

## **After the Darkest Hour: How Suffering Begins the Journey to Wisdom** **Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.**

### **Brief Workshop Description:**

*After the Darkest Hour: How Suffering Begins the Journey to Wisdom*  
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Most people understand that suffering and sorrow are inevitable parts of every life and that illness, death, loss of a loved one, a cherished relationship, or a job are universal experiences, not retribution or symptoms of bad luck. But few of us comprehend the ways in which suffering can give rise to growth. What is it that allows some people to become better - more courageous, conscious, compassionate, stronger, wiser - as a result of life's "dark nights of the soul," while others become bitter, jaded, and angry as a result of the same kinds of experiences?

This workshop explores the qualities - psychological, behavioral, and spiritual - of those who have turned periods of pain and suffering into opportunities for growth and renewal. While the workshop is founded on deep truths about the nature of reality, it offers clear, practical strategies for growing through life's difficult times. An invaluable workshop experience for professionals who are working with people who are presently experiencing loss or difficulty as well as for all those who desire to be better prepared for life's inevitable losses.

Through lecture, discussion, and exercises, you'll learn:

- The truth about life - Everyone lives a drama.
- The alchemical metaphor for turning lead into gold and how to use this in your own life.
- Brick houses/straw houses: How prepared are you for suffering?
- Understanding luck, destiny, and free will and learning when to row against and when to flow with the events of your life.
- How to move beyond resiliency by utilizing 12 infallible strategies for growing through the pain of hard times.

### **Behavioral Objectives:**

1. Participants will be able to illustrate and describe in detail the philosophy and stages behind the "Wheel of Life."
2. Participants will identify six (of twelve) strategies utilized by individuals who have used suffering as a catapult to psychological growth and transformation.
3. Participants will be able to distinguish and describe the differences between "real suffering" and "neurotic suffering."

## **Content Outline of Workshop:**

Note: This workshop will focus particularly on the helping professions and ways in which practitioners can help clients/patients during life's difficult times.

1. Introduction to Philosophical/Spiritual Views of Suffering
  - A. Religious and Wisdom Traditions
  - B. Western Philosophy
  - C. Secular Wisdom
2. The Nature of Consciousness
  - A. An exercise in Conscious/Unconscious Processes
  - B. Expansion of Consciousness about the Nature of Human Life
  - C. The Search for Meaning
3. Real Versus Neurotic Suffering
  - A. Differentiations
  - B. Self-Imposed Suffering (Principles of Deductive Reasoning and ways in which this process leads to neurotic suffering)
4. The Wheel of Life – A Medieval Metaphor
  - A. Happiness
  - B. Loss
  - C. Suffering
  - D. Hope
5. The Alchemical Metaphor
  - A. *Nigredo*: “The Blackening”
  - B. *Albedo*: “The Whitening”
  - C. *Rubedo*: “The Reddening”
6. Learned Helplessness and Its Impact on Suffering
  - A. A description of the construct
  - B. Examples from the research and clinical literature
7. Resiliency and Beyond
  - A. The Nature of Resiliency
  - B. Transformation
8. The Hero's Journey
  - A. The Story
  - B. The Metaphor
  - C. The Relationship to Resiliency and Transformation

9. Luck, Destiny & Free Will
  - A. Locus of Control
  - B. “The Middle Way”
10. Ways in Which We Add to Suffering
  - A. Resistance to Change
  - B. Expectation that Life is Always Fair
  - C. The Illusion of Egoism
  - D. Failure to Take Responsibility for our Responses
  - E. Ruminative Suffering
  - F. Failure of Compassion
  - G. Unconscious Approach to Life
12. Twelve Strategies for Growing Through Suffering
  - A. Discover a Larger Perspective
  - B. Turn Toward Compassion
  - C. Recognize and Stop Self-Imposed Suffering
  - D. Practice Mindfulness
  - E. Grieve
  - F. Build Good Containers
  - G. Count Your Blessings and the Power of Optimism
  - H. Find Courageous Role Models
  - I. Keep a Sense of Humor
  - J. Express Your Feelings
  - K. Silence, Prayer & Meditation
  - L. Come to Your Life Like a Warrior
13. Questions and Comments
14. Wrap-Up

### **Brief Bio:**

Kathleen Brehony is the author of the critically acclaimed **Awakening at Midlife** (Riverhead Books, PenguinPutnam, 1996). This book was honored as a Finalist in the 1996 **Books for a Better Life Award**. PBS produced an hour-long **television special** based on this book called “The Midlife Survival Guide.” The program – using Brehony as writer and talent – has aired, and continues to air, throughout the United States. Executive Producer and Vice President of Connecticut Public Television – the producing station for the television special -- Larry Rifkin refers to Brehony as both “expert and eloquent.”

Awakening at Midlife has been featured as one of the year’s “Books to Read” by New Age Journal and excerpted (second serial rights) for Natural Health magazine. This book has also been published in Chinese and Portuguese (Brazil). Hundreds of readers have written with their enthusiastic and positive responses to this author’s wisdom and down to earth language. Actor Robert Urich refers to Awakening at Midlife as “the single most important book I’ve read in my entire life.” Singer/songwriter, Beth Nielsen Chapman calls the book, “simply wonderful.”

Brehony's **Ordinary Grace** was published in March, 1999 by Riverhead Books (PenguinPutnam), it explores the nature of goodness, and is informed by remarkable stories of ordinary individuals who help others in extraordinary ways. This book was featured in the *One Spirit Book Club* and reviews have been outstanding. *Kirkus Reviews*: "A heartening inquiry into why ordinary folks routinely go the second mile for others...The quiet strength of this book lies in its storytelling...A restorative tonic, more than mere chicken soup for the soul because it may well inspire readers to go out and do something good for somebody." *Publisher's Weekly*: "Readers seeking reassurance that people can be good as easily as not will find inspiration in these personal stories; they may even be motivated to their own good deeds by Brehony's strategies for grace at the close of the book." *Amazon.com* "If you're looking for an antidote to the daily barrage of cynical and pessimistic claims about human nature, this will do the trick... through strong storytelling supported by extensive research, Brehony makes a convincing case for the inborn and sacred goodness of humanity." Brehony is presently in negotiations with several producers who are interested in bringing the stories that inform this book (and others like them) to a weekly television series. Actor Robert Urich is attached to the project as co-producer and on-air host.

Brehony's third book written for the general public **Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound**, co-written with Robert Gass, was published in Spring, 1999 by Broadway Books (Random House). This book, the first on this subject written for the general public, has been chosen as the "April Main Selection" for the *One Spirit Book Club*. Deepak Chopra describes this book as "Clear and enlightening." Jean Houston says: "A masterful introduction to the spiritual path of chanting... a profound and practical book." Bernie Siegel refers to it as: "A beautiful book about the discovery of spirit in all of our lives."

**After the Darkest Hour: How Suffering Begins the Journey to Wisdom**, was published on September 9, 2000 by Henry Holt and Company (North American rights) and in Britain and Ireland by Vision Paperbacks. This deeply personal – and practical book -- provides a wealth of anecdotes about how different people face difficult situations and grow from the challenges they present. These are complemented by poetry, mythology, and religious stories from many faiths that offer a rich context of meaning for exploring the psychology, philosophy, behavior, and spiritual beliefs of those who have used their suffering as an opportunity to add greater meaning to their lives and move toward greater consciousness. The pre-publication review by *Kirkus Reviews* (July 1, 2000) gave After The Darkest Hour a starred recommendation and wrote, "Sure to become a classic treatment of suffering."

**Up the Best Seller Lists!** (Adams Media, 2001), written with co-author Karen Jones, is an informative and irreverent take on the book publishing and book marketing industry for authors and small publishers. It offers practical, philosophical advice as well as "street-smarts" for all those interested in promoting and marketing their written work. It will be published by Adams Media in July, 2001.

Brehony is very media savvy, offers a great interview, and has appeared as both guest and host on numerous radio and television programs; produced and hosted many Public Broadcasting specials; and served as Executive Producer and on-air talent for a bimonthly regional talk show – **All About Women**. She was the Director of Marketing and, later, President of **The Media Works**, an independent video and film production company where she served as Executive Producer, head writer, and frequently on-air talent, for more than one hundred video and film scripts for industry, training, and broadcast.

Brehony currently serves as a **regular guest host and guest expert** for a daily radio program on a regional NPR station. Executive Producer for PBS radio affiliate WHRO/WHRV, Betty Luse describes Brehony as both radio host and guest, as "wise, thoughtful, respectful, very funny, and a lively conversationalist. She's absolutely one of our favorites." Recognizing the audiences' enthusiastic response to Brehony's on-air skills, Luse refers to her as "The kinder, gentler, Dr. Laura." With radio veteran Cathy Lewis, Brehony co-hosts a weekly radio program:

**The Art of Living: Conversations About the Heart and Soul of Modern Life.** Negotiations are presently underway for to bring this program to a **national audience**.

A **licensed clinical psychologist and Jungian-oriented psychotherapist**, Brehony has been in private practice for the past twenty-two years. She holds a Ph.D. and M.S. in clinical psychology from Virginia Tech and a B.A. in Sociology from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. She completed her residency at the University of Mississippi Medical Center where she served as Chief Resident. She co-edited (with Lee Frederiksen and Laura Solomon) a well-respected behavioral medicine book that is considered a classic in the study of the application of marketing strategies to health-related behaviors. **Marketing Health Behavior** (Plenum, 1984) continues to be widely used in university-based public health and psychology programs. **Boston Marriages** (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), co-edited with Esther Rothblum, was nominated for an American Library Association Award and is a staple of Woman's Studies Programs throughout the world. Brehony continues her private practice in Virginia Beach, VA.

Brehony is listed in **Outstanding Young Women of America** and **The National Registry of Who's Who – Life Member**. She is the recipient of two **Golden Quill Awards for Non-Fiction Writing** (1997, 1998) and the **Winner of Visions Magazine "Excellence in Writing" Award for Non-Fiction** in 1999.

Kathleen has taught at the university level and is a sought-after speaker having conducted hundreds of professional workshops, keynotes, seminars, and training programs.

Brehony divides her time between Virginia and Los Angeles where she writes, continues her private practice, maintains her personal and organizational coaching practice, and manages her speaking engagements. She is currently working on a new non-fiction book, a national tour for "hope and healing," and writing screenplays for television and film.

**Full Curriculum Vitae available upon request.**