

Unattended Grief + Interconnected Spirals

Hello and welcome to ArtPause. My name is Quinn Rivenburgh and I'm an art therapist and yoga teacher. I will now invite you into a brief mindfulness and drawing practice. As you begin, please remember that we will be focusing on the process--your lived experience in the moment--rather than the product of what you create. And as we enter this time together, please always take care of your body and its needs, and know that you can pause or leave whenever you need to. This recording does not replace mental health treatment.

We are going to begin with a short meditation and then move into a brief art practice. Please have your paper and pencils handy so that you can move from the meditation directly into drawing.

Let's take a moment to find a comfortable seat and make sure that your hips and back feel as supported as possible. Next, slowly begin to scan the room or the space that you are in, just letting your eyes wander and trying to remain unattached from any judgments that might come up. Just notice what your eye is drawn to: colors or textures, light and shadow. Now find an object to rest your gaze on, or, if it feels more comfortable, please close your eyes. We will move to check in with the breath. Notice the depth of your inhales and the length of your exhales. Bring your attention to wherever your breath feels most prominent; perhaps that's in the nostrils, in the throat, in the chest or belly. Rest your attention there for several breaths.

Now we will move into a simple self-hold. On your next inhale, please stretch your arms as far as you can out to the side extending the tips of your fingers to the left and the right; and as you exhale cross your arms over your body, holding your opposite shoulders or upper arms. Inhale and stretch your arms out wide extending your fingertips, and exhale, wrap your arms around yourself again. And now take a few deep breaths with your arms wrapped around yourself feeling your chest expanding against the support and containment of your arms. As you do so, if it feels good, you can flutter or tap your fingers on both hands; this helps to integrate the left and right hemisphere of your brain. Take a few more more deep breaths, inhaling fully and exhaling completely, then let your arms slowly fall by your sides, relaxing any tension in your torso.

We will begin with drawing a spiral. Start in one half of the paper, and begin to draw outward. Try to draw the lines close to one another, but also please don't worry if the lines overlap, or if it's not a perfect circle. In fact, it may begin to look more like a topographical map of an island. That's beautiful. As you draw, check to make sure you aren't holding your breath. Are you gripping the pencil? Experiment with releasing some of the muscle tension in your hand. Your line may waver, but this grip will be more sustainable in the long term.

Continue with your spiral until you have filled about half the paper.

Next, shift over a to the other half and begin to draw another spiral. Pay attention again to your breath, your muscle tension. Don't rush your spirals, but eventually these two spirals will begin to overlap. Begin to see these spirals as intersecting mountain ranges, or perhaps as water droplets on the surface of a pond, or perhaps they take on a shape that you alone can see.

Grief comes to us in waves. Grief ripples outward from its source, beginning densely packed and seemingly continuous, and after time there begins to be some breathing room. But these griefs are not isolated--they ripple and effect the other spirals of emotion within us.

When you are finished with this second spiral, go back in with particular attention to the points of overlap. Mark these points in some way that makes sense to you. As you do so, hold a person, place, or thing in your mind that needs attending to. Let the tears come if they want to, but just like the lines, don't try to force it. You are creating a constellation of your loss. Let it be messy. Let it be complex. Let it be what it needs to be.

When your attending to the drawing feels finished, put your pencil down and sit back. We will now return to our breath and self-hold. Inhaling fully, stretch your arms out wide; then exhale, and wrap your arms around yourself. Continue holding yourself for several breaths; notice if your body would like to sway slightly side to side or back and forth. Please listen to your body and allow it to move as it wants. Stay in touch with your breath, feeling your chest and belly expand. When your process feels complete, return to looking around the room, bringing yourself back to the here and now.

Thank you for taking an Art Pause.