

LESSON 3: GRIEF AND LOSS



We are all affected by **grief and loss**. Yet what is the first thing we think of when we hear the word grief? That's right, generally **death**. But there are many things we grieve apart from death. There is the **loss** of a partner or relationship; Loss of a job or lifestyle. Loss of family, money, dreams, friends, pets and so on.

We quite often brush over these things as **nothing**, or just the way life is, without giving them the attention they deserve. Now, I am not talking about wallowing in it or seeking attention to drain another person's energy from them which some people seem to thrive on. I am talking about a **healthy expression** of the feelings associated with the loss. Feelings? I hear you ask?

That's right **feelings**! Those often uncomfortable, sometimes even painful things that happen, deep inside your gut. We relish the pleasant ones like happiness, pleasure, love, excitement etc. but **avoid the pain** like the plague.

But just as the **pleasant feelings** get expressed so too must the painful ones. Have you ever noticed how much we chase pleasure and happiness and peace and good? But did you know that we live in a universe that is **dualistic; polarized; balanced?** That means there is a **positive and a negative** happening at exactly the same time to exactly the same degree. You cannot be happy without being sad; have pleasure without pain. Good without bad. **Right without wrong.** They are two sides of the same coin and the more you chase one side, the more the universe (God, Allah, Buddha, Spirit – whatever you choose to call it) will bring in the other side to balance you out.

Have you ever noticed how the more you chase happiness the sadder you become? The more pleasure you chase, the more pain you attract? The more we chase peace the more we perpetuate war? That is because **you cannot have one without the other.** The two simultaneously exist as two sides of one equation. Life is about **balance.**

So, rather than feel the pain most of us do whatever we can to avoid it which ironically brings more pain. We do things

like drink, use drugs, eat, work, focus on others or get busy in some way. Because **this does not get rid of the pain** we feel frustrated and often angry (which is not a feeling but an **outcome** of other built up feelings) and because we don't know what is really bothering us, due to the accumulation of a myriad of events and feelings bottled up, we get angry that we are angry. So, we need more drugs, alcohol, food etc. to cover it up which in turn **produces more pain** until we get to such a point that we cannot cover it up anymore because it is all leaking out the sides!



There is a universal law that states; '**What is suppressed must be expressed.**' So if we do not choose to express things in a healthy way then we end up miserable or stuck or confused without knowing why. Some of us have absolutely **no logical reason** to be unhappy in our minds but that doesn't change the fact that we are.



Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, an amazing example of a human being who worked with dying cancer patients discovered that there are actually five stages to grief.



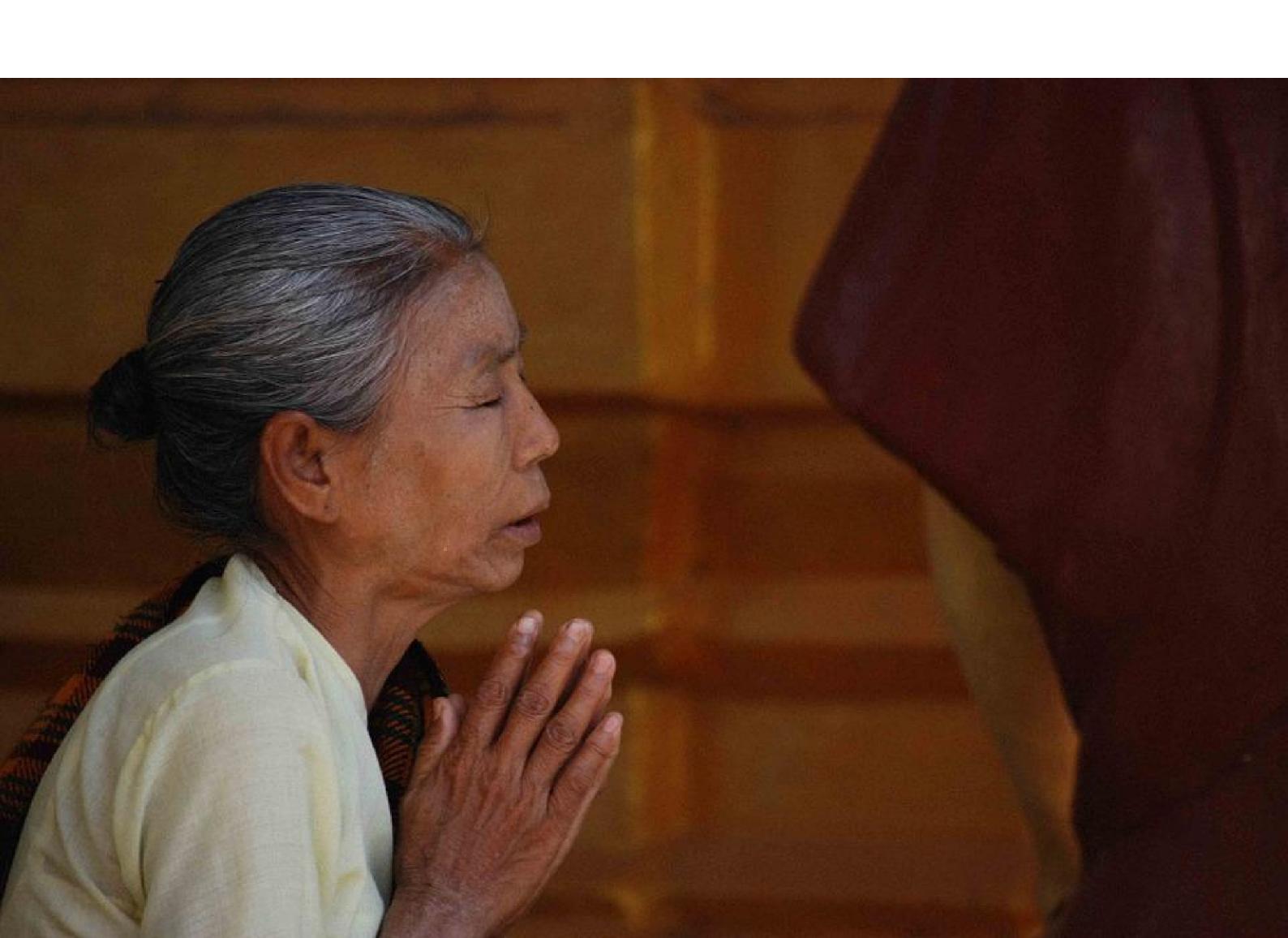
1.DENIAL

The **first thing** that we usually say in a crisis or when we lose something is I don't believe it! No I must be dreaming. No no no no no no no no no no!



2.ANGER

Then denial leads to anger. **Why** did this have to happen to me? I am a good person ... how dare they do this to me after all I have done for them. How could she just pack up and leave? Now what am I going to do? And so on.



3. BARGAINING

This is often when the **very least religious** of us turn to God. “Please give me another chance God – I beg you - It will be different this time I promise - I can change honey - I know I can stop drinking - I just didn’t know how important it was to you.



4. DEPRESSION

We all know this feeling from different times of our lives.

What's the point of it all then? **Why bother?** We spoke about depression earlier, how we feel like there is not much, if anything left to live for. I meet a lot of people suffering severe depression because their addiction has contributed to them **losing everything.**



5.ACCEPTANCE

Finally comes **acceptance**. This is the way it is. There is **no point in fighting** the inevitable ... this thing is bigger than me. **Understanding** that there isn't a lot we can do to change what we've have done in the past but we can damn sure **change our future**.

Be aware that there is a **fine line** between acceptance and resignation though. **Resignation** is a defeatist attitude like oh what's the point? It has a taste of resentment and bitterness added to it. Acceptance understands that the **fight is not getting you anywhere** and that it is so much easier to let go and let God. Knowing there is a higher or deeper power here that has a **purpose** for all things.

Cancer patients live a **much healthier life** with a greater chance of recovery when they get to this stage. It is a **peace of mind** that comes with learning life's lessons. I would never have thought at the time of my drug and alcohol use that anything good could arise from it but I am really **grateful** that I went so low and experienced such pain because I have been able to help many more people as a result.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross recognized that a patient could go through the stages in order, move back and forth between them or get stuck in any stage but none the less, the stages were **unavoidable**.

So as mentioned earlier, grief isn't just isolated to death and in answering the questions below, you will **begin to understand** how much grief and loss we actually have bottled up inside.

Remember this is **only the tip of the iceberg**. What we can see is often not even ten percent of what is really going on underneath, but it's a start.

Who do you know that has died? Think about how that made you **honestly feel**. For some it is nothing substantial but for others, and I meet loads of people with unresolved grief from death, it will be **enormous**. I have met people in my life that have said how **strong** they were for not crying at someone's funeral or death. That is not strong ... it's **sad**. We have all met people with such **built up pain** inside them and it's so hard to get anywhere near them with their **walls of pain and anger** around them.

As you identify the feeling/s associated with the death/s actually allow yourself to ‘**FEEL**’ them. Sit quietly somewhere and if you need to cry then just cry.

One of the biggest problems men have of my generation especially, is that they think it is **weak to cry**. They think they have to bottle up their emotions and sort everything out on their own. There is so much pressure on them, usually from themselves and their own ignorance, to be providers and work everything out on their own.



There is an unspoken **pressure** men put on their partners without even realizing.

Many men don't talk to other men about what is really going on. They often talk **bullshit**. About cars, sports, work etc. but not about how they **really feel**. The only people who really know what is going on inside them is their partners.

This puts **enormous pressure** on the partner because no matter what she suggests, "*Go and see someone honey - Talk to your GP or a therapist – have you spoken to Tom I'm sure he feels the same way?*" But we not only don't do what they suggest, we put them under this cone of silence; "*Don't you dare tell anyone about this or I'll never share anything with you again!*"

Observe how women talk with each other. They talk about you, about sex, about **how they struggle**, about life, how they feel, all of it, mostly.

We place such a burden on them and often they don't even realize until it's too late.

That is why out of all the close to 4,000 suicides that took place last year in Australia alone, 80% of them were **male**!

These are **outrageously high statistics** for what we proclaim to be civilized and educated humans.

This is the main reason I run Men's groups, to give men an **opportunity** to see we are actually going through the same stuff but not talking about it.

As you allow yourself to **feel the feelings** (Yep it's not rocket science) they are being expressed and therefore not bottled up for another less comfortable or inappropriate time.



How did your relationships end?

Make a list of all your **romantic relationships** and how they ended and how it made you feel. Even if you ended them, you still experience grief. Sometimes we think we do not have the right to feel if we end things but feelings are feelings right.

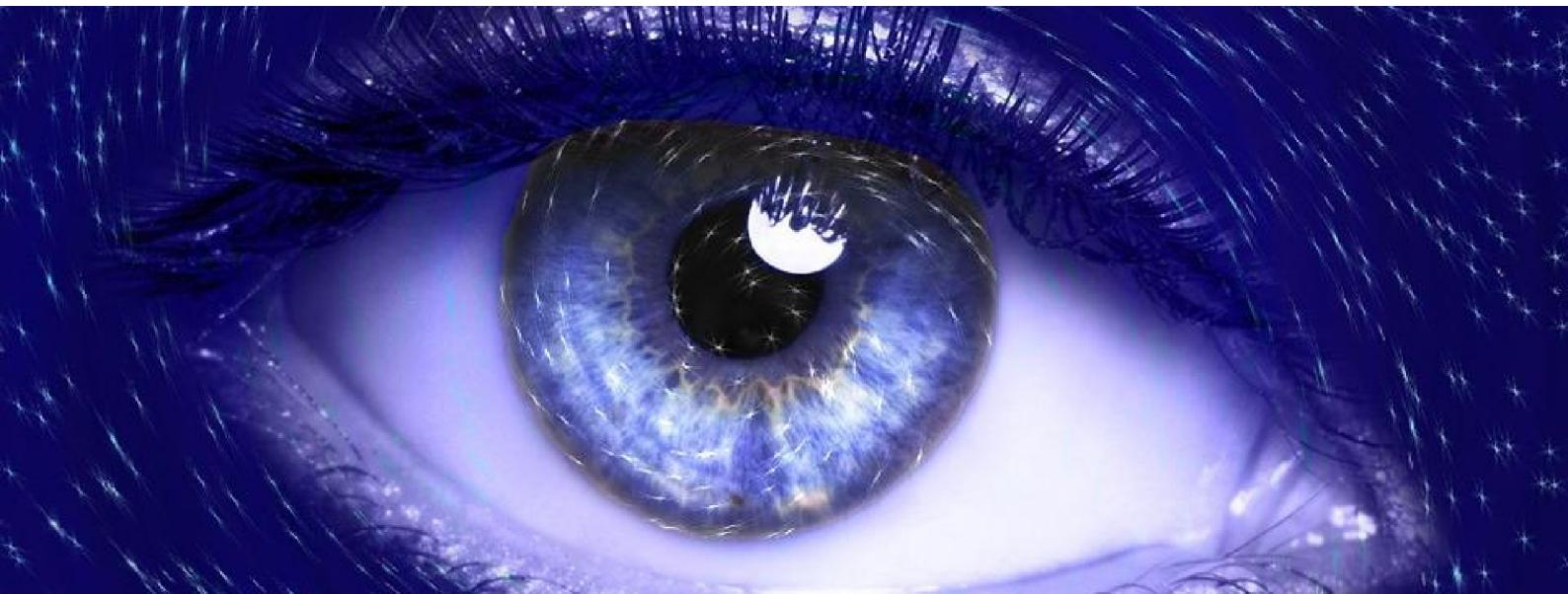
Like a lot of people, have you been **cheated on**? Did **you** do the cheating? Not only will you feel the pain of losing the relationship, but also the shame of **what you have done**.

A lot of us still carry grief over our first or one '**real love**' in our lives. Rather than **feel the pain** of a breakup the most common and sadly the most encouraged response is to get blind drunk. We listen to the well-meaning but stupid advice of friends and media, "*There's plenty more fish in the sea. Let's go get drunk and get you laid again.*" Problem solved! Well **problem suppressed** for now.

The problem (as previously mentioned) with trying to drink away your problems is you need more and more to cover them all up.



What lost dreams or ambitions do you have?



In my drug and alcohol counseling sessions I met lots of individuals that have **lost dreams and careers** some due directly to their drug or alcohol use. One guy, in his late thirties, was a state player for a well-known **West Australian** football club. Because a large part of the sporting culture in Australia involves **drinking after the games** and drinking leads to other things (Mix with this the fringe benefits that come with being an elite athlete like girls, power and notoriety) it wasn't long before the extra curriculum outside of sport took over from his aspirations to be a **football star**. He got so caught up in the glamour and high of it all he said he hadn't even realized how bad he had gotten. He was dismissed from the team to which he responded with more drugs and alcohol and it **just got worse** from there. Almost twenty years later he was sitting in-group dealing with what he could have been dealing with before blowing his dreams. Now it was **too late** for him. He was too old and his body too badly damaged to ever play again. Do you think that isn't on his **mind** till the day he dies?

So, it may not be a football career but **what dreams or aspirations have you lost** and how has that affected you? It may be a dream to be a police officer, a fire fighter, a teacher, to be in a certain type of family or relationship – anything?

Incidentally after a lot of group and counseling work and some **continued encouragement**, the man I spoke of ended up becoming a coach for young up and coming footballers. He spoke of having an even **greater reward** from helping them develop than he ever got from his own accomplishments as an athlete. I cannot think of anyone better to be **coaching young people** about the do's and don'ts of football and the perceived glamour lifestyle it entails.



What lost dreams or ambitions do you have?

What lifestyle or finances have you lost?

When I was young, I had a **perception** that by the time I was thirty I would be happily married with kids, have a nice house, car, successful job etc. The reality was that I was a full-blown junkie **living a life of lies** and loaded with shame and guilt and stealing benefit payments from my own partner and newborn child - a little off track to say the least. So, what lifestyle dreams have you lost?

Is there **anyone** that's particularly on your mind? Anyone that you feel you are not clear with?

Write letters to anyone you feel you **need to express** something to. You don't need to give them the letter as it is not about them hearing but about **you expressing it.**

What changes have you noticed if any? Either for the better or the worse?

Below is a really **cool meditation technique** I learned that much like the candle exercise really helps you to remain calm in any situation. At least for this you don't need to light a candle so you can **do it anywhere** like in a slow line at a bank or a checkout or an airport etc.

It is great for people who experience anxiety or panic attacks. As soon as you feel it coming on do this:

SEVEN TIMES SEVEN

- Take a long slow breath in to the count of seven seconds
- Hold that breath for the count of seven seconds
- Let that breath go for the count of seven seconds
- Repeat process seven times



Reflections:

I now invite you to reflect on what stood out for you the most in this lesson. Write a few lines about it if you choose.

Stay tuned for next week where we look at relapse and why it's such an important part of the healing process.