



Issues –8-20

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Quotes of the Month

“It is a sobering thought that the finest act of love you can perform is not an act of service but an act of contemplation, of seeing. When you serve people, you help, support, comfort, alleviate pain. When you see them in their inner beauty and goodness, you transform and create.”

Anthony de Mello SJ

I see how I was nearly caught by my suffering, hypnotized into doing nothing about my situation but worry—justifiable, perhaps, but also maybe a little self-absorbed. In Zen, we call this kind of tightness “being tied up without a rope.”

Touchstone

What is Grief?

The word “grief” is the simple shorthand we use for what is actually a highly complex mixture of thoughts and feelings. Grief is everything we think and feel inside after someone we love dies or leaves or something we are attached to goes away. In other words, grief is the instinctive human response to loss.

Grief is natural and necessary. Our culture tends to deny, diminish, and judge the pain of grief, but the truth is that grief is not something to be afraid of, hide from, or think of as “bad” or “weak.” It is not an illness or mental-health problem. If you are grieving, rest assured that what you are experiencing is not only normal, it is the very thing that will help you heal.

Grief: The Counterpart to Love

Grief is not something we choose or don’t choose. Rather, it is in our wiring. It is the normal and necessary journey we embark on after something we have valued no longer exists.

- *If someone we love dies, we grieve.*
- *If a beloved pet dies, we grieve.*
- *If someone we love leaves us, we grieve.*
- *If something we value is taken away from us, we grieve.*
- *If circumstances we were comfortable with or attached to change, we grieve.*
- *In general, the stronger our attachment to the person or the thing, the stronger our grief will be.*

You see, love and grief are two sides of the same precious coin. One does not—and cannot—exist without the other. They are the yin and yang of our lives. People sometimes say that grief is the price we pay for the joy of having loved. If we allow ourselves the grace of love, we must also allow ourselves the grace of grief and mourning.

(Source: Center For Loss and Life Transition. <https://www.centerforloss.com/grief/>)

Touchstone

Postcards-by-Deacon Dan McGrath

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

During the summer days of the first year after Carol died, I found myself spending a lot of time reflecting on the previous year. As I looked back at the early days after Carol's death, I remembered thinking that my life was over and nobody could understand or feel the pain I was experiencing.

Sometimes good intentioned friends would say to me, "Well, don't you think that somewhere there is someone worse off than you?" My first thought would be to say, honestly, "no."

In her book "When Things Fall Apart," Pema Chodron tells us about a Gary Larson cartoon where two women are standing behind their locked door peeking out the window at a monster standing on their doorstep. One of the ladies is saying, "Calm down, Edna, Yes, it is a giant hideous insect, but it may be a giant hideous insect in need of help."

Pema responds to this cartoon:

"The most difficult times for many of us are the ones we give ourselves. Yet it's never too late or too early to practice loving-kindness. It's as if we had a terminal disease but might live for quite a while. Not knowing how much time we have left, we might begin to think it was important to make friends with ourselves and others in the remaining hours, month or years."

It is said that we can't attain enlightenment, let alone feel contentment and joy, without seeing our patterns and our habits. This is called developing loving-kindness and unconditional friendship with ourselves. We are not striving to make pain go away or become a better person. In fact, we are giving control altogether and letting concepts and ideals fall apart.

"This starts with realizing that whatever occurs is neither the beginning nor the end. It is just the same kind of normal human experience that's been happening to everyday people from the beginning of time."

That summer, I was honored to celebrate the spreading of the ashes of a friend's wife, who had died the previous year. When my friend first called and asked me, I felt that it was still too soon after Carol's death. I was

afraid I would let my emotions get in the way of his need to express and feel his loss. So I told him I would get back to him.

I had been reflecting a lot on self-compassion, realizing that the "monsters" at my door (grief, sadness, loss, loneliness, anger, and fear) were not things that I needed to hide or run away from. Rather, self-compassion invited me to open the door and embrace them with loving kindness and compassion. As I did so, each emotion in its own way had joined me on my journey of life, not as something to fear but giving me the strength and resilience to move forward without Carol by my side.

In spite of my fear, I decided to go ahead with the service for my friend's wife. I found myself very relaxed as I gathered with the family. I felt real connection and empathy with their loss and stood by my friend's side to comfort and help him as we celebrated his wife's life and recognized the family's sadness at her loss. I came home that afternoon with feelings of gladness and contentment-feelings I hadn't felt very much in a long time. But most of all I came home knowing that regardless of how we feel at times, no one is truly alone in their suffering. All we have to do is open that door.

Pema Chodron continues her meditation on our **monsters**:

"This very moment is the perfect teacher...we can meet our match with a poodle or with a guard dog, but the interesting question is...what happens next. We regard discomfort in any form as bad news. But for people who have a certain hunger to know what is true. Feelings of fear, instead of being bad news, are actually very clear moments that teach us where it is that we're holding back. They're like messengers that show us, with terrifying clarity, exactly where we're stuck. This very moment is the perfect teacher, and lucky for us, it's with us wherever we are."

***"Learn to embrace sorrow, look straight at its face and joy will reappear."** (Rumi)*

Deacon Dan and a "Postcard" from Carol

Touchstone

Grieving

Grieving people have two choices. The first choice is to try to avoid their grief and emotions associated with their loss and continue on with life, hoping to forget. This is a risky choice, because when grief is ignored, it continues to cause distress.

The other choice is to recognize grieving and seek healing and growth. Coping with and adjusting to loss is slow, hard work. As difficult as it may sound, it is healing to embrace your grief, give it full expression and attention and, in so doing, distress will ease. While a show of strength at times of significant loss may seem admirable, it does not serve the need human beings have to express grief. It is essential to allow oneself to feel all the emotions that arise, as painful as they may be, and to treat oneself with patience and kindness. (Source: National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.)

Touchstone

Grief vs. Mourning

If grief is what we think and feel inside, what is mourning? Mourning is the outward expression of our grief.

Mourning is crying, talking about the loss, journaling, sharing memories, and telling stories. Other ways to mourn include praying, making things, joining in ceremonies, and participating in support groups. Mourning is how, over time, we begin to heal. It is through active and honest mourning that we reconstruct hope and meaning in our lives.

The Six Needs of Mourning

During our journey through grief and mourning, we all encounter six needs we must meet if we are to heal:

- Acknowledge the reality of the death.
- Embrace the pain of the loss.
- Remember the person who died.
- Develop a new self-identity.
- Search for meaning.
- Receive support from others.

Touchstone

Reconciling Our Grief

We're sure you understand by now that love never ends. We continue to love those who have died. Because grief is love's twin, grief never ends either. We don't "recover from" or "get over" grief.

Instead, we become reconciled to it. We learn to live with it and integrate it into our continued living. We come to reconciliation in our grief journeys when the full reality of the loss becomes a part of us. Healing is not returning to an old normal but rather creating a new normal.

Our grief does soften, however. If we explore, embrace, and express it along the way, it eventually becomes less painful. The more actively we grieve, mourn, and meet our six needs of mourning, the more likely we are to live the rest of our days with meaning, love, and joy.

There is darkness and pain in grief, but there is also hope. We have loved, and we must now muster the courage to mourn.

(Source: Center For Loss and Life Transition. <https://www.centerforloss.com/grief/>)

Do not protect yourself from grief by a fence, but rather by your friends". ~Czech Proverb





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Book Suggestions

- ⇒ Tuesdays with Morrie-Mitch Albom
- ⇒ Dying To Be Me-
- ⇒ The Artist's Way-Julia Cameron

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Website Suggestions

- ⇒ www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com
- ⇒ www.theconversationproject.org/
- ⇒ www.soundstrue.com

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