** illustrating your grief journey and rituals from a great distance.
- Look at other maps from the maps lesson (Week 2) to see what sparks your imagination.

worksheet: Creating Your Own Ritual

Rituals maintain the world's holiness. Knowing that everything we do, no matter how simple, has a halo of imagination around it and can serve the soul enriches life and makes the things around us more precious, more worthy of our protection and care.

~ Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*

In our grief journeys there are many moments and possibilities to honor and mark with ritual.

Consider your journey and what you have already experienced:

- A loss
- A transition
- A change of circumstances
- And more...

Consider the future and what you know you will encounter:

- Anniversaries (birthdays, death-days, wedding anniversaries, diagnosis anniversaries, etc.)
- Starting new relationships
- Moving
- Letting go of their belongings
- And more...

Consider the goal of your ritual:

- To help me to let go
- To help me to say goodbye
- To help me to mark a particular date (anniversary, for example) or time period (a month, year or decade since the death/ending/loss)
- To help me honor the memory of someone
- To help me honor myself (having survived a particular experience, time period or life change, for example)

Consider the elements of rituals you want to include:

- Light candles
- Say a prayer, poem or blessing
- Meditate



- Listen to or sing meaningful music
- Make an altar
- Ring a bell or Tibetan singing bowl
- Light a sage smudge stick or incense

***NOTE:** The time frame for this activity is **the next four weeks**. Don't feel any pressure to come up with (and implement) your ritual in one week. Take your time gathering materials, writing, ideas, and then make a date for your ritual. Take some pictures, if possible, to aid sharing and remembering, and also to use on an art journal page, if desired. When you are ready to share your ritual experience/s, we will welcome that in our circles!

Consider some additional steps you can include to create a more sacred and impactful ceremony:

- Choose the location of your ritual with intention
- Ask dear friends to witness or participate in it with you
- Take a purifying bath beforehand
- Use special symbols or objects in your ritual: elements of nature (feathers, eggs, nests, leaves, seeds, dried flowers, rocks, crystals, etc.)
- Include a personal power symbol or talisman
- Be playful: use bubbles, glitter, or costume to bring lightness to your ceremony

Consider crafting a special beginning or ending:

- Light a candle. Burn sage or incense.
- Use music, meditation, rattles, dancing, drumming, or a Tibetan singing bowl to announce the opening of the ceremony.
- Create a sacred space using rocks or candles, scarves or flowers laid in a circle or at the opening to a space. *(In ancient rituals, a circle was formed and the space outside the circle was swept clean, sealing the circle and creating a line of demarcation between that sacred space and the rest of the world.)*
- Blow out a candle, give thanks aloud, sing a closing song, walk back through the entrance that began the ritual, etc.

A place to take some notes...

What occasion/event/person are you marking with this ritual?

What goal/s do you have for your ritual?

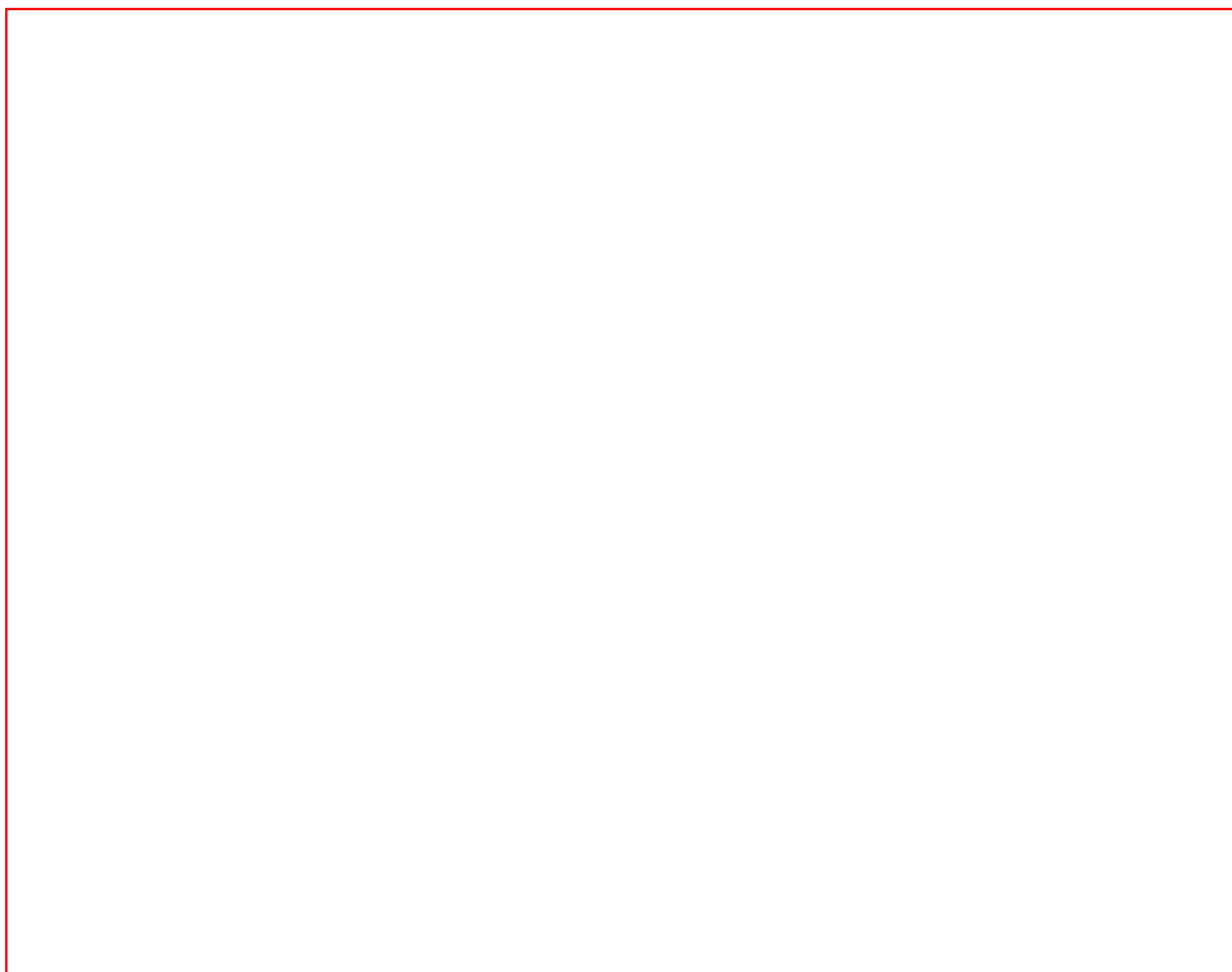
Where would you like to do it?

Who would you like to be there?

When would you like to do it?



What elements would you like to include in it?



How would you like to OPEN the ritual?

How would you like to CLOSE the ritual?

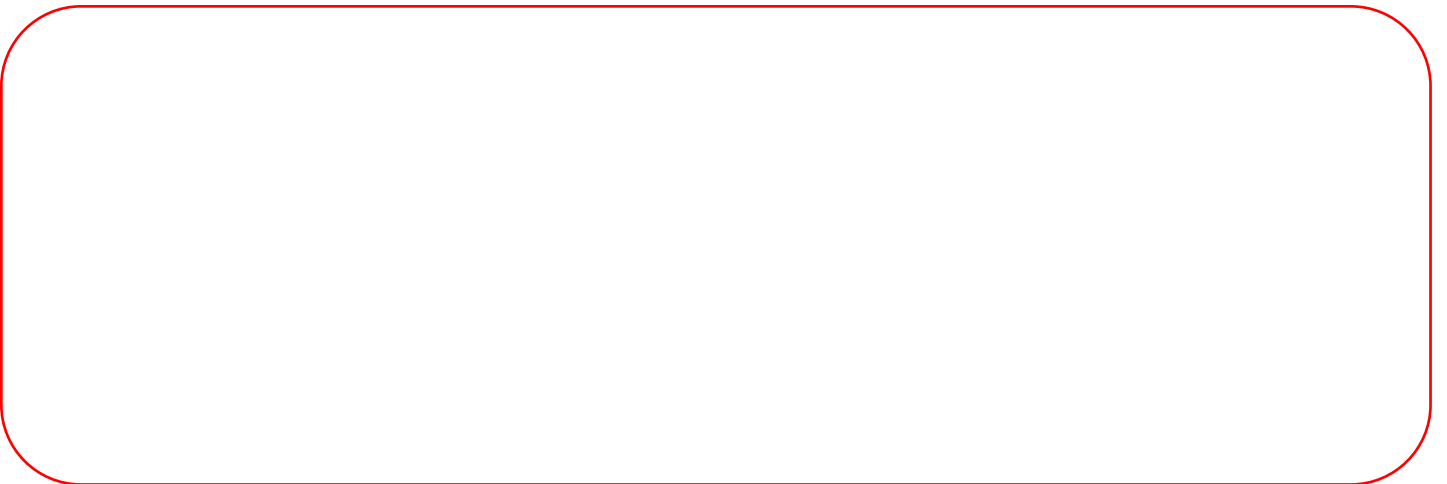
Anything else you'd like to include in your planning/brainstorming.

Here are some questions to consider:

- What intention do I want to bring to my altar?




- Where is a special place in my home that can hold this altar?
Shelf, table, ledge, counter, etc.



- What elements do I want to include in my altar?



- Do I want to create a *wabi-sabi* altar (something more ephemeral, perhaps in nature) or a more permanent altar?



Once you've created your altar, I invite you to...

- Meditate and/or pray in front of your altar
- Journal in front of and in response to your altar
- Do some authentic movement in front of your altar
- Take a photo of it and share with the group on Flickr or in our live calls.

What comes up that surprises you? What comes up that moves you? What comes up that feels like resistance for you?

worksheet: Letting Go Ritual

In Blackwater Woods

Mary Oliver

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away
over
the blue shoulders

of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is

nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned

in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side

is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world

you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it

against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to
let it go,
to let it go.

Background info

Ritual: the symbolic behaviors we perform before, during, and after a meaningful event

According to Scientific American magazine, "Rituals performed after experiencing losses – from loved ones to lotteries – do alleviate grief."

There's something about a ritual or ceremonial marking of a significant ending or loss, that helps us to move through and beyond it. With your loss or losses there may have been some ritual, such as a funeral or a goodbye party. But there also may not. If you feel called to do this, I encourage you to take some time **over the next four weeks*** to create a letting go ritual honoring whatever loss or losses you've experienced.

Here are some elements of rituals you might consider including:

- Light candles
- Say a prayer or blessing
- Meditate
- Listen to or sing meaningful music
- Make an altar
- Ring a bell or Tibetan singing bowl
- Light a sage smudge stick or incense

Here are some additional steps you can take to create a more sacred and impactful ceremony:

- Choose the location of your ritual with intention
- Ask dear friends to witness or participate in it with you
- Take a purifying bath beforehand

- Use special symbols in your ritual: elements of nature (feathers, eggs, nests, leaves, seeds, dried flowers, rocks, crystals, etc.)
- Include a personal power symbol or talisman
- Be playful: use bubbles, glitter, or costume to bring lightness to your ceremony

Writing prompts

- Write a goodbye letter to the part of your life that ended at the beginning of this transition.
- Write a prayer for yourself, honoring what was, as well as what is right now and what will be.
- On small slips of paper write the things you are letting go of by marking this ending with intention.

Activity

Some options for the final part of your ritual:

- Take the writing you have done and incorporate it into an art journal page.
- Take the writing you have done and burn it during your ritual.
- Take the writing you have done and bury it during your ritual.
- Trade your writing for bird seed or bread crumbs and perform your own "casting away" ritual, symbolically letting go of the past, as in the *Tashlich* ritual.

Tashlich, meaning "cast away," is a ritual performed by Jews on first day of the Jewish new year as a physical reminder of the human effort to cast away one's sins. By casting crumbs of bread into the living waters and reciting the verse from Isaiah – "cast all our sins into the ocean's depths" – we state our intention to return to our true selves. (adapted from myjewishlearning.com)

- Take photos of your ritual and print them out to use in your art journaling.

Use any aspect of your ritual as a jumping off point for an art journal exploration.

***NOTE:** The time frame for this activity is the next four weeks. Don't feel any pressure to come up with (and implement) your ritual in one week. Take your time gathering materials, writing, ideas, and then make a date for your ritual. Take some pictures, if possible, to aid sharing and remembering, and also to use on an art journal page, if desired. When you are ready to share your ritual experience/s, we will welcome that in our circles!

art journal prompt: The Words I Do Say/Don't Say



How do you talk about the person/aspect of your life that you are grieving?

Do you find those words hard to come by? Do you have trouble finding the words at all?

Or are the words easy but the feelings underneath the words more elusive?

(You may feel "talked out" about your grief story. If that's the case, move along to another prompt!)

Part 1: The Words I Do Say

And what we discovered was that each new telling, each act of storytelling, was its own catharsis, its own type of redemption. Each conversation ushered forth new tears, unleashed another layer of sorrow, and of loss, and of that bittersweet, now-familiar sadness.

~ Noa Silver

When we share our grief stories with the world, our families, our friends, and/or strangers we are confronted with a narrative dilemma. How do we encapsulate the story so we can share it? What do we include and not include? What is "ready for prime-time" and what is not? How do we talk about it without falling apart or breaking down in sobs?

And what about our conflictual feelings? The not so rosy parts of the story that feel like truth but also so fragile and vulnerable to share? Do we talk about that too? Or do we stick with only the “positive” and palatable moments and memories?

And what about the grief we feel that is invisible to others? Do we bring it up to be seen and known, or do we leave it in the shadows, and continue to feel misunderstood by others who don't know what is really in our past?

With this prompt, I invite you to consider the words you DO use to talk about your grief.

Part 2: The Words I Don't Say

One aspect of our grief is a layering of feelings over, under, and all around. We are caught in a briar patch of hard feelings: anger, shame, regret, abandonment, sadness, fear, loneliness, resentment, frustration, confusion, and more. There's a lot of pressure in our society to put a smile on and remember (and talk exclusively about) the Good Things. But what about the pain they caused you as they left (or well before)? What about your feelings of anger and resentment at the way it all unfolded or turned out? Life is not simple, people are not simple, relationships are complex. Nothing is all good or all bad. And we are left in our grief with such complexity to sort out, often on our own. Our experience deserves acknowledgment.

With this prompt, I invite you to consider the words you DON'T say when you talk about your grief.

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Start with journaling. Imagine you're talking to a specific person (a family member, friend or stranger) and spill the words on the page. Consider what surprises you. Consider what is rote or automatic. Then do the same for another specific person. Are the words different? Do you want to shift the words you use? Keep writing until you feel satisfied. Then make art about it.
- Write out the words you use to describe your grief story on a piece of notebook paper. Tear it up into pieces, glue it on your page, make art on top of that.
- Collage or draw faces on your page. Draw large speech bubbles. Write a conversation about your grief story between you and someone else in the bubbles. See what comes up that surprises you.
- If you are grieving an invisible loss, consider incorporating a veil or obscuring element on your page. Tracing or tissue paper are good for that. Play with obscuring the words AND bringing them out into the light (or up to the surface).
- Use the Left side page to journal about what you DO say and the Right side page to journal about what you DON'T say.
- Use lots of layers to signify the layers of stories, words, realities, truths, and untruths that are the fabric of your grief.
- If there are things you feel you can't say out loud, journal them on your page and paint over them. Or use obscured journaling to write them down, pour them out.

art journal prompt: What I Wish I'd Said

Life is short. There is no time to leave important words unsaid.

~ Paulo Coelho

**What if you don't have the opportunity to say what is really
on your heart and mind?**

Often, in grief, we are left with the feeling of what was left unsaid. And then, since the person we felt it about is gone or has moved on or shuts us out, we don't have the chance to have closure with them. (And if you are in grief about a life circumstance change, this applies as well...we don't always feel safe enough or able to speak freely to ourselves or the Universe about what we're holding deep inside.)

What if there wasn't/isn't any space to speak openly about your story, your feelings, your fears?

Today's invitation is to find the sentence prompt that most speaks to you and start with that.

Read the list aloud. Feel into which one (or ones) tug at your heart. Begin there.

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| • I wish I could remember... | • I will not pretend... | • I did not grieve... |
| • It is true... | • I long for... | • My real grief... |
| • I wish someone would ask me... | • My body... | • I did not get to... |
| • I did not get to... | • I'm so sorry heart... | • I loved... |
| • Now that you are gone... | • Let me tell you... | • My tears are for... |
| | • It is true... | • I miss... |

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Begin by choosing one of the prompts above and then journaling all over your page. Do all the art (painting, collage, etc.) on top of it.
- Use your dominant hand to begin the prompt. Use your non-dominant hand to respond to the prompt.
- Once you've finished a page with one of the prompts go back to the list and choose another to art journal about.
- Use authentic movement throughout your process. Before, during, and after. See what shifts or what new feelings and thoughts surface when you move your body.

Quotes to inspire you

"And the air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. Big Things lurk unsaid inside."

~ Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

"The things that go unsaid are often the things that eat at you—whether because you didn't get to have your say, or because the other person never got to hear you and really wanted to."

~ Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*

"If I had had words to speak such a thing, I would have. But there were none that seemed big enough for it, to hold that swelling truth." ~ Madeline Miller, *The Song of Achilles*

art journal prompt:

What People Say (and Don't Say) to Me

Part 1a: What People Say to Me That's NOT Helpful

It's incredibly common for people to say inappropriate, unkind, uncompassionate, and uncomfortable things to us when we are grieving. This comes from their discomfort and our society's influence on them, causing them to think that cheering you up, helping you see the sunny side, or talking you out of your grief is helpful. Additionally, their discomfort with your sadness often ends up with Foot in Mouth syndrome.

The truth is, what we really need is to be seen and held in these moments. But, unfortunately, that's not how it often works.

As part of your creative process to move through your grief, this is an invitation to air the things people have said that don't feel good, are irritating, are painful, and more. Sometimes putting it on the page actually can make you laugh. Exposing these comments helps you to see how ridiculous they actually are.

Part 1b: What People Say to Me That IS Helpful

On the other hand, there are things people say that are helpful, supportive and validating. What are those statements?

Part 2: What People DON'T Say to Me (That I Wish They Would)

Whether or not anyone has said something supportive, we know what those words could and should be. Take a moment to think about what you wish people would say to show their support for you in these challenging times.

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Speech bubbles and people's faces are a great place to start with this prompt.
- Use the Left side of the page for what people say that's **not helpful** and the Right side for what they say that **IS helpful** or what you **wish** they'd say.
- Scribble! Try scribble writing as a way to evoke the feeling of all the words people say (helpful or not). Don't worry about whether the writing is legible or not. Just scribble it all out. Sometimes we don't need the actual words on the page to feel the release of all of them.
- Use obscured journaling (journal on the page one direction, then turn your book 90 degrees and journal over it, and then turn it again 90 degrees and journal again) to write all the things people have said to you that you'd like to let go of! Obscured journaling is the best way to really release and let go of words that you don't want to revisit.

The following pages are examples of ways to use words to play with the concepts above. It doesn't have to all be dark! We can laugh at the situation, too.

From the files of "What People Say to Me (That's NOT Helpful)":

From *Dancing in the Pity Party* by Tyler Feder.

"my mom died young" reaction

B I N G ☹️

"God never gives us more than we can handle"	"My mom had a cancer scare once"	"Only the good die young"	"She's not suffering anymore"	[changes the subject]
"I'll be hugging my mom a little tighter tonight"	tight hug (pleasant)	"I know how you feel because my parents got divorced"	[is comforting for one week max and then acts like it never happened]	any reaction that starts with "at least"
"God just needed another angel"	[one-ups your tragedy with their own tragedy]	FREE SPACE "thoughts and prayers"	(becomes very formal all of a sudden)	"I know how you feel because my dog died"
"I'm praying for you"	"My condolences to your family"	[radio silence]	"She's in a better place"	"I'm sorry for your loss"
Pity Face™	"I know how you feel because my mom died at the young age of 86"	tight hug (unpleasant)	"How did she die?"	"May her memory be a blessing"

From the files of "What People Say to Me (That's NOT Helpful)":

From the Modern Loss Handbook by Rebecca Soffer

of your final product.

I CAN'T
EVEN
IMAGINE.

I SERIOUSLY
DON'T KNOW
HOW YOU DO IT.

THEY'D
WANT YOU TO
BE HAPPY.

HOW ARE
YOU EVEN
ALIVE?

I KNOW JUST
HOW YOU FEEL.
MY DOG DIED.

I LITERALLY WOULDN'T
SURVIVE WHAT YOU'RE
GOING THROUGH.

IT TAKES
A YEAR.

KNOWING WHAT YOU'VE BEEN
THROUGH MAKES ME FEEL
BLESSED (SUBTEXT: I'M SO
GLAD I'M NOT YOU).

THEY'RE IN
A BETTER PLACE.

AT LEAST YOU
CAN ALWAYS GET
PREGNANT AGAIN!

EVERYTHING
HAPPENS
FOR A REASON.

YOUR LIFE
IS A
TRAGEDY.

(ADD SOME
OTHERS
YOU'VE BEEN
TOLD HERE)

art journal prompt: **Word Map**

What happens when we look at the words the mean so much to us in our grief journey?

I love words and the relationships they have with each other. Sometimes it's where they originated, sometimes it's how they have evolved. Sometimes it's how they sound or what they mean.

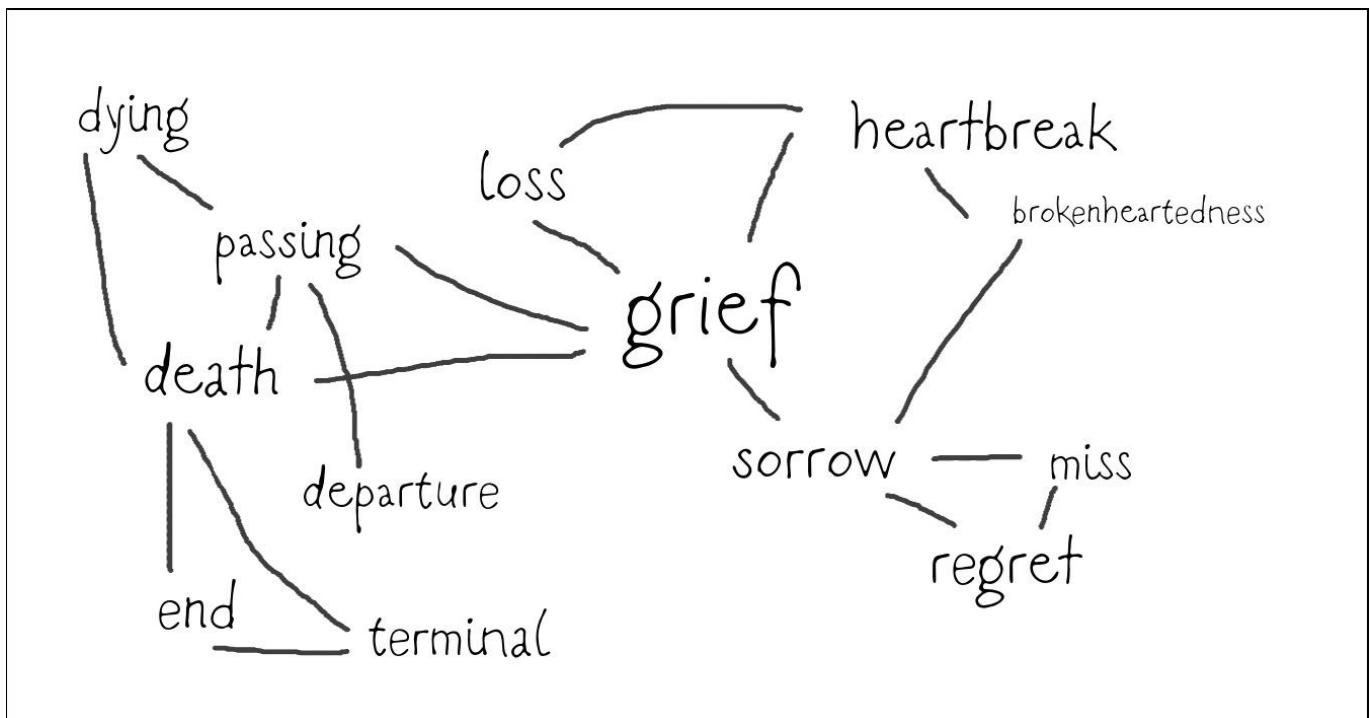
For this prompt I invite you to explore the words you use to talk about your grief or that you feel when you are looking closely at your grief.

Some great online resources for words in general:

[WordHippo](#)

[Visual Thesaurus](#)

A **word map** is like a web of words, showing connections and interactions. A very basic example is below.



Suggestions for approaching the page

- Start by brainstorming a list of words that pop into your mind when you are thinking about your grief.
- Next, make a word map, like above, or use one of the other map examples to plot your words.
- Or, write your words on little scraps of paper and then glue them down on the page. Create your map from there.

art journal prompt: Time

Background info

How does the concept of time figure into your grieving process? Is it about living through each minute, hour, day, week, and month or is it about looking into the past or the future? Or both? Or something else entirely?

This week I invite you to lean into an exploration of what Albert Einstein called “the illusion of time” and the reality of time in your life during your mourning.



Below are several jumping off points. Feel free to take one or more as your seeds of inspiration.

- How does time affect you now in your grief?
- How does time FEEL in your grief?
- What does a minute feel like? Or an hour or a day or a week or a month or a year?
- What do you wish you could do about time?
- Look back on the past. Explore your memories.
- Consider where you are in the present, in relationship to the past and the potential future.
- Look into the future. What might it hold for you?
- Anniversaries (we did focus on this in an earlier lesson, but perhaps you have more to excavate here)
- Seasons changing, years passing
- Your own mortality
- What life is like year after year holding this loss in your body, mind and spirit
- What is your distance (in time) from the moment of loss?
- Take an accounting of the ways in which you've changed...and the ways you've stayed the same
- Before Loss/After Loss

And, a map prompt:

- Map your grief journey from Before Loss to today
- Map your grief experience in a minute-by-minute way

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Look for images of clocks, hourglasses, calendars and use on your pages.
- Look back through calendars and photostreams to find inspiration
- Sit with the concept of time, holding it in your body as you pause or meditate. How does a minute feel? How about an hour?

Quotes to inspire you

Do not hurry as you walk with grief...it does not help the journey. Walk slowly, pausing often ~ do not hurry as you walk with grief.

Be not disturbed by memories that come unbidden. Swiftly forgive & let the Universe speak for you, unspoken words. Unfinished conversations will be resolved. Be not disturbed.

Be gentle with the one who walks with grief. If it is you, be gentle with yourself...Swiftly forgive ~ walk slowly ~ pause often. Take time, be gentle as you walk with grief.

~ adapted from Sheila McCaffrey

So many times, in our despair, we see our pain as something that will never end. In fact, this often defines our moments of despair: when we believe that our pain contains the rest of us. In contrast, there is this sense of peace to work toward: the belief that our life contains our pain.

~ Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*

*Oh, please don't go
Let me have you for just one moment more
Oh, all I need
All I want is just one moment more
You've got to hold me and keep me now
~ Mindy Smith, One Moment More*



Photo by Samer Daboul (via pexels.com)

art journal prompt: Kintsugi Map

What if we mapped our grief journey with the heart-centered practice of *kintsugi*?

Kintsugi (golden joinery) is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum, a method similar to the *maki-e* technique. As a philosophy, [*kintsugi*] treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.



As a philosophy, *kintsugi* can be seen to have similarities to the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, an embracing of the flawed or imperfect. Japanese aesthetics values marks of wear by the use of an object. This can be seen as a rationale for keeping an object around even after it has broken and as a justification of *kintsugi* itself, highlighting the cracks and repairs as simply an event in the life of an object rather than allowing its service to end at the time of its damage or breakage.

[~ Christy Bartlett, Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics](#)

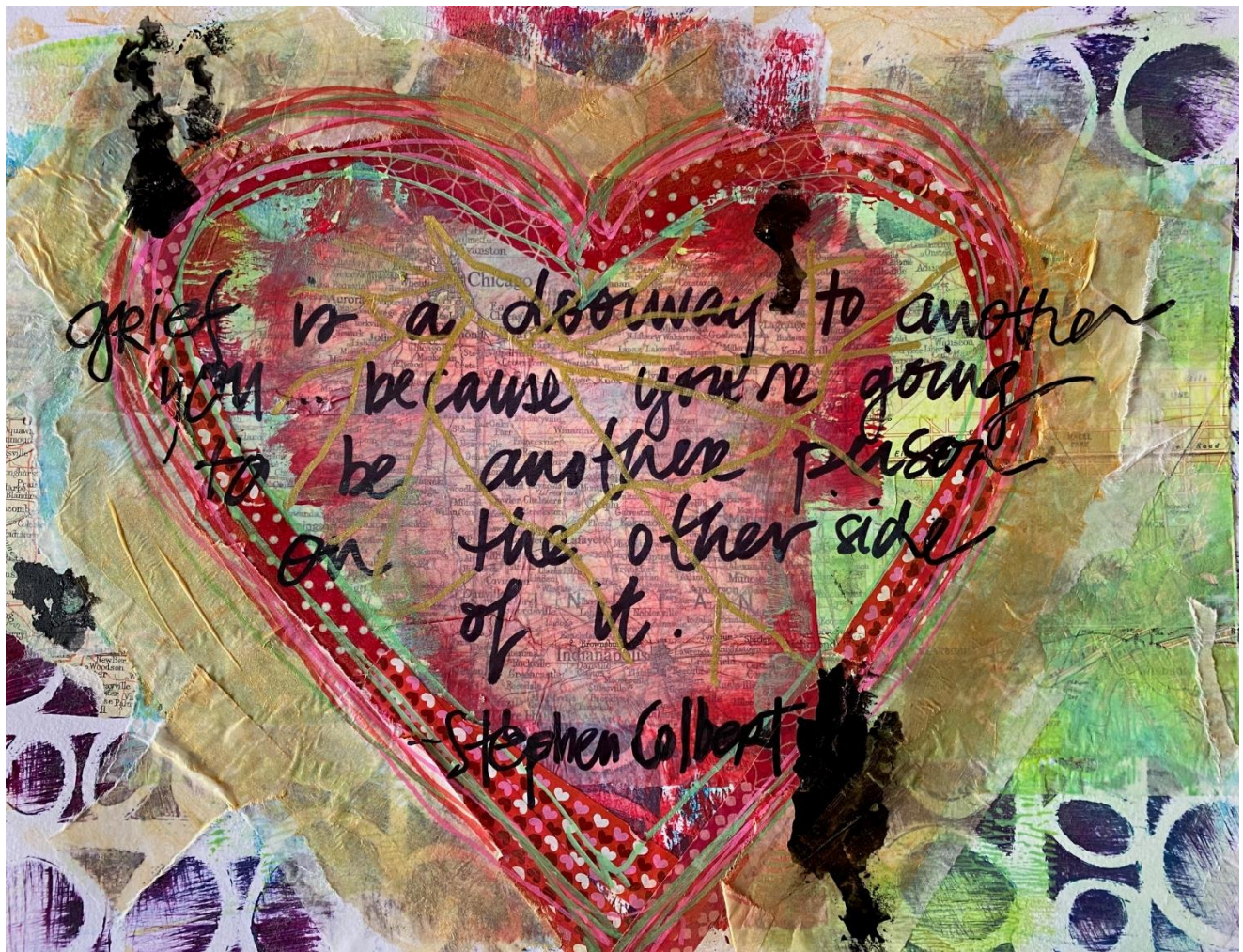
What if we highlighted the painful and challenging path of our grief journey with gold?

How might that affect or change our relationship with all those steps along the way?

How might embracing the beauty of our pain or brokenness (or that of the one/s we lost) help us to see the whole experience in a different light?

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Cover your page with a map. Use a gold paint pen to go over some of the roads. Narrate your grief journey in other ways on the page.
- Cut out a map in the shape of a heart. Use a gold paint pen to mark your journey. Journal on the page about your journey and how it has changed you.
- Create your own map and use gold paint or paint pen to mark the journey of your grief.
- Choose another type of map (a cut-away map/diagram comes to mind) to illustrate your grief journey and apply a gold layer to signify places where you have healed or found some beauty.



Quotes to inspire you

I am stronger than I am broken.

~ Roxane Gay, *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*

*Nothing lasts, nothing is finished, nothing
is perfect.*

~ Richard Powell, *Wabi-Sabi Simple*

*The wound is the place where the Light
enters you.*

~ Rumi

*To know the dark, go dark. Go without
sight, and find that the dark, too, blooms
and sings.*

~ Wendell Berry

*There is a crack in everything. That's
where the light gets in.*

~ Leonard Cohen

*Sometimes we don't want to heal because
the pain is the last link to what we've lost.*

~ JM Storm

art journal prompt: Unraveling

Her chenille scarf, in her travels, had begun to come unraveled at a corner. She fingered the unanchored stitch, gave it a tentative tug. She could fix this when she got home, remake the corner with another strand of chenille. She tugged a bit harder on the yarn, pulled out six or seven stitches, an oddly satisfying gesture. She tugged again, felt the stuttering of the tiny knots giving way.

She unraveled one row and then another. Then another and another. The yarn made a loose and pleasant tangle on her knees, at her ankles. Jack had given her the scarf for her birthday.

Kathryn pulled until she had a mound of twisted chenille as big as a small pile of leaves. She let the last of the yarn fall onto the grass. She stuck her frozen hands into the pockets of her coat.

She would have to recast all her memories now.

~ Anita Shreve, *The Pilot's Wife*



Noor Sethi (unsplash.com)

Looking back over your grief journey so far, when and/or where do you feel the unraveling happens or happened?

Are there points in your story that you could feel the yarn pulling free, the stitches coming undone?

Are there times in which you had the desire or longing to begin to pull it all apart?

What did you do?

Suggestions for approaching the page

- Use yarn to tell this story.
- Scribble all over the page, like a tangled knot of yarn. Journal along the lines the story of your unraveling.
- Do you have an old scarf that you're willing to sacrifice to the process? Sit with your stories and memories and begin the unraveling process with it. Notice how it feels while you do it. Keep it meditative. Don't listen to the tv or talk on the phone. Really put your focus on this process of unknitting the scarf. Keep your mind and heart open as you do this...and when you feel done, begin the art journaling process to move deeper into your awareness of what came up.

art journal prompt: Weaving the Strands

In this, our final week of the Geography of Grief, we are also pulling all the strands together from each of the previous seven weeks, seeing how they relate to one another, and considering how mapping and exploring them helps us to navigate back to ourselves.

Week 1: Pouring One Cup of Tea

Week 2: Maps

Week 3: The Body + Tears

Week 4: Circles

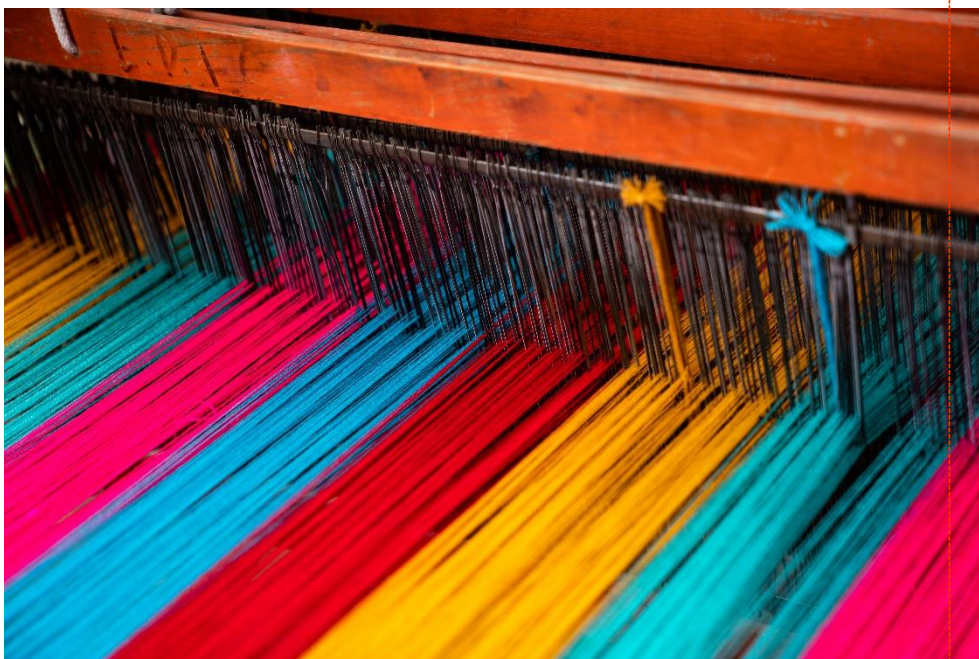
Week 5: Ritual

Week 6: Words

Week 7: Time

and, Week 8: Mending with Gold

This week I invite you to look back at the different themes and see how they interweave with each other.



For example:

Sergio Gonzalez (via unsplash.com)

- How do CIRCLES relate to TIME when telling your grief story?
- How do WORDS interweave with TEARS?
- Which MAPS help you tell your stories of grief that haven't yet been shared?
- Have you worked on a grief RITUAL? How have you journaled about it?
- Have you poured a cup of tea and told another grief story lately? There may be another one in there...
- Now that you've come through these past seven weeks, how are you feeling your grief differently in your BODY?

Quotes to inspire you

"The onset of grief is a time when we stand on the ledge between life and death. It is an awakening that feels like a deadening. Relief is not found in what we normally think of as comfort. The velocity of the universal black hole sucks us into it."

~ Stephanie Ericsson

"The thing that makes me the most grateful for grief: the opportunities that I've had because of my grief, the opportunities to connect on a profoundly deeper level with humans than I ever was able to before. I'm not afraid of other people's grief. And there's this common thread that runs between all of us who's ever really lost and felt this deep grief...We have such an opportunity to deepen our connection because of this grief. And I know it might not seem like it now because it's a fresh loss. But eventually you will find things to be grateful for."

~ Claire, from Anderson Cooper's podcast, All There Is

"Grief is the courageous expression of sorrow and it opens us up...like love...We can not live in full bloom without it."

~ Sophie Sabbage

"Sooner or later every one of us becomes an expert on loss."

~ Rabbi David Wolpe

"Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing. We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy."

~ Pema Chodron

"To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight, and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings."

~ Wendell Berry

"If pulled, grief is a thread that will leave us naked in song."

~Mark Nepo

Recommended Podcast list

- [All There Is with Anderson Cooper](#)
- [Terrible, Thanks for Asking with Nora McInerny](#)
- On Being with Krista Tippett
 - interview with [Pauline Boss](#)
 - interview with [Rachel Naomi Remen](#)
 - Interview with [David Whyte](#)
 - interview with [Roshi Joan Halifax](#)
- Unlocking Us with Brene Brown
 - [Grief and Finding Meaning](#)
- [On Creativity and Grief](#)
- And here's a real treasure trove of even more possibilities: [21 Best Grief Podcasts for 2023](#)

Recommended Reading list

- *100 Poems to Break Your Heart* edited by Edward Hirsch
- *A Kiss Before You Go* by Danny Gregory
- *Bearing the Unbearable* by Joanne Cacciatore
- *Companion Through the Darkness* by Stephanie Ericsson
- *The Cure for Sorrow* by Jan Richardson (poetry)
- *Dancing at the Pity Party: a dead mom graphic memoir* by Tyler Feder
- *The Geography of Loss* by Patti Digh
- *Heartbreak, A Personal and Scientific Journey* by Florence Williams
- *Hello Grief: I'll Be Right With You* by Alessandra Olanow
- *It's OK that You're Not OK, Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture that Doesn't Understand* by Megan Devine
- *The Modern Loss Handbook* by Rebecca Soffer
- *Planet Widow* by Gloria Lenhart
- *Sparrow* by Jan Richardson
- *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion