

necessarily a fun place; it may be boring or even frightening.

It would be easy to see the origin of the idea of floating up to heaven in the received idea that heaven is 'up there somewhere'. It would be easy to read into children's ideas about ghosts and others coming back and say that those who put forward this view are denying the finality of death, or that they do not really comprehend the notion. In our view it is better to let the words speak for themselves and not to try to read into them.

The clinical implications for people working with bereaved children or those who are themselves facing death, their siblings and their parents are evident; we should not assume that 'Gone to heaven' is an answer in itself.

It may raise many problems which would need some time to unravel.

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Separation or internalisation when a loved one dies?

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The loved object is not gone, for now I carry it within myself and can never lose it.¹ Five years ago Wyn died. We had lived together as friends for 23 years and when she went, part of me seemed to die with her. I was told by many well-meaning people, 'You will never get over her death until you have let her go – you've got to say goodbye'.

I still remember the devastation I felt on hearing these words – I wanted to draw her close to me, into my very being, not tear her away. I felt desperate.

In my work as a bereavement counsellor, clients frequently reflect the same despair:

'I can't let him go, I can't separate from him. How can I push him away out of my life?'

As I worked through my own grief, I was aware of a slow healing taking place within, a peace, a oneness with the world. The joy of living returned, but I was never aware of consciously separating myself from Wyn. It seemed in a strange way that the reverse had taken place; it was as if she had merged within my very self until once more I felt complete.

'... to rebuild with anguish the inner world which is felt to be in danger of deteriorating and collapsing'²

'... when a death occurs... we lose a sense of self.'³

WRITTEN SOON AFTER WYN'S DEATH

Whilst attempting to struggle through the darker period of my life, losing the one I loved having watched her suffer in agony, I died. Not one death, but several: the death of my personality, the death of my inner joy and happiness, the death of myself.

I realised for the first time what 'the valley of the shadow of death' was. Not the death of my loved one, but my death: my death which caused for me the death of everything I loved and enjoyed – music, colour, beauty, the song of the birds, the vastness of the sea, the sky, the heather on the cliffs, my garden, the flowers, my friends, my dogs. Everything seemed to die, and yet the physical forms remained. Every thought, every breath, everything I saw, heard, felt and tasted was of death, a painful death; Wyn had died.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Perhaps the most difficult problem which the bereaved face, and the most difficult for counsellors to understand, is how one lets go of a loved person outside of oneself in the interest of discovering a new relationship with the lost person within oneself. Part of the difficulty lies in the lack of an adequate language with which to express an experience for which no words exist.

In this paper Daphne Brown, who is now a counsellor specialising in bereavement, uses telling quotations, imagery and personal reminiscence to share with us her own successful attempt to solve this problem.

'External objects may change rapidly but it will be many weeks before corresponding changes have taken place in ... their internal equivalents.'³

Three months after Wyn's death

I was walking across the field with my dogs when I looked up and saw a pigeon flying against the backcloth of stormy grey clouds. As the pigeon

turned, a slender ray of sunlight caught the underside of its wing and it appeared silver against the sky. I stopped and watched it. Suddenly I realised that I was appreciating and even absorbing the beauty; suddenly in that moment I had regained contact with the outside world – only for a moment – but it was as if, in those few seconds, I heard Wyn say deep, deep within me, ‘It’s all right Daphne, it’s all right.’

THE PROCESS OF INTERNALISING

Responsibilities and possessions

“Out of bits of the personality of others [the child creates] the unique mosaic of self.”⁴ In this view, identification with the lost person is not just another way of postponing the realisation of loss, it is the necessary condition without which grief cannot end and a new identity be developed. The object is never truly given up: it is made part of the self.³

One of the first aspects which hit me with such force when Wyn died was the desolate frustration of the little things which she did and which either I was not in the habit of doing, or with which I had little or no knowledge of how to cope. I felt so fragile and wanted to screw myself up into a tiny ball. I wanted to scream and be silent at the same time. It was the small everyday things that hurt. She put the kettle on for the morning tea, fed the cat and dog, checked the heating system, did the shopping when I was at work; put the dustbin out... It was so painful to take over her responsibilities, but gradually I did. The cat and dog continually reminded me that they wanted feeding and in time the other tasks became routine, second nature – they actually became part of me.

When I first entertained visitors I felt split in half, as if I was doing two jobs, hers and mine. After many, many months the two roles merged into one. I had internalised the part she played. It was when her contribution became, little by little, my contribution, the pain eased and harmony developed within.

Although there is usually a need to shed many of the loved one’s possessions, I believe there is a similar, parallel experience concerning certain belongings which are kept. A few hours before she died Wyn gave me her watch. For the first two years it was still her watch, but now it is mine.

Internalising ‘ours’ as ‘mine’

“If I have relied on another person to predict and act in many ways as an extension to myself, then the loss of that person can be expected to have the same effect on my view of the world and my view of myself. “Ours” has become “mine”, the partnership is dissolved.”³

It is difficult taking over a loved one’s responsibilities. It is moving to take possession of his/her belongings, but to enjoy alone something which has been shared together is heart breaking. For me it was the garden – we nearly always worked in it together especially at weekends. Now the garden was empty, its beauty remote, steely grey and so, so lonely.

Three years passed. I had the garden re-landscaped, shrubs were moved, the design altered. Sadly these changes failed to bring peace to my inner world. They did not touch that deep part, now writhing in pain, which had once been a well of peace, overflowing into our tranquil outer existence, especially when we were in the garden; even the roses looked sad.

One night, quite suddenly, there came into my mind the beautiful bronze sculpture of a goose girl. I recalled seeing her at the Chelsea Flower Show the year before Wyn died, a life-size figure, exquisite, but so expensive we had dismissed the idea of ever purchasing her. The following morning I drove to the Elizabethan farmhouse near Guildford where the sculptor lived. Three months later, not only was a goose girl installed in the garden with three geese, but also the life-size figure of a boy, dreaming time away, as he played his flute beside my pond.

Suddenly the garden became ‘mine’; it became alive, vibrant, full of colour; it was no longer lonely. ‘Ours’ at last became ‘mine’, and instead of just picturing her working outside, it was as if Wyn was within me enjoying the beauty, and all the things she had tended with such care merged together as part of me. Peace returned, inner peace.

Internalising the joy of sharing

“Just as the frightened child has to set up a permanent mother inside himself, the adult mourner has to internalise, take into himself, his loved object, so that he will never lose it.”²

Our first holiday was in Guernsey, and when the cowman delivered milk to our cottage, he left a bunch of

home-grown freesias on the doorstep. Thereafter, whenever we wanted to share a particularly happy event, we each bought the other a bunch of freesias. The tears I have shed over not being able any more to run into the kitchen and give Wyn a bunch of those fragrant little flowers.

I look at this act and try to see which part belonged to me and which to Wyn. I had something happy to celebrate; she reciprocated that happiness, but it actually belonged to me. The initial happiness was there before I ever saw Wyn. She enabled me to express that happiness, she allowed it to spill over. Now that she was no longer there I still had this happiness but I had to find a different recipient.

What was important was to hold on to the joy and redirect it. Could I internally integrate the expression of my joy? With the help of my counsellor I learnt, and am still learning, the value of myself. I have discovered that it is actually possible not only to experience, but to express happiness within oneself.

After a space of many months rolling into years, I felt comfortable buying myself a bunch of freesias. Thus my inner being is being enriched as well as being soothed, and I can now rejoice.

SHARING BEAUTY

Flowers played a significant part in our lives. Not only did we give them to each other on special occasions, we frequently brought them home simply to appreciate their beauty, and certain traditions developed.

We both marvelled over the delicacy of the first snowdrops or the early winter daffodils; the magnificence of the bluebell woods never ceased to cause us to stand and wonder. The first walk we took we took after Wyn’s initial illness was to the local bluebell woods – it was the last time we ever saw them together.

I thought I would never see, feel or appreciate such beauty again.

But my ability to appreciate beauty did return. Now, looking back, I realise that all the beauty I had seen and loved was from *within me*. I could not understand or perceive in any way what Wyn was seeing, even though she expressed apparently similar delight to mine. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and not in the eye of your friend.

So the beauty still remains. It is because of the ‘terrible havoc’ which Klein speaks of in the inner being of

a grieving person that he/she cannot connect and integrate that beauty within themselves – it remains outside.

It is only now, after many years, that I am endeavouring to understand a little of what it means to internalise a lost loved one, to identify again with the outer world and the need to do so. With the passage of time I can also begin to appreciate what has contributed to my inner world becoming gradually integrated both internally and with the world outside.

I can marvel again at the beauty of the first snowdrops, the spring flowers, the flight of the gulls over ploughed fields, the inquisitive robin on the bird table, a gentle dawn and a glorious sunset. I have regained this joy because I have regained compatibility within, and with everything around me. Wyn is no longer outside. She has returned in a different way, and as a result, she and I have externally separated and I am no longer dependent on her.

I can now laugh – it is much easier to laugh when there are two of you, and cry when there is only one – but I can laugh outwardly because I am laughing inwardly at the same time.

Regarding the bluebells: a friend of mine took me to her woods, different woods, where I found a similar beauty, but the experience was not Wyn's – it was mine. I think perhaps it was there that I said 'Goodbye' to the Wyn I used to know.

'There will be no need to cling, no need to rail. Instead there is a quiet contentment, a feeling of good fortune, a deep sense of having been added to; and we can say with conviction, 'I'm glad we knew each other'.⁵

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EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The National Funerals College (Lincolnshire, UK)

Peter Jupp, BD, MA, MTh, MSc, PhD, FRSA

The National Funerals College is an educational body serving the United Kingdom and aiming to improve the quality of funerals as indicated in the *Dead Citizens Charter*. This was launched in January 1996 to draw attention to the rights all citizens have in preparing for funerals, either of themselves or of others. The *Charter* is consonant with the College's first stated principle:

to stimulate better funeral practices for the sake of the dead and of the bereaved.

The *Charter* was launched as a discussion document and is being reissued in the light of comment from a wide variety of specialised and professional groups, eg funeral directors, cemeteries and crematoria, clergy, hospices, and bereavement charities and support groups, including Cruse Bereavement Care.

The College was founded by Lord Young of Dartington, widely known for his pioneering of the Consumers' Association. Researching for *A Good Death: conversations with East Londoners** he became conscious of how perfunctory many funerals had become and of how little help they provide for grieving families.

The function of the funeral

Death and life are inseparably linked. We are born mortal and so, one day, we will all have a funeral. Our lives are full of opportunities whose exploration death prohibits, so that the fact of death forces us to make choices. Funerals play a key and positive role in human societies because, in focusing on the individual who has died, they emphasise the achievements and values which survive. Paradoxically, death promotes life.

Funerals have three traditional functions: to dispose of a dead body, to transfer the 'soul' safely to the next life and to help the survivors come to terms with their loss. Contemporary funerals rarely fulfil their potential. Certainly, in funerals following a tragic or premature death – say of children or of leaders, or resulting from an accident or AIDS – survivors may receive great support, the deceased great attention and the funeral service great preparation. Such funerals may provide healing and satisfaction. Meanwhile, many funerals impoverish the participants, in particular those where:

- the deceased was elderly, in an institution or unknown;
- the family has made no plans;
- the family's preferences are limited by clergy, funeral directors or cemetery/crematorium procedures.

Over a long perspective, control over the funeral has steadily shifted from dying people and their families towards professional groups. Today, funerals are organised by bereaved families, funeral directors, clergy, and cemetery/crematorium management. However well these different groups contribute, the funeral as a whole does not always play a constructive role in the grieving process, nor does it always do justice to the life of the deceased. Thus a special feature of the College's seminar programme is the participation of all the principal groups involved to consider in what ways greater co-operation can help bereaved people.

The work of the College

Nearly 800 people have attended seminars. Course assessments have been analysed by John Pearce (British Humanist Association). They have revealed how professional groups tend to blame funeral inadequacies on each other, and how the current fragmented system can frustrate both families and professionals. Paradoxically, John Pearce estimated that 'clergy are the only realistic prospect for pro-active change'.

Changes in British funeral practice are accelerating. The National Funerals College believes that it is critical that change benefits those most subjectively involved, people who are facing death or preparing for funerals, either their own or of someone close to them. The *Charter* argues that funerals should be more personal, more prepared, and more positive.

The media has paid enormous attention to funerals these last few years – a combination of the *Dead Citizens Charter*, the work of the Natural Death Centre, the high-profile marketing of pre-paid plans, the challenge to current practices of the large funeral-directing companies, and the multiplying number of alternative funeral groups. Building on the public awareness of the long-term work of bereavement support groups, of hospices and palliative medicine, most people will benefit from the lifting of the 'taboo' on death.

The National Funerals College is funded by the Nuffield Foundation's Phoenix Fund. The Chairman is professor Malcolm Johnson, Director, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. The Director is the Revd Dr Peter C. Jupp. Copies of the *Dead Citizens Charter* and information about forthcoming courses can be obtained from the National Funerals College, Braddan House, High Street, Duddington, Stamford, Lincs PE9 3QE. Tel: 01780-444269.

*Young M, Cullen L. *A Good Death: Conversations with East Londoners*. London, UK and New York, USA: Routledge, 1996.