

September 10, 2015

How is shame connected to grief?

Taos News Article

The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.

Dear Ted,

In your article on September 10th you spoke of shame, I'm wondering if you will be more specific on how shame is integrated into grief and loss as well as death and dying?

Thank you, Jill

Dear Jill,

Thank you for following along in reading this column on emotional healing. I'll be happy to expand on specifically shame can have an impact on the grief process as well as the dying process. Shame is a tricky word as it means something different to each and every person. Often it is a word that holds a certain stigma and just hearing the word can make someone retract and want to hide away. Shame has the connotation that you have done something wrong and should have known better, done it differently, or at least had a totally different feeling and/or behavior you are presently experiencing. So often, poor health can be perceived both internally and externally as a choice and a hindrance rather than an issue in which support is needed.

This happens in the dying process as well. You see it well illustrated in these sayings, "She's giving up" or "He quit trying" and other clichés that really don't make much sense, but can be embedded into your psyche and make you believe that you're not supposed to die! These hidden internal dialogues (tapes) can make the dying process more difficult, block important communication, and produce feelings of insignificance in one of the most significant moment of one's life, their death.

Giving space at such an important time allows someone in the dying process to have dignity, ask for needs, take care of certain "last minute" tasks emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually and have a conscious death process in which embarrassment and a resistance to ask for needs and wants turns into a permission that is cultivated and shared. There is grief in dying and there is grief in loss of all kinds.

Within grief, you may have been taught to not have or to express emotions that someone may feel are wrong or inappropriate. You may feel there are certain ways to act or specific things to say and it may not be how you are feeling. In the midst of grief your cognitive functions and your emotional state may be incongruent and out of balance.

Within shame a person may build a certain emotional jail with bars made of survivor's guilt, disenfranchised grief, social stigmas, and resistance to a natural and normal healing process called grief. Having permission to feel, and to remember that emotions do not have to make sense allow someone to step into the next phase of their life. Now they can truly and deservingly live and experience life fully.

Shedding shame and being open to healing and life allows for joy, passion, hope, and growth. Removing your filters that cause roadblocks in your life path is the key to healing from loss.

If you are interested in hearing more about how shame penetrates all of our lives and how we can transform this pain into a strength, I invite you to join us October 24th and 25th at our second conference: Transforming Shame. Golden Willow Retreat will be sponsoring and creating a conference that will be hosted at the Kiva Light Center in Santa Fe. Please visit www.goldenwillowretreat.com for more information and to register.

Until next week, take care.

Golden Willow Retreat is a nonprofit organization focused on emotional healing and recovery from any type of loss. Direct any questions to Ted Wiard, LPCC, CGC, Founder of Golden Willow Retreat at (575) 776-2024 or GWR@newmex.com