



## Wisdom Of Grieving, by Terry Patten

Not only is grieving a stage of the spiritual activist's journey, but the grieving process itself often unfolds in stages, which can be described using Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's famous five stages of grief. These five stages—"denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance"—describe the process of psychologically responding to the prospect and reality of any catastrophic loss.

Denial can be said to be a defense against suffering and grieving. If reality is too painful, don't face it. Maintain equilibrium and good humor by closing the metaphorical eyes, or the mind. Turn off the new, doubt its veracity, change the channel.

While we can certainly criticize people's motivations for disengagement, it is also true that the attitudes communicated in media are often reactive and draining. So there are good reasons to practice skillful, selective disengagement from the 24/7 news cycle. Making intelligent and economical use of media and politics disciplines tendencies toward both mindless addiction and reactive avoidance.

Anger easily becomes a habitual defense against feeling loss, sadness, and fear. There are very good reasons to be angry. Anger is the energy to change what needs to be changed. But healthy anger rises and falls, rather than becoming a chronic state, and it stays in touch with grief.

The next stage is bargaining, an attempt to regain lost equanimity, perhaps by imagining alternative scenarios that mitigate the sense of loss. Whereas true equanimity is based on opening up to all of reality, including its darkness, bargaining seeks to keep painful realities at bay. It is a more sophisticated form of denial.

The fourth stage is depression. When it is clear that heartbreaking loss cannot be avoided, the being is at least temporarily shattered. We begin to fear losing something we have always depended upon and taken for granted—such as the company of a loved one, the restorative and healing grace of Mother Earth, or the ability to live in prosperous, secure, open liberal society without doing anything to protect or defend it.

Mature, responsible adults are charged with staying intelligently related to the realities of our lives. But that requires us to pass through all the harrowing stages of grief into acceptance.

True acceptance recognizes the reality of our situation and accepts

responsibility to arrive in basic equanimity and a capacity to act. We find a way to choose life, even in a world that includes horrific losses. We choose engagement with reality, including the gritty and not always pleasant involvements with people we may not like and in situations we would prefer to avoid. We know we have arrived in acceptance when we are in motion, doing what we can to make a positive difference. We find deep equanimity.

---

*Published at [www.awakin.org](http://www.awakin.org) on Feb 26, 2018*