



Issues -7-19

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Touchstone

Love is a mystery in which I dwell, grateful and unafraid.

It doesn't happen right away. We are too preoccupied with our own deprivation and sadness. And we need time to mull over our lives, to go over and over what we have lost, what we are going to do, what the future may hold. And it probably doesn't happen—that suffering becomes love—because we will it so. But all the time we are struggling with our grief and its meaning, the seeds of a new compassion are germinating in our psyches. Because we have suffered, we are tender-hearted toward others. Because our own defenses have been peeled away, we have a new perspective on what it means to be vulnerable, and we recognize the vulnerability of others. Because we recognize how closely we are all connected to one another, in a way we become porous, transparent—people whom the light shines through. And the light, which is love illuminated, reaches those around us and perhaps they, too, become able to take the risk of loving. Together we realize that “no man [or woman] is an island.” We know that, while we are still sad, we are not alone, and that love, often forged out of sadness, is life's greatest gift to us all.

Martha W. Hickman, Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations For Working Through Grief. HarperCollins.

Quotes of the Month

“To be seen from the inside is the most healing experience we can ever have.”

Christina Rasmussen

“You may my glories and my state depose, But not my griefs. Still I am king of those.”

William Shakespeare

“Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become love. That is the mystery.”

Kathrine Mansfield

“The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared.” — Lois Lowry

Our memories often hurt us. It can be painful to remember the person who died—the good times as well as the bad times— because the memories so strongly evoke the person's absence now as well as her absence for all the days of our future. But from my own personal experience as well as from all my decades of counseling mourners, I've learned that there comes a time when we're ready to unpack the memories. If they're happy memories, it's like we have a treasure inside us that needs to be shared. It's lonely keeping all those memories to ourselves. If they're more challenging memories, we begin to realize that working through them will require sharing them. They'll keep bothering us until we do. The sharing of our memories causes us pain too, of course, but it becomes a more bittersweet pain, with the sweet outweighing the bitter a little more each time. When I'm ready, I need to share my memories.

Alan Wolfelt, Grief One Day at a Time: 365 Meditations to Help You Heal After Loss. Companion Press.



Touchstone

Postcards-by-Deacon Dan McGrath

(Note: My wife died Oct. 23, 2015 these postcard reflection were written following her death)

For me, trying to understand death is like trying to catch the wind. The mystery that it presents can be felt in my grief, tears, loss and soul. But in the end its grasp is beyond capture or explanation. And the little I do know about death and the finality of it all...can all but overwhelm me. In the end it's all about trust and hope.

A Buddhist parable called the Parable of the Mustard Seed is about a woman named Kisa Gotami. Kisa's only child, a very young son, had died. Unwilling to accept his death, she carried him from neighbor to neighbor and begged for someone to give her medicine to bring him back to life. One of her neighbors told her to go to Buddha and ask him if he had a way to bring her son back to life. Kisa found Buddha and pleaded with him to help bring her son back to life. He instructed her to go back to her village and gather mustard seeds from the households of those who have never been touched by death. From those mustard seeds, he promised he would create a medicine to bring her son back to life. Relieved, she went back to her village and began asking her neighbors for mustard seeds. All of her neighbors were willing to give her mustard seeds, but they all told her that their households had been touched by death. They told her, "the living are few, but the dead are many." As the day became evening and then night, she was still without any of the mustard seeds that she had been instructed to collect. She realized then the universality of death.

She said, "It's not just a truth for one village or town, nor is it a truth for a single family. But for every world settled by gods [and men]. This indeed is what is true...impermanence. With this new understanding, her grief was calmed. She buried her son in the forest and then returned to Buddha. She confessed to Buddha that she could not obtain any of the mustard seeds he had instructed her to collect because she could not find even one house untouched by death.

The author Hilary Dockray shared this reflection about the parable:

"Losing a loved one to death is a tragedy no one wants to face. When faced with such painful loss, we can feel like Kisa, with grief so unbearable that we wish for anything to make the death not be real. But as Kisa learned, death is universal. Nearly everyone at some point in their life loses a loved one to death. This is part of the impermanence of things that Buddhism speaks of. This does not make the pain of these losses any easier to bear. How we cope is different

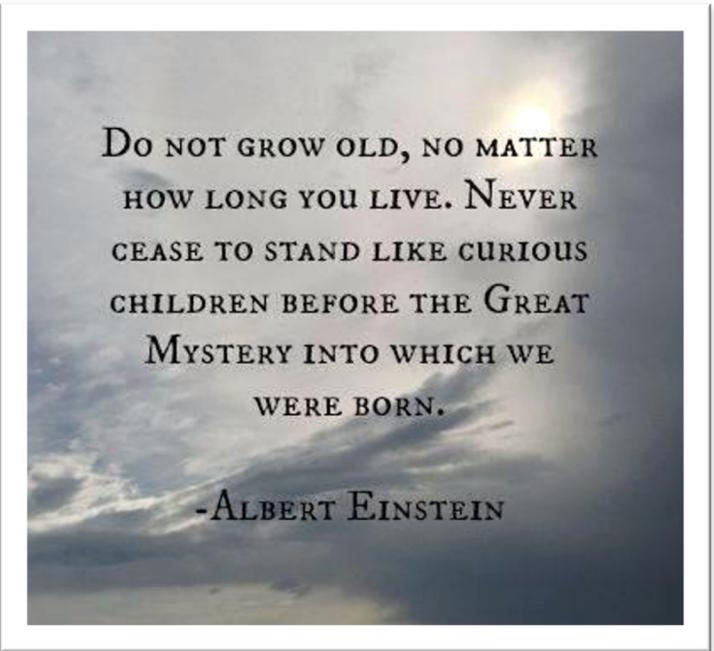
for everyone. For Kisa, it was one story among countless throughout human existence of how a person has suffered great loss and yet learned in their own way to move forward. For the griever, it is a reminder that you are never truly alone in your experience."

Since Carol's death I have tried to move forward by reaching out with kindness and compassion to others. It helps me set my feelings of grief aside for shorter periods of time, allowing me to stay in the present moment...finding peace and hope amidst my grief.

Lately I have been reading a lot about "self-compassion." Being present to others is one thing but how does one reach out to the self with compassion?

The very word "compassion" is an invitation to "suffer with" and enter with me in my suffering. Compassion involves recognizing our shared human condition, flawed and fragile as it is. Self-compassion, by definition, involves the same qualities. Kristin Neff, Ph. D., writes in her book, "Self-Compassion:"

"We can't be moved by our own pain if we don't even acknowledge that it exists in the first place. Much of western culture has a strong "stiff-upper-lip" tradition. We are taught that we shouldn't complain, that we should just carry on. If we're in a difficult or stressful situation, we rarely take time to step back and recognize how hard it is for us in the moment. The truth is, everyone is worthy of compassion. The very fact that we are conscious human beings means that we are intrinsically valuable and deserving of care."



DO NOT GROW OLD, NO MATTER
HOW LONG YOU LIVE. NEVER
CEASE TO STAND LIKE CURIOUS
CHILDREN BEFORE THE GREAT
MYSTERY INTO WHICH WE
WERE BORN.

-ALBERT EINSTEIN



Touchstone

CELEBRATE A LIFE

In the earlier stages of your grief, you will find much comfort in creating a memorial to your lost loved one. One of the first and easiest ways for you to celebrate the lost life is to write your own eulogy to them. If you want to, you can read this written testament out loud at the funeral or a later memorial service. Or you can keep it private, for your eyes only. But write it, you should. Celebrate his or her life with words. Tell everything you loved about them, all the quirks and little things you will miss. You can also include things that bothered you about your beloved, things you will not miss. Just remember, though, this is a eulogy, to memorialize the life they lived, honor their memory, and commemorate their passing. Let the writing be a labor of love, an outpouring of your heart and soul. Once it's all out, you will know whether you want to share it or not. Do give consideration to sharing your eulogy with others.

Another way to commemorate your loss is by creation of a memorial space in your home. You will probably feel the need to create an "altar" of sorts, to remember and honor him or her. Most people do this automatically. This is a normal and natural instinct, and should be encouraged.

Your "altar" could be a side table set up to hold photos, mementos, toys or possessions, candles, flowers, anything you want to include.

One activity that would involve the whole family is to create a memory book or scrapbook of your beloved. Include family stories, lots of photos, memorabilia such as awards, service pins, souvenirs of travel. Have family members write poems or drawings to include in the book. This is especially helpful for the children. The group activity of making the memory book can help a family reminisce, talk openly about the deceased, and lean on each other during the painful days of bereavement. There are many comforting ways to memorialize your lost one, honor his life and mark his passing with appropriate ceremony. You might want to contact their place of business or school and contribute a memorial bench under a tree with a plaque of commemoration. Plant a "Tree of Life" in a special corner of your yard. Let the children help you pick it out, plant it and water it. It can be very therapeutic to plan and implement "just the right" memorial for your loved one. You may have not given this much thought, so I recommend that you devote some time and effort to this most worthy project. It will help you stay in touch and close to your lost beloved.

Touchstone

"I'm Not Fine"

"He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it"

Turkish proverb

In the beginning, soon after word of the tragedy spreads to your family and friends, the gathering commences. The ritual of the funeral provides support for you. Your family allows you to ventilate, provides a shoulder for you to cry on. Early in your bereavement, outsiders understand and expect you to express your grief.

As time goes on, your support system dissipates, as friends and family drift back home, and back to their lives. You may feel very much alone with your grief at this point. And you may also notice something curious. Those neighbors and coworkers who were so understanding in the beginning are starting to get uncomfortable with your grief. They don't know what to say to you now, and although they may not expect you to be through grieving, it makes them uncomfortable, and they secretly wish you would "get over it", for their own comfort.

Even some of your family members may be eager to get over the loss and pain and get back into their normal routine. Adult children may urge their mother to stop mourning, because "Dad wouldn't want you to be sad". This is wrong, misguided advice that is given not to help Mom, but to help life return to normal for the children.

Don't let anyone tell you how to grieve, or for how long. Everyone grieves in their own way, and they need to take as long as they need to process the loss and recover. It cannot be done on someone else's timetable. This means you, too.

The uncomfortable reactions of others when you try to express your grief quickly teaches you to "act recovered" in an attempt to make them more comfortable and to regain their approval.

So what do you do? You tell them "I'm fine".

No, you're not! Quit doing that, giving an "Academy Award" performance just to cater to the feelings of others. It is not helpful.

Surround yourself instead with people who "get it" and will allow you to tell your story of grief over and over or cry when you need to, without judging you or giving unsolicited and ignorant advice. It is not time for you to "get on with your life" until you are good and ready. And don't act otherwise. Nope, you're not gonna win an Oscar for acting like you're fine.



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Book Suggestions

- ⇒ On The Bring of Everything-Parker Palmer
- ⇒ Walking Each Other Home-Ram Dass
- ⇒ The Grace of Dying-Kathleen Singh

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Website Suggestions

- ⇒ www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com
- ⇒ www.griefwatch.com
- ⇒ www.jackkornfield.com/self-compassion/

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