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A STUDY OF GRIEF AND SORROW

MAYAN REVELATION NUMBER 260

The Nature of Grief and Sorrow

The Treatment of Grief and Sorrow

The Psychology of Grief

The Power of Faith to Heal

The Character of Sorrow

Conclusion

Affirmation

Beloved Perfector:

As we advance in the study of Mayanry it is essential that we examine at some point our attitudes toward those experiences which bring grief and sorrow to our daily lives. The tragedies which result in grief and sorrow are, fortunately, not too numerous. It is possible that you may never have faced a situation so overwhelming that you wondered how you could keep going. But such experiences have come to most of us. And they will inevitably come to you. It is important that we learn how to deal with those hours when we are grief-stricken and engulfed by sorrow.

This Lesson differs from others in that it deals with the preparation of your mind for what may happen. Some of you, Beloved Students, are now facing moments when the loss of a loved one has blotted out all normal thinking about the present and the future. For most of you this Lesson will be a form of preparation for what may occur next year or ten years from now.

Furthermore, we do not live in isolation. Our happiness is closely interwoven with that of others. When we understand the physical and mental influences of grief and sorrow upon the lives of those with whom we associate, we are better able to help them. We can offer the guidance, and the spiritual undergirding, by which they may be enabled to regain some measure of self-assurance and peace.

It is not a rare occurrence to find those whose happiness is undermined by the obsessive grief of a friend. I know of two school teachers who shared an apartment. Their lives were filled with normal and happy experiences until the mother of one of them died suddenly of a heart attack. The daughter was stricken by uncontrollable grief. She felt unreasonable guilt because she had not done more for her mother. She became silent, uncommunicative. She refused to go out socially. She seemed to appreciate the sympathy of her friend, but she did not respond to it. Her grief led her to draw within herself, shutting out even the

one who had been a companion for several years.

This incident points to one of the reasons for seeking to understand the nature of grief and sorrow, and for learning the best way to deal with these problems. Sooner or later you must face moments of personal tragedy or separation. You will also have opportunities to help relatives, neighbors and friends who are tortured by the loss they have suffered.

As you study this Lesson you may feel that it deals with principles far removed from your present circumstances. Accept the teachings as necessary to an understanding of the universal experiences of men and women. Prepare for what may some day prove to be the major problem which confronts you. Fix in your mind a pattern for the support you will want to give to those about you who are facing tragedy.

Earnestly and reverently repeat the following prayer and then proceed with your Lesson.

PRAYER

Dear Father, Thou art the giver of all of life. The universe, and all that is within it, is in Thy hands. Thy power is offered to all who will receive it. Enlighten our minds that we may understand both life and death. Enable us to walk with courage, the path which Thou hast set before us. Give us comfort in hours of sorrow, and hope great enough to overcome our grief. May Thy spirit enable us to triumph over loneliness. Let Thy peace fill our hearts today and always. Amen.



THE NATURE OF GRIEF AND SORROW

GRIEF and sorrow usually originate in bereavement, though there may be other sources. A parent may exhibit signs of excessive grief when a child is critically injured in an accident, or when he fails scholastically, or morally. Distress may come from loss of property. One of the most pitiable victims of grief I have ever encountered was a woman whose house and possessions were destroyed by fire. But by far the most frequent cause of sorrow and grief is the loss of a loved one.

We seldom draw a line between grief and sorrow. The dictionary indicates that they are synonymous. Modern psychology, however, does note a distinction between the words. Grief is a morbid form of sorrow, and its manifestations are serious and long lasting. Sorrow is normal in hours of bereavement. It is a natural state of mind when a loved one is a victim of sickness or accident. Grief, on the other hand, affects the total personality of the individual. It often involves the subconscious attitudes of the one who is grief-stricken toward the one who is deceased.

In order to gain greater insight into these personality states we will deal in this Lesson with grief from the psychological viewpoint, and regard sorrow

as the normal state of mind of one who is facing the loss of a loved one. Remember that the definition of the words is only to give us a tool with which to work. The effect of these experiences on the personality is what we need to understand.

Try to keep an open mind to the ideas which are suggested here. Your entire life can be ruined if the poisonous aspects of grief are ever allowed to gain control over your thinking. Even the greatest loss, however, can be endured and overcome if you appropriate certain spiritual principles. Sorrow can be lifted by the assurance of divine purpose and strength.



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GRIEF

GRIEF goes deeper than sorrow. It affects, and in turn is affected by, both the conscious and subconscious selves. It is frequently accompanied by a feeling of complete hopelessness. In many respects it is similar to the extreme form of melancholia which may become so severe that it requires hospitalization. Often it produces listlessness and lack of interest in people or events. Frequently the victims of grief do not shed tears. Their friends say of them: "If only they could weep they would get relief." But they seem unable to cry.

The grief-stricken person draws within himself and tends to become morbid. He will not carry on a sustained conversation upon any subject except his own trouble. I knew a man who lost an only son in the Korean War. He gradually shut himself in a world which included only his own thoughts. He closed up his son's room and insisted that it remain unchanged. Each morning he took out his son's suits, brushed them, and replaced them as they were before. When he met people or business associates he soon launched into a recital of his personal woes. When he was with his family he remained silent for hours at a time. He was a victim, not of sorrow, but of pathological grief.

Grief tends to change the disposition and personality of its victim. You may have met a person who was so affected. He had been cheerful, but his grief made him hostile, irritable, and unsocial. Though once he was affable, now he became continually morose. He avoided his friends. He refused to attend worship services, although he once found great satisfaction in being a part of the life of the church. Sometimes grief even causes a person to blame God for the misfortunes which have shattered his happiness.

The one who grieves deeply may lose all interest in the type of recreation or social life which once meant a great deal to him. St. Augustine revealed this characteristic of grief when, after the death of a friend, he wrote: "My heart was black with grief. Whatever I looked upon had the air of death. My native place was a prison house and my home a strange unhappiness. The things we had done together became sheer torment without him. My eyes were restless looking for him but he was not there. I hated all places because he was not in them ... I bore my soul all broken and bleeding, and I could find nowhere to sit down and rest. Not in shady groves, nor in mirth and music, nor in perfumed gardens, nor in formal banquets, nor in books, nor in poetry could I find peace. I hated all things, hated the very light itself."

We have known such victims of grief to indulge in prayers for the dead

- not for themselves - though formerly they had never even tried to pray. Sometimes they have become drawn to a person who promised occult communication with the other world. Sometimes they have developed a delusion that the one whom they miss is not dead at all. They expect him to return at any moment.

It is not enough to assert that people whose reasoning is distorted by grief are not "thinking straight". They are no less ill than victims of pneumonia. It is clear that mental and spiritual therapy is required.

A person may need help when the loss of a loved one blots out every light of hope and assurance. Recognize this. When bereavement comes to you, or to someone whom you might aid, follow carefully the principles to combat grief which are included in a later part of this Lesson. At this point it is enough to recognize that the symptoms of extreme grief indicate that mental and spiritual guidance is needed.



THE CHARACTER OF SORROW

*L*ET us now consider the ways in which sorrow differs from grief. In the first place, in sorrow the element of hope is never completely absent.

The bereaved person may for a time be confused and shocked, especially if the loss has come suddenly, and without warning. Gradually he becomes adjusted to the altered circumstances. He does not indulge in delusions that the tragedy has not occurred, nor in the phantasy that the situation will be restored to normal in a given time.

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In the second place, sorrow presupposes that love exists in the heart of the one who mourns. When two persons are tied together by the bonds of genuine love, the death of one brings to the other an experience of serious emotional upheaval. This is no less true when the love is friend for friend, than it is when the ties are those of family and home. Usually grief involves feelings other than, or in addition to, love. Possessiveness is the predominant factor. Possessiveness is seldom free from selfishness. Love, on the other hand, is unselfish; it always places the well-being of the loved one before selfish considerations. Nowhere is there a better description of genuine love than in St. Paul's thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. Read it in connection with this Lesson.

Grasp the principle that grief is essentially selfish. It will contribute to your sustained health and happiness. All too often we sorrow for the loss of someone dear, but we grieve for the loss which we ourselves have suffered.

The genuineness and intensity of sorrow depends upon the strength of the love we hold for the one from whom we are separated. If the feelings are strong, the sorrow may be a crushing experience. Where the sentiment is real, but not strong, the sorrow, though genuine, will not leave a permanent mark. Where love is altogether absent, death may cause signs of distress, but these are sometimes a performance for the benefit of observers.

When the person who has died is very old and a burden to himself and to others, one may feel sorrow at his passing, but such feelings are mingled with

relief at the thought that his sufferings are ended. If such a passing causes grief then we must discover whether neglect, or failure, has created feelings of guilt within us. If hatred rather than love has marked the relationship, secret satisfaction and not sorrow may be experienced when the separation comes.

Sorrow, then, is a result of love. It is one of the deepest and most universal characteristics of humanity. It inextricably binds together all mankind. It is the feeling you can share with all men and women who mourn because of separation from those they love.

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In the third place, sorrow, as opposed to grief, tends to strengthen and ennoble the person affected. Grief hardens and twists one's character, making a man self-centered and morbid. Sorrow has the opposite effect. It deepens affection for those who are sympathetic. A recent book tells the story of a woman whose entire character underwent a radical change through the discipline of a great sorrow - a change from harshness and selfishness to rare tenderness and saintliness. This can happen in real life, as dramatically as in fiction.

Sorrow is painful. It brings heartbreak. But let sorrow show you values which you have forgotten. Let it enable you to see life at its best and noblest. Let it lead you to a decision to remodel your life after the dream you have glimpsed, but never realized.



THE TREATMENT OF GRIEF AND SORROW

WE now turn to a consideration of how we can handle grief and sorrow, not only in ourselves, but in our dealings with others. It should be clear from the earlier parts of this Lesson that grief offers a more serious problem than sorrow. We have suggested that grief often has its foundation in the personality of the one who grieves. Frequently the source lies in previous experiences which were repressed.

A report of a recent incident which occurred in an English town may help us to understand what is involved. A woman manifested every sign of extreme grief when her pet dog was killed by a passing automobile. She could not control her emotions, resisting every friend who offered encouragement, weeping almost incessantly for a number of days.

A counselor discovered that the loss of her pet animal was not the full explanation of her grief. The dog unconsciously symbolized for her an only child which she had lost at birth. The woman blamed her doctor for the child's death, and was bitterly resentful. As time passed her resentment was repressed. At about the same time she secured her pet animal and quickly transferred to it her frustrated affections. From then on the dog symbolized, and took on all the values of, a child. She grieved for its loss as she would have for her own baby. The incident brought out her suppressed resentment, and plunged her into grief which was entirely out of proportion to its cause.

Sometimes a sense of repressed guilt is the chief factor in the explanation

of grief. I attended the funeral of a woman who had led an exceedingly difficult life. Her husband had neglected her; and he had treated her cruelly on many occasions. At the service he wept uncontrollably. Later he erected a huge monument over her grave. He would interrupt conversations to tell people about the wonderful wife he had lost. Part of his performance was for the benefit of those who were acquainted with his neglect, but part of it was grief dictated by a strong feeling of guilt.

When factors such as these are involved it is helpful if we are willing to face them. However unpleasant it may be, to recognize that our grief is a product of selfishness, or self-pity, it is important in gaining inner peace and happiness. Then grief is changed to sorrow, and can be handled as such.

Let us look, then, at the suggestions which will help us in hours of sorrow.

1. Remember that time is always a healing factor. We are wise not to make serious decisions too quickly, but to take up the interests which had formerly engaged our attention. Get back into the normal channels of contact with friends as soon as possible. Welcome the sympathy and understanding of those about you. If you are tempted to feel that friends are inconsiderate because they do not frequently refer to your sorrow, remember that they hope to spare you pain by not talking about the loss you have suffered. Their sympathy may be deeper than you realize.
2. The time to show consideration for a sorrowing friend is not only at the time of death, but in days and weeks that follow. It is then that loneliness takes hold. It is then that the friend begins to realize the changes that are inevitable because of the loss of a loved one. It is then that true understanding can make its fullest contribution.
3. Loosen the grip of your sorrow by re-directing your love; or bring comfort to someone else who is mourning by leading him into new avenues of service.

Parents who have lost an only son, and who for a time have felt that their world has fallen apart, find their normal feelings restored with remarkable swiftness by the arrival of a grandchild. They learn to reorganize their emotions.

It is not always easy to re-direct love in a manner that seems fruitful. It is especially difficult when the family is small, or scattered. If such is your case, you can - if necessary - cope with your sorrow by giving of yourself to those in need. Teach a church-school class; assist at a public school or at a welfare center; or love and encourage even one person who longs for help. When your heart is aching these may seem poor substitutes for the ways in which you would like to express your emotions; but courageously re-direct your affections into new channels. This will help to fill the empty place in your life.

THE POWER OF FAITH TO HEAL

*T*HUS far we have examined only the practical and psychological ways to deal with sorrow. We now turn our attention to the resources of religion as a means to gain strength.

In Jerusalem one day, a bomb exploded in the Arab market place, killing thirty-four persons. A short time later a group of people came down the road, led by a woman who was convulsed by grief. Evidently she had lost a husband, or son, in the bombing. She was supported by two aged men as the procession moved down the street. She was screaming her grief. Her body was shaken by uncontrolled contortions. After a time, one of the elderly men spoke to her in a loud voice. Immediately her screams ended, and she walked quietly with bowed head. What had the man said to her in Arabic? He had said, "Stop acting like those who have no faith."

It is unfortunate that many who profess the Christian faith show no evidence of trust or courage in time of sorrow. The pagan world was amazed when the first followers of Jesus sang hymns at the funerals of their loved ones. This was possible because they had two beliefs which could transform sorrow into quiet peace and joy. One was the promise of the divine Presence to give comfort; the other was an unshakable confidence in the eternal life. The Mayan philosophy - which arose independently - gave similar assurances. These beliefs are the foundation of all courage and strength to overcome sorrow.

During the days when religious services of all kinds were banned in Russia, certain Christians - meeting in a home - were visited by Soviet agents. The names of the worshipers were written down. As the agents prepared to leave the house the leader of the Christian group said: "There is one other Person present whose name you have not taken." "Nonsense," replied the agent, "we have searched every room and closet. There is no one else here." "There is One here whose name you have not taken," insisted the Christian leader. When asked to explain, he said: "Jesus Christ is here." He was right. There is always One to bring comfort to those who trust in Him. His presence gives meaning even to the most tragic separation, and this lifts the burden of sorrow.

By far the best antidote for sorrow is the assurance that life does not end here, that personality lives on in what we know as God's gift of eternal life. All of us have moments when we ask the question, "Can you assure me that my loved one is not dead, that life goes on? If you can do that I can bear my sorrow and my loss." Unfortunately, this faith is not firmly fixed in the minds of many who have been brought up within the Christian faith. Some individuals believe it is too good to be true. They have been influenced by the Freudian idea that immortality involves "wish fulfillment", the idea that men tend to believe what they want to believe.

Much of our doubt concerning the eternal life stems from our absorption with the physical body. We find it difficult to picture the self, or soul, as separate and independent of the body. This is not unnatural when so much of our interest is devoted to the development and care, the protection and healing, of our bodies. We give but little time to consideration of the spirit. It is difficult to see a soul. Of course, we forget that we also cannot see a mind, yet we accept the mind as real. When you look at a physical brain preserved in a jar you do not think of it as a mind. The mind cannot be confined to physical terms.

Yet it is real. You admit it. Why, then, should you hesitate to accept the idea of the soul merely because it cannot be located physically?

The finest thought of the ages gives affirmation of life everlasting. The ancient Mayans had a deep-seated confidence in the continued existence of the soul. The Christian faith is rooted in this assurance. Moreover, almost every great thinker throughout the ages - men who have been steeped in the nature of truth - have expressed their confidence in immortality.

Best of all we have the Gospel record. Christ conquered death. With the early Christians we can say, "Because he lives, we too, shall live." To know and to accept this truth is the best cure for sorrow.



CONCLUSION

*T*HIS Lesson is designed to help you. You may need to face now the qualities of selfishness in your life that will make you a victim of grief whenever tragedy strikes close to you. This is the time to change attitudes which are potentially destructive.

You may come into contact with friends and acquaintances who are victimized by sorrow or grief. Utilize the principles here presented to give them understanding and faith.

Whenever you face the inevitable separation from someone you love, may you have the foundation of truth by which you, like the ancient Mayans, can go courageously onward to face life and its challenge.



AFFIRMATION

I will look critically at myself to discover whether inner selfishness has laid the foundation for grief.

I will seek to encourage and help others who are burdened by grief and sorrow.

I will lay hold of the practical and spiritual resources by which I can find comfort and strength in every hour of sorrow.

Blessings,

Your Instructor.