

Kavaler-Adler, S. (2020). The culture of the mourning group in a culture that often fails to mourn: Evolution of themes of psychic anorexia and self-deprivation. *MindConsiliums*, 20(8), 1-15.

***THE CULTURE OF THE MOURNING GROUP IN A CULTURE THAT OFTEN
FAILS TO MOURN: EVOLUTION OF THEMES OF PSYCHIC ANOREXIA
AND SELF-DEPRIVATION***

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The American culture is known for its consumerism and manic results orientation. Americans are rarely perceived as having time for long term emotional or psychological processes, let alone for a grief process that requires an internal personal focus over time. The culture as a group has just begun to learn about grief. Perhaps our first real venture into it was at the time of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's funeral. The horrific shock of Kennedy's assassination immobilized the country and gathered all us human souls together in groups with tears that could be, just for the moment, shared openly. How different this was than the gatherings in the street on VE day, after the triumphant victory of World War Two, when Americans kissed, danced and hugged in the streets but would never have thought of crying in those same streets. How many years did it take us to have memorials for the Vietnam War where people thought of grieving together by the monuments. The Korean soldiers have still not been mourned as testified to in radio interviews by a few surviving Korean War G.I.s, just last summer, in the summer of 2003.

When Kennedy's son, John Junior, died another horrific death, by his own hand, after his father's death nearly forty years before, Americans were just beginning to learn about grief. At that time, I was asked to appear as an expert on grief on a national television show on CNN, called "Both Sides: With Jesse Jackson."

Jesse Jackson interviewed three of us as experts on grief. It was clear that the show's theme reflected an awareness that the country that gathered in the streets to cry when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot would need to have a communal acknowledgement of grief when his son also tragically died. At the time of the television broadcast we discussed anger within grief as well as grief itself. There was an acknowledgement that many citizens would be angry at John Kennedy Junior for the self destructive and impulsive way that he drew the curtain on his own life. Unlike his father, who was shot by an assassin, John Kennedy Junior, had insisted on flying his own plane despite predictions of dangerous weather conditions that caused a commercial airline to cancel its flight in the same direction. With Kennedy bravado and his own personal grandiosity, John Kennedy Junior had disregarded all warnings and had risked not only

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his life, but also the lives of his wife and sister in law. The results were fatal as everyone knows. Such large scale tragic negligence couldn't allow Americans to indulge in a grieving process in which loss was the sole and primary affect. The grief necessitated the inclusion of rage, not only about loss, but at the one lost, Kennedy junior himself. How could he have been so careless and self absorbed? How could he have thought he would survive the fantastic threats of nature when lifelong professional pilots were called back in caution? Such questions intermingled with discussions of how grief encompasses aggression within grief, anger within loss, rage within sadness.

Jessie Jackson drew the interpenetrating comments of all three of us grief experts in different state, with he in another, as all spoke as if in one room. Despite a dark room around me, the conversation through my ear phones brought connections between Jackson and us three grief consultants. We actually looked like we were in one room when our faces were flashed side by side on T.V., but how long would the observations we made, and questions we raised about the complexities of the mourning process, linger on in the minds of the general public who still expected grief to last no longer than a week or possibly a weekend?

In the Jewish religion, we have a week of Shiva, and in many cultures – the props of grief, such as wearing black clothing, are observed for at least a year. Yet the true complexities of grief, which resonate back to all the earlier losses and disappointments in our lives – stretching back before cognitive memory to infancy – are rarely anticipated. In this culture the majority turn to anti-depressants instead. Those within this majority often perpetuate the cycle of blocked grief, altering their moods by medical edicts on prescription pads. A Prozac generation can hardly tolerate the successive cycles of grief, rage, anger, loss and yearning that constitute the natural developmental evolution towards re-birth of self and renewed capacities for love, creativity and intimacy.

Then we all were shocked into mutual grief by September 11, 2001. The date has the same infamy as the date of Pearl Harbor or D. Day, when we went “over there,” landing on the beaches of Normandy. Possibly for the first time in New York, if not in American history, mammoth corporations acknowledged the need to grieve in the face of universal trauma. I joined others in the mental health field who were temporarily hired by a corporation to lead September 11th grief groups and to be available for counseling. The company that asked for us to volunteer actually seemed to understand that employees who might only consciously wish to go back to

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work would subconsciously be in shock when fellow workers, residing in the trade towers, had just been massively murdered. Brining in mental health practitioners, American corporations seemed to be acknowledging, for the first time,

that their employees needed to express their rage, their sadness, and their questions about how to grieve. We were there to tell such employees that whatever they thought and felt was O.K. There was no correct prescription for grieving the effects of traumatic loss. There was no exact way to deal with their children who expressed confusion and wondered why their parents did not want to take off and fly on a planned vacation. They needed to know that they could just listen to their children and could just talk about whatever horrible thoughts or memories come up. They wanted to say good-bye to their colleagues who they had worked with over years and wanted to say something with meaning to the parents of these lost colleagues. They got to express this in groups with psychoanalysts and psychotherapists like myself, because corporations were willing for the first time to invite us into their doors. Trauma had hit the headlines enough to arouse interest about how to grieve its losses. Is our culture beginning to wake up to the mourning process despite this seeming preference for manic fixes and Prozac?

I do know that my monthly group has been a resource for many who can surrender to the realities of grief. For four hours once a month there are phases of grief experienced and shared and many mourn over years in the profound bonding that contains and nurtures them within. We originally called this monthly therapy group, “mourning regrets.”

The Culture of the Mourning Group

From individual process to group process, from internal world to external world, from monologue to dialogue, the four hour monthly object relations mourning group travels all the developmental avenues that evolve into self transformation. Pivotal moments of surrender to grief punctuate the movement towards psychic change. Loss and regret interact, and the aggression within loss (first spoken of by Melanie Klein in 1940, in her “Mourning and Its Relation to Manic Depressive States”), speaks in the present moment. This occurs first within the internal world in the group’s initially psychic visualization and then within the external world within the group’s interpersonal process. Within the group transference projections and projective identifications also culminate their course into both group and individual awareness.

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For the ten years that the “mourning regrets” therapy group has been meeting, as the group leader, I always begin the group by conducting a guided psychic visualization. During this visualization I ask all group members to close their eyes and breathe. I ask them to allow themselves to let their thoughts come through freely into their mind and to keep breathing deeper as they see what they feel. I ask them to note any repetitive thoughts and then to see what the feelings are, both the more intense ones in the forefront of their awareness, and the subtle ones in the background of their awareness. Then I invite them to enter the main part of the visualization, asking them to allow whoever comes to them in their mind to appear before them. I ask them to feel what they need to say to this person.

Still reminding the group members to breathe, I ask them to look directly at the person who arises in the internal world through the psychic visualization. I ask them to be aware of what they feel as they speak to the other. I then ask them to see if the other reacts or responds as they speak. I ask them to continue breathing deeper as they listen to what the other, within their internal world, has to say. I then ask them to experience what they feel as they respond back to the other. I often also ask them to see if they can feel a connection with their heart as they breathe, and ask if they want to say anything from their heart to the internal other in focus in the moment. I also ask what their stomach has to say to the person. Unlike the heart, the stomach speaks of anger, rage and hunger, when the heart speaks of love, loss and earning. At the end of visualizing this first person, who has freely arisen in their internal vision I ask the group members to see if they want to keep the person in their heart or wish to put the person outside their heart. I then ask if they can let go of the person and say good-bye. I ask if they feel tensions related to resisting saying “good-bye.” I ask them to open their breathing to these tensions, rather than fighting them, and to see what feelings open up within. Then as they welcome the tension, I ask them to breathe deeply again as they say “good-bye.”

I then take this same psychic journey with the group as they keep their eyes closed and picture another person who arises within their internal world psyche. When they relinquish this second person I ask them to open their eyes, whenever they are ready, I ask whomever wishes to start to share what the wish to share of their psychic visualizations with the group.

When someone begins to share their internal world experience they may take off into associations to confidential issues in their life, or they may relate their experiences to the ongoing interpersonal world they are in with the other group members. Those who open up tears

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of grief during the psychic visualization may begin to speak from the core internal center where the crying comes from. Someone may hand the grief stricken speaker the communal box of tissues that rests on the back of the couch, where several members sit. The group listens intently to the first speaker. Generally they respond to the content expressed by this person. Sometimes the group members don't respond to the speaker who shares their visualization and its message. If someone is passed over in this way by the group, and another member is responded to, I as the leader, might make a group intervention at this point. I might ask why the group is responding to one person as opposed to another, whereas my other interventions will be interpretations about any one individuals' mourning process, related to the content of what they share with the group or to the way they share it.

I also ask the group member who shares whether she or he wants feedback from the group about how they are coming across if the group has not been forthcoming in response. If they say "yes," the group will begin to share their withheld and tentative responses, which may include critical comments in addition to supportive or empathic ones.

The visualization lasts thirty to forty minutes after the Saturday (once a month) group begins at twelve noon. The follow up from the sharing process then evolves for another hour and a half or an hour and 40 minutes, until we have our break for refreshments at two P.M. The group resumes at 2:20 PM or 2:25. Those who haven't spoken in the morning generally create a space for themselves to speak in the afternoon. Some members intentionally wait for the second half of the group to speak of deeply aroused feeling states and conflicts that they have been meditating on during the morning session, or which have been inspired by the morning session. Interpersonal conflicts, projections and transferences often appear more clearly in this second group phase. Conflicts between members that make external the internal world conflicts over aggression often appear in this second group phase. The interaction between the feelings of grief and sadness within the mourning process, as well as aggression and defense within mourning, often play themselves out more openly in the second phase of the group's process (from 2:25 P.M to 4 P.M.). We end promptly at 4 P.M.

The Individual Developmental Mourning Process Within the Group

Beyond bereavement, developmental mourning is about the grieving of the loss of the primal object as it lives and haunts us within our internal worlds. The core of psychic change is the

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pivotal moment of surrendering to the pain of loss, surrendering to grief. The process of working with all the aggressive dynamics that block this is all part of the developmental mourning process. The grief of regret is the grief based on the psychological interaction and alchemy of loss and guilt. The grief transforms guilt through loss into the empathic promise of compassion or into D.W. Winnicott's (1963) "capacity for concern."

In the case of Sharon we can see this whole evolution through the process of one group session in which the macrocosm is seen in the microcosm. The group process witnesses and cultivates the developmental evolution that evolves at first through the internal world of one person within the group. First there is the psychic visualization and then the sharing of that individual visualization with the group. There often follows a mild enactment of the pathological dynamics of the old internal self and object constellation played out in the safety of the group laboratory. The group processes this enactment, allowing a surrender to the pain of regret and compassion within the loss of the old self and its insistent tie to the primal mother (the punishing and depriving self in identification with the primal parent aggressor). Finally each group member relinquishes the raging attack against the self, as the projected internal child self is re-owned and thus psychically integrated.

The culmination of this entire process is that the empathy between group members creates new and increasingly healthy identifications that can fill the internal void and build psychic structure. The old self destructive identifications are gradually surrendered. The loss of the bond with the old mother can be experienced through displacements with a spouse. The gradual relinquishing of this bond is often punctuated by the agony and anguish of letting go. This allows sealed off core self love to open and to transform into the longing felt at the moment of grief.

Sharon's Psychic Anorexia Evolves through the Group Process

Silence is felt for five minutes or so after I end the group's psychic visualization by asking everyone to open their eyes when ready. I have invited whoever wishes to start to speak. I have invited them to share their visualizations. Then Sharon, a group member who is generally quiet in the group begins to speak. She says:

I don't usually speak, but I need to today! When Susan asked to see what colors come up with our feelings, I saw red and black, the colors of *rage*. I am filled with so much rage! That's why I'm generally silent here because I'm afraid that if I open my mouth, all my

rage will erupt and I'll bite someone's head off! I'm filled with rage towards myself for how I spoiled my vacation for my family. I tried to blame my husband, but it's really me! We were all having a great vacation over the holidays. My kids were doing great. I was getting along with my husband's parents.

Then on Sunday, our last day at the resort, my husband asked me if I wanted to go for a walk by myself. He offered to be with my daughter so I could be free to go. It was a gorgeous day and I was dying to go. It was such a great place to walk, up in the country. So I went. But as soon as I felt the pleasure of having time to myself and enjoying walking in the country, I had to create something to worry about to punish myself for having any pleasure. I started obsessing about having my husband's jacket with me, thinking that he would need it when I was gone and be angry with me. I worked myself up into such a state that when I got back I created a fight with my husband. I had to spoil everything. I can't tolerate having pleasure. I had convinced myself that he was angry at me for having his jacket, thinking he would want to punish me for going off and leaving him with my daughter. He had been generous and offered to baby sit for our daughter so that I could go. I never could have asked him! God knows I could never ask for anything I wanted myself! But even though he offered I was convinced that he resented it because I had to find a punishment for having anything I wanted.

The whole time I was on the walk, I kept focusing on the jacket, thinking that my husband would need it and would focus his resentment about me having a walk on my having taken his jacket. I made the whole thing up! Then I became so defensive, having created this argument with my husband in my head. I became so defensive that I actually created the fight I feared. My husband couldn't care less about his jacket, but he was upset about conflicts he was having with this mother. When he told me that he was upset I lashed out at him with utter contempt and self righteousness, telling him that I couldn't care less about his conflicts with his mother, telling him that that was all his problem, telling him to stop dumping his problems on me. Then he really was angry at me. I had created the whole thing!

I created the whole thing to punish myself for having pleasure, for having anything. I used to feel so much regret about my contempt but behind my contempt is my stoic self-righteousness about being superior to others because of my martyred attitudes that I can do without. I really get off on self-deprivation! The very thing that I hated in my mother is totally in me now! I can't even receive a present that my husband gives me. He just about gave up. In the past the group always heard about my husband raging at me. But now you can see how enraged a person I am! It's all related to my need to deprive myself and to feel superior because I can deprive myself. I punish myself for having anything, and I punish anyone else for giving me anything.

It would be a torture for both my husband and myself when he would try to give me a present. I would be so cold, victimized and self righteous if he gave me something I didn't want, and if by *some miracle* he bought be something that I actually liked and wanted I would immediately squelch any pleasure in receiving the gift then. I would find some rationalization for why I really didn't need it. With therapy, this is the first year that I was actually able to take in my husband's and my children's celebration of my birthday. I used to torture everyone. I didn't realize how identified I was with the very thing in my mother that I hate! The last time I tried to give my mother a present, it was an invitation to come up against the wall of her dramatic and stoic martyrdom! I had gotten her a food

processor, and the minute she opened it, she immediately said, 'Why don't you take it. I have one.'

I feel nauseous when I think of it. I want to throw up. Talk about bad food! I was fed a constant diet of my mother's self-deprivation, and I learned all too well how to turn a punitive attitude against myself, or against anyone else who dared to ever think of enjoying anything!

There is again a moment of silence in the group. Then Elaine says:

I'll take the risk of having my head cut off by Sharon. I think it's great that you're getting to all of this and you articulate it so well! I can really relate to it. It reminds me of a psychic visualization I once had in the group. In the visualization I was so filled with rage that I became King Kong knocking down buildings and destroying everything in sight. Then the scene switched and I was a two year old clinging to my mother, wanting my mommy. All this rage was just about wanting my mother.

It sounds like you attack your husband for giving anything to you because that's what your mother did to you. You are a child too, wanting your mommy, and so you take her in by being like her, when she won't let you take her in through having any feeling contact. Susan told me about how that works. You have said that the three year old in you once opened up in this group, before I came into it. Everyone said you were able to show the three year old in you who was emotionally abandoned and attacked by your mother. What would she say now when she sees you depriving yourself and scapegoating your husband, just like your mother scapegoated you?

Sharon is crying as she replies, feeling the grief of regret related to her own behavior:

She'd say she doesn't want me to treat others like my mother treated her! She'd say that I'm silent in this group because I don't want to make anyone else here feel that horrible hurt of the three year old within me, the three year old who couldn't fight back. My internal three year old feels totally helpless – needing my mother, not having anyone to talk to. I was always being blamed by my mother for not being able to do things she wanted me to know things that she never taught me and which were way beyond me. I was always the bad one for my mother, and so I didn't deserve anything. I could only feel good if I deprived myself and felt self righteous about it like she did. But then a life time of this has filled me with so much rage that I go around feeling like I could kill anyone who says anything to me.

Sharon turns to Nancy and says: "You got a shot of this today, from me. When you tried to talk to me in the waiting room, I turned cold on you, froze you out." And Nancy said, "I understood. You said you didn't like to talk before the group. I didn't feel attacked." (In the next monthly group, Sharon did openly express contempt and attacked Nancy in her attempt to explain her frustration and rage related to Nancy's 'obsessionalism.' Although Sharon is terrified of exposing this contemptuous part of her that wants to verbally bite everyone's head off, she is able to risk exposing it to the group when she is angry at Nancy. She finds out that she doesn't

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traumatize or kill anyone because Nancy is not a three year old. Nancy reacts with anger and an insulting retaliation that actually relieves Sharon, not being devastated. This relieves Sharon because she is afraid that she could devastate others onto whom she projects her vulnerable child self).

Returning to the group meeting, Sharon says, at this time:

You may not have felt attacked by me, but I felt ugly and mean when I said I didn't want to talk to you. I'm silent when I feel ugly with my mean and angry hate. Right now I just hate myself, but I know that the hate really goes back to my mother who screwed me up in the first place. I just regret like hell that I keep acting like her. I was always trying to be the total opposite to her. That's why I'm silent in here. I don't want to show the monster rage-aholic mother part of me. You guys only heard of the rage-aholic part of my husband and saw me more as the victim. But it's time for me to fess up. I'm the rage-aholic hanging out in silence, hiding and trying to contain the monster inside of me. Anyone who is as self depriving as I am is filled with rage. Then we, deprivation addicts, feed ourselves with the attitudes of contempt and self righteousness. Even as a child I could see that the only thing my mother had, in the midst of her mock saintly martyrdom, was her god damn self-righteousness!

Then Rachael said:

You sound so pained as you speak, so filled with grief and despair, but I think things will be getting better for you now because you are so filled with insight. You're so able to process your feelings and thoughts and see what your problems are!

Sharon responded (politely), "Thank you, but I don't seem to get anywhere with this insight. I have seen this all before. I think I'm getting better and then I'm right back in this place again!"

Then I intervened as the group leader:

Sharon you just demonstrated the very thing that you're complaining about, giving the polite platitude of a formal thank you to Rachael, and then proceeding to reject the gift in her words. This way, you rejected the gift of hope that Rachel was trying to offer you. Similarly, you reject your husband's gifts and his generous offer to baby sit so that you can enjoy a walk and have some solitude, which you always say you are dying for.

Also you complain of being back in the same place, but the process of mourning and insight is always going back and forth. It's the process of all emotional growth. This culture has never understood how much time mourning takes. Actually it's a lifelong process. There is no growth and development in life without going back and forth in the grief and awareness of mourning, and in the return to the re-living of the old mode of relationship in the pathological mourning state. You can't just be there without regressing and having to work on the same issues again.

What makes you think that you don't have to be human like everyone else? You used to have the fantasy of the perfect people who you wanted to be like and also felt excluded by. But you secretly believe that you should be perfect. It's O.K. for everyone else to fall on their faces, but not you.

Now Beverly joined the conversation:

I can really relate to Sharon. In a session with Susan I remembered that when I was twelve I wanted to jump into the grave with my mother when my mother died. I hated her when she was alive, but even though she screamed at me, and threatened me, and scapegoated me, she was the only one who gave me any attention. So, naturally, I had to identify with her and had no sense of self when she died. My father had withdrawn a long time ago. I've been feeling so much rage towards him lately! The men in my life have to take all the rage and shit I felt towards him that I never got to express. That's part of why I'm having so many problems with my boyfriend now, especially after moving in with him. I keep wanting him to give me what both my mother and father didn't give me. It doesn't seem to matter sometimes how much I am aware of what I'm doing. I'm still doing it! What did help was when I actually felt the grief of longing to die with my mother, to jump into her grave, to be with her. Talk about self-deprivation, I was willing to deprive myself of my whole life just to be with her. When I realized that, I really did start to take my life more seriously and to do my art work in a more creative way. I had my first exhibit in ages last year, after the message from that session with Susan about wanting to jump into my mother's grave – that really began to hit me!

Victoria was also motivated to talk:

I know just what Sharon means about being attached to one's own self-deprivation. Just yesterday my boyfriend offered to help me with something. He was going to talk to the construction workers in my house for me about taking care of something. But instead of letting him help me, I began dictating to him what to say and how to say it. I just knew he would turn around and say, 'Do it yourself then,' and that's exactly what happened. I can't receive help of gifts either. It makes me feel out of control. I get back into control by refusing help and trying to do everything for myself. Then I feel burdened and angry. Then I don't feel like giving anything to anyone. I hide it. People actually think I'm generous, but secretly I know how withholding I really am.

I'm just like my grandmother who was more of a mother to me than my mother. And just like her I secretly get off on thinking I'm better than others by not asking for anything for myself. My boyfriend wanted to take my grandmother to this party and she told him what time she had to leave. He was a few minutes late, so she got in a cab and went by herself. He was totally puzzled and frustrated. He was only trying to help her so that he could have a good relationship with her for my sake. I'm sure she got off on showing him up and proving she didn't need anyone. She gets more out of that form of self-righteousness than out of accepting any human companionship or help. I'm the same way. I just know enough not to demonstrate it to the world. I've changed enough to live with a generous guy and to act generous even when I'm not inside, but I still get psychic feedings from attitudes of contempt and self-righteousness that are the pay off for self-deprivation, just like Sharon.

I have moments of grief and regret about it, especially when I drive my boyfriend away and everyone here knows that he's the best one I've had, including my ex husband, but the addiction to those attitudes of being superior to others who show their needs is really powerful. Being above it can be a real high. When I'm in a state, I don't have to

admit to myself that the hungry raging infant in me that I project onto everyone else is really starving inside of me!

The image of being superior is false food but sometimes it really feels like that's what's nurturing me. I think that the internal starvation shows up in this group when we do the psychic visualization. No matter how much I try to breathe deeply, and let go, I feel this deadness on the left side of my body. I have some real split in me. The right part of my body feels alive. But the left side feels dead, and I try to wake it up by letting the energy in my breath travel from my feet upwards, rather than downwards from my head. Of course it's in my head that all these fucked up attitudes and their addictions live.

Then Darlene:

As I've listened to everyone talk about self-deprivation and self-sabotage, I realize I have it too. I don't so much get off on depriving myself, but I don't seem to be able to promote myself whenever I have a conscious goal and have a conscious intention to succeed. I end up languishing. Eventually, I had to give up dancing and then I gave up writing even though I published a book. But ironically, I start having one success after another when I don't care, when I don't have any goal and when my creativity is involved with nurturing the performance of others. I've done fund raising for this organization, which I always had been scared to do. The organization has grown and when I was voted in as president I was able to find a way of creating a salary for myself. I don't want to go back to being poor, but now I don't seem hungry for very things I longer for before, to be recognized as a dancer or writer. I can't seem to promote myself in these areas. I was just like you, Beverly, in the past. I too was so desperate to be seen and recognized, desperate for love really, that I would cry at auditions, just like Beverly who said she had cried at job interviews if she didn't get the job. I was also filled with shame about the neediness. Once I was desperate enough to think of sleeping with someone in the dance world to get a job. Looking back, it all seems strangely comical now. But at the time I was desperate.

Still I couldn't summon enough faith in myself to promote myself in a realistic manner. When Sharon brought up my book in another group I denied I cared about it anymore. It's true, just as Sharon had said that I stopped promoting it when my mother refused to read it. When I wrote it I was doing it for her approval. I did everything for her approval. Then when I didn't get it from her or from all the others onto whom I projected her I just gave up on my own goals. That's why it's so much easier to help others with their creative projects, ones that I am in a position to authorize, rather than to work on projects of my own that bring up the old craving for my mother's and father's approval.

My father was actively destructive to my creativity and my mother gave up hers, even though she had a tremendous talent as an actress and singer. I couldn't have what she couldn't have for herself, I couldn't win over the father figures in the dance world who I felt alienated from.

So depriving myself of success, even if I'm willing to do all the work of the creativity, felt like my fate. I didn't love the self-deprivation but I felt it was what I deserved. It was more comfortable than unconsciously believing that I was betraying my mother by any success out in the world. My mother martyred herself because she had to. When my father became mentally ill there was no other choice for her but to go to work

at an ordinary 9 to 5 job in order to support the family. And she did it without complaining. [Darlene is crying and sobbing as she says this.]

I'm the one who always complains, and my sister perpetually complains, but my mother never ever complained. She really seemed like a saint to me. She gave up any career to promote her enormous talent and I always thought she must resent it. But I eventually realized that my mother really wanted to be a mother! She was a really good mother [crying], and would have been a good mother if my father wasn't always disrupting everything with his rages and his active abuse of her. Lately I've come to forgive my mother. Just like Linda has said, I can't hold on to the old resentments when I really understand now what it feels like for her. And she'd reached out to me too now, even though she couldn't read my book. I also realize now that if she read it it would just open up too many old wounds. She's protecting herself by not remembering. She always loved my father, but even though he was so dependent on her he could never tell her. He tortured her and never expressed any gratitude to her for all she sacrificed. He never even told her he loved her.

I want my mother to know how grateful I am. I was able to tell her, over the phone and we both cried [crying as she says this]. She was a really good mother and she sacrificed for all of us. I still feel angry at my sister, and now I keep strict boundaries with her. I don't, let her know my feelings, although she does know I'm angry at her even though I won't express it to her. I don't want to share my feelings with my sister because my sister always fed off my feelings, allowing me to express all the feelings while she hid hers.

But with my mother, I no longer feel angry. I really have forgiven her. When I told her I was grateful I felt so much love for her. And when I saw her we could just look at each other and feel the love. We didn't even need words then. She called afterwards and said she felt grateful. What did she feel grateful for? I didn't do that much. But she really took me in and I really took her in. When we did the psychic visualization I could connect with my mother in my heart and speak from my heart to her.

When Susan asked if we wanted to keep the person in our hearts when saying good-bye or put them outside our heart, I left my sister outside, but I took my mother into my heart. And my heart wasn't a bleeding heart then as it had been in relation to my father when I had him in the psychic visualization years ago. Now, with my mother my heart can feel full, not only with sadness of grief that I've felt here many times, but also with the love that emerges out of the space opened by the sadness to my inner core. Just like with my husband this group has helped me to learn how to love. It's only through love that we can give up the self-depriving state. I guess those who feel nurtured by me for their creative projects experience this through me now.

Susan, the group leader and analyst, responded:

Today's group seems to have evolved into a theme, a theme within the overall theme we share of the individual mourning process within the group. It seems like a theme of unconscious gratification through self-deprivation or through psychic anorexia. Nobody spoke more pointedly and succinctly and tragically to this theme than Emily Dickinson, who said, 'The Banquet of Abstemiousness Defaces That of Wine.' She also wrote, "Renunciation is a piercing virtue," at the point when she refused to marry the one man she loved and adored, her father's best friend, who proposed to her after her father and

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his wife were dead. “No” is the most exciting word in the English language, conflating the meaning of excitement and self-denial, perversely and paradoxically turning deprivation into its opposite, excitement! To have accepted the offer of marriage from the man she loved would have confronted her with realities of sex and marriage that – her poetry showed – she was terrified of.

This topic was not continued in the group, but more can be said to contrast the pathological mourning arrest of Emily Dickinson with the evolving developmental mourning process that Sharon and her fellow group members illustrated here. Instead of the real earthly thing that Emily Dickinson could have as a corporal being in a human body who could marry a mortal man, she chose to believe that she would have a far superior form of marriage in heaven, after her death. She believed that she would be rewarded for her stoic self-deprivation with the love of the father god figure who lived in her psyche as a demon lover figure. Her fantasy god was actually her demon as he demonically drew her towards self-deprivation and death. She struggled to try to win the love of a grandiose god father for whom she had to neglect the human size man, the man who actually proposed to her and would have offered her love in actual daily life on earth. By practicing psychic anorexia as her one and only true religion, Emily Dickinson developed and remained a prisoner of a demon lover complex (as defined by Kavaler-Adler, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2003).

Ending Summary

Sharon is using the mourning group to relinquish the pathological mourning state that she was fixated in when she first came to treatment with me ten years ago, to deal with her own demon lover complex. Sharon first came to see me, after reading my first of three books on mourning, *The Compulsion to Create*. She articulated to me at that time that by reading my book she had learned that she lived within an internal world of fantasy figures. These were figures of extreme and contrasting natures, either being demonic parents or perfect people (implying a psyche perpetually effected by the psychic splitting from preoedipal trauma).

The mourning group has allowed Sharon to begin risking interactions with real external others, who she continually discovers to be quite different than her internal demons and angels. The group meeting reported here, in which Sharon speaks of her self-punishing rage and her psychic anorexia, is followed by a group meeting where she risks exposing as well as experiencing her anger and its defensive contempt. She risks creating conflicts over retaliatory aggression with another group member. In this group she comes a long way from her lifelong

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pattern of schizoid seclusion and withdrawal. She steps beyond scapegoating her husband to encounters with fellow group members who can process her feelings and reactions with her. She sees in the next group that in contrast to her terrors of “biting” another’s head off, the group member she judges with frustration and contempt does not die or become traumatized. The verbally assaulted woman merely gets angry and also begins to take a look at the content of Sharon’s feedback about her own (obsessive) behavior, even though she is infuriated by the mode of Sharon’s expression in her first attempt to bring the rage-aholic side of her out of the closet in the group.

The role of aggression within the mourning process becomes once more apparent in the laboratory of the mourning group! Melanie Klein (1940) certainly was right, when she went beyond Freud’s (1917) “Mourning and Melancholia,” when she spoke of rage in psychic fantasy in her “Mourning and It’s Relation to Manic Depressive States.” She also spoke there of feelings of hate, contempt and competition, related to dreams and psychic fantasy that accompany all the grief and loss aspects of the mourning process. I would add that this is true whether or not the mourning process of the individual is related to actual bereavement or is related to the many, and life long, phases of mourning related to separation-individuation, the re-owning split off parts, and the multiple phases of life long psychic development (see Kavaler-Adler, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004).

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