

## **THE ASTROLOGY OF GRIEF**

### **An introduction**

A man rings a talk-back radio station distraught. He has just broken a terracotta pot and feelings of upset-ness, rage and guilt flood his body. He can't understand what is happening to him. Yet twelve months ago his wife had died and the terracotta pot was the last item they had bought together. How would you, as the consulting astrologer, deal with such a man if he came to see you? How would you deal with his illogical fear that his known world was shredding before his very eyes?

The experience of grief is among the most fundamental and inescapable aspects of the human condition. The aim of this article is to offer astrologers an introduction as to what grief is and present ways of working with clients in grief in astrological consultation. Some of this work has appeared in published form in "The Mountain Astrologer" October-November, 1999 and been translated into Russian and Dutch, and some of it was presented at the AA Conference in Reading in September, 2000.

People grieve many things. This article looks at grief specifically as it relates to death and how an astrologer can effectively deal with a client in grief from death in the consulting room.

### **WHAT IS GRIEF?**

In their book "The Grief Recovery Handbook (Revised Edition)", Harper Perennial 1998, James and Friedman tell us that grief is the emotional response to loss and the process of adjustment to a new situation. Grief occurs when there are conflicting emotions caused by the end of or change to a frequent pattern of behaviour. For example, if someone you love has been ill for a long time, there may be relief at their death. There will also be sorrow at not being able to continue that relationship.

Grief is a human response that lets us know that for the moment things are different than they were before the loss. Death, divorce, separation, abortion, the loss of limb or lifestyle will precipitate feelings of grief. And though the responses to these losses are similar, it is generally agreed that loss through death is the most significant, possibly because of its finality or because it confronts one's own mortality.

Statistically, once every 9-13 years, we will lose someone and at least twice in our life we will make funeral arrangements for someone we love. 8 million people become new griever each year due to death. And the grieving process takes between 2-5 years to complete, a fact that is largely unrecognized or acknowledged.

For since major emotional losses are not regular occurrences in our lives, few people have any preparation for handling grief or are equipped to support family and friends at times of grief and personal loss.

We have all been educated on how to acquire things: a job, education, a house, a car and almost anyone can take a course in virtually anything that interests them. However, no-one teaches us what to do when we lose things. Every loss, every death we encounter throws us into a balsamic phase; and since we live as a death-denying society which exonerates scientific thought and embraces separation from all other forms of life, that only exacerbates the situation. Couple that with a medical profession which views the loss of life as a failure, the demands of advertising with its mandate to viewers to look and stay young, and the fast-disappearing rituals of life and what we end up with is a society unconsciously believing that aging and death are to be feared. Hence when we come to face this loss, we have very few tools to handle the separation and isolation and believe that within a week, two weeks, or three weeks after the funeral we should start to feel better.

As well, apart from the first few days after a loved one dies, the extended family is usually no longer physically around to support and help a person in grief. And in the precious few days when they are, our culture has determined what sort of behaviour is acceptable - behaviour which doesn't necessarily relate to the needs of the bereaved.

There are two ways to avoid grief in human life:

1. The first is to die young before anyone you love precedes you, the "die young, stay pretty" syndrome.
2. The second way is to avoid ever really loving or caring for someone. That way you never have to be emotionally involved with death

Grief is the price we pay for living a full life.

## **WORKING WITH CLIENTS IN GRIEF IN CONSULTATION**

A good predictive astrologer with an understanding of the grief process can do a great deal for a client in the consulting room. However, I have found it is best to let at least six months pass before taking on a client who is experiencing grief. This is to enable the body to adjust to the circumstances, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually and for the work of grief to commence, that is, the completion of undelivered emotional communication.

The overall experience of people in acute grief are remarkably uniform but the intimate responses are unique. In consultation, the astrologer is not aiming to alleviate suffering but rather to facilitate the healing process by acknowledging what has occurred and shifting it into a bigger picture for the client.

As Bernadette Brady, the co-principal with myself of our astrological teaching school Astro Logos, often says to our students, as astrologers we read a person's Fate, we don't write it.

Hence as astrologers we need to know:

1. the process of grief;
2. that this process fits into the predictive work for the client;
3. how to read that predictive work for a client who is still grieving;

The length of this article means that I can look only at the first one and how it relates to a client's natal chart.

## THE PROCESS OF GRIEF

The process of grief is not the same as the process of dying. In her brilliant and pioneering work, Dr Elisabeth Kubler Ross identified 5 emotional stages that a person may go through when they have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, namely: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. One bi-product from this work has been that people now tend to apply the concept of these stages to other aspects of human emotion. Grief is much more fluid than the rigidity of stages. And the nature and intensity of the feelings caused by the loss relate to the individuality and uniqueness of the relationship.

### Common Responses

However, many griever experience common responses and such responses lap like the waves of the sea around a person in the following way:

- **Shock.** Clients are generally not in denial about the death of someone they love. They know that a loss has occurred. They may be in shock but they are not in denial.
- **Anger** may sometimes be associated with the circumstances of the loss, such as the client being prevented from being with the person who dies. Or if the relationship has been blocked or stifled in some way, then the client may be angry that the person has died before they have had a chance to repair the relationship. However, anger is not an automatic part of grief. Some griever will be angry. Others won't.
- **Reduced concentration**  
The person in grief may find that an idea that got them to move from the house, say, to the garden is forgotten once they reach the garden. This is a normally occurring phenomenon. The client's entire being - emotional, physical, and spiritual - is focused on the loss that just occurred. One needs to assure the person in grief that where possible, it is a good idea to avoid driving, since grieving people suffer an incredibly high percentage of serious and fatal auto accidents and avoid working with any tools that require concentration and mental co-ordination. This preoccupation with the emotions of loss and an inability to concentrate seem to be universal responses to grief

and is another reason why it is important to let time pass to see a client for predictive work. This inability to concentrate is the most common of all responses to loss and seems to be the only way that a person in grief can make sense initially of an incredibly painful experience.

- **Numbness**

The way the body copes when hearing about the death of someone close is to “not feel” for a while – not feel emotionally and/or not feel physically – and it may seem like and has often been mislabelled as denial. However, the body and the mind are using their own intelligences to sort through the ideas, feelings and experiences of a lifetime of relationship with the person who has died, some of which may have been unconsciously hidden for many years and that have now been exposed by the death.

### **Corresponding behaviours include...**

- **Being tearful**

In this world of paradox and contradiction, whilst crying may be a valve to the release of emotions, it can also be used as a way to stop feeling. James and Friedman have found that emotions are contained in the words a person speaks and that the tears a person cries become a distraction from the real pain caused by the loss. It is only as the person gives voice to their thoughts and feelings that the tears disappear and what arises in its place is a real depth of feeling.

- **Disrupted sleep**

People in grief either seem unable to sleep or sleep too much - or find they alternate between the two.

- **Changed eating routines**

People in grief either have no appetite or eat non-stop - or find they alternate between the two.

- **Fluctuating emotions**

People in grief often talk about fluctuating emotions. Experienced as a difficulty in being able to maintain emotional stability, a person in grief will often feel emotionally and physically drained.

The key to recovery from the incredible pain caused by death, divorce, and all other losses, is contained in a simple statement: Each of us is unique and each of our relationships is unique. Therefore, it is important to discover and complete what is emotionally unfinished in all of those relationships. The job of the astrologer is to recognise grief when it is sitting in the consulting room and to act not only with compassion but with knowledge when delineating the predictive work.

## THE SHAPE OF PERSONAL GRIEF

Grief is a very powerful process which takes over and floods a person's life. Grief is painful – and it's supposed to be. It lets us know that for a time, things are different. But like a broken bone, grief must be set properly in order for it to heal in good physical shape and function again. One doesn't want the blocking of grief to throw the person into secondary symptoms, such as depression or weight gain.

One of the great misnomers of our time is that time heals all wounds. "Time" not only doesn't heal but it diminishes our memory the further we move away from the death itself. It is not time that heals the wounds but what you do within that time frame that causes closure and completion. However, the majority of people around us have never had the opportunity to successfully complete their grieving. Parents only pass on to us what they were taught - often this is the unsuccessful conclusion of grief events - and such behaviours can be seen clearly in the natal chart.

## CHART SIGNATURES

I have found the following chart signatures in client work give clues as to how they will or won't deal with the grieving process:

- Charts with a lot of *fixity* or *earth* may find it more difficult to allow introspection and change, and may instead project anger as a way of defence. Such people may have been taught to avoid showing emotion, to be strong for others and not to let it interfere with a person's life. These include: charts with a predominance of *planets in Taurus*, with its fear of emotional change; charts with a predominance of *planets in Scorpio* with its fear of betrayal; charts with *Sun-Saturn* combinations; *Saturn in the 10th house* or *Saturn conjunct the Ascendant* which suggest a need to control their world through fear of domination or suppression; and charts with heavy *Virgo*, *Virgo rising* or *Virgo Moon* can produce a desire for perfection and clear boundaries that causes difficulties in accepting change.
- Charts with *8th house planets* generally probe beneath the surface of events, and if the death of someone close occurs while they are young, going through the grieving process, rather than being shielded from it, is necessary in the understanding of how to utilize that 8<sup>th</sup> house.
- *Sun-Neptune* combinations or charts with a lot of *mutability* may avoid facing grief, preferring to romanticize the memory of the person who has died. They may have been told when young: "Be glad she is no longer in pain, she had a long life, she's in heaven now".
- Strongly *Uranian/Aquarian* charts may refuse to acknowledge the emotional intensity of grief, preferring to intellectualise it, and may instead skate over the deeper issues involved. They may have been told when young to grieve alone.

- Charts with “wounds” may experience grief more deeply and hence find they need more time in processing the event and the changes it brings than what society allows. These include: *Sun-Pluto* connections which confront the father’s mortality at an early age and have to learn to build inner trust as a way of dealing with betrayal; *Moon-Saturn* connections with their unconscious patterns of separation-anxiety and "skin hunger," the unconscious need for human touch that remains unfulfilled, leading to feelings of insecurity and a fear of rejection; *Moon-Pluto* connections which describe an awareness of very intense, adult emotions surrounding them at birth for which they have no resources or understanding, and which get pushed into the unconscious; *Pluto in the 12th* which implies a dramatic or intense birth, the memories of which are usually repressed and later expressed as a fear of death and loss of control; *Pluto on the IC* signifying violence encountered in the home or an intense childhood filled with passionate adult emotions, possibly including the death of the mother or an immediate family member, which in adulthood requires an intense home-front.
- *Pluto conjunct the Ascendant* indicates someone who doesn't run away from deep emotions and is naturally confronting, who feels at home with deep emotional intensity and may confront grief as a way of understanding themselves.
- Charts with a lot of *angular planets* will take action and be effective in challenging situations, and often respond to predictive work as a way of future-pacing.

## CONCLUSION

This article is a brief introduction to the astrology of grief and how to work with clients in the consulting room via their predictive work. Statistically, once every 9-13 years we will lose someone we love. If the grieving process takes between 2-5 years to complete, then 30% of all clients we see as consulting astrologers will be going through this process. We therefore need to be aware if the client is in grief and to read their predictive work accordingly.

