

## Healing the Loss of a Dream, Part II by Rokelle Lerner

Letting go of a dream that was dear to us is one of the most difficult circumstances that we encounter as humans. Yet we need to remind ourselves that life demands release. We let go when we go to sleep, when we take a breath and ultimately when we die. But truly this takes time and the development of self-compassion. If not, some of us will continue to carry the dead corpse of a past relationship or job around with us for eternity.

For those in this transition place between dreams, the process is slow and sometimes it feels like nothing is ever going to change. But with patience and compassion, we suddenly notice that the eggshell cracks, the branch begins to develop a bud and we're ready to enter a new phase in our lives. During the space between the death of one dream and the birth of another, don't be surprised if it feels like change is non-existent. The truth is, what's happening is occurring "underground", deep in our soul. The poet laureate Juan Ramon Jimenez writes the following about the process of waiting:

*"My boat struck something deep...  
Nothing happened.  
Sounds, silence waves...  
Nothing happened.  
Or perhaps everything has happened.  
And I'm sitting in the middle of my new life."*

During the transition between the death of one dream and the birth of another, we need to allow the full realm of our despair and grief, our anger and sadness. If we're willing to do this, we inevitably reach a state of grace called acceptance. The following are steps for grieving the death of a dream and entering into this transcendent state:

### **Name the Dream**

The healing process begins when we can be honest and name the dream that's been shattered. Because we're not trained to notice the dreams that are attached to our losses, it takes gentleness and reflection to discover the underlying vision and the meaning it held for us. Tools for discovering your dreams include having courageous conversations with trusted friends, journaling, art, meditation and tending to your dreams at night.

### **Educate Your Friends**

Once the dream is named, we need to educate our friends and loved ones about the nature of our grief. We need to let them know that our grieving may take some time and we would hope for their support and patience while we go through our grieving process. Those of us who are supporting friends, relatives or clients in their mourning can help by asking the right questions and listening carefully. We need to be mindful and not analyze or label someone whose grief won't diminish. Rather, we can gently ask what dreams they had that surrounded their loss: "Could it be that you miss the dream of the nurturing family?" "Is it possible that the image of

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yourself as the courageous healer has gone?" My experience is that when the shattered dream is acknowledged, it brings forth tears, perhaps anger, and, ultimately, the relief that someone *finally* understands.

### **Create Safety**

Like a butterfly in a cocoon, find some safety and comfort for yourself. Don't throw yourself into situations that threaten your need for serenity. This transition time will be an opportunity for you to discover the art of self-soothing. For some this will mean meditation, listening to music, prayer, silent walking, utilizing the creative arts or connecting with friends. You might check with those you trust to see what helps them to create sanctuary in their lives. However, it's our responsibility to explore what form of comfort will bring us the kind of ease and safety we need. This is valuable information that will sustain you throughout your life.

### **Tell Your Story**

At some point it will be crucial to tell your story and have it witnessed. Telling our story can move us beyond the wounding and helps us to process our grief in ways that can't be done in isolation. We need to look into the eyes of others who hear our lost dreams and notice their sadness, their compassion and even their outrage or horror. Storytelling is a powerful form of soul retrieval in every culture on this planet. When you're able to tell your story, it honors the past and creates room for a future. It's a way of cleaning out your psychological garden to make room for new growth.

### **Discover Your Patterns**

The way we bring situations, relationships, or dreams to a close is often a style we've developed for dealing with endings. Think about the ways you've learned to say goodbye: Do you hang on? Do you end abruptly/ Do you linger before you leave? Do you leave and then return again and again? The way we let go of a dream can involve any of these styles. Sometimes knowing our patterns can help us to be gentler with our process.

### **Find Perspective**

It will be important to get some perspective in order to see the bigger picture. If you think that the old dream is the best that you'll ever have, you're going to remain in a cycle of suffering. If we're consistently focused on what's not working in our lives, we will never develop the ability to embrace something better. The gift waiting to be claimed by perspective is the ability to see the whole picture of what we've lost: the good, the bad, the precious and the horrible. It's also the best remedy for self-pity. There is no other behavior that locks us into misery then feeling sorry for ourselves. It completely pulls us away from our connection with ourselves and then all we have is a mass of toxic resentment. A remedy for self-pity is to be of service, volunteer your time, and discuss with others the journey they've been on and how they were able to focus their energy on life-giving thoughts.

### **Borrow Hopefulness**

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*"Our most spectacular answers to prayers have come when we were so helpless, so out of control that we could do nothing at all for ourselves."* Catherine Marshall

Sometimes when we mourn, there are days where it seems impossible to reach any level of optimism for the future. This is the time when we need to listen to our friends who try to influence our state of mind. Instead of negating the positive nature of what people give us, we can literally borrow their hopefulness for the future, even when we have none ourselves.

A colleague of mine was doing therapy with a woman who had lost her husband several years previously. This woman wanted help in creating a new vision for her future. However, every time this woman would get close to a new dream, she'd "blow it off" and become sullen and despairing. My colleague acknowledged her hopelessness but also offered her client this gift: "I know you can't see your way past your grief right now, but I'm going to remain the container for your hope and you can 'dip' into this container when you're ready." Meanwhile, she encouraged the woman to borrow some of the optimism she had: "It's free of charge", she said, "and you can carry it with you as long as you'd like".

If we are to have meaning in our lives, we gradually need to try on new dreams. If we refuse to entertain new visions for our future, we eventually walk the procession of the living dead. We don't have to cook up some future fantasy that doesn't ring true. Rather, we can begin to journal, draw or even be silent to see what longing is stirring in our hearts. This is the practice of cultivating the willingness to listen to our deepest desires.

For those who have experienced the death of a dream, it takes courage to dream again. Anyone who has experienced this kind of loss understands the expression, "dare to dream". It's definitely daring to get our hearts and minds wrapped around another vision for us. But if we're willing to take the chance, it provides a powerful affirmation of life that feeds our spirit.