Finding a pathway from grief to peace

There is way too much overwhelming grief and loss today as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, and more. We need to find new vital pathways to transform the deep sadness of grief and loss into peace and hope. Kathryn Rossi, a clinical psychologist specialising in the use of therapeutic hypnosis and mind-body healing, shares the process she discovered to transform her own grief into peace following the death of her husband and professional partner of 30 years, by applying ‘Rossi Principles’ of their own pioneering award-winning work.

The phrase ‘Oh, you never get over it’, is commonly used to describe grief, and can set the stage for a potential lifetime of misery. The truth is much kinder in that grief does not have to last forever, even when losing one’s soul mate. Grief is a natural and healthy response to loss that is needlessly pathologised in today’s thinking. Grief can be associated with a whole gamut of intense emotional expressions such as surprise, relief, sadness, anger, frustration, and fear. One psychologist, however, believes a transition from grief to peace is possible, ranging from months to years, but not forever, through a process that mirrors the natural cycles experienced within our bodies every 90–120 minutes, day and night.

Psychotherapist Kathryn Rossi specialises in therapeutic hypnosis and mind-body healing. Through much of her career she worked in partnership with her husband Ernest Rossi, a world-renowned psychotherapist, teacher, and author. He was a pillar and pioneer in therapeutic hypnosis, mind-body healing, and psychosocial genomics. When Ernest began his death process Kathryn realised she had no idea how she would live without him, but took comfort that the work they pioneered together would see her through. Ernest died in higher consciousness of natural causes in September 2020. Kathryn’s world opened to many consciousnesses not typically available in usual linear thinking, but not uncommon in spiritual traditions such as meditation and yoga. Subjectively, it felt like a dream state where the edges of reality are blurred. There were times she was unsure if she was awake or asleep, alive, or dead.

She employed critical components of her and Ernest’s work to process grief in a way that provided a sensible and scientific pathway to peace. ‘I no longer live with his loving presence and beautiful touch’, says Kathryn in a recent article in The Science of Psychotherapy, ‘but do live with solid truths of science we discovered together’.

**TAPPING INTO ULTRADIAN RHYTHMS**

Have you ever wondered how ‘Time heals all things’? At the heart of Kathryn’s journey are the ultradian chronobiological rhythms our bodies use for natural healing and creative discovery. An ultradian rhythm is less than the circadian day (~24 hours), and can be highly variable to adapt to life’s circumstances. The most robust ultradian rhythms of life are the ~90–120-minute cycles that imbue peaks and valleys of the Four-Stage Creative Cycle (Figure 1).

Regarding grief, it is important to know that within each ultradian cycle nature offers rest and relief often lasting ~20 minutes. In other words, pain, pressure, and sadness can lift 12 times a day! Kathryn believes we can learn to recognise and benefit from these natural blessings of relief and hope.

At this point, it is important to understand the difference between depression and sadness within the grief experience. Depression is a clinical diagnosis usually associated with a sense of hollow emptiness, while sadness seems to be an emptiness – brought about by the loss of a loved one – that is full of memories. Grief, therefore, employs an active mind and is more associated with sadness.

The distinction is important as sadness is like fleeting clouds passing in the sky and depression is putting down an anchor. According to Kathryn’s paper in the American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis, ‘in grief, this overactive mind is fruitlessly looking for familiar markers of state-dependent memory, learning, and behaviour that are largely absent and beg to be reset’. It is akin to prevent limb pain or tinnitus – both embody an overactive neuronal response to loss. Importantly, this ‘active’ component to grief provides an opportunity for healing. Therapy comes in the relearning and resetting of those ‘markers’, and time is essential. This is where ultradian rhythms can be so helpful because they involve populations of neurons to grow and old ones to rewire life experiences, such as grief, produce pressures mediated through messenger molecules on cell receptors that signal our stem cell genomes to become new neurons; a process called neurogenesis. It takes approximately three to six weeks for a neuron to mature in the adult human brain. However, whereas the physical neural architecture may renew in that time, mood, mindset, and behavioural change take longer because they involve populations of neurons and their downstream effects on what Kathryn terms ‘the embodied mind’.

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This embodied mind – a substrate of consciousness – is key to tapping into the body’s ultradian rhythms to find the moments to reset towards a state of peace incrementally and therapeutically.

Kathryn discovered that the embodied mind uses eight dimensions to reconstruct a satisfying life. These dimensions include emotional, social, cognitive, physical, behavioural, cultural, spiritual, and philosophical. In this expansiveness of what makes us human is where Kathryn’s grief theory differs from others that only focus on the emotional aspects.

**THE MIND–BODY PROCESS**

According to the Rossis, recognising and entering natural trances states can help connect with our healing ultradian responses. It is important to bring an open mind, trust the process, be honest, look for comfort, appreciate that you

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**FIGURE 1. THE FOUR-STAGE CREATIVE CYCLE**

The Creative Cycle (Figure 1) is a microcosm of the larger ultradian rhythms to find the moments to reset towards a state of peace incrementally and therapeutically. Kathryn discovered that the embodied mind uses eight dimensions to reconstruct a satisfying life. These dimensions include emotional, social, cognitive, physical, behavioural, cultural, spiritual, and philosophical. In this expansiveness of what makes us human is where Kathryn’s grief theory differs from others that only focus on the emotional aspects.

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Behind the Research
Kathryn Rossi, PhD

Research Objectives
Kathryn Rossi’s research focuses on psychotherapy, therapeutic hypnosis, rehabilitation, psychosocial genomics, and yoga.

Detail
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Bio
Kathryn Rossi, PhD, has edited or co-authored 20 books in the field of psychotherapy including the 16 volumes of The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson, with Ernest Rossi and Rosanna Erickson-Klein. She has authored ~80 scientific papers on psychosocial genomics, therapeutic hypnosis, and yoga. Currently, she is writing a new book on grief.

References

Personal Response
Your very personal journey through intimate loss precipitated new pathways that may lead to a new psychotherapy for grief. Can you tell us more about that?

The Phoenix rises out of ashes to emerge from devastation to become stronger, smarter, and more powerful. Transcending personal grief to find peace after the death of my husband has opened the door for others to do the same with grace, dignity, and hope. The time is ripe for a new psychotherapy for grief that merges nature, science, and ancient traditions. Mind, body, and soul are the ingredients that make up a full and satisfying life. These are the twigs that create the new nest for the Phoenix to rise to.

Let’s put our heads together and make this happen.