

# 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

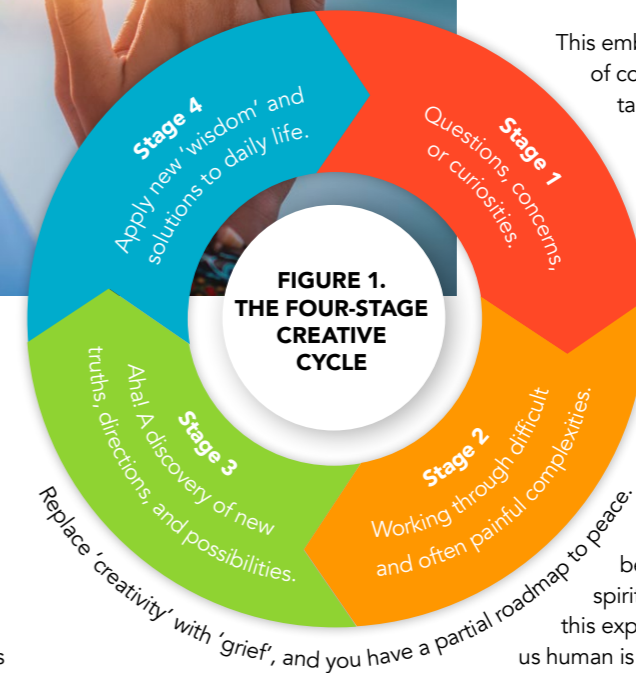
Have you ever wondered how 'Time heals all things'? At the heart of Kathryn's journey are the ultradian chronobiological rhythms our bodies use for natural healing and creative discovery. An ultradian rhythm is less than the circadian day (~24 hours), and can be highly variable to adapt to life's circumstances.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



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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 phantom 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 in that we can learn to recognise progress and healing daily, hourly, and seasonally.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT TIME AND TIMING

When a loved one dies time takes on a different context. It becomes increasingly subjective, seemingly disconnected from objective time. Kathryn says every grief is different but quotes research that suggests grieving behaviour linked to spousal loss typically lasts about three years, whereas hers lasted for one. She then explains that if you examine that time

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scientifically, in terms of the body's ultradian rhythms, within those rhythms are opportunities to reset our mind and come to peace – turning loss into living.

Our minds are flexible, adaptable, and physically grow to respond to changing realities. There is a biology that underlies all of life processes, adaptation, and change.

Life experiences, such as grieving, 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'. It is best to look at one's progress seasonally, realising it takes time for new neurons to grow and old ones to rewire or metabolise and be eliminated.

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 trance 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

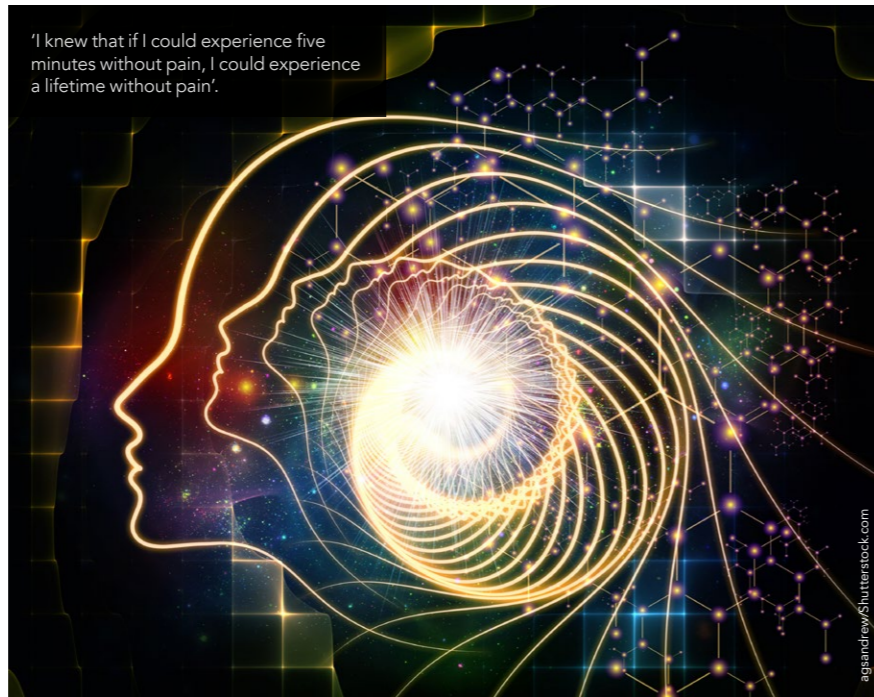
really do not know what is coming next, understand that psychological shocks and surprises are part of kick-starting growth, and to simply be responsive in the present moment.

When Ernest died, Kathryn was motivated to explore this mind-body process to move from a state of grief to one of peace. It was, to a degree, familiar territory for her. Before she met Ernest, she had an accident that left her with a serious and painful neck fracture. Using this mind-body process every day for nine months, she faithfully looked for the absence of pain morning, afternoon, and evening, and used those periods as building blocks for an ultimately pain-free existence. As Kathryn puts it, 'I knew that if I could experience five minutes without pain, I could experience a lifetime without pain'. The question now for Kathryn was whether the experience of looking for the absence of pain could be applied to grief.

Using natural trance states, Kathryn tapped into her basic rest-activity cycle – an ultradian rhythm of approximately 90 minutes, characterised by different levels of activity and rest. The 'rest and relief' period of about 20 minutes was critical for the healing process.



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## It was as if my heart tried to reach out for Ernest's body and would not accept that he was not coming home.

During that time, Kathryn would focus on coming to terms with Ernest's death by experiencing whatever surfaced, no matter how painful, and then the sensation of naturally evolving peace and comfort followed for at least five minutes, gradually increasing that time over successive sessions.

### THE HEALING

After one month, she felt 'a blissful inner peace that dwelled freely for five days. This boded well, but then she started experiencing intense physical discomfort around her heart – angina pain, palpitations, and irregular heartbeat rhythms. She says, 'It was as if my heart tried to reach out for Ernest's body and would not accept that he was not coming home'. Over the next few months, Kathryn experienced extended periods of inner mental peace alternating with periods of physical discomfort, the focus of which shifted from her stomach, genitals, and then her skin. She refers to these periods of mind-body wrestling as 'neurosensory cascades' of change.

After five months, she found most days were relatively peaceful and happy. She

says, 'I had a non-defined "gut" sense that grief was lifting (but) I knew that future waves of sadness were inevitable'. After nine months, the neurosensory cascades seemed to pass, and after a year and nine days, she woke with 'a surprising early morning thought: "I am bored with my grief"'. At that point, Kathryn realised she could confirm 'a job well done' – 'to have faced grief directly, head-on, and to transform into peaceful living in the present moment'.

Kathryn is aware that every grief is different, but as a therapist, she shares her subjective experience in the hope that it will help others grappling with the grief of losing a loved one to learn how time heals. She invites fellow clinicians to investigate this mind-body process with ultradian rhythms as a pathway to peace for those in their care.

Kathryn is grateful to have found how to move through grief to peace, but she also knows there will always be a sense of loss: 'Will I always miss Ernest and wish he were here? Clearly, the answer is yes. But he gave us all, in his lifetime, so many ways to build a better and satisfying future'.



# Behind the Research

## Kathryn Rossi, PhD

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### Research Objectives

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

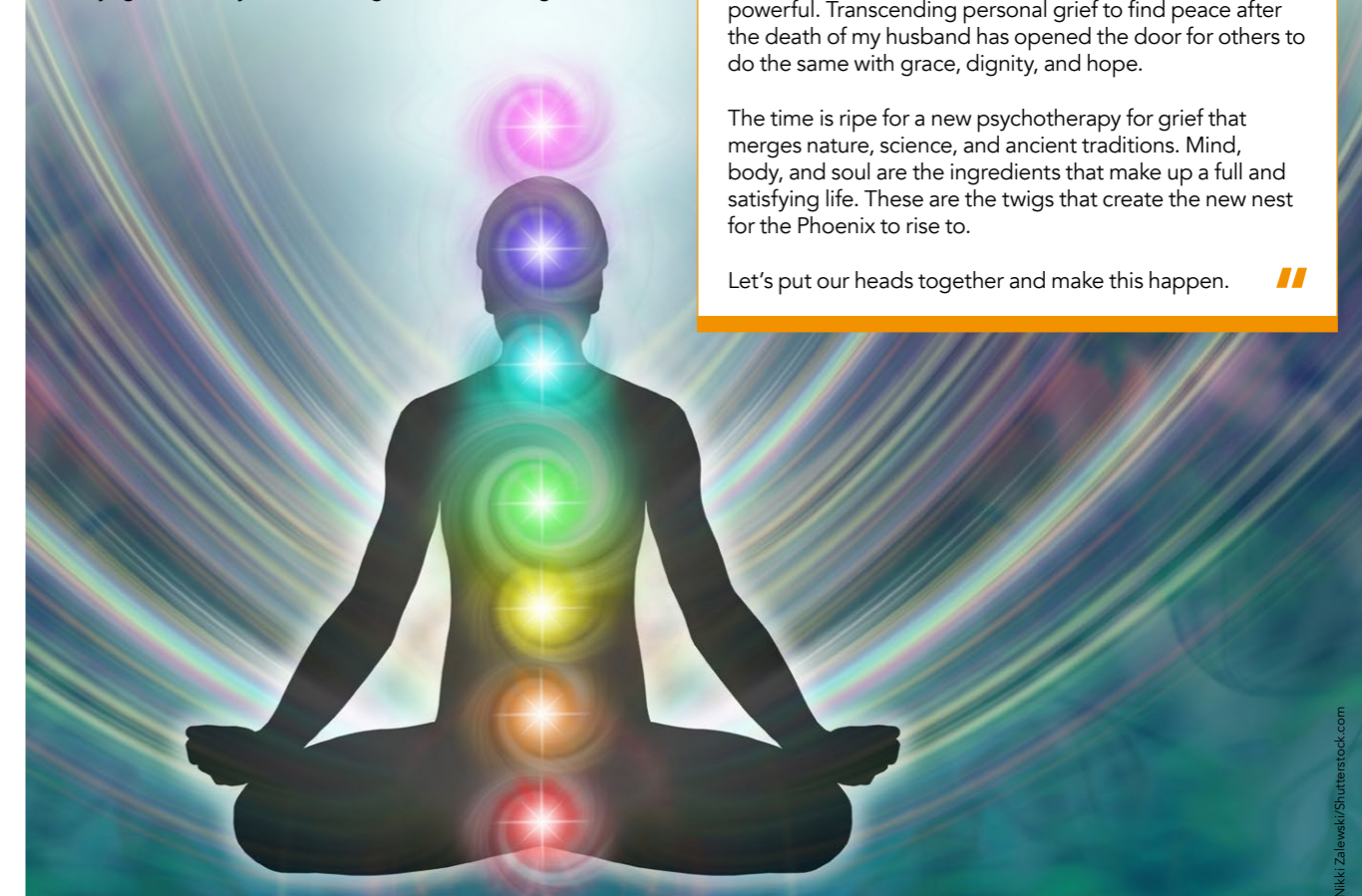
### Detail

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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 Roxanna Erickson-Klein. She has authored ~80 scientific papers on psychosocial genomics, therapeutic hypnosis, and yoga. Currently, she is writing a new book on grief.



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### References

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### 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. ||