

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Francis Weller:** Earthgrief has no resolution, because it will be ongoing and multiplying. And so the idea of us facing that privately, there's no goddamn way your heart can stay open to the world fully without Being crushed by the weight of what's happening. So this is why we need circles. We need ritual. To at least allow us to not shut down in defense.

[00:00:26] Because what we're expected to do is just too damn much.

[00:00:32] **Nate Hagens:** Joining me today is psychotherapist Francis Weller for discussion on the human need for grief, ritual, and community. As the author of multiple best selling books, including *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, *Rituals of Renewal*, and *The Sacred Work of Grief*, Francis Weller has introduced the healing work of ritual.

[00:00:56] To thousands of people for over 40 years. He has worked as a psychotherapist during which he developed what he calls soul centered psychotherapy. Francis also founded and directs Wisdom Bridge, an organization that offers educational programs that seek to integrate the wisdom from indigenous cultures with the insights and knowledge gathered from Western poetic, psychological, and spiritual traditions.

[00:01:23] Francis work on grief and community is, in my opinion, at the core of what is needed ahead of and during, the Great Simplification. The topics covered on this platform are often heavy and full of devastating implications for the human and the non human world. perhaps through the work of people like Francis, we can learn to hold space for grief with each other.

[00:01:48] in the middle of this chaos in order to more effectively respond to the crises the world faces for those of you who are questioning, the gradual departure from Dennis Meadows limits to growth, energy depletion, climate, topics, we're still going to have, those issues because they are central to livable futures for people to understand.

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[00:02:16] But more and more, I think we don't so much face an environmental or an economic or a social problem, but a disconnect in our culture from our ancestral tether of the type of life we lived back then. Grief, addiction, left brain versus right brain, narrow versus wide boundary thinking. All the things about who we are as human animals are centrally important to the times ahead.

[00:02:44] Which is why I'm interested in these topics because I think they're extremely relevant. This was an amazing conversation. This was the first time I talked to this man. I hope you enjoy and learn from this conversation with Francis Weller. Francis Weller, welcome to the program.

[00:03:05] **Francis Weller:** Thank you, Nate. It's good to be here.

[00:03:08] **Nate Hagens:** This is our first conversation. We have a lot of mutual friends and off camera, I learned that, we grew up in the same area of Wisconsin. So cripes, maybe we do the whole podcast on grief in the Wisconsin accent. we'd probably lose a lot of followers if we did that. Great to see you. we're going to discuss grief today.

[00:03:31] you are a world expert on that. I have been reading your book, the wild edge of sorrow, and I know very little about this subject, but I think it's central to, Central to our times and, I'm a little nervous about what I'm going to discover, in this conversation and how it, reflects back on my own life and my own journey.

[00:03:55] but let's start there. What was your own journey on how you came about to be an internationally recognized expert on the topic of grief?

[00:04:05] **Francis Weller:** Well, there are many tributaries that were part of that. I mean, growing up, the youngest of eight, as I mentioned offline, my father had a very major stroke when I was quite young.

[00:04:19] And in a sense, my childhood ended at that moment and I became kind of a pseudo adult and I had to take care of many things around the home, but I don't think I ever had a chance to really be a child. So there was this erosion process that made me begin to feel less connected to my own being, to my own self.

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[00:04:45] And so I kind of had this character of melancholy that was with me much of my youth. A lot of deaths, a lot of, just struggle was part of that early life. But then as I grew and I became Educated in my profession, I became a psychotherapist when I was quite young, still 27 years old. And, you can't sit in this room very long without seeing that most everything that you touch has grief behind it.

[00:05:22] Whether that's the experience of rough childhoods, alcoholism, divorce, deaths of friends, family, children. There's nothing we touch right now that doesn't have a background. sound that sounds like sorrow. So we, I had to really become familiar with that territory. And then in the 90s, I became familiar with, grief work through ritual and community and began to understand the larger context that we were intended to have to process our sorrows.

[00:05:59] It's like when you come to see me in my office, we call that private practice, right? You come to my private practice. And somehow we have privatized grief so much. In our collective, in the white Western culture, that we almost instinctively, reactionarily, carry it privately. We don't talk about it. We don't share it.

[00:06:23] We don't see it in the other person's eyes. So, Through all of these different tributaries, I began to understand that this is one of the least addressed issues collectively, psychologically, emotionally, soulfully, in our collective body, and our failure to do so has led to catastrophic outcomes.

[00:06:46] **Nate Hagens:** I have so many questions.

[00:06:50] first of all, can you briefly describe and define, when you use the word grief, what do you mean by that?

[00:06:56] **Francis Weller:** I mean the heart and soul's response to loss. And when you begin to see the size of the cloth, as Naomi Nye would say, it's everywhere. There's no part of our world that's not being touched by grief on any given day.

[00:07:13] The process is one of descent. We're taken downward when grief takes us. It has the same root origin as the word grave, gravity, gravis. We are taken down when grief touches us. And that's the holy territory of soul.

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[00:07:29] **Nate Hagens:** So I am kind of a macro systems ecologist and I look at the metabolism of, around eight to 10 percent of all the humans that have ever lived or alive today and the magnitude of, the human economic superorganism and all of it.

[00:07:47] so I, look in a systems view, presumably grief had an adaptive, quality to it in our ancestral past. Yes.

[00:07:57] **Francis Weller:** Yeah, it's just the way the heart registers its affections. There's no separation between love and loss. They are entangled forever. There's no love that does not know loss. So how do we honor love?

[00:08:12] How do we honor our affection for our family, our neighborhoods, our watersheds? Well, we register that in our bones, in our hearts, when there's damage done to those things. When we lose someone in our family, or our kinship circle, the soul registers that loss instantly.

[00:08:32] **Nate Hagens:** And how do you define soul?

[00:08:37] **Francis Weller:** Well, we need much more than 90 minutes for that, Soul is more of a way of seeing and experiencing than it is a thing. We have soulful conversations. They are deep, rich, intimate, vulnerable. They touch what is most human. The direction of soul is down into the depths. We talk about depth psychology. Again, we have a deep moment of connection. Well, that word depth has something to do with the territory of soul.

[00:09:12] It's, it deals more with beauty, with, like I say, vulnerability, community, ritual, imagination. Those are the facets that let us know we're in a soulful territory.

[00:09:26] **Nate Hagens:** And presumably you've studied, in addition to your grief rituals and your writing and, your practice. I know you've worked at common wheel with cancer patients and such.

[00:09:38] Presumably you've studied cross cultural or even, historically is our current modern Western world really an American. an anomaly, with a cross cultural perspective with how we treat grief at arm's length or sweep it under the rug? or is that common in human cultures?

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[00:09:58] **Francis Weller:** And no, it's not that common.

[00:10:00] I'm not saying it's terribly unique, but any culture that begins to align individualism. Is going to struggle with grief.

[00:10:13] **Nate Hagens:** Why is that?

[00:10:14] **Francis Weller:** Because the, dictates of individualism are heroic. Do it alone, rise above it, always be successful, show no vulnerability. So those very dictates demand that we kind of push grief down.

[00:10:32] **Nate Hagens:** We don't want to admit. So an individual centric culture, as opposed to a community, based, group culture, the quest for status is very large and grief is a show of weakness. So it is, it's swept away, whereas grief is acknowledged and even respected. And sought after in a group perspective because of its healing properties.

[00:11:02] And we are all grieving together. So we're in this together sort of thing. So it's. Wow, that, I hadn't thought about that. So it's tethered to an individualistic economic cultural system.

[00:11:13] **Francis Weller:** Absolutely. I remember being interviewed some time ago and the topic was what I called at the heart of all our sorrows and at the heart of all our sorrows is this profound sense of emptiness, particularly in white capitalistic culture.

[00:11:32] Because we don't have living culture, we don't have the matrix within which the experiences of being human are being held adequately, whether that's grief or gratitude, whether it's initiation or elderhood, none of these things are actually held communally. By and large, I'm not saying that's completely gone, but by and large, those elements have not been addressed.

[00:11:57] And so we feel this great emptiness inside of us. And what's worst about this state is that we fill this emptiness with colonialism, with economic advancement, with racism, with consumption. Why are we, particularly in this country, the most consumptive culture on the planet? And it's partly because we are the most empty psychologically and emotionally.

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[00:12:23] And we fill that, we try to fill it with stuff.

[00:12:27] **Nate Hagens:** So here's a thought, that I just had that one of the reasons that Western culture, not just the United States, but led by the United States, that we're at the vanguard of the carbon pulse. And so we are, as the average United States citizen is using 100 times the exosomatic energy in our energy footprint.

[00:12:48] Relative to what our bodies actually need internally with, food calories. And so we are insulated from a weekly, monthly, yearly tragic events that maybe without this energy surplus, our ancestral, people, humans back in the day, they encountered loss and tragedy all the time. So grief was like necessary.

[00:13:18] And now we've kind of like in an Icarus flying toward the sun, a sort of, movement, we haven't encountered it. And so it's become a huge blind spot, for us as individuals and our culture. Does that make sense?

[00:13:34] **Francis Weller:** Oh, yeah. We've been on an Ascension trail for at least three or 4, 000 years trying to create systems of domination and control and supremacy.

[00:13:45] And consequently, right now, what we're facing is this corrective time brought about by what I'm considering the soul of the world, the Anima Mundi, is taking us downward into this time of great descent, what I'm calling the Long Dark. This is a prolonged period of descent that I hope has the potential To tie us back into connection and entanglement.

[00:14:11] **Nate Hagens:** So the name of this podcast in my work is called The Great Simplification, which is basically the downside of, or the top part of, and then the downside of the carbon pulse, which is a biophysical, macroeconomic vantage of the human trajectory. how does the long dark map onto this, is it related to economic growth and hydrocarbons and, all that?

[00:14:36] or does it rhyme?

[00:14:37] **Francis Weller:** I think they, are pointing a finger at the same thing. The long dark invites more of a soulful reflection on where we're going and why we

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need to go there. There's a necessity for this time. And you probably might say that same thing for the macroeconomic issue, that we need a correction, that how we've been living has been in disconnection to what it is that amplifies a meaningful life, a soulful life.

[00:15:08] I could say more about that, but

[00:15:10] **Nate Hagens:** to be clear, from an ecological standpoint, we need a correction from an economic standpoint, whether we need a correction or don't need it is coming because of the laws of thermodynamics and physics, which I may kick the can a little bit. We don't know. But why is it necessary?

[00:15:30] Like in my parlance, we have to prepare for what's ahead. But you're actually going a step further and saying that the Going through the long dark, as you say, is necessary. Why is that?

[00:15:43] **Francis Weller:** Because in, one of the ways I frame it is through the language of alchemy. Which is an ancient precursor to physics and chemistry and things like that, you know.

[00:15:57] But what alchemy says is that we go through seasonally, episodically, times of descent into what they call the negredo, the blackening. And they say in the negredo, that is the time of endings, of shedding, of decay, of collapse, and if we could participate in it, they say that the negredo is the beginning state of any process of soul making.

[00:16:27] We've lost the soul in this culture, in this society. We're a very self based, but not a soul based, we're a self focused culture.

[00:16:38] **Nate Hagens:** Do you know Bill Plotkin by any chance? I know Bill quite well. Kel Suprise, he was on the podcast last year and he said something echoing what you just said, it came to mind.

[00:16:50] Before we get too far off of my intro questions, are there cultures that you're aware of today that, invoke and accept and process grief much more than, the United States?

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[00:17:03] **Francis Weller:** Yeah, I think most traditional cultures do. You could find very active grieving process, say, for instance, in the Black Baptist community, where they know how to have a funeral.

[00:17:15] They know how to grieve. We apologize in white churches for losing control, you know, like, I'm sorry I cried, you know. We have such a, lack of, generosity and hospitality to tears, to grief, to wailing, you know? So yes, there are many cultures that this is a part of their life because they can't get away from it.

[00:17:45] I remember being in West Africa many years ago, but there was a grief ritual going on someplace in the village almost every single day because grief was ever present. They couldn't get away from it, but they also, by doing so, were the most alive people and probably the most joyous people I've ever met.

[00:18:05] I remember saying to one of the women, you have so much joy, because it really startled me, and what she said immediately was, well, that's because I cry a lot.

[00:18:15] **Nate Hagens:** So, I'm a American male. and the only real times I've cried, I cried a few months ago, when I had kind of an emotional week, but it wasn't like sobbing, crying.

[00:18:33] I've cried three times like sobbing, crying. all three times were the loss of my dogs, my, my golden retriever, Quinn, Maisie and honey bear. And I remember fighting it. I don't want to cry. That would, I would be out of control and I'm not supposed to cry, but I remember feeling really sick. Like I was so miserable.

[00:18:56] And then like three days after she died, I cried like sobbing, crying. And then I felt like two hours later, I felt like I had been cleansed and I felt so. better. So what physiologically is going on when people grieve or cry? And what happens if they're experiencing the emotions of grief, but they don't let them out and they're suppressed?

[00:19:19] What's going on with the body?

[00:19:20] **Francis Weller:** Well, what we've understand now is that grief is always meant to be in motion. There's a current of grief, and I like that word current

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because when I'm doing my grief work, I'm actually current in my life. Because most of the time what I'm doing is facing not only my history, but generations behind me.

[00:19:44] And I'm really rarely ever current, because that grief is like a sediment. I mean, people come into my office and they talk about depression, but when I listen to them, it's not so much depression, but oppression. There is this mantle of untouched sorrow that is settled on them like sediment and is oppressing their vitality.

[00:20:06] Now, one of the things that they've done with grief research is that they've found that the tears that we weep in grief contain cortisol. And others, yeah. We're literally cleansing ourselves when we, grieve. So that's one of the reasons why we feel different. And I would tell you that watching several thousand people over the years grieve together, the faces look so different.

[00:20:36] After the ritual is over, they look lightened, opened, released from the weight of all of that. We're not meant to carry it around like a U Haul. This is supposed to be processed continuously. You know, all of the sorrows that touch us.

[00:20:54] **Nate Hagens:** So is grief, does grief manifest in the body like a toxin? Like I know when we have toxins, like when people drink alcohol and then, later that week, if you take a sauna, I mean, it can get processed through sweat or from bowel movements or urine or tears, as you say, or breath, we get rid of stuff in our body.

[00:21:18] is grief like that, like in our bodies?

[00:21:22] **Francis Weller:** What I think happens is it more like it becomes a congestion in the heart, and we talk about congestive heart failure in this culture as the number one cause of death. And it's not just fat. It's not just cholesterol. The research also shows that the lack of connection, the lack of friendship, the lack of being able to express ourselves fully is oppressive to the heart.

[00:21:47] It stresses us. So we end up dying from heart failure.

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[00:21:52] **Nate Hagens:** I'm not going to apologize, but I really have so many questions. Go for it. What is the relationship between grief and something like cognitive dissonance, where Leon Festinger's, you know, famous example that acknowledging something that's so painful, is so scary that you suppress it in order to maintain your current identity and state of being.

[00:22:16] And that results in all kinds of problems. It sounds like grief and cognitive dissonance are related.

[00:22:22] **Francis Weller:** Well, we have to ask ourselves, why do we have to repress it? You know, and one of the primary reasons is We're asked to carry it in solitary confinement. It's like there's an intelligence that says, I can't express this because there's no holding space for it.

[00:22:40] I wrote in the book that grief, to release grief requires two things, containment and release. But without containment, if there's no village, if there's no community, if there's no ritual ground, then I have to become the container and then there's no release. So I become a permanent recycling center for sorrow.

[00:22:59] It just keeps cycling over and over again within me.

[00:23:03] **Nate Hagens:** So the implications of those two points are, to successfully or appropriately grieve, we have to do so in community. We can't do it by ourselves.

[00:23:13] **Francis Weller:** At least to a degree. You know, when people come in here, You can feel that same anxiety you talked about earlier about God, they'll say something like if I go there, I'm never coming back.

[00:23:24] There's so much grief. And I tell them, if you don't go there, you're never coming back. Because most of our aliveness is caught up in the suppression of sorrow.

[00:23:35] **Nate Hagens:** Most of our aliveness is caught up in the suppression of sorrow. Yes. God, that's horrible.

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[00:23:45] **Francis Weller:** Well, yes, but that is the dictate. That's the requirement to be particularly a white man in this culture.

[00:23:51] You can't lose control. You have to be above it. You have to get over it. You know, if you lose someone close, well, we'll give you a few days of bereavement, but then get back to work. There's no, again, no hospitality to this, so we spend much of our psychic energy trying to keep this field at bay.

[00:24:12] **Nate Hagens:** So this is the emotional toll of the Borg or the economic superorganism or the thing in the matrix that our economic system is treating us as isolated, growth, profit, cogs and machines without looking at the embodied origins of who we are, with all of our psychology and physiology and the system that is the human body.

[00:24:42] **Francis Weller:** When we, again, I'm not saying this is conscious at all, but when we moved from communal based Village based realities to more the individualistic. We lost touch with what I call the primary satisfactions. Eating together, dreaming together, dancing together, grieving together, giving thanks together, taking our youth through initiation, starlit skies, rituals of, elderhood.

[00:25:12] I mean, so many things. That's what shaped us over hundreds of thousands of years. And then we abandon that. We've lost the primary satisfactions, and now we pursue secondary satisfactions. Wealth, status, prestige, advantage, material goods. Addiction, and we can never get enough of that, can we? I work with a lot of wealthy people, and they can never have enough, because it doesn't fill what the primary satisfaction's filled.

[00:25:45] And that's at the heart of our grief. We don't even know it. We don't know, you know, we're missing this. But there's this ache in our soul that is so loud and so deep and so persistent. And then we just have to have the next glass of wine, or the next, you know, or the next,

[00:26:05] **Nate Hagens:** So how much of our addictions and our self medication for alcohol and pornography and gambling and stock options and all that is self medicating against the inability to express grief in the way that you're describing?

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[00:26:21] **Francis Weller:** Well, you recognized that one of the things I said is that, the two primary sins of Western civilization are amnesia and anesthesia. So this great forgetting, which what Daniel Quinn called this times.

[00:26:35] **Nate Hagens:** And by the way, the, golden retriever that I cried about was named Quinn after Daniel Quinn.

[00:26:40] But go on. Lovely,

[00:26:41] **Francis Weller:** lovely. But this great forgetting, we can't tolerate that. That this is gone, and so we have an entire industrial focus on anesthesia. To help us survive.

[00:26:59] **Nate Hagens:** So anesthesia is the bookend to the amnesia.

[00:27:02] **Francis Weller:** Yes. The anesthesia is there because of the amnesia.

[00:27:06] **Nate Hagens:** And if the amnesia, if we suddenly remember, then gradually or suddenly the need for anesthesia disappears?

[00:27:14] **Francis Weller:** That's what I've seen. In my own life, but also in many people that I've worked with over the decades.

[00:27:21] **Nate Hagens:** Can you give an example?

[00:27:23] **Francis Weller:** Well, when you grant someone primary satisfaction, I could think of many examples. but particular ones. I remember a young, one young man I was working with who He was so ashamed of himself for feeling weak, for feeling inadequate, not having a voice.

[00:27:42] and over time he began to trust his relationship with me, began to feel like he might actually be welcomed. But then he went through men's initiation with me, a year long process, and to see him return to the primary matrix of a community of men, of ritual, of song, of story, of being held and touched.

[00:28:06] Of being out under the, around the campfire, you know, sharing laughter, tears, just to watch him kind of return to what his inheritance actually

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bequeathed him, which is aliveness, joy, delight, tears, connection. Those things return to him and I can feel, I could feel and see and witness him coming alive again.

[00:28:32] I remember a friend of mine saying to me, are you happy? And I said, well, I have moments. of being happy, but I've stopped trying to be happy because every time I wasn't, I thought I was failing. What I want is to be alive. And every one of these emotions has vitality in them. My grief is vital. My sadness is vital.

[00:28:53] My anger is vital. Even my fear is vital. And I want to be alive, not happy. You know, I want to feel my own pulse. As I'm in this body for however long it's going to carry me, but, you know, it's getting shorter and shorter on that far on that side of the coin.

[00:29:12] **Nate Hagens:** So we're, very aligned on this. Today is, Friday, January 24th.

[00:29:16] And this morning, I released a frankly, Towards wide boundary sovereignty. And one of my recommendations was, to pursue ancestral intimacy, which sounds a lot like your primary satisfaction. And I think what you're really talking about is as a culture, as a species, we have to mature and move from secondary satisfaction back to primary satisfaction.

[00:29:43] And the irony is. That for most of us, not all of us, but most of us in the Western world, moving back to primary satisfaction would actually be less energy resource and ecosystem, throughput intense.

[00:29:58] **Francis Weller:** Well, if we were really again sane and we practice primary satisfactions, the economic system would collapse in one hour.

[00:30:07] **Nate Hagens:** Yes.

[00:30:08] **Francis Weller:** There's no need for that economic system. I'm not saying we don't need food and things like that. Of course we do. But the primary activity of economics is to replace the primary satisfactions.

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[00:30:20] **Nate Hagens:** So grief is actually a threat to the current, power system. Yes.

[00:30:27] **Francis Weller:** To be alive, to feel your heart, to feel your affection for the world.

[00:30:33] When I first started doing grief rituals, maybe two or three people would come with concern for the earth. The last few rituals I've done, it was like three fourths of the people there are there because of earth grief. They're there because they're, the denial is broken, or is breaking. and that's what gives me some hope, is that through grief, We might remember our affection for the world.

[00:31:02] We might remember that we are the receptor sites for the sorrows and joys of the world. If we don't receive that, who will? All right, I'm gonna,

[00:31:14] **Nate Hagens:** let's, drill into this a little bit. So, I understand there's grief if there's a loss of a loved one, or a dog, or there's a tragedy in the family.

[00:31:25] And I understand that humans have encountered that, obviously, from the Pleistocene and, before. Yeah. The magnitude of the grief at the ongoing sixth mass extinction and the fact that fish are having to swim poleward to get enough oxygen and the 70 percent plus reduction in animal fish, bird, insect, populations.

[00:31:53] That's like a different orders of magnitude of grief. And in my own life, I do deeply care and love the natural world. But what's changed for me. Among other things, I was, when I was four years old, I was watching mutual of Omaha's wild kingdom and all those episodes. And now the, cinematography is so fantastic on planet earth and these things, I can't watch them anymore because when I watch them, I,

[00:32:24] I see the beauty of the hummingbirds and the orangutans and all the animals and the fish. And my mind fast forwards to what's coming in the next 50 years. And I feel sick and I have to turn it off. So there is an unprocessed grief there. And I don't think it's because I don't care or don't love nature.

[00:32:44] So help me understand what's going on there.

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[00:32:48] **Francis Weller:** Part of what we're facing is the reality that grief is unsolvable. You cannot resolve this grief. See, when you lost your beloved dog friends, you were with that grief, and it carried you. And it's probably still there, to a degree. But for the most part, you could say there is some resolution to that sorrow.

[00:33:10] I live with that melancholy. I live with the bittersweet of their absence. I still love them. I still miss them. But there's some resolution to that. Earth grief has no resolution. Because it will be ongoing and multiplying. And so the idea of us facing that, again, back to that earlier comment about privately, there's no goddamn way your heart can stay open to the world fully without Being crushed by the weight of what's happening.

[00:33:44] So this is why we need circles, we need ritual, to at least allow us to not shut down in defense. I mean, all praise to amnesia, all praise to numbing. Because the, what we're expected to do is just too damn much. it's too hard to do what you just said. Face the world. Face the world's grief.

[00:34:09] **Nate Hagens:** So it's like, getting rid of inflammation in the body by taking, saunas and cold plunges and exercising and sweating.

[00:34:18] This is the emotional equivalent of grieving in a group with others on the sorrow of the earth. That you're, not solving the problem. you're just getting rid of the cortisol and other things in your tears and your emotions and your body so that you wake up cleansed and ready to work on all the things we're working on.

[00:34:41] **Francis Weller:** Not

[00:34:41] **Nate Hagens:** quite Nate. I would say

[00:34:45] **Francis Weller:** what I know. When we come to the end of our rituals, and it's usually a three day gathering, we come to the close of the ritual, and I'm doing a closing prayer, basically. I'll say something like, we didn't do this just for ourselves. We didn't do this just so our hearts could feel lighter.

[00:35:03] We did this so we could love the world more ardently, so our love might fall into the streets. And to the young ones, and to the watersheds, that we might

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feel our affinities more directly and fully. And consequently, we might respond more wholeheartedly to what is happening, to injustices, to violations, to damage.

[00:35:28] **Nate Hagens:** So, you're saying that if grief is kept at bay Let's say for the earth and for the oceans and the other 10 million possible 10 million species, we share the planet with that. If it's not properly grieved in ritual with a group of other like valued, like minded humans, like you suggest that because it's kept at bay, the mirror image of that is that we can't fully love.

[00:35:55] And if we can't fully love them, we can't fully roll up our sleeves and play a role in doing whatever work we are working on, in service of life. Is that what you're saying? That if I, for example, one person, but just use me for the moment, if I fully grieve what I'm afraid to grieve for now, because I know so much about the stats, that then I would actually love more?

[00:36:20] **Francis Weller:** I think you would feel more connected to what it is you're doing, not so much out of obligation or kind of a moralism, but out of affection. Wendell Berry, that wonderful farmer poet, said that it all turns on affection. So how do we get back to affection? Well, that has to go through the chambers of the heart.

[00:36:43] And for me to go into the heart means I have to register what's there. The grand loss, the grand scale of decline, of suffering, of refugee status, there's so many things happening that could, again, cause the heart to shut down. But if it all turns on affection, then I need the practices that keep the heart soft.

[00:37:08] To keep it pliable, to keep it responsive to the world. And yes, we need ritual ground. But when I use the word community, I'm also talking about the community of stones, the community of trees. You can go out and grieve. With the trees, you can go out, I mean, I have driven past clear cuts that just brought me to my knees.

[00:37:29] And was that just some kind of a psychological projection? Or was I registering in my body that field of sorrow, you know? And that's our spiritual responsibility, I feel.

[00:37:41] **Nate Hagens:** So you're a grief expert.

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[00:37:45] **Francis Weller:** I mean, I know the territory somewhat.

[00:37:50] **Nate Hagens:** Do you grieve more? Then the average person and when you grieve, do you feel cleansed and then renewed or do you grieve and it's like a groove on a, album, that you can find that groove again easily and you tend to then grieve a lot.

[00:38:12] **Francis Weller:** I think there are gradations to that sorrow that happen on any, given day. That's why I think the idea that I like is the apprenticeship of sorrow. This apprenticeship, well, the apprenticeship recognizes that on every day you will, touch something sorrowful. Like when I drove in to see you today from my home in the woods, I drove past two or three, skunk, dead skunk, raccoon, fox, and those losses touch me.

[00:38:45] I feel them. They don't, in that moment, may not bring me to my knees, but in the right setting, they could. If the holding space was present, they could take me to my knees. But the apprenticeship recognizes the continuity of sorrow. At any given day, any given moment, walking down the street, seeing someone on the street asking for money, that's heartbreaking.

[00:39:11] We shouldn't have that in the richest country in the world. Or we shouldn't, you know, hear the news of mass roundups of immigrants being forcibly removed from this country. That's sorrowful. And we need to register that again, but we need spaces in order to do that.

[00:39:28] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So there's a distribution of different temperaments and experiences and, levels of trauma with the population of citizens of the United States and the world.

[00:39:42] Are there certain, is there a certain part of that distribution that it dangerous is too strong of a word maybe, but that For them, grieving would really spiral them into a depression and, or worse. Is that something that's a concern?

[00:39:59] **Francis Weller:** I think the opposite is true, that when we don't process the grief, we spiral into depression.

[00:40:05] So, depression, we could say, is the freezing of that emotional ground.

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[00:40:11] **Nate Hagens:** So, as we Crest, the carbon pulse and all the craziness of coming decades with all the things, politics, AI, caring capacity, climate oceans, wars, and violence. We actually better have a relationship with grief because if we don't and we suppress it and keep it at arm's length and all these things are going to truly be depressing and metabolize in our body and hurt our, health because we haven't.

[00:40:44] **Francis Weller:** Yes. I mean, I wrote the forward for, Dwayne Elgin's last book. not surprised. choosing earth was his last book that he wrote. And, he, talked to me and he says, I, want you to write the preface to this book. And I didn't want to write it, you know, cause I had to read the book.

[00:41:09] And the book is hard to read because he talks about the next five decades, or is it seven decades? I can't remember. Five decades. And the probable projections onto each of these decades of where we're going to be heading. And it scares the shit out of me. But I had to write something. And I had to say something honestly.

[00:41:31] And so I talk about rough initiation. I talk about the long dark.

[00:41:36] **Nate Hagens:** What's rough initiation?

[00:41:37] **Francis Weller:** Traditional initiation done in many, cultures. Not here, by and large. But in traditional cultures, and even in our own deep time ancestral lineage. There was a process by which the elders, the ancestors, the rituals, the sense of the sacred, the community itself, the land itself, all held the young ones in a process of intense cooking to help them emerge out of that process.

[00:42:06] childhood state into something more participatory as a young adult in the well being of the community. Initiation was not meant for the individual, it was meant on behalf of the community. And that's why I call the initiation a contained encounter with death. Because there is no initiation if there's not an engagement with death.

[00:42:27] A rough initiation is an uncontained encounter with death. There's no containment for what we're experiencing, but we are definitely encountering death.

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So the potential for radical realignment is, here. And again, that's a lot of what I see in rituals work is a reshaping, kind of a reconfiguring of the internal, matrix.

[00:42:53] I talk about grief and ritual with the language of derangement. That ritual allows us to get deranged periodically, and that derangement is necessary because the current arrangement isn't working, and we need to be rearranged periodically in shape and size and scope and scale that's more attuned to soul than it is to economics or business.

[00:43:20] **Nate Hagens:** So. In future decades, those communities, those nations, those cultures, those families, those areas that have metabolized their grief are going to be more resilient to the times ahead.

[00:43:34] **Francis Weller:** No doubt. No doubt. Yeah. I mean, part of what, again, what grief does is it reminds us continuously of our deep entanglement with everything.

[00:43:47] I mean, I don't know if you remember when I wrote about the, this is 2010 when the Gulf oil spill happened. And I would wake up in the middle of the night crying, hearing the sounds of the dolphins suffocating and the shorebirds dying. That's 2,000 miles away from my home, but my psyche doesn't register distance, it registered the entanglement.

[00:44:10] That this is a relationship that's part of my body, part of my soul, and I'm not separate from it. That's part of what I love about grief, is it recognizes that everything that's happening, it's touching us. And if we don't register that, if we don't honor that, then I have to live separate and segregated from the tissue of the world.

[00:44:36] **Nate Hagens:** So Carl Jung, mentioned the concept of shadow. and in your book, you write that grief and death are, relegated into this shadow. so if our. If our culture, accepted grief and death more than, ours does, would the shadow in the average person be smaller? I guess that's a dumb question, that the answer is yes, right?

[00:45:03] Answer is yes. And so how do we do that? Is there a proper or a correct way to grieve or is there a wrong way to grieve?

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[00:45:13] **Francis Weller:** Well not grieving is the wrong way to grieve, you know.

[00:45:18] **Nate Hagens:** Okay, let's start there, yeah.

[00:45:21] **Francis Weller:** no, there's not a right way to grieve, as long as you're willing to touch it and hold it and bring some warmth to it.

[00:45:28] Again, that's another alchemical idea, that in order for this to move, we have to keep it warm. And we keep the grief warm by attention, by affection, by care, by writing, by dancing, by being with friends, by sharing this material. We keep it warm so it can keep moving. The moment it turns cold, either through Shame or through refusal or through anesthesia, it freezes and becomes hardened and then we're back to congestive heart failure.

[00:46:01] There's no movement.

[00:46:02] **Nate Hagens:** So in some ways, I, we have many mutual friends, but I don't think you know much about my work, but this podcast is a kind of a ritual grief of sorts because we're talking about all the ills of the world from a science integrated perspective without. Resolving them without coming up with answers and some episodes are fricking hard hitting I've teared up, at times.

[00:46:26] So in a way it is a processing of grief of sorts.

[00:46:32] **Francis Weller:** Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think anytime we have a chance to speak honestly about what it is that's in the field. It's like when, COVID hit. The ambient field changed, and suddenly we were breathing in anxiety, uncertainty, tremendous amounts of grief. We were breathing that in every day, and the currency of our conversations changed.

[00:46:58] Things began to alter as a consequence of that. So what you're doing is you're allowing that ambient field to be given language, so we can see what's actually moving around us. And that's helpful. We need to have language for these things. We need to have forms of expression, but I do feel that information alone is not going to get us down the road.

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[00:47:20] **Nate Hagens:** Fully agree. And every month that goes by, I agree with that more. yeah, we need information to know that something's wrong and then we need to heal and find community and find the others and grieve and strategize and live and love and laugh and, figure things out and then apply that. to the problems of the day.

[00:47:42] I, I, see that now. So when someone comes to you, you're a psychotherapist, and you're well versed in grief, you listen to them and you give some advice. Like, are there, like a doctor would give a different titrations of medicine. Are there different categories of, grief practice that you recommend, to different people based on their situation and their experience, or is it all the generally the same pathway?

[00:48:14] **Francis Weller:** I mean, collectively, the conditioning is fairly ubiquitous. It's most of all of us have had this conditioning to stuff it and move on. So just allowing to naming it, you know, that you sound even just to start by saying that sounds incredibly sad. Just to acknowledge that story isn't humorous, or it's not incidental, that actually carries a lot of sorrow.

[00:48:43] And then to allow them to begin to feel some familiarity with the ground of grief, and to allow the two of us in that moment. To register, to feel it, but I will say to them at some point in my work, this is a good place to learn how to tolerate contact with this very uncomfortable guest. But at some point, you will need a much larger holding space.

[00:49:07] You'll need some ritual ground. You'll need some community around you. Because that's that fourth gate of grief, which has to do with what we expected and did not

[00:49:16] **Nate Hagens:** receive. we haven't talked about your five gates. Would you briefly, touch on them and then get back to your point here?

[00:49:24] sure.

[00:49:25] **Francis Weller:** Yeah, these became evident in sitting with many, people over many decades of grief work. The first one is self evident that's, you know, everything that we love, we will lose. That's a harsh, reality, but it's the truth. You

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get to hold on to nothing. Everything you love, you will lose. So whether that's a child, a partner, a marriage, a home, your life, you get to hold on to nothing.

[00:49:56] And people say, well, I get to hold on to the love, right? So, well, only if you honor the rights of love, which include grief. I tell that story in the book about this 80 some year old architect, engineer. An Austrian engineer came to one of the talks I was giving, and I had heard earlier from someone that his wife had just died, like two months prior.

[00:50:21] And he raised his hand and asked this question, and he said, what is the one, two, three of grief? I want to be over with this. I'm done with this. And I said to him as gently as I could, I can't accept the premise of your question. It presupposes an ending to your grief. It will not end. It will change over time, like I just said to you, Nate, you know.

[00:50:45] It will turn into a bittersweet melancholy, but this is the shape that your love for your wife is now taking. Are you willing to accept that love? And he said, I can do that. You know, I can do that. If we can see that love and grief are not estranged. They're not antagonistic, they're actually a continuum, that my love is now taking this shape of sorrow, of tenderness, of ache, you know.

[00:51:13] **Nate Hagens:** Let me double click on that and get back to your five things, but let me double click on that. So would you say that The sensation of bittersweet melancholy plus love and joy and all the other things was the default state of our ancestors, that bittersweet melancholy was kind of the set line through, a human life.

[00:51:37] **Francis Weller:** It's hard to project. I mean, I would imagine that anyone who's holding field was strong enough would not be demanded that they excise that part from their life. But they would honor that. I mean, in some traditions, like the Jewish tradition and others, they honored it for a year or more. there's space to be held in that field.

[00:52:02] We used to wear the black armbands. Remember that? You know, to signify that you're a person in mourning. So we might interact with you differently. We might come to you softer. We might come to you with more curiosity and how

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are you doing with that? But there's no marking anymore. We don't wear black. We don't.

[00:52:21] We don't honor these deaths

[00:52:22] **Nate Hagens:** because we've been at a all you can eat Vegas smorgasbord culturally for Two generations and so this has been forgotten like you said amnesia So one more question What's the relationship between love and grief or grief and joy if someone doesn't grieve ever? like a lot of people in our culture, does that mean they can't quite experience the, full joy and full love?

[00:52:52] Is that, what you're implying?

[00:52:54] **Francis Weller:** I am implying that, yes. I mean, I describe our culture as a flatline culture. there's a very narrow range of what we're allowed to feel. We can get pissed off, we can get angry, you know, we might feel a little sadness, but we can't go into the deep register of grief.

[00:53:11] And consequently, the upper register of joy is collapsed. And what we've put in its place is excitement, is stimulation, stock markets, roller coasters, alcohol, drugs. Second

[00:53:23] **Nate Hagens:** satisfiers.

[00:53:24] **Francis Weller:** Second satisfiers, yeah. we don't have genuine joy. So we have to. You know, see if I got a pulse by getting something exciting and stimulating.

[00:53:34] **Nate Hagens:** So the suppression of grief and the fear of death have reduced the amplitude of our full human emotional spectrum.

[00:53:42] **Francis Weller:** Absolutely. Wow. Without question. Wow. Without question.

[00:53:46] **Nate Hagens:** Okay, go on to the second gate of grief.

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[00:53:49] **Francis Weller:** The second gate of grief is the places in us that have not known love. So as I mentioned at the beginning, some of my early years were, there was a lot of shame.

[00:53:59] I felt a lot of shame. And whenever you feel shame, you begin to look for the causative factors within us. So if I'm too sad, well, I've got to get rid of that. If I'm too exuberant, if I'm too sensual, if I'm too, whatever, angry. So we begin to piecemeal out. the parts of me that make it harder for me to feel approved of within my network, schools, church, family, peer groups.

[00:54:32] But eventually we begin to feel pretty thin, psychically. Now, every one of those losses, every one of those outcast parts of me are worthy of grief. But I can't grieve with what I hold for what I hold with contempt. As long as I judge those parts of me and keep them at bay, I can't grieve for them. And in that sense, there's no avenue of return for them.

[00:54:58] So much of the grief work that people have done is about softening the space between what's been outcast and what's not. They want to welcome back and grief around shame around that interior segregation is really important work. That's primarily the issue of psychotherapy. It's basically grieving what you've lost, what you've disowned.

[00:55:23] And hopefully in the process of grieving, you create a river of return so these pieces can come home again. So that's the second gate.

[00:55:33] **Nate Hagens:** And the third?

[00:55:35] **Francis Weller:** Sorrows of the world.

[00:55:37] **Nate Hagens:** The Earth.

[00:55:38] **Francis Weller:** Earth grief. And this one, like I say, is becoming more and more, undeniable. Whether it's calving glaciers or, you know, you mentioned the insect population.

[00:55:52] We wake up in the morning now to silence. There's very little bird activity. When I first moved to this house 22 years ago, I would complain some

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mornings, God, the birds are just, they're waking me up at 5 in the morning. They're just so loud. But now, with the insects disappearing, the birds have nothing to eat.

[00:56:12] The bats are gone.

[00:56:13] **Nate Hagens:** I think there's, there's a lot of people in the environmental, ecological space where I have, a lot of work and contacts who are, perplexed at. The inability of large fractions of our population to understand, the ecological crisis as if it were an information deficit.

[00:56:38] And speaking to you, I wonder if it's primarily a, a protection mechanism somehow in the body, supported by our culture that If I acknowledge that those facts that those people are saying about the natural world and, the, early innings of the six mass extinction, then I'm going to feel immense grief and I'm afraid to feel that.

[00:57:04] So I'm not going to acknowledge those facts. Is there some truth to that?

[00:57:08] **Francis Weller:** 100%. But we're back to the same predicament, right? I have to somehow face this alone. You know, in, do you know Jeanette Armstrong, the Okanagan elder from Pacific Northwest? Amazing woman. She said in her village, they shape life like this.

[00:57:27] So it's, community first, family second, and the individuals last. Having it shaped this way, even their word for belonging translates into our one skin. That no matter what happens to you, it'll be registered in our one skin. You're not going to be feeling it alone. She said you've inverted that completely in white culture.

[00:57:49] Individual first, family second. And she said you use the word community all the time, but there's no blood in it. It's thin. The rhetoric is empty. So that's our predicament. You know, to face all of what you just said, we have to face it at the pinnacle all by myself. And we don't have this covering that says, no matter what befalls you, you'll be held.

[00:58:14] You'll be caught. You'll be held.

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[00:58:16] **Nate Hagens:** It's not just white culture. I mean, this is also in China and it would also be, it's the economic culture of the superorganism and growth more. Yes.

[00:58:26] **Francis Weller:** I think, yes, I think the widespread of capitalism, even as it's expressed in its mutated form in China, that ideology has again usurped primary satisfaction.

[00:58:44] Now it's about productivity, economic growth. These have become the mythologies of our time. And we don't have a mythology of soul or of community, of meaning, of depth. We have a mythology of economic progress. And that progress always entices us to develop more, advance, But we don't know how to return.

[00:59:11] The old mythologies were cyclical. You came back again and again. This one's a straight arrow shooting to Our collapse, our complete demise.

[00:59:21] **Nate Hagens:** Oh yeah, because the coming back is going to be a doozy. so, and the fourth gate, Francis.

[00:59:29] **Francis Weller:** The fourth gate is what we expected and did not receive. And what I mean by that is that we were wired.

[00:59:36] In our deep ancestral body, over 300, 000 years at least, and probably several million in our hominid form, but we were wired for certain things, to expect certain things. That when we opened our eyes that first time, on some level, we were expecting 40 pairs of eyes looking back at us, and to be held by many, and to be seen by many, and watched, and coaxed, and witnessed by many.

[01:00:07] And when that's not there We begin to feel that emptiness again creeping in, and the worst part about that emptiness is that we blame ourselves for it. What did I do wrong? Because on some level, we expected something more than this. This is it? This is the game? You know, economic advancement, that's the whole game?

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[01:00:29] So, yeah, when we don't get what we expected, that hole is, immense, and it's filled with sorrow. And we have to cry into this emptiness for generations, I think. What's touching your neck

[01:00:45] **Nate Hagens:** that landed? I mean, this gets back to ancestral intimacy and primary satisfiers and, we had 150 people or you said 40 pairs of eyes.

[01:01:01] what's touching me is two weeks ago. I had a party with some followers of the podcast and many of them are good friends and we spent the night and had music and food and, It, it was 40, 50 people who are speaking the same language and who, we weren't crying, we were laughing and smiling,

[01:01:23] **Francis Weller:** but they all

[01:01:23] **Nate Hagens:** followed the podcast.

[01:01:24] So I know that there is a common thread of grief for the natural world that united us, and I felt it was the first time in years. Maybe ever that I didn't look at my phone until three in the next afternoon. That's because that's what I had been missing or craving. So what you said makes so much sense.

[01:01:46] But our economic system isn't such that we could do that on a daily basis. no,

[01:01:53] **Francis Weller:** Plus the economic structure is based on chronic discontent. We're always feeling we want something more. The new phone, the new car, the next thing. It's as if we're designed to feel discontent. Well, we are, because those primary satisfactions are not being cultivated.

[01:02:18] within our lives, and then again, in their absence. And the fifth gate. Fifth gate is ancestral grief. And as I've sat with this gate over many years, it's become clear and clear that most all of our grief has some thread of ancestral grief in it. It's like my shame grief. I used to think my shame was, you know, somehow my own wound.

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[01:02:49] But as I begin to look, I can see that thread go through my family and go back generations. That it is not mine. I'm the current curator of this grief. But that ancestral grief is deep seated and needs to be addressed

[01:03:06] **Nate Hagens:** as a story or as an epigenetic thing in your body.

[01:03:10] **Francis Weller:** Yes. I think both the, another part of that fifth gate is that, when we feel it collectively all the time, which is the what particularly white ancestors did to the indigenous people on this continent, and then the importation of slavery.

[01:03:32] That's still in our collective grief bowl, and we've not addressed that. And the fact that these issues around racism and how we treat the Native cultures here, that's still part of our untouched ancestral grief. We have never addressed it. We can't throw money at it. I mean, we should, but that's not the only solution.

[01:03:55] We have to get on our knees and begin to really acknowledge this legacy of 500 years of colonialism, of usurpation, of domination, of genocide. This is in our bodies.

[01:04:12] **Nate Hagens:** I don't know. I think it's in our cultural stories, but I don't know that it's in our, I mean, how far back do we go? Do we go back to that we exterminated the Neanderthals?

[01:04:25] **Francis Weller:** I don't know how far back we go. I just feel and I hear from people I sit with that this has not been resolved in our collective.

[01:04:34] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. Well, we, cause we haven't talked about it as a national level on that. I fully agree.

[01:04:40] **Francis Weller:** no. And I think our grieving would be a signifier to the Native and the Black communities that are Sorrow and our repentance is genuine, you know, yeah, I think we have to do that.

[01:04:58] **Nate Hagens:** If we grieve through all these things, a momentous torrent of grief for all the things, doesn't that leave us in just a sodden puddle of, tears and a fetal position?

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[01:05:16] **Francis Weller:** No, in fact, it makes me feel more joyful, you know, I've never seen, I think that's the fear, right? The fear is that grief will take us hostage.

[01:05:27] That I'll become imprisoned within this shadowed land of depression and sadness. But what it does in reality is it quickens the heart, reminds us of our faithfulness and our fidelities to the wider landscapes of friendship and community and watersheds. It brings us alive. I wish you could see, you know, about three fourths of the way through the ritual.

[01:05:58] There is this giddiness that begins to infest the room. there is this joyfulness that begins to come in and the singing begins to change and the dancing begins to change and, because the hearts have been lightened, we're not weighed down by So much grief, and we recognize by the end of the day, that tomorrow we'll start picking up more.

[01:06:24] We'll start gathering it again together.

[01:06:26] **Nate Hagens:** Maybe briefly, I mean, you're, known for, facilitating grief rituals in community, give us an overview of what that looks like, the whole process, in, brief.

[01:06:38] **Francis Weller:** Well, we gather usually Friday afternoon. How many people? Anywhere from the smallest ones would be like 25.

[01:06:50] The biggest ones would be about 60. because you still want some sense of intimacy in the room when you do that

[01:06:58] **Nate Hagens:** work. Well, so, so the midpoint of that would be the 40 pairs of eyes.

[01:07:02] **Francis Weller:** The 40 pairs of eyes, exactly. We begin by movement, drumming, and singing to try to create some harmonic field of attunement, that we're all here for this purpose.

[01:07:14] We're all here for this. And then I ask people to go around, we go around the circle, and people share one thread of grief. Most people have many threads, but just name one thread of grief that you're walking in with. Could be the suicide

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of a child, or the, whatever it is, they name it. Then we ask, was there any sorrow share that you could not relate to?

[01:07:36] And of course you could. you may not have had that experience. You may not have gone through divorce or lost a child or whatever, but you could relate to it because of the shared experience of sorrow and grief. And then I say, okay, now let's just imagine that this is our communal cup of grief, that this isn't my grief, but this is ours.

[01:08:01] That itself is freeing. That itself allows me to begin to feel that I'm not alone. In this, I'm sharing this with all of you.

[01:08:12] **Nate Hagens:** So what you're doing so far in this process is you're putting a local cultural overlay that gives the humans that come the social permission and actually support for, grieving, which our macro culture does not.

[01:08:30] **Francis Weller:** Yeah. I mean, that's true no matter where you are. Ritual has a way of inviting the old psyche, the archaic psyche, the one that knows that inside of this space, the parameters of cultural appropriation, not, not appropriation, but appropriateness change. So suddenly it's appropriate for me to weep in front of you.

[01:08:54] It's imp it's appropriate for me to hold one, us, to hold one another. It's appropriate for us to, be on our knees, side by side for hours. Wailing and bellowing and, but you wouldn't do that in a safe way, because that's not the containment field for that. So what ritual does is it signifies to the psyche, this is what you've been waiting for.

[01:09:16] Another part of that fourth gate grief is I've been waiting for this my whole damn life to have a field where I don't have to hold it all together, where their permission has been granted and I can fall.

[01:09:30] **Nate Hagens:** Okay, so continue then, what else happens in the weekend?

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[01:09:33] **Francis Weller:** Well, we focus a lot on this idea of village mind, that, I want people to know that when we come to the ritual late Saturday, you might not grieve.

[01:09:49] You might support somebody who does. And you will leave here saying, we wept. That's also healing. That, well, I didn't get what I paid for. You know, that American idea of, I gotta get my money's worth. That's what ritual does, is that the wisdom of ritual is repetition. There are many people who come to these rituals over and over again, and you can feel the difference in somebody who says, I know.

[01:10:20] That this is the field that allows me to do that. And I'll enter it quite easily and quite quickly.

[01:10:26] **Nate Hagens:** So as a psychotherapist who's had a lot of experience in this, do you think that grieving and sorrow are, equally as important in our daily lives as laughter?

[01:10:36] **Francis Weller:** I think they're equally inevitable.

[01:10:38] **Nate Hagens:** Okay.

[01:10:38] **Francis Weller:** You know, again, like that's, why the apprenticeship is there is in order for me to have that laughter, I have to be current. I can't be encumbered by the weightiness. Of a, of a sedimented heart that's filled with sadness.

[01:10:57] **Nate Hagens:** It needs that. So if I'm suppressing my, grief and sorrow, I, by definition cannot be fully present.

[01:11:05] **Francis Weller:** I think what happens is that we end up living much more strategically than genuinely. To live in an individualistic culture that has demanded you shape a self that fits in, that is approved of. That leads to strategic life. It doesn't lead to participatory life. It doesn't lead to an engaged emotional life.

[01:11:30] It leads to figuring out what's going to get me by without being seen as defective or flawed or inadequate,

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[01:11:38] **Nate Hagens:** you

[01:11:38] **Francis Weller:** know.

[01:11:39] **Nate Hagens:** I, doubt that anyone has studied this, but there's something that I've been interested in lately because of the power AI military kind of turbo charge, at the top of our culture at the moment that there's something called the dark triad.

[01:11:56] Which I'm sure you're familiar with, Machiavellianism. I wonder if you were to lead a group of dark triad people in a weekend ritual, and they were allowed to grieve communally, if that would change or soften their dark triad characteristics. Just a speculative question.

[01:12:18] **Francis Weller:** It might take many Rituals. It took me three rituals before I shed my first tear.

[01:12:26] You know, as I was a well packed white man, you know, I knew how to pack it in, but I also knew I had tremendous sadness in me, but it took me three times before that opened

[01:12:37] **Nate Hagens:** up. So when you lead these rituals, now professionally, are you also crying?

[01:12:43] **Francis Weller:** No, tears will come because it's hard not to when you're sad.

[01:12:55] It's so gorgeously expressive of the broken heart. There's nothing more genuine, in my experience, than being in a room of people who are willing to say, this is what I'm carrying. No pretense, no act, no strategy, just the genuineness of saying, I feel broken, I feel overwhelmed by the sorrows of the world, I feel whatever it is.

[01:13:23] I love being in that space.

[01:13:25] **Nate Hagens:** I'm the curious sort, Francis. And this subject fascinates me because I know very little about it with some of the people you said that have

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come to a lot of the rituals, or some of your patients, because you were a psychotherapist. Have you noticed like demonstrably a massive change in their behavior after going to many of these rituals and like Kathy or Joe were this way and now they're this way and I see a lightness in their being.

[01:13:53] Is that a palpable note, something you notice?

[01:13:56] **Francis Weller:** Oh, yeah. I mean, that's one of the reasons why, not with everybody I work with, because some people that's just, that would be too much, but most of the people I work with, I encourage at some point to come to and participate in this because I know what that does to you psychically to get that fourth gate.

[01:14:16] Touched, to actually be embedded in a ritual ground of a village life, even for three days, can change how you hold yourself in the world. Something interesting happens usually on Sunday afternoon, is there's another wave of grief comes in the room, that we have to leave. See for those three days we're inside of primary satisfactions.

[01:14:39] We're singing, sharing meals, sharing dreams in the morning, we're doing ritual, we're holding each other, we're crying, we're laughing, we're dancing. For those three days, we are inside of what we expected, and then somebody will say, I just got here. And now we have to leave. I said, yes, that's true. We do not live inside of primary satisfactions.

[01:15:03] But now you can use this time as a homing beacon. This is what I want in my life. And I won't just go out seeking it. I'm going to start to try to create it. And that's also one of the hopes is that people don't just come to be consumers. I don't want people to come just as a consumption practice, but to embody this and take this back to their friends and to their families and to their communities.

[01:15:31] And we just did a grief ritual training with close to 800 people in 32 countries.

[01:15:38] **Nate Hagens:** To train people to do what you do. For, to take a

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[01:15:43] **Francis Weller:** smaller version of that, but yes, just how do we hold the space? How do you know? And someone said, well, don't we all have to be therapists? I said, if we're waiting for all just for therapists to show up or fucked, you know, it's, and this is, and the thing is that we've made grief a clinical problem.

[01:16:02] What is more normal? What is more ordinary than sorrow? What we need to become is confident in our capacity to hold the space so that people can go to their knees. And that's doable. We can all learn how to do that.

[01:16:17] **Nate Hagens:** So short of going to one of your training, the trainers, or one of your, north of San Francisco, ritual sessions you were just talking about, how could someone go about facilitating grief either for themselves or for their own community, or does it require a facilitator as such?

[01:16:38] **Francis Weller:** No, thankfully, it, what it requires is a willingness to gather. I often suggest to people, just ask three or four friends to come over on any given night, let's say it's a Friday night, and, say the topic tonight is going to be loss. The topic tonight is going to be grief. And let's make some agreements.

[01:17:03] And the primary agreement is that we're not going to give it any advice. We're not going to try to fix a damn thing because nothing is broken. The heartache of sorrow is not a problem to be solved. It's a presence awaiting deep witnessing. And so when we give permission, when the gatherings, you know, four or five people can start with a poem or a prayer or lighting a candle, and then just, let's just tell the stories.

[01:17:27] I mean, every person you see on the street, Nate, is filled with sadness, filled with grief, but how many of us have a place to take it? And that's part of what I feel I'm called, that's what I feel called to do is to create many circles. I just worked with a group in Israel and we had some Palestinian therapists join the online training.

[01:17:51] Cause grief is everywhere, you

[01:17:52] **Nate Hagens:** know. I think you're doing really, important work and now I understand why it's taken six months for you to actually get there. Get on this podcast. So let me make something, let me ask you to make something explicit that

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has been so far implied. this podcast and the broader work of my colleagues and network is, Changing the initial conditions of the future to make the future better than the default, how, on the metacrisis and, all the things in what ways is grief critical to addressing the complex global challenges we face today?

[01:18:33] **Francis Weller:** Part of what I wrote in that preface forward for Dwayne's book is that, grief will be the keynote for the coming generations.

[01:18:44] So we are looking at least two generations. where this work of grief must become much more widespread. And we need many, and so that was so heartening to see 800 people say yes, that they want to in Chile and in South Africa and in, you know, Norway, and they want to bring this. I just got an email today from Brazil, you know, that there's just this ache to be able to hold the spaces for what they know is coming.

[01:19:17] I mean, if we get out of our denial, we know that the descent has begun. We know that the long dark is upon us, and intuitively we know that the consequences of that will be suffused. With copious levels of loss. Species and languages and homes and land and, you know, on and on. As you know, you're much more, versed in all of the particulars of that loss.

[01:19:54] **Nate Hagens:** My mind is much more attuned to it. My body perhaps not as such.

[01:19:59] **Francis Weller:** Well, that's the thing. I mean, as we go deeper into the long dark and the grief becomes more, front and center, for us to stay alive, and participate. When I talk about the long dark, I'm also recognizing I'm not going to see the end of that.

[01:20:17] I'm going to die long before that long dark is over. So what is my responsibility right now? My responsibility is to plant seeds of imagination of what living culture might look like. And to process grief collectively is one of the heartbeats of living culture. When you see a living culture that has endured for 10, 000 to 125, 000 years, what makes that possible?

[01:20:45] You know, it's how we hold one another. Particularly in times of trouble and loss.

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[01:20:50] **Nate Hagens:** One of my recent ideas, also in the Frankly I put out today, is that historical cultures that have expressed wisdom often do that by using restraint. And we have very little restraint in our culture. and it seems like facing grief is one of those things that issues immediate comfort and convenience and takes some restraint and says, this is necessary, we're going to do this.

[01:21:17] Is our, grief and exercising restraint related?

[01:21:22] **Francis Weller:** Yeah, I have a new, essay collection coming out this summer, and one of my essays is on the, is the value of restraint, you know, because it is collectively one of the least acknowledged soul values. we, our focus is on, increase and, gathering more to us rather than practicing restraint.

[01:21:48] To do grief work and to touch back into the primary satisfactions makes restraint relational. It's not something I'm depriving myself of. But in, in a, if the, if that field is still being nourished, then my selfish needs are actually going to be met, not by me taking more, but my allowing more, my supporting more of the community.

[01:22:17] That's what's going to allow that, Space to open up and feel held and cared for.

[01:22:24] **Nate Hagens:** Let me flip that a little bit. So instead of, encouraging people to be apprentices to sorrow or, going through grief rituals, what do you find to be the most helpful way for you or I or anyone listening respond to someone else?

[01:22:43] Who is grieving, whether that is others or even, yourself responding to yourself. Like, how do we respond to someone else who is grieving? Is there a best practices there?

[01:22:55] **Francis Weller:** I think it's mostly important to not try to talk them out of it. To just say, I see you and I understand your heart is caring so much right now.

[01:23:06] And I'm here. You know, we don't have to do a lot of talking. We certainly don't need to make it, try to make it better. That's oftentimes, insulting to the grief that's there. What we need to do is really say, I see you. Particularly for the young

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ones. When I'm, we're getting more and more of the 20s and the 30 year olds to our gatherings, and I think what's helpful for them is to say what you're feeling is real.

[01:23:36] What you're feeling is legitimate. What you're feeling is not just your own grief, but the soul of the world. you're, feeling it all. And if we can do anything to help hold you and support you. We're here. I mean, I'm here for that. That feels like a deep responsibility of someone who's about to, you know, get close to 70 years old.

[01:23:57] **Nate Hagens:** I agree. I think that's really important. And I think the, how to metabolize emotions and, our hindbrain and our deeper systems is not something that's taught or accompanied all the bad news and the charts and the graphs. And I think it, it needs to be. Let me ask you a hypothetical question.

[01:24:21] There seems to be a hierarchy and the more that status is important with the people involved, the less likely they're going to be, able to do a grief ritual, et cetera. What would happen if Biden's, well, now Trump's cabinet would be able to go through a grief ritual? Like, what, what might change in our world if high level politicians were able to periodically grieve, and then go back to their important work?

[01:24:51] David

[01:24:51] **Francis Weller:** Well, just beginning by taking the other side of that is that there's a ritual that happens fairly, I think, yearly out here in California by the Bohemian Grove, and they begin with a ritual of burning care. So they do the opposite. They create an effigy of care, and then they burn that, so that In the sense that it gives them permission to not care about the condition of the world.

[01:25:20] **Nate Hagens:** What? Who does that? Yes.

[01:25:22] **Francis Weller:** The Bohemian Grove, where they gather all the wealthiest, most powerful, typically white men together, and they do this ritual every

[01:25:31] **Nate Hagens:** year. The Bohemian Grove, is that, in the Muir Woods?

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[01:25:35] **Francis Weller:** No, it's in the, outside of Monterreo in, on

[01:25:40] **Nate Hagens:** the Russian River. That's, not good.

[01:25:44] That would be my magic wand question. It would get Francis Weller to the White House and lead 35 people or 40, 40 pairs of eyes through a grief ritual.

[01:25:53] **Francis Weller:** That would be powerful. There's a fairy tale called the Lindworm. Do you know the Lindworm fairy tale? King and Queen deeply in love but they can't conceive so the wife goes to visit this wise old woman, or she sees her on the path and says, why are you so sad?

[01:26:11] You know, well, I can't conceive a child, you know, and that would make us the most happy. So she says, well, here's what you do. You know, you do this, you follow these instructions, please follow these instructions exactly as I tell you. And she doesn't, obviously. And so she gets pregnant and the pregnancy goes along and it's time for the birth.

[01:26:33] And the midwife is there with her. But the first child that's born is this slimy. Worm, this snake like creature, and the midwife throws it out the window, and the second child comes out beautiful, the gorgeous boy, you know, everything's great, and kingdom goes on for 16, 17 years until the young boy's ready to go out and find his, wife.

[01:27:01] Well, they go out on their horses, and suddenly this massive creature. Locks their pathway and says, No wife for thee until there's a wife for me. And they turn around and go back, and this happens two or three times, and they don't know what this is. And finally, the midwife confesses that, Well, there was this other.

[01:27:25] So he is the firstborn. So he has the right to be married first. So they invite this creature into the kingdom. You know, but every woman that they give him, he devours. This is a problem. So there's no satisfying this part of us that has been tossed away. So then that same old woman talks to the next maid and says, here's what you do.

[01:27:51] I want you to, sew seven blouses and put them all on and come to the room, the wedding chamber. with a bucket of lye and a steel brush and a bucket of

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milk. She walks in and he says, okay, take your clothes off, it's time for bed. And she says, I'll take off one of my blouses if you take off one of your skins.

[01:28:21] And he says, No one's ever asked me to do that before. So she gets the lye bucket and the steel brush and scrubs, and everyone hears this howling throughout the kingdom. And of course, this goes through seven layers. And underneath all of that is this quivering young boy who's never had a chance to mature.

[01:28:47] That's what I would imagine would need to happen with the cabinet officials, is the scrubbing of seven layers of our own. Forgetfulness, our own collusion and, with. The denial and the in living in a culture of death,

[01:29:10] **Nate Hagens:** the majesty and the horror and the incredible detail and complexity of our current human ecosystem story is the thing of fairy tales itself.

[01:29:24] And yet it's real. And we're living it sometimes, especially when I learn about it. Something new like today. It's just astounds me how disconnected we are from our ancestral intimacy and primary satisfaction. As you said, thank you for your time today. I have a few closing questions if you don't mind for those people that feel the arrow of truth that you've fired, with words today, what are some things they could do in their own life to, to move in the direction of integrating this into a daily practice or something in their lives?

[01:30:02] **Francis Weller:** Well, I think that idea of calling together a few people is very important. It's beginning to get into the currency and the language of sorrow and grief. And be mindful of how powerful and dominant that heroic mantle is, of being in control, of rising above everything, of dominating every emotion you feel, developing a more compassionate Witnessing of your own sorrows, but also the sorrows of others.

[01:30:33] There's a number of rituals that I list out in the book that don't require other people, but they require some relationship to place, you know, like speaking your sorrows into a large stone and writing them on there. And taking them out into nature, and digging a hole, and making an offering in the hole, putting the stone in the ground, and saying, Would you please carry this for me?

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[01:30:57] I could no longer carry this. You might actually transmute this into nutrients for the microbes and the mycelia, and this might actually turn into a fern, or a frog. But I can't carry it anymore, you

[01:31:11] **Nate Hagens:** know. So voicing it and writing it and burying it in that way is both a ritual and it cleanses the body by the process of writing and doing those things.

[01:31:23] That's important.

[01:31:24] **Francis Weller:** It's a very important thing. It's a form of acknowledgement. It's a form of honoring. I think what our grief wants is to be honored. It doesn't want us again to take us down into a place of deadness. Absolutely not. It wants us to feel alive.

[01:31:38] **Nate Hagens:** And you mentioned earlier that at your grief rituals, you've been seeing more young people, in their twenties and thirties.

[01:31:46] We have a lot of those that watch this podcast. What recommendations would you have for them listening to this show?

[01:31:51] **Francis Weller:** Very similar to have collective ground where you can speak these things, you know, where you can set them down. The thing is that, you know, you don't have to do a ritual like I've done. Any kind of gathering with intention can allow that field to open up and allow the movement of those emotions to happen.

[01:32:16] And what I think the young ones really need is just a continuous presence at the grief shrine, that they know that it's there. I mean, we have people come from Australia and England, Canada, and all across the country, and I say, that's wonderful that you're here, but this is a core symptom of the problem that we're facing, that this is not happening in all of our communities, that you have to travel 8,000 miles for the privilege to grieve?

[01:32:43] That ain't right. So the young ones, I want them to have ample opportunities to stay current and just stay connected to their own bodies and souls.

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[01:32:54] **Nate Hagens:** The reason that people travel that far is because you're well known and it's led by someone who's an expert at this. If you're going to do it locally, especially young people.

[01:33:05] There's a prerequisite, which is the people that you, invite to share an evening or a weekend and just feel the intimacy of the loss of the world. As one example, you kind of have to feel close to those people and trust them first. They can come to you and be strangers. but if you're doing it locally, it's gotta be with someone that you have some modicum of trust and affection for.

[01:33:27] Yes.

[01:33:28] **Francis Weller:** You would have to build that up.

[01:33:29] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[01:33:30] **Francis Weller:** I mean, it's, not an automatic thing. That's why we do it over three days.

[01:33:34] **Nate Hagens:** Right.

[01:33:34] **Francis Weller:** You know, by the way, people arrive as strangers typically, but they leave as village mates. So if, for these young ones, the first session may not be a grief session. It might be saying, who are you?

[01:33:46] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[01:33:46] **Francis Weller:** Why, what moves you? What's touching you? What's weighing on you.

[01:33:51] **Nate Hagens:** This is so important. We need to be doing this at all scales in every community in the United States in the world. The social capital tethers are a no regret strategy for what's coming. And I'm very sure that, I mean, I'm, I was sure after I read your book, I'm even more sure after this conversation that this, that grief is a part of it, it's a powerful part of it.

[01:34:11] **Francis Weller:** Absolutely.

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[01:34:12] **Nate Hagens:** What do you care most about in the world, Francis?

[01:34:15] **Francis Weller:** That we are able to, Attune ourself to the dreaming earth once again, that the earth for millennia informed us of how to be decent human beings. That required a psyche attuned to the rhythm and song of the earth, the dreaming earth.

[01:34:42] So what I would want most, what I love most, what I desire most, is that return to that level of attunement. And I've seen that. I've seen how ritual. Dreams differently in different parts of the continent. How the Earth articulates itself particularly. In each locale and that we become a chorus of articulation of uniqueness.

[01:35:07] That what IS what I sing and dream about in the, you know, in the redwood forest of my town and someone in Texas or in Australia, that we're able to bring our dreams together and reim. This world, or not so much reanimate the world, but remember it's animacy, that this is a living being that we're part of, and what I love most is the capacity to know that, and to feel that, and to encourage that in one another.

[01:35:43] **Nate Hagens:** I have to say that whenever I'm walking in a redwood forest, I feel the animacy of, the world. it is just a, vector that pulls me right in there, and so you, you're a very fortunate man to live there. Thank you so much for your time today and your important work in the world. do you have any closing comments, for our viewers and listeners?

[01:36:08] **Francis Weller:** Don't be a stranger to your own sorrows. I mean, there's a lovely poem by Rumi that I often close our grief ritual gatherings with. And as he said, those tender words we shared with one another. Are stored in the secret heart of heaven. One day, like rain, they will fall and spread. And our mystery will grow green across the earth.

[01:36:36] So I hope our tears can water the seeds of that green earth. That's what I pray. Thanks for having me, Nate.

[01:36:44] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you, Francis. To be continued, my friend. To be continued. If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification,

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please follow us on your favorite podcast platform. You can also visit [TheGreatSimplification.com](#).

[01:36:59] [com](#) for references and more. And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our discord channel. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagans, edited by No Troublemakers Media and produced by Misty Stinnett, Leslie Batlutz, Brady Heine, and Lizzie Sirianni.

[01:37:29] Earthgrief has no resolution, because it will be ongoing and multiplying. And so the idea of us facing that privately, there's no goddamn way your heart can stay open to the world fully without Being crushed by the weight of what's happening. So this is why we need circles. We need ritual. To at least allow us to not shut down in defense.

[01:37:55] Because what we're expected to do is just too damn much.

[01:38:02] Joining me today is psychotherapist Francis Weller for discussion on the human need for grief, ritual, and community. As the author of multiple best selling books, including *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, *Rituals of Renewal*, and *The Sacred Work of Grief*, Francis Weller has introduced the healing work of ritual.

[01:38:26] To thousands of people for over 40 years. He has worked as a psychotherapist during which he developed what he calls soul centered psychotherapy. Francis also founded and directs Wisdom Bridge, an organization that offers educational programs that seek to integrate the wisdom from indigenous cultures with the insights and knowledge gathered from Western poetic, psychological, and spiritual traditions.

[01:38:53] Francis work on grief and community is, in my opinion, at the core of what is needed ahead of and during, the Great Simplification. The topics covered on this platform are often heavy and full of devastating implications for the human and the non human world. perhaps through the work of people like Francis, we can learn to hold space for grief with each other.

[01:39:18] in the middle of this chaos in order to more effectively respond to the crises the world faces for those of you who are questioning, the gradual departure from Dennis Meadows limits to growth, energy depletion, climate, topics, we're still

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going to have, those issues because they are central to livable futures for people to understand.

[01:39:45] But more and more, I think we don't so much face an environmental or an economic or a social problem, but a disconnect in our culture from our ancestral tether of the type of life we lived back then. Grief, addiction, left brain versus right brain, narrow versus wide boundary thinking. All the things about who we are as human animals are centrally important to the times ahead.

[01:40:14] Which is why I'm interested in these topics because I think they're extremely relevant. This was an amazing conversation. This was the first time I talked to this man. I hope you enjoy and learn from this conversation with Francis Weller. Francis Weller, welcome to the program. Thank you, Nate. It's good to be here.

[01:40:37] This is our first conversation. We have a lot of mutual friends and off camera, I learned that, we grew up in the same area of Wisconsin. So cripes, maybe we do the whole podcast on grief in the Wisconsin accent. We'd probably lose a lot of followers if we did that. Great to see you. We're going to discuss grief today.

[01:41:01] You are a world expert on that. I have been reading your book, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, and I know very little about this subject, but I think it's central to, Central to our times and, I'm a little nervous about what I'm going to discover, in this conversation and how it, reflects back on my own life and my own journey.

[01:41:24] But let's start there. What was your own journey on how you came about to be an internationally recognized expert on the topic of grief? Well, there are many tributaries that were part of that. I mean, growing up, the youngest of eight, as I mentioned offline, my father had a very major stroke when I was quite young.

[01:41:49] And in a sense, my childhood ended at that moment and I became kind of a pseudo adult and I had to take care of many things around the home, but I don't think I ever had a chance to really be a child. So there was this erosion process that made me begin to feel less connected to my own being, to my own self.

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[01:42:15] And so I kind of had this character of melancholy that was with me much of my youth. A lot of deaths, a lot of, just struggle was part of that early life. But then as I grew and I became Educated in my profession, I became a psychotherapist when I was quite young, still 27 years old. And, you can't sit in this room very long without seeing that most everything that you touch has grief behind it.

[01:42:52] Whether that's the experience of rough childhoods, alcoholism, divorce, deaths of friends, family, children. There's nothing we touch right now that doesn't have a background. sound that sounds like sorrow. So we, I had to really become familiar with that territory. And then in the 90s, I became familiar with, grief work through ritual and community and began to understand the larger context that we were intended to have to process our sorrows.

[01:43:29] It's like when you come to see me in my office, we call that private practice, right? You come to my private practice. And somehow we have privatized grief so much. In our collective, in the white Western culture, that we almost instinctively, reactionarily, carry it privately. We don't talk about it. We don't share it.

[01:43:53] We don't see it in the other person's eyes. So, Through all of these different tributaries, I began to understand that this is one of the least addressed issues collectively, psychologically, emotionally, soulfully, in our collective body, and our failure to do so has led to catastrophic outcomes. I have so many questions.

[01:44:20] first of all, can you briefly describe and define, when you use the word grief, what do you mean by that? I mean the heart and soul's response to loss. And when you begin to see the size of the cloth, as Naomi Nye would say, it's everywhere. There's no part of our world that's not being touched by grief on any given day.

[01:44:43] The process is one of descent. We're taken downward when grief takes us. It has the same root origin as the word grave, gravity, gravis. We are taken down when grief touches us. And that's the holy territory of soul. So I am kind of a macro systems ecologist and I look at the metabolism of, around eight to 10 percent of all the humans that have ever lived or alive today and the magnitude of, the human economic superorganism and all of it.

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[01:45:16] so I, look in a systems view, presumably grief had an adaptive, quality to it in our ancestral past. Yes. Yeah, it's just the way the heart registers its affections. There's no separation between love and loss. They are entangled forever. There's no love that does not know loss. So how do we honor love?

[01:45:41] How do we honor our affection for our family, our neighborhoods, our watersheds? Well, we register that in our bones, in our hearts, when there's damage done to those things. When we lose someone in our family, or our kinship circle, the soul registers that loss instantly. And how do you define soul? Well, we need much more than 90 minutes for that, Soul is more of a way of seeing and experiencing than it is a thing. We have soulful conversations. They are deep, rich, intimate, vulnerable. They touch what is most human. The direction of soul is down into the depths. We talk about depth psychology. Again, we have a deep moment of connection. Well, that word depth has something to do with the territory of soul.

[01:46:42] It's, it deals more with beauty, with, like I say, vulnerability, community, ritual, imagination. Those are the facets that let us know we're in a soulful territory. And presumably you've studied, in addition to your grief rituals and your writing and, your practice. I know you've worked at common wheel with cancer patients and such.

[01:47:08] Presumably you've studied cross cultural or even, historically is our current modern Western world really an American. an anomaly, with a cross cultural perspective with how we treat grief at arm's length or sweep it under the rug? or is that common in human cultures? And no, it's not that common.

[01:47:30] I'm not saying it's terribly unique, but any culture that begins to align individualism. Is going to struggle with grief. Why is that? Because the, dictates of individualism are heroic. Do it alone, rise above it, always be successful, show no vulnerability. So those very dictates demand that we kind of push grief down.

[01:48:01] We don't want to admit. So an individual centric culture, as opposed to a community, based, group culture, the quest for status is very large and grief is a show of weakness. So it is, it's swept away, whereas grief is acknowledged and even respected. And sought after in a group perspective because of its healing properties.

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[01:48:32] And we are all grieving together. So we're in this together sort of thing. So it's. Wow, that, I hadn't thought about that. So it's tethered to an individualistic economic cultural system. Absolutely. I remember being interviewed some time ago and the topic was what I called at the heart of all our sorrows and at the heart of all our sorrows is this profound sense of emptiness, particularly in white capitalistic culture.

[01:49:01] Because we don't have living culture, we don't have the matrix within which the experiences of being human are being held adequately, whether that's grief or gratitude, whether it's initiation or elderhood, none of these things are actually held communally. By and large, I'm not saying that's completely gone, but by and large, those elements have not been addressed.

[01:49:27] And so we feel this great emptiness inside of us. And what's worst about this state is that we fill this emptiness with colonialism, with economic advancement, with racism, with consumption. Why are we, particularly in this country, the most consumptive culture on the planet? And it's partly because we are the most empty psychologically and emotionally.

[01:49:53] And we fill that, we try to fill it with stuff. So here's a thought, that I just had that one of the reasons that Western culture, not just the United States, but led by the United States, that we're at the vanguard of the carbon pulse. And so we are, as the average United States citizen is using 100 times the exosomatic energy in our energy footprint.

[01:50:18] Relative to what our bodies actually need internally with, food calories. And so we are insulated from a weekly, monthly, yearly tragic events that maybe without this energy surplus, our ancestral, people, humans back in the day, they encountered loss and tragedy all the time. So grief was like necessary.

[01:50:48] And now we've kind of like in an Icarus flying toward the sun, a sort of, movement, we haven't encountered it. And so it's become a huge blind spot, for us as individuals and our culture. Does that make sense? Oh, yeah. We've been on an Ascension trail for at least three or 4, 000 years trying to create systems of domination and control and supremacy.

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[01:51:15] And consequently, right now, what we're facing is this corrective time brought about by what I'm considering the soul of the world, the Anima Mundi, is taking us downward into this time of great descent, what I'm calling the Long Dark. This is a prolonged period of descent that I hope has the potential To tie us back into connection and entanglement.

[01:51:41] So the name of this podcast in my work is called The Great Simplification, which is basically the downside of, or the top part of, and then the downside of the carbon pulse, which is a biophysical, macroeconomic vantage of the human trajectory. how does the long dark map onto this, is it related to economic growth and hydrocarbons and, all that?

[01:52:05] or does it rhyme? I think they, are pointing a finger at the same thing. The long dark invites more of a soulful reflection on where we're going and why we need to go there. There's a necessity for this time. And you probably might say that same thing for the macroeconomic issue, that we need a correction, that how we've been living has been in disconnection to what it is that amplifies a meaningful life, a soulful life.

[01:52:38] I could say more about that, but to be clear, from an ecological standpoint, we need a correction from an economic standpoint, whether we need a correction or don't need it is coming because of the laws of thermodynamics and physics, which I may kick the can a little bit. We don't know. But why is it necessary?

[01:53:00] Like in my parlance, we have to prepare for what's ahead. But you're actually going a step further and saying that the Going through the long dark, as you say, is necessary. Why is that? Because in, one of the ways I frame it is through the language of alchemy. Which is an ancient precursor to physics and chemistry and things like that, you know.

[01:53:27] But what alchemy says is that we go through seasonally, episodically, times of descent into what they call the negredo, the blackening. And they say in the negredo, that is the time of endings, of shedding, of decay. of collapse, and if we could participate in it, they say that the negredo is the beginning state of any process of soul making.

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[01:53:57] We've lost the soul in this culture, in this society. We're a very self based, but not a soul based, we're a self focused culture. Do you know Bill Plotkin by any chance? I know Bill quite well. Kel Surprise, he was on the podcast last year and he said something echoing what you just said, it came to mind.

[01:54:20] Before we get too far off of my intro questions, are there cultures that you're aware of today that, invoke and accept and process grief much more than, the United States? Yeah, I think most traditional cultures do. You could find very active grieving process, say, for instance, in the Black Baptist community, where they know how to have a funeral.

[01:54:45] They know how to grieve. We apologize in white churches for losing control, you know, like, I'm sorry I cried, you know. We have such a, lack of, generosity and hospitality to tears, to grief, to wailing, you know? So yes, there are many cultures that this is a part of their life because they can't get away from it.

[01:55:15] I remember being in West Africa many years ago, but there was a grief ritual going on someplace in the village almost every single day because grief was ever present. They couldn't get away from it, but they also, by doing so, were the most alive people and probably the most joyous people I've ever met.

[01:55:35] I remember saying to one of the women, you have so much joy, because it really startled me, and what she said immediately was, well, that's because I cry a lot. So, I'm a American male. and the only real times I've cried, I cried a few months ago, when I had kind of an emotional week, but it wasn't like sobbing, crying.

[01:56:02] I've cried three times like sobbing, crying. all three times were the loss of my dogs, my, my golden retriever, Quinn, Maisie and honey bear. And I remember fighting it. I don't want to cry. That would, I would be out of control and I'm not supposed to cry, but I remember feeling really sick. Like I was so miserable.

[01:56:26] And then like three days after she died, I cried like sobbing, crying. And then I felt like two hours later, I felt like I had been cleansed and I felt better. So what physiologically is going on when people grieve or cry? And what happens if they're experiencing the emotions of grief, but they don't let them out and they're suppressed?

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[01:56:48] What's going on with the body? Well, what we've understand now is that grief is always meant to be in motion. There's a current of grief, and I like that word current because when I'm doing my grief work, I'm actually current in my life. Because most of the time what I'm doing is facing not only my history, but generations behind me.

[01:57:14] And I'm really rarely ever current, because that grief is like a sediment. I mean, people come into my office and they talk about depression, but when I listen to them, it's not so much depression, but oppression. There is this mantle of untouched sorrow that is settled on them like sediment and is oppressing their vitality.

[01:57:36] Now, one of the things that they've done with grief research is that they've found that the tears that we weep in grief contain cortisol. And others, yeah. We're literally cleansing ourselves when we, grieve. So that's one of the reasons why we feel different. And I would tell you that watching several thousand people over the years grieve together, the faces look so different.

[01:58:06] After the ritual is over, they look lightened, opened, released from the weight of all of that. We're not meant to carry it around like a U Haul. This is supposed to be processed continuously. You know, all of the sorrows that touch us. So is grief, does grief manifest in the body like a toxin? Like I know when we have toxins, like when people drink alcohol and then, later that week, if you take a sauna, I mean, it can get processed through sweat or from bowel movements or urine or tears, as you say, or breath, we get rid of stuff in our body.

[01:58:48] is grief like that, like in our bodies? What I think happens is it more like it becomes a congestion in the heart, and we talk about congestive heart failure in this culture as the number one cause of death. And it's not just fat. It's not just cholesterol. The research also shows that the lack of connection, the lack of friendship, the lack of being able to express ourselves fully is oppressive to the heart.

[01:59:17] It stresses us. So we end up dying from heart failure. I'm not going to apologize, but I really have so many questions. Go for it. What is the relationship between grief and something like cognitive dissonance, where Leon Festinger's, you

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know, famous example that acknowledging something that's so painful, is so scary that you suppress it in order to maintain your current identity and state of being.

[01:59:46] And that results in all kinds of problems. It sounds like grief and cognitive dissonance are related. Well, we have to ask ourselves, why do we have to repress it? You know, and one of the primary reasons is We're asked to carry it in solitary confinement. It's like there's an intelligence that says, I can't express this because there's no holding space for it.

[02:00:10] I wrote in the book that grief, to release grief requires two things, containment and release. But without containment, if there's no village, if there's no community, if there's no ritual ground, then I have to become the container and then there's no release. So I become a permanent recycling center for sorrow.

[02:00:29] It just keeps cycling over and over again within me. So the implications of those two points are, to successfully or appropriately grieve, we have to do so in community. We can't do it by ourselves. At least to a degree. You know, when people come in here, You can feel that same anxiety you talked about earlier about God, they'll say something like if I go there, I'm never coming back.

[02:00:54] There's so much grief. And I tell them, if you don't go there, you're never coming back. Because most of our aliveness is caught up in the suppression of sorrow. Most of our aliveness is caught up in the suppression of sorrow. Yes. God, that's horrible. Well, yes, but that is the dictate. That's the requirement to be particularly a white man in this culture.

[02:01:21] You can't lose control. You have to be above it. You have to get over it. You know, if you lose someone close, well, we'll give you a few days of bereavement, but then get back to work. There's no, again, no hospitality to this, so we spend much of our psychic energy trying to keep this field at bay. So this is the emotional toll of the Borg or the economic superorganism or the thing in the matrix that our economic system is treating us as isolated, growth, profit, cogs and machines without looking at the embodied origins of who we are, with all of our psychology and physiology and the system that is the human body.

[02:02:12] When we, again, I'm not saying this is conscious at all, but when we moved from communal based Village based realities to more the individualistic. We

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lost touch with what I call the primary satisfactions. Eating together, dreaming together, dancing together, grieving together, giving thanks together, taking our youth through initiation, starlit skies, rituals of, elderhood.

[02:02:42] I mean, so many things. That's what shaped us over hundreds of thousands of years. And then we abandon that. We've lost the primary satisfactions, and now we pursue secondary satisfactions. Wealth, status, prestige, advantage, material goods. Addiction, and we can never get enough of that, can we? I work with a lot of wealthy people, and they can never have enough, because it doesn't fill what the primary satisfaction's filled.

[02:03:15] And that's at the heart of our grief. We don't even know it. We don't know, you know, we're missing this. But there's this ache in our soul that is so loud and so deep and so persistent. And then we just have to have the next glass of wine, or the next, you know, or the next, So how much of our addictions and our self medication for alcohol and pornography and gambling and stock options and all that is self medicating against the inability to express grief in the way that you're describing?

[02:03:51] Well, you recognized that one of the things I said is that, the two primary sins of Western civilization are amnesia and anesthesia. So this great forgetting, which what Daniel Quinn called this times. And by the way, the, golden retriever that I cried about was named Quinn after Daniel Quinn.

[02:04:10] But go on. Lovely, lovely. But this great forgetting, we can't tolerate that. That this is gone, and so we have an entire industrial focus on anesthesia. To help us survive. So anesthesia is the bookend to the amnesia. Yes. The anesthesia is there because of the amnesia. And if the amnesia, if we suddenly remember, then gradually or suddenly the need for anesthesia disappears?

[02:04:44] That's what I've seen. In my own life, but also in many people that I've worked with over the decades. Can you give an example? Well, when you grant someone primary satisfaction, I could think of many examples. but particular ones. I remember a young, one young man I was working with who He was so ashamed of himself for feeling weak, for feeling inadequate, not having a voice.

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[02:05:12] and over time he began to trust his relationship with me, began to feel like he might actually be welcomed. But then he went through men's initiation with me, a year long process, and to see him return to the primary matrix of a community of men, of ritual, of song, of story, of being held and touched.

[02:05:36] Of being out under the, around the campfire, you know, sharing laughter, tears, just to watch him kind of return to what his inheritance actually bequeathed him, which is aliveness, joy, delight, tears, connection. Those things return to him and I can feel, I could feel and see and witness him coming alive again.

[02:06:02] I remember a friend of mine saying to me, are you happy? And I said, well, I have moments. of being happy, but I've stopped trying to be happy because every time I wasn't, I thought I was failing. What I want is to be alive. And every one of these emotions has vitality in them. My grief is vital. My sadness is vital.

[02:06:23] My anger is vital. Even my fear is vital. And I want to be alive, not happy. You know, I want to feel my own pulse. As I'm in this body for however long it's going to carry me, but, you know, it's getting shorter and shorter on that far on that side of the coin. So we're, very aligned on this. Today is, Friday, January 24th.

[02:06:46] And this morning, I released a frankly, Towards wide boundary sovereignty. And one of my recommendations was, to pursue ancestral intimacy, which sounds a lot like your primary satisfaction. And I think what you're really talking about is as a culture, as a species, we have to mature and move from secondary satisfaction back to primary satisfaction.

[02:07:13] And the irony is. That for most of us, not all of us, but most of us in the Western world, moving back to primary satisfaction would actually be less energy resource and ecosystem, throughput intense. Well, if we were really again sane and we practice primary satisfactions, the economic system would collapse in one hour.

[02:07:36] Yes. There's no need for that economic system. I'm not saying we don't need food and things like that. Of course we do. But the primary activity of economics is to replace the primary satisfactions. So grief is actually a threat to the current, power system. Yes. To be alive, to feel your heart, to feel your affection for the world.

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[02:08:02] When I first started doing grief rituals, maybe two or three people would come with concern for the earth. The last few rituals I've done, it was like three fourths of the people there are there because of earth grief. They're there because they're, the denial is broken, or is breaking. and that's what gives me some hope, is that through grief, We might remember our affection for the world.

[02:08:32] We might remember that we are the receptor sites for the sorrows and joys of the world. If we don't receive that, who will? All right, I'm gonna, let's, drill into this a little bit. So, I understand there's grief if there's a loss of a loved one, or a dog, or there's a tragedy in the family.

[02:08:55] And I understand that humans have encountered that, obviously, from the Pleistocene and, before. Yeah. The magnitude of the grief at the ongoing sixth mass extinction and the fact that fish are having to swim poleward to get enough oxygen and the 70 percent plus reduction in animal fish, bird, insect, populations.

[02:09:23] That's like a different orders of magnitude of grief. And in my own life, I do deeply care and love the natural world. But what's changed for me. Among other things, I was, when I was four years old, I was watching mutual of Omaha's wild kingdom and all those episodes. And now the, cinematography is so fantastic on planet earth and these things, I can't watch them anymore because when I watch them, I.

[02:09:54] I see the beauty of the hummingbirds and the orangutans and all the animals and the fish. And my mind fast forwards to what's coming in the next 50 years. And I feel sick and I have to turn it off. So there is an unprocessed grief there. And I don't think it's because I don't care or don't love nature.

[02:10:14] So help me understand what's going on there. Part of what we're facing is the reality that grief is unsolvable. You cannot resolve this grief. See, when you lost your beloved dog friends, you were with that grief, and it carried you. And it's probably still there, to a degree. But for the most part, you could say there is some resolution to that sorrow.

[02:10:40] I live with that melancholy. I live with the bittersweet of their absence. I still love them. I still miss them. But there's some resolution to that. Earth grief has no resolution. Because it will be ongoing and multiplying. And so the idea of us

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facing that, again, back to that earlier comment about privately, there's no goddamn way your heart can stay open to the world fully without Being crushed by the weight of what's happening.

[02:11:14] So this is why we need circles, we need ritual, to at least allow us to not shut down in defense. I mean, all praise to amnesia, all praise to numbing. Because the, what we're expected to do is just too damn much. it's too hard to do what you just said. Face the world. Face the world's grief. So it's like, getting rid of inflammation in the body by taking, saunas and cold plunges and exercising and sweating.

[02:11:48] This is the emotional equivalent of grieving in a group with others on the sorrow of the earth. That you're, not solving the problem. you're just getting rid of the cortisol and other things in your tears and your emotions and your body so that you wake up cleansed and ready to work on all the things we're working on.

[02:12:11] Not quite Nate. I would say what I know. When we come to the end of our rituals, and it's usually a three day gathering, we come to the close of the ritual, and I'm doing a closing prayer, basically. I'll say something like, we didn't do this just for ourselves. We didn't do this just so our hearts could feel lighter.

[02:12:33] We did this so we could love the world more ardently, so our love might fall into the streets. And to the young ones, and to the watersheds, that we might feel our affinities more directly and fully. And consequently, we might respond more wholeheartedly to what is happening, to injustices, to violations, to damage.

[02:12:57] So, you're saying that if grief is kept at bay Let's say for the earth and for the oceans and the other 10 million possible 10 million species, we share the planet with that. If it's not properly grieved in ritual with a group of other like valued, like minded humans, like you suggest that because it's kept at bay, the mirror image of that is that we can't fully love.

[02:13:25] And if we can't fully love them, we can't fully roll up our sleeves and play a role in doing whatever work we are working on, in service of life. Is that what you're saying? That if I, for example, one person, but just use me for the moment, if I fully grieve what I'm afraid to grieve for now, because I know so much about the stats, that then I would actually love more?

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[02:13:50] I think you would feel more connected to what it is you're doing, not so much out of obligation or kind of a moralism, but out of affection. Wendell Berry, that wonderful farmer poet, said that it all turns on affection. So how do we get back to affection? Well, that has to go through the chambers of the heart.

[02:14:12] And for me to go into the heart means I have to register what's there. The grand loss, the grand scale of decline, of suffering, of refugee status, there's so many things happening that could, again, cause the heart to shut down. But if it all turns on affection, then I need the practices that keep the heart soft.

[02:14:38] To keep it pliable, to keep it responsive to the world. And yes, we need ritual ground. But when I use the word community, I'm also talking about the community of stones, the community of trees. You can go out and grieve. With the trees, you can go out, I mean, I have driven past clear cuts that just brought me to my knees.

[02:14:59] And was that just some kind of a psychological projection? Or was I registering in my body that field of sorrow, you know? And that's our spiritual responsibility, I feel. So you're a grief expert. I mean, I know the territory somewhat. Do you grieve more? Then the average person and when you grieve, do you feel cleansed and then renewed or do you grieve and it's like a groove on a, album, that you can find that groove again easily and you tend to then grieve a lot.

[02:15:42] I think there are gradations to that sorrow that happen on any, given day. That's why I think the idea that I like is the apprenticeship of sorrow. This apprenticeship, well, the apprenticeship recognizes that on every day you will, touch something sorrowful. Like when I drove in to see you today from my home in the woods, I drove past two or three, skunk, dead skunk, raccoon, fox, and those losses touch me.

[02:16:15] I feel them. They don't, in that moment, may not bring me to my knees, but in the right setting, they could. If the holding space was present, they could take me to my knees. But the apprenticeship recognizes the continuity of sorrow. At any given day, any given moment, walking down the street, seeing someone on the street asking for money, that's heartbreaking.

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[02:16:41] We shouldn't have that in the richest country in the world. Or we shouldn't, you know, hear the news of mass roundups of immigrants being forcibly removed from this country. That's sorrowful. And we need to register that again, but we need spaces in order to do that. Yeah. So there's a distribution of different temperaments and experiences and, levels of trauma with the population of citizens of the United States and the world.

[02:17:12] Are there certain, is there a certain part of that distribution that it dangerous is too strong of a word maybe, but that For them, grieving would really spiral them into a depression and, or worse. Is that something that's a concern? I think the opposite is true, that when we don't process the grief, we spiral into depression.

[02:17:35] So, depression, we could say, is the freezing of that emotional ground. So, as we Crest, the carbon pulse and all the craziness of coming decades with all the things, politics, AI, caring capacity, climate oceans, wars, and violence. We actually better have a relationship with grief because if we don't and we suppress it and keep it at arm's length and all these things are going to truly be depressing and metabolize in our body and hurt our, health because we haven't.

[02:18:14] Yes. I mean, I wrote the forward for, Dwayne Elgin's last book. not surprised. choosing earth was his last book that he wrote. And, he, talked to me and he says, I, want you to write the preface to this book. And I didn't want to write it, you know, cause I had to read the book.

[02:18:39] And the book is hard to read because he talks about the next five decades, or is it seven decades? I can't remember. Five decades. And the probable projections onto each of these decades of where we're going to be heading. And it scares the shit out of me. But I had to write something. And I had to say something honestly.

[02:19:01] And so I talk about rough initiation. I talk about the long dark. What's rough initiation? Traditional initiation done in many, cultures. Not here, by and large. But in traditional cultures, and even in our own deep time ancestral lineage. There was a process by which the elders, the ancestors, the rituals, the sense of the sacred, the community itself, the land itself, all held the young ones in a process of intense cooking to help them emerge out of that process.

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[02:19:36] childhood state into something more participatory as a young adult in the well being of the community. Initiation was not meant for the individual, it was meant on behalf of the community. And that's why I call the initiation a contained encounter with death. Because there is no initiation if there's not an engagement with death.

[02:19:57] A rough initiation is an uncontained encounter with death. There's no containment for what we're experiencing, but we are definitely encountering death. So the potential for radical realignment is, here. And again, that's a lot of what I see in rituals work is a reshaping, kind of a reconfiguring of the internal, matrix.

[02:20:23] I talk about grief and ritual with the language of derangement. That ritual allows us to get deranged periodically, and that derangement is necessary because the current arrangement isn't working, and we need to be rearranged periodically in shape and size and scope and scale that's more attuned to soul than it is to economics or business.

[02:20:50] So. In future decades, those communities, those nations, those cultures, those families, those areas that have metabolized their grief are going to be more resilient to the times ahead. No doubt. No doubt. Yeah. I mean, part of what, again, what grief does is it reminds us continuously of our deep entanglement with everything.

[02:21:17] I mean, I don't know if you remember when I wrote about the, this is 2010 when the Gulf oil spill happened. And I would wake up in the middle of the night crying, hearing the sounds of the dolphins suffocating and the shorebirds dying. That's 2, 000 miles away from my home, but my psyche doesn't register distance, it registered the entanglement.

[02:21:40] That this is a relationship that's part of my body, part of my soul, and I'm not separate from it. That's part of what I love about grief, is it recognizes that everything that's happening, It's touching us. And if we don't register that, if we don't honor that, then I have to live separate and segregated from the tissue of the world.

[02:22:05] So Carl Jung, mentioned the concept of shadow. and in your book, you write that grief and death are, relegated into this shadow. so if our. If our culture,

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accepted grief and death more than, ours does, would the shadow in the average person be smaller? I guess that's a dumb question, that the answer is yes, right?

[02:22:33] Answer is yes. And so how do we do that? Is there a proper or a correct way to grieve or is there a wrong way to grieve? Well not grieving is the wrong way to grieve, you know. Okay, let's start there, yeah. no, there's not a right way to grieve, as long as you're willing to touch it and hold it and bring some warmth to it.

[02:22:58] Again, that's another alchemical idea, that in order for this to move, we have to keep it warm. And we keep the grief warm by attention, by affection, by care, by writing, by dancing, by being with friends, by sharing this material. We keep it warm so it can keep moving. The moment it turns cold, either through Shame or through refusal or through anesthesia, it freezes and becomes hardened and then we're back to congestive heart failure.

[02:23:31] There's no movement. So in some ways, I, we have many mutual friends, but I don't think you know much about my work, but this podcast is a kind of a ritual grief of sorts because we're talking about all the ills of the world from a science integrated perspective without. Resolving them without coming up with answers and some episodes are fricking hard hitting I've teared up, at times.

[02:23:56] So in a way it is a processing of grief of sorts. Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think anytime we have a chance to speak honestly about what it is that's in the field. It's like when, COVID hit. The ambient field changed, and suddenly we were breathing in anxiety, uncertainty, tremendous amounts of grief. We were breathing that in every day, and the currency of our conversations changed.

[02:24:28] Things began to alter as a consequence of that. So what you're doing is you're allowing that ambient field to be given language, so we can see what's actually moving around us. And that's helpful. We need to have language for these things. We need to have forms of expression, but I do feel that information alone is not going to get us down the road.

[02:24:50] Fully agree. And every month that goes by, I agree with that more. yeah, we need information to know that something's wrong and then we need to heal and find community and find the others and grieve and strategize and live and love and laugh and, figure things out and then apply that. to the problems of the day.

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[02:25:12] I, I, see that now. So when someone comes to you, you're a psychotherapist, and you're well versed in grief, you listen to them and you give some advice. Like, are there, like a doctor would give a different titrations of medicine. Are there different categories of, grief practice that you recommend, to different people based on their situation and their experience, or is it all the generally the same pathway?

[02:25:43] I mean, collectively, the conditioning is fairly ubiquitous. It's most of all of us have had this conditioning to stuff it and move on. So just allowing to naming it, you know, that you sound even just to start by saying that sounds incredibly sad. Just to acknowledge that story isn't humorous, or it's not incidental, that actually carries a lot of sorrow.

[02:26:13] And then to allow them to begin to feel some familiarity with the ground of grief, and to allow the two of us in that moment. To register, to feel it, but I will say to them at some point in my work, this is a good place to learn how to tolerate contact with this very uncomfortable guest. But at some point, you will need a much larger holding space.

[02:26:37] You'll need some ritual ground. You'll need some community around you. Because that's that fourth gate of grief, which has to do with what we expected and did not receive. we haven't talked about your five gates. Would you briefly, touch on them and then get back to your point here? Sure, sure.

[02:26:54] Yeah, these became evident in sitting with many, people over many decades of grief work. The first one is self evident. That's, you know, everything that we love we will lose. That's a harsh. reality, but it's the truth. You get to hold on to nothing. Everything you love, you will lose. So whether that's a child, a partner, a marriage, a home, your life, you get to hold on to nothing.

[02:27:25] And people say, well, I get to hold on to the love, right? So, well, only if you honor the rights of love, which include grief. I tell that story in the book about this 80 some year old architect, engineer. An Austrian engineer came to one of the talks I was giving, and I had heard earlier from someone that his wife had just died, like two months prior.

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[02:27:51] And he raised his hand and asked this question, and he said, what is the one, two, three of grief? I want to be over with this. I'm done with this. And I said to him as gently as I could, I can't accept the premise of your question. It presupposes an ending to your grief. It will not end. It will change over time, like I just said to you, Nate, you know.

[02:28:15] It will turn into a bittersweet melancholy, but this is the shape that your love for your wife is now taking. Are you willing to accept that love? And he said, I can do that. You know, I can do that. If we can see that love and grief are not estranged. They're not antagonistic, they're actually a continuum, that my love is now taking this shape of sorrow, of tenderness, of ache, you know.

[02:28:43] Let me double click on that and get back to your five things, but let me double click on that. So would you say that The sensation of bittersweet melancholy plus love and joy and all the other things was the default state of our ancestors, that bittersweet melancholy was kind of the set line through a human life.

[02:29:07] It's hard to project. I mean, I would imagine that anyone who's holding field was strong enough would not be demanded that they excise that part from their life. But they would honor that. I mean, in some traditions, like the Jewish tradition and others, they honored it for a year or more. There's, space to be held in that field.

[02:29:32] We used to wear the black armbands. Remember that? You know, to signify that you're a person in mourning. So we might interact with you differently. We might come to you softer. We might come to you with more curiosity and how are you doing with that? But there's no marking anymore. We don't wear black. We don't.

[02:29:51] We don't honor these deaths because we've been at a all you can eat Vegas smorgasbord culturally for Two generations and so this has been forgotten like you said amnesia So one more question What's the relationship between love and grief or grief and joy if someone doesn't grieve ever? like a lot of people in our culture, does that mean they can't quite experience the full joy and full love?

[02:30:22] Is that, what you're implying? I am implying that, yes. I mean, I describe our culture as a flatline culture. there's a very narrow range of what we're allowed

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to feel. We can get pissed off, we can get angry, you know, we might feel a little sadness, but we can't go into the deep register of grief.

[02:30:41] And consequently, the upper register of joy is collapsed. And what we've put in its place is excitement, is stimulation, stock markets, roller coasters, alcohol, drugs. Second satisfiers. Second satisfiers, yeah. we don't have genuine joy. So we have to. You know, see if I got a pulse by getting something exciting and stimulating.

[02:31:04] So the suppression of grief and the fear of death have reduced the amplitude of our full human emotional spectrum. Absolutely. Wow. Without question. Wow. Without question. Okay, go on to the second gate of grief. The second gate of grief is the places in us that have not known love. So as I mentioned at the beginning, some of my early years were, there was a lot of shame.

[02:31:29] I felt a lot of shame. And whenever you feel shame, you begin to look for the causative factors within us. So if I'm too sad, well, I've got to get rid of that. If I'm too exuberant, if I'm too sensual, if I'm too, whatever, angry. So we begin to piecemeal out. the parts of me that make it harder for me to feel approved of within my network, schools, church, family, peer groups.

[02:32:02] But eventually we begin to feel pretty thin, psychically. Now, every one of those losses, every one of those outcast parts of me are worthy of grief. But I can't grieve with what I hold for what I hold with contempt. As long as I judge those parts of me and keep them at bay, I can't grieve for them. And in that sense, there's no avenue of return for them.

[02:32:28] So much of the grief work that people have done is about softening the space between what's been outcast and what's not. They want to welcome back and grief around shame around that interior segregation is really important work. That's primarily the issue of psychotherapy. It's basically grieving what you've lost, what you've disowned.

[02:32:53] And hopefully in the process of grieving, you create a river of return so these pieces can come home again. So that's the second gate. And the third? Sorrows of the world. The Earth. Earth grief. And this one, like I say, is becoming

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more and more, undeniable. Whether it's calving glaciers or, you know, you mentioned the insect population.

[02:33:22] We wake up in the morning now to silence. There's very, little bird activity. When I first moved to this house 22 years ago, I would complain some mornings, God, the birds are just, they're waking me up at 5 in the morning. They're just so loud. But now, with the insects disappearing, the birds have nothing to eat.

[02:33:42] The bats are gone. I think there's, there's a lot of people in the environmental, ecological space where I have, a lot of work and contacts who are, perplexed at. The inability of large fractions of our population to understand, the ecological crisis as if it were an information deficit.

[02:34:08] And speaking to you, I wonder if it's primarily a, a protection mechanism somehow in the body, supported by our culture that If I acknowledge that those facts that those people are saying about the natural world and, the early innings of the six mass extinction, then I'm going to feel immense grief and I'm afraid to feel that.

[02:34:34] So I'm not going to acknowledge those facts. Is there some truth to that? 100%. But we're back to the same predicament, right? I have to somehow face this alone. You know, in, do you know Jeanette Armstrong, the Okanagan elder from Pacific Northwest? Amazing woman. She said in her village, they shape life like this.

[02:34:57] So it's community first, family second, and the individuals last. Having it shaped this way, even their word for belonging translates into our one skin. That no matter what happens to you, it'll be registered in our one skin. You're not going to be feeling it alone. She said you've inverted that completely in white culture.

[02:35:19] Individual first, family second. And she said you use the word community all the time, but there's no blood in it. It's thin. The rhetoric is empty. So that's our predicament. You know, to face all of what you just said, we have to face it at the pinnacle all by myself. And we don't have this covering that says, no matter what befalls you, you'll be held.

[02:35:44] You'll be caught. You'll be held. It's not just white culture. I mean, this is also in China and it would also be, it's the economic culture of the superorganism

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and growth more. Yes. I think, yes, I think the widespread of capitalism, even as it's expressed in its mutated form in China, that ideology has again usurped primary satisfaction.

[02:36:14] Now it's about productivity, economic growth. These have become the mythologies of our time. And we don't have a mythology of soul or of community, of meaning, of depth. We have a mythology of economic progress. And that progress always entices us to develop more, advance, But we don't know how to return.

[02:36:41] The old mythologies were cyclical. You came back again and again. This one's a straight arrow shooting to our collapse, our complete demise. Oh yeah, because the coming back is going to be a doozy. so, and the fourth gate, Francis. The fourth gate is what we expected and did not receive. And what I mean by that is that we were wired.

[02:37:06] In our deep ancestral body, over 300, 000 years at least, and probably several million in our hominid form, but we were wired for certain things, to expect certain things. That when we opened our eyes that first time, on some level, we were expecting 40 pairs of eyes looking back at us, and to be held by many, and to be seen by many, and watched, and coaxed, and witnessed by many.

[02:37:37] And when that's not there We begin to feel that emptiness again creeping in, and the worst part about that emptiness is that we blame ourselves for it. What did I do wrong? Because on some level, we expected something more than this. This is it? This is the game? You know, economic advancement, that's the whole game?

[02:37:59] So, yeah, when we don't get what we expected, that hole is, immense, and it's filled with sorrow. And we have to cry into this emptiness for generations, I think. What's touching your neck that landed? I mean, this gets back to ancestral intimacy and primary satisfiers and, we had 150 people or you said 40 pairs of eyes.

[02:38:31] what's touching me is two weeks ago. I had a party with some followers of the podcast and many of them are good friends and we spent the night and had music and food and, It, it was 40, 50 people who are speaking the same language

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and who, we weren't crying, we were laughing and smiling, but they all followed the podcast.

[02:38:54] So I know that there is a common thread of grief for the natural world that united us, and I felt it was the first time in years. Maybe ever that I didn't look at my phone until three in the next afternoon. That's because that's what I had been missing or craving. So what you said makes so much sense.

[02:39:16] But our economic system isn't such that we could do that on a daily basis. No, Plus the economic structure is based on chronic discontent. We're always feeling we want something more. The new phone, the new car, the next thing. It's as if we're designed to feel discontent. Well, we are, because those primary satisfactions are not being cultivated.

[02:39:48] within our lives, and then again, in their absence. And the fifth gate. Fifth gate is ancestral grief. And as I've sat with this gate over many years, it's become clear and clear that most all of our grief has some thread of ancestral grief in it. It's like my shame grief. I used to think my shame was, you know, somehow my own wound.

[02:40:19] But as I begin to look, I can see that thread go through my family and go back generations. That it is not mine. I'm the current curator of this grief. But that ancestral grief is deep seated and needs to be addressed as a story or as an epigenetic, thing in your body. Yes. I think both the, another part of that fifth gate is that, when we feel it collectively all the time, which is the what particularly white ancestors did to the indigenous people on this continent, and then the importation of slavery.

[02:41:02] That's still in our collective grief bowl, and we've not addressed that. And the fact that these issues around racism and how we treat the Native cultures here, that's still part of our untouched ancestral grief. We have never addressed it. We can't throw money at it. I mean, we should, but that's not the only solution.

[02:41:25] We have to get on our knees and begin to really acknowledge this legacy of 500 years of colonialism, of usurpation, of domination, of genocide. This is in our bodies. I don't know. I think it's in our cultural stories, but I don't know that it's in

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our, I mean, how far back do we go? Do we go back to that we exterminated the Neanderthals?

[02:41:55] I don't know how far back we go. I just feel and I hear from people I sit with that this has not been resolved in our collective. Yeah. Well, we, cause we haven't talked about it as a national level on that. I fully agree. No, And I think our grieving would be a signifier to the Native and the Black communities that are Sorrow and our repentance is genuine, you know, yeah, I think we have to do that.

[02:42:28] If we grieve through all these things, a momentous torrent of grief for all the things, doesn't that leave us in just a sodden puddle of, tears and, a fetal position? No, in fact, it makes me feel more joyful, you know, I've never seen, I think that's the fear, right? The fear is that grief will take us hostage.

[02:42:57] That I'll become imprisoned within this shadowed land of depression and sadness. But what it does in reality is it quickens the heart, reminds us of our faithfulness and our fidelities to the wider landscapes of friendship and community and watersheds. It brings us alive. I wish you could see, you know, about three fourths of the way through the ritual.

[02:43:28] There is this giddiness that begins to infest the room. There is, this joyfulness that begins to come in and the singing begins to change and the dancing begins to change and, because the hearts have been lightened, we're not weighed down by So much grief, and we recognize by the end of the day, that tomorrow we'll start picking up more.

[02:43:54] We'll start gathering it again together. Maybe briefly, I mean, you're, known for, facilitating grief rituals in community, give us an overview of what that looks like, the whole process, in brief. Well, we gather usually Friday afternoon. How many people? Anywhere from the smallest ones would be like 25.

[02:44:20] The biggest ones would be about 60. because you still want some sense of intimacy in the room when you do that work. Well, so, so the midpoint of that would be the 40 pairs of eyes. The 40 pairs of eyes, exactly. We begin by movement, drumming, and singing to try to create some harmonic field of attunement, that we're all here for this purpose.

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[02:44:44] We're all here for this. And then I ask people to go around, we go around the circle, and people share one thread of grief. Most people have many threads, but just name one thread of grief that you're walking in with. Could be the suicide of a child, or the, whatever it is, they name it. Then we ask, was there any sorrow share that you could not relate to?

[02:45:06] And of course you could. you may not have had that experience. You may not have gone through divorce or lost a child or whatever, but you could relate to it because of the shared experience of sorrow and grief. And then I say, okay, now let's just imagine that this is our communal cup of grief, that this isn't my grief, but this is ours.

[02:45:30] That itself is freeing. That itself allows me to begin to feel that I'm not alone. In this, I'm sharing this with all of you. So what you're doing so far in this process is you're putting a local cultural overlay that gives the humans that come the social permission and actually support for, grieving, which our macro culture does not.

[02:46:00] Yeah. I mean, that's true no matter where you are. Ritual has a way of inviting the old psyche, the archaic psyche, the one that knows that inside of this space, the parameters of cultural appropriation, not, not appropriation, but appropriateness change. So suddenly it's appropriate for me to weep in front of you.

[02:46:24] It's imp it's appropriate for me to hold one, us, to hold one another. It's appropriate for us to, be on our knees, side by side for hours. Wailing and bellowing and, but you wouldn't do that in a safe way, because that's not the containment field for that. So what ritual does is it signifies to the psyche, this is what you've been waiting for.

[02:46:45] Another part of that fourth gate grief is I've been waiting for this my whole damn life to have a field where I don't have to hold it all together, where their permission has been granted and I can fall. Okay, so continue then, what else happens in the weekend? Well, we focus a lot on this idea of village mind, that, I want people to know that when we come to the ritual late Saturday, you might not grieve.

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[02:47:19] You might support somebody who does. And you will leave here saying, we wept. That's also healing. That, well, I didn't get what I paid for. You know, that American idea of, I gotta get my money's worth. That's what ritual does, is that the wisdom of ritual is repetition. There are many people who come to these rituals over and over again, and you can feel the difference in somebody who says, I know.

[02:47:49] That this is the field that allows me to do that. And I'll enter it quite easily and quite quickly. So as a psychotherapist who's had a lot of experience in this, do you think that grieving and sorrow are, equally as important in our daily lives as laughter? I think they're equally inevitable.

[02:48:08] Okay. You know, again, like that's, why the apprenticeship is there is in order for me to have that laughter, I have to be current. I can't be encumbered by the weightiness. Of a, of a sedimented heart that's filled with sadness. It needs that. So if I'm suppressing my, grief and sorrow, I, by definition cannot be fully present.

[02:48:35] I think what happens is that we end up living much more strategically than genuinely. To live in an individualistic culture that has demanded you shape a self that fits in, that is approved of. That leads to strategic life. It doesn't lead to participatory life. It doesn't lead to an engaged emotional life.

[02:49:00] It leads to figuring out what's going to get me by without being seen as defective or flawed or inadequate, you know. I doubt that anyone has studied this, but there's something that I've been interested in lately because of the power AI military kind of turbo charge, at the top of our culture at the moment that there's something called the dark triad.

[02:49:26] Which I'm sure you're familiar with, Machiavellianism. I wonder if you were to lead a group of dark triad people in a weekend ritual, and they were allowed to grieve communally, if that would change or soften their dark triad characteristics. Just a speculative question. It might take many Rituals. It took me three rituals before I shed my first tear.

[02:49:56] You know, as I was a well packed white man, you know, I knew how to pack it in, but I also knew I had tremendous sadness in me, but it took me three times before that opened up. So when you lead these rituals, now professionally, are you also crying? No, tears will come because it's hard not to when you're sad.

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[02:50:25] It's so gorgeously expressive of the broken heart. There's nothing more genuine, in my experience, than being in a room of people who are willing to say, this is what I'm carrying. No pretense, no act, no strategy, just the genuineness of saying, I feel broken, I feel overwhelmed by the sorrows of the world, I feel whatever it is.

[02:50:53] I love being in that space. I'm the curious sort, Francis. And this subject fascinates me because I know very little about it with some of the people you said that have come to a lot of the rituals, or some of your patients, because you were a psychotherapist. Have you noticed like demonstrably a massive change in their behavior after going to many of these rituals and like Kathy or Joe were this way and now they're this way and I see a lightness in their being.

[02:51:23] Is that a palpable note, something you notice? Oh, yeah. I mean, that's one of the reasons why, not with everybody I work with, because some people that's just, that would be too much, but most of the people I work with, I encourage at some point to come to and participate in this because I know what that does to you psychically to get that fourth gate.

[02:51:46] Touched, to actually be embedded in a ritual ground of a village life, even for three days, can change how you hold yourself in the world. Something interesting happens usually on Sunday afternoon, is there's another wave of grief comes in the room, that we have to leave. See for those three days we're inside of primary satisfactions.

[02:52:09] We're singing, sharing meals, sharing dreams in the morning, we're doing ritual, we're holding each other, we're crying, we're laughing, we're dancing. For those three days, we are inside of what we expected, and then somebody will say, I just got here. And now we have to leave. I said, yes, that's true. We do not live inside of primary satisfactions.

[02:52:32] But now you can use this time as a homing beacon. This is what I want in my life. And I won't just go out seeking it. I'm going to start to try to create it. And that's also one of the hopes is that people don't just come to be consumers. I don't want people to come just as a consumption practice, but to embody this and take this back to their friends and to their families and to their communities.

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[02:53:01] And we just did a grief ritual training with close to 800 people in 32 countries. To train people to do what you do. For, to take a smaller version of that, but yes, just how do we hold the space? How do you know? And someone said, well, don't we all have to be therapists? I said, if we're waiting for all just for therapists to show up or fucked, you know, it's, and this is, and the thing is that we've made grief a clinical problem.

[02:53:32] What is more normal? What is more ordinary than sorrow? What we need to become is confident in our capacity to hold the space so that people can go to their knees. And that's doable. We can all learn how to do that. So short of going to one of your training, the trainers, or one of your, north of San Francisco, ritual sessions you were just talking about, how could someone go about facilitating grief either for themselves or for their own community, or does it require a facilitator as such?

[02:54:08] No, thankfully, it, what it requires is a willingness to gather. I often suggest to people, just ask three or four friends to come over on any given night, let's say it's a Friday night, and, say the topic tonight is going to be loss. The topic tonight is going to be grief. And let's make some agreements.

[02:54:32] And the primary agreement is that we're not going to give it any advice. We're not going to try to fix a damn thing because nothing is broken. The heartache of sorrow is not a problem to be solved. It's a presence awaiting deep witnessing. And so when we give permission, when the gatherings, you know, four or five people can start with a poem or a prayer or lighting a candle, and then just, let's just tell the stories.

[02:54:57] I mean, every person you see on the street, Nate, is filled with sadness, filled with grief, but how many of us have a place to take it? And that's part of what I feel I'm called, that's what I feel called to do is to create many circles. I just worked with a group in Israel and we had some Palestinian therapists join the online training.

[02:55:21] Cause grief is everywhere, you know. I think you're doing really, important work and now I understand why it's taken six months for you to actually get there. Get on this podcast. So let me make something, let me ask you to make something explicit that has been so far implied. this podcast and the broader work of my

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colleagues and network is, Changing the initial conditions of the future to make the future better than the default, how, on the metacrisis and, all the things in what ways is grief critical to addressing the complex global challenges we face today? Part of what I wrote in that preface forward for Dwayne's book is that, grief will be the keynote for the coming generations.

[02:56:14] So we are looking at least two generations. where this work of grief must become much more widespread. And we need many, and so that was so heartening to see 800 people say yes, that they want to in Chile and in South Africa and in, you know, Norway, and they want to bring this. I just got an email today from Brazil, you know, that there's just this ache to be able to hold the spaces for what they know is coming.

[02:56:47] I mean, if we get out of our denial, we know that the descent has begun. We know that the long dark is upon us, and intuitively we know that the consequences of that will be suffused. With copious levels of loss. Species and languages and homes and land and, you know, on and on. As you know, you're much more, versed in all of the particulars of that loss.

[02:57:24] My mind is much more attuned to it. My body perhaps not as such. Well, that's the thing. I mean, as we go deeper into the long dark and the grief becomes more, front and center, for us to stay alive, and participate. When I talk about the long dark, I'm also recognizing I'm not going to see the end of that.

[02:57:47] I'm going to die long before that long dark is over. So what is my responsibility right now? My responsibility is to plant seeds of imagination of what living culture might look like. And to process grief collectively is one of the heartbeats of living culture. When you see a living culture that has endured for 10,000 to 125,000 years, what makes that possible?

[02:58:15] You know, it's how we hold one another. Particularly in times of trouble and loss. One of my recent ideas, also in the Frankly I put out today, is that historical cultures that have expressed wisdom often do that by using restraint. And we have very little restraint in our culture. and it seems like facing grief is one of those things that issues immediate comfort and convenience and takes some restraint and says, this is necessary, we're going to do this.

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[02:58:47] Is our, grief and exercising restraint related? Yeah, I have a new, essay collection coming out this summer, and one of my essays is on the, is the value of restraint, you know, because it is collectively one of the least acknowledged soul values. we, our focus is on, increase and, gathering more to us rather than practicing restraint.

[02:59:18] To do grief work and to touch back into the primary satisfactions makes restraint relational. It's not something I'm depriving myself of. But in, in a, if the, if that field is still being nourished, then my selfish needs are actually going to be met, not by me taking more, but my allowing more, my supporting more of the community.

[02:59:47] That's what's going to allow that, Space to open up and feel held and cared for. Let me flip that a little bit. So instead of, encouraging people to be apprentices to sorrow or, going through grief rituals, what do you find to be the most helpful way for you or I or anyone listening respond to someone else?

[03:00:13] Who is grieving, whether that is others or even, yourself responding to yourself. Like, how do we respond to someone else who is grieving? Is there a best practices there? I think it's mostly important to not try to talk them out of it. To just say, I see you and I understand your heart is caring so much right now.

[03:00:36] And I'm here. You know, we don't have to do a lot of talking. We certainly don't need to make it, try to make it better. That's oftentimes, insulting to the grief that's there. What we need to do is really say, I see you. Particularly for the young ones. When I'm, we're getting more and more of the 20s and the 30 year olds to our gatherings, and I think what's helpful for them is to say what you're feeling is real.

[03:01:06] What you're feeling is legitimate. What you're feeling is not just your own grief, but the soul of the world. you're, feeling it all. And if we can do anything to help hold you and support you. We're here. I mean, I'm here for that. That feels like a deep responsibility of someone who's about to, you know, get close to 70 years old.

[03:01:27] I agree. I think that's really important. And I think the, how to metabolize emotions and, our hindbrain and our deeper systems is not something that's taught

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or accompanied all the bad news and the charts and the graphs. And I think it, it needs to be. Let me ask you a hypothetical question.

[03:01:50] There seems to be a hierarchy and the more that status is important with the people involved, the less likely they're going to be, able to do a grief ritual, et cetera. What would happen if Biden's, well, now Trump's cabinet would be able to go through a grief ritual? Like, what, what might change in our world if high level politicians were able to periodically grieve, and then go back to their important work?

[03:02:21] David Well, just beginning by taking the other side of that is that there's a ritual that happens fairly, I think, yearly out here in California by the Bohemian Grove, and they begin with a ritual of burning care. So they do the opposite. They create an effigy of care, and then they burn that, so that in the sense that it gives them permission to not care about the condition of the world.

[03:02:50] What? Who does that? Yes. The Bohemian Grove, where they gather all the wealthiest, most powerful, typically white men together, and they do this ritual every year. The Bohemian Grove, is that, in the Muir Woods? No, it's in the, outside of Monterrey in, on the Russian River. That's, not good.

[03:03:14] That would be my magic wand question. It would get Francis Weller to the White House and lead 35 people or 40, 40 pairs of eyes through a grief ritual. That would be powerful. There's a fairy tale called the Lindworm. Do you know the Lindworm fairy tale? King and Queen deeply in love but they can't conceive so the wife goes to visit this wise old woman, or she sees her on the path and says, why are you so sad?

[03:03:41] You know, well, I can't conceive a child, you know, and that would make us the most happy. So she says, well, here's what you do. You know, you do this, you follow these instructions, please follow these instructions exactly as I tell you. And she doesn't, obviously. And so she gets pregnant and the pregnancy goes along and it's time for the birth.

[03:04:02] And the midwife is there with her. But the first child that's born is this slimy. Worm, this snake like creature, and the midwife throws it out the window, and the second child comes out beautiful, the gorgeous boy, you know, everything's

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great, and kingdom goes on for 16, 17 years until the young boy's ready to go out and find his, wife.

[03:04:31] Well, they go out on their horses, and suddenly this massive creature. Locks their pathway and says, No wife for thee until there's a wife for me. And they turn around and go back, and this happens two or three times, and they don't know what this is. And finally, the midwife confesses that, Well, there was this other.

[03:04:55] So he is the firstborn. So he has the right to be married first. So they invite this creature into the kingdom. You know, but every woman that they give him, he devours. This is a problem. So there's no satisfying this part of us that has been tossed away. So then that same old woman talks to the next maid and says, here's what you do.

[03:05:21] I want you to, sew seven blouses and put them all on and come to the room, the wedding chamber. with a bucket of lye and a steel brush and a bucket of milk. She walks in and he says, okay, take your clothes off, it's time for bed. And she says, I'll take off one of my blouses if you take off one of your skins.

[03:05:50] And he says, No one's ever asked me to do that before. So she gets the lye bucket and the steel brush and scrubs, and everyone hears this howling throughout the kingdom. And of course, this goes through seven layers. And underneath all of that is this quivering young boy who's never had a chance to mature.

[03:06:17] That's what I would imagine would need to happen with the cabinet officials, is the scrubbing of seven layers of our own. Forgetfulness, our own collusion and, with. The denial and the in living in a culture of death, the majesty and the horror and the incredible detail and complexity of our current human ecosystem story is the thing of fairy tales itself.

[03:06:54] And yet it's real. And we're living it sometimes, especially when I learn about it. Something new like today. It's just astounds me how disconnected we are from our ancestral intimacy and primary satisfaction. As you said, thank you for your time today. I have a few closing questions if you don't mind for those people that feel the arrow of truth that you've fired, with words today, what are some

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things they could do in their own life to, to move in the direction of integrating this into a daily practice or something in their lives?

[03:07:31] Well, I think that idea of calling together a few people is very important. It's beginning to get into the currency and the language of sorrow and grief. And be mindful of how powerful and dominant that heroic mantle is, of being in control, of rising above everything, of dominating every emotion you feel, developing a more compassionate Witnessing of your own sorrows, but also the sorrows of others.

[03:08:03] There's a number of rituals that I list out in the book that don't require other people, but they require some relationship to place, you know, like speaking your sorrows into a large stone and writing them on there. And taking them out into nature, and digging a hole, and making an offering in the hole, putting the stone in the ground, and saying, Would you please carry this for me?

[03:08:26] I could no longer carry this. You might actually transmute this into nutrients for the microbes and the mycelia, and this might actually turn into a fern, or a frog. But I can't carry it anymore, you know. So voicing it and writing it and burying it in that way is both a ritual and it cleanses the body by the process of writing and doing those things.

[03:08:52] That's important. It's a very important thing. It's a form of acknowledgement. It's a form of honoring. I think what our grief wants is to be honored. It doesn't want us again to take us down into a place of deadness. Absolutely not. It wants us to feel alive. And you mentioned earlier that at your grief rituals, you've been seeing more young people, in their twenties and thirties.

[03:09:16] We have a lot of those that watch this podcast. What recommendations would you have for them listening to this show? Very similar to have collective ground where you can speak these things, you know, where you can set them down. The thing is that, you know, you don't have to do a ritual like I've. done. Any kind of gathering with intention can allow that field to open up and allow the movement of those emotions to happen.

[03:09:46] And what I think the young ones really need is just a continuous presence at the grief shrine, that they know that it's there. I mean, we have people come from Australia and England, Canada, and all across the country, and I say,

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that's wonderful that you're here, but this is a core symptom of the problem that we're facing, that this is not happening in all of our communities, that you have to travel 8, 000 miles for the privilege to grieve?

[03:10:13] That ain't right. So the young ones, I want them to have ample opportunities to stay current and just stay connected to their own bodies and souls. The reason that people travel that far is because you're well known and it's led by someone who's an expert at this. If you're going to do it locally, especially young people.

[03:10:35] There's a prerequisite, which is the people that you, invite to share an evening or a weekend and just feel the intimacy of the loss of the world. As one example, you kind of have to feel close to those people and trust them first. They can come to you and be strangers. but if you're doing it locally, it's gotta be with someone that you have some modicum of trust and affection for.

[03:10:57] Yes. You would have to build that up. Yeah. I mean, it's, not an automatic thing. That's why we do it over three days. Right. You know, by the way, people arrive as strangers typically, but they leave as village mates. So if, for these young ones, the first session may not be a grief session. It might be saying, who are you?

[03:11:16] Yeah. Why, what moves you? What's touching you? What's weighing on you. This is so important. We need to be doing this at all scales in every community in the United States in the world. The social capital tethers are a no regret strategy for what's coming. And I'm very sure that, I mean, I'm, I was sure after I read your book, I'm even more sure after this conversation that this, that grief is a part of it, it's a powerful part of it. Absolutely. What do you care most about in the world, Francis? That we are able to, Attune ourself to the dreaming earth once again, that the earth for millennia informed us of how to be decent human beings. That required a psyche attuned to the rhythm and song of the earth, the dreaming earth.

[03:12:12] So what I would want most, what I love most, what I desire most, is that return to that level of attunement. And I've seen that. I've seen how ritual. Dreams differently in different parts of the continent. How the Earth articulates itself particularly. In each locale and that we become a chorus of articulation of uniqueness.

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[03:12:37] That what IS what I sing and dream about in the, you know, in the redwood forest of my town and someone in Texas or in Australia, that we're able to bring our dreams together and reim. This world, or not so much reanimate the world, but remember it's animacy, that this is a living being that we're part of, and what I love most is the capacity to know that, and to feel that, and to encourage that in one another.

[03:13:13] I have to say that whenever I'm walking in a redwood forest, I feel the animacy of, the world. it is just a, vector that pulls me right in there, and so you, you're a very fortunate man to live there. Thank you so much for your time today and your important work in the world. do you have any closing comments, for our viewers and listeners?

[03:13:38] Don't be a stranger to your own sorrows. I mean, there's a lovely poem by Rumi that I often close our grief ritual gatherings with. And as he said, those tender words we shared with one another. Are stored in the secret heart of heaven. One day, like rain, they will fall and spread. And our mystery will grow green across the earth.

[03:14:06] So I hope our tears can water the seeds of that green earth. That's what I pray. Thanks for having me, Nate. Thank you, Francis. To be continued, my friend. To be continued. If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform. You can also visit TheGreatSimplification.

[03:14:29] com for references and more. And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our discord channel. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagans, edited by No Troublemakers Media and produced by Misty Stinnett, Leslie Batlutz, Brady Heine, and Lizzie Sirianni.