



***EXPLORING THE GRIEF JOURNEY:  
CULTURAL, FAMILIAL & PERSONAL DIMENSIONS***

***WORKSHOP RESOURCES***

**PRESENTED BY  
SIMCHA RAPHAEL, PH.D.**



**FRIDAY APRIL 16, 2021  
7:00-9:00 PM  
SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021  
10:00 AM-12:00 PM  
2:00-4:00 PM**



***INTEGRATIVE THANATOLOGY  
CERTIFICATE TRAINING***

*...a key issue for the individual, and indeed for society, is to learn to bear the pain of loss that must inevitably be faced; to keep a passionate involvement in humanity and human relationships; to learn to comfort and console others with compassion; and to seek and accept the compassionate concern of other members of human society."*

*Beverly Raphael, The Anatomy of Bereavement*

Resource manual prepared by:

Simcha Raphael, Ph.D.

DA'AT Institute for Death Awareness Advocacy and Training

April 202

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**EXPLORING THE GRIEF JOURNEY:  
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with  
Simcha Raphael, Ph.D.  
April 16-17, 2021**

**T**oday there is a burgeoning transformation of cultural attitudes to death, and a plethora of theories, methods and practices that guide our work with the dying and bereaved. However, regardless of one's approach or perspective, there is a growing recognition among spiritual care-givers and helping professionals that one is more adequately prepared for companioning the dying and bereaved by investigating our own personal reactions and responses to death and dying. Especially in this time of pandemic crisis, there are high levels of stress affecting caregivers: being able to wrestle with one's own personal losses, and with the grief one encounters doing this work, leaves an individual less susceptible to "compassion fatigue" and more open to caring for others.

With this in mind, this experientially-oriented workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to explore their personal grief journey, as well as how both family of origin and the surrounding culture impact our attitudes towards grief and loss. In the final analysis, we shall look at death as a teacher that gives one the opportunity for psychological and spiritual development.

**WORKSHOP OUTLINE**

***SESSION 1 - FRIDAY APRIL 16, 2021 7:00-9:00 PM***

**INTRODUCTION/CULTURAL IMAGES OF DEATH**

Death Denial in Times of COVID-19

From Death-Denial to a "Death-Positive" Culture

*Experiential Process - Internalized Images of Death*

***SESSION 2 - SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021 10:00 AM-12:00 NOON***

**FAMILIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH AND GRIEF**

Learned Attitudes Towards Death in Our Family of Origin

*Experiential Process in Triads - Healing Our Family of Origin Story*

***SESSION 3 - SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021 2:00-4:00 PM***

**HEALING OUR PERSONAL GRIEF STORY**

*Experiential Process - Healing Our Grief Story*

Q&A, Tasks and Sages of the Grief Journey

Closure - Envisioning Yourself as a Harbinger of the Emerging "Death Positive" Culture

## WORKSHOP GOALS/LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- 1) Workshop participants will develop the ability to recognize the unconscious connections between personal, familial and cultural attitudes towards grief, in their own lives and in those of their clients and students.
- 2) Workshop participants will expand their comfort level in dealing with death, dying and bereavement so that they can be more adequately prepared to deal with bereavement issues that emerge in counseling or informal settings
- 3) Workshop participants will acquire more understanding and perspective on their individual grief healing journey
- 4) Workshop participants will come away with a sense of being agents of transformation in the emerging “death positive” culture.

## BIO

**Simcha Raphael, Ph.D.** is Founding Director of the DA'AT Institute for Death Awareness, Advocacy and Training. He has served as Adjunct Professor of Religion at LaSalle University and Temple University, and works as a transpersonal psychotherapist and spiritual director in Philadelphia. A Fellow of the Rabbis Without Borders Network, he is author of numerous publications including the groundbreaking *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, and is co-editor of *Jewish End-of-Life Care in a Virtual Age: Our Traditions Reimagined* (2021). His website is [www.daatinstitute.net](http://www.daatinstitute.net).



# ***PERSONAL GRIEF HISTORY EXERCISE***

DURING THIS EXERCISE, THERE ARE THREE DIFFERENT ROLES YOU WILL PLAY

<b>A. TRAVELER</b>	ONE WHO IS WALKING THE MOURNER'S PATH
<b>B. GUIDE</b>	GUIDING SOMEONE ALONG THE MOURNER'S PATH
<b>C. OBSERVER</b>	A CURIOUS, SUPPORTIVE WITNESS

## ***A. TRAVELER***

- as traveler, your role is simply to share your own story
- reflect on the questions “Exploring Personal Grief History”, and share your story
- trust your own comfort level and remember there is nothing you have to, or need to share
- be willing to be open to your own experience

## ***B. GUIDE***

- as guide, your role is to help your partner share their own grief story
- use “Guidelines for Hearing the Grief Story” as a way to help support your partner

## ***C. OBSERVER***

- as observer, your role is to lend gentle and non-active support to both the traveler and the guide
- lend energy to listening to the story
- observe the interactions between traveler and guide
- be prepared to offer feedback after the exercise
- if appropriate, feel free to offer support to the guide during the exercise
- watch the clock and give both guide and traveler signal that there are only 3-4 minutes left

In doing this exercise, remember to use active listening skills. Ask questions to help the traveler [client] share their experiences, but be sure to keep the focus on only one person for each session. Make sure there is one person serving as timekeeper, giving the speaker a two-minute warning for the end of the exercise.

# **EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE IN TRIADS - EARLY MEMORIES, FAMILY STYLES OF GRIEF**

## **EXPLORING PERSONAL GRIEF HISTORY**

1. What was your first loss by death? How old were you?  
What do you most remember about that experience?
2. What feelings do you remember having about that loss?
3. How did people around you respond?  
Mother? Father? Siblings? Others?
4. What kind of support did you receive?
5. What messages did your father give you about death?  
How did he express his grief?
6. What messages did your mother give you about death?  
How did she express her grief?

## **GRIEF IN THE PRESENT**

7. What has been your most recent or most difficult loss by death?
8. How did you or how are you coping with it?
9. In what ways do you remember the person you are mourning, their life and their gift to you?
10. What has been the most difficult part of dealing with this death?
11. In what ways have you learnt and grown as person as a result of this loss?
12. *Of the important people in your life still living, what would the most difficult death for you? What would make it most difficult?*

## **STYLE OF DEALING WITH GRIEF**

13. What is your primary style of coping with grief?
14. Is it different now than it was when you were a child? How is it different?
15. Can you share your grief with others? If so, how does this help you? If not, why do you choose not to share your grief?

Adapted from J. William Worden *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*

# ***GUIDELINES FOR HEARING THE GRIEF STORY***

## **1. BE AWARE OF BODY POSITION**

- how are you seated in the room?
- is your partner comfortable? are you?
- even with computer, can you maintain eye contact

## **2. BE THERE AND LISTEN**

- above all, what you must do, and do very well, is listen
- listen very well, and with full attention
- give nonverbal cues that you understand what they are saying
- if you listen in this manner, your partner will be encouraged to talk to you about his/her grief experiences
- there are often no words to take grief away
- your presence and acceptance is more important than advice

## **3. ASK QUESTIONS**

- ask clear and simple questions
- ask feeling questions ("how did you feel about....? rather than "why do you think?"
- ask caring, concerned questions
- questions are not designed to obtain information, or to fulfill your curiosity
- questions are designed to reassure your partner of your interest
- to steer and guide his/her attention

## **4. PERMIT AND ENCOURAGE DISCHARGE OF EMOTION**

- sharing grief experiences often evokes strong emotional reaction
- be aware of directing your partner's attention to where discharge may occur
- if discharge begins, allow and encourage it to happen
- e.g. "it's okay to feel your sadness" "just stay with that feeling, I'm with you"
- if you console someone too quickly, you may have the opposite effect and inhibit discharge of emotion (notice how we deal with crying babies)

## **5. SHARE YOUR OWN FEELINGS (AS APPROPRIATE)**

- by allowing bereaved individuals to express their emotions, you are helping them unload some of their emotional burden
- if you share ways in which you identify with their feelings, it helps alleviate the emotional isolation people often feel

## **6. HELP BRING EXERCISE TO A GENTLE CLOSURE**

- recognize that once you begin allowing someone to tell their story, it is difficult to end story abruptly
- be aware of the passing of time
- approaching end of exercise, ask "what else do you need to say to feel complete for now?"
- make sure your partner is able to center themselves and be able to go on to next part of exercise
- you might also ask your partner a question like: "What are you looking forward to this week?" - this helps to move them away from the emotional content of their session to prepare for changing roles



## ***STAGES AND TASKS OF THE GRIEF JOURNEY***

<b><i>STAGES OF GRIEF</i></b>	<b><i>TASKS OF GRIEF</i></b>
1. INITIAL SHOCK AND DENIAL	1. TO ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE LOSS
2. FACING THE PAINFUL TRUTH	2. TO EXPERIENCE THE PAIN OF GRIEF
3. PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER	3. TO ADJUST TO AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE DECEASED IS MISSING
4. SAYING YES TO LIFE!	4. TO EMOTIONALLY RE-LOCATE THE DECEASED AND MOVED ON WITH LIFE
Based on William Worden, <i>Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy</i>	

"I thought I could describe a state, make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history... There is something to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape."

***C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed***

# **COMMON GRIEF RESPONSES DURING THE MOURNING PROCESS**

## **THOUGHTS**

- \* disbelief, confusion
- \* forgetfulness
- \* preoccupation with the dead person and/or with the dying process
- \* attempts to put death into a perspective they can understand
- \* denial that the death has happened

## **FEELINGS**

### ***Anger***

- \* experiences the unfairness of the situation: "Why Me?"
- \* blames the deceased for making them suffer or for leaving them
- \* blames others for the death
- \* protests & rebels against what has happened in attempt to reverse the reality

### ***Guilt***

- \* feeling responsible in some way for the death or for not preventing the death
- \* talking about things they should have done ("if only's")
- \* feeling guilty for being alive or healthy

### ***Sadness***

- \* feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- \* insecurity, decreased self-esteem
- \* loneliness

## **BEHAVIORS**

- \* sleep disturbances - insomnia or sleeping too much
- \* increase or decrease in appetite
- \* social withdrawal
- \* loss of interest in personal appearance
- \* searching for the deceased
- \* crying (sometimes with others, sometimes alone)

## **PHYSICAL RESPONSES**

- \* panic, feelings of being overwhelmed
- \* decreased resistance to illness
- \* weight change, muscular tension
- \* rapid or irregular heartbeat
- \* tightness in throat or chest
- \* sinking feeling in stomach
- \* blurred vision and/or headaches
- \*

## **BEREAVEMENT ASSESSMENT**

*What are elements to look for in a person's life, and in a family, which provide information on how people will deal with death and bereavement?*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>1. SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK</b>                                     | children; other family; friends; recently moved to area? established family?  |
| <b>2. LIVING SITUATION</b>   | with family; alone; community housing   |
| <b>3. CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH</b>                                     | sudden; long illness (e.g. Alzheimer's or cancer); violent death; suicide; homicide; COVID-19 no funeral/deathbed goodbye |
| <b>4. RELATIONSHIP WITH DECEASED</b>                                 | length of marriage; ambivalent unresolved relationship; over-identified with deceased; guilt; anger                       |
| <b>5. AGE OF DECEASED</b>  |   |
| <b>6. ACTIVITIES</b>   | employment, social contacts, Parish or community involvement, changed social roles  |
| <b>7. RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION</b>                                   | belongs to church; attends church; religious attitude to death  |
| <b>8. APPARENT COPING MECHANISMS</b>                                 | awareness of grief; openness to communication; verbal expressions of grief  |
| <b>9. EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO DEATH</b>                               | guilt; anger; denial; adjustment to loss; overall attitude  |
| <b>10. UNRESOLVED EARLY GRIEF</b><br>War veteran; Holocaust survivor | e.g. childhood bereavement; Vietnam/Iraq  |
| <b>11. CONCURRENT LIFE TRANSITIONS</b>                               | adolescence; marriage; divorce; retirement menopause; "empty nest" syndrome   |
| <b>12. PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF</b>                                | insomnia; loss of appetite; overuse of sedatives  |
| <b>13. PHYSICAL HEALTH</b>   | handicapped; chronic illness; history of illness, addictions  |
| <b>14. MENTAL HEALTH</b>   | history of addictions; substance abuse; sex addiction/pornography   |
| <b>15. OTHER RECENT LOSSES</b>                                       | recent deaths; divorce; job loss  |

# REFLECTIONS

## THREE WAYS TO MOURN

Prof. Abraham Joshua Heschel once said: There are three ways to mourn - to weep, to be silent and to sing.

**THE FIRST WAY TO MOURN IS TO WEEP.** Even if our tears are for ourselves, for our ache of loneliness, for our pain of loss, they are still sacred, for they are the tears of love. But we may weep only if we do not weep too long, only if the spark of our own spirit is not quenched by a grief too drawn out, only if we do not indulge ourselves in the luxury of grief until it deprives us of courage and even the wish for recovery.

**THE SECOND WAY TO MOURN IS TO BE SILENT:** to behold the mystery of love, to recall a shared moment, to remember a word or a glance, or simply at some unexpected moment, to miss someone very much and wish that he or she could be here. The twinge lasts but a moment, and passes in perfect silence.

**THE THIRD WAY TO MOURN IS TO SING:** to sing a hymn to life, a life that still abounds in sights and sounds and vivid colors; to sing the song our beloved no longer has the chance to sing. We sing the songs of our beloved; we aspire to their qualities of spirit; and we trust in our heart that there is a God who hears the bittersweet melody of our song.

Jack Stern, "How We Should Mourn"

## FROM C.S. LEWIS, *A GRIEF OBSERVED*, 1961

Tonight all the hells of young grief have opened again; the mad words, the bitter resentment, the fluttering in the stomach, the nightmare unreality, the wallowed-in tears. For in grief nothing "stays put". One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral? But if I am on a spiral, am I going up or down it? (p. 46)

## STEPHEN LEVINE, ON GRIEF:

Some believe they have no grief. This is another aspect of our rigid denial and self-protection. Everyone has grief. Everyone seems to have some unbalanced tally sheet with life, some unfinished business. An incompleteness with the past and with ourselves, a fatiguing self-consciousness, the predominant theme of the unfinished symphony of mind's yearning. Our grief manifests as self-judgement, as fear, as guilt, as anger, as blame. . . . Our grief is our fear of loss, our fear of the unknown, our fear of death. Grief is the rope burns left behind when what we have held to most dearly is pulled out of reach, beyond our grasp. Stephen Levine, *Healing Into Life and Death*, p. 102

Grief is a process that takes many guises. It is not a single emotion, not a single state of mind. Someone asked: "Do I have to get rid of my anger before I can get into my grief?" Anger is our grief, and until it is acknowledged and investigated, it may be difficult to get into the feelings that lie beyond. For some it may be that until they explore whatever anger is felt toward the individual who died, they will not be able to experience the unfolding of accompanying states and moods of their grief. Unexplored anger may separate one from the deeper levels of their grief in the same way it has separated them from the deeper levels of that person who is now grieved.

adapted from Stephen Levine, *Healing Into Life and Death*, pp. 108-109

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## **DA'AT INSTITUTE FOR DEATH AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND TRAINING**

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- 1. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS on death, dying, bereavement and the spirituality of end-of-life issues and concerns;**
- 2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING to clergy, health care and mental health professionals and educators working with the dying and bereaved;**
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- 5. PRINTED AND AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES on the various facets of dealing with grief and loss, and on the spirituality of death and afterlife.**

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