

Death and the Gift of Completion – Part 1

By Taron Puri , B. A. LL. B

“We never believed it would happen to us” said a friend who had within a month, lost her father to an illness! We watch it happen to others all around us and for a moment, we feel their sadness, their loss. But, like weathering a passing storm, we soon forget and continue on with our lives. Inevitably, time decrees that we cannot be exempt. Ultimately, we must face the loss of a loved one. It is at this juncture that we experience the sheer darkness, intense grief and emotions such as guilt, fear, helplessness and anger! An intensely turbulent time, death strikes into the deepest parts of our psyche. It brings to the surface our own unresolved issues and conflicts. This begs the question, “How can we prepare for this experience”. Is there another way?

Death and Denial

In Western society we are in denial of death. While we intellectually know that we will all die, ‘emotionally’ we behave as if it will never happen to us. This is painfully obvious within our closest relationships. Whether with our parents, close friends, spouses or colleagues, we can often be hurtful, mean, demeaning, critical, judgmental, righteous, arrogant, and outright selfish. We use guilt, jealousy, anger and fear to manipulate our ‘loved’ ones so as to feed the illusion of being in control and feeling powerful. Unfortunately, in so doing, we create separation. We end up experiencing feelings of loneliness, disharmony, conflict, and isolation between our ‘loved’ ones and ourselves.

This dynamic often stays in the unconscious until an illness, an accident or simply time, brings us face to face with an imminent or sudden Death! It is then that the proverbial ‘Mac truck’ hits us; sending us reeling and confused by a barrage of conflicting thoughts, feelings and emotions. We are assaulted by feelings of our **own** guilt and helplessness as we realize that there is no longer a venue for resolution and healing. Time has suddenly taken a turn and left you holding the ball, with no one to throw it at or to. Now you must deal yourself with the unresolved feelings about how you chose to behave with your father, mother, friend or lover. Ostensibly, they have won the match by having the last word; **the game is over. There may even be a score, but, there is NO COMPLETION, only emptiness!** Simply, denial of death at this point is no longer an option.

The Gift of Completion

By choosing to be aware of the fact that we are not here forever, we can bypass this unwelcome scenario. To do so, we must understand **we can have completion with someone without it being an ending.** We often avoid bringing things to completion in our relationships because we view completion as an ending. This is not so. When we have completion with someone or within a situation, it is actually an **opening** or a **beginning.** Through this beginning, we can move to relate to our loved ones from a

healthier place of acceptance, forgiveness, love and compassion. With completion, the reward is that we have a more authentic, honoring and freer relationship.

To Quote:

“When we are complete...we have finally let go of any resentments, any misperceptions, any blocks to love with that person. We have let go and allowed that person to be. We need not fix this person, change this person, nor control this person. We simply allow them to be...This completion allows us to be with this person in total love, support, and caring...(and)...allows us to begin living in joy, in freedom and in genuine caring.” (Presence Presents, Maynard and Leanne Dalderis, 1992)

Conclusion

When someone close to us dies, feelings of loss, grief, sadness along with anger and helplessness are often inevitable. It is part of being human. However, the Gift of Completion can support us through creating an understanding of the dynamic behind death. We can choose to be aware and consciously keep in mind that time gives no guarantees as to how long any of us can remain here on this earthly sojourn. When we have completion, while we may miss the company of our loved one (as our access to them has shifted), we don't harbor regrets. How then do we get completion? Easy! Simply create a list of all those you love and consider dear to you. Then, reflect upon & assess where there are blocks in your relationship which are keeping you from having a richer, more authentic connection. Then **Communicate** your thoughts, feeling, experiences and observations with them **with an eye to finding a solution, rather than being right**. It's as simple as that!

For those of you who don't feel complete and your loved one has died or transitioned, I will deal with this in Part 2 of this article.

Death & the Gift of Completion: Part 2

In Part 1, we discussed the importance of completing with our loved ones while they were living and doing so without delay, as death may only be a breath away. How to achieve completion was also outlined and we established that through completion, we could experience a deeper, more authentic & meaningful relationship. However, for many of, this awareness arrives at our doorstep after the fact. We find that after having lost a loved one, feelings of emptiness, guilt and remorse begin to emerge from the shadows of our psyche and haunt our every thought, feeling and action. Essentially, we find ourselves experiencing the '**could have, should have**' syndrome!

Death without Completion

With the loss of a loved one, we go into coping as a necessary survival mechanism. Coping allows us to function and attend to all the logistical challenges involved in wrapping up the affairs of a loved one. It helps us to maintain our composure, as typically, family and close friends become the focus of those in need of our comfort, strength and support. There is even a strange sense of 'normalness'. However, coping was never meant to be a permanent state but rather, a temporary bridge.

As things settle, we realize that our world has permanently changed and will never be the same. This triggers a process of introspection and reflection which unveils thoughts and feelings which, until now, may have been hidden, suppressed or even repressed. Whatever the case may be, we inevitably will feel incomplete in, and about our relationship with our loved one. Whether it was because we were less than integral or honest with them; or that we never expressed our appreciation and our gratitude for them, such a realization can be painful. This is particularly so since death is so final and the challenge becomes one of keeping from being swallowed by feelings of despair and hopelessness. So what then, is the way through?

The Way Through

The way through this situation is by realizing that completion can come from 'within' us. By going within and getting in touch with 'all' of our feelings, whether good, bad or ugly, we can honestly inventory our behavior and effect the necessary changes to bring ourselves to a place of clarity and closure. In this regard, death, by its very nature, makes us face the consequences of our actions. It informs us that to find peace, we must 'come clean' and make amends for actions which lacked integrity, honesty and truth. Here then are 3 steps to start you on your way through to completion:

1. **Forgive yourself** – the first and foremost step is to honestly admit your failings, accepting them as part of being human. By practicing self-forgiveness, you are taking a mature stance which sees the folly of indulging in a diet of self-trashing! Once you allow for not having been 'perfect' in your relationship, then you can be well on your way to re-establishing equilibrium.
2. **Identify & Evaluate the unresolved issues** – during this stage, create a list of issues in need of resolution. Nothing is too minor or major here to list. However, consulting with friends and family is useful here in keeping you clear as to what was an actual issue because often, we can be harder on ourselves than necessary. Perspective is everything!
3. **Create a healing space for clearing** – how this stage looks will depend on your specific situation and beliefs. The emotional self needs rituals and processes to bring completion. (A funeral starts off the process but often, we need our **own personal** rituals to help us resolve deeper feelings and issues.) Some specific techniques for processing include:

- a. **Writing** – simply putting your feelings down in writing can be highly cathartic. One specific process, called a Love Letter, is designed to help you move through various emotional states through to a place of resolution and peace. And even if it is written as a letter, the intent is not to have to send it to anyone but rather, to clear your own conscience and energy. Then, in ritual, you can burn the letter to signify your intention to let go and move on.
- b. **Invoking a Healing Circle** – this is a gathering of close, personal friends with whom you can create a meaningful ritual in which you acknowledge, without judgment, the good and bad of the relationship. This often is also a good time to call upon the spirit of the deceased and offer your heartfelt thoughts and feelings. Essentially, you create a powerful space for remembering, reminiscing, grieving and ultimately releasing, in a ‘personalized’ way, your regrets about your relationship with your loved one.
- c. **Consciously learning from the loss** – this is an important step through which a negative behavior is transformed into a positive one. When we realize that our actions with a loved one were hurtful, harmful and unloving, we can honor their memory by changing ourselves. We can learn from our mistakes and resolve to choose a more loving attitude towards others, thus becoming a better human being for it. Lining up the assistance for support can be very helpful here as effecting self-change is a highly challenging and difficult task to do on your own.

Conclusion

Ideally, living consciously in our relationships rewards us by bringing the Gift of Completion when a loved one passes on. But for those of us who miss this opportunity, we can still find completion if we are willing to stay out of denial, feel whatever needs to be felt, and then choose actions which will support us in our own healing. Certainly, by so doing, there is less opportunity for the ‘could have, should have’ syndrome to take hold of your life.