



THE MOURNING PROCESS

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

The saying is that the only two PREDICTABLE things in life are death and taxes. And yet, in spite of this, people still DON'T deal with death very well. By "death," I am referring to two types: the obvious (i.e., that a person has passed on) and the less obvious (i.e., LOSSES and ENDINGS of significant parts of a person's life, such as a friendship, a marriage, a career, etc.).

Back in the late 1960's, a psychiatrist named Elisabeth Kubler-Ross studied life and death, and the effects death can have on those who have suffered the loss. She found there to be five typical stages a person goes through, although everyone can experience their feelings a little differently from each other. These can include DENIAL, shock, or isolation at first. After this, people can feel ANGER about the loss, maybe being mad at God or a higher power if they believe in this, and/or maybe being angry with the person who died for "abandoning" them. Next, the person may feel the need to BARGAIN with God, etc. to try to "get the deceased person back." He or she may promise to be a "good person" always, for instance, if the deceased one can "come back now." However, upon the realization that the loved one isn't coming back, the person can feel DEPRESSED. Hopefully, after all this, one can feel some ACCEPTANCE and RESOLUTION regarding the loss. Note that these stages can merge with each other, and can come and go for a while, and that a person can experience OTHER feelings along with these, too.

To mourn in a HEALTHY way, I would suggest several points to keep in mind. First of all, remember that with loss and mourning come FEELINGS. I tend to think that things are PROPORTIONAL in this instance (i.e., the more one cared about the deceased person or loss, the more one will mourn). In essence, I believe that having and feeling your emotions about the loss is a way of HONORING and paying HOMAGE to your loss by acknowledging how much that individual or situation meant to you.

Also, be sure to go at your own PACE. Don't let others rush you into finishing your mourning before you are done because of THEIR discomfort with emotions and/or death. Let yourself NATURALLY mourn the loss and don't think about if you are taking too much (or too little) time to process it. Remember that death and loss are very PERSONAL, subjective experiences and deserve ADEQUATE time to conceptualize, comprehend, and gain perspective on what's happened.

On the other hand, bottling up one's feelings can cause both EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL problems. Emotional outgrowths of this behavior can include depression, anxiety, sleep and eating problems, irritability, and low self-esteem due to not grieving enough or at all. Physical symptoms can include backaches, tight shoulders and neck, gastrointestinal ailments, headaches, chronic fatigue or sickness, etc.

In addition, try to maintain a good BALANCE between keeping up with daily-life events and practical items for which you are responsible while still giving yourself time to feel your feelings periodically EVERY day, whether it's with company or alone.

And DO LEAN ON good family members and friends, even if you don't normally ask anyone for help. If not now, when else would you let your friends and family be there for you as YOUR sounding board, source of emotional comfort, confidant, etc. Share the wonderful memories with these people, cry on their shoulders (literally and figuratively), and just let them BE THERE FOR YOU. Mourning does take time, but it is a HEALTHY, NECESSARY PROCESS that helps you work through the upset over the loss and, ultimately, by doing so, can assist you in reaching ACCEPTANCE. If you have difficulty getting there, meeting with a Psychologist can help you with this.

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