

7th February 2022

Belonging

“With just a few found and trustworthy seeds, you have nurtured the greatest harvest there is in this, your humble life of belonging.”

Toko-pa Turner, Belonging: Remembering ourselves home

I have a new book to add to my collection of publications on bereavement issues: *Belonging: Remembering ourselves home*, by a Canadian author, Toko-pa Turner. She poses the question, “Feel like you don’t belong?” and answers it: “You are not alone.” Her response could offer the reassurance that there are *lots* of people who feel they don’t belong, or it might suggest that the aloneness can be dealt with. Either way, the book is a fascinating exploration of an important dimension of grief and loss.

Turner says: “The world has never been more connected, yet people are lonelier than ever. Whether we feel unworthy, alienated, or anxious about our place in the world ... the absence of belonging is the great silent wound of our times.” I think Turner is onto something important here.

In bereavement, loneliness is, of course, a typical process. From the loneliness of missing the presence of a loved one, after a long marriage for example, to the loneliness experienced when it seems the whole world continues as normal, with no recognition or understanding of your grief. Ally these issues to the break-down of community and the sanitisation of death rituals, and loneliness can be crippling. In Abraham Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs*, “to belong” is one of the major needs that motivate human behaviour. He portrays the hierarchy as a pyramid, with the need for love and belonging at the centre of our social needs.

Belonging, therefore, is at the heart of who we are and what makes sense for us in life. What can people do to reach out and find belonging again, when their whole world has been shattered and they need to make some sense of the future? What can *we* do understand people’s yearning for belonging, to welcome them into our networks so that their basic needs are fulfilled? Can we find and share some trustworthy seeds and nurture the harvest people clearly need, the “humble life of belonging”?

A prayer for today

*Till earth is over may we always know love never fails us: God has made it so.
Hard times will prove us, never remove us; we belong to God, we belong to God.*

Words by Roberto Escamilla; English version by John L Bell

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