

The nature of grief: differentiating natural-sense from emotion

When grief hits it does so like an explosion. The ancient Chinese character for grief describes a bird being blown out of the sky, or winded so it cannot fly. This clearly expresses the power of the emotions involved, people often feel as if they cannot breathe and a gasping for breath in the first few moments of knowing a loved-one is dead.

But is any of this natural? Isn't the situation of grief and the grieving process like any other dramatic event in the long list of dramas that humans encounter, but which the rest of nature doesn't? It is so common for people to anthropomorphize the situation of what they feel is "grief occurring in nature". David Attenborough's wildlife programmes often compound our belief that animals and humans are similar in an emotional arena: the elephant who seems to mourn for its lost parent, the swallow who seems to mourn for its mate. All these and more show what we think is mourning, but in fact it isn't. The main difference is that grieving is not really a natural occurrence, there is no such thing as grief in the natural world, just as there is no such thing as anger or anxiety or any of these categorized emotional states. "Emotion" - the word says it all, emotion means a "disturbance", something that essentially is a disruption to the natural flow. Emotion is very much part of the dis-ease state. The precursor to emotion is sensitivity or feeling, which is not emotion. Emotion is very much about a "me" having an emotion, there is always an "I" involved in emotional experience. In sensitivity or feeling or instinct, there is no "I", there is just a feeling.

Encountering death "feels" in two ways, it feels cool or cold, and it also feels like a downward dispersion, like something was activated and moving which has now changed to a dropping downward to passivity and stillness. This change is what is felt by animals, especially those which herd together and act as a single unit, it feels like the energy of the herd has changed and this also requires adjustment. Basically that process of energetic adjustment occurring with animals is what humans misinterpret as mourning. There is a process where the energy of a herd or group or even a pair, re-forms and adjusts to the new sense of feeling and also a sense of dispersion and coldness is felt. However, everything is accepted immediately, there is no question of wishing it were different or thinking of times long ago when there was another scenario. There is neither sadness nor tears, simply a feeling as if a magnetic field has changed shape and now feels more cool and soft in one area and this is being adjusted or acclimatized to. This is not a process of mourning. The season of autumn represents death and it is this feeling that is experienced rather than a sadness and longing.

This of course occurs in the human as well. The human infant/primitive nature that is within us will adjust, as it is the sense of the human-animal, there is a feeling of coldness or dispersion, a downward movement of energy or an autumnal feel. At the same time, however, the human has the adult sense of separation and "I", and as such the situation of death is taken very personally. Death immediately kicks in the deepest alarm system of the "self" which is about mortality and the massive anxiety of this, the possibility that this can happen to "me" and that it is close at hand. This disguises itself as a very strong longing for the person to be alive again, for everything to be secure and all right and for

there to be something happening other than what is actually occurring. There is a powerful anxiety that starts up just after the feeling of coolness of death or autumn hits and this is sheer panic. The heart beats furiously, the tears well up, there is a feeling as if the body is being pulled in two directions at once, the sensation of the natural downward letting-go of change and the grasping and upward pulling of the emotion of anxiety and panic. A person in the panic state often needs to hold onto something, to be held, calmed and comforted.

This is how humans for millennia have coped with the dreadful emotional reaction of death. Some cultures induce a process of wailing and expressional grief in order to cathartically release the emotional tension and be comforted by each other in order to move into the natural adjustment phase that has been held back by this panic process. Sometimes there is a celebration of a person's life so it is almost an opposite feeling of what is naturally sensed in order to "get over" the feeling of panic. It is the panic sense at the same time as the feeling of dispersion and letting-go that people commonly know as grief, yet in fact the actual sense of death and coolness has very little involvement in what is initially felt by people.

The panic comes initially very intensely and then in waves of horror at what has happened to "me", that my mother, father, sister or brother has died. This is the origin of the panic, when it's perceived to be happening to "me". One is assailed by past memories, remembering how things used to be, comparing how things were with what they are now and wanting there to be a different scenario. Or if a person died in a particular way that seemed "wrong" there is an enormous charge to "right the wrong", as we see in the Michael Jackson case where his death never had anything to do with Michael Jackson, but is related to non-acceptance, panic and a need to blame in order to feel that "Justice is served", all of which are a form of security to counter simple and basic fears of the chaos felt at death. If all doctors were examined to see how many prescription medication treatments negatively effect their patients' health, a massive proportion of them would be struck off.

Of course not everyone feels the panic state, some do adjust much more quickly, the letting-go is allowed to occur and is sensed in a similar way to animals. There is little or no drama involved, things simply change and this happens naturally. However for many people the idea of death of a loved-one is a real phobia, even speaking of death or dying can trigger panic buttons and an attempt to try to find security and solidness in order that the "I" can feel safe and absolute again, not uncertain. It is really when there is no fear of death because there is no "I" involved in the situation that grief no longer contains a stage of panic but is just sensed as a change, exactly like the seasons, so from the highs of summer we get the lows or the passing-away feeling in autumn and this is "all" it is, as with wild-nature.

There is no right or wrong to this. Some people will constantly feel the panic which will have to be expressed outwards in many different forms over quite long periods of time before there can be a resolution and a sense of letting-go. A different of the problem can be a total denial of the situation, which is actually another form of panic occurring, where

similar to a rabbit in headlights the system switches off and there is a kind of emotionless-ness and an insensitivity. This is much more likely to occur in men and the panic much more likely in women as stereotypical expressions, but of course not always. As with all of life, the nature of death is both deeply intimate and deeply impersonal. Death itself is simply death of an energetic field or the transformation of this field. The “self” never existed in the first place so it cannot be the death of “self”, but at last simply a dropping away of the idea that “self” is really a reality (please see previous articles and www.headless.org for explanation of this philosophy). So the imagination of the grief-stricken person is often about if the loved one felt pain or whether they suffered before they died, the suffering is often a real concern. But if there is an understanding that in fact the suffering stops only when the “self” drops away, then no matter what pain there is, it is not the same as pain with suffering.

It is always said to be the “ones who are left behind who suffer” and this is absolutely true, all the abstracted ideas of what it was like to *be* the person before they died and what it is like to feel the pain one experiences before death are all about “me”, and have nothing to do with the energetic field that we considered was so important in life. Basically the main difference between the human and the animal is that for the human death is owned and so is very scary, while for the animal there is no ownership as there is no “me” involved in the body before or after death, it is all the same Oneness.

So grief and fear and anger and all the other emotions are basically always about “I” at root and this is the fundamental distortion that we experience. Originally in the infant days and in our prehistoric past anger used to be the energy of assertion and expression. The emotion of over-excitement/anxiety used to be just an excitatory energetic rush of a sensation of heat, the emotion of grief used to be simply the feeling of letting-go of dispersive downward moving energy, the emotion of fear or terror was simply a cold downward movement of energy.

These can be expressed seasonally:

Spring - assertive energy (in dis-ease this forms anger)

Summer - expansive energy (in dis-ease this forms anxiety)

Autumn - dispersing downward energy (in dis-ease this forms grief)

Winter - downward energy (in dis-ease this forms fear/terror)

There is an energetic expression before the “I” takes hold of the sensation and turns it into a dis-ease pattern. This is the nature of the human emotional state. This article is not about an explanation of how to avoid these states or what to “do” in order to make things “better”. What is described here is how-it-works and the key point is that when “I” is seen to be an illusion the rest of the house of cards will fall. But it is vitally important not to look at nature and anthropomorphize an ideology based on the human. The human-condition is unique, as is our sufferance of the idea of death, and so, of life.

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