

Chapter One

Grieving Your Loss

“The best way out is always through”

Robert Frost

I don't think I ever fully understood the term overwhelmed until the break-up of my marriage. I was shaken to my core at the discovery of my husband's affair. Immediately after, I was in a kind of hyper-alert state where nothing seemed real and something within me knew my life, as I knew it, was over. In the period immediately following a bereavement of this kind, there are several stages which are common to everyone; feelings we all go through. In this chapter, I hope to show you that you are not alone in how you feel, to give you support to guide you through the emotions, and to help you to realise they won't last forever.

I was told by a friend soon after I discovered my husband was leaving me, that *“everything is going to be OK”*. I had three young children, one only a tiny baby; I was in shock, grief and despair. I thought it was a ridiculous thing to say. But it must have stuck deep in

my mind, and throughout the following years of rebuilding myself I would occasionally remember it and think what a wonderful piece of simple wisdom that was.

But that was some way off.

In the beginning, there is nothing but pain. Real raw pain and an aching in your chest like your heart *is* really broken. It was all I could feel: the sobbing, the wallowing, the screaming anger, the humiliation, the fear and panic; the wretched loneliness.

I, like you may be feeling now, could never envisage a day when I would be glad my husband left me. In the beginning, my world was so shattered I could barely comprehend thought beyond surviving the day. When I did have a moment to contemplate, all my thoughts were fearful, panic-filled monsters – dread for the future looming on the horizon. Grief, anger, financial and practical worries. The story of the betrayal played over and over in my mind. I couldn't see past feeling like this, let alone imagine ever being truly happy again.

Of course, everything was going to be OK. The problem is that, in the beginning, there is no way of knowing *how* it's going to be ok, so all we see is our world caved in. The immediate devastation of the car crash makes it impossible to see a way out. This is normal and you have to allow yourself to feel it, honestly and fully. The period straight after the break-up is the time to grieve, not to deny your feelings and put on a coping face. The stress can make you ill. For me, the

immediate physical symptoms following the crisis included a constant knot in the stomach, loss of appetite leading to sudden weight loss, anxiety, panic attacks and a pain in the chest that felt like my heart was sore. You may have felt all or some of these. It is painful and feels unbearable, but it usually eases when the immediate shock subsides. However, it's worth remembering that it's possible to carry longer-term physical symptoms from stresses which have been buried and not dealt with. This is why it is so important to deal with all the emotions and issues as they come up. Your mind doesn't forget your anger, sadness or denial. It just buries them in your subconscious if you decide not to deal with them. And if you don't deal with them, that's when they can manifest into physical tensions in the body. IBS, allergies and migraines are all commonly linked to stress. Keeping your emotions healthy can help keep your body healthy.

What are the emotions you feel?

There are five classic stages of grief as defined by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book, *In Death and Dying*. The model was later expanded to include other forms of personal loss which included divorce and the end of relationships. The stages are:

- **Denial**
- **Anger**
- **Bargaining**
- **Depression**
- **Acceptance**

Written down, neatly listed on paper it looks like five easy steps from heartbreak to happiness. But of course, it's not like that. You flow in and out of them. You think you've left one stage behind, then something happens to pull you right back there. It can go on for months or even years.

The most important thing to remember, no matter what stage you are in, is to let the feelings be felt. Don't try to suppress them because you think "I shouldn't still be angry/crying/depressed by now". If you are, then you *are* and you must let the feeling be expressed.

However, once you've learned how to, you can help yourself to feel better and to move forward with your life. It doesn't mean that you won't find yourself returning to the earlier stages but each time will be shorter, and they will happen less frequently. There is a way out of the darkness.

So, let's return to the five stages of grief in more detail, to see why we feel what we feel, and how we can help ourselves through them.

Denial: "It's not real; they'll come back any minute"

A strange and possibly perverse feeling I experienced in the beginning, was that I didn't want to hear that I was going to be OK on my own, because I couldn't comprehend that I *was* on my own. All I wanted was for this not to have happened. I was in denial.

Do you find yourself not wanting to hear that the break up could be the best thing that ever happened to

you, because a huge part of you still believes that your partner will come back? You might put off making plans and arrangements for the coming weeks or months because “everything will be back to normal by then, when we’re back together”. Or you may find that when friends talk to you about how you’re coping, you aren’t speaking honestly because part of you is thinking “we don’t need to have this conversation, because s/he’ll be back any day now”.

This is a wonderful fantasy to cling to momentarily. It’s comforting because it allows us to get on with our lives. The hope brings a surge of positivity; we begin to get stronger, improve ourselves. Because in denying the reality of our situation, we are really hoping “if they see how great I am now, they’ll want me back”. Well, let’s look at the possible outcomes:

a) Your partner will come back. If you’ve worked on yourself from the inside out and are attractive because you are authentic and happy and love yourself, **and they are worthy of this new you**, then this could be a gorgeous second time around beautiful relationship. But the chances are, that if you are reading this, then it really is over, which leads us to...

b) You work on yourself; you are happy; you’ve grown. You don’t get back together. You fall apart at the setback, and slip into one of the next stages of the grief cycle. This is normal.

Denial is our mind trying to protect us from that which seems too much to bear. But what our mind doesn’t

know is that we can cope with the truth. The saying goes “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” and when you can bear to face the truth that it’s over, that the person isn’t coming back and yet you are *still here*, still standing with even the smallest conviction to go forward, you can be immensely proud of yourself. The goal isn’t to get your partner back; it’s to get YOU back.

Anger: “How Could This Happen To Me?”

When trying to heal with an optimistic attitude or self-awareness, there is often confusion surrounding whether you can be “a positive person” and be angry. For me, the paramount consideration is that the anger is present; you can feel it. To suppress it while you contemplate whether you “should” feel angry is to deny part of yourself. Where the spiritually-wise are correct, is that it is bad for us to hold on to negative emotions such as anger, jealousy and revenge. They ultimately serve no purpose but to damage us and our spirit. Holding anger is toxic, releasing it is vital.

So, you feel anger but it needs to be released in a healthy way. There was a time of course, in the early days, when my anger and resentment were directed straight at my husband. It needed doing, things needed saying and it had to come out. But the time for that passes and, in the long run, it is healthier and serves you better not to unleash your negativity onto someone else, however badly they wronged you.

Screaming and thrashing pillows are safe when you are alone. But for me, with small children around, it wasn't practical. Some people find physical exercise the best

way to let it out. I found getting a writing pad and scrawling down all my angry words in huge raged writing was an amazing release. I wrote pages of diary in the early months, I didn't hold back or edit or suppress. I didn't set a limit as to how long I was going to keep writing but there naturally came a point several months in when I just didn't need to write the angry words down anymore. I didn't share it with anyone, and eventually, as part of a letting go process much later, I destroyed those diaries, because they no longer served any purpose. But they were a wonderful way to feel and express my hurt and pain without inflicting it on anyone else.

Releasing all the anger in one go isn't possible. It would be too much for a person to cope with! This is why we go around in circles with our emotions. We think we've dealt with it, only for it to come up again and bite us a month down the line. But that's not such a terrible thing. After a month or so we may be better equipped to deal with the newer part of the emotion. It's as if we are being protected by our own minds, which is a comfort. Gradual release is healthy. It lets us get on with life, facing the emotions as they come but not letting them fully consume us.

Anger and rage can feel like they are driving you mad and sometimes you need help to release emotions. Counselling, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT*) and Sedona Method* are a few which I tried. Go with what feels right for you and what works for you. The goal is to come out the other side of this experience with a sense of peace and acceptance. Not because it makes you a

“better person” but because it will make you a happier one.

**EFT and Sedona Method are specific learned techniques which help release unwanted emotion attached to negative ways of thinking.*

Bargaining: “If I change they’ll come back”

One of the things that grief makes us do is to look back with regret. If only I had done this differently, if we had sorted out that issue way back, maybe we wouldn’t be here now. One of the hardest things to accept (but which can ultimately bring us the most comfort) is that, whatever happened in the past, we did with the best knowledge, experience and sense of self we had at the time. As a result, things are actually entirely as they should be presently.

Some people try to bargain with their partner; I did. I begged my ex-husband to try to save the marriage. I asked if we could at least try, and that I’d let go if it really couldn’t work; he didn’t want to. Others bargain with their integrity; they promise to change for the other person. It can never work long term, and your true self suffers when you bargain with it. It’s time to notice where in your life you are living for *you*. Not for another person, not for a relationship, but for your own highest good.

If you recognise that you are bargaining and want to stop, that's a great step. If the things that you are feeling, doing and saying are compromising who you truly are then you will know. It requires deep honesty to admit that your relationship wasn't what you thought it was, but it's so rewarding and empowering when you know that you don't have to give anything of yourself up because you are enough without that person.

Depression: "I can't face life alone"

After the initial shock of a split, once the denial and the bargaining fail to comfort us and the anger stops feeling useful, we can go through a period of deep sorrow or depression. There will be days when you feel physically unable to function. Everything looks bleak and there seems to be no positive view to make life seem worthwhile. Sometimes I would feel like I was OK, and then the simplest thing reduced me to an emotional wreck. I remember being out in town one day with my baby, and I walked past a group of young women who looked around the age of the person my husband had left me for; such a small trigger which released memories of my humiliation. I could not function in public that day and ran straight home and cried it out of my system. Feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem feed depressive symptoms. They make you want to hide away and sometimes, for a while, to curl up and die. For those prone to depression, a devastating loss of a relationship can heighten these symptoms. It's vital to recognise when feelings become all-consuming and to get help.

But it is equally important to recognise that depressive feelings are completely normal. The end of a relationship is a bereavement. You have lost someone you love, you may have lost a home and you may have financial insecurity. Your world as you know it has changed completely in some cases, so allow yourself to feel those feelings. Give yourself permission to cry. Few things are more cathartic than sobbing until you feel drained. The important thing to remember is that these are feelings, emotions. They are not who you are, and you can change how you feel when you decide to. That is the key to getting yourself out of the depressive stage.

Repetition of the stages

As I said before, these stages don't always follow through in a particular order and you may come back to one, more or all of them repeatedly. We get stuck sometimes, and our emotions seem to slip backwards. Things that we think we've dealt with return to hurt us. Thoughts go from being positive and forward looking, to being fearful, depressive and sometimes obsessive. This is perfectly normal because healing is a process, not a one-time event.

But if the way you feel is a *choice* why can our powerful mind not simply create enough positivity and joy to cancel out the pain?

When you live a life that you know and are familiar with, your mind creates a future for that life. Even if you don't have in your conscious mind a five, ten or twenty-year plan, your subconscious has made those plans. In your subconscious mind, you are with your spouse until

you die. You imagine any children will grow up together in your family unit; maybe you planned future children together. You have family holidays, perhaps a new house one day, celebrations, careers, highs, lows. You imagined supporting each other through it all.

Then, when that person leaves, unexpectedly, suddenly, painfully, your mind cannot make sense of it. Everything that is in your subconscious mind no longer exists. It has been wiped out and there is nothing to replace it. It is not surprising then, that denial is so very strong in the early stages of grieving. You also start to question your mind. How could you have got it so wrong? If that future you created could so easily be shattered, how can you trust anything you ever believe again?

That subconscious future your mind created cannot just be replaced overnight. It has built up over the years of your relationship. So, never be hard on yourself and feel that you aren't healing quickly enough. The purpose of this book is to let you know there is hope after the heartbreak. But when the bad days come, despite your resolve to be positive, you can now understand why.

Resolving feelings around betrayal

I wanted to write a little about break up due to adultery because it is my own personal experience, and it adds its own specific elements of grief and hurt to the end of a relationship. I became aware that many months down the line of healing and self-love, the affair still tortured me. However much I'd moved on, detached from him,

rebuilt my life and found joy in what I had, the thought of the betrayal still had the ability to bring me feelings of revulsion, pain and anger. And to be completely truthful, despite how amazing my life is now, it's still possible to feel a sense of pain to think that someone I once loved and trusted could be capable of that level of betrayal.

In some cases, the discovery of a partner's affair means the immediate end of the marriage for the betrayed person. In other cases, spouses will take back the person who cheated and attempt to heal the marriage. In my case I wanted to do everything I could to save my marriage. But my husband was emphatic that it was over. He tried to lessen his guilty feelings by saying it happened because he "needed to fly", he told me he wasn't leaving for her, but because it was what he needed to do to be "true to himself". He tried to offload guilt by telling me that I was the root of all his issues, and that I needed to take part responsibility for what he did. But ultimately, he left to be with someone else.

It is a devastating thing to face and I have wept with feelings of worthlessness. When you find out your spouse has been cheating, you realise that they weren't in the same relationship as you at all. And who knows for how long? You reopen the wound of discovery again and again, working out the when and how of the deception. It's not useful, but we all do it. It's an obsession. You get into the comparison game, because his behaviour has told you that you are not good enough. That someone else is better. What makes the betrayal so hard to bear is that we buy into what

someone else's behaviour says about us. I let my husband tell me that "You are too much of this and not enough of that" and "She is so this, and doesn't do that" and I believed it for a long while.

If, like me, you thought you were happy in your relationship; that despite problems (and which marriage doesn't have those?) it was strong and you had plenty holding it together, you will have been stunned at the sudden ending of everything you knew. And if, added to that, you are told that someone else has taken your place whilst you were still in the relationship, then it becomes easy to start feeling a bit worthless and flawed. Because he left me for her so it must be true, right?

Well, here's another way to look at it. I'm interested in the popular idea that thoughts are energy which can create reality, and the book, *The Astonishing power of Emotions* by Jerry and Esther Hicks, contained a really helpful insight. The theory goes that for a relationship to work, both people must be on a matching wavelength of energy. If one is happy and one isn't, then it's not going to work; sounds obvious, doesn't it? The person who is content in a relationship will be sending out positive vibrational thoughts, to create the future life they want to have. If the other person is unhappy and focused on dissatisfaction, dishonesty and fear (the basis for cheating), there is a huge discord occurring. Though unaware on my part, the split was inevitable. He may have told me that I wasn't good enough for him, but the fact is that he wasn't a match for what I wanted and needed.

Realising this greatly comforted me because it helped me understand that I still get to have the happy life I created with my thoughts, it's just that the person I was with at the time was not a match for that life. If he was, then we would still be together. For me to receive that life, with a person worthy of my love, he had to go. Thinking this way requires a real leap in perspective, but we will come to that in a later chapter.

So where does this leave your battered self-esteem then? Well, what it meant for me was that I no longer believed that he left for someone more amazing than me. The other person is, in fact, irrelevant to who you are. If you learn to keep your energy positive and trusting, despite the betrayal, you will get to have the partner you truly deserve when the time is right. But most importantly, for now, you can love and value yourself unconditionally.

Acceptance...finally?

There will be a point when you reach acceptance that it's over. However, acceptance is not the end; it is simply the end of denial. You can reach acceptance and still feel depressed or angry about your situation. So, don't look to reach acceptance as a point of happiness. You need to go further – that is the difference between simply moving on from a break up and truly shining!

In the next chapter, we will look at my additional stages in the healing process which will gradually help you to leave the earlier heartbreak behind and be truly happy.

Exercises

Spend a few minutes in quiet contemplation to see if you can feel which of the identified stages you are currently in, then write down your responses to the questions on the next pages. Don't reject any feelings which come up, just accept that they are a normal part of the grieving process.

Tip: There is no scoring, analysis or solution-finding required, and no good or bad answer. As you work through the book, you can come back periodically to answer the questions again, and see the progress you have made

Denial

Does a part of you still want to get back together with your ex-partner, and why?

Are you putting off any important decisions or discussions because deep down you hope your partner may come back?

Anger

Do you feel wronged regarding the end of the relationship, and in which ways?

Are you at all angry with yourself, and why?

Do you feel the need to 'get even'?

In which ways, and towards whom, do you express your angry feelings?

Bargaining

Would you change things about yourself in order to get your partner back?

What would/could you have done differently to avoid the end of the relationship?

What would you be prepared to compromise in order to make the relationship work?

What would you be prepared to give in order to take away the pain you are currently feeling?

Depression

What proportion of the time do you feel low/sad/tearful?

Are you able to laugh at all?

Do you feel able to function in normal daily situations?

How positively are you able to view your potential future?

Take some time to think about what you've written and try to sum up your feelings in this one last question:

What are your biggest fears about being without your partner?



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