

Grief in the Raw

[Grief in the Raw](#)

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sourced from [Robert Augustus Masters' newsletter](#).

Grief is heartbreak at its purest and messiest, imbued with existential vulnerability and at least some degree of agony.

Grief is the core-level, deeply felt response to loss and in-your-face impermanence. It includes sorrow, but is more than sorrow. It doesn't just weep, but wails, its sounds unmistakably expressing pain and devastation felt right to the marrow – and it also can be silent, thunderously and unspeakably silent. It may include wild mood swings, disorientation, spiritual revelations, and bouts of rage.

The emotionally bruised surfaces of grief may show to varying degrees, but the bulk of it all too often remains in our shadow. Frozen grief, muted grief, strangled grief – so much heart-hurt and ossified sorrow stored out of sight, so that it won't mess with our life. But what a price we pay for this!

Grief helps make us fully human, emotionally and spiritually grounding us in the raw reality of loss and the inevitability of endings, minus any buffers or distractions. There's pain in it, sometimes unbearable pain, but there's also an opening, however rough or ragged, to life at a fundamental level.

The gifts of grief include not only this reality-unlocking openness, but also a kind of broken-heartedness that has the power to greatly deepen our intimacy with each other and with life itself. Fully felt grief *connects* us all – grieving together attunes us to what really matters.

At first, it's "my" grief, intensely and understandably

personal. We may go no further than this, or we may find ourselves shifting to a sense of “our” grief, as our heart breaks open to include the pain of others close to us. And we may then further shift to “the” grief, as we attune to collective suffering and allow the feeling of that to penetrate and move us. This brings not just more grief, but more love and compassion and connection, as the circle of our being expands to include everyone who has grief.

When we’re in touch only with *my* grief, *our* grief and *the* grief remain in our shadow; when we’re in touch only with *my* and *our* grief, *the* grief is in our shadow. And when we’re connected with all three, grief is completely out in the open. The move from personal to relational to collective grief is not a strategy or practice, but a natural outcome of surrendering to our own grief.

Grief is not something to get over, but something to get into, fully. Its heartbreak is not a malady, but can be a portal into depth and communion, ripening into a grounded bareness of being that guides us into deeper, far more humane ways of living.

Unfortunately, contemporary culture is largely grief-phobic, especially regarding the uninhibited expression of grief. A few tears are usually deemed okay, so long as they’re not too loud, not too messy. “Being strong” in the presence of grief is often held as more of a virtue than letting grief have its way with us – with “being strong” meaning keeping relatively stoic, holding things together, not letting our emotions “get the better of us.” The unexpressed grief that permeates our culture – and is stored in our collective shadow – keeps us overly apart from each other.

And why? Because openly expressed grief empathetically links us, sooner or later, to everyone who has grief – and we all have grief. It comes with being human. To leave it unattended isolates us, caught up in exaggerated autonomy and

separateness, out of touch with the interconnectedness of all that is. In cultures that are death-avoiding, openly expressed grief is a no-no, because it directly and deeply exposes us to death and our own mortality.

Signs that Grief May Be in Our Shadow:

- **A lack of empathy** when faced with others' heartbreak and crises. Especially others who are very different from us.
- **Turning away from our pain.** Overreliance on painkillers and tranquillizing agents, including electronic sedation.
- **Resisting being vulnerable.** The less vulnerable we are, the more difficult it is to access our grief.
- **Discomfort when in the presence of others' grief.**
- **Thinking of grief as something to get over.**
- **Feeling ashamed when we display any sorrow.** This happens when we associate sorrow with weakness, dysfunction, or a loss of power.
- **Emotional numbness and disconnection.**
- **Feeling depressed when things end or significantly change.** Where grief is the heart suffused with – and blown open by – loss-centered hurt, depression is the heart *flattened* so much that it cannot be felt.
- **Shifting to aggression when we feel rising sadness or shame.**
- **Denying that we have grief.** It's easy to project our grief onto others, thereby distancing ourselves from our own.

Opening to our grief, making room for it to breathe and flow and find fitting expression, might seem unproductive, out of keeping with our get-ahead intentions and motivations, but it actually is a profoundly productive undertaking, if only because of its capacity to deepen our shared humanity, our cross-cultural kinship.

Grief brings us into intimate contact with life's ever-arising losses and endings, providing not a solution to this, but rather the capacity and space to be fully present with it – emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Grief de-numbs us, tenderizes and deepens us, rendering us more whole, more alive, more here. Choose, and keep choosing, to trust it; however rough the ride may be, it is worth taking, for the sake of one and all.

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