

DOCTORATE DISSERTATION

SPIRITUAL PSYCHOLOGY  
AND DEALING WITH GRIEF

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D. specializing in: Pastoral Counseling Psychology  
in the Department of Graduate Studies of the  
University of Sedona.

Department of Graduate Studies

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Ph.D. DISSERTATION

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. dissertation of

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## DISSERTATION EVALUATION REPORT

Name: Vickie L. Carey

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Degree: Ph.D. in Pastoral Counseling Psychology

Title: Spiritual Psychology and Dealing with Grief

Comments on the Introduction: This introduction is an excellent encapsulation of the central theme of the thesis. You have immediately eased the readers into essence of your research. "Going through trials and tribulations of every day life are not easy for anyone, but it's part of life and most people don't give the little ups and downs a second thought. At some point in everyone's life, a trial or trauma will cross an individual's path and create a state of grief."

Comments on Review of Literature: Much of your information and certainly your enthusiasm is derived from the work of an excellent selection of authors. Personal stories are always powerful: "In her book *Going Within* (1989), Shirley MacLaine offers a look into spirituality through her own personal experiences. She provides the reader with an insight into her own dilemmas that arose when she looked within her own being. Sharing her approach to incorporating a personal connection to the Divine Universal Spirit with her every day life. Building a bond that empowers an individual to overcome and succeed."

Comments on Findings: Among your important considerations: "The next area of this existential thought is Isolation. At some point in everyone's life they realize they are alone and isolated. Whither it's dealing with loneliness from the lack of companionship or that of facing a serious illness. We can't make the assumption that a relationship or relationships in general are the purpose or primary goal of human existence. One doesn't need to be physically alone to feel lonely. Many people facing serious illness suddenly feel a lone and isolated at hearing the news of their immortality. No matter what the support system, the medical treatments or potential chances for recovery, an individual will on some level face the healing process alone. After all, your wife or husband can't take a shot for you and make your illness go away."

Comments on Discussion: Note is underlined: "The movement to merge psychology and spirituality together again has been progressing for decades as indicated by to Michelle Lusson (1994). But it seems our modern times have finally accepted or broadened the definition of 'spiritual' to mean more than just mainstream religious beliefs. Today more alternative beliefs are moving into this realm of therapy in seeking to reconcile the spiritual and physical aspects of our human selves."

Comments on Summary and Conclusions: You present a critical analysis of your subject, and a special note is given to these words in conclusion. "Allowing individuals to find the meaning and discover the peace they seek in healing their grief."

Overall Comments: Extensive research and study are evident in this well-written and comprehensive thesis submission. You have successfully achieved your stated goal with a fine presentation of the findings of your position. Good work!

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## **I – Introduction**

Going through trials and tribulations of every day life are not easy for anyone, but it's part of life and most people don't give the little ups and downs a second thought. At some point in everyone's life, a trial or trauma will cross an individual's path and create a state of grief. Whither these trials are facing the physical death of a loved one, or traumatic events such as abuse or rape, an individual goes through similar phases of grief and internal conflict.

Sometimes it's hard to separate the affects of a physical loss with those of abuse or victimization. Grief occurs not just from the loss of a loved one, a relationship, a family pet, a job, one's health or independence. It also occurs when individuals feel the loss of their own freedom, security, and innocence, especially when these events are associated with victimization and trauma.

Grief in all it's forms can be especially hard as an individual tries to look for answers of why, at the same time they're trying to heal. Understanding the phases of grief and allowing the self to feel as the individual moves through those phases can help with the healing process. There is more to the understanding than just reading and allowing the self to feel the emotions. An individual must also make a conscious effort to control their actions in an effort to move forward instead of allowing the situation to anchor their mental health in the past.

The key is to not allow the past and actions of others to control you now or in your future. We can't go back and change the things we went through. But we can learn from them, heal ourselves in the process and let go of the control these events and the people involved in them may have on our life.

The solution to looking at trauma in one's life is to look at the choices that are provided in the after math. It's easy to dwell in the emotion, assess blame on individuals and even on the self. The hard

part is trying to overcome what occurred, forgive the self and finding a way to let go of the event and it's affect on an individual's life.

But how does a person go about healing from grief, regardless of the triggering source? In a world where nearly 80% of the population believes in a spiritual path, it's not uncommon for people to look to their faith for answers. Understanding the phases of grief, from a perspective of the spirit, can help an individual work through the fear, anger and emotions to overcome what might potentially be long lasting detrimental effects.

This article is by no means covering anything new, nor is it meant to replace professional mainstream therapy for those who need it. But perhaps it can give a metaphysically spiritual perspective for how to handle the turmoil of trials, tribulations and the grief associated with trauma from a spiritual level. It looks at the current theory behind Existential Therapy, how that can be built upon for work in Spiritual Psychology and their application to dealing with grief.

## II – Review Of Literature

Much has been written about Psychology and Spirituality over the eons of time. We can look through literature spanning civilizations, societies and continents to get a glimpse of the past and the evolution of both these subjects to the modern era. Taking advantage of this knowledge is no easy task considering how much has been written. Choosing resources is a daunting task and provides a lifetime of reading to expand one's perspectives. Instead, I have tried to choose a few poignant works that have had an impact on my life in a personal way as I dealt with my own issues of victimization. The following is a brief review of these works that have been used as the bibliographic resources for this essay.

As stated in my Doctorate of Divinity Dissertation, understanding concepts of a subject should always start with a definition to establish a common understanding of words, labels and how they are used in a discussion. Along with the American Heritage (2005) and Webster's (2003) dictionaries, June G. Bletzer, Ph.D. has compiled one of the best metaphysically based dictionaries offered today. Her *Encyclopedic Psychic Dictionary* (1986) offers concise explanations to help any spiritual student understand the concepts of metaphysics and how each topic relates to other.

In her book *Going Within* (1989), Shirley MacLaine offers a look into spirituality through her own personal experiences. She provides the reader with an insight into her own dilemmas that arose when she looked within her own being. Sharing her approach to incorporating a personal connection to the Divine Universal Spirit with her every day life. Building a bond that empowers an individual to overcome and succeed.

Shakti Gawain is one of my favorite authors. In *Creative Visualization* (1982) and *Living In The Light* (1986), Ms. Gawain explains the affects of living in positive energy vs. allowing negative

patterns to continue dictating our actions and health. Her approach touched me in profound ways and inspired me to develop my own motto for dealing with victimization. "You cannot change the past. You can only change the way you allow the past to affect your present and your future."

How we think and set up recurring patterns of thought directly affect how we feel physically. Louise Hay (1982, 1999) who describes her understanding of how metaphysical causality affects our lives and our health. Ms. Hay outlines how to change these patterns with affirmations to bring about change and turn the negative patterns into positive ones.

In her books, *Energy Medicine* (1998/2008) and *Energy Medicine for Women* (2008), Donna Eden outlines how to work with the body's energy system to live a healthy and happy life. Mental health cannot be achieved in many cases when an individual's physical health is over shadowing their daily lives. Ms. Eden provides insight and exercises for the reader to change their own life into a positive future.

Kirk Schneider, Ph.D. and Rollo May, Ph.D. (1995) are two of the most influential existential therapists today. They have outlined an existential approach to therapy that allows for an integration of other theories, including those that accept and considers the spirituality of the individual.

Irving Yalom, M.D. (1980) outlines the four major themes of existential thought as death, freedom/responsibility, isolation/loneliness, and meaninglessness. Through existential therapy we can extend these themes into the perspective an individuals personal spiritual beliefs and practices.

Course work also plays a part in the concepts used in this essay. The teachings of Rev. Michelle Lusson, D.D. (1994) and Dr. Paul Leon Masters (2007) have provided a great deal of insight in the joining together of the spiritual and mental bodies of an individual that can and does provide strength of courage to attack any situation in life.

Additionally, Noel Langley (1967) provides insight into the approach of Edgar Cayce's view of reincarnation and the purpose or meaning of the soul. Along with the teachings of White Eagle (1987), these perspectives outline some of the concepts of the spirit, creation of the soul and how these aspects relate to the physical incarnation of the human existence.

Today the Internet is one of the main sources of research and information in the world. The trick is making sure you choose resources that can back up the information they provide with sited sources. Wikipedia.org is one of the better online encyclopedias, it's interactive and provides expert visitors to question or point out inaccurate information, while still providing sources for follow-up research. This comes in especially handy when you're researching specific subjects such as Psychology and Existential Therapy.

### **III – Methods**

I have been studying metaphysical practices for nearly 30 years. Through my own trials and tribulations in life I have had the fortune to work with psychologists and therapist to over come acts of abuse and victimization. These real world experiences along with formal and informal study have provided a base of study and practice that melds spirituality and psychology together. Along with observations through teaching and learning from my own clients, I have gained an appreciation for the strength held in the human spirit. Along with a great respect for the endurance held within the human soul.

I have long had an issue with the staunch approach to mental health as a solely clinical endeavor. There is much more to a person then their physical mind and mental thought process. Why mainstream psychology has ignored the vital role of the spirit in an individual's life is unclear to me. As existential therapies have developed in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I began to develop hope that mainstream psychiatry would finally expand their approach to include the beliefs and practices of the individual's spirituality. In doing so many people would find answers to the questions that have been plaguing their peace of mind and wholeness of mind, body and spirit health.

In this essay I hope to share a bit of my own experiences and what I've learned over the years in this area. Along with published authors and professional concepts that provide tools for individuals to feel empowered to over come their own fears and grief, to set down the baggage that others have heaped upon their shoulders, and to finally walk away and let go of the past in order to find peace and happiness in their future.

## **IV – Findings**

### **Existential Therapy**

The American-Heritage dictionary defines Existential as relating to, or dealing with existence or to be based on experience, such as empirical evidence.

The etymology of the word can bring an interesting view of how Existentialism is viewed today. Etymology.com states the word can be found as early as 1846 from Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who wrote of Existents-Forhold “existentielle Pathos” which means the “condition of existence”. What makes this interesting is that “existentielle Pathos” literally means “churchyard.” Does that mean Existential Therapy is really just an alternative or extended view of the human condition from a spiritual perspective? Or that it at least started out that way?

According to Wikipedia.org (2007), Existential therapy starts with the belief that although humans are essentially alone in the world, but we long to be connected to others. People want to have meaning in each other’s lives, but ultimately we must come to realize that we cannot depend on others for our validation. The result of this revelation is anxiety in the knowledge that our validation must come from within and not from others.

This perspective is widely held in Metaphysics as accurate with discussing the responsibility of the soul to the choices and conditions of the individual spirit. We cannot blame others for the choices we have made, nor the spiritual choices we selected to work through in this incarnated embodiment. But how does this relate in detail to the common view of Existential Therapy and Thought?

Irvine Yalom (1980) identified four major areas of existential thought. He defined these as Death, Freedom and Responsibility, Isolation and Loneliness, and Meaninglessness. Yalom suggests these areas do not answer the ultimate questions, but rather views them existential fears, which individuals must learn to cope or deal with.

In Yalom's area of Death, he suggests it refers to the cycle of life and that of a physical death. But it is also symbolic of human limitations or what we might break down into situations of life. Which can cover the end of a relationship, job, lifestyle or any number of emotional criteria that affect the human condition.

Yalom's area of Freedom states that it is essential to connect freedom with responsibility and that one cannot exist without the other. From his perspective the battle between freedom and responsibility are what bring individuals into therapy. The idea that freedom does not have consequences is a common misunderstanding. One cannot throw caution to the wind without taking responsibility for the outcome of their actions.

The next area of this existential thought is Isolation. At some point in everyone's life they realize they are alone and isolated. Whither it's dealing with loneliness from the lack of companionship or that of facing a serious illness. We can't make the assumption that a relationship or relationships in general are the purpose or primary goal of human existence. One doesn't need to be physically alone to feel lonely. Many people facing serious illness suddenly feel a lone and isolated at hearing the news of their immortality. No matter what the support system, the medical treatments or potential chances for recovery, an individual will on some level face the healing process alone. After all, your wife or husband can't take a shot for you and make your illness go away.

The last area of Yolam's existential thought is Meaning, the meaning behind life. This search for meaning can be summed up as the center of the existential issues and stands behind or underlies the three previous areas. In other words, individuals feel the need and are almost driven to find the meaning behind things. To attain the answer to these questions, an individual must face the other areas of existential thought.

While these concepts expand psychology and psychotherapy into existential areas, the mainstream psychological methods still leave out a big part of the human psyche. Existential thought addresses the physical and mental aspects of the here and now in an individual's life. But many people believe they are much more than a physical shell with a brain. Which brings up the early spiritual connection existentialism brought to the table by Søren Kierkegaard.

We can build on these concepts of Existential Psychology and add to them the affects and influences of the spirit and spiritual belief of the individual. Including in the analysis, the concepts of reincarnation, karma, and spiritual lessons that can help individuals discover the answers they seek to these ultimate questions of the Meaning of life.

Shakti Gawain (1986), states that "*When we, as individuals, first rediscover our spirit, we are usually drawn to nurture and cultivate this awareness.*" She goes on to explain that we become faced with the dilemma of spiritual understanding and vision, while stuck in the physical existence of the self. This conflict can create a battle between wills and for some seeking the ultimate answers is no longer as important and reaching the ultimate destination of spirit and enlightenment.

### **Spiritual Psychology**

Spiritual Psychology is an understanding of humans being multi-layered entities with a Mind, Body and Spirit according to Donna Eden (1998). Commonly known as integral, transpersonal, or

spiritual psychology, this spiritual approach to mental health is a method that seeks to explore the full range of human potential in relationship to and with the spirit.

Kirk Schneider (2004) touches on the idea that as the Age of Reason evolved, the science of psychology divided itself from spirituality and the human condition. As behavioral science strived to understand the mind from an analytical perspective, the myths and esoteric beliefs of an individual were no longer considered valuable in mental health. But when the mind is separated from the spirit, what's left can be an insufferable complex of emotional neuroses. Is it no wonder that the Freudian psychologies focused almost entirely on neurotic behaviors and their roots in human infancy. But when you separate the spirit from the mind, what's left is an individual that cannot relate to the physical world, the responsibilities, relationships and complex emotions within it to the full consciousness of the self. That whole being is an integral part of the mind, body and the spirit of each individual.

The movement to merge psychology and spirituality together again has been progressing for decades as indicated by to Michelle Lusson (1994). But it seems our modern times have finally accepted or broadened the definition of 'spiritual' to mean more than just mainstream religious beliefs. Today more alternative beliefs are moving into this realm of therapy in seeking to reconcile the spiritual and physical aspects of our human selves.

Louise Hay (1999) encourages us that it's no longer taboo to talk about karma, reincarnation and the affects of our past and past lives upon the issues and trials we face today. Spiritual Psychology takes the step beyond scientific psychology and tries to merge the wisdom of both the physical and spiritual experiences together again. After all, when more than 80% of the worlds population holds some type of spiritual belief, why wouldn't we try to understand the human condition from both a physical and spiritual perspective.

Michelle Lusson (1994) describes Spiritual Psychology as a method that seeks to understand the three layers of the human being. The person we display to the world, the person we see our self as, and the person we really are within our spiritual existence. This process of understanding helps an individual gain insight into the trials we feel that have moved us away from our spiritual path, created karma, and consequently caused us to feel separated from the Divine force within our life and our own Higher Self. Through spiritual work and therapy, we can let go of these pains and fears to gain understanding about the lessons our soul seeks to acquire and to see ourselves in a new light. To bring about a holistic healing for the whole being of mind, body and spirit.

Additionally, these layers of the human are represented in the levels of being or the mind, body and spirit of an individual. Through an understanding of who we are at a sub-atomic level, we can begin to see how the layers of an individual are developed, intertwined and support or hold back the mental health of a person.

#### Mind, Body and Spirit

Everyone has heard about these bodies of existence known as the mind, body and spirit. But there are also corresponding conscious minds for each of these areas of an individual as well. In the simplest of terms, we are made up of 4 levels of being.

1. The physical being - the physical mind
2. The soul being - the soul mind
3. The spiritual being - the spirit mind
4. The Divine Consciousness - the Divine mind

We can see these in action when we look at the corresponding levels of consciousness within the individual self.

#### The Conscious Self: The Physical Mind

The physical brain is the mind of the Body. This is the individual's conscious mind, the part of the self that governs day-to-day activities. Where individual reasons and processes information that interact with and where they hold their current life memories.

#### The Higher Conscious Self: The Soul Mind

The sub-consciousness is the mind of the Soul. This area of being is also called the higher consciousness of the self. This is the part of the self that talks to an individual's conscious mind and represents the true self of a person; this is the spiritual presence in this incarnation. If an individual is someone who holds a lot of doubts about who they are, those thoughts are held in the subconscious mind. No matter what the physical mind does, or tries to present to others, the energy behind the doubt is still held in the subconscious mind. This is one of the reasons that what an individual thinks of them self is so important to their overall health. To over come obstacles, an individual must start with their subconscious mind.

#### The Super Conscious Self: The Spirit Mind

The super consciousness is the mind of the Spirit. This is where an individual holds the aspect of the Divine within them self. Some call this level of consciousness the Divine Self or the God-Self. You might think of this as the controlling mind of the whole being. This is where an individual holds all past life memories; it's their reasoning center for making choices on a spiritual level, and the connection or bridge to the greater Universal Divine Spirit.

### The Divine Consciousness: The Universal Connection

The Divine Spirit is "The Everything, The All" that exists. It's everything connected together through out all of creation through energy. It is, for lack of a better word "God" and we are each part of and connected to that Divine consciousness. The Divine Conscious mind within an individual is the connection or bridge to the knowledge and energy of the greater Universal Divine Spirit.

Spiritual Psychology strives to help an individual discover the knowledge, wisdom and the answers they hold within their levels of Consciousness. Not just to understand whom they are and why they are here, but also to help face the challenges of life. To discover understanding behind the issues or events that cross their path in order to address them and heal from them when appropriate.

From this perspective, handling day-to-day trials and tribulations can be learning lessons for the soul and provide experiences to evolve the spirit. Understanding the spiritual lesson, connections and karma behind an event can lesson the confusion, ease the pain and help an individual heal from the grief associated with any situation. It's through combining these two approaches of Existential Therapy and Spiritual Psychology that an individual can face grief and deal with the trials it may bring into their lives.

## **V – Discussion**

### **What Is Grief**

Grief occurs from a large number of events in an individual's life. It is during Grief that many people feel the most alone and segregated from the world around them. Perhaps in this context, Grief is the ultimate example of Existentialism in action.

Grief comes in many forms of loss. Loss of a loved one, a relationship, a family pet, a job, one's health or independence, even one's own freedom. And dealing with loss comes in many forms, from depression to denial or more serious reactions that affect an individual's well being and mental health. We all have a way of dealing with every day grief, but I think everyone would agree that prolonged grief is never a good idea and can be detrimental to the wholeness of mind, body and spirit.

Understanding the phases of grief can help an individual work through the trials and tribulations, to overcome its long lasting effects. No longer should an individual feel segregated from the norm, when they realize their progression of thoughts and feelings follow a pattern of emotion. This in and of itself can bring about peace of mind as an individual deals with the trauma or bereavement of a relationship or loved one.

### **The Phases of Grief**

Grieving itself is a very individualistic emotion. No two people will approach grief in the same way. It has been my experience that it can be sometimes dangerous to assume that everyone will react in the same way to a traumatic situation or event. Individuals can through extremes of emotions

from shock, denial, and anger or experience a total break down in emotion that borders on emotionless expressions or the alternative extreme, hysteria.

How is someone expected to react, what is the pre-formed package of emotion that an individual is supposed to feel? The problem with this approach is that not everyone goes through the same life experiences as another person. Additionally, the influences of an individual's spiritual beliefs and understandings will also play a role in their expression of emotions. Because of this, there isn't an expected package for grieving. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

However an individual expresses their emotion, there is a pattern of emotion seen in grief that is universal. Understanding these different phases can help an individual understand where they are in the mourning process. Thereby allowing the individual to understand their grief, empower their reactions and provide knowledge that enables them to move toward healing. These phases of grief are similar to the stages of dealing with issues in your life, those being Acknowledgment, Acceptance, Forgiveness, Action and Letting Go. But when dealing with grief, we may approach these stages a little differently or in more detailed stages.

Before I continue with this section, let me add what I believe to be an important element to Spiritual Psychology as it relates to professional Psychiatric Therapy. Not all Spiritual Psychologists are trained in the professional field of Psychiatric Therapy. It's important to know your limits and understand the triggers for when a client needs to be referred to the professional field.

Phases of Depression and Anger in dealing with Grief, or any type of therapeutic event in an individual's life, can bring about violent punishments, not only to the individual, but also to others. An individual might turn to drugs or alcohol to numb the pain and memories. Thoughts of suicide or harming others in acts of vengeance can arise. These cases should not be solely monitored by a

Spiritual Psychologist, but should involve Psychiatric professionals as well. It is the responsibility of any therapist, spiritual or other wise to pay close attention to their client's needs and evolution through the healing process. When situations occur that can put an individual or others in danger, it's time to involve other professions who can assist in monitoring, assisting and providing a great in-depth range of healing.

According to Yolom (2002) there are several stages of grief that can be dealt with through the four major themes of existential thought death, freedom/responsibility, isolation/loneliness, and meaninglessness.

From a spiritual perspective, insight through my own personal experiences, as well as, my experiences in spiritual counseling over the years we can take that existential thought a step further. We can define the phases of grief into a structured and simplified set of stages for any individual to apply to their life.

#### Shock / Acknowledgement

Shock is often the first stage of grief. It is accompanied with disbelief or not wanting to acknowledge the loss.

Individuals who are faced with an unexpected death certainly go through this phase of grief. This can be especially true if the passing results from an accident, unexpected health event, or a violent crime.

Relatives of fallen soldier may face a prolonged exposure to this phase, if the deceased has been taken in battle from an overseas theater. They worry about the care, respect and shipment of their soldier's remains to return home. The extended time between hearing the

news from Military officials and seeing their loved one helps to maintain this period of disbelief. For some that can be helpful in that it allows the family to plan and organize burial before the soldier is returned home. For others it can be a time of terror and extreme denial.

A family facing the sudden loss of a loved one through an accident or violent crime can be hit hard news of this type of passing.

Victims of abuse also may see a prolonged exposure to this phase of grief, as shock is often the more common emotion seen here. This is often more accurate for victims of sexual rape and assault. But this can occur with victims of physical assault and battery. Even if the victim reports the assault to medical or law enforcement officials, there is a feeling of numbness and disbelief.

For victims of sexual assault, answering questions, feeling violated again by medical probing to collect evidence is just another step in what many feel as the continuation of the assault. A large number of these victims slowly move from shock to denial as they are returned to some form of control over their situation. Often a rape victim will immediately find a hot shower to wash away any remnants of the rapist. Only to find a few hours later their conscious mind thinking through the trauma feels the need to take yet another hotter shower to wash the feeling and images away.

Individuals who face notification of news that ends a relationship may have varying responses during this phase. The nature of the break up, the type of relationship and the circumstances surrounding the situation all play a role in how an individual may respond.

One thing that is common between all these types of circumstances is the initial response to the sudden loss of the principles of trust and security. The soldier loses trust in his or her ability to back up the team or unit. The survivors lose trust in their understanding of the world, the military, police, spirituality, or even God. A victim of a violent crime loses trust in society and law enforcement to protect their community. In addition they share a sense of loss of safety, and their own sense of personal security. A person dealing with the end of a relationship also faces a sense of loss of trust that strikes at the core of what some believe is the purpose of human existence.

The initial incident that kicks off the flow of emotions facing grief may be wide ranging, but the initial damage to the psyche affects more than just the sense of loss of an individual in death or a relationship.

On some level most people acknowledge the notification of news of a loss. Assault victims may subconsciously acknowledge the event, even if they attempt to block out what happened. But it's important to note here that acknowledgement doesn't mean acceptance. Acknowledgement on this level refers to the taking in of information. A crude comparison would be the acknowledgement of seeing an email in your in-box. You know it's there, even if you haven't accepted its delivery.

#### Denial / Acceptance

Not wanting to accept that the loss has occurred is very common and follows quickly on the heels of shock. Denial can be a powerful response when dealing with grief and loss. "I don't believe it" or "No, this can't be happening" are very common thoughts during this phase.

Denial can evolve into a greater issue once the initial shock of a situation has subsided. In an attempt to protect the conscious mind, many rape victims will fall into a complete state of denial and sometimes face a self-imposed amnesia to escape the pain of the assault.

Victims of physical assault can mirror this response depending on the circumstances surrounding the attack and the severity of physical damage. But they may also create a block in memory for the initial cause or reason behind the assault as a means of dealing with their own emotional turmoil. A precursor so to speak, that cuts off the concepts of feeling self-guilt before it has a chance to get started.

One group of individuals that I've worked with that don't seem to spend a lot of time in denial, are soldiers of war. The horrors of death are something they saw face to face in an instant, or witnessed as the aftermath of an attack. When the events of loss occur on a more personal level, the concept of denial is rarely a thought. They know what they have been through, what happened and can often recount it in vivid detail. For them, this phase deals more with the concepts of acceptance than denial.

But in all these types of scenarios, an individual will come to terms with the traumatic event. Even if the situation isn't one of violence, but rather the passing of a loved one through illness. An admission that the loss has occurred will at some point set down into reality and acknowledged.

## Guilt

I have yet to counsel a client that is dealing with a loss that hasn't had feelings of guilt on some level. It's common for people to start blaming themselves for what has occurred. "If only I had done this", "If only I had not done that" are questions an individual may begin to

ask of themselves. Especially if the loss is something you think you could have controlled, such as being laid off from a job, a relationship or a suicide of someone close.

Parents of soldiers face this phase just as anyone else. Looking for answers as to why it was their child that was taken. What did they do wrong that caused their child to be punished, as if their sin or crime was carried out upon their child.

Military Soldiers often find the phase of Guilt the hardest to overcome. Especially if the loss they are facing was related to a war effort. Not only do they face the guilt of being a member of their team to survive, in some cases, they may be the only one who wasn't killed. Additionally, they replay the scene of battle in their consciousness mind allowing the images and guilt to permeate their subconscious and establish thought patterns that develop into personal illness. In a manner of speaking, they establish scenarios of self-punishment to attack the guilt they feel for surviving or being the only one unharmed.

Soldiers who return home with their unit can find themselves falling into guilt because they are not there in the war theater backing up their company, or division. Those who fall into Posttraumatic Stress may find they are left behind when their unit is reassigned overseas, adding to their guilt that they are home safe and sound, while their compatriots are now in harms way.

The end of a relationship can create similar inner turmoil and conflicts. Especially when an individual is unaware of situations that create the separation. They begin to replay each day in the relationship through their conscious minds looking for the ultimate questions of "why" or "what did I do". Once again taking on the blame and guilt into their subconscious being. This same scenario can be seen in individuals who have lost their job, failed at an

intensely personal goal or project, or a variety of other situations where an individual feels personally responsible.

Abuse victims are conditioned to believe their beating or abuse is self-inflicted and they are the cause of the abuse. After prolonged abuse, individuals begin to believe what they are told and that message is transferred from their conscious minds into their subconscious.

Anyone who has worked with Rape victims knows this scenario all too well. Though society doesn't help with its approach to blame the victim for their assault. Whether a person shouldn't have been wearing a certain type of attire, they shouldn't have been walking in a certain area during that time, or they shouldn't have left the window open at that time or in that neighborhood.

It's important to remember that there are always things going on in the background of these situations that an individual cannot control, no matter how hard they try to convince themselves otherwise. If the loss comes from the result of a suicide for instance, it's hard to remember that the person who passed made their choice on their own and the resulting passing was their responsibility.

## Depression

Depression often comes and goes through out all stages of grief. But it may be exceptionally difficult in the early stages when an individual is begging the Divine for help and their prayers seem to go unanswered. Everyone needs time to cry, feel sad or lonely and feel the loss they've experienced. Without an individual giving time to the self to be sad, they are not able to release and heal the emotions that have been opened.

But there are varying levels of depression that should be monitored. Severe and deep depression can cause new issues and sometimes can create new dangers. Clinical depression can be triggered by a variety of stresses in an individual's life. The losses of a loved one, a relationship or some type of violent situation are certainly big triggers for kicking off a serious condition of depression.

### Anger

At some point everyone gets angry after a loss. Blaming the person who left, the people or organization involved, or the situation that caused the loss takes some of the burden off the guilt the individual may feel toward them self.

Families losing a loved one to war or a violent crime may shift blame to the enemy or criminal. Sometimes taking this level of anger to a passionate effort that prevents the situation from happening to someone else's child. This can be a good avenue of release as an individual works through the healing of the loss as they channel their energy into a project that still connects them to what they lost. We have seen this in our generation with the fight for MADD, Megan's Law and a variety of other legislation that have been enacted as the result of survivors taking their anger and channeling it into personal goals that benefit society

But sadly the phase of anger can be detrimental as well. Especially when feelings are turned outward onto others and even inwards toward the self. Just like the concerns of individuals falling into depression, Therapists are warned about the signs of anger becoming harmful to an individual or those around them.

Anger serves little purpose in grief, but it is a release of emotion and can be the predecessor to healing. At some point an individual grows tired of crying, or being silent and begins to seethe with anger. The energy it takes to stay angry can be draining physically. The negative thoughts that permeate the conscious and subconscious can create negative patterns that build into physical illness in the body. What one expresses outwardly, will be used to attract the similar energy back into ones life. If not dealt with, these emotions can slowly create a snowball effect and what was once a sad situation can migrate into a bad situation that evolves into seriously destructive life.

Anger can also be one of the more important phases of grief on the opposite side of the emotional coin as well. When an individual acknowledges their anger how it affects their life, they can use it as the catalyst for change and healing from the situation. On some level that makes the phase Anger a necessary component for instigating a desire to change and healing from grief.

### Forgiveness

The first step to healing in grief is Forgiveness. Absolving the self, the situation or others involved who have shared in some way with this loss. Forgiveness comes in many forms and for many reasons. Each situation is going to be different. And each person is going to have specific details from their own perspectives about what has occurred, what needs to be addressed and what needs to be forgiven. It's not about what others think an individual should do or address, because those outside influences may or may not have any affect on the inner sub-consciousness of the individual. This is about the individual self and how they look at the grieving situation through their eyes and sub-conscious mind.

It's also important to state that forgiveness on this level isn't about passing judgments, or absolving someone of a crime or abusive act. It's about releasing the negative energy an individual holds within their conscious minds that cause detrimental harm to their mental and potentially physical health.

This type of forgiveness can be especially difficult from the perspective of an abuse victim. The last thing many victims want to do is absolve their perpetrator of the harm and suffering they caused. But holding onto the anger and hate one may feel toward that individual is only allowing them to continue their abusive control. An individual can forgive the self for allowing their attacker to control their emotions, energy, and perspectives of life. In other words, victims may not want to absolve their abuser, but they can absolve their own guilt and anger toward themselves that may have developed from the abusive event. In doing so they can make a stance to take that control back and release the connection they have with their abuser. In doing this, the Victim can become an abuse survivor and the perpetrator moves into the realm of a non-entity. No longer having the ability to intimidate, control or threaten the survivors sense of trust, security, or emotional connections to themselves and those around them.

Soldiers have an equally hard time pinpointing who or what to forgive. They seem to have a common focus in blaming them self for not being fast enough, or reacting a certain way after a military confrontation. Others facing PTSD may not have a specific event to pinpoint, but rather hold guilt of not being able to be there for their unit as it returns to a combat theater. Or they may hold anxiety concerning a feeling of not being 'whole', supportive or being able to interactive with their family. Once again the issue comes down to forgiving the self.

### Hope / Action and Letting Go

The forgiveness, action and letting go are the hard parts to dealing with any loss. But through inner reflection, counseling and meditation, an individual can learn to forgive and let go. Sometimes forgiving and letting go on a spiritual level can help release the pain and emotional hurt felt on a physical level as well. Through all this a person can rediscover hope.

An abuse victim who has forgiven them self of allowing others to control their actions and emotions, can release that control and take back their life. Letting go of the past actions of others, and looking forward into their own future with hope.

A soldier can release their guilt, fear and feelings of always having to look over their shoulder. In doing so, they can learn to move forward in trusting their own instincts, actions and others around them helping to provide a sense of self-assuredness and security.

When the loss deals with a death of a loved one, letting go can be especially hard. But individuals can let go of the past and still maintain a sense of the relationship through spiritual interaction. Letting go of the traditional understanding of communication, and moving forward into a new spiritual communication.

There's no way to pinpoint which of these phases is the most difficult to move through, as each individual is different along with their situation. Putting thoughts into action is one way of moving through grief and discovering the steps of healing. One way this can be done is through a "Letting Go" meditation. The method I use for clients is provided in Appendix A and lays out a step by step process for putting thoughts to paper and releasing the anxiety, pain and anger associated with mourning and loss.

Individuals face a myriad of issues in their conscious minds during these phases of grief. Their emotions ride on the surface and often times anything another person may say can burrow into their consciousness and add fuel to the fire. Even if the words are not meant to do so, an innocent comment meant as support can be a trigger for an emotion break down. This continual self-attack on the emotions and psyche of an individual is detrimental to healing from the issue that caused the mourning process to begin with.

Here is where Spiritual Psychology can step in and provide guidance to understanding the real circumstances behind the issues.

### **Dealing With Grief**

Sometimes sitting down and trying to meditate is the last thing an individual wants to do. But this type of inner reflection can provide insight into what an individual faces on a subconscious and super-conscious level. Even if an individual feels too distraught to relax for meditation, a Spiritual Therapist has the ability to help guide an individual through the process. The most successful therapies adapt to the strengths of the individual, but also to the potential of the Therapist as well. The healing process is a joint effort. Even though the primary burden is on the client to allow healing to take place, the Therapist has the ability to guide or direct the client toward a path of understanding and healing.

Shirley MacLaine (1989) suggests that going within our own spiritual consciousness allows us to see the world and the events around us with Divine sight. Dr. Paul Master (2007) teaches this similar approach, sighting our ability to connect with the Divine knowledge within our own spiritual consciousness and developing a personal connection with the Universal Divine wisdom to look at the events in our life through God's eyes.

While mainstream psychology would frown upon these types of approaches to find closure and healing, spiritual psychology may promote these concepts. These spiritual approaches not only allow the individual to understand the situations that occurred, but also provides a gateway for communication to gain additional information and even answers to address the 'why' questions that torture so many during grief.

For instance, the physical loss of someone or something doesn't mean we can't communicate on a spiritual level. Whether that communication occurs through dream, meditation or a consultation through psychic talents. Individuals sometimes only need an opportunity to say goodbye, apologize for a perceived injustice or inquire as to why a situation occurred and what they could have done differently. We may not communicate in the same way as when they were alive, but in some cases we might be able to communicate more often or even on a more compassionate and loving level. A Spiritual Therapist has in their armory of tools, access to psychic mediums (if they are not one themselves) that can assist a client in connecting to and interacting with spiritual communications.

From a metaphysical perspective, an individual can find comfort in understanding the lesson behind the situation or what karmic issues were involved. Noel Langley (1967) reports the approach taken by Edgar Cayce on the concepts of reincarnation, the soul's ability to choose lessons and take accountability for the events in our lives.

Michelle Lusson (1994) describes the spirit as the culmination of all our lifetimes, energies, and spiritual essence. The spirit is that which we are in the totality of being. Every life, every memory and every action ever taken on ones spiritual path is the essence of a spirit. The soul is a subset or smaller section of our spirit. It is the section of our total being that we chose to pull into a single physical incarnation to work with and work through for karmic issues and spiritual lessons.

For those who hold a belief in reincarnation these concepts can open doors to understanding the spiritual connotations behind the physical situations they are confronted with in the physical embodiment. While it may be difficult to gain an understanding of going through pain and grief as the result of a karmic issue from a previous lifetime, it still gives an individual insight into what they are going through. It provides meaning to an otherwise meaningless situation in their life.

An abuse victim can discover if their attack was karmic, or if the event was chosen to provide an experience that gives them knowledge and understanding of other victims. Allowing them to become healers of abuse later in their own lives. A soldier might discover that the loss of a buddy in combat was designed by that person's soul as a means to provide spiritual lessons to their family or friends in the realm of compassion, support and unconditional love. There are just as many potential reasons and possibilities for why something has occurred on a spiritual level, as there are people on the planet. For some, this approach gives an individual meaning, acceptance and the ability to discover peace over the events that have taken place.

According to White Eagle (1983) once the soul has made its choices to learn lessons or work through karmic issues, it will leave or put to rest a relationship that no longer benefits the progression of enlightenment. Or if the soul has completed its mission, it will leave this physical world in a manner that leaves the gift of enlightenment for those it leaves behind.

From these perspectives of the spiritual purpose of a chosen lifetime, individuals can learn that choices are being made every moment through out the life of the soul that causes adjustments to the spiritual blue print. At some point, the soul will see the life it has built and decide the construction has been completed. When the physical body dies, the soul detaches itself and prepares to return to the larger spiritual body.

The biggest issue people face when dealing with grief of any type is “why”. Why did a parent have to die, why did a buddy have to be killed in battle, why did a young woman have to be raped, why did a relationship end with betrayal. It is human nature to want to understand the reason behind situations that cross our path. The not knowing ‘why’ often provides the ammunition for what many people use to create self inflicted guilt and anger. Seeking answers on the physical plane that may not become apparent, creating frustration and hopelessness, a feeling that there is no meaning to life or the situations that occur within it.

By using meditation to seek answers within the Divine Self, an individual gains a powerful tool that can guide their physical actions through out the immediate situation and through out the grieving process. This helps each person walk the path of their soul, making choices that lead them closer to fulfilling the purpose of their soul and the intent of their life in this incarnation. While at the same time, helping them to see through Divine eyes the issues and circumstances, or the meaning behind why situations have occurred as they have. From working on karma, spiritual lessons and working through grief the view of spirit can bring about comfort and peace within the person in mourning.

## VI – Summary and Conclusions

The Spiritual Psychologist has the ability to use spiritual concepts based on the individual's beliefs and spiritual practices as tools to help promote healing through the varying stages of grief.

Meditation, holistic healing, regression therapy and guided communications are all viable in the office of the spiritual therapist. This existential approach of incorporating spiritual teaching into the physical world can bring about a great understanding and peace for the individual, who can then apply the knowledge to their situation and find healing from within and from above

If Yolam's approach to existential thought is the search for meaning being the center of individuals holding the need and being driven to find the meaning behind things is true, then finding the meaning in all areas of being is a must to develop a full picture of life and existence.

Using Spiritual Psychology to address the traumatic events in ones life may not be easy or conventional. But it can and does provide many with an understanding of why things occur the way they have. Allowing individuals to find the meaning and discover the peace they seek in healing their grief.

## **A – Appendix**

### **Letting Go Meditation**

This meditation is designed to raise the consciousness and connect with the issue or individual causing a feeling of pain or hurt on a spiritual level. It builds a bridge between the conscious, sub-conscious and super-conscious minds in order to review a situation from a spiritual perspective and heal both the soul and the conscious self.

Since this is a special meditation, individuals may want to prepare their meditation space in a special way. Add a few ritualistic items, such as lighting a white candle and saying a prayer stating your intent for this meditative session. Some people like to decorate their meditative space with religious symbols to add to the spiritual significance of this meditation. Others like to write a note that defines their emotions, states messages they didn't get to verbalize or just put down in words what they feel within themselves.

Meditative music is a wonderful way to add to a special guided meditation like this. It can help you focus your intent, raise your energy and block out unexpected interfering noises. *Ascension to All That Is* by Robert Slap is one of my personal favorite pieces for this kind of meditation. You can find it on Amazon.com.

Take your time; try to imagine as much detail as possible as you conduct this special meditation. There's no right or wrong way to doing this. Just trust yourself, and allow the images and feelings to emerge.

1. Sit in a comfortable position, one that you can sustain for about 30-45 minutes.
2. Close your eyes and take in a deep cleansing breath. Fill your lungs to their fullest capacity. Then release the breath through your mouth and push all the air out of your body. Take in 3

deep breaths through the nose, imagine the white light from the universe coming into your lungs and collecting at your solar plexus.

3. With all 3 exhales, image all the stress, anxiety and negativity you have leaving your body carried out to the universe on a gay smoke where it can be dissipated and no longer do harm to anyone. As you exhale, imagine the events of the day or week floating out of your body. Put these worries aside and begin to relax your entire body and mind. Feel the tension in your muscles begin to subside. Begin at your solar plexus and imagine the white light moving up and down your body from this point. Imagine the warmth of the energy as it passes through your muscles and organs. Feel the tingling sensations as the light moves down to your toes and up your body to the top of your head. Imagine your entire body engulfed by this white divine light, from the inside out.
4. Say a prayer asking your guides and teachers to come to you and to help with the purpose of this mediation. Ask them to lend their energy to your spiritual protection and to provide support for your purpose. State your intention clearly and ask 'God' to help you with your meditative journey. Don't forget to thank them up front for their efforts.
5. This step takes a little practice, don't worry if you can't do this for any extended period of time, but at least give it a try. Keep your eyes closed, but look up at the pituitary gland. This is a small gland located in the middle of your forehead, just above the brow. (This is also considered to be the position of your third eye and is therefore the gateway to higher conscious realms). Try to keep your eyes focused on this point. The muscles around your eyes may become sore as you stretch them upward, so don't over do this at first. As you practice, this step will become easier and easier to do.
6. As you focus on your third eye imagine you're at the base of a tunnel, dimly light and slanted upward. Imagine your astral body (or your soul) standing up from your physical body and begin to walk toward and into the tunnel. See the lights on the walls and the texture of the floor as you walk through the tunnel. Imagine yourself moving upward.

7. Just a head of you, you see a set of glass doors and through those doors you can see a brilliant white light. You feel in your heart that this is the light of the universal consciousness, of God. A feeling of Peace, calm, protection and knowledge fills your insides. With each step closer, you feel more relaxed and at peace, you feel uplifted and connected to this universal energy.
8. As you approach the doors, they automatically open and invite your soul into this realm of enlightenment. This is your spiritual sanctuary. This is the one place where you are always safe and protected from all things. In the center of the room is a place for you to sit down and enjoy the calm and security.
9. As you position your self in the seating area, imagine yourself closing your eyes and mentally connecting with the person or the inner issue that is causing you harm. If it's an issue, try to imagine it in a form that you can talk with. It can be a ghostly presence; a ball of energy, whatever form you feel it should take. If it's a person, mentally connect with what you see as their spiritual essence. Ask their permission to join you in your sanctuary.
10. It's important ask permission. Equally important is for you to "listen" for their responses. If you feel the answer is no, tell them you are letting them go and then return to your sanctuary.
11. If the answer is yes, imagine this person's spiritual self-joining you in your sanctuary. Remember you are perfectly safe here. Nothing will happen to you, you will never be in any danger.
12. Once you are spiritually facing the person or issue, explain why you have asked them here. Explain your feelings and emotions. But in a way that does not place blame on the person or yourself. Explain to them that you've acknowledged and accepted the issue at hand.
13. Then tell them you are forgiving them and why. Explain why this issue is being resolved within yourself and why you feel the need to forgive.
14. Next, explain why you feel this "baggage" is no longer yours to own and it belongs to them. Tell them, you are giving the hurt and pain back and moving on. Explain that they need to deal

with the issues within them self if you feel that is appropriate. But that you will no longer accept the pain or hurt that has been on your shoulders and in your heart.

15. Lastly, state firmly and without doubt, "I forgive you. I let you go. I am moving on with my life."
16. There's no need to wait for an acceptance or ok. Once you have made your statement, you're done. This is YOUR time and YOUR sanctuary where you make the rules and laws.
17. Once you have made your statement, you can conclude your visit. Thank them for coming and tell them it's time for them to go forever. Watch the person or energy rise and walk out your sanctuary doors, never to return again.
18. Take a moment to thank yourself and spiritually celebrate your accomplishment. Wither it's tears of joy, or great party, you've done something so significant to your life that you deserve a pat on the back and hug. So imagine your divine presence, a spirit guide or whatever spiritual help you called into your sanctuary holding you and providing congratulations.
19. Now, it's time to relax. Take a deep breath and prepare to return to the waking world.
20. Make sure you thank your divine presence and guides deeply for their gift of service and protection to you. Thank them for coming here during this meditation to meet you and/or visit with you. Give them a goodbye hug, then rise from your seat and head out your sanctuary doors.
21. As the doors close behind, see yourself standing at the top of the spiritual tunnel. As you move through the tunnel you become more and more aware of your surroundings and your body.
22. Imagine yourself passing through the glass doors and heading back down to your meditative space. Imagine your soul walking through the door to your room, and seeing your physical body right where you left it. As your soul steps back inside your spiritual body, all the visions sensations and answers you received merge with your physical brain and are automatically stored into your conscious mind.

23. Take in a deep breath, begin to feel your body, become more and more aware of your surroundings, have a nice long and hard stretch, and then open your eyes.

The last thing you should do before you get up from your meditative spot is to record this event either on tape or in a journal. It's important to do it right away while the images, feelings and sounds are still clear in your mind.

Then go out and enjoy the rest of your life!

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