

## BEREAVEMENT

### Movements of the Healing Process

The first movement of the healing process is becoming aware of one's feelings and the reality of the loss. There is a numbing effect immediately following a loss, perhaps along with disbelief, denial, shock and "separation anxiety." Once one can take a step back and observe the feelings that are flowing through oneself and see with some degree of clarity the reality of the loss, then the healing process has begun. This awareness is rarely a sudden realization, but comes slowly as the layers of disbelief are sloughed off and as one begins to realize that the pain of the loss is not unbearable (although waves of seemingly unbearable pain may still occur).

The next movement in the healing process is talking about one's pain and accepting responsibility for moving through it. Telling the story of one's loss is integral to the healing process. Acknowledging the pain instead of denying it enables a person to move through it. It is in telling another about what it feels like to live "in the loss" that helps one discover the truth that resources for healing are truly within oneself, and the responsibility for moving through the pain can be accepted.

Accepting responsibility for moving through the pain brings one to identify and use healthy means of communicating one's feelings and needs. Communicating feelings and needs is necessary for the healing process to proceed. Unhealthy or dysfunctional ways of communicating are all too prevalent in our society. "Healthy communicating" enhances self-confidence and self-esteem. This may mean learning new ways of communicating which involve risk-taking with family and friends.

As empowerment builds in the healing process, decision-making about one's life and its new direction begins to take place. There is no denying that after a loss, such as the death of a loved one, one is confronted with a new way of living and decisions about how that living will take place. Action in a new life direction is not only healing, it is also energizing and growth-producing.

Allowing oneself to see the loss in a greater context of meaning, so that one can now move beyond it, is an essential spiritual task in the process of healing. In one respect, the search for meaning is a life task, but in the midst of a loss, it is even more poignant. Grasping a vision of greater meaning frees one to move beyond the loss to a renewed sense of living.

Becoming involved in reaching out to others who are experiencing loss in their lives and practicing appropriate support skills is the last movement in the healing process. It is the bridge between one's own healing and the healing of another. In the web of life, we are all connected. While the healing process requires our taking responsibility for moving through our own pain, we also need others to complete the process. Receiving and giving support is part of the dance of life.

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