



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

together we remember... together we heal...

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.bereavedparentsusa.org

JULY/AUGUST 2014



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, July 3rd -- Topic: "Moving Towards Independence from Our Grief"

Thursday, August 7th -- Topic: TBA

7:00 at The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, 10 Children's Way, Poughkeepsie, NY

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information



A WARM WELCOME TO NEWCOMERS

We understand how difficult it is to attend your first meeting. Feelings can be overwhelming; we have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Our stories may be different but we are alike in that we all hurt deeply. We cannot take your pain away but we can offer friendship and support. Bring a friend or relative to lean on if you wish.

BEFRIENDING YOUR BODY: HOW YOGA HELPS HEAL TRAUMA

Q&A with Bessel van der Kolk

*Bessel van der Kolk, MD, is a clinical psychiatrist whose work attempts to integrate mind, brain, body, and social connections to understand and treat trauma. A frequent Kripalu presenter, he is a professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine; director of the Complex Trauma Treatment Network, NCTSN; and medical director of the Trauma Center in Boston, where he was principal investigator of, thus far, the sole grant from the National Institutes of Health to study the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) using yoga. His forthcoming book, *The Body Keeps the Score* (Viking Press), examines how trauma affects the brain and body, and looks at a variety of treatments, including yoga. Kripalu Compass spoke with him recently.*

Q What is yoga therapy?

A I don't use that term. As far as I'm concerned, there's no special thing called yoga therapy. Yoga is simply a wellness practice that can help people blossom and restore health and peace of mind.

Q How does yoga practice impact people who have experienced trauma?

A When people think about trauma, they generally think of it as a historical event that happened some time ago. Trauma is actually the residue from the past as it settles into your body. It's located inside your

own skin. When people are traumatized, they become afraid of their physical sensations; their breathing becomes shallow, and they become uptight and frightened about what they're feeling inside. When you slow down your breathing with yoga, you can increase your heart rate variability, and that decreases stress. Yoga opens you up to feeling every aspect of your body's sensations. It's a gentle, safe way for people to befriend their bodies, where the trauma of the past is stored.

Q How important is talk therapy in treating trauma?

A If you've been traumatized, you're likely to have a very distorted relationship to your body. My particular angle, or contribution, is that trauma is really a somatic issue. It's in your body and, because of that, yoga has great relevance, because it goes directly to sensing and befriending the body. While talking and knowing what happened and being able to articulate it is an important part of treatment, the most important part is starting to regain ownership of your body and be comfortable in your own skin.

Q What does the evidence show as far as yoga's efficacy?

A Our studies show that yoga has at least as beneficial effects in alleviating traumatic stress symptoms as the best possible medications. In the studies we did involving neuroimaging of the brain before and after regular yoga practice, we were able

to show that the areas of the brain involving self-awareness get activated by doing yoga, and those are the areas that get locked out by trauma and that are needed in order to heal it.

Q You also use other techniques to treat trauma, including EMDR, neurofeedback, and theater. How does each of these work?

A My approach is very much “one size doesn’t fit all.” One method doesn’t benefit everybody. In order to recover from trauma, you need to address a large number of different systems. EMDR is particularly helpful to integrate traumatic memories, and it does so by shifting some areas of the brain involved in memory processing. Neurofeedback can affect brain activation patterns—it can actually change brain waves, and can help to make people’s brains quieter and more attentive. Yoga might be able to reach the same goal, but it would probably take longer. Theater is particularly helpful to help people gain a voice and to deeply inhabit a particular state. Instead of always feeling frightened or withdrawn, they can act like a king or a powerful warrior. It’s a consciousness-expanding tool. Also, traumatized people often misread other people, or become withdrawn or scared of others, and theater allows for deep engagement with other people.

Q Does yoga also promote connection for this population?

A I don’t think yoga is a very social enterprise, but it’s interesting that it’s so much more satisfying to do yoga in a group than by yourself. There’s a likelihood that doing yoga in groups may activate the mirror neuron system of the brain, which is a system damaged by trauma, so practicing yoga and meditation in groups might give people a deeper sense of belonging.

Q You train yoga teachers to work specifically with people recovering from trauma.

A Yes, we run a program at Kripalu twice a year that’s attended by about 100 yoga teachers from around the world. It’s important to be aware that trauma is not unusual in people’s lives. About 80 percent of the population has experienced a trauma at one or another point in their life, through accidents, alcohol, depression, family violence, or other circumstances or events. It’s very useful for yoga teachers to become aware of the implications of what

they say and do, and the speed and the intensity of their methods and the effect it might have on people. Learning to own your body can be a terrifying thing—many people might have flashbacks and become panicked when they start doing yoga.

Q Is the mainstream health-care system beginning to recognize yoga as an effective treatment for trauma?

A I wouldn’t say it’s conquered the mainstream world by any means. You see evidence here and there—yoga is going on in some police academies and in the military. But it’s almost impossible to get research funding for this work, and I’m still considered an outlier for advocating for yoga for PTSD. Is mainstream medicine and psychiatry aware of the full potential of yoga for the treatment of trauma? No, absolutely not.



“scratch the surface of her joy and you
will find a well of sorrow. dive into the
well and discover her spring of hope.
follow that spring to the river of her
strength, compassion and faith...
immerse yourself in her river and you
will have touched her soul.”

~ terri st. cloud, bone sigh arts



CLOSE TO THE GROUND: *Lean In To Suffering*
by Gerry Larkin

The young woman sitting next to me looks to be in her late 20s. Given our proximity to the University of Oregon, she could be a graduate student, maybe, or a young professor. She is sipping a big bowl of café au lait, her head bent low. I try not to notice her weeping, but her sadness is so palpable I can feel my own tears forming. After a minute or two, I decide to move a couple of tables away to give her some privacy.

But I can’t get her sadness out of my mind. At my age, I’ve experienced my fair share of suffering—lost relationships, near-fatal automobile accidents, losing

four dear friends in the past few years. But the story that comes to mind as I think about sadness surprises me. It happened to a young student of mine, back in Detroit. Maybe it surfaces because she looked like this young woman—lovely and full of life, with a rare intensity.

M. worked as a high-end escort for businessmen visiting the city on weekends. The way I remember it, she had several regular clients and was saving up with a plan to get out of the business, when she got into another argument with her boyfriend about it while they were driving one Saturday morning. This time he told her that if she didn't quit immediately, he would kill himself. He pulled the car over, pointed a pistol to his head, and told her she needed to make her decision. Panicked and hysterical, the young woman called me at the temple. As I struggled to understand her—he pulled the trigger.

Her suffering was immediate and overwhelming. Fifteen years later, none of us who were close to her at this time has ever forgotten that phone call and its aftermath. The first noble truth of Buddhism is that life is suffering. Minor suffering mostly, but sometimes overwhelming suffering. Nobody is left out.

One of the Buddha's first disciples was the son of a wealthy merchant named Yasa. They had met early one morning in the forest, by accident. Yasa was bemoaning his "perfect" life. He had just spent most of the night partying. His parents catered to his every whim, which translated into a luxurious lifestyle: a mansion of his own, fine clothes, money, music, women. If he were alive today, he would have his own reality show.

Yet when Yasa met the Buddha, he told him that his life was miserable. Having everything he could ever want hadn't protected him from boredom, worry, fear, or anger. Seeing how happy the Buddha looked, he wanted to know his secret. The Buddha responded: everyone suffers. While we may learn to manage our suffering through therapy, meditation, talks with good friends, and exercise, if we look closely, we'll see that the suffering doesn't ever go away completely. And while it is easy to say that joy is also always a part of life, when we suffer, we suffer. Period.

Ironically, the second truth Buddhism has to offer is that the way through suffering is just that: straight through it. How do we do this? First, we name it. Heartbreak. Worry. Disappointment. In doing this we admit that we are suffering.

Then we need to lean into it with everything we've got, using all the help that is available to us. An old koan teaches this: "The whole world is on fire. How do you sit in meditation?" Until we realize that there is

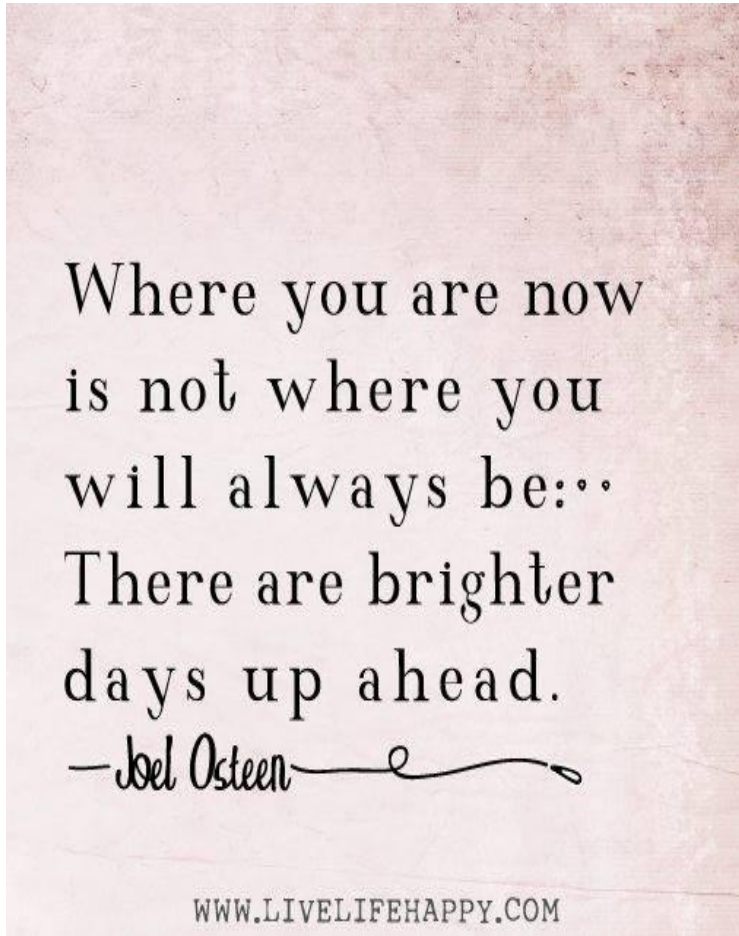
simply no escape from the pain that life brings and that *all* we can do is to sit in the middle of the fire, we only pile suffering on top of suffering. Resistance is like that.

So we lean in. And suffering dissipates. When we came together, all of the temple residents wept with our young friend. For weeks we did special practice together. Meditation. Chanting. Prayer. Prostrations. I think she attended every retreat offered that year. Slowly, slowly I watched the light come back into her eyes. When she later married a wonderful young man, I got to perform their wedding ceremony. We could look at each other with the great love that seems to grow out of shared sadness. When she had her baby, we all rejoiced. We still do.

Words to Live By...

Use this recitation in moments of suffering:

***Breathing in, I return to the
island of just this moment.
Here is where the sky, the ground,
and the air hold me up, comforting me.
Breathing out, I begin again.***



Where you are now
is not where you
will always be...
There are brighter
days up ahead.
—Joel Osteen—

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From the Ugly Shoes Club Facebook page: Here are the top 10 pieces of advice I can give you when you are in deep grief:

1. Just breathe for the first few weeks.
2. Try at least once a day to go for a walk even if it's only for 15 minutes.
3. Have extra rest as grief is very hard on your body and you have just received a massive shock.
4. Avoid heavy drinking as it will only exaggerate your sadness.
5. Try very hard to focus on the positive impact your person has given you.
6. If you keep seeing them in death only, quickly change that memory to a picture of them smiling and laughing.
7. Understand you may not get many signs when your grief is very heavy, some do some don't.
8. Forgive people when they try to tell you they know how you feel, they are only trying to be kind.
9. Hold off seeing a medium reading for at least 4 months. Your deep grief may hinder the process.
10. Spend five minutes a day picturing them in a beautiful place where they have full access to all you do.

You see it takes time to heal but what is important is to understand there are billions of people who have been where you are before you and there will be billions more after you. Death is a part of life. You are not being punished - you did not do anything bad in a past life - you are a spirit having a human experience and part of that experience is facing grief.

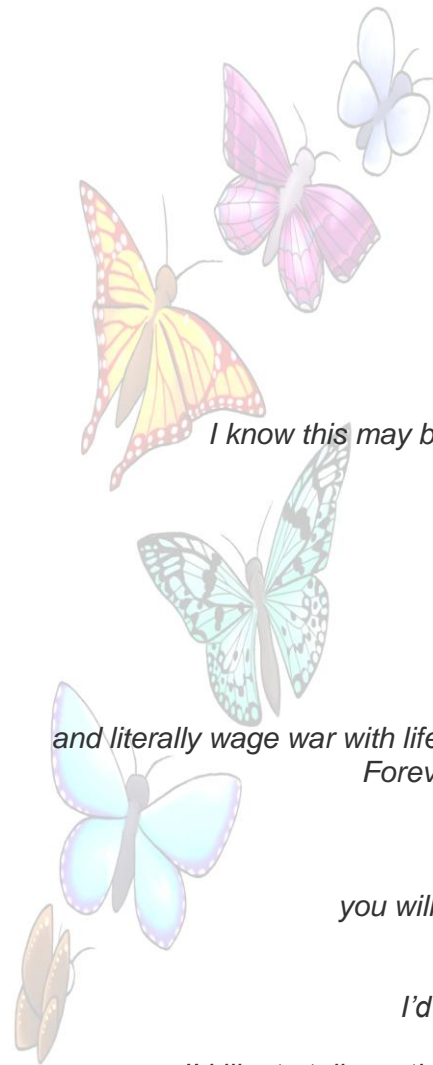
GRIEF IS NOT THE ENEMY by Tom Zuba

*Grief can be a powerful, transformative teacher
if you let it.
There is a new way to do grief.
Grief is not the enemy.*

*But oh do I know how it can feel like one.
The enemy.
Especially at first.*

*Grief is actually our automatic, internal response to
loss.*

*Grief is
God's way
Life's way
Love's way
of saying
stop
everything.*



*Everything.
And
reevaluate
realign
regroup
reassess
repurpose
remember
and
reawaken.*

*I know this may be impossible to believe.
Especially at first.*

*And you are entitled to
fight
kick
scream
wail
resist*

*and literally wage war with life for as long as you like.
Forever, in fact, if you desire.
And by doing that
by waging war
with life itself
you will be creating hell for you
right here on earth.*

*I'd like to tell you it's easy.
It is not.*

*I'd like to tell you there is one book to read,
one teacher/guru/shaman/sage/wise one
to follow.*

There is not.

*I'd like to tell you there is one lecture to go to,
5 easy steps to take,
one miraculous course to take.
There is not.*

*But there is your next step.
And then your next step.
Followed by another step.*

*And to determine your next step I encourage you to
read everything
listen to everyone
follow several (many)
teachers/gurus/shamans/sages/and wise ones.*

*Take it all in to determine what resonates with you
now.
At the place you find yourself today.*

*You will recognize (remember) truth when you
encounter it.*

*And when you know
at your very core*

what your next step is,
even if there is a twinge of doubt
and a mountain of fear,
take it anyway.

Take the next step.

Move in the direction
of light
and love
and life itself.

Let grief be your teacher.
Grief is not the enemy.

*We've been led to believe that in order
to heal after the death of someone we
love, we need to find "closure"...*

*The task is not to seal off loss but
rather to find a way to live
meaningfully with it...*



"Anchored on the edge of beauty.
Alive but not living.
Watching but not experiencing.
Sleeping but not dreaming.
My name is Grief.
Welcome to my world.
Where most stay..
because they don't know they can
leave."

Christina Rasmussen



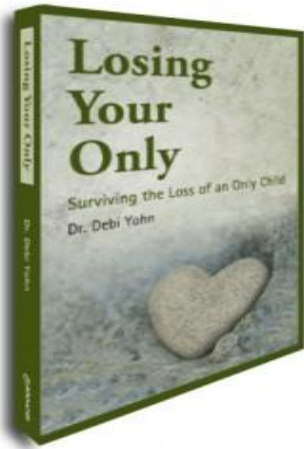


BOOK REVIEW

TRANSCENDENCE

A Buddhist Prayer

By Joan Halifax Roshi



LOSING YOUR ONLY By Dr. Debi Yohn

More and more people and families are dealing with the loss of loved ones of all ages – and there are so many that have no idea how to grieve and how to make the necessary changes in their lives. This is where Dr. Debi Yohn can help.

A Comment From Dr. Debi About Losing Your Only

*My current book, **Losing Your Only** is written to the Parents or Loved Ones that have lost an only child. This book is written from my own personal experience. When my only child was killed in a car accident, my life took a different path. I was living in Shanghai China. He was going to college in USA. In my grief, I discovered that my purpose is to motivate, and support parents and all clients live to their life potential. Losing a child is horrific; losing an only child brings it up a notch. So what do we do with that kind of experience? We have decisions to make. We can live or we can die with the child. I decided not only to live, but to thrive.*

LOVE GIFTS

Special thanks to

Al and Cheryl Sanza in memory of their daughter Liz

Patti Tucker in memory of her son Kevin

Kathy and Nick Zanikos in memory of their son, Gregory

Charlie Barnett in memory of his daughter Melissa

Kitty Maier in memory of her son Edward

Lynita and Perry Plain in memory of their son Aaron

Dianne Sinon in memory of her son Sean

Donna Moray in memory of her daughter Lisa

Kathy and Joe Corrigan in memory of their son Michael

Linda Mack in memory of her son Danny

Emily's friend in memory of Bonnie LaRocca

Charlie and Janet Powers in memory of Michael Corrigan

Pat Roza in memory of her son Christopher



**Mail donations to Patti Tucker, 11 Trails End,
Hopewell Junction, NY 12533**

*May sorrow show me the way to compassion.
May I come to recognize the gift of my loved one's
death by opening my ear of compassion.
May I realize grace in the midst of suffering.
May this experience in some way be
a blessing for me.
May loving-kindness sustain me.
May love fill and heal my body and mind.
May I be peaceful and let go of expectations.
May I find peace and strength that I may use my
resources to help others.
May I receive the love and compassion of others.
May all those who are grieving be released from their
suffering.
May I offer love, knowing that I cannot control the
course of life, suffering, or death.
May I be open to the true nature of life.
May I open to the unknown as I let go of the known.
May I offer gratitude to those around me.
May I be grateful for this life.*

**WHEN YOU HELP
SOMEONE WHO IS
LOST AND CONFUSED;
WHEN YOU HOLD
SOMEONE WHO IS
SAD AND GRIEVING;
WHEN YOU HUG
SOMEONE WHO IS
UNHAPPY AND
HOPELESS;
YOU TOO WILL FEEL
HEALED AND WHOLE.**
Incredible.



IN LOVING MEMORY CHRISTOPHER USIFER

November 28, 1984 ~ July 4, 2007

Miss You and Love You Christopher.....

*You changed me.
You changed who I am,
You changed who I will be
I am forever changed because of you.*

You've taught me that love has no boundaries

You've taught me that there is more to life than what I know.

You've taught me to really truly count my blessings.

*You've taught me the strength of a bond
between a mother and a child.*

Life is unpredictable.

*Life is about the love you share,
and the people you share it with.*

*Life isn't easy and there is pain beyond measure
but my life must continue, even though your life is gone.*

*I must continue,
so that I can change the lives of others
the way you have forever changed me.*

7 STEPS TO HAPPINESS

*Think less, feel more.
Frown less, smile more.
Talk less, listen more.
Judge less, accept more.
Watch less, do more.
Complain less, appreciate more.
Fear less, love more.*

~ Doe Zantamata