



*Love*

*Loss*

*Light*

Illuminating the Path Through Grief

*Karen Trench*

*The Song of the Phoenix*

What can be said about you in truth is unknown,  
but still you hearten long-wearied worlds with  
the idea that we can rise again from dear things destroyed.

What form are you?

What color?

I think the story tellers have taken their  
liberties with what is visible, while leaving the great  
sages to contemplate despair, wonderment, joy  
and other unsleepable things that cannot be seen.

What calls out to you to do as you do for  
five hundred years at a turn without reward  
or even the acrid scent of mercy?

Ashes to ashes, note the most trusted scribes,  
Till thou return unto the ground;

For out of it wast thou taken:

for dust thou are, and unto dust  
shalt thou return,

though they didn't realize that it was you  
at the time of scripture.

your entombment and decay,

teachings, warnings, reckonings:

we must not diminish the ancestor's

*departing blessedness for the ancestor is the  
vessel from which new life emerges.  
So must say the toad of the tadpole,  
the tree of the seed,  
the man of his mother,  
the woman of this earth, and  
the earth of something wordless.  
I've never heard spoken of your song,  
but recently I learned it  
as it glided, breathlessly,  
across my own vocal chords  
in response to some beckoning  
from above.  
It seems that I am the Life that  
has been left behind.*

*Jamie K. Reaser, 2019*

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## *Foreword*

Grief never comes invited. It takes no effort on our part. We who bear grief didn't stay up at night wishing it on ourselves, or wishing our dear ones to be so far away for so long. Grief finds us, along with the entourage of emotional, physical and spiritual changes that ensue. Yet despite the ubiquity of loss, it never seems to show up in predictable ways.

Grief arrives in our lives on its own terms.

Healing on the other hand, must be invited. Unlike grief, healing requires effort and a deliberate strategy. And unlike grief, healing is not universal. The pain of loss can change us.

One of the hard truths for many people who suffer grief is that it simply doesn't go away. It can change, alternating from subtle to more acute grief depending on the time of year, the people we are with, or not with, or the music we listen to. Grief doesn't usually have an on-off switch like we wish it could, even though many of us become skilled at hiding our pain.

So many of us carry on in our human existence with unhealed pain that comes to define who we are, who we think ourselves to be. Healing demands from each of us that

we do things differently once we experience the pain of loss. We often have to step outside of our comfort zones that grief has already shaken. And often, we have to change our ideas of what healing is in order to be able to hold our pain.

Each of us has our own unique experience with grief and healing. None of us do either quite the same. However, Karen Trench has constructed a manual from her own experience of pain. Part of what makes this book you are reading so helpful is that it allows you to contemplate from the starting point of loss many different way to facilitate healing. This is no simplistic feel-good book. There is anguish on each page, that same bottomless immensity that I am sure you have felt. My feeling is that you will resonate with the emotions she is sharing—the feeling of loss, of missing something, of a sense of always being out of step. But my hope is that you will also resonate with the recommendations that come in the form of what she calls “blessings.”

Why blessings? Is there such a thing as a blessing in the magnitude of grief?

I believe so, because it's often in places of great pain that we find the value of our precious human lives. Our capacity to love, share and feel together—all of them are done almost automatically until our lives are shaken by unthinkable losses. Karen has brought her experience into light to share with you the possibility of healing, even if it's just a little bit. And as many of you have experienced, when

people go out of their way to use their human capacity to care to address the bottomless suffering of grief, it is indeed a blessing.

This book will not make grief go away. This book can show you how to hold the grief in your life from a loving place. Loss feels so punishing and so alone. Holding yourself gently, lovingly, when you are suffering—perhaps that's what your loved one would do? Allow this book to do the same.

Sameet Kumar, Ph.D.  
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Author, Grieving Mindfully, The Mindful Path Through Worry and Rumination, and Mindfulness for Prolonged Grief.

*The Sweet Taste of Grief*

*I saw grief drinking from a cup of sorrow  
and called out,*

*"It tastes sweet, does it not?"*

*"You've caught me," grief answered,*

*"And you have ruined my business.*

*How can I sell sorrow*

*when you know it's a blessing?"*

*Rumi*



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*Lessons Learned*



*“Pay attention, the Beloved is whispering, ‘Loss teaches you everything.’” Alfred K. LaMotte*

**WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER**, I dreamed of one day penning the Great American Novel. What I never dreamed is that I would one day write the book you are now holding. Maybe it’s human to go through life thinking that bad things happen only to other people. Such magical thinking worked for me until the day fate came knocking at my door.

One fine spring day in 2015, my beloved husband of twenty-three years took his own life. I’d had no warning. I was completely clueless. His sudden departure was utterly shocking and devastating. In truth, it almost destroyed me. In an effort to acknowledge and release my emotions, I began writing a grief journal to help me heal. My journal became the cornerstone of this book.

Author Isak Dinesen, who bore a great deal of sorrow in her own life, wrote in her book *Out of Africa*, “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into or tell a story about them.” Writing my story about the tragic loss of my husband is a way to further lighten the load of sorrow that, after nearly four years, presses against my still healing heart. My fervent wish is that it helps to lighten yours too.

You will notice that I often quote from the many books about grief and loss I read during my darkest times. These books were my salvation and helped to keep me sane. They were something for me to hold on to when I felt most alone.

When my journey through grief began, I looked upon my sudden loss as a curse. My heart had been broken open, laid bare, exposed, and vulnerable. I was literally prostrate with grief. I thought it inconceivable that it could bestow upon me even one blessing, let alone multiple ones. But as I read and wrote and healed, I came to realize that I was much stronger than I ever imagined. And as time unfolded and I recovered, the grieving process gave me many valuable insights and lessons. I began to uncover golden nuggets of truth about myself and about life that had been buried before my loss. I came to see these as blessings and treasured them because each served to transform me in positive ways. I also came to understand that this experience was not sanctioning my loss but rather was a way of honoring both my husband and myself.

As Kathryn Walker says in her book *A Stopover in Venice*, “Rich and mysterious gifts are concealed in the dark folds of pain.” For me, this knowing came only with time. When it comes to grieving, some things must wait until our hearts can bear it.

I determined early on that as insurmountable as it felt, I was going to walk headlong into my towering wall of grief. Although walking around that wall would have been far easier, I was possessed with a deeper knowing—far beyond intuition—that told me if I took the shortcut, I was never going to heal and that sooner or later, my grief would most surely manifest in an unhealthy manner. And as the great Winston Churchill once said, “If you’re going through hell, keep going.”

And so, I kept going.

Although my husband took his own life, this book is not about suicide or being a suicide survivor per se. *Love Loss Light* depicts my step-by-step journey through grief and is my way of sharing with you the many blessings that were bestowed upon me while on my quest to heal my heart. Little by little, these blessings began to fill up and illuminate all of those dark, empty places in my heart and soul and ultimately led me back to living and loving life again. If but one of them can give you even one measure of comfort as you walk your own path, then I have learned my lessons well.

No journey through loss and grief is the same, but each journey can inform another's. No one gets out of this life—this gift of having a human experience—unscathed. Pain, loss, and suffering are part of the gift of being human. There is no way to avoid it. Having walked my path for close to four years now, I have learned well that it is the brought-to-your-knees experiences that teach us the most valuable lessons. That everything in life is transient. That our good and bad experiences are all fleeting. That this too shall pass. And, finally, that our lives are so precious—each and every moment is a gift to be cherished and embraced because nothing lasts forever except one thing—and that is love. Love is the heartbeat of all of creation. Love is eternal and everlasting. Love never dies, ever! Love is the greatest blessing of all.

So lean into the wind and just keep going, knowing this: It is our love that leads us to grief, but it is our grief that leads us back to love.

I dedicate this book to you.

*“There is no end. For the soul there is never birth nor death, nor, having once been, does it ever cease to be. It is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, undying and primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain.”*  
*Bhagavad-Gita*

Karen Trench

Love Loss Light

***Bitter Sweet Resonance***

*I have been honed by pain  
as the fine resonate cello  
is honed by time—  
and grief has kissed my face  
leaving its mark upon my brow  
changing forever my vision  
sweetly, ever so sweetly opening  
my heart.*

*Catherine Firpo, 1989*

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## *About the Author*



Karen Trench never imagined that she would give up a successful career in television for anything, let alone for a log cabin high in the Colorado Rockies. Then again, she never thought she'd meet her soul mate, with whom she lived in those mountains, on and off, for two decades of blissful marriage. When she found herself a widow, a shocked survivor of her husband's death, she could not have conceived that she would someday emerge from the wreckage a strong, happy, and emotionally empowered woman. Now she shares her story of *Love Loss Light* with a fervent prayer that it may be of service to her fellow travelers in grief. Her journey continues at [www.karentrench.com](http://www.karentrench.com).

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