

How Shall We Grieve in Tumultuous Times?

by Rev. Maria
Dancing Heart (Hoaglund)

We live in a culture where grief is not honored in many meaningful ways. We live in a society that's very awkward around the subject of death and dying and grief. We have "bereavement leave" in the workplace that last for three or four days. We use words like you need to "get over it," and "keep busy," and maintain a "stiff upper lip." It's almost as if we encourage each other to turn a blind eye and ear to our true feelings. So it's no wonder that we call this grief "work." It is indeed work to express our feelings especially in our culture, as we do not make it easy to do something that's actually quite a natural process.

Having acknowledged that, I now would like to invite you to imagine with me what it would be like to be living in a totally different culture, where expressing grief is encouraged and honored. I've been reading some material by a woman named Sobonfu Some -- her name means "keeper of the rituals" -- of West Africa, whose tribe, the Dagara tribe in Burkina Faso, actually encourages their people to let go and grieve whatever no longer serves them.

As a child, Sobonfu remembers when a friend of hers died and she was asked the question, "Have you grieved enough? Have you cried enough?" rather than "Aren't you finished crying about that yet?"

The belief among the Dagara Tribe is that hanging on to old pain makes it grow until it can smother our joy and creativity; it could



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even have the potential to kill us. So it's always a good thing to be "letting go" and releasing. Doesn't that feel liberating to imagine living in a place like that, to imagine that kind of encouragement and permission to grieve?

I've heard it said that if all the women of the world could cry at once, the world would be healed, we would have peace in an

instant. I believe this might be true. Certainly, if all of us who need to cry and grieve and release "old stuff" could do so when necessary, we probably wouldn't be fighting each other so much. We wouldn't play the blaming game or the shaming game so much. Rather, we might take more responsibility for our own pain and work on letting it go.

So, as we consider our grief and the memories of those we have loved, or those people we are remembering and honoring in our thoughts today, I want to invite you to grieve in any way that you can, today and in the days ahead. I want to invite you to be really good to yourself in these grief-laden, sometimes intensely pain-filled days. May you find and even create time to be sad, to look at photographs of your loved one and remember, even cry your eyes out, if you need to. May you honor the things and people and places that your loved one loved, and do things that will help you honor and remember them.

May you find creative and safe ways that you can release your feelings of anger -- even rage, denial, sorrow, and loneliness -- like writing in a journal, like going for long walks in the beauty of nature and letting Mother Earth know about your pain, like seeking out a support group or a counselor and really delving into and embracing your pain and sorrow.

One of the things I find myself doing as a bereavement counselor is giving people permission to grieve the way they need and want to. I'll never forget a phone call I made years ago to a woman who had just lost someone very significant in her life. She said that her friends were urging her to get out with them and do things. But she said that all she felt like doing at the time was to stay in bed and eat ice cream. I suggested to her that probably what she needed to do for the next little while, at least, was to stay in bed and eat ice cream. If that's what felt good to her, that's what she deserved to do for herself.

We all sometimes need this encouragement to follow the guidance that our intuition is already bringing us.

As you move through any "letting go" process, may you remember that all the struggles and trials of grief that you move through can be considered "compassion training." As you go through these hard times of releasing a loved one or something that no longer serves you, you have the great potential to become a stronger person who can be more compassionate and open-hearted when your friend or co-worker goes through their trials and tribulations next week, next month, or next year. As human beings, we do all suffer pain and loss, and we all need the support and encouragement to walk through the pain and suffering when it happens. And walking through the unknown, the "adventure of grief," has the potential to bring us deep growth and transformation.

One more thing I would encourage you to do when moving through your grief is to connect with Spirit. Deepen your spiritual life. Whether you spend more time in nature, go to church, find a good way to pray, tune in, and talk with God/dess/Spirit, it's so important right now to allow your higher power to guide your way. If we don't ask, it can't happen; this is universal law.

I recently read a piece by Rev. Leo Booth in Unity's Daily Word which reminded me of Popeye and his spinach. When Popeye was in a fix, he would reach for a can of spinach, and thus, he was always able to overcome any obstacle that was in his way. The spinach is always there; we just need to remember to reach for it, preferably sooner rather than later.

So, today I invite and challenge you to move deeper into your spiritual life, whatever that would mean for you. Spirit is always available and so delighted to guide our ways, especially when we seek out Spirit. And this is likely to make your process so much easier, more interesting, and even magical!

Rev. Maria Dancing Heart Hoaglund is a United Church of Christ minister and hospice spiritual and bereavement counselor who has recently published a unique, inspirational book for healing and prayer. *The Last Adventure of Life: Sacred Resources for Transition*, is available through her website: www.bridgetodreams.org. Or call (360) 341-2741.

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