SESSION TRANSCRIPT · THE MISSING PIECES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

Where Am I, Really? (The Grief No One Named)

with Sarah Hutt · Day 2, Tuesday, October 27 · The Unnamed Losses

Hello. Welcome to this talk that I'm really excited to share with you as part of the Missing Pieces of Perimenopause Summit. My name is Sarah, and I am from Wild Rose Path. I work with women in this spot, using plant wisdom and the landscape around me to help you see exactly where you're standing in this time of becoming.

I'm based in Sedbergh, which is in the north of the UK. If you know it, it's between the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales. And this talk comes out of probably one of my biggest personal transitions, which involved the beginning stages of entering perimenopause, entering that period of really becoming who I am, while simultaneously losing my father, who was the closest person to me. He really witnessed me. I lost him to cancer near the end of 2023, and this is where Wild Rose Path has been born from.

So, something in you is disorientated right now, and you've maybe not got a name for it yet. Maybe the person who always saw you clearly, a witness for you, is gone, through something like death or a relationship ending, and they've gone right in the middle of you really becoming who you are now. Maybe it's a slightly different circumstance, like a parent ageing or a child leaving, or your own sleep and mood shifting underneath you without warning.

So here's what today is about. It's about the three landscapes that you might actually be standing in right now, and one way to find out which one of them belongs to you.

In the in-between, we often feel like we're in this liminal space, and it's hard to see the shape of your own life when you're the one standing inside it, when you're the one living it. You don't really get that view from above. It can be really difficult to zoom out and get that bird's-eye view of our own lives, the one where it's obvious: oh, that's what's happening, I see the whole picture. You often just get today, and the madness of whatever today is asking of you.

And I think that's why so much of this looks like indecision. You can't choose between staying or going, between the old version of things and whatever's coming next. I don't think that's a failure to choose. I think that's just how perspective works when you are inside the thing instead of looking down at it.

And it's not really one feeling or one stuck place. There are a few different landscapes that you can actually be standing in here, and each has its own shape, its own weather, so to speak.

There are three that I use in my work, three main landscapes for this in-between place in a life transition. And each of the three landscapes also has a plant ally that comes along with it, one for each.

So, the three landscapes. The first one is Disturbed Ground. The second one is the Ghyll. And the third one is the Hedge. Let's have a quick look at each of these landscapes and their plant allies.

When you're in Disturbed Ground, it's like a fracture point. Something has just ended, or is in the process of ending. It's the point where it is all happening in real time, and it is raw. Sometimes this point can come very suddenly in our lives, with no forewarning. A crack has appeared, the ground has gone from under our feet, and we're in a sense of sudden shock and surprise.

Sometimes, though, the cracks creep up long before the floor goes. You may have had an inkling that there was going to be an ending, something on the horizon that's been coming ever closer, and now there are so many cracks that the ground has finally given way. Either way, at this point we often find feelings of shock and sudden grief, feelings that can really sweep us off our feet with their intensity and sometimes almost come out of nowhere. They feel so sudden. And we may find at this point that it becomes difficult to carry on with everyday life as it was.

Herb Robert is a really good ally for this part of the landscape, because it takes root in those threshold spaces in nature. It grows a lot in cracks in the ground, at the bottom of walls, and at the edges of things. Those threshold spaces, those places in between, are where it grows. And it's one of the first plants that can spring back. If you clear an area of weeds, Herb Robert is often the first to come back again after the destruction.

It's a wonderful little plant in terms of how rapidly it self-seeds, too. It knows that there's a cycle to its life. It's aware of that cycle, and it self-seeds rapidly so that a new cycle of growth and new plants can come in to fill the space. I've found it a really nice plant to work with in this particular moment, because in the suddenness and shock of it all, your brain can sometimes just be racing to look for answers, and grief can be all-consuming. And just to see that little plant pop up again when everything seems to have been razed to the ground, when there seems to be no other opportunity for plants to grow there.

The next landscape is the Ghyll. For those of you not from the north of England, a ghyll is like what's in the picture here. It's a steep-sided, almost ravine-type place with a stream or a body of water running down the middle. In this landscape, you can't necessarily see the bottom from the top.

By this point, the initial fracture, the initial shock, the initial ending has happened. And this is the point I often refer to as the descent. If this is happening to you on an identity level, you can find that the old self is now shedding, but the new one isn't here yet. Everything you believed about yourself to be true, all those narratives and stories we had about ourselves, start to shed away. You start to question everything that made you, you before.

In other kinds of life transitions, it's often a point where your old life, your old situation, whatever has ended for you, is almost burning to the ground. Sometimes it can feel that extreme. If it's more on an identity level, people on the outside may not notice that there's anything going on. It can be incredibly disorientating from an internal perspective, while from the outside you look as if you're just moving through life as usual. You're functioning on the outside.

And then there are life transitions where it's more obvious to the outside world, like a relationship breakup, where something is ending. But there's still this aspect of something burning away. And there's no view at this point of what is next, what is to come. That's where you just can't always see the bottom from where you're stood.

When we're at this point of descent, at the Ghyll, a plant ally that I particularly like to work with is foxglove. The first thing to say about foxglove is that we're often told about its toxicity, and we tell our kids not to touch it because it's poisonous. Foxglove is not a comforting plant in terms of being easy or tactile, something you can touch. It's not a comforting plant, but it is a way marker. If you look at the pictures here, there's a group of them, and I often find them standing on their own as well. But they act almost like a way marker, and they seem to give you this medicine: this is the right way.

As much as it feels like you would do anything right now to scrabble up the side of this ghyll and get out of this situation, perhaps to go back to how things were, or to rush on to whatever is new and comes next, foxglove acts as that way marker to say, you're in the right place. You're meant to be here, right here and right now.

And I think it also reminds us of something else. With this plant, we tend to witness it more, because we can't really interact with foxglove much because of its toxicity. It's a plant that wants witnessing, not touching. So when we're at this point in our own life transitions, I think it's really important to remember that being witnessed at this time can be incredibly healing.

The final landscape we're going to look at today is the Hedge. The Hedge is the threshold point. After the Ghyll, after that descent, we get into this liminal space, this real in-between. Some would call it the darkness, or the underworld. And when we have been in that place, there's often a threshold to cross. The Hedge is a landscape guarded by hawthorn. This is a

very prolific plant in my locality, and many of the hedges around the masses of fields here are made of hawthorn.

As we move through this liminal space, it can be a space that we want to get through really quickly, to get to the new and rebuild our lives. It's about finding the balance between staying in that place long enough to find the gems in that in-between space, to find the wisdom that waits for us, while acknowledging that it's a very uncomfortable place to be. I personally struggle with it, because I'm someone who likes to crack on with things, and I don't like sitting around and waiting.

At this stage, we start to become aware of the threshold point, and maybe even start to get one or two signals about what could be on the other side. Hawthorn is a really nice plant at this in-between, threshold stage, because it guards that boundary line. We're not fully through the in-between yet, but we're slowly starting to move and really starting to orient ourselves toward maybe a new direction. Hawthorn doesn't seek to resolve everything, come up with a five-step productivity plan, or help you hack your way through. It guards that space.

Hawthorn is traditionally a plant of real ancestral wisdom. There's a lot of old lore that says if you have a hawthorn hedge or tree, particularly an individual hawthorn tree, it's very bad luck to cut parts of it down. To me, it holds a lot of ancestral wisdom because it's such an ancient plant, and it's a very cyclical one as well. Around May time, you get all the blossoms. And at this time of year, as I'm recording, as we move through September and October, the hedgerows are full of bright red berries, sustenance for the hard times ahead. So it's a plant of cycles, old wisdom, and old knowing, and it helps us connect with that old wisdom and old knowing as we move through this liminal space toward a new part of our life.

As we get to this threshold point, it can be a useful ally for looking at what we're going to keep and take forward with us into the new, and which things we're done with and letting go of. That could be certain stories we've held about ourselves for a long, long time and built our whole belief of who we are on. It may be time to let some of those go. It's a time of sorting.

There might be things, as well, where you just don't know yet. You can't have everything figured out so soon. It just wouldn't really pan out very well. So there are things we may just need to put in a pause box for now.

So take a quick second to check in with yourself. Can you name one thing that you've been quietly beating yourself up for not having decided yet, or not having acted on? Just something you could put in the pause box and put down. You can say, I'm not letting go of this indefinitely, but I'm putting it on pause for a little while. It's still yours, but it's not due today. Take a few

seconds and think about whether there's anything there for you. I'd love to hear about it later on if anything comes to mind.

So the big question is, where am I standing right now? As we've talked about these three landscapes, perhaps one stands out to you more than the others, and you recognise it as the place you're standing right now. If you need some more support working out which one you're actually standing in, that is what The Stile is for. It's a few short questions, and it'll tell you your particular landscape, whether that's Disturbed Ground, the Ghyll, or the Hedge. It will talk to you about the plant ally that goes with it, and it will give you one small thing to actually do. Not a load of action steps, just one small, tiny thing. Some of them are even just about going outside and noticing something. So not overhauling your life, just noticing.

So I'm not going to tell you which one you're in today, but there is a way to find out, by crossing The Stile. You'll be provided with the link to The Stile so you can take the quiz and find out which landscape you're in. And from there, we can talk about a few ways that Wild Rose Path can support you with whichever landscape you find yourself in right now.

I hope this talk has been useful for you. Whichever landscape you're in right now, I think the most important thing to remember is that this is a process. This is a transition, and it is normal, and there is nothing wrong with you. You aren't broken in any way.

Thank you so much for listening to this talk, and I hope you enjoy the rest of the summit.