

Grief and Mourning for the World

With LaShelle Lowe-Charde

When faced with suffering and loss it is natural to feel grief. Like any emotion, grief by itself is not a problem. It is simply something that flows through you when you allow it. Grief has its own beginning and ending. You don't have to go looking for it. Your job is to allow grief by pausing, giving it your full attention, and breathing through your heart..

Unfortunately, you might live in a culture that undervalues grief and mourning. Other than funerals, you may have no grief and mourning rituals to engage in on your own or with others. Yet, grief is an essential piece in allowing you space to be with what is happening, to heal, and to find acceptance. From healing and acceptance, compassion and wise action can arise.

As you witness injustices and fear-based politics, see acres and acres of forest burn from wildfires, watch the death count from COVID-19 rise, and more, grief arises. You try to allow it, but something gets tangled. In the next instant, there is tension and anger and perhaps the thought, "I should do something." Or "It shouldn't be this way!" Or perhaps there is a wave of hopelessness as you think, "The world is a terrible place and will burn itself up." These reactions crowd out grief. Instead of grieving you find yourself angry, hopeless, or despairing. These feelings are inevitably accompanied by reactive thinking that doesn't contribute to healing nor wise action.

But if you live in a culture that has pushed away grief, along with much emotional expression, you can't help but have deeply formed habits that take you away from the aliveness of grief. What can you do to access grief and the doors it can help open? Let's look at some possibilities.

Set Up Support and Create New Norms

With people close to you, you can ask for support in making space for grief. Consistently making requests and allowing grief to be present and have its expression will, over time, shift the grief norms in your community. Here are some possible requests for support around grieving.

- I want to let you know that when grief comes up for me I want to honor it by allowing the tears and feeling. I am not falling apart in that moment and don't need rescuing. Just your warmth and presence is enough.
- What would be helpful for me to hear is something like, "Take all the time you need to grieve." Or "I am not bothered by your tears." Or "Grief is welcome here."
- Express your own grief in front of others. As you meet your own grief with acceptance you inspire others to do the same.

Time for Quiet

Make time and space to simply lie on the floor or ground and do nothing but focus on your experience in the moment. Moving quickly from task to task blocks your ability to feel. Train yourself to interrupt thinking and return to body sensations and feelings.

Connect with Mourning as a Valid Universal Need

Cultivate a supportive relationship to mourning. Remind yourself that mourning is a need like any other. Tending to this need contributes to your thriving. Each time grief arises, say to yourself, "It's

okay to grieve. I can make space for grief.”

Ask for and Create Forums for Mourning

Ask your community, church, and temple leaders to set up gatherings for mourning. Identify the universal values in these meetings and visualize them being nourished and met.

Learning to allow grief is not the end of the story. To keep grief from slipping into despair, specific doable action is essential. Continue to ask what you can do to nourish and protect the universal needs over which you feel grief. It is up to you to learn to discern the actions that serve others, cultivate compassion, and help you live in empowered integrity. Here are some examples of specific and doable actions to help meet and protect needs for: equity, respect, consideration, inclusion, and more.

- Maintain your own self-care so that you can truly be of service when you choose the way you'd like to take action.
- Offer prayers and love for all those impacted by injustice.
- Step up and speak up any time you witness racism or sexism.
- Reach out to those you know are most directly impacted and offer reassurance that you care and will offer support.
- Participate in groups or public demonstrations that promote equity and respect.
- Sign relevant petitions.
- As you walk about in public, set your intention each day to express friendliness and care. This might mean smiling at others more than you usually do, letting someone go before you in a line, or offering a greeting.

As you engage in actions like these, it's important to continually make space for grief and find your way to equanimity and compassionate presence with what's happening. In this way, you can trust compassion and wisdom to inform your actions and truly be of service.

Practice

Take a moment now to set your intention to allow grief. Then choose one specific time and place this week where you could be supported in expressing grief.