



Bereavement the Most Difficult of Grievs

By Michael Cruse

During the COVID 19 pandemic we are all at least grieving the loss of normalcy in our comforting routines and expectations. Some of us are grieving far more personal and threatening losses such as income, assets, businesses, jobs, and social isolation. Some of those losses are temporary, some will be difficult to replace and some will be lost forever.

This kind of grief requires an attachment that is difficult for us to relinquish. Although we may suffer and struggle we often find satisfactory replacement attachments. When we are fortunate enough, resilient and adaptive enough, these replacement attachments often approximate or exceed what had been previously lost. This often causes us to conclude that these losses happened for a reason and/or that we benefited from a special protection.

However, there is another kind of grieving that is uniquely different and far more difficult-it is called bereavement. In bereavement we are grieving a loss, through death, of the person and the intimate relationship we kept. In death we experience the permanent separation from the one we loved.

In the case of end of life illness, some may engage in anticipatory bereavement to help prepare us before actual death. However, for most of us anticipatory bereavement is far too threatening to approach and is defended with denial. In intimate relationships it is not uncommon for one of us to be preparing for the impending death while the other remaining in denial. This dynamic enables the relationship to maintain a sense of balance of hope and truth.

In intimate relationships we experience a blurring of our personal boundaries based upon needs, wants, strengths and weaknesses. This causes a couple's identity to emerge that can enable us to be better versions of ourselves. The death or the impending death is experienced as an existential threat to our identity as a couple-we are painfully being unwound and undone.

Bereavement or anticipatory bereavement is literally the cost of love.

In bereavement, we are simultaneously continuing and discontinuing our bond with the deceased and forming a new relationship with the deceased over time (Silverman & Nickman). Further, in bereavement or anticipatory bereavement our previous major losses, even non-death losses, may get reactivated-especially if those losses have had underlying unresolved issues or conflict. Fortunately, the passage of time is favorable in bereavement, if given care

and attention. Overtime, we learn to cope and live with the loss-often expressed not so much as getting better but as getting different.

In death there is no replacement for the person we loved nor the intimate relationship we kept. Sometimes, there are subsequent new relationships, or reinvestments in other intimate relationships that can help fill the void and niches.

In bereavement, there are opportunities for personal growth that can only occur in the midst of our suffering. Our willingness to embrace our own suffering is essential to our psychological & spiritual growth and is inextricably linked to our capacity to experience joy (Peck).

This is why,

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