

ABOUT TEARS

There is a sacredness in tears.

They are not the mark of weakness, but of power.

They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.

They are messengers of overwhelming grief ... and unspeakable love.

~ WASHINGTON IRVING

The more profound the grief, the more profuse the tears. For most, but not for everyone, the grief for a beloved will manifest itself in tears. To cry is to be human, just as to laugh is to be human. To laugh heartily is to live fully, and to cry with deep sobs is to grieve fully. As we age into maturity, we may experience moments of paradox when we realize that joy and sorrow can exist simultaneously. We may find ourselves laughing even as we are crying, our tears being symbols of both our sadness and our gladness.

Crying allows us to express the deepest parts of ourselves in a way that far exceeds the capability of the spoken word. We are not all poets, and the deep love felt for the one from whom we are now separated may be best expressed through tears. In the world of grief, words are often inadequate. Tears help us bridge the gap between where we are in our grief today and where we need to move toward tomorrow. Tears are a reminder that we have not forgotten our loved one. Tears connect us to a deeper level to the suffering we are feeling.

Our tears remind us that we are suffering and that part of who we are has been torn apart. We need to honor the tears that rundown our cheeks for they are drops of wisdom from inside of us. This innate wisdom turns our words into water when our sobs are too great for words. Our tears are reminders to grieve boldly and courageously in the manner that each of us needs to do as an individual testament of our love.

Often a sense of embarrassment is associated with crying, a feeling of being out of control. An original meaning of the word "embarrass" was, "to hinder the freedom of movement." When our tears embarrass us, we become prisoners to our emotions. We become locked up or bound down by our feelings. We are unable to express our feelings freely as we need to.

Whether grief is one day old or one year old, or whether grief is timeless, grief by its very nature gives permission to cry. Do not allow your freedom to cry to be hindered by anyone. And most importantly, do not hinder yourself from crying the tears that still need to be shed.

By Timothy Nickel

7 GOOD REASONS TO CRY YOUR EYES OUT

By Therese Borchard

New York Times reporter Benedict Carey referred to tears in a recent piece as "emotional perspiration." Given that I sweat a lot and hate deodorant, I suppose it makes sense that I weep often. But I'm not going to apologize for that, because after a good cry, I always feel cleansed, like my heart and mind just rubbed each other's backs in a warm bath.

In his intriguing article, "The Miracle of Tears", from which I've lifted some of the research for this post, author Jerry Bergman writes: "Tears are just one of many miracles which work so well that we take them for granted every day." Here, then, are seven ways tears and the phenomenon we call "crying" heal us physiologically, psychologically, and spiritually.

1. Tears help us see.

Starting with the most basic function of tears, they enable us to see. Literally. Tears not only lubricate our eyeballs and eyelids, they also prevent dehydration of our various mucous membranes. No lubrication, no eyesight. Writes Bergman: "Without tears, life would be drastically different for humans—in the short run enormously uncomfortable, and in the long run eyesight would be blocked out altogether."

2. Tears kill bacteria.

No need for Clorox wipes. We've got tears! Our own antibacterial and antiviral agent working for us, fighting off all the germs we pick up on community computers, shopping carts, public sinks, and all those places the nasty little guys make their homes and procreate. Tears contain lysozyme, a fluid that the germaphobic dreams about in her sleep, because it can kill 90 to 95 percent of all bacteria in just five to 10 minutes! Which translates, I'm guessing, to three months' worth of colds and stomach viruses?

3. Tears remove toxins.

Biochemist William Frey, who has been researching tears for as long as I've been searching for sanity, found in one study that emotional tears—those formed in distress or grief—contained more toxic byproducts than tears of irritation (think onion peeling). Are tears toxic then? No! They actually remove toxins from our body that build up courtesy of stress. They are like a natural therapy or massage session, but they cost a lot less!

4. Crying can elevate mood.

Do you know what your manganese level is? No, neither do I. But chances are that you will feel better if it's lower because overexposure to manganese can cause bad stuff: anxiety, nervousness, irritability, fatigue, aggression, emotional disturbance and the rest of the feelings that live inside my happy head rent-free. The act of crying can lower a person's manganese level. And just like with the toxins I mentioned in my last point, emotional tears contain 24 percent higher albumin protein concentration – responsible for transporting many small molecules (which has to be a good thing, right?) than irritation tears.

5. Crying lowers stress.

Tears really are like perspiration in that exercising and crying both relieve stress. For real. In his article, Bergman explains that tears remove some of the chemicals built up in the body from stress, like the endorphin leucine-enkephalin and prolactin, the hormone I overproduce because of my pituitary tumor that affects my mood and stress tolerance. The opposite is true too. Bergman writes, "Suppressing tears increases stress levels, and contributes to diseases aggravated by stress, such as high blood pressure, heart problems, and peptic ulcers."

6. Tears build community.

In her "Science Digest" article, writer Ashley Montagu argued that crying not only contributes to good health, but it also builds community. I know what you're thinking: "Well, yeah, but not the right kind of community. I mean, I might ask the woman bawling her eyes out behind me in church what's wrong or if I can help her, but I'm certainly not going to invite her to dinner." I beg to differ. As a prolific crier, especially on video, I always come away astounded by the comments ... the resounding support of people I don't know all that well, and the level of intimacy exchanged among them. Read for yourselves some of the comments on both my self-esteem video and my recent death and dying video and you'll appreciate my point. Tears help communication and foster community.

7. Tears release feelings.

Even if you haven't just been through something traumatic or are severely depressed, the average Joe goes through his day accumulating conflicts and resentments. Sometimes they gather inside the limbic system of the brain and in certain corners of the heart. Crying is cathartic. It lets the devils out before they wreak all kind of havoc with the nervous and cardiovascular systems. Writes John Bradshaw in his bestseller Home Coming: "All these feelings need to be felt. We need to stomp and storm; to sob and cry; to perspire and tremble." Amen, Brother Bradford!