



Video Transcript

Grieving Personal Loss: Finding Healing Through Self-Compassion

In grief, we all experience intense emotions. We have sorrow, we have depression, we have loneliness, we have anger. Watch for the double arrow. What that means is there is suffering that we experience that we have no influence over. When you wake up in the morning, ask yourself, who is there? Well, my mama is still alive. My sister is still alive. I still have my children. Hi, it's Judith, Dr. Judith Erman Shapiro with Gaia Goddess. And today we're going to talk about grieving personal loss and how we companion ourselves in an honest, compassionate way. And I'd like to tell you a little bit about myself. I am an end-of-life doula. And I'm a bereavement counselor. And I have done research. I've done original research on something that's called grief trajectories. And I love the idea of grief trajectories because it's very three-dimensional. So the idea of grief trajectories is that grief is not a two-dimensional snapshot. It's just not what happens when we grieve. There's a state before we experience loss, so there are preconditions. Then loss happens and we respond to it. Then a year later, there's a picture of loss or grief. And then two years later, and so on and so on. So grief is not a snapshot. It's a path. And I love that idea. Within that, they have established that there are like five common grief trajectories. There are people who begin by feeling very depressed before the loss. And then after the loss, it increases. And then they come down to the level where they were and they're still feeling grief. For a lot of people, there's a baseline with no depression and no... prior anxiety, and then they experience loss. Of course, those things increase,

but it very quickly comes down to baseline. Believe it or not, that's the most common trajectory of grief. But what I found in my research is that there are as many grief trajectories that I could name and follow the path of as there are unique human beings.

So we all have a path. And I think that prior research has been a little biased because in grief, we all experience intense emotions. We have sorrow. We have depression. We have loneliness. We have anger. Many people also feel joy and appreciation, and they connect to their community and their religious beliefs during that time. All of those intense emotions are normal and not pathological part of grieving. But what I noticed is that we study one thing, and that's sadness and depression. It's a very intense part of loss. But in my experience, it's only part of loss.

So I studied what's called thriving. There are five parts of thriving that have been defined in human psychology. One is our social connectedness. Two is our sense of our own or the discovery of our own personal strengths. Three is having a sense of purposefulness in how we approach life and how we create meaning. Also, our spiritual beliefs are part of our sense of thriving. And then lastly, just having appreciation for life, noticing that we're alive, being appreciative for the unique condition that we are in. But that isn't studied when you talk about grief and loss. And so that's what I studied as part of the grief trajectories. I also studied creativity, that we engage our sense of what's called everyday creativity in how we adapt to the things that we lose, how we adapt to death, how we adapt to loss of any kind. So I think we do need to broaden our sense of what's happening when we're grieving and not just focus on that intense state of emotion where everything is defined as how happy or unhappy as we are. Let me assure you that your emotions are like the weather. Your emotions are going to change over time, no matter how intense they may be. So I want to offer a few ideas, practical ideas for you as you face your personal loss. And the first one is, and I have to tell you, I hated hearing this in my darkest times of grief, but you know what? It's true and it's useful. And that is You must allow yourself time. Why is that so hard to hear? I think it's hard to hear because there's an immediacy we feel. We need to shed ourselves of the discomfort we experience in grief. But it takes time. It takes time for our body to register shock. It takes time for our body to process intense emotion. It takes time for the brain to make sense of this might have happened. That could have happened. How do I consciously and from my unconscious, how do I make peace with all of this? That process takes time. And time will change how you experience grief and how you feel. So number one, please allow for time. The second thing that has become apparent to me is that we need to allow ourselves modes of expression. So if we leave everything buried inside,

then it remains buried inside. And there are so many different modes of expression or self-discovery that we can participate in. We can talk. We can write. We can dance. We can sing. We can sit back and listen to music. We can join a support group where other people are talking about loss. and measure how we are experiencing loss around those other experiences of loss, not by way of comparison, but to help us engage in that conversation with ourselves. It's really, really important. to allow those things to come to the surface and receive expression, that in and of itself is a curative factor. We also want to be gentle and kind with ourselves. And there's a phrase or a concept that comes from Buddhism that I think is really applicable here. And that phrase is, watch for the double arrow. What that means is there is suffering that we experience that we have no influence over. So we experience death or we experience loss. There's no way we can go back and change that or rewrite or re-script what happens. But what happens is on top of the arrow of what's happening, we send out other barbs to ourselves. Why didn't I do this? Why didn't I say this at last? How come? What if I had? And sometimes that turns into blame for others. You might have done this. You could have done this. But all of these arrows that we sling, come as a second happening after the first arrow has happened. So we want to focus on the phrase, no double arrows, remain gentle and compassionate with ourselves. We also want to allow for the transformation to happen. So death involves change. involves change in the reality that we perceive in the world around us. For many people, it involves change of role. So if I was a wife and I lost my husband, if I was a mother and I lost my child, I was a daughter and I lost my parent or my sibling, it means that our roles are restructuring. And we have to be very careful about the biases or stories that we come into the story with. So my husband always says, this is going to be awful. It's just a phrase that he says all the time. And I always say to him, how can you prescript? How can you decide it's going to be awful when you haven't even experienced it yet? So allow for change to happen. Allow for the newness of your reality to take place. And aim for positive transformation. Aim for the parts of thriving that this experience could actually contribute to. Your sense of being connected to those who love you, to your community. Your sense of becoming aware of your own personal strengths. A lot of people say to me, I didn't know. I didn't know that I was this strong. Allow yourself to develop purpose around what you have experienced. And a good example of that is there are many parents who went through loss during school shootings, who went on to be advocates for safety within schools and safety for children within the world, despite their sense of loss. I think we all marvel at the strength of those individuals, but we're all capable of choosing purpose and of experiencing appreciation.

So say you lost someone you didn't know that you were going to lose. When you wake up in the morning, Ask yourself, who is there? Well, my mama is still alive. My sister is still alive. I still have my children. So we can develop and cultivate and enjoy appreciation for life and for those things that we still have. Make sure that you stay connected to your schedule. So establishing a sense of normalcy during the time of grieving is very important. And here's what I'm talking about. Did you eat today? Have you not stopped eating today? Did you sleep last night? Have you taken a shower? Did you make the call you make every week to your best friend? It's really important at times when we feel so lost to just maintain the kind of schedule that you have had as best you can. Those markers, and I'm not saying that this is easy because there are things that disrupt our appetite and our sleep and our doing, but those are markers of normalcy in our day that really help. Listen, there's one more thing that I want to say that might be helpful when you're grieving personal loss, and it's that if you ever feel like it's too much, it's just too much to bear, and you feel like you're drowning, like the water is just, you can't even breathe, that's the time to reach for help. And there is help. There is help out there for you to have. So remember that there are therapists, bereavement counselors, and end-of-life doulas like myself. There are support groups. There's nothing wrong with calling your best friend, calling anyone who you know will have a gentle and listening heart, and asking them. And if you don't know of anyone like that, is there a trusted professional? Does your doctor listen to you well? Does the nurse that they work with listen really well? Is there someone that feels solid to you that you can let them know, I think I'm in a little bit of trouble here. And there are also... Numbers like 911 or 211, where you can call if you feel suicidal, if you feel homicidal, if you feel that you are completely overwhelmed. Please take care of yourself with compassion. Aim for positive transformation. Allow yourself some time. This is Dr. Judith Ehrman Shapiro. I'm with you. I see you and I feel you. And I'm sending you all of my love. Thank you. We hope you enjoyed this practice with Gaia. And if you did, make sure to heart it above and explore more suggestions below. Till next time, love, light, and Gaia.