

SECRET # 9 - EMOTIONS AND GRIEF

*“The Past: Our cradle, not our prison;
there is danger as well as appeal in its glamour.
The past is for inspiration, not imitation,
for continuation, not repetition.”*

Israel Zangwill

There is a saying in New Thought Christian teachings that “we are spiritual beings going through a human experience.” I would like to re-phrase this to cover my next point. “We are spiritual beings going through an emotional existence.” One of the things we must recognize as we go through our journey is that decisions are made from two different foundations. One is fact based and the other is emotion based. We either make decisions based on the facts involved or with our emotions. If you make a statement such as “I need...” then more than likely this is based on fact. If you start with “I would like to have...” then more than likely this decision is being based upon emotion. Neither is a right or wrong way. They are just different.

As emotional beings we need to be aware of how emotions affect our decision-making. We know when decisions are based on facts and those facts have been researched that most often the decision will be a good one and more often than not will end up with the desired result. However the same cannot be said about decisions made from emotion. Here is an example: You have just met someone for the first time and they would like to borrow a significant amount of money from you. If you are making a decision from facts you would find out who the person is, research their past credit history, ask for some sort of collateral and prepare an agreement outlining re-payment terms. If however you made a decision from emotions it may sound something like this. “Gee, I really like you and you sure are stuck and since you are a friend of a friend I will lend you the money.” In which case is the individual likely to be repaid? I would suggest to you as adults most of our decisions need to be fact based. Are yours?

In the book entitled “You’re Ok, I’m Ok”, Thomas A. Harris speaks about the concept that within each of us are three states of being, adult, parent and child. The adult is the fact based decision-making aspect of us. All decisions are based upon facts and only facts, no emotion is added to the decision making process for the adult. The second aspect of us is the parent. The parent’s role is to safely navigate us through life. It is the part of us that tells us to look both ways before we cross the street or to watch out for the hot burner of the stove. The third aspect of us is the child. You have heard the term “inner child” and this is where I believe this term fits appropriately. Within the child are the emotions. Happiness, joy, glee, elation, sadness and grief are all emotions of the child. Invariably the parent aspect and the child aspect come into conflict. Having a critical parent results in this conflict.

Be aware of your emotions and what triggers them. Have you ever heard of “emotional blackmail?” This happens in many ways. We may feel guilty about something and make decisions based on that guilt. We may allow ourselves to be taken advantage of, or make poor decisions because we feel bad about something from our past dealings with that person or event.

It is important to note that the emotional part of us comes through our “inner child” and that part of being successful is not to allow that child to make adult decisions. On the other hand it is equally important to recognize that you need to dip into our child-like emotions to make life all it can be. Life would be very dull indeed if we only came from adult mode. In fact it would be dangerous to ignore that part of us that gives us joy, hope, exhilaration and so on. The appropriate balance between adult-like behaviours and child-like behaviours is vital to any long-term success.

One of our emotions that we have is worry. I once heard someone say, “Worry is the most useless emotions we have as human beings.” Why would they say that? They were coming from the place that worry is a concern about a future event that you have no control of. As an example “I am worried about whether the bus will arrive on time.”

You have no control over whether the bus will arrive on time or not. Many factors go into the bus arriving on time including how many people get on the bus before you do that morning, how much traffic there is on the roads that day, if the bus left the station on time, the weather conditions and so on. If you worried about all those factors as well you would worry yourself to death, and some people do.

Some individuals are chronic worriers. They do not sleep well, eat properly, or look after their personal care. Worry can be like a spiral the more you worry the more worries you have. If you are showing symptoms like insomnia, unexplained stomach pains or dizziness, your worrying may be leading to stress and causes these symptoms. I would suggest that you seek professional help to assist you in diagnosing and treating the causes of these symptoms, especially if it is worry.

A method I use to deal with worry is to express worry in a different way. I replace the word “worry” with the word “concern”. I am concerned about the bus being on time. I can deal with a concern, which is based on fact. So, if I am concerned about the bus being on time I may start to say things like “if the bus is late I will take a taxi and still be there on time.” This takes the steam out of worry. You see worry is based upon the hidden “what if” that is associated with it. In the case of the example above the true worry is not whether the bus will arrive on time but the “what if” it does not.

Again you can “what if” yourself to ill health. There are so many “what if” scenarios that you could work yourself into a frenzy. Here is a way to handle “what ifs,” ask yourself what the worst-case scenario that would happen if the bus were late. An example might be. If the bus is late it means I will have to catch the next bus and be late for work. As I have nothing of priority going on this morning this is not a problem. The other side of the coin here is that I do need to get to work on time because I have to be there for an important meeting. In this case you would develop a contingency plan like taking a cab, getting a ride with a friend, leaving on an earlier bus. Do you see how you can take the worry out of an issue by planning and making it a concern, which can be handled rather than a worry, which is an emotion?

Another of the emotions is grief. Grief is one of the largest barriers to success. It is in the same neighbourhood as fear for being an inhibitor preventing individuals from achieving their goals and succeeding in what they desire. Grief is the emotion that allows us to overcome loss. I was once told that we grieve all losses and we experience some sort of loss every day. This was a real “wow” for me. I started to ponder how many losses we may have every day. There are major losses like the loss of a loved one, the passing of a dear friend, the loss of a relationship through divorce or separation, loss of a job, loss relating to moving from one home, city or country to another, and so on. But what about the little losses that accumulate each day? Do we acknowledge when we miss the bus, or tear our favourite shirt or dress, or we dent our car, or stain our carpets, or miss our child’s school play, and so on. It is important to acknowledge our grief, even the small instances and know that they are very real for us.

If we do not acknowledge these losses they accumulate. Have you ever had one of those days that you feel bummed out and you do not know why? Odds are that you are going through a grieving process. Emotional outbursts or some emotional decision-making can be the result of unresolved grief. If you are attempting to become financially successful but are sabotaging your efforts by going on massive spending binges it may be the result of unresolved grief. The shopping trips may be your way of handling grief and may make you feel good temporarily, however when you get the bill you will feel bad and find yourself in an emotional ying yang.

It is natural to feel grief. Some grief like the loss of a child or family member is very difficult to overcome. This grieving and healing takes time. Allow yourself that time. Know that you are grieving and that now may not be the time to tackle all of life’s problems and concerns. It is also important to know that some losses we may never totally overcome. The loss of a small child is typically one of these. The grief may last a lifetime. There is a cycle to grieving. Parts of that cycle you may visit several times. Know this and be patient with yourself.

There is a cycle to grief. There are many models of the grieving cycle and I have outlined only one of them. It is based upon the theory of a wave in that you may cycle back to each phase several times before breaking free of the cycle and moving past the grief. As always you may wish to seek out other models to follow.

Phase one of the grieving process starts with some form of loss. The first reaction is the Shock and Denial Phase. In this phase you typically feel overwhelmed. The event has just occurred and you are in shock and awe. You may deny that the event has happened at all. Questions like “why did this happen to me?” or “how did I deserve this?” are normal. During this time you move into automatic response and you may do things like a robot as the emotional overwhelm takes over. You may become forgetful; have difficulty making decisions or plans.

Phase two typically includes Resistance and or Anger. “It is not fair that this has happened to me” and “you can’t make me do this” are common phrases heard in this phase. You recognize the loss that you have suffered and are angry that this has happened to you. This may be accompanied by fear or withdrawal. You may have an abundance of upsetting feelings and find it difficult to feel good about life.

Phase three is called the Pit. This is the low part of the wave. You may you have no place to hide and have a fear of expressing your feelings. During this phase there may be self-doubt, and a questioning of everything about you including your competency. You may question your own existence and “why was it not me.” This may also lead to depression.

Phase four is moving from the pit or low to an upward swing. Though you may move through the other phases over and over again you now add the “Letting Go” cycle. This is a period of the unknown. It is though your fear has been challenged and a waking up process begins. During this phase you may feel fragile but there is a little excitement that the worst has past. You may find yourself thinking about your future and goals that you may have.

Phase Five is that period during which Exploration and Adjustment happens. You may feel impulsive and have a sense of urgency around completing things. You may be anxious to try a new role. You may feel a need to finish unfinished business and to get on with your life and accomplish all that you desire to do and complete.

Phase Six is where personal alignment occurs. The loss is placed in perspective with respect to the balance of your life. The loss has been accepted and a sense of moving on occurs. There is an acknowledgement of the loss and where it is placed in one’s life journey.

Know that the cycle of grief exists and that it can cycle over and over again. What is the cause of your grief? Where are you relative to the stages of the cycle presented above? Are you at a place where the natural grieving process is occurring or are you at a place where doctor or counsellor’s help is required.

It is amazing how easy it is for children to cry. Crying is an expression of and for releasing grief. There is nothing like a good cry to make you feel better. As we grow older for some reason we do not use this natural release mechanism, yet it allows us to move through our grieving cycle so much more quickly. It is a mystery to me that we do not allow ourselves to cry more often.

The other side of the coin is letting grief become so debilitating that you do not move on with your life. You are so overcome by grief that it stops you from going on with your life or achieving all that you desire in life. This is where you need external help. Friends and family are initially helpful, however, you may need some professional help and counselling. You may suffer from depression even though you may not be aware of this. Face your fear of criticism and see your doctor if you find it difficult to let go and take life by the horns. Sometimes you do not even know that grief is what is holding you back. Make sure that there is not a medical reason for feeling the way you do. If there is not, then it is time to take inventory and see what else may be holding you back from living the life you desire.

EXERCISE: I

So what do I worry about? List your worries on a piece of paper. Then express your worries as concerns. When you see a concern written on paper do you see how different it feels than a worry. Respond to your concerns with a plan of action.

EXERCISE: II

Acknowledge the grief in your life. What items are you grieving now from the past? What losses occurred today or this week that you would like to acknowledge and let go? List the losses in your life under the headings of High, Medium and Low levels of grief. Have you acknowledged that grief? Create an affirmation appropriate to acknowledging that grief and then let it go for that moment or day. It may go something like this. “ I acknowledge that I am grieving the loss of _____ and I miss you very much. I remember you for who you were in my life and what you meant to me. I shall treasure that memory forever. As I travel through this day you are with me. I know you would want me to go on with life and that by “taking life by the horns” I am doing honour to you. I know you will be there always.”

EXERCISE: III

What stage of grief am I in for each of the items I have listed in Exercise I? If you are grieving multiple losses you may be at different stages for each of them. It is important to know which of these is influencing you at the moment. Gravitating between different losses may be what is keeping you in a cycle of grief that you may not be passing through or out of.