



## Session 12 – Loss and Grief

A friend of mine, Louise Broomberg, shared her knowledge about loss and grief from a very clear and pure perspective. My way of dealing with loss and grief you will see in the next session.

Here is Louise's story:

One thing we know for sure about this material world is that it is impermanent, transitory: the cycles of birth and death are an unavoidable part of life, as natural as the seasons. And yet as much as we can accept and understand this, any loss does inevitably evoke grief and sorrow. Whether it be the death of a person or a pet, the loss of a home or job, the ending of a marriage or age and stage in life.

My friend Louise hadn't experienced any significant loss in her life until she was well into adulthood. She had met the love of her life and they were planning to marry and spend the rest of their lives together. And then after a few short years he died suddenly and unexpectedly. Talk about a crash-course in loss and grief! As she sat with his still warm, lifeless body, she had a profound life lesson in what is real and eternal and what is temporary and needs to be released. Love is real and eternal; bodies, like all material forms, are not. They are wonderful, miraculous vehicles for the Spirit for a short time, and then they return to the earth. But Spirit is invincible and can never die.

As comforting and reassuring as that realisation is, she also learnt that grief has a life of its own and we all have different reactions to it. It is felt physically, and we do need to grieve any loss in whatever way is natural for us. Most religions and cultures have rituals around death and mourning to help people through this process. There isn't really a one size fits all approach, but there are some common threads.

The Swiss-American psychiatrist, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, did ground-breaking research in the field of death, dying and grief in the 1960's, at a time when it was a subject that was hardly talked about. In her book, *On Death and Dying* (published in 1969), she identifies five stages of grief.

They are:

- **Denial** (confusion, shock, disbelief – ‘This can’t be happening, there must be a mistake, he’ll wake up soon...’)
- **Anger** (frustration, anxiety – ‘How dare he bale on me! Surely doctors could have done more... ’)
- **Depression** (overwhelm, hopelessness, despair – ‘How can I do this without him? This is too much for me to bear.’)
- **Bargaining** (struggling to find meaning, telling the story – trying to change it in retrospect – ‘What could I/should I have done/not done to change the outcome?’)
- **Acceptance** (coming to peace, exploring options, moving on)

All the stages might show up, although not necessarily in that order and no predictable time limit on any of them. Sometimes they can all happen in one day, and all over again the next day. It takes as long as it needs to for each one.

One of the most valuable tools Louise had in navigating the landscape of grief was having a spiritual practice, including meditation, that enabled her to be fully in the pain and go through all the stages of grief. While at the same time being able to observe from a place of perspective and great compassion. It seems like a contradiction, but not only is it possible, it becomes a catalyst for profound acceptance, greater heart-opening and expanded awareness

For her the most powerful, profound source of healing was love and gratitude, and it is never too late for that – all expressions of love and gratitude, in thoughts and prayer, words and actions, are a healing balm both for the one who is passing, as well as for the one grieving. Love bridges the divide between hearts and dimensions, and thankfulness gives tangible form to the love and brings one more easily to acceptance and peace.

The whole world is having a unique experience of grief with the Corona virus pandemic. There is of course the increase in physical death, with the added tragedy of people dying alone in isolation, and many of the familiar mourning rituals (like funerals) having had to be curtailed. For the most part it has been the loss of the familiar, predictable way of life, loss of livelihoods, loss of certainty. The greatest fear human beings have is the fear of the unknown, of uncertainty, and these times have thrown almost everyone into some form of uncertainty. We can see the five stages of grief being played out everywhere in the world: many in denial (this isn’t real, it’s a hoax, just bad flu...); many more in anger (why is this happening? Who is to blame? China! The government!); depression (bewilderment, confusion and fear, with increased suicide rates in some places); bargaining (there are a number of different narratives to explain what is happening and how we can get out of it – from mainstream science to conspiracy theories). And thankfully many have come to acceptance.

Those are the ones who can be with what is, observe what is happening with calm assurance and help create the way forward.