THRIVE EMERGE

THE SACRED JOURNEY
HOW WE HOLD SUFFERING

Our children are struggling. Covid and 2 years of educational disruption. Climate change. School violence. Political conflict.

The latest data on anxiety and depression tells us that mental health issues in kids and adults have skyrocketed. Once they are old enough to appreciate a world beyond the simple, warm comforts of home, they will struggle.

As parents, teachers and therapists, we struggle with our children, and for them. Their distress is multiplied in the adult heart 100 fold.

One might reasonably say, "This has always been the order of things. Life is nothing but uncertain, fluid, unpredictable. Losses are inevitable, and with loss comes sadness, anxiety, emotional pain. We bear up, we move on."

True perhaps on one level. Yet the human heart seeks meaning, seeks to know why, seeks to give words and shape to our suffering, to make sense of it, justify it, turn the struggle not into loss, but into growth, creation, possibility, renewal.

This is in some ways one of the oldest and deepest of human longings: to know why we suffer and in knowing, to ease the pain in our souls. A patient of mine with an extremely stressful job tells me "I wrestled for so long with my anxiety and guilt about what I owed my employer. I couldn't talk to them about it and was consumed by my own worries. But when I finally knew what I wanted to say and spoke what was true for me, my words freed me."

To wrestle with one's soul. To find what is one's most authentic truth in the midst of what sometimes feels like unendurable pain. This is both the curse and blessing we are offered by god, every day of our lives.

In Genesis, Jacob wrestles with the angel till the break of dawn and proclaims "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." Wounded by the angel, he asks for and is given the angel's blessing and is named Israel – one who wrestles with god.

An incredible gift this – to be blessed by god because we have made the choice as human beings to grapple with our own angels – and demons – face to face. An incredible gift when, rather than turning away from pain, we embrace it and are transformed into a greater self – creative, resilient, compassionate, patient – and with the grace to weather the multitude of challenges that life brings our way.

THRIVE EMERGE

Our children are struggling – but not without purpose. This is their journey, in their deserts, with their angels. We cannot and should not rescue them from what is rightfully theirs: the challenge of seeking meaning, of seeking a truer and deeper self and with that, finding their place, their purpose in the world.

In his poem On Children, Kahlil Gibran writes:
"Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

As with sit with our children – at home, in the classroom – and bear witness to their anxiety, their struggles, their suffering, let us remember the vision that Gibran offers: from a wisdom born of age, we have the opportunity to gift our children with love, stability and support; and, with this blessing: that we trust that their paths in life – full of joy and pain, full of loss and triumph – will meet the mark that god has meant for them.