

Blue Paper

Journey Through Loss and Grief: In the Time of COVID-19

Author: Patricia Pitta Ph.D., ABPP

Clinical Psychologist

Board Certified Couple and Family Psychologist

This paper is part of a project from the New York State Psychological Association on Loss and Grief to help therapists and the lay population attain knowledge about the grieving and mourning process. The premise is that knowledge is power. The hope is this paper will educate the reader so in the process of loss and grief we can become stronger as we deal with the “raw pain” and the “collective grief and loss” we are all feeling that will enable healing. “We are all in this together.”

Distribution with authorship intact is permitted and encouraged.

For media inquiries: contact drpatriciapitta@gmail.com

To learn more about Dr. Pitta: information at end of the paper.

Outline:

- Pgs. 3-5 Overview of loss and grief in COVID-19**
- Pgs. 5-6 Definitions**
- Pg. 7 Understanding Shock Phase**
- Pg. 8 Stage of Denial
Following Ways to Ease the Shock Phase**
- Pgs. 9-12 Awareness of Loss Phase
Stage of Anger
For Those Who Experienced Trauma
Tasks for the Mourner in this Phase**
- Pgs. 12- 14 Conservation and the Need to Withdraw
Stages of Bargaining and Depression
Tasks for the Mourner in this Phase**
- Pgs. 14- 16. Healing Phase
Acceptance
Tasks for the Mourner in this Phase**
- Pgs. 16-19 Renewal
Tasks for the Mourner in the Renewal Phase**
- Pgs. 20-21 References**
- Pgs. 21-22 About Dr. Pitta**

Journey Through Loss and Grief: In the Time of COVID-19

By Patricia Pitta Ph.D., A.B.P.P.

Clinical Psychologist

Board Certified Couple and Family Psychologist

We are all experiencing “collective loss and grief” on so many levels (Nixon, 2020; Cann, Hebb, Devine, Forneret, Gilbert, Williams, Gailing, Perex-Prot & Adwish, 2020). COVID-19 has presented us with new realities we could never have imagined. The COVID-19 virus has terrorized the entire world and put us into a state of anticipatory grief for fear of the future about who will get sick and who will die. We fear the unknown, and we are afraid of getting infected or infecting others. (Sweeting, 1990; Wallace, Wladkowski, Gibson & White, 2020).

Losing a loved one in this time of COVID-19 has further catapulted us into experiencing death in traumatic ways. Before the death of a loved one occurred, many family members were not able to communicate with the hospitalized family member, spouse, or partner, and be by his/her side. After the death, the usual rituals that families and friends partook in were not able to take place or in a very truncated version. A further complication was that funerals were delayed in some instances for weeks due to the funeral home directors and crematoriums being overwhelmed with the number of deaths and families they had to serve.

At funerals, only a few people were able to be present with social distance and no touching giving mourners and family members a very isolated experience. As we know, the loss of a loved one is a very lonely experience under the best of times. In COVID-19 this feeling of loneliness is further exaggerated by lack of being physically close with our grieved family members and friends.

COVID-19 has thrust us into experiencing complicated loss and grief because the common enemy has changed life as we know it. In this “new normal” there is little opportunity for socialization or connectedness. We are mainly socializing through the Internet and phone. Social distancing is the prescription and recommendation for people meeting together. For many, with social distancing, the fear of infection outweighs the ability to relate and mourn in community and feel comfortable.

To add to our experiencing “collective loss and grief”, we as a world and nation are subjected to experiencing increased worry, financial concerns, questions about how to protect ourselves and stay connected to family and friends. People are worrying about the future and what will become of everyday life. Our mental health is being challenged on so many levels. where anxiety, depression and suicide are on the rise as well as emotional. Mental abuse, substance abuse and addictions are on the rise. As I am writing this paper, our cities are on fire due to the racial injustices and the killing of George Floyd by police officers in Minnesota and people are protesting. Also, social distancing is not being followed which is spiking people’s fear that the COVID-19 infections and deaths will increase again. It appears that everyone is functioning within a “new normal” that is so painful and full of loss.

In COVID-19, guilt is a strong emotion felt by many because family members feel they did or could not protect the person who died by possibly exposing him/her to the disease or could not ensure that they did not get infected. Many mourners feel guilty because they could not visit the dying while in the hospital, say goodbye and attend funerals and healing rituals in the customary ways that usually follow the death of a loved one. Sudden and unexpected death, like what is happening with COVID-19 leads to a more complicated mourning process (Cable, 1996).

There have been families that have sustained multiple deaths within a short period of time due to COVID-19 leaving them emotionally flooded, overwhelmed and struck with grief. Complicated and collective loss and grief complicates the grieving process still further by resulting in the possibility of experiencing prolonged grief (Malkinson, Rubin, & Witztum, 2008; Pivar & Prigerson, 2008) brought about by the inability to grieve as we are accustomed to and the many added threats and losses that are plaguing our world presently.

The purpose of this paper is to educate the reader about the loss and the grieving process to inform you that what you are experiencing is a “**NORMAL**”. This paper is not only for those who experienced loss as a result of COVID but also for those mourning and grieving for deaths that occurred not to the pandemic. Education is power and knowing what you are encountering and feeling gives you choices on how to proceed in your journey through loss and grief. If we can become cognizant about what we are feeling both emotionally and physically; we will negotiate the grieving process to enable us to summon the strength to deal with our new realities.

This paper can be used by therapists to assist clients in their journey or by those sustaining loss, mourning, grieving and working on their own. May we work for the betterment of ourselves, our families, our communities, our nation and the world. Feel free to share with your colleagues, friends and loved ones.

Some helpful definitions:

Bereavement is an objective state or condition of loss. In anticipating or experiencing bereavement, we feel grief, a psychic state of mental anguish.

Mourning is the process a grieving person goes through, as well as the social expression of the grief. Mourning is another form of loving.

Mourning is not time specific. Some grieve longer or shorter times. This is all **NORMAL**.

Grief is about loss and the threat of loss. The stronger the bond between us and the person we have lost, the more we will hurt both physically and emotionally. Grief is a form of love and a continuing of our bond with our loved one. When we are torn from a family member or friend, a part of us dies as well. Our natural need for attachment gets severed, often bringing the return of childhood fears and other losses. The world feels like a more dangerous place. As a result, we may feel out of control. We ache to have the loved person back. We know in the rational part of our mind that the person is not coming back, but it also seems impossible to let him/her go. Letting go emotionally of our loved one is painful and that is our “grief work.” We experience strong emotions, including guilt, shame, anger and frustration. No two people grieve alike.

Kubler-Ross (1969) is known as the pioneer in the work of loss and grief. She identified five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance). She also published a book with David Kessler (2014) on looking at the meaning of grief through the five stages. Kessler (2019) identified the sixth stage of grief (finding meaning in loss). Sanders (1992) identified 5 phases of grief (shock, awareness of loss, conservation/withdrawal, healing and renewal, conservation-withdrawal).

What will be described are the stages and phases loss and grief to enable you to identify what you are feeling and enable you to talk about what you are experiencing. In the process, you will bring new meaning to your connection with your deceased loved one. Navigating the mourning process, brings new meaning to your life enabling you to heal. You may experience some or all of the stages and phases in different ways at different times. Understanding where you are in the process helps you move through this very difficult time with knowledge to be able to feel and not fear what you feel (Pitta, 2011). As we are all

saying, “We are in this together”. And, with knowledge and support you will heal.

I. Understanding Shock

Shock is identified as a sudden and violent disturbance of the mind or emotions. No one is truly prepared for the death of a loved one; the more unexpected the death, the more a person will tend to be in shock. Also, in traumatic death, such as through COVID-19, murder or terrorism, the longer the initial period of shock can last; and the more complicated the process of resolving grief can be. The grief process doesn't change us, but it exaggerates our usual response patterns.

No one grieves in the same way and shock will affect each person in different ways. We feel the effects on all levels: physical, emotional, and social, and these effects can be felt individually or all at the same time. Common symptoms are: Dry mouth, sighing or yawning, generalized weakness, neck and back pain, hazy thinking, feeling like living in a fog, crying, trembling, strong startle responses, insomnia, and poor appetite. You can have your own specific responses that are not listed here. People report that they feel a state of alarm, disbelief, confusion, restlessness, feelings of unreality, helplessness and disconnection.

At times, we may feel numbness or are unresponsive as though we are disconnected from who we are. People might say they feel disassociated from their bodies. We may also express our shock through screaming, rage and withdrawal. As a result of experiencing shock, many people withdraw from their friends and family as well as their usual everyday activities. They become preoccupied with thoughts of their lost loved one. Many mourners in COVID-19 can experience more intense emotions due to the nature of the death due to the pandemic and the depth of the shock experienced. In the pandemic, your level of isolation can intensify your feelings of loss. Your reactions and feelings

are **NORMAL**. There is nothing wrong with you that you will not be able to work through. You are working through loss of a loved one as well as the loss of the effects of the pandemic that causes so much pain on so many levels.

Parallel Process to the Shock Phase is Experiencing the Stage of Denial

We can't believe that our loved one is gone. We know it, but we can't allow ourselves to feel it. You wake up in the morning and say to yourself, "It isn't so"; "I can't believe it"; "It is not true". As we journey through the loss, we do learn to accept the loss that brings us to an awareness that really hurts. The denial cannot go on and the reality needs to be faced slowly.

Following are Ways to Ease the Shock Phase

Safety is very important at this time. Surround yourself as you are able in these unusual times with people who are kind and who enable you to feel safe. Use modern technology to communicate with others that will help with expressing your feelings. Journaling is also a good means to express your feelings. Holding in emotions takes more energy than sharing your feelings. Allowing others to nurture you during the shock phase, is important. You need others to support you. Ask for support. Some people are afraid to approach you because they don't want to intrude or may feel uncomfortable dealing with death. Give your friends and family the signal that they can help you. You may experience anxiety and helplessness, which are **NORMAL** and appropriate reactions. Be patient with yourself. You might find yourself losing things. You may frequently feel restless and agitated. Do not judge yourself. These are **NORMAL** responses. Don't be concerned if you feel your loved one has not died. This is a frequent and normal reaction and feeling. Your mind is trying to defend you from feeling the pain.

Take part in any rituals that are being planned. Participating with others will enable you to feel supported and more in control. Take your time and allow yourself to be just as you are. Make no major decisions about the rest of your life while in shock.

II. Awareness of Loss Phase.

During the first stage of grief, shock provides a temporary buffer against the emotional turmoil of loss. When we enter the second phase, the insulation is stripped, and we are left feeling raw and exposed. This stage resembles having a tooth with its nerve exposed; causing anything we put in our mouths to aggravate the nerve ending and give us pain. Like a toothache, the pain from the awareness of loss can be experienced for moments, hours, days, or months. At times the pain is bearable, but at other times it is excruciating in its power. Common symptoms of this phase are yearning, frustration, crying, anger, guilt, shame, sleep disturbances, fear of death, over-sensitivity and disbelief. We may dream of the deceased or even sense his/her presence. We may experience separation anxiety, feeling alone and unsafe in the world. This period uses enormous amounts of psychic and physical energy. We can feel debilitated from prolonged stress. There can be conflicts among family members, possibly manifesting as fights over money or over who gets what possessions. It is best to wait to deal with these issues when everyone can experience more regulated emotions. More than likely, the grief is affecting the way they are thinking, feeling and acting. On the other hand, the way people are reacting around monetary and possession distribution are a continuation and expression of the relationships they experienced before the death of the loved one. At this time, it's best to keep things as simple as possible and not make any hasty decisions or changes.

Intellectually, we know that the person is lost, but emotionally we are not convinced, and we wish, bargain, yearn and search for some sign that our lost one is close by. Many people report getting signs from the dead that seem to indicate that they are still connected to us. This

comforts us for the moment but leads to terrible disappointment when the signs do not consistently appear. Feeling anger parallels this stage where one realizes that the denial can no longer continue.

Parallel to the Awareness of Loss Phase is the Stage of Experiencing Anger (Kubler Ross, 1969, 2014).

We can no longer deny the reality of our loss. We start to question: Why did this happen? What will happen to my life? We are left with feeling that our loss is so unfair. We need to be able to face our feelings slowly and there will be peaks and valleys of anger, sadness and anxiety. This is presently happening with the tremendous losses experienced in the nursing homes and with members of ethnic groups and lower socio-economic group members who experienced disproportional number of losses due to COVID-19 in comparison to others. People are questioning why and are looking to find the causes of these horrible statistics and they are experiencing feelings of raw anger.

For Those Who Experienced Trauma in the Past

With the continuous media coverage of COVID-19 and with how we are all concerned about people getting infected, sick and dying, you can be experiencing Pre-Traumatic Stress (Var Der Kolk, 2014, 2020). In this process, people are in a state of terror and fear and they emotionally shut down. What follows is a fight and flight response. Those who experienced Post Traumatic Stress in the past are pre-disposed to re-experience trauma in the pandemic. Thus, it becomes more difficult to work through grief. If this is happening, you may need to reach out to a psychologist or mental health professional to help you work through your feelings and realities.

Tasks for the Mourner in this Phase:

Many people try to distract themselves during this phase, but it is important to do your grief work by allowing yourself to feel emotions little by little. Realize that the pain of loss must be experienced. Do not try to escape it. Short periods of distraction, however, are healthy but at times, you might feel very upset and your mind can race. This is **NORMAL**. The feelings will pass. Give yourself permission to feel. If you fear feeling, allow yourself to access to your emotions for short periods of time and then go back to whatever you are doing. This will prove to you that you can feel and then regain your functioning. Crying is another form of expressing yourself. Sometimes we need to cry to be able to find the words to express what we are feeling.

Vent your anger. It is normal to be angry because of the emotional turmoil caused by loss, deprivation, conflict and confusion. Expect to feel extra sensitive while you are grieving. If someone says something that appears insensitive, say something and don't go into an emotional tailspin. Recognize that we all have our limitations. If the person continues to be hurtful or insensitive, it might be better to distance yourself for a while.

Joining a support group or going to individual therapy will help you let you know that you are not alone in your loss and offer the tools you may need to help heal. There are also many resources you may avail yourself in the COVID-19 White Paper (<http://bitly.ws/8FhI>). If you share your feelings, you will discover that you are not alone in your feelings. As you share and get support you are on your journey to heal.

Talking about our loss over and over might seem excessive, but this is the work of grief, which will eventually enable us to accept our losses. Remember this is a slow process. Important to take breaks and do other things like work at our jobs, function within the household, socialize and exercise.

Exercise helps in discharge of energy associated with the release of over production of hormones that your body is pumping into your system when you are struggling with grief and loss laced with trauma. Chemicals are released to the part of your brain that controls emotions and you can feel emotionally flooded and overwhelmed. Using meditation exercises can be helpful to deal with flooded emotions. There are many apps available on your phones and on the Internet as well as a relaxation/mindfulness exercise that I created: <https://drpatriciapitta.com/video-relaxation.php> that can be helpful. Also, eating a balanced diet is also important to nourish your mind and body to enable healing. For many, it is common to lose your appetite at this time, but you still need good nutrition.

Through all the difficulty, hope remains constant. During grieving, it's hard to conceptualize that image because the world appears to be a darker place. Remember, grief will lessen. The pain will not last forever. As we can endure so much emotional and physical pain, sheer exhaustion will set in. This exhaustion initiates the next phase and stage of grief.

III. Conservation and the Need to Withdraw

As we journeyed first through shock and then through exposure to the loss, we are now exhausted from feeling so much psychic pain. In the stage of withdrawal, we need to conserve what little energy we have left. Now, we welcome being alone; we fear falling apart if we continue feeling such intense emotions. We may find ourselves not wanting to return phone calls, preferring not to communicate with others. Characteristics of this stage are: Weakness, fatigue, great need for sleep, weakened immune system, helplessness and feeling a loss of control. As we hibernate, we can obsessively review and ruminate about the death. We question why it happened and we wonder if we could have done something to prevent it from happening. Especially in COVID-19 many family members feel responsible for transmitting the illness to family

members. The bottom line with COVID-19 is that we all learned as we went along the severity of the illness and how it was transmitted. As I am writing this which is 13 weeks into this horrid pandemic, we are learning better ways to protect ourselves and others that we did not know weeks ago. The scientists are still learning about this new disease. Talk about your feelings. With sharing, you will be able to manage your feelings in a better way.

Paralleling the Phase of Conservation are the Stages of Bargaining and Depression (Kubler-Ross, 1969, 2014).

We come to an understanding that life will never be the same as it was in the past when our loved one was living. We enter our “new normal” of losing our loved one and the loss of many of our freedoms to this horrid disease. We start moving at this time to a realization that, without forgetting our precious memories of our loved ones, we will need to find new experiences and ways of perceiving life. Remember, we take our loved ones with us.

Tasks for the Mourner in this Phase:

We all need to withdraw. In order to grieve at this time, many need to be alone. We might fear and feel such elevated emotions. That is **NORMAL**. It is a time of deep emotion and exhaustion. It is important to learn to conserve energy so that we may heal from shock and stress. Sleep more; take little naps. It is important to nurture ourselves. Take baths, walks, massages if possible, to provide a sense of peace and centeredness. Simplify life. Find shortcuts for everything possible. Many people resort to developing dependency behaviors (drinking, drugs). Break the patterns and hopefully, don't start them. Reevaluate the attitudes that are perpetuating them. If you can't, it is important to reach out for professional help.

Do think about your lost one—the good and bad times. Review photos or videotapes of your life with the deceased. Visually looking at

life puts it in perspective. When feeling emotionally low, know that these periods will begin to get shorter and shorter. Everyone's grief pattern is not the same. Don't be concerned if your grieving experience doesn't follow stages or phases presented or how others in your environment feel. We all experience loss and grief in our own way.

IV. Healing Phase

Our grief work gives us a death and resurrection experience. As we die to our old life, a new one is being forged in its place (Pitta, 2001). As we lessen our withdrawal, we reach a turning point. New events emerge or we simply wake up one morning and realize that we are feeling a little more hopeful. We are now moving towards a resolution that we had doubted would ever come. People reach this healing phase in their own time. For some it takes months, while for others the process can last much longer. What is good to know is that we all reach this phase eventually. It's important to remember that we will still have periods in which we regress to earlier stages of mourning and feel pain, particularly when we are reminded of our loved ones.

At this time, it is likely we will feel better physically, have increased energy, sleep better and a stronger immune system. Allow yourself to enjoy the return of energy. Celebrate it!

Paralleling the Phase of Healing is the Stage of Acceptance.

We come to realize that we will be okay even though it is not easy, and we will be reminded of the pain we feel and felt, but we go forward with life. We begin to accept the death experience as a part of life even if it came upon us without warning. As we learn to accept, our body can feel calmer and prepare us for tackling the next stage and phase of healing.

Tasks for the Mourner in this Phase:

We need to relinquish old roles and think about creating new ones: As we build our internal resources, we begin to think of ourselves as individuals rather than as the parent, child, or sibling of the deceased. One of the hardest tasks of bereavement is giving up former roles. Throughout our lives we became accustomed to doing things in a certain way in relation to the deceased loved one. We need to rethink the way we organize our lives. It's **NORMAL** to feel that you have become a different person. We are forming a new identity in the process of making changes slowly. We eventually find ourselves with new routines and new opportunities. One of the most important tasks of bereavement is carving out a new life based on what we need for ourselves. It's time to begin to trust ourselves to make decisions that will foster our individual development. This is not selfish. One needs to love the self.

We begin to take responsibility for decisions that we had put aside. Trust your decisions. No one is perfect. If you make a mistake, try again. Also, it's important not to make too many decisions at once. Remember healing is a slow, step-by-step process. Take care of yourself by eating well, exercising and going for medical check-ups. Develop a hobby or take a course. Take time off from grief. Laugh with friends and make new ones.

When we grieve, we feel scattered. We often run away from ourselves and our feelings. Now we have the task of finding our own center. This is a time for self-soothing and becoming the best parent and friend to yourself. This process will enable you to make decisions based on your thoughts, needs, and feelings rather than on what others think you should do.

You might possibly have allowed the people who have been supporting you tell you what to do. Now is the time to take responsibility for yourself. You can help center yourself through meditation, relaxation, and spiritual guidance. We need to forgive our loved one for dying and ourselves for living. Forgiving comes when we

have worked through the emotions of guilt, anger, shame and loss associated with our loved one's death. We never forget our loved ones, but we accept that we will never have them in our physical life again. It's natural to try to find the meaning of a beloved person's death.

Meaning may come from the way our lost one lived his/her life. Some people find it in helping others who are themselves experiencing loss. In renewal phase finding meaning can play an important role of being able to renew our lives and move forward. People who feel a strong connection with God or a higher power derive peace from their spiritual relationship. In some cultures, families have rituals to mark the passage from an old to a new phase of life. We need not abandon the people we have in our lives and the way of life we knew, but we are open to new circles of friends, activities and dreams. Sometimes the bereaved feel guilty about not spending their time as they did in the past. However, it's **NORMAL** and **HEALTHY** to do things differently, even if it's sometimes scary. When we stop idealizing the deceased, and we remember both the happy and the sad times with him/her, we are ready to move to the final phase of healing: Renewal.

V. Renewal

As we have journeyed through the stages of shock, awareness of loss, conservation and withdrawal and healing, we never thought that we would get to renewal. We may have thought our life was over, but little by little, we have rebuilt our lives, with some things the same and others very different. We are not the same people. The old self dies, and we are met with a new self that opts for life. (Sanders, 1992). In your time of loss, you can experience many new discoveries (Miller, 1994). Now, we realize new strength that we did not know we possessed.

At this time, we find ourselves re-energized. The energy we lost to grief has returned and we can use it for new experiences. We feel more stable; our emotional ups and downs have diminished. At anniversaries and holidays, some of the grieving feelings return, but they soon pass. In

this stage of renewal, the search for the expression of meaning comes to the forefront. Many find meaning in being able to talk about what they are grateful for and what they shared with the deceased loved one. Finding meaning has been explored by Kessler (2019) and defined as the sixth stage of grieving. People who can find meaning will be less likely to get stuck in one of the five stages of grieving discussed. Becoming stuck in grief fosters bitterness, anger and depression. Finding meaning in mourning and grief empowers the individual to move along and make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

Many people find meaning through religious rituals while others are out to right the wrongs that were done in the death. At this very moment protestors for George Floyd, the person killed by the Minnesota cop as three other cops stood by and watched are doing just that. Creating meaning for ourselves started in earlier stages of mourning. I call this setting the “thought and emotional foundation” for what is to come in the renewal phase where meaning for the death can be expressed in many different ways.

For example, John Walsh as stated in Kessler’s book *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief* (2019) took meaning to his becoming a producer of a very successful show entitled *America’s Most Wanted* after he suffered a loss of a son by murder. He wanted to bring killers to justice. Candy Lightner who created *Mother’s Against Drunk Driving* created this organization after her daughter was killed by a drunk driver with multiple record of such criminality. She created her meaning to try and help others like herself who were left with experiencing such unjustified loss.

I was a recipient of help from this organization as was my family when my father was killed by a drunk driver while he crossed the street. I found meaning from my experience and one of the ways I created my meaning was to make one of my specialties in my career as a psychologist in grief and mourning. I worked with many 911 families who experienced traumatic loss through this act of terrorism. I helped

these families rebuild their lives in a new way while they were able to mourn their losses. Writing this paper gave me an added sense of meaning to be able to help a reader dealing with grief and loss at this moment as I was helped by Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. Meaning can be found in many ways. It could be to plant a tree or do something that commemorates the death that also signifies moving forward for the mourner. It could be a silent act too. Remember, we all mourn and grieve differently.

Tasks for the Mourner in the Renewal Phase

It is essential to keep loneliness in perspective by learning to live without your loved one. Loneliness is a by-product of grief. In their difficulty in being alone, many people look to substitute the deceased too quickly. We need to face our loneliness, meaninglessness, guilt and isolation and realize that we will not be overtaken by these feelings. As we learn to master our feelings, we become stronger and feel a freedom that we never knew. As we reach a “personal renewal”, we can be open to new people and new experiences. Loneliness does not last forever, but we need to be patient with ourselves. We will eventually reach a point where the search to add new people in our lives becomes important to us. We are not replacing the deceased one but making a new life and sharing new experiences with another person or others that will be informed by our love for our lost one.

Anniversaries are special days that will probably cause grief reactions to return. Many people fear they are going through grief all over again. It is **NORMAL** to re-experience sad feelings at anniversaries; the feelings will subside with time again.

Working through loss may push us to do things we may never have previously envisioned like feeling stronger, giving permission to celebrate our new roles, activities and experiences. Our loved ones would have wanted us to go on with life and be happy.

We can now accept responsibility for and living for ourselves. Most people can take responsibility for their daily routines, but the biggest challenge is being responsible for our emotional independence. Most of us have spent much of our energy living with another. When the other dies, we are left with a large void inside ourselves. We need to acknowledge the new freedom, which in the beginning seemed like a life sentence. We now have an opportunity to live in a different way. Some people are so frightened to grow that they remain embittered and inflexible. People who choose life, take risks and try out new experiences and new relationships. We need to center ourselves through such activities as meditation, prayer and reading to help us determine what we really want from ourselves and others.

Accept that you will feel lonely at times. Reach out to others. Be patient; remember that we all grieve differently. As you make a new life, the wisdom, love and caring from your loved one will always be with you. Even though someone dies, the relationship doesn't die. (Albom, 1997). The bonds that you had with the deceased take on another meaning, but do not end (Klass, Silverman & Dennis, 1996). I hope that by reading this paper, you will realize that many of your painful, overwhelming and almost unbearable feelings are **NORMAL** aspects of mourning that need to be faced in your journey to healing.

My hope for you is that you will gradually be able to work through your loss and develop a new life, with the gift of wisdom gained from your personal journey through loss and grief.

References:

Albom, M. (1997). Tuesdays with Morrie. Morrie Albom Publishers, New York.

Cable, D. (1996) Grief counseling for survivors of traumatic loss. In Doka, K., *Living with grief and sudden loss: Suicide, homicide, accident, heart attack and stroke*. Taylor & Francis, Washington, D.C.

Cann, C., (2020). Grief theories and the thinking behind them. In Cann, C.; Hebb, M., Devine, M., Forneret, A.; Gilber, A., Williams, L., Gailing, S., Perex-Prott, S. & Adwish, R. *White paper: In Death, Grief and Funerals in the COVID age*. <http://bitly.ws/8FhI>

Kessler, D. (2019). *Finding meaning: The sixth stage of grief*. Scribner, New York

Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. (1996) *Continuing bonds*. Taylor & Francis, Pennsylvania.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. Macmillan Company, New Jersey.

Kubler- Ross, E. Kessler, D., (2014). *On grief and grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*: Scribner, New York.

Miller, J. (1994) *What will help me?* Willowgreen Publishing, Indiana.

Nixon, K. (2020). *Grieving our collective- loss-One Stitch at a time*. Yes Magazine.org.

Pitta, P. (2001). *Journey through grief*. Bulletin: Division 42, Independent Practitioner, Winter Edition, American Psychological Association.

Sanders C. (1992) *Surviving Grief and Learning to Live Again*. John Wiley & Sons, N.Y.

Sweeting, H. (1990). Anticipatory grief: A review. *Social science & medicine*, 30 (10), pp. 107

Var Der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps score: Brain, mind & body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Books, New York

Wallace, CL, Wladkowski SP, Gibson, A & White, P. (2020). Grief during the COVID-19 pandemic: Considerations for Palliative care providers, *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*: doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2020.04.012>.

About the author: Dr. Patricia Pitta is a Clinical Psychologist and a Board-Certified Couple and Family Psychologist in private practice in Manhasset, New York. She specializes in the treatment of anxiety, depression and loss in individuals, couples and families. She helps couples find new meaning in their lives where they have experienced loss due to unrealistic expectations or disappointments as they journey through relationships. She is an Approved Supervisor with the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and is an Adjunct Professor of St. John's University in Jamaica, Queens.

She has authored: *Solving Modern Family Dilemmas: An Assimilative Therapy Model* published by Routledge (2014). She has co-edited *Integrative Couple and Family Therapies: Treatment Models for Complex Clinical Issues* published by the American Psychological Association (2019). She has been featured in videos published by the American Psychological Association focusing on Integrative Couple Therapy (2019) and *Parenting Your Elderly Parents* (2007). She has published many articles and made many presentations throughout her career. She has consulted to print media as well as appeared on T.V. and radio.

She was the President of the Clinical Division of the New York State Psychological Association and is presently on their board. She has held

elected positions in the American Psychological Association in the Division of Independent Practice and is presently the Vice President of Practice for the Society of Couple and Family Psychology.

To contact Dr. Pitta: drpatriciapitta@gmail.com