Integrating Everyday Change and Loss: Learning to “Go With The Flow”

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Part 1

- Removing barriers to the Flow…and growth.
- Albert Einstein said, “nothing happens until something moves…”

There is a pattern to the universe (Joan Guntzelman Ph.D)

- Of birth, death and rebirth…
- Chaos, order, chaos…(Jean Vanier)
- We can struggle against this pattern but it remains.
Heraclitus: “You cannot step into the same river twice.”

Life…Death…Rebirth…

- Major religions refer to this pattern and invite one to “enter in” according to the group’s belief system and traditions.
- The pattern abounds in nature.
- The pattern is difficult but not negative. It is the opposite of negative. Without death there is no life.

“Do I really want to grow as a human being?” Well…

- Growth requires change
- Change often requires stress
- Learning to cope with stress (change) leads to further growth
If you struggle with change…

Welcome to the human race…

To live is to experience change and loss (Bruce E. Agneberg, M.D.).

- In what ways do I struggle against the pattern of continuous change in my life?
- In what ways do I accept this pattern in my life?
- Just what does “going with the flow mean?”
- It seems to have something to do with accepting the pattern of “birth, death, and rebirth into my life. Detachment.

Detachment…

- Is the absence of a need to hold on to anyone or anything. It is a way of thinking and being which gives us the freedom to flow with life.
Why “Detachment…?”

“Suffering is clinging to that which changes” – Buddhist quote

Loss and Grief

- Loss: The end or change of a familiar pattern of living or behavior.
- Everyday separations.
- Grief: The normal and natural reaction to loss.
- Grief involves both emotion and intellect.
- Surrender
- Grief is emotional energy.

We need to recognize the losses in our lives that have made us the people we are (B. Agneberg, M.D.).

- We don’t “get over” our losses… “They become us.”
The “integration” of the loss or change into our life is a much healthier goal or way of looking at the work of grief than “getting over it.”
The idea of finding “closure” in grief may not be the best way.

Sometimes we have to wait for the “integration” of a change in our lives to happen—“A Spirituality of Waiting” (Henri Nouwen).
Help others to wait with hope = community
• “Don’t be impatient with the universe” Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

• “We have what we need. We don’t have to rush after it. It was there all the time and if we give it time it will make itself known to us” – Thomas Merton

The work of Grief requires a “Sacred Space.”

• Allow yourself to grieve or integrate the change in your own “unique way,” without judging your feelings or setting time limits.

• Allow others to grieve in their own “unique way,” without judging their feelings or setting time limits.

• Thomas Merton once said in comparing the spiritual life to the search for a path in a field of untrodden snow: “Walk across the snow and there is your path.” No one can give you exact directions. Each person’s spiritual geography, each person’s grief process (or way of dealing with change) is unique.

• We need to be gentle with ourselves and others. This isn’t as easy as it sounds.

• Try not to try too hard…
Be kind – everyone you meet is fighting a battle.

- “Problems” are defined by mainstream society.
- What if your grief or what you are struggling with isn’t recognized?
Disenfranchised Grief
(Barbara Joy, Ph.D)
♦ Exists when a loss is not socially sanctioned or extends beyond society’s time limit for grieving.
♦ The individual grieves, but others may not acknowledge or validate that person’s right to grieve, the manner of grieving, or the loss of that specific relationship.

Examples of Disenfranchised Grievers:
♦ Children, Adolescents, Elderly.
♦ Miscarriage.
♦ Incarceration
♦ Critically Ill.
♦ Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual.
♦ Loss of a pet.
♦ Retirement
♦ Divorce
♦ Rape / sexual abuse

Disenfranchised Grief Becomes a Secret Grief by necessity.
“We are only as sick as our secrets”
Ron Morgan, CPE Supervisor
Cleveland Clinic Foundation

The gift of “Non-Judgmental Understanding” is tremendously helpful – and rare.

♦ Sacred space.
♦ Unconditional love = unconditional positive regard.
♦ Feelings aren’t right or wrong. They just are.
♦ Resist the urge to correct irrational feelings. Allow yourself or someone else to have irrational feelings. It’s ok.
♦ Acceptance of someone’s (even your own) feelings does not mean acting on them. It’s ok. Let it be.

Five Stages of Grief can be helpful but sometimes not are not always…

♦ People dealing with change or loss move back and forth between stages the of grief—
♦ There is a groping going on within one’s self to establish the SIGNIFICANCE…of the loss.
♦ “They say my mother’s dead, but I’m not buying it…” -This is denial - everything else is grief.
♦ The opposite of Disenfranchising…
The Gift of “Significance” (Doug Manning)

- Unconditional understanding says “You are allowed to feel your grief” - thus helping the person by allowing them to establish the significance of their loss within.
- Acceptance of another’s feelings helps them integrate their loss. Acceptance by others of our feelings is helpful to us.
- We can’t “fix it”-but we can stand in “solidarity.”
- What if one never finds acceptance of their feelings?

We could get stuck – maybe labeled!

- We disenfranchise someone’s grief by labeling them as “wallowing in it.”
- Can our feeling uncomfortable with someone’s grief cause us to label someone as wallowing? A fear of intimacy.
- We may begin to avoid them.
- If we let a person talk about their feelings a while instead of changing the subject or using some other way of shutting them down we may see them move through their feelings and move on.

A helpful attitude to have toward oneself or another…

- “Your secret is safe to share with me.”
- “Your secret is sacred to me.”
- Be “generative.” – Unconditional Positive Regard for the other.
It won’t be a secret anymore

Key Words And Ideas:
- There is a pattern to the universe, of life, death and rebirth.
- Recognize our own losses.
- Integration of loss is better than “getting over it.”
  - Disenfranchised grief.
- How to help – Sacred Space, Significance, unconditional understanding – or positive regard.

Things to Remember…
- Welcome to the human race.
- Einstein said he could never understand it all…
- Try not to try too hard...
The secret of life is enjoying the passing of time. Any fool can do it. There ain't nothing to it. Nobody knows how we got to the top of the hill. But since we're on our way down, we might as well enjoy the ride.

The secret of love is in opening up your heart. It's okay to feel afraid. But don't let that stand in your way. 'Cause anyone knows that love is the only road. And since we're only here for a while, might as well show some style. Give us a smile.

Isn't it a lovely ride? Sliding down, gliding down. Try not to try too hard. It's just a lovely ride.

Now the thing about time is that time isn't really real. It's just your point of view. How does it feel for you? Einstein said he could never understand it all. Planets spinning through space. The smile upon your face. Welcome to the human race.

Some kind of lovely ride. I'll be sliding down. I'll be gliding down. Try not to try too hard. It's just a lovely ride. Isn't it a lovely ride? Sliding down, gliding down. Try not to try too hard. It's just a lovely ride. The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time. - The Secret Of Life, by James Taylor