

The Grieving Odyssey

Grieving arises at one moment or another. It may be a monumental personal grief or it may be a shared or collective grief. Whether we are grieving the loss of a dear loved one, an entire family, one's home, one's country or a way of life, there comes a time we surrender to the process, as upheaving and emotional as it is. The following 12 Stages of Grieving can deliver us eventually to states of freedom and inner peace. These steps are not necessarily in order. One can move back and forth or stay in a stage for the necessary, extended time. The following list identifies key stations and the overall progression one may make. Each stage is then explained in greater detail further below.

The Grieving Odyssey, when it is our time to embark on it, will take whatever time it needs to take. This overview may bring up emotions. Find the support in processing them further as necessary. You may be asked to hold those in your life traversing these stages, as well.

The 12 Stages of Emotional Grieving

- 1) Denial (Shock, Numbness)
- 2) Anger (Rage, Passive Aggressiveness, Vengeance)
- 3) Bargaining
- 4) Betrayal/Guilt
- 5) Depression (A gray time-out; strengthening self for raw rage or gutted grief)
- 6) Sadness/ Deep Grief
(Key moment when a key letting go happens and gives birth to a more whole, mature Higher Self incorporated in the personality.)
- 7) Mental Comprehension of Situation
- 8) Heart Compassion of Situation
- 9) Forgiveness (Includes Radical Forgiveness)
- 10) Acceptance ("It could not have been any other way. It is all as need be.")
- 11) Letting Go/Gratitude
- 12) Rebirth- Creative Empowerment

*Grief is the willingness to be claimed by a story bigger than the one you wish for.
~Stephen Jenkinson*

1. DENIAL

This includes the shock and the numbing to cope. Denial is Grace that protects us from the full impact of what loss or devastation is before us, until we are ready to feel the more raw feelings. It is a necessary time of readying the person to face what has truly happened.

Suggested Exercise:

- Write the story of your loss uncensored for yourself.
- Then read or simply tell it to a trusted confidant.

2. ANGER

Anger is a protest expressed through blatant rage, tense passive aggressiveness or seething vengeance. It is a way to set a boundary. Sometimes anger is shamed out of us. It is also vulnerable to be so raw in our pain, which is one layer beneath anger. We have to pass through this stage and learn to express the anger without harming oneself or another.

Anger shows us precisely where we are stuck, where our limits are, where we cling to beliefs and fears.

~Jack Kornfield

Suggested Exercises:

- Saying "No!" exercise
- Empty chair technique to express.
- Using bats and pillows to beat out the anger.
- Writing a letter uncensored of unleashed anger.
- Art Therapy- clay or painting. Using black and red paint can jumpstart anger that one may not give oneself permission to feel.

3. BARGAINING

Bargaining is we replay events in the futile hope for something different. It is also where we attempt to control what may still remain as a positive outcome. In some cases, bargaining works - whether healing from a terminal disease, or being able to reverse what one thought was completely lost. In the case of death and other losses, it is the place where one repeats the events up to the loss and asks "What if?", "What could have happened?" and "What should have happened."

Suggested Exercises:

- Write out what you would have wanted as the ideal scenario.

- Write out or repeat to oneself, self-soothing phrases or affirmations to support you. i.e. I trust, I am forgivable, I am at peace.

4. BETRAYAL/GUILT

Betrayal is a more pointed version of anger where we feel fully the position of being a Victim. Guilt is where we feel responsible for a certain part of the loss. We can beat ourselves mercilessly over this.

Suggested Exercises:

- Write an Anger letter to the other
- Write an Anger self to oneself
- Practice the Forgiveness Meditation for several days in a row.

5. DEPRESSION

Depression can be disorienting, painful and frightening. By having the overview of what depression is, we are given a understanding of its purpose. Depression is a cocoon, a chrysalis, a dark gestation or a time-out where the ego is obliged to take a backseat. A deeper, more humble, wiser self is in formation. When this self is formed enough, it will result in a breakthrough of one or all three of the following:

- Intense Rage and Anger
- Overwhelming Grief and Sorrow
- A denied truth, opinion, longing, career, path, pursuit, preference that is finally pursued

The Dark Night of the Soul is when we no longer feel a connectedness with our spiritual path. It can be “Dear Father, why have you forsaken me?” It may feel like God has abandoned us. It feels like sometimes that no matter what spiritual practices we do, nothing works. It is riding this out.

Suggested Exercises:

- Spiritual practices that support the person into going into deeper states are highly recommended so to strengthen the Higher Self. These include chanting, reading spiritually inspiring texts, yoga, meditative dance, silence, fasting, prayer.
- Walking or being in nature helps ground the person while everything feels so ungrounded.

“Rest in it and surrender . . . let go of all our old attachments to the way the spiritual path is supposed to be. Let down into that darkness and into that emptiness where we

find what he calls an ineffable sweetness that begins to rise into that hollowed out container.”

~St. John of the Cross

6. SADNESS, SORROW, GRIEF

“God is nearest the brokenhearted.”

~Psalms 34:18

Heartbreak, Being Gutted, Broken Open all capture what happens to us when Sadness or Sorrow visits. It is a key stage on the Grieving Odyssey. It is when the Ego Death is at its Climax. It's when we can no longer protect and avoid. It is a Relief. It's when we cave in to the overwhelming pain and heartache and in our doing so, let the light in.

This ironically, can be some of the sweetest moments of our life. It is when the light can get in. It is when we touch the Absolute truth of our nature. It is when we break open to compassion for all beings, understanding that all beings are held in this same suffering. It is sometimes when we feel the most connected to all beings.

In Sorrow, there is a letting go – not the spiritually wise letting go of later on the Odyssey, but one that comes because we can't fight it any longer. It is a tempering of our attachments like no other.

Suggested Exercises:

- Spiritual music.
- Being alone, being silent
- Time in nature
- Baths, Massage, Energy Healing

“The wound is the place where the Light enters you.”

~Rumi

“Sorrow is a Romance with the Divine and Kirtan (chanting) is the serenade in such moments.”

~Krishna Das

*“Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.*

You must wake up with sorrow.

*You must speak until your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

- Naomi Shihab-Nays

7. COMPREHENSION

This is the mental and analytic understanding of what has happened. This can be an understanding of historical facts and dynamics, whether within a family, culture, society or country that would have contributed to the loss. One must hold this piece delicately, as it may be premature to go there or taken as a way to insensitively run over the more raw emotions of the earlier stages. However, when the person is healed enough, it is the place where the first glimpse of an overview happens, beyond the understandable victim position. Some never get to this stage and that is okay.

Suggested Exercises:

- Write the story of the loss from an omnipresent point of view.
- Paint, make a collage or model clay of all players in the story.
- Watch documentaries or movies, or read about all related players in one's story.
- Forgiveness Meditation

8. COMPASSION

The Compassion stage is when the heart breaks open, for oneself, for the “other”, and for all parties. There is a coming into a Oneness with all. There is no more “Other”.

Suggested Exercise:

- Heart opening meditations
- Listening to heart-stirring music
- Listening with the heart to the other side (if relevant)
- Forgiveness Meditation
- Offering volunteer service

9. FORGIVENESS

Traditional forgiveness includes offering compassion when we have been wronged and taking responsibility and making amends when we have wronged. In radical forgiveness, we also take responsibility for what is unhealed in ourselves to attract any offender – personally, socially or politically. We move from victimization to gratitude for the soul growth that any disturbance catapults us into.

Any forgiveness process can reach the states of liberation, freedom and inner peace. You may one day come to the place where you humbly say, "It couldn't have been

any other way." This is a tall order and committed attention and surrendering to the rich journey that forgiveness is, can take you there.

Suggested Exercise:

- Traditional Forgiveness Meditation
- Radical Forgiveness Meditation

10. ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance is the natural result of genuine forgiveness. It's accepting and integrating what is, is. There is emotional acceptance where we no longer are in longing and hoping for what is, to be any different. And then there is spiritual acceptance. It is the place where we acknowledge it could not have been any other way. It is recognizing there is a spiritual order to what has occurred. This can be blasphemous to the personality self.

Suggested Exercises:

- Read spiritual texts to strengthen a faith and trust.
- Learn about saints and mystics who faced great challenges and came out on the other side.
- Write and repeat affirmations of "I accept that"

"I can see clearly now, the rain is gone..."

~Johnny Nash

11. LETTING GO/ GRATITUDE

The authentic first glimmers of letting go come. Sometimes it is a natural, effortless falling of the apple from the apple tree, sometimes it's a decision because one sees that it's simply time and it's too costly to hang on - emotionally, physically, financially or spiritually. However, it is also something to never be rushed or shamed.

"Grieving - it's over when it's over."

~Cyntha Gonzalez

Suggested Exercises:

- Visit the place or places where one frequented with the loss in question.
- If this is not possible, look at photos.
- Write a gratitude list for all.
- Paint a gratitude list for all.
- Write a love letter to what has been lost.

12. REBIRTH

Instead of looking behind, one looks forward to what is next. Sometimes this is a whole new life. Sometimes it is taking the lessons learned or the memory of what was and giving to relieve the suffering of others and make the life of those still here, better and more enlightened.

Suggested Exercises:

- Vision Board
- Write a future ideal scene, in the present tense, with positive language, as if it is already happening. Feel it as if you are already living it.
- Hire a coach to guide you in creating the new and take action.

*"Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind.
It's gonna be a bright, bright sunshinin' day
I think can make it now the pain is gone
All of the bad feelings have disappeared
Here is the rainbow i've been praying for
It's gonna be a bright, bright sunshinin' day
Look all around, there's nothing but blue skies
Look straight ahead, there's nothing but blue skies"
~Johnny Nash*