PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY:

A SEVEN-SESSION GRIEF GROUP

ADDRESSING SPOUSAL LOSS AFTER EIGHTEEN MONTHS

by

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ABSTRACT

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY:

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Pathway into the Garden of Discovery is a psycho-spiritual seven-session program, developed to benefit the field of thanatology, and to provide a structured grief group that focused on spousal loss after eighteen months. Clinical and theological principles of loss and grief were applied as the construct of this demonstration project. The loss and grief program was designed as a closed, contemplative, multi-faith self-discovery grief group, with a hospital chaplain as program facilitator. The seven-session curriculum developed by the author was titled connecting, creating, changing, contemplating, communicating, curiosity, and compassion. Each session became a foundation for the subsequent session, with focused homework and handouts. The program presents methodology, discussion, and data from program participants. This demonstration project can be adapted to address the needs of various types of losses, and the impact of grief. The project exemplifies techniques for future facilitators to modify and implement.

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This is the day the Lord made, let us exult and rejoice in it.

N.S.B.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

My grief and pain are mine. I have earned them. They are part of me.
Only in feeling them do I open myself to the lessons they can teach.
Anne Wilson Schaef (1994)

The human experience of death introduces the reality of grief. Grief is a sense of sorrow, sadness, and suffering originating from a loss. The state of grief influences the physical, emotional, and spiritual well being of the human. With the death of a significant relationship, the griever's life may become challenging, as the life once known vanishes. Long-held beliefs may be shattered, and the mourner may feel confused. In grief, dreams and hopes once shared with the loved one can also feel dead. Grief halts life as usual, and the griever can be overwhelmed with new thoughts and feelings. After the death of a loved one, the griever faces both the physical and social aspects of coping with grief. During the first year, accepting the reality of separation may be painful to face, especially alone.

Immediately following the death, the griever has the support of family, friends, and others in the community. Religious rituals such as wakes, unveilings, and sitting *shiva* (the seven day mourning period that immediately follows the funeral in Judaism) are designed to support the griever immediately after the rupture of death. With the exception of the *yarzeit* (the anniversary of a loved one's death, when it is customary to light a candle that burns for 25 hours), there are no other rituals beyond the first year. Immediately after the death, family may arrive from all parts of the country to attend the

funeral, and remain to support loved ones for a while. The community may support the family in the first week with food, prayers, and other acts of kindness. As the days and months pass, the griever, now alone faces a surging sense of grief. When alone, the experience of grief may feel like being isolated in the wilderness without a map, with no pathway out of the despair. The griever can become trapped in the suffering. The loss becomes the griever's narrative, one of sorrow, and without hope.

The process of learning to face the new reality in the absence of a loved one is often addressed in initial bereavement groups. Grief groups provide a sacred space for sharing stories, expanding awareness of the loss and grief, and identifying purpose and meaning. Within the first year of the death, a grief group offers an opportunity to learn and share coping skills. Coping tools taught in initial grief groups may include relaxation, journal writing, and the importance of proper physical self-care, such as eating, sleeping, and exercise. Learning new ways to face birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and significant life events alone is often addressed in bereavement groups during the first year of mourning.

With a sense of support from others walking through similar experiences, even in the wilderness, the narrative of grief may begin to transform, and provide healing. Although stories of lamenting may continue, beneath the narrative there is often a subtle shift of thoughts and feelings. How a mourner moves though grief can make the difference between remaining caught in the anger, bargaining, and disconnecting phases, or creating new ways of remembering and reentering life. After the initial year of physical and social focus, grief groups can be a catalyst for personal growth, and for experiencing a future filled with hope.

When addressing grief, consideration of appropriate support and interventions is crucial. Worden (1982), a recognized grief pioneer researcher and therapist noted that "timing is essential" (p. 75), and many issues linger beyond the first year. During the initial year of grief, mourners may require specific support to address grief from loss, and the necessary adjustment to continue on, in the absence of their loved one. A year or more after the death, the psycho-spiritual needs of those left behind can face very different, less stark, immediate, and more nuanced and diffuse issues**.**

Grief has characteristics that are both universal and unique to being human. The experience of grief is universal, yet the way we move through the grief is our unique story. With death, the beloved, who was physically and emotionally part of our life is, in a flash, gone forever. Never to talk with, touch, or see the loved one again, is the new reality. Personality and personal beliefs influence the process of grieving, and attitudes impact the challenge of moving through grief. Although the experience of grief offers the possibility of self-discovery, personal beliefs may inhibit movement, and become a foundation for unresolved grief.

During the first year and a half after a death, telling the story can release the pain of unspoken grief, especially when the death was sudden, unexpected, traumatic, or violent. After time, beyond the first eighteen months, the integration of grief may actually encourage the mourner to develop a new reality with positive changes. Grieving is a process that values and normalizes the interruption of daily life caused by a death. Within the rawness and rage of loss is the opportunity to examine past and present thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In the process, the griever may discover a unique identity through inquiry into the existential question of, "who am I without my parent, partner, or

child?" Facing grief can be a lengthy challenge. Yet, loss and grief presents opportunities for self-discovery, to compassionately investigate identity, and to notice the internal shift of thoughts and feelings that grieving promotes. It is also a time to contract from everyday routine, and make time to engage in meditation and soul-searching.

Exploring existential questions of meaningfulness and God takes courage and resolution. Faced with significant life changes caused by the death of a loved one, the griever's responses are rooted in personal and cultural beliefs. Often it is not until after the first year of loss that the griever learns to integrate healthy solutions and adopt methods that help reestablish a sense of security and serenity. Group support for facing grief, sharing life situations of interruption and impermanence, and reentering life through a pathway, can be beneficial beyond the first year.

Grief may be experienced after various types of losses, such as addiction, amputation, death, disconnected relationships, disasters, health issues, job loss, pet loss, multiple moves, and other meaningful life situations. In this project, the loss addressed is the death of a spouse. The death of a loved one included losses that were anticipated, such as from terminal illnesses, or sudden and unexpected losses, such as random, and traumatic deaths. The death may have come peacefully or precipitously.

This demonstration project, *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery*, responds to a need to explore the broader psycho-spiritual reservoir of grieving, as some needs remain unmet during and after the initial year of mourning. With this in mind, an intentional, structured, self-discovery grief group beyond eighteen months after the death of a spouse to benefit the process of grieving was developed. The program is designed as a seven-session closed, contemplative, and multi-faith self-discovery grief group to examine the

impact of the psycho-spiritual aspects eighteen month after the death of a spouse. Beyond the clinical concepts of grief, this project will emphasize the value of groups and group work in addressing grief.

Operational Definitions

In this demonstration project, the author uses the following terms as defined by Stroebe and Stroebe (1987, p. 7):

Bereavement refers to the state of suffering a loss of someone significant through that person's death.

Grief refers to the emotional response to a loss.

Mourning refers to the expression of grief, which may include rituals or customs related to one's religious or cultural practices.

Organization of the Demonstration Project

Chapter one provides an overview and introduction to the clinical concepts of grief, and the impact of spousal death upon the mourner.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature on grief, bereavement, mourning, and the role of bereavement groups, and presents a contemplative and kabbalistic approach to grief.

Chapter three describes the methodology, including recruitment, inclusion criteria, instruments, program development, and data collection employed in this demonstration project.

Chapter four provides the results of the project in two parts; the first addressing the profiles of the group participants, and the second, highlighting what occurred in each group session.

Chapter five provides a summary of the demonstration project, and discusses the results and implications of the findings, including recommendations for future replication of the group.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.
William Shakespeare (Macbeth, Act IV, Scene III)

Clinical Perspectives on Grief and Bereavement

Grievers face a new reality and need time and tools to explore and process the issues of loss and grief. In grieving, therapeutic factors to consider are the personality of the griever, and the narrative of the death. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (1917) defined mourning as ". . .the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on (p. 243)." He views the "work of mourning" as the need to relinquish ties to the lost love object (known as decathexis), done through a process whereby a mourner reviews memories of the lost person. According to Freud, "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (p. 245). The unsuccessful resolution of the loss leads to melancholia (what we would now consider under the rubric of depression). Freud suggests that disrupted childhood attachment injures the ego and, upon the death of a loved one, manifests in guilt and shame. Bowlby (1988) concurs that infant disruption of attachment affects the adult griever. He interprets the attachment disruption as trauma to the self, which is a normal mourning response to death, and thus, reparative. Both Freud and Bowlby accept that the "dynamics of attachment, the self, and mourning are interrelated" (Schermer, as cited in Kauffman, 2010, p. 38).

Bowlby moved away from Freud's grief work model, and shifted the "paradigm explaining the origins of attachment and consequences of separation" (Stroebe, 2002, p. 128). The separation was viewed as a maternal deprivation, based on his work with children. Bowlby (1988) addressed loss as a psychological trauma in response to separation, by identifying both normal and pathological stages of grief reactions. The four phases of natural grief are: shock and protest, preoccupation, disorganization, and resolution. In normal grief, one oscillates between the stages; length of time varies, and belief influences the healing process. In addition to normal grief, Bowlby described three pathological responses to grief: inhibited, delayed, and chronic. In the first two responses, the griever is unable to express or accept the loss, whereas in chronic grief, the griever is unable to relocate the loss. In terms of attachment theory, Bowlby associates delayed grief with avoidant attachment, and chronic grief with ambivalent attachment. In pathological grief reactions, the bereaved may use addiction and/or social isolation to muddle through grief, and refuse or deny treatment. Bowlby initially identified the need to work through grief by "rearranging representations of the lost person and, relatedly, of the self," and later noted that "this detachment (…reorganization…) …also furthered the continuation of the bond, a relocation of the deceased so that adjustment can gradually be made of the physical absence of this person in ongoing life…" (Stroebe and Schut, 1999, p. 198).

Through an initial collaboration with Bowlby, Parkes (as cites by Stroebe, 2002) shifted the focus away from maternal deprivation, to a focus on adult bereavement processes, through his research with widows. Parkes (1998) identified four phases of grief to the impending death of the widows (i.e., anticipatory grief). They include

numbness, pinning (the longing for the return of the deceased person), disorganization and despair (withdrawal from usual activities), and reorganization (a return to usual activities, with diminished sadness). The mourner may pass through these phases several times before a sense of recovery and reorganization has set in (p. 857). As mourning progressed, Parkes (1972, as cited by Horowitz, 1990) designated seven phases of the mourning response. These included:

> (1) Initial denial and avoidance of the loss;
> (2) Subsequent alarm reactions, such as anxiety, with restlessness and physiological complaints;
> (3) Searching to find the lost person;
> (4) Anger and guilt;
> (5) Feelings of internal loss;
> (6) Adoption of traits or mannerisms of the deceased; and
> (7) Acceptance and resolution, including appropriate changes in identity.

In pathological mourning, Parkes (2006) noted that attachment styles strongly influenced one's reaction to loss. These included denial and chronic depression of mood, and an unrelenting occupation with the lost loved one (p. 199).

Horowitz (1990) views mourning as a process of going through phases that "involves an unconscious change in mental structures of meanings about the self and other people" (p. 297). The transformed mental structure, known as a self-schema, "is an organized composite of multiple features that persists unconsciously to organize mental processes and perhaps produce derivatives for conscious representation" (p. 303). Known as the "stress response syndrome," Horowitz identifies a five-phase process, that includes outcry, denial, intrusion, working through, and completion. While the phases may not be experienced by all persons, "personality style, current conflicts, and developmental level of the personality all affect the experience and length of the phases" (p. 301). The reorganization of schemas between self and others needs to ultimately

reflect the permanency of the loss. “Between the initial unconscious view of the deceased as alive, yet lost to contact with the self, and the eventual, full, unconscious acceptance of the death, unconscious beliefs undergo many changes. These lead to varied conscious experiences during a working-through phase” (p. 314). Elements of the self and other schemas identify this process as a “role relationship model,” and are incorporated into an object relations psychoanalytic treatment model (p. 302).

Object relations theory addresses personality development and psychopathology based on the internal psychic representations of interpersonal relationships. People, parts of people, or physical items that are symbolic representations of a person or part of a person that have been internalized are known as “objects” (Summers, 1994, p. 24). Conceptually, object relations theory describes the interpersonal relations that are incorporated, beginning in infancy. Klein (1940), an object relations analyst, defined the relationship between normal mourning and early psychic development. She believed that the loss of a loved one in adulthood revives the early experience of the “depressive position” when the infant was weaned from the good object. Pathological mourning is seen in the adult who was unable to work through the infantile depressive position, and develop a sense of security of an inner world filled with good objects (p. 323).

The resolution of pathological or prolonged mourning may require the assistance of a trained mental health professional. Working through mourning often is done through the relationship between patient and analyst in the therapeutic relationship. Though the patient has come for assistance with an inability to successfully cope with the death of a loved one, something powerful develops in the interaction that has the potential to either promote the resolution of conflicts, or interfere with the task at hand. We each bring our

past experiences to any new experience. Because of the powerful nature of the relationship between patient and analyst, something known as transference occurs in the interaction. This is the process “whereby we unconsciously transfer feelings and attitudes from a person or situation in the past on to a person or situation in the present. The process is at least partly inappropriate to the present” (Hughes & Kerr, 2000, p. 58). In the context of pathological mourning, the transference is likely to include conflicts that represent remnants of losses from earlier relationships with primary caregivers, such as parents. How one relates to the analyst is a byproduct of those experiences that can often be traced back to infancy and the parent-child bond. In the sacred space of the analytic room, the patient will reveal conflicts from early childhood interactions. The therapeutic relationship consists of the real relationship between the patient and analyst, as well as transferred aspects of past relationships. Included in the interactions are defense mechanisms (ways that the patient has learned to cope). One such defense mechanism is introjection, which refers to the internal psychic representations of early significant objects that have been incorporated into the infant’s psyche, and are representative of earlier experiences. These internalized images of others can include good and bad aspects, and may contain inaccurate representations. In the internal family system model, Schwartz (1995) defines transference as “a part that is frozen in the past at an emotionally laden time, or a part that carries a burden from interactions with the original person.” The therapist will “ask the client to find the parts that have these transferred feelings or beliefs” in an effort to “unburden those parts.” (pp.87-88). In this way, the therapist would be able to work together with the client to address the parts and work through the bereavement issues.

In her discussion of defensive process of introjection, McWilliams (2011) notes,

> When we are deeply attached to people, we introject them, and their representations inside us become part of our identity. . .If we lose someone who image we have internalized, whether by death, separation, or rejection, not only do we feel that our environment is poorer for that person's absence in our lives but we also feel that we are somehow diminished, that a part of our self has died. An emptiness or sense of v oid comes to dominate our inner world (p. 112).

Analytic treatment would examine the transferential elements of the patient's introjects, in an attempt to work through the earlier conflicts. It is likely that pathological mourning would interfere with the bereaved's relationships with family members, friends, partners, and colleagues. By re-experiencing these conflicts with the analyst, the patient can transform pathological mourning into normal morning. Klein (1940) notes that,

> only gradually, by regaining trust in external objects and values of of various kinds, is the normal mourner able once more to strengthen his confidence in the lost loved person. Then he can again bear to realize that this object was not perfect, and yet not lose trust and love for him, nor fear his revenge. When this stage is reached, important steps in the work of mourning and towards overcoming it have been made (p. 106).

Winnicott (as cited in Buckley, 1986) identified stages of development, with "holding" being the first stage. The process of developing the self begins with total dependence, and transitions to separation. Facing the death of a spouse affects the sense of separation, and raises the question of "who am I without my spouse?" The holding stage is as not merely physical, but also represents "the total environmental provision prior to the concept of living with" (p. 240). The rupture and alienation created by bad holding in childhood can manifest in many ways, and can influence the way the griever moves or does not move through loss in adulthood. By providing a secure and consistent "holding environment," the analyst can help the adult who, as a child, grew up without the security of having incorporated good objects. In turn, the adult can learn to come to

grips with the understanding that, while not perfect, the lost person was still a loving object. The analyst provides the needed holding environment the bereaved person needs.

An early theorist addressing the transformation of pathological grief to normal grief was Eric Lindemann. Based on work with survivors of the 1942 Coconut Grove fire, Lindemann (1944) published a paper identifying five components of the acute grief syndrome. These included: (1) somatic disress, (2) preoccupation with the image of the deceased, (3) guilt, (4) hostile reactions, and (5) loss of patterns of conduct (p. 142). Lindemann further noted that,

> the duration of a grief reaction seems to depend upon the success to which a person does the grief work, namely, emancipation from the bondage of the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships. One of the big obstacles to this work seems to be the fact that many patients try to avoid the intense distress connected with the grief experience and to avoid the expression of emotion necessary for it (p. 143).

As a psychoanalyst, it appears that Lindemann believed that grief was repressed, and needed treatment to express their feelings.

Another influential theoretical approach to grieving behavior comes from the clinical work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) and her work with dying patients. This five-stage model was transformed to serve as a stage model that described emotional tasks that persons coping with grief would traverse, and includes (1) denial and isolation - "this can't be," (2) anger – "why me?," (3) bargaining – "I promise…," (4) depression – "I don't care," and (5) acceptance – "I am ready to move on." The appeal of this model appeared to be an understanding that one stage led to the next, ultimately leading to a sense of closure. Failure to move through the sequential stages would indicate an inability to come to terms with the loss.

Sanders (1992) developed an integrative theory of bereavement that also includes five distinct phases. They include (1) shock, (2) awareness of loss, (3) conservation/withdrawal, (4) healing, and (5) renewal. Sanders notes,

> The phases do not have clear-cut stopping and starting points. The process is free-flowing: symptoms of one phase often overlap those of the next phase. We often get stuck in one phase or another and stay there for awhile (p. 39).

Although everyone grieves differently and will be affected differently, the responses of the griever tend to be physical, emotional, and social. Sanders identified mediators that influence the grieving process. Internal mediators include age, gender, health, personality, ambivalence, and dependency, while external mediators include social support, religion, socioeconomic status, culture, and other crises (pp. 37-41). Sanders encourages the griever to plan a ritual, and uses language that includes words such as, "normal" and healthy," rather than pathological.

Worden (2009) proposes a task model that allows the mourner to take a more active role to work through grief. He identifies four tasks of normal mourning. They are: (1) accept the reality of the loss, (2) work through the pain of the grief, (3) adjust to living without the deceased, and (4) refocus the energy from the deceased by reinvesting in the establishment of new relationships (p. 283). Worden notes that any tasks that are not completed have the potential to "impair further growth and development" (p. 103). He notes, "grieving is a fluid process and is influenced by the mediators of mourning (p. 53), and that "mediators of mourning. . .hold the key to understanding individual differences in the mourning experience" (p. 9). The mediating variables include: (1) kinship - who the person was, (2) the nature of the attachment – such as dependency issues, (3) death circumstances – the mode of death, such as expected, unanticipated, or traumatic, (4)

historical antecedents – loss history, (5) personality variables – such as age/gender, and coping or attachment styles, (6) social variables – support systems, including religious resources, and (7) concurrent stressors – such as life-change events (p. 284).

Rando (2003) has developed an approach that combines stages and processes. She used the term *complicated grief to* refer to grief that does not follow the normal course or process to successful completion, and presents with "symptoms, syndromes, diagnosable mental or physical disorders, and death. . .and specified two criteria. . .to be indicative of complicated grief: they must have developed or significantly worsened since the death in question, and must be associated with some compromise, distortion, or failure of some normal grief process" (p. 46). Three phases of grief and mourning are identified, and include the avoidance phase, the confrontation phase, and the accommodation phase. Along with the phases are six processes, known as the 6 R's (i.e., each process begins with the letter "r") that one hopes to accomplish throughout the phases. They are: recognize the loss (avoidance phase); react to the separation, recollect and re-experience the deceased and the relationship, relinquish the old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world (confrontation phase); and readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old world, and reinvest, by putting emotional energy into new people (accommodation phase). Examples of some of the risk factors for complicated mourning include the nature of the relationship, nature of the loss, multiple losses, severe trauma, concurrent mental illness, isolation, and guilt, to name a few.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) provide another approach to understanding loss. Known as the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (DPM), the model

identifies two stressors, “loss-oriented (focusing on the deceased and death events; confronting and dwelling on loss) and restoration-oriented (dealing with secondary stressors, such as coping with finances or learning to run a household, that come about as a result of death). They identify the process of confrontation and avoidance of both loss and restoration stressors as oscillation” (Stroebe, 2002, p. 134). Stroebe and Schut (2010) note that “emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies” can be used in the loss-oriented or restoration-oriented stressors (p. 277). The DPM moved away from a stage and phase model, to a more balanced approach of facing the reality of the loss, and continuing to live one’s life after the loss. The coping process is dynamic, and reflects the reality of the need to express emotions over the loss, while at other times needing to focus on the tasks of daily living.

Rubin (1999) uses an object relations framework in his proposal of a two-track model of bereavement, and states that the “response to loss must be understood as it relates to both the bereaved’s functioning and the quality and nature of the continuing attachment to the deceased.” The first track focuses on “how people function naturally and how this functioning is affected by the cataclysmic life experience that loss may entail,” while the second track “is concerned with how people are involved in maintaining and changing their relationships to the deceased” (pp. 684-685). The model appears to be closely aligned with the work of Bowlby and Parkes noted earlier in this chapter. What is unique about Rubin’s two-track model of bereavement is his moving away from a pathology viewpoint into a more normative viewpoint within object relations theory. Rubin notes,

> This model separates the analysis of personality function from the object detachment aspects of the bereavement process. . .One can

> be consciously and unconsciously processing the loss without necessarily manifesting the functional and symptomatic indicators associated with grieving. . .The essence of the two-track model is that the response-to-loss process occurs at both the personality-behavioural and the object-related levels (p. 339).

Examining the bereaved's relationship to the deceased, through an exploration of the imagined representations to the deceased, as well as the quality of one's memory of the deceased, would be a better indicator of whether one has resolved the loss, or whether the mourning process is obstructed. Rubin describes the resolution of the loss as an "ongoing experience involving recollection, imaging and association at conscious and unconscious levels" (p. 340). A satisfactory resolution of the loss would be seen "if the cognitive-affective relationship is facilitating rather than threatening, and if recollection is a source of warmth and a pleasant experience…Ultimately, if memories of the deceased stand with rather than against the self-representations, the term 'resolution of bereavement' adequately describes the internal object relationship and the response to loss" (p. 342). The two-track approach appears to be indicative of a positive, emotional connection with the deceased, moving from the earlier psychoanalytic view of detaching from the deceased loved one, toward an integrative, relational model of bereavement.

Shapiro (1994) has introduced a systemic, developmental approach to grief and bereavement that also includes cultural and social norms. She notes, "grief is a deeply shared family developmental transition, involving a crisis of attachment and a crisis of identity for family members, both of which have to be incorporated into the ongoing flow of family development" (p. 12). Reestablishing a sense of stability among the surviving family system is paramount for healthy grief, through needed "individual, family systemic, community, and sociocultural resources" (p. 13). Shapiro believes that healthy

family bereavement results when “the capacity of family members to recognize and respect their differences in grief reactions and coping style” are operative (p. 15).

Shapiro offers the a systemic developmental approach to bereavement:

> 1. Grief is a family developmental crisis that becomes interwoven with family history. . .and radically redirects the future course of shared family development.
> 2. Grief is a crisis of both attachment and identity, disrupting family stability in the interrelated domains of emotions, interactions, social roles, and meanings. Grief mobilizes a family’s resources for managing intense emotions, reorganizing daily interactions, and redefining the identity of the complex, collaborative self.
> 3. A family’s first priority in managing the crisis of grief is re-establishing the stable equilibrium necessary to support ongoing family development. Resources. . .include the individual, the family system, the community, and the sociocultural environment.
> 4. The shared developmental process of establishing growth-enhancing stability while gradually integrating an new sense of the complex, collaborate self is lifelong. The timing of family bereavement will vary with the degree of stress and. . .in the circumstances of the death, the balance of stress and support, the nature of the shared developmental history, and the availability of cultural grief practices.
> 5. The greater the family’s degree of stress. . .the greater the need for growth-constraining structures (intrapsychic and/or interpersonal) that dissociate overwhelming aspects of the grief experience, reestablish identity, and restrict. . .disequilibrating change.
> 6. Over the course of the family life cycle, families continue integrating the reality of the death and its consequences for reorganizing every aspect of the collaborative self. . .
> 7. Changing family relationships will include transformation of the relationship to the deceased, whose enduring image provides support for the ongoing development of surviving family members. Ideally, the deceased will be reintegrated into the family as a living, evolving spiritual presence. . .who continues to support the family’s development.
> 8. The goal of family bereavement is to restore the flow of developmental time and resume ongoing family development. Healthy grief reactions involve growth-enhancing strategies for Reestablishing stability; problematic grief reactions involve growth-constraining strategies for stability that interfere with ongoing family development (pp. 17-18).

Shapiro's non-pathologizing model strives to "help families survive and grow while bearing the burden of death and loss (p. 18). Unlike the original psychoanalytic approaches, grief "is resolved through the creation of a living, growing relationship with the dead family member that recognizes the new psychological or spiritual. . .dimensions of the relationship" (Shapiro, 1996, p. 552).

A significant loss can shatter a person's world-view. As a result, a task for the griever is find and create meaning, in an attempt to bring structure to make sense of the loss and their shattered world views. This is the basic premise of a meaning reconstruction model espoused by Robert Neimeyer. According to Neimeyer (1998), "meaning reconstruction in response to a loss is the central process in grieving" (p. 110). Elements of meaning construction include:

> (1) The attempt to find or create new meaning in the life of the survivor, as well as in the death of the loved one; (2) The integration of meaning, as well as its construction; (3) The construction of meaning as an interpersonal, as well as personal, process; (4) The anchoring of meaning making in cultural as well as intimate, discursive contexts; (5) Tacit and preverbal, as well as explicit and articulate meanings; and (6) The processes of meaning reconstruction, as well as its products (Neimeyer, 2000, pp. 552-555).

Identified processes of meaning construction include:

> (1) Grieving entails reaffirming or reconstructing a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss, (2) Adaptation to bereavement typically involves redefining, rather than relinquishing, a continued bond with the deceased, and (3) Narrative methods can play a role in restoring or re-storying a sense of autobiographical coherence that has been disrupted by loss (Neimeyer, 2007, pp. 195-203).

Some of the techniques suggested by Neimeyer in working with the narrative of grievers include narrative retelling, therapeutic writing (i.e., composing a goodbye letter to the deceased, or writing an autobiographical piece that includes shared experiences with the

deceased), writing an epitaph, journaling, choosing a life imprint, linking objects, using metaphors to describe the loss, and writing poetry (Neimeyer, 1999; Neimeyer et al., 2010). Perhaps what is most crucial is, what Neimeyer (2012) notes that "it is not a question of what grief therapy techniques do for a bereaved client; it is the question of what bereaved clients (and therapists) do with the techniques that counts." He notes that the "therapeutic presence" provides the "holding environment," and states the importance "of the broader relational framework that provides a 'container' not only for our client's grief, but also for the specific procedures we offer to express, explore, and ease the experience of loss" (p. 3). Hence, the constructivist approach used by Neimeyer is closely aligned with Stephen Mitchell's relational approach (1988), whereby the therapist and patient are co-constructors of narratives and personal meanings (DeYoung, 2003, p. 28).

The Role of Bereavement Groups

Grief groups promote learning how to live after the death of a loved one. The benefit of a group is that it offers members a safe environment to express painful feelings without fear, guilt or judgment. The griever has an opportunity to create connections with others who also experienced the death of a loved one. An effective bereavement group encourages the griever to experience pain, and offers grief education. Understanding phases of grief, the common experiences of grief, and uniqueness of grief may help normalize the healing process.

According to Yalom (2005) the struggles faced in each group are similar in content. He identifies death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness as the four human conditions of existence that are foundational in groups, yet experienced

differently. Yalom describes the anxiety that results in each of these conditions as follows:

> (1) we wish to continue to be and yet are aware of inevitable death; (2) we crave structure and yet must confront the truth that we are the authors of our own life design and our beliefs. . . is responsible for the form of reality. . .(3) we desire contact, protection, to be part of a larger whole, yet experience the unbridgeable gap between self and others; and (4) we are meaning-seeking creatures thrown into a world that has no intrinsic meaning (pp.101-102).

Groups are usually formed with participants facing similar issues who can benefit from the experience of others, such as spousal loss. A grief group can address the four existential inquiries identified by Yalom. A spouse faces the impermanence of life in the face of death. For the surviving spouse, life has been shattered, and daily, mundane routines change. A bereavement group gives the griever permission to create a time and space to acknowledge the self, examine beliefs, and safely reconstruct a new and meaningful narrative (Neimeyer, 1998). Although participants share the loss of a spouse, the fundamental responsibility for movement and growth lies within the self. The development of cohesiveness in a group functions "to create a group culture maximally conducive to effective group interaction" (Yalom, 2005, p. 121).

In a group setting, the griever has the opportunity to reflect. However, "the alternative to being (reflective) is reacting and reacting interrupts being and annihilates" (Winnicott, as cited by Buckley, 1986, p. 244). As the baby depends on a non-interrupted oceanic (comfortable) union with his or her mother, so, too, is the need of the group to feel a sense of safety. The sense of annihilation comes from being forced into an action that prematurely causes the self to be separate, and leads to a sense of an impingement that is often experienced after a sudden or traumatic death.

Holland (2011) notes that bereavement groups provide the grieving with an opportunity to be with others who have experienced the death of a loved one. She highlights the support that being with others can provide, helping mourners realize that they are "not crazy, not alone, not as different as they think, not losing their minds, and have nothing wrong with them." Holland notes that "a bereavement program provides an empathetic, supportive environment with people who understand what you're going through because they are, too" (p. 244).

Lund & Caserta (1992) designed a study to examine the value of self-help groups in facilitating the coping of 192 recently widowed, older spouses. This study followed a previous study that demonstrated a "high degree of coping ability, resourcefulness, and resiliency among many of the bereaved spouses." The rate of bereaved spouses who reported coping difficulties was 18 percent. The entire sample was asked if they would participate in self-help groups if available, and 44 percent indicated that they would attend. The results indicated that bereaved older spouses would desire to participate in self-help groups, though this percent should not be interpreted as representing the majority of older, bereaved spouses. The data indicate that self-help groups might benefit those who had difficulty coping, which was defined as those who lacked the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings with others, and those who did not occupy their time. The benefits noted included the ability to enhance one's support system by meeting new friends, and being able to share thoughts and feelings with others through support group attendance, leading to greater coping skills and resiliency after a death (pp. 48-49).

A study by Yoo & Kang (2006) assessed depression levels and life satisfaction in Korean women. The three-part program included a breathing exercise, a self-help group

to share experiences with grief and learn new coping skills, and a health examination. The support group was modeled after Worden's tasks of grief described earlier. The findings indicated reduced depression levels, along with increased life satisfaction scores, and point to the benefits of devising social support programs that incorporate elements of the bereavement task models.

Davison, Pennebaker, & Dickerson (2000) note that many persons attend support groups for a variety of illnesses and issues. The experience of a group offers participants the opportunity for social interaction with others in similar situations, and provides information and understanding of areas of mutual interest (p. 205). The basic premise is that self-help groups work well as people facing a similar challenge help each other by simply coming together. The authors note that "the power of this approach lies in the belief that a collective wisdom is born through the shared experience of participants... and the opportunities for disclosure, empathic connection, shared goals, and psychological adjustment to life challenges. They underscore the medical value of meaningful group-based program whose psychological focus elicits psychosocial and physical health benefits" (pp. 206-207).

Shear et al. (2005) presents techniques that can be employed in groups when working with patients who have chronic grief. These include (1) repeated retelling of the story of death, (2) an imaginary conversation with the deceased, and (3) work on confronting avoided situations (pp. 2603-2604). Similarly, techniques that can be used based on the Rando 6's model described earlier, include: gestalt therapeutic exercises (i.e., empty chair or role play), bereavement rituals, psychodrama, writing/journaling, and creative works, such as music, art, and sculpting (Rando, 1993, p. 595).

Bonanno (2009) notes that some grievers are resilient and do not require the intervention of a bereavement counselor or bereavement group to cope with their losses. Their mourning process is relatively short, and they do not feel the need to participate in a bereavement group. They are able to move on with their lives, despite the losses. For those experiencing difficulties moving on after the loss of a loved one, participation in a bereavement group may serve as a buffer against further problems-in-living. Over time, the group process may help the griever transform the sadness of significant attachment losses, and co-construct a new identity.

Contemplative Approaches

Mindfulness meditation is an approach to focus the mind and witness whatever arises, without judgment. This practice, which can be done individually or in groups, results is an awareness of thoughts, words, feelings, and actions, and can lead to being a genuine presence for others. Evidenced-based research on mindfulness and stress reduction was pioneered by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center (Kabat-Zinn & Santorelli, 1996, p. 1). The mindfulness-based stress reduction approach is sensitive to group dynamics, and to individual uniqueness of pain, fears, behaviors, and attachments.

Contemplative communication encompasses the use of silence, sharing, and witnessing between speakers and listeners. Rather than respond with comments that reflect the urge to change or fix others, listeners (especially in groups) are encouraged to witness, without interruption, what has been revealed. Contemplative communication is a conscious act of vocabulary and idiom, which connect participants in a non-judgmental way. By silently reflecting on what is heard, listeners are urged to pause by going within,

and being curious. They may internally wonder: what influenced the question? How important is it? This technique allows participants to become aware of their inner thoughts and feelings, and provides a compassionate and calming environment that facilitates the exploration of self-discovery.

Silence offers an opportunity to explore sensations, and tune in to one's internal narrative. Wegela (2009) believes that allowing others to speak without interrupting, simply being with another person and offering a silent and sacred space, is healing. She notes that therapists need to be comfortable with silence, while listening attentively and hearing the pain of another. Breathing techniques offer a way to slow down or energize the body and mind. Conscious breathing offers the body and mind time to process thoughts and feelings, and to apply energy toward self-healing and balance. During moments of silence and breath awareness, the body and mind have a chance to pause from ongoing unconscious thoughts and feelings, and can lead to moments of insight. The practice of breath (and yoga) integrates the body and mind through movement, from a "sense of separation to a sense of wholeness, and a union with the Absolute" (Sillari, 1998, p. 5). A personal practice of meditation that includes moments of silence enhances the experience of patience. In turn, this encourages acceptance and responses that are reflective, rather than reactionary (Kumar, 2005).

The application of meditation within a grief group can provide participants a way to experience a personal sense of well being, by providing an opportunity for members to explore loss, and discover new insights with curiosity and compassion. As a "moment-to-moment awareness" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 265) practice, mindfulness meditation can be applied to activities throughout the day. Meditation is described by Buddhist psychology,

and in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Taoist teachings. In this project, the terms meditation and contemplative are used interchangeably.

Theological Underpinnings

In addition to the physical, social, and psychological disruption, the death of a loved one can cause a spiritual interruption. Schermer (as cited in Kauffman, 2010) describes the experience of death for some people as a "severe and disruptive hole, gap, or absence within the continuity of the self that implies exile and impermanence" (p. 40). The loss leaves the griever with a feeling of being in a spiritual exile, disconnected from normal living, and retreating from relationships and activities. Relationships with family and friends may shift with a conscious letting go, as needs change. Emotional and spiritual pain may transform the griever's relationship with self, and others. Anger and blame can blind one's prior beliefs, and also change the griever's relationship with God. Impermanence becomes the new reality after the death of a loved one. People and places may feel void of fulfillment or purpose.

The experience of death is challenging for the psyche to understand, accept, and reconcile. Death evokes emotions of pain and despair, and an internal exile from the external world. An exile is like walking in the wilderness without knowing what direction to take. The first year after the death is a time of contraction, and provides the griever with an opportunity to feel the emptiness that exists. In the void, the bereaved may reflect on personal thoughts, relationships, and the meaning of life. An inquiry into what and who is meaningful to the bereaved person encompasses an investigation into spiritual beliefs, and often needs time to germinate.

Genesis 4:8 notes that “Cain set upon his brother and killed him.” Adam and Eve are the parents who experience the death of one son, Abel, by their other son, Cain. As the parents of both the murdered and the murderer, they are the first humans to experience death. “Adam and Eve came and sat by the body. . .but they did not know what to do. . .” Hammer (2006) notes that in the story, “the raven and the dog together show human beings how to treat the dead with dignity, how to be even more human” (p. 369). In addition, Adam and Eve are the first archetypical humans to experience both God and Satan. The concepts of good and evil are frequently raised with clergy after a death, with questions such as, where is God? How could God allow evil in the world? Baron-Cohen (2011) explored the biological relationship between compassion and evil.

The psycho-spiritual perspective is congruent with relational theory, which recognizes the influence of relationship to the self, the other, and God. In exile, the search for a purposeful and meaningful life often includes seeking answers from God. Trust, patience, faith, and hope are attributes necessary to pursue theodicy, while feelings of helplessness, brokenness, doubt, and anger may harden the heart and hinder the pursuit.

Death is an unknown mystery. After the burial of the body, people may question what happens to the soul. The bereft are left to wonder what is experienced beyond the physical world. The griever’s spiritual and religious beliefs may shape the process of healing grief. Questions of faith, personal relationship with God, and beliefs are existential questions that can be explored through biblical stories, prayers, psalms, and practices that console those who are grieving.

In Judaism, ritual guides the bereaved from the moment of death through the first year. After the cessation of breath and brain function, the body is dead and attended to

with dignity. The body is washed ritually and prepared for burial within twenty-four hours. The ritual of sitting *shiva* follows the funeral, and for seven days the community supports the grievers by offering food, visits of comfort, and care. Community support continues throughout the next 11 months as the bereaved recites *Kaddish* (a prayer sanctifying God's name, traditionally recited in the presence of at least ten Jews), generally in a synagogue.

Numbers and Judaism have always had an intricate connection. Every letter of the Hebrew alphabet corresponds to a number. Though the symbolism for numbers appears in Judaism, for purposes of this demonstration project, the focus is on the number seven. As noted earlier, after a Jewish burial, the bereaved often engage in a mourning period called *shiva* (literally, sitting for seven days grieving). Seven appears to be one of the more symbolic numbers in Judaism. After the six days of creation, God rested from completing the creation of heaven and earth, and all that was in them, and God blessed and sanctified the seventh day as the Sabbath (Genesis 2: 1-3). In Christianity, the seventh day of creation is considered a day of rest, "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work" (Hebrews 4:4). The Christian Sabbath is observed on Sunday.

In Christianity, a sign of the covenant (and hope) is formed through the symbol of the rainbow (Genesis 9:11-13). The archangel Raphael, translated as "God Heals," is represented in both Judaism and Christianity, and is associated with the color of emerald green. In faith traditions, the sense of healing may be visual, such as seeing colors; or auditory, through hearing the sound of seven musical notes. Christianity flows from Judaism and shares many of the same narratives found in biblical literature, though rituals from multi-faith religions, cultures, and spirituality may differ.

Seven Sacraments offers an acknowledgement of the human life cycle from birth to death, and the significant moments of healing, ordination, and matrimony in the Catholic faith. A sacrament is a symbolic sign of receiving external grace into one's inner soul. The sacraments offer a sense of transformation and resurrection through confession to a priest. The root of the seven sacraments is found in Exodus and Genesis, the old testament of the Hebrew bible, and acknowledges space, time, and the seasons of birth, life, death, and renewal.

Catholicism follows the teaching of the seven Sacraments, while some Protestant traditions follow a few sacraments, such as birth, Eucharist, and confirmation. Other Christian traditions have separated from formal Sacramental support. The seven sacraments have no actual colors assigned. However, the garments of priests and pastors, as well as the sanctuary, reflect changes of color on the altar in the Chapel, during Holy Days. Rituals provide a sense of constancy, a connection to the past, a celebration of the present, and a legacy for the future.

The seven chakras offer a spiritual perspective to insight, healing, and action. The practice of the seven chakras creates a sacred space, and time, for self-reflection through the use of yoga, breathe, visualization, and meditation. The chakras provide an internal focus of self and time for restoration, as grieving can exhaust the body, mind, and spirit. Contemporary scientist and mystic, Joan Borysenko (1997), considers chakras colors and how the "seven chakras reveal seven paths to God" (p. 3).

In developing the *Pathway to the Garden of Discovery* program, the author was influenced by Kabbalistic teachings. Kabbalah is an esoteric aspect of Judaism that attempts to explore, understand, and discover meaning and purpose. This system uses

letters, numbers, and colors to interpret biblical scriptures (the Torah). The Kabbalistic model includes ten Divine emanations, known as *sefirot.* Each emanation (*sefirah*, in the singular form) is represented by a word that represents one way that God reveals His will. Each *sefirah* was incorporated into the session construct of each meeting. The session titles as theoretical constructs used in the program were derived from the Kabbalistic framework. These constructs of connecting, creating, changing, contemplating, communicating, curiosity, and compassion are highlighted in this brief program outline:

- *Connecting:* constructing a holding environment for sharing the personal story of loss (first session)
- *Creating:* focusing on personal identification, separation of self, and the existential question, who am I without you? (second session)
- *Changing:* acknowledging one's personal identity and exploring what is meaningful (third session)
- *Contemplating:* reflecting upon intimate relationships of the self, beloved, and God (fourth session)
- *Communicating:* differentiating core beliefs, and articulating the shadows of the self (fifth session)
- *Curiosity:* discerning life after the death of a spouse, and discovering a season of the self (sixth session)
- *Compassion*: reflecting on the group process, and ending with a sense of sojourn (seventh session).

The *sefirot* also served as a blueprint for the seven-session grief program.

Correlations are made between the session constructs, each of the *sefirot,* the seven days of creation, biblical characters, and texts. The first three of the ten *sefirot, chochmah* (wisdom), *binah* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge) are considered the "Flows of Mind" (Wolf, 1999, p. 57). The last seven, the *sefirot* of emotions, are identified as: *chesed* (loving kindness), *gevurah* (discernment); *tiferet* (beauty); *netzach* (endurance); *hod* (splendor); *yesod* (foundation); and *malchut* (royalty). Though Divine emanation flows downward beginning with *chesed* and concludes with *malchut*, in this project, the seven-session grief program theme begins with *malchut* and concludes with *chesed*.

> The Kabbalah tells us that the creation is not complete. We create the environment through which the universe can be perfected. The tools we are given are the ten Sefirot. They are the spiritual energies of Mind and Emotion (Wolf, 1999, p. 52).

Ginsburgh (1995) notes that according to Kabbalah, the first two *sefirot, chochmah* and *binah* are "concealed" to God, while the lower *sefirot* are "revealed" to humans, and correspond to the emotions of the heart (p. 119). The s*efirot* include three channels for the Divine emanation of light. The right side as loving-kindness and the left side as discernment are external, while the middle *sefirot* remains as the constant inner emanation or point of light (p. 99). In referring to the lower seven *sefirot* representing the seven days of creation, the seven weeks between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot, and the seven years in the Jewish sabbatical cycle, Kaplan (1997) states that, "According to Rabbi Abulafia, there are seven levels in creation: Form, matter, combination, mineral, vegetable, animal, and man. Man is thus the seventh level, and is most beloved by God" (p. 190).

The program curriculum incorporated the lower seven *sefirot*. The meanings of the seven *sefirot* were used, without providing the corresponding Hebrew name. The theme for each session encompassed a *sefirah,* and each session built upon the previous theme. Table 1 outlines the seven sessions, *sefirot*, and theme for each group meeting.

Table 1 Seven Sefirot

Session/Construct	Sefirah		Theme
1. Connecting	*Malchut*	Royalty	Face To Face
2. Creating	*Yesod*	Foundation	My Mirror & Me
3. Changing	*Hod*	Splendor	Roots, Rhythms, & Rituals
4. Contemplating	*Netzach*	Endurance	Awareness, Ambivalence, Acceptance & Autonomy
5. Communicating	*Tiferet*	Beauty	Indulging Spirit
6. Curiosity	*Gevurah*	Discernment	Begin Anew
7. Compassion	*Chesed*	Loving Kindness	Hear, I Am

Winkler (2004) provides descriptive reflections on each of the *sefirot*. He notes that,

> *Malchut* is the beginning, like a sunrise, and an ending, like a sunset, symbolic of a full circle and of a spiritual foundation. *Yesod* represents creativity channel to rebirth "through you, within you, and out into the universe." *Hod* opens the possibilities of ways to present presence with gracefulness and splendor or with intimidation. *Netzach* is the spark of relationships, experiences, and projects that fuel the force of empowerment. *Tiferet* is the inner beauty representing a "sense of togetherness;" the heart center to channel Divine Light within and through you. *Gevurah* provides ". . .randomness with direction, and tempers what would otherwise be running amok." *Chesed* is "symbolic of the lovingness that emerges out of the act of creating, of giving form to something" (pp. 50-55).

The essence of the days of creation was incorporated into each group session, with the seven sessions corresponding to the seven days of creation. The fusion of session number and the day of creation were introduced during the opening part of the program. The day of creation is connected to the theme through a simple statement of a few words or a short narration. Table 2 provides an overview of the connection between session and day of creation.

Table 2 Seven Days of Creation

Session/Construct	Day of Creation	
1.Connecting	First	Let there be Light - Awareness
2. Creating	Second	Separating of Firmament - Transformation
3. Changing	Third	Earth and Vegetation - Hearth
4. Contemplating	Fourth	Sun, Moon, & Stars - Night Light
5. Communicating	Fifth	Fishes & Birds - Beneath & Beyond
6. Curiosity	Sixth	Breath & Birth - Human Being
7. Compassion	Seventh	Rest - Reflection & Resilience

Biblical characters were spontaneously added to the project during session three, beginning with a brief narration of "Sarah." The biblical characters chosen depicted different stories of loss and grief. Ribner (2012) and Frankel (2003) have written books highlighting biblical characters, and inspired the desire to introduce biblical characters as a program component. Table 3 depicts the connection between session number and biblical character.

Table 3 Session and Biblical Characters

Session/Construct	Biblical Character	
1. Connecting	Eve	Mother of Murdered and Murderer
2. Creating	She'ilah	Anticipatory Death/Legacy
3. Changing	Sarah	Despair and Wonderment
4. Contemplating	Miriam	Moving through a narrow constrictive space
5. Communicating	Queen Esther	Hidden Identity
6. Curiosity	Prophetess Deborah	Listened to all who sat under the Palm Tree
7. Compassion	The Shechinah	Indwelling Presence

To plan a curriculum from session one, the author retrospectively began with the biblical character, Eve. The next session offered various choices of biblical characters to include. Hannah, a woman who introduced prayer from the heart, or Naomi, who represented the bitter-sweetness of death and legacy, could have been incorporated. Though either would have been appropriate, the author chose the biblical character of She'ilah (daughter of Jephthah), who randomly, suddenly, tragically, and unexpectedly received a death sentence by her father. Unable to successfully be saved from her fate, She'ilah requested two months to go to the hills and mourn with her friends (Judges 11:34-39). She'ilah teaches the importance of relationships, and how to live the end of life with dignity.

Similar to Ribner and Frankel, Hammer and Feit (2012) has also provided a narration of forty-nine biblical women to correspond to the forty-nine days that fall between the Jewish holidays of Passover and Shavuot. The narration for each of the days reflected the *sefirah* of the day. Also of note is another meaning of the word *sefirah*.

Beyond being an emanation of God, another definition of *sefirah* is counting. The period between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot is often referred to as *sefirat ha-omer*, meaning, the counting of the *omer*. An *omer* was a measurement of grain that was brought to the temple, beginning with the second day of Passover as an offering to God, and culminating on Shavuot. The first 32 days of the *counting of the omer* are considered days of mourning, in which Jews do not attend weddings or parties, and do not cut their hair. The mourning period represents the days when the disciples of Rabbi Akiba were afflicted by a plague and killed for disrespectful conduct toward one another. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the seven-session bereavement group occurred during the counting of the *omer*, overlapping this period of mourning.

The Role of Color

According to Jacobson (1996), the seven-week journey between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot serves as a spiritual blueprint "to actualize ourselves" (p. 4). The counting begins with the *sefirah* of *chesed*, and concludes on the seventh week, with the *sefirah* of *malchut*. Each week is described by a color. While *malchut* is often depicted by the color brown, in this project, *malchut* is portrayed as white, a color inclusive of all the colors. Table 4 provides an overview of the group sessions and corresponding *sefirot* and colors.

Table 4 Sefirot and Color

Session/Construct	*Sefirah*	Color
1.Connecting	*Malchut*	White
2. Creating	*Yesod*	Red
3. Changing	*Hod*	Orange
4. Contemplating	*Netzach*	Yellow
5. Communicating	*Tiferet*	Green
6. Curiosity	*Gevurah*	Blue
7. Compassion	*Chesed*	Purple

The use of color is supported through psychology, Yogic tradition of Chakra, through the use of food to improve and expand the human response (Brennan, 2007), and in the Kabbalistic tradition of the *sefirot*. The order of colors was white, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Together, the colors represented a rainbow, as a symbolic representation of hope in the Jewish tradition. Color appeals to the visual senses, and offers a sense of meaning in many traditions. Birren (1978), an authority in the field of color, addressed the influence of color on the human psyche. In the Yogic tradition, the Chakras use color to represent parts of the body. Similarly, color represents parts of the body in the Kabbalistic *sefirot*. The specifics of how color was incorporated into the program will be addressed in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the literature on grief, the role of bereavement groups, and the incorporation of contemplative and kabbalistic elements into the seven-session grief program. There is limited literature on the use of contemplative multi-faith self-discovery grief groups addressing spousal loss after eighteen months. The current demonstration project was an attempt to address this by providing grievers with the opportunity to explore the narrative of spousal loss beyond the first year. The next chapter will provide an overview of the methodology used in the planning and development of the current demonstration project.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study of the *Pathway to the Garden of Discovery* Program focused on the clinical and psycho-spiritual components of grief in spousal loss. In this chapter, the process of developing the seven-session self-discovery grief group will be highlighted. Areas addressed include recruitment of the sample, location, informed consent, confidentiality and data storage, and program overview.

Recruitment of the Sample

To identify persons who would benefit from participating in a bereavement support group, the author contacted hospital colleagues, along with a synagogue rabbi in her community. Once potential participants were identified, the referring agent had to obtain verbal consent to provide their contact information to the program author. The following inclusion criteria were used:

1) Potential participants had to have experienced the death of a spouse at least 18 months prior to joining the group.

2) Potential participants needed to be willing to commit to attend all seven sessions of the group.

3) Potential participants had to consent to being audiotaped during the group meetings.

4) Potential participants could possibly know each other.

5) Potential participants had to be willing to participate in a group being conducted as part of the requirements for the author's completion of her doctoral program.

Excluded from the group were those who lost a spouse to suicide, murder, or accidental death. Their participation might change the dynamic of the group process.

The author contacted potential participants by telephone, explained the purpose of the group and study, and conducted an informal screening (brief assessment) to assure that they met the inclusion criteria for the group. Once verbal consent was given by telephone, the author sent an invitation letter to potential participants (Appendix A). Those persons who chose to participate in the group were then sent an acceptance letter, (Appendix B). A follow-up reminder was sent to prospective participants prior to the first meeting (Appendix C). Each letter included the time, location, and meeting schedule. Enclosed with the acceptance letter was a consent form (Appendix D) for participants to complete and either return by mail or e-mail, or bring to the first meeting. In this document, the terms participants or members are used interchangeably to refer to those persons who attended the seven-session group.

Informed Consent

Participants were mailed the consent form, in addition to the invitation, acceptance, and reminder letters. The consent form indicated the purpose of the group, the activities that would be used, how confidentiality would be maintained, and the participant's right to voluntarily withdraw from the group at any point during the seven group meetings with no penalty. Participants were notified that the group was being conducted as a component of the group facilitator's doctoral program, and that group meetings would be audio recorded. Contact information for the group facilitator was also included. Participants were given a copy of the consent form after they submitted a

signed form to the group facilitator. In this document, the words author, group facilitator, and chaplain facilitator are used interchangeably.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

Each participant accepted into the group was assigned a number from one to six. The number was used for all records and homework sheets that participants submitted. In addition, for purposes of the write-up of the demonstration project, the number would be used to describe the results. Audiotapes and any collected material were kept in a locked office that no one else had access to. Written materials (i.e., homework assignments) were returned to participants at the end of the seven-week program. Any materials not returned, including the audiotapes, will be destroyed after the final demonstration project report is completed.

Location and Time

In securing the proper physical environment to hold the seven-session program, factors such as confidentiality, safety, parking, and financial obligation identified the local public library as an ideal site to hold the group meetings. As a town resident, there was no room rental fee, and the first floor location provided easy access to the large meeting room, and accessible restroom facilities. The room appeared to be well maintained, had access to tables, an adequate number of chairs, large picture windows, and a view of nature during the spring. The setting appeared to be one that would provide the intimacy needed for the program. A custodian prepared the room at least 20 minutes prior to each meeting, using the configuration requested on the application for use of the

room. Chairs were placed in a circle, with a small table in the center. A tablecloth was placed to cover it, and the on the table were candles, index cards, and other necessary material for each group meeting.

The space was available for the group for 105 minutes for seven Thursdays from April through May 2013. Two unavoidable scheduled breaks were included as part of the planned seven-session program over the nine-week period. The first break occurred between the second and third meetings, and the second break occurred between the fifth and sixth meetings.

Program Overview

In planning the program, the author developed curriculum sheets (Appendix E) for each of the seven sessions. These were solely for the use of the author, and not distributed to program participants. With the exception of the first meeting, each of the sessions followed the same basic structure. The first session provided an overview of the seven-session program. At the initial session, each member received a welcome letter (Appendix F), a handout outlining the program overview (Appendix G), and a colored folder as a place to keep weekly handouts and homework assignments. Members were encouraged to keep a journal of personal thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Each session began with a welcome by the author (a hospital chaplain), who, going forward, will also be referred to as the Chaplain Facilitator (CF). Following the welcome, the group participated in a ritual, known as the opening question. Participants were given a colored index card, and began the session silently, by noting their responses to the question on the index card. The check-in ritual provided participants with the

opportunity to share an awareness of thoughts, feelings, or actions. The offer of a blessing after the opening ritual was inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Marsha Prager (2003), who notes, “the act of blessing, [it] IS a mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is what blessing IS” (p. 3). During each session, explicit techniques such as breathing, and visualization were used. Implicit teachings offered participants an opportunity to discuss faith through biblical characters, texts, psalms, and prayers. Each session included a structured theme that provided a framework for reconstructing a meaningful narrative. The theme was provided during the initial session. Subsequently, each homework assignment identified the next meeting’s theme, and built upon the theme of the prior session.

An introduction to mindfulness meditation was provided. The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) developed most meditation handouts. The goal was to inspire or support a personal meditation practice, and various methods of mindfulness meditation, such as relaxation, journaling, breathing, contemplation, self-care, and visualization were offered. Mindfulness meditation was employed in the opening and closing rituals and the theme, and developed throughout the program. Meditations were also handed out at the end of each session.

Sharing Our Story (SOS) was a subtext used to support the overall theme of grieving. An SOS is a nautical term used as a signal when one needs immediate help. After the death of a loved one, the life known to the griever changes. The initial cries after a devastating death can sound like an SOS, or a call for help. The goals of the SOS were to provide additional ways to understand the grieving process, to support participants’ exploration of the impact of the loss, and to discover new ways of

transforming grief. Titles of the SOS included sharing, separating, solace, support, shadows, seasons, and sojourn.

The Use of Color

Color provided an implicit learning scenario that was integrated throughout the program. As previously noted, each *sefirah* had a corresponding color representation. The homework theme and meditation handouts were placed on appropriate colored sheets of paper. Electric candles and index cards reflected the color used during the session. In each session, the author wore black pants, shoes, and a jacket, with a shirt and scarf representing the session color.

Program Materials

This demonstration project utilized questionnaires that were developed by the author. Beyond some basic demographic information, the pre-assessment form (Appendix H) elicited data on the nature of the death, feelings experienced, other significant losses, the role of one's faith tradition as a support or hindrance, relationship to God, and personal and spiritual practices, to name a few. Additional materials used included homework assignments that addressed the session themes, and meditation handouts (Appendix I). The homework was distributed at the end of each session, and placed on appropriate colored paper. The intention for assigning homework was to prepare participants for the following session, and maintain a mindfulness focus. Journaling was introduced as a way to reconstruct the narrative of life and death, and to encourage participants to record any thoughts and feelings that arose. The Chaplain

Facilitator (CF) developed all homework assignments, and most meditation handouts, which incorporated the work of contemporary authors, including Andrew Weil, Tara Brach, and Deepak Chopra.

A post-assessment questionnaire (Appendix J) and program evaluation form (Appendix K) was administered after the seven-session program, and served as an evaluation tool for the program. The questions elicited data on changes in attitudes, beliefs, and feelings; activities that participants would focus on after the group concluded; the most meaningful moments experienced during the program; self-discoveries; and suggestions for improving the group program.

Summary

This chapter illustrates the organizational methods used to develop the seven-session grief group, along with the structure of each session. The next chapter will present the participant profiles, along with the results of each session.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study, and begins with a description of the sample characteristics. A portrait of each participant is provided, followed by a narrative describing each session's results.

Sample Characteristics

The study sample initially consisted of two men and six women. The two men were unable to make a commitment to attend all seven sessions, and declined participation in the study. Six women participated in the study. All study participants were married to a Jewish male, and ranged in age from 55-80. The mean age of the study sample was 63.8. All study participants earned bachelor's degrees, and three participants completed master's degrees. Two study participants were retired. Only two participants experienced the anticipated death of their spouses. The other deaths were sudden, unexpected, and/or traumatic. At the time of their spouses' deaths, all but one had participated in some form of individual and group counseling. One participant did not have children with her spouse. The sample characteristics, including demographic information, employment status, type of death, participation in counseling, and age of spouse at the time of death are presented in Tables 5, 6, and 7.

TABLE 5

STUDY SAMPLE

Participant	Name*	Age	Religion	Education/Degree	Employment Status
1	"She" who is reaching in & reaching out	64	Jewish	Masters of Social Work	Self-employed
2	Glory	62	Jewish	Masters of Social Work	Employed
3	Love	64	Jewish	Sixth year advanced college degree	Retired
4	Rose	55	Jewish	Master's Degree	Self-employed
5	Joan	80	Protestant	Bachelor's Degree	Retired
6	Diana	58	Catholic	Bachelor's Degree	Employed

*All names are pseudonyms, chosen by participants.

TABLE 6

TYPE OF DEATH AND COUNSELING EXPERIENCE

Participant	Name*	Current Age	Type of Death	Counseling at Time of Death
1	She who is reaching in & reaching out	64	Anticipated	Individual
2	Glory	62	Sudden/Traumatic	Individual & Group
3	Love	64	Sudden/Unexpected	Individual & Group
4	Rose	55	Sudden/Traumatic	Individual & Group
5	Joan	80	Anticipated	None
6	Diana	58	Sudden/Unexpected	Individual & Group

*All names are pseudonyms chosen by participants

TABLE 7

AGE OF PARTICIPANT AT DEATH OF SPOUSE

Participant	Name*	Current Age	Age at Death of Spouse	Years Since Death of Spouse	Age of Spouse at Time of Death
1	"She" who is reaching in & reaching out	64	53	11 years, 1 month	51
2	Glory	62	49	13 years	54
3	Love	64	61	3 years, 9 months	60
4	Rose	55	52	3 years, 6 months	65
5	Joan	80	78	18 months	78
6	Diana	58	55	3 years, 4 months	63

*All names are pseudonyms chosen by participants

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

"She" who is Reaching in and Reaching out: Participant 1

"She" is a 64-year-old Jewish female, married for 24 years to a Jewish male. Together, they had three children. Her spouse died eleven years ago, at age 51, after being diagnosed with a brain tumor. After this anticipated death, "She" attended individual counseling. Their teenage son lived at home, and now all children are adults and reside independently. Other significant deaths in her life include the death of her parents. "She" has a Master's of Social Work degree, and is presently self-employed. Of note, "She" began dating approximately one-two years ago, and is currently dating.

Pre-Assessment

"She" identified the most profound feelings after her spouse's death as loneliness, excruciating pain, sadness, and longing. Significant losses included her confidant, and sensuality. The most significant change after her spouse died included her sense of security. "She" filled her empty time after her spouse's death through regular synagogue attendance, Tai Chi and running exercises, and raising her 14-year-old son.

Most significant to "She" after the death of her spouse was raising her teenage son without a father. Everything "She" did or said was influenced by her spouse, or reminded her of him. "She" recognizes the powerful and pervasive influence he had on her, and felt the need to live his life for him, including relating to his friends and supported causes he supported. Additionally, "She" now had to figure out her single identity, apart from her "we" identity, as a couple.

Some long-term changes “She” experienced included an ability to laugh and have fun without feeling guilty; the ability to return to pre-marital activities she loved, including trying variations on these activities; a strengthened faith and involvement in synagogue life; and the exploration of new relationships, including involvement with someone who could become her life partner.

“She” noted that her sorrow was triggered when she went grocery shopping or tried to clean out clothing or papers, often leading to her gasping and feeling that she couldn’t face things; and reading eulogies or articles written by her spouse (either personal talks he delivered or other writings).

In terms of her relationship with God after the death of her spouse, “She” noted attending services regularly. While studying Jewish texts or in conversations with others, “She” found herself using God language without necessarily believing it. “She” recalls how her mother-in-law was very angry with God, but does not remember herself being mad at God. However, “She” was mad at, and jealous of her husband’s strengthened faith when he was ill.

Describing how her faith tradition supported the grieving process, “She” described a large, traditional Jewish funeral; community support through the *shiva* period, with many people coming to the house, sharing letters, and religious articles written by her husband, looking at photos, and telling stories. In synagogue, “She” recited *Kaddish*, and felt the emotional support of her community. Additional sources of support came during decision-making processes of the wording on the gravestone, and holding an unveiling, along with the annual *yarzeit* gatherings.

Taking Jewish teachings more seriously is a major way “She” described changing over time. Meaningful sayings include “Who is wise? One who learns from everyone;” “The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to be afraid;” and ‘This is the day the Lord made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Singing loudly (especially Jewish songs or prayers), coming to cherish her alone time, personal thoughts, reading, and dancing around the house are other changes that occurred over time. Concluding her pre-assessment, “She” was thankful for the opportunity to reflect and share.

Post-Assessment

After the seven-session grief group, “She” identified her most profound feelings as anger, guilt, sadness, and unfinished business. Changes in attitudes and beliefs were characterized as relational and having a sense of support. “She” planned to focus on a confidant and new learning after the group concluded.

The most meaningful moment during the group was the opportunity to create a new name during the sixth session. “She” identified seven discoveries about herself after the group. These included:

(a) Enjoying sharing her learning with others over the years since her loss, sometimes even “showing off” how far she had come,

(b) While moving toward greater acceptance, still having many “shoulds” in judging herself,

(c) Continuing resistance to journaling, despite acknowledging that she had occasional wonderful insights while writing before and during program,

(d) Learning new breathing techniques for relaxation and recharging,

(e) Letting go of trying to be in control of everything, and letting the experience unfold, while allowing the leader to take care of the group process,
(f) Conversely, liking that she tended to “bring all of me” to the group, including her watchfulness about the process (acknowledging the tension in her experience), and
(g) Having unexpressed anger.

Aspects of the group that worked for “She” included learning new breathing techniques, trying meditations, writing a poem, passing around the pouch of stones (it spurred her on to levity, as well as solemnity), the leader managing all the pieces of each session, and time-use in a flexible and gentle manner.

Glory:
Participant 2

Glory is a 62-year-old Jewish female, married for 18 years to a Jewish male. Together, they had two children. Her spouse died at age 54, and it has been 13 years since he died. This was a second marriage for both, and he had children from his first marriage. The death was sudden and traumatic, and came unexpectedly within two and a half months after diagnosis. Glory attended individual and group counseling after her spouse died. At the time of his death, their two young teenagers lived at home. Presently, their young adult children live at home. Their son is emotionally affected by the traumatic demise of his father. Other significant deaths in Glory’s life include the death of her parents, as well the those of other close relationships around the same time as her husband died. Glory has a Master’s of Social Work degree, and is employed. In describing the unexpected death, Glory noted, “As a young widow with two teenage children, I felt as if I had been broadsided by a Mack truck."

Pre-Assessment

Glory identified the most profound feelings after the death of her spouse as anger, being in a crisis mode, feeling dead inside, excruciating pain, fearfulness, helplessness, isolation, jealousy, loneliness, sadness, and being traumatized. She identified no other significant losses after his death. Glory listed several significant changes, including relationships, her sense of security, work, financial management (needing to learn a lot quickly), and life issues of raising two children on her own.

After his demise, Glory filled her empty time through relationships with her children, exercise, and new learning. The support she received immediately from her synagogue community waned over time. Glory continues to seek a comfortable Jewish community. She did not address questions pertaining to loss on the pre-assessment questionnaire.

Post-Assessment

After the grief group, Glory identified anger as the most profound feeling. Changes in attitudes and beliefs were characterized as financial, relational, psychological, spiritual, and a sense of support. Glory planned to focus on companionship, activities, and new learning at the conclusion of the group. She identified no meaningful moments regarding the group. Glory noted two discoveries as a result of the group, including being ready to move on from being a widow, and wanting to approach her children as the adults that they are, rather than treating them as if they were still teenagers. Aspects of the group that worked for Glory included feeling the group provided a safe space for people to feel comfortable opening up, and her sense of being with a “great leader” and “great women!

Love:
Participant 3

Love is a 64-year-old Jewish female, married for 40 years to a Jewish male, whom she identified as her childhood sweetheart. Together, they had a son. It has been three years and nine months since her spouse died, at age 60, a death that she characterized as sudden and unexpected. Love attended individual and group counseling after his death. At his demise, their son and daughter-in-law lived out-of-town. Other significant deaths for Love include those of her parents, and her three sisters (her father and sisters died from Huntington Disease). Love, who was retired and had a sixth year advanced college degree, was eagerly awaiting the birth of her first grandchild when she entered the bereavement group.

Pre-Assessment

Love identified the most profound feelings after her spouse's death as anger, blame, excruciating pain, fear, loneliness, and sadness. Significant losses were noted as financial, sensuality, and support, and she identified major changes in her work and relationships. Love filled her empty time with hobbies, physical activities, new learning, travel, groups, and relationships. The most significant experience for Love after the death of her spouse was being alone. Identified long-term changes included living a new life without her spouse being physically near her; being vulnerable and learning much on her own without his loving support; becoming independent, and communicating and connecting with new and old friends. Love noted that her sorrow was triggered when she

entered her driveway and house without her spouse's car or physical presence; sleeping alone; hearing jokes, viewing movies, and attending family events.

In terms of her relationship with God, Love noted that she felt a sense of loving, and knowing that God and archangels were supporting her. She felt the support of God from the other side of the veil, and felt a connection to her spouse through meditation, and talking with God. Love described having a large, traditional funeral for her spouse, but found the experience of *shiva* to be challenging, and not that helpful. She felt most supported by the presence of her son.

Love describes changes over time and catalysts for her growth in attempting to continue living in joy, and knowing that change is healthy. She is motivated to move forward with her new life, knowing that her husband supported her. Love has kept busy with friends, travelling, and continued learning. Additionally, she noted doing new and different activities with friends (male and female), going alone to the theater, attending lectures, movies, restaurants, vacations, clubs, and weddings.

Post-Assessment

After the group, Love identified joy and gratefulness as her most profound feelings. Changes of attitudes or beliefs noted including loving life, and having a sense of support and security. Love planned to focus on a confidant, participating in co-ed groups, attending lectures, and balancing meditations after the group concluded.

Most meaningful components of the group were described by Love as feeling the homework was great, and what she described as a superb sharing of emotions. Love exclaimed, "Life is a living meditation." She identified seven self-discoveries, including:

(a) Continuing to always share her truth,

(b) Remembering to honor her art and heart,

(c) Knowing that she is truly at love and with oneness with all of life's harmony. "Life happens for us, and leads us back to something great,"

(d) The grief journey continues on a multitude of levels, with unlimited potential in learning,

(e) Not worrying about health, as she is not alone. Taking care of herself, and embracing the silent stillness of her own personal magnificence,

(f) Having the courage to peel layers of fear, by being still, feeling, seeing, and knowing she has unlimited potential; and

(g) Just being, realizing that all happens is for the highest good, and knowing that humanity is the doorway to the Divine.

Aspects of the group that worked for Love included sharing, and reprioritizing what was important. Love included the following note:

> Note to Chaplain Facilitator:
>
> *I see so many things now. I've opened up to new awakenings about who I am so that my fears can subside. I accept where I am, and am peaceful/balanced. The relaxation into my being brings such peace. I am pleased. I know I will need to continue to work at this new feeling of fearlessness constantly, but with the use of breath and being in the now always available to me, I will keep practicing! The love that fills me grounds me and is so abundant. I find it so easy to share. I feel the joyous radiant love throughout my being. I am so blessed. This wonderful grief group with Sarah has truly attributed to my lovely state of being! Thank you my dear Sarah for awarding me the gift in participating in the discovery into the garden of grief.*

Rose:
Participant 4

Rose is a 55-year-old Jewish female, married for 16 years to a Jewish male. Together they had three daughters. Her spouse died at age 65, and it has been three years and six months since his death. Rose, who converted to Judaism, has children from her first marriage, which ended in divorce. Her spouse's death was sudden and traumatic for Rose and their three young daughters, who were home when he suddenly became ill in the middle of the night. The paramedics tried to revive him, before bringing him to the hospital. Rose recalls that moment as a nightmare. At the time of his death, Rose attended individual counseling, and her children briefly attended a grief group addressing parental death.

Other significant deaths in Rose's life include those of her parents and brother. Rose has a master's degree, and works from home. She is coping with the unexpected death of husband, while sustaining family life for their three daughters, and her previous children, including a daughter with special needs.

Pre-Assessment

Rose identified the most profound feelings after her spouse's death as being in crisis mode, fear, guilt, isolation, loneliness, regret, sadness, being traumatized, and having unfinished business. Significant losses identified after the death include her confidant, sensuality, and support. Though Rose questioned her faith, she found herself a believer, and did not view this as a loss. Rose identified significant changes in her relationships and sense of security after her spouse died.

To fill her empty time, Rose found herself caring for her family and handling estate and business matters. Rose noted the profound silence she felt in the absence of her spouse and all that he represented. Relationships vanished, paradigms were shattered, and Rose felt her future looking blank and feeling she had lost “their” future. Rose could not respond to the long-term changes she experienced, and felt that she was at an impasse and unable to move forward in her personal adult life three years after his passing. She noted that her sorrow was triggered when she listens to music, sees intact families who appear happy together, and when faced with any kind of celebration.

Rose described her relationship with God as very strong, yet humble and collaborative, after the death of her spouse. Feeling supported by her faith tradition, Rose honored her spouse’s wishes for a traditional funeral, and found that sitting *shiva* was an honorable way to manifest her love toward him. The following year, Rose created a meaningful unveiling service to memorialize his memory. In concluding her pre-assessment, Rose noted that she had no illusions regarding the realities of the life she had been given, as well as a stark honestly she had toward and about herself.

Post-Assessment

After the seven-session grief group, Rose identified unfinished business as her most profound feeling. She categorized changes in attitudes and beliefs as relational, psychological, spiritual, a sense of support, and a sense of becoming more secure. Rose planned to focus on new activities, including dancing, yoga, meditation, and exercise; companionship, including a desire to meet new people; and obtaining a confidant, whom she identified as a new therapist. She also expressed a desire to find another group to attend.

Rose identified the fifth session as the most meaningful moment in the group, by allowing herself the freedom to take a big risk and be seen by others without filtering thoughts and feelings. Her seven self-discoveries included:

(a) That she had put structured limits on her real emotions while grieving for her spouse, and their lives together,

(b) Being more fearful than she realized,

(c) Realizing that she was not alone in her experience, thoughts, and feelings about losing a spouse,

(d) Being more open to engaging in a group, as she previously never wanted to do so,

(e) Realizing that being in a group following her spouse's death would have helped her cope better,

(f) Knowing that she doesn't have to feel so alone, and can find comfort and direction by collaborating and connecting with others, and

(g) Resolving to continue working through her bereavement issues in a more structured way, to promote her personal development. Rose felt that a major learning was realizing that she needed to make the time for herself by tending to, and connecting to her spiritual self.

Rose felt positive about the structured weekly sessions. She felt that the session progression was natural and coherent, and that the facilitator led in an organic way that allowed room to interpret, internally reflect, and then bring it back to the group to share and examine deeply.

Joan:
Participant 5

Joan is an 80-year-old Protestant female, married for 38 years to a Jewish male, after her first marriage ended in a divorce. They each had three children. The anticipated death occurred when her spouse was 78-years-old, after a two-year diagnosis of prostate cancer. Joan did not attend counseling after her spouse's death. The adult children were out of the home, and one daughter had significant emotional issues. Other major deaths in Joan's life included the death of her parents, and the death of a child. Joan has a college degree, was retired, and felt she adjusted well, since she had been previously divorced and on her own, and her husband provided financial security.

Pre-Assessment

Joan identified the most profound feelings after her spouse's death as isolation, loneliness, and sadness. Significant losses included her confidant, sensuality, and support, and Joan experienced major changes in her relationships. Joan filled her empty time by engaging in physical activities, and selling and buying homes. She identified housing as the long-term change she experienced.

In response to what triggered her sorrow, Joan replied, "I don't know, but an invisible finger pulls the right string every now and then." After her spouse's death, Joan questioned her "higher power." She noted that when she felt sad, she mentally spoke to a higher power. While she described herself as not being religious, she noted that "there is a being out there" whom she relied on. Joan followed her husband's wishes regarding funeral, financial, and housing matters. He did not want a funeral, so she held a memorial

service. Joan felt unsure of how she had changed over time and did not fully answer this question.

Post-Assessment

After the seven-session grief group, Joan identified loneliness as the most profound feeling she experienced. Changes in attitudes and beliefs were characterized as having a sense of support and security. Joan planned to focus on activities and new learning after the group ended. The most meaningful moment in the group was during session six, when Joan wrote a letter to her husband, and heard the letters of other members. Aspects of the group that worked for Joan were the interactions with everyone in the group, sharing feelings, and the introduction of new thoughts and ideas.

Joan identified three self-discoveries:

(a) She felt she was handling her spouse's death "her way," which she described as comfortable and guilt-free,

(b) She recognized that without constant interaction with others, she can fall into a self-pitying mode, and

(c) She found herself thinking more about the higher being, and possibly questioning more.

Diana:
Participant 6

Diana is a 58-year-old Catholic female, married for 16 years to a Jewish male. This was her only marriage, and they had no children. Her spouse died suddenly and unexpectedly at age 63, and it had been three years and four months since his death.

Diana attended individual counseling, and a two-part grief program when he died. Other significant deaths in her life were the death of her parents. Diana had a bachelor's degree and was employed. She described herself as financially responsible and employed during the marriage. Though Diana is dating someone, she is focused on having a separate identity.

Pre-Assessment

The most profound feelings Diana identified after the death of her spouse included guilt, feeling dead inside, regretful, sad, feeling traumatized, and having unfinished business. Diana noted the loss of her confidant, support, and companionship as significant losses upon her spouse's death. Other major changes for Diana included her relationships, the ability to manage a household, and a sense of security, since she had been living alone. Diana filled her empty time with friends, engaging in hobbies, including concerts, watching light television, and engaging in light reading.

Most significant to Diana after her spouse's death was the feeling of shock. She wondered why he died, since he seemed "healthier than ever," and felt the timing of his death was "terrible." He had completed a major project, and was in the process of getting his life together. Diana noted that her long-term challenge was struggling to manage household chores and old routines that were her spouse's. She was now "with a new best friend." Diana noted that her sorrow was triggered when she found herself alone and not busy, walking to work, returning home from work to an empty house, and engaging in activities they enjoyed as a couple, including listening to music, going for walks, and viewing television.

Diana noted minimal changes in her relationship with God after her spouse's death. She and her spouse did not practice their respective religions. However, Diana found herself frequently drawn to God, by praying that he look after her. It had been over twenty years since she was actively involved in religion. Diana noted being very involved in earlier years, and that she had basic beliefs in God, and in the afterlife. She found this comforting, since "love never dies." Diana honored her spouse's wishes for cremation, and there was no traditional burial or formal funeral service. Friends and family later gathered for a memorial program, and "did his dance."

Over time, Diana noted that she was inspired by her spouse's example of "putting himself out there and taking risks." In the second year after his death, Diana spent much of her time reading. She described the third year as the most difficult. Diana added that she experienced a big shift after the first six months, when she experienced moments of joy and pleasure. She attended concerts and other activities with friends. Diana felt very motivated to pursue an interest, using her husband as an example. She began noticing men after a year, and "rekindled an old acquaintance into romance." After almost two years, Diana felt stuck. After giving herself a "free pass" for the first year, Diana was starting to "face issues left undone."

Post-Assessment

After the seven-session group, Diana identified having unfinished business, feeling dead inside (still feeling somewhat hardened), and a diminishing sense of helplessness as the most profound feelings she experienced. Diana noted the following changes in her attitudes and beliefs: psychological, spiritual, ritual, a sense of support, and a sense of separation. Diana planned to focus on companionship, including

maintaining and nourishing previous relationships, and addressing the unfinished business.

Diana identified the first session as the most meaningful moment in the group, when she shared her personal narrative of her spouse's death, and heard others' stories. She was enamored by the power of members sharing stories. Though common and different elements existed, Diana found many similarities in the stories. Several components of the group were also meaningful to Diana, including the opening and closing rituals, the introduction of the symbolism of the day and the accompanying narrative, journaling, the mirror breathing exercises, the homework, and especially the letter to a loved one. Diana identified seven self-discoveries, including:

(a) She was not alone, and found that others were going through similar struggles,

(b) She was not alone in feeling "stuck," though maybe her challenges were different than others,

(c) She was not "behind schedule" in processing her loved one's death and rebuilding a life without him,

(d) She was open and loving, though it sometimes felt hidden, as she had been closed, guarded, and protective of her time and space,

(e) She liked being in a group, which was something she hadn't done since college, and found that the mutual sharing of stories and struggles helped her feel a "common humanity,"

(f) She especially appreciated the simplicity of the opening and closing rituals in creating a sacred space in the group, and when alone, and

(g) She reconnected to the spiritual, contemplative, and reflective parts of herself in the group.

Diana included the following personal note to the Chaplain Facilitator:

> *I am so grateful to have been a part of the group - it was very powerful and meaningful for me. Thank you for creating a safe, sacred, loving space for us to gather, reflect and share such intimate parts of our lives and our journey.*
>
> *With love and gratitude,*
> *Diana*

This first part of this chapter presented an overview of each group participant. The individual profiles provided a descriptive narrative reflecting responses to the death of a spouse, along with participants' assessment of the seven-session program. The next section highlights the results of the seven group sessions.

Session Results

Session 1: Connecting

The beginning of the session was devoted to providing the clinical ground rules for the seven-session group. Participants were asked to respect the confidentiality of all members, by not disclosing information about the identity of participants or the group to others, and by keeping information shared in the meetings within the confines of the group setting. A request to honor the commitment to the seven meetings was reiterated, with the understanding that participants who felt they wanted to leave the group could do so without any penalty. An introduction to the nature of contemplative communication, and how members would interact with others in the group as information was shared was provided. Participants were encouraged to use the ongoing learning from the group

meetings in a way that protected all members. Attending to these housekeeping issues was intended to offer the group a sense of safety, and a safe place to speak freely and be vulnerable. Participants were also invited to complete the consent and pre-assessment forms. Once completed, a verbal overview of the seven-session format was provided. The process of providing the group framework took longer than planned, before moving into the formal structure of the group.

The opening ritual of responding to a written question on a colored index card began. Participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the responses were the members' personal thoughts and feelings. When completed, the cards were placed on the center table. Also on the table was a candleholder with seven colors.

The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) noted that there was one light shining from a white candle, and referenced the first session to the first day of creation, "Let there be Light." What is the understanding of light on the first day of creation? In Jewish mysticism, light is a metaphor for awareness. The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) offered a blessing:

> *As we move through the next seven sessions, may we join together and connect our hearts with compassion. May our presence offer a sense of serenity as we share our stories.*

Participants introduced themselves by their given names, and provided the names of their deceased spouses, and the length of time since their deaths. The CF offered a mindfulness meditation exercise, and participants reflected on the experience. As personal meditation practices were revealed, members were encouraged to continue their practices, or, for those with limited experience, be open to experiencing something new. The issue of the lack of time during the week for personal meditation arose. The CF gently responded, "try to find at least ten minutes a day for yourselves. In Yogic and

Jewish traditions, sages teach that if you are unable to take at least ten minutes a day then you need to take an hour."

Face-To-Face was the theme for first session. The discussion focused on five suggested questions: When did you hear? Who was with you? Where did your love one die? What happened? How did your body feel? Without interruption, participants shared narratives of facing the death of their spouses. In this contemplative listening mode, the narrator ended, and participants witnessed the narrative in silence. Quiet space was encouraged for pausing between speakers, and then the next speaker began sharing.

Participants connected as tears flowed between speakers and listeners. Some members identified with the similarities of the stories, while others discovered a different experience regarding the death of spouses. Participants noted how valuable it was to share personal stories, and hear of others' experience, regardless of how much time had passed since their losses.

During the closing ritual, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) reiterated the importance of confidentiality to maintain a sense of safety. Each participant received a copy of the program overview. Homework and handout sheets printed on red colored paper were distributed, though there was little time for an explicit explanation. The CF invited participants to set aside ten minutes each day at a specific time, and connect to the material offered. The session concluded with the CF letting members know they may email or call her with any questions or concerns. The participants entered the first session as strangers in an unfamiliar environment, and exited the group with a sense of community. An apparent bond was observed as participants revealed their narratives with depth and breadth that surprised the CF.

The CF apologized for inconveniencing group members by running 20 minutes past the designated scheduled meeting time. At this point, the CF realized that one and half hours for six participants was insufficient time. The CF was personally exhausted after the first session.

Session 2: Creating

The CF greeted participants as they entered the room, and had an opportunity to privately speak with them. Usually, the conversations centered on their experience of the assigned work. Members were encouraged to explore the assigned homework with a sense of wonder. Everyone arrived early or on time, except for Participant 2. The group waited a few minutes while the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) checked her phone and email to see if a message had been left. Participant 2 arrived later, and was welcomed by the CF non-verbally, with a smile and a hand gesture into the circle, as the group continued their process.

Before the opening ritual, participants hugged each other spontaneously. They chatted for about ten minutes, until the formal session began. At the designated start time, participants sat and created a quiet presence. Participants responded silently to the ritual question of writing on an index card. While waiting for everyone to complete the initial ritual, participants were invited to pause, breathe, relax, or close their eyes and try to recall the memory of loved one. After completing the question, members placed the index card on the center table.

The CF invited members to take one of seven colored stones from a little pouch on the table, place the stone upon their index cards, and say the names of loved one. The CF began the ritual by offering the pouch to the person sitting on her right until each person voiced the name or silently recalled their loved one. The topic of separations was

incorporated by the CF through a discussion of the separation of the waters above from the waters below, as the second day of creation represents the separation of the firmament.

The conversation reflected thoughts regarding identity, relationships, and change. As the check-in conversation came full circle, the CF encouraged participants to breathe, and expressed her appreciation to members for participating and having the courage to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The CF offered a visualization technique on the mirror meditation that was similar to the assigned homework.

In focusing on *My Mirror and Me*, the group explored the concept of intimacy. A way to describe intimacy became **"**In-To-Me I-See." Inquiries of who am I without you were explored, and participants shared ways of coping without their loved ones. Many expressed what they missed the most. Participant 1 identified a new awareness of healing by returning to dance, which was something she stopped doing during her marriage. Discussion of intimate relationships and intimate deaths occurred, as Participants 3 and 4 shared stories about the death of their siblings, and Participant 5 shared a story about the death of her child. The group developed a sense of holding, as participants voiced their painful experience of loss, and were witnessed.

The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) supported the group process with the statement, "All parts welcomed!" These words reflected a teaching in the Practicum in Counseling I course by Ann Akers (personal communication, November 22, 2010) of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and were intended to encourage participants to let go of their inner critical voices (the "CV"). The words "good enough as you are now" were used to offer a sense of confidence and compassionate care. The conversation

of loss and love was nurtured with laughter and tears. Participants intimately offered their narratives, articulated words that included *budding, blooming, healing, nourishing,* and *growing,* and one member stated, “I am an opening bud!”

The closing ritual began after the last participant shared her narrative. A space for silence was included to allow members to ”pause and go within,” and notice sensations and thoughts within the confines of their minds. Maintaining a sense of quiet, the CF invited participants to offer their “take away” through a word or phase, as they returned the stone into the pouch. The CF offered the empty pouch to the person on her left. Participants had the option to “pass,” rather than offer a verbal comment. The group was thanked for their willingness to work, and encouraged to engage in self-care, noting that this work can be physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually challenging.

The homework theme and handout meditation were distributed on orange colored paper. The group ended with participants sitting in a circle with outstretched hands. Members were asked to extend their right hands, palms facing downward, and their left hands, palms facing upward, and then connect to the person on their right and imagine giving energy, and then imagine receiving energy from the person on their left. The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) offered the kabalistic understanding of energy, that with the right hand we give, and with the left hand we receive, and we need both energies to be balanced. The group spontaneously stood together and became a hug huddle, as the session formally ended. The CF reminded the group that the group would not be meeting for another two weeks.

The participants continued to linger and talk with one another. Participant 2 approached the CF and stated that she was unable to find time to complete the homework.

The CF responded to the concern over “no homework” by communicating that she would like all participants to complete the assignments, but that her presence in the group was more essential than the homework. After this dialogue, the CF was blindsided when Participant 2 asked, “Since we are not meeting next week, some of want to get together. Will you send the list with our contact information?” As the CF paused without responding, the conversation moved to another subject. The CF refrained from verbally responding. Clinically, the CF noted that a group meeting outside of the session was inappropriate behavior for members in a closed group. The CF consulted her clinical advisor, who concurred, and the CF planned to address this request at the next meeting as a group issue.

Between the second and third meeting, Participant 2 emailed the Chaplain Facilitator (CF), and requested the contact list. The CF intentionally chose to speak directly with Participant 2, rather than email a response. After several telephone messages back and forth, Participant 2 responded and continued to insist on receiving the contact list. The CF professionally addressed the situation by clearly explaining that this was a closed group, and during the scheduled meetings, the group needed to meet as a whole, and not sub-divide. The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) explained that this protects the confidentiality of the group, and provides a boundary of safety. Participant 2, a clinical social worker, disagreed. She argued that it was senseless, but eventually and reluctantly accepted the response. The CF indicated that she would encourage interactions among participants at the conclusion of the seven-session program, and that a discussion about the group meeting outside of the designated sessions would be brought up during the next session.

Individual emails were sent to all participants, reminding them that the next meeting was scheduled for two weeks later. There was a planned gap in the schedule when the group would not be meeting the following week. Also included with this mailing was the second part of the pre-assessment form for participants to complete.

Session 3: Changing

The original schedule included a week off between the second and third session. Prior to the group, Participant 5 notified the CF that she was unable to attend, and dropped off a poem that reflected her homework. Participant 2 was also not present. All the chairs remained in a circle, and the CF placed the index card on the empty chairs for Participants 2 and 5. The CF informed the group that Participant 5 was unable to attend, and read the poem in her absence. In knowing this absence in advance, the poetry offered the group a sense of her presence.

The CF silently wondered how the absence of two participants after a scheduled break would affect the group. This session focused on change and, ironically, various changes serendipitously occurred. First, the CF planned to address the “getting together” issue after check-in. Second, the idea of connecting the biblical story of Sarah to the concept of the third day of creation occurred spontaneously. Third, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) reflected upon information received from participants’ homework and group responses, and had a better understanding of some of the components that affected their personal grieving processes.

During check-in, Participants 4 and 5 expressed their surprise at how much they missed the group. Participant 6 asked if the group had met the previous week. Rather than waiting until after the check-in, the CF immediately responded and addressed the issue of

the "get together" suggested at the end of the prior session. The CF stated there had been no meeting, and that "since this was a closed group, all interactions needed to be kept within the group. After the seventh session, members were welcome, and even encouraged, to continue meeting. At this point, however, to honor the sanctity of the group, we will only meet as a group." Participant 2 who suggested the "get together" was not present for the group discussion.

The group moved into a discussion, and Participant 1 tearfully stated, " I was so upset over this. I wondered if I should I call you and say we can't do this to the group, or should I stop being in control, and trust that you would handle the situation." They were tears of self-discovery, revealing trust in her inner voice. Participant 6 also voiced concerns about the closed group meeting outside of the designated sessions. Letting go of the need to be in control, she appreciated her ability to trust the CF would handle this matter. The group moved away from the discussion, and resumed focusing on the designated program theme.

Roots, Rhythms, & Rituals addressed changes in beliefs of faith, seasons of the life cycle, and personal practices that offer a sense of solace. Discussion of changes in faith traditions and practices were explored. The multi-faith participants identified their birth religions as Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant, all married to Jewish spouses. Participants best identified the impact of their belief system and grief:

> *I have traditional Jewish beliefs, yet I am open and exposed to other things and to live life holistically. I try to live by the precept from Ethics of our Fathers, 'who is wise? One who learns from everyone'* (Participant 1).

> *I believe all is well, everything happens as it is supposed to. Everything happens for the common good. Out of this situation, only good will come. Things happen for a reason for my soul's path. I am*

> *safe. My breath work with mantras works so well for solace. I believed this as a child, and then lost this intention until my beloved died. Now I believe again* (Participant 3).
>
> *My beliefs are always evolving. I believe in a universal creator - the immovable mover from which all existence came and continues. I believe we are a reflection of this creator, life force, and spirit. I was raised with a strong Christian background, a regular Sunday school attendee. Yet with God I became Jewish. When my beloved died, my belief was helpful. As time goes on, "I struggle now." In process of the dark side, our Universal immoveable mover needs therapy* (Participant 4)!
>
> *I was a very religious Roman Catholic child. Almost born again Roman Catholic in high school and college, and then I distanced myself from formal religion. I believe in a being greater than me, perhaps a being beyond me. I am not actively involved in any faith tradition now, but still generally believe in a caring God, and an afterlife. I miss the sense of grounded-ness that gave me, but that's where I am at now* (Participant 6).

The following excerpts describe how life becomes ruptured with the death of a spouse:

> *In the first years, I needed to live his life. His friends became my friends, his causes became my causes. I kept his memory alive for our eighth grader. Now I am moving from the we-identity and finding me. Living life on what turns me on! Reclaiming 'dancing' and developing my love of dance. The first time I laughed again I remember* (Participant 1).
>
> *My beloved filled me with so much I did not need others. I did not need to be in groups. I just loved my little life of being totally connected to my husband and him to me. Without him in my life, I needed to create community. I realized "I am alone." Seeing the "empty parking space" when I came home was so painful* (Participant 3).
>
> *The first year, I was numb, flat, sick, nauseous. I was in a tunnel. I got busy. "I lost a brother when I was eleven-years-old. Now I see how I followed my parents' form of grieving—I needed to change everything—I became a servant of his tapes. Felt I was channeling my beloved. The absence of the "garage door opening" was awful. Being happy made me sad, such as listening to music, which we enjoyed together. I was so focused on the tombstone; it needed to be perfect* (Participant 4).

> *It's been three years since his death. Initially, I was shocked and numb. I took the time from January to May to plan a memorial (he did not want a traditional funeral) that was my focus. Then I went into the "anything in the pants" syndrome. That lasted a while. I did it to feel whole. In the first year, I gave a pass to all responsibility. In the second year, the passes catch up. I have no family and no kids. I am on my own. This year, the third year, is the hardest, even harder than the first. During the first year, I felt guided. Now I am faced with how to deal with stuff. I am still in that adjustment transition of figuring out. Strong inertia* (Participant 6).

Participants shared personal practices, that included learning to live from the heart (Participant 1); meditation, dancing, singing, and connecting (Participant 3); spontaneity, going back and forth, making time for her children, needing Shabbat, no time for self now (Participant 4); and never being disciplined, but needing to find new places; now being distanced, without any "personal practice," but always appreciating her Catholic rituals (Participant 6).

During this session, even with the absence of two members, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) believed that the depth of the group interaction indicated that members needed additional time to speak during the meetings. The theological advisor encouraged the use of Psalm 23 as a way of supporting the griever. As the session concluded, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) consequently planted the seed for a discussion in the next session about extending the group time by fifteen minutes, and encouraged members to consider how this might be done to everyone's satisfaction. After the group meeting, the CF received an email apology from Participant 2 for the absence, due to a patient crisis in her clinical practice.

Session 4: Contemplating

The beginning of each meeting began to take on a life of its own. The participants initiated a ritual of individually hugging one another before the formal group began. Along with the hug came a welcoming smile. The participants were seen, accepted, and supported by one another. The CF read excerpts from a poem about hugs.

All participants attended this session. Participant 2 arrived early, and made it known to the CF. Her presence was acknowledged, and she was warmly welcomed into the group. Participant 2 did not have her homework. She received another copy, and was invited to participate in the group discussion.

The opening included the ritual question, evoking the presence of the loved one; a review of contemplative communication; taking time to pause and breathe between each speaker; and noticing any questions that arose within. With all members present, the check-in lasted almost thirty minutes, longer than noted in earlier sessions, as each participant reflected on feelings and thoughts of the prior week.

The CF offered a reflection of the prior session material, and quoted passages related to a discussion of the body and movement, by Gabrielle Roth (1998)**.** The session connected to the fourth day of creation, that included the sun, moon, and stars with movement and transformation. The biblical character of Miriam, who led the people with music and dance after their journey through a dark and narrow space, was incorporated, along with a discussion of the attribute of endurance, and the strength to continue moving through the challenges of grief.

This session opened the pathway for contemplating ambivalence toward the loved one and toward God. Participants were asked to describe their relationship with God,

using the terms intimate, ambivalent, or non-existent. All participants disclosed having a relationship with God, even if they felt anger or lacked a sense of understanding about the need for their loved ones' deaths. The types of death and statements about participants' relationships toward God are described below:

> *This was an anticipated death. My ambivalence with God starts with my ambivalence about my belief in God. I am grateful to God, but haven't expressed anger at the death of my husband* (Participant 1).
>
> *This was a sudden death. Ambivalent. My relationship with God seems to vacillate. Sometimes I feel close, but face confusion. I have been pondering His/Her role in my life* (Participant 2).
>
> *A sudden and unexpected death. Intimate. My relationship with God is amazingly close, a constant part of me, lovingly connected, always communicating* (Participant 3).
>
> *Sudden and traumatic death. intimate and ambivalent. Intimate, in that my sense of God and His presence is with me always, my conversation is thanks, questions, and a range of human emotions from love and respect to frustration and anger* (Participant 4).
>
> *Anticipated death. Ambivalent. I silently say a prayer sometimes, and know there is a higher power. I am not a regular at church or synagogue* (Participant 5).
>
> *Sudden and unexpected. Ambivalent. Previously very religious, but always open to various faiths. I found that was not always healthy, so I distanced myself from my religion, but not God* (Participant 6).

Participants described a similar ambivalence in their relationship toward their spouses. Though most members identified themselves as non-religious, they described a close relationship to God. Religion became the foundation for burial and mourning rituals and traditions for four participants. For all participants, spirituality and faith became a greater source of support than religion in the process of healing grief.

Awareness, Ambivalence, Acceptance, & Autonomy was the theme that focused on sources of support. Participants became a source of support and reflection for each

other, as they shared situations of moving from their comfort zone into the abyss of the unknown. Displays of support were offered through a word, laughter, and, in one situation, with applause. The collective tears became a way of saying, “I hear you, and you are seen.” Most participants arrived to the group ten minutes early, and stayed almost ten minutes after the group ended. Hugs and smiles were given freely. Participants expressed the following new sense of awareness:

Remembering that I am good enough (Participant 1).

Knowing I am loved (Participant 3).

Companionship and connection of heart, mind, and soul (Participant 4).

I miss the male voice at night, when all alone (Participant 5).

Love never dies **(**Participant 6).

Beyond these new elements of awareness, this session marked the first time a participant identified the use of color from the Yogic tradition, Chakra. As this was noted, others expressed a positive connection to the use of color in the homework and meditation handouts, and how they looked forward to a time when they would experience a rainbow of colors in their lives.

Before the closing ritual, a group discussion was held to determine if more time was needed for the group sessions, and how to create additional time, since most members returned to work. Using the contemplative communication model, participants experienced the opportunity to voice their opinions and rationale for their choices. The group decided to begin ten minutes earlier, and end five minutes later than originally scheduled, in future sessions. Members appreciated the experience of making a group decision, and described the process as an empowering moment that offered the

understanding and benefits of witnessing and sharing thoughts. Participants were able to pause and breathe, and observe their thoughts and feelings. Members described the experience as discovering inner elements of trusting the group, and relinquishing a need to control. They witnessed group consent, and graciously accepted the extended time that would begin in the next session.

Session 5: Communicating

Session five included the usual opening and closing rituals. Participant 2 arrived late for this session. The check-in reflected an insightful discussion, and the additional time allowed the session opening to feel less rushed. In addition to the usual evoking the presence of the beloved spouses in the opening ritual, participants were invited to evoke the presence of other loved ones. Some participants mentioned siblings and a grandparent. All participants mentioned their mothers. This was not surprising, as the session was held a few days before Mother's Day. After all participants shared, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) felt internally grateful, knowing that she was the only woman in the group whose mother was still living. The CF highlighted to the group significant reflections that emanated from the previous session, including making time and space to contemplate, having patience, and being more compassionate with themselves in their bereavement process.

The theological opening addressed the fifth day of creation, which welcomes living animals into the seas, and birds of all kinds in the air above the earth. The fifth day indicates a world greater than our minute perception. The biblical character Queen Esther hides her identity until she is ready to be seen. Before unveiling her hidden identity, she prepares herself with seven maidens. The clinical intention of the fifth session was to

prepare for revealing the truth of the hurting heart. Thoughts and feelings hide within, and may be dormant until sparked, or bloom like the changing seasons.

The *Indulging Spirit* theme focused on the movement through grief. The topic encouraged participants to (a) remember feelings immediately after the death, (b) notice feelings at the midpoint between death and now, and (c) reveal present feelings. The intention identified feelings that remained the same, and feelings that changed over time. The session offered the opportunity to be vulnerable and unveil the shadow side of the self, while sharing the uniqueness and universality of grieving.

Until this session, all participants, except Participant 2, completed each homework assignment. Unlike the typical question and answer format, the assignment for this meeting was less traditional. A handout of a large heart on green paper was given. The instructions were to identify and reflect on feelings at three points, beginning immediately after the time of death through the present day, using three different color pens to represent each time period. Only Participants 1 and 3 completed the assignment. Participant 3 produced a fabric pillow in the shape of a stuffed heart. The pillow with different color paper depicted each stage of feelings, and became part of the center table for the duration of the sessions. Participant 1 used three different colors, drawing objects within the heart that reflected her feelings, and her heart also became part of the sacred table. Though not completed by the other four participants, everyone actively shared in the discussion, noting changes in attitudes and beliefs.

Contemplative communication was encouraged, and participants were reminded to pause between speakers, close their eyes (if comfortable), and notice thoughts and feelings that arose within themselves. Participant 4 was the last member to share. As she

spoke, it became apparent that she was concealing a hurting heart. This day, Participant 4 was vulnerable, and tears flowed as she shared the pain of trying to keep her life together by raising a family, feeling jealous of "intact" families, and coping with the shadow side of herself. Love was palpable in the room, as participants intentionally listened to her story. Participant 4 dropped the facade of trying to hold everything together, and revealed her pain. When the group ended, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) offered Participant 4 a green paper heart to take home, as a symbolic metaphor of the group love. Participant 4 had the courage to express, "I realized this is my personality. I always thought it was about him. Now I see it is me!" The CF identified this session as most challenging, to provide sacred space to reveal emotionally latent and sensitive narration, while holding the integrity of the group, and offering a sense of safety.

Prior to the closing ritual, the CF stated that only two sessions remained, and invited participants to consider how they may want to conclude the program, such as going out or bringing in lunch, and how much time to allot. The CF also reminded the group that there was another scheduled week off between the fifth and sixth session.

Session 6: Curiosity

The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) was concerned about how upset Participant 4 was in the prior session, and wondered if she felt so vulnerable that she might not return. The CF considered calling to check on her before the next meeting, but chose not to. The group provided a sense of trust that allowed each member to become vulnerable, express themselves from the heart rather than the head, and reveal the sanctity of the hurting heart.

This session prompted a conversation regarding various losses, including divorce, death of a child, death of siblings, and death of parents. In addition, other issues that impacted the grieving process were discussed as unique or universal. The core of this session reflected the search for oneself, and an understanding that members change, just as the seasons change. Participants shared issues that were aroused when grieving the death of their spouses. These included having dependent parents or children; feelings of sensuality; feeling isolated without a partner; personal views toward work, retirement, and finances; relationships that challenge and comfort; responses to death, depending on personality; and a shattering spiritual belief system.

The CF noted that this session corresponded to sixth day of creation, when the intricate and wondrous human being was birthed. Participants were invited to pause, breathe, relax their eyes, and visualize a new name for themselves for the remainder of the group meetings. After the meditation, participants were asked to write the name that came to them. During this meeting, participants transformed from being known by their birth name (and as a number for purposes of their homework) to their new, chosen name.

The archetypical biblical character of the sixth session was Deborah, the prophetess who invited guests to sit under her palm tree as she listened to their stories. The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) offered the blessing, “so, too, may we receive the energy of Deborah as we listen intentionally to each other.” After the blessing, each person shared their name, and how they arrived at this choice. A few members identified the action of giving themselves a new or different name as a significant moment.

Begin Anew addressed the issues of re-entering life as a single person after the death of their spouse. Participant 5 initiated the discussion of taking off the wedding ring.

Others shared stories of being out for the first time without their wedding rings, and the effect this had on their body, mind, and spirit. Comments included gratitude for being able to articulate to the group feelings that were not understood by others.

The question of “who am I without you?” was revisited. Some members felt they needed more time to mourn, despite the passage of three years, while others wanted to move on, and felt ready to begin again with new partners. The theme encouraged participants to review the time since the death of their loved ones with a sense of wonder, and notice and identify what was most significant for them in the changing seasons of the self. Throughout the challenging discussion, the group was able to hold both the pain and pleasure, and the despair and joy of loss with a sense of love and laughter.

During this session, participants read the letters they composed to their loved ones. Each letter offered profound and emotionally engrossing narratives. The group listened intently, offered reflection, and paused between each reader. Prior to reading the letters, participants were encouraged to discern internal thoughts and feelings, and express conversations with a sense of curiosity. Although Participant 3 previously wrote a letter to her spouse in a first year bereavement support group, she noted it to be a very different assignment after almost four years. Participant 5 expressed gratitude and a sense of empowerment by writing a letter to her spouse. Participant 2, who had not completed the assignment, described what she imagined she would have written in the letter.

The conversations deepened, as participants appeared to unveil further aspects of their hidden selves. Before the closing ritual, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) held a group discussion to obtain input on how members wanted to conclude the program. Participants

decided that everyone would bring a lunch item to share, which would be eaten together in the library after the seventh session.

Session 7: Compassion

The challenge of the final group was facing the loss of time together, a place to share from the heart, and to hear from the centered heart. Post-assessment and program evaluation forms were placed on each seat. Upon completion, participants received a purple index card with the instruction to respond to the intention without turning over the card. On the back of the card was a poem by Rilke (1975). When everyone completed their responses, they were invited to turn over the card, and silently read the answer. Participant 6 asked if everyone received the same answer, and the CF replied that all had received the same poem. After the initial opening, a meditation, *Observing Sensations*, was given. The group concluded with the CF sharing highlights, discoveries, and a poem of comfort.

Hear, I Am was an exercise that provided the group with an opportunity to reflect on meaningful moments, significant occurrences, or other group or personal experiences. The exploration of personal stories, transformations, and discoveries were elements of the deep discussion. Observing thoughts and feelings were new teachings to Participant 5, and a review for the other participants. Each participant created ways to sooth the pain of grief, noting that patience, people, and developing an attitude of gratitude was part of the process of healing grief.

The homework prompted group discussion. However, Participant 3 hoped for a final assignment, with participants creating their own assignments. Interestingly, this was the initial plan of the Chaplain Facilitator (CF), who then chose to change to the “I Am”

poem. In addition to the closing ritual, a certificate (Appendix L) was offered to each participant. The certificate included each participant's chosen name, and was witnessed and signed by the other participants, using their chosen names. A gift was also given to the library custodian as a token of appreciation.

Following the closing ritual, the group remained after the session, and enjoyed a wonderful assortment of delicious foods and beverages. Participants remained an hour and forty-five minutes, rather than the original planned hour. Lunch was a communal celebration with discussion of past, present, and future times together. The group closed the sacred circle with a sense of sojourn.

Summary

This chapter illustrated the content incorporated into each session. The structure remained the same, while the core and subtext changed. Each session included clinical and theological underpinnings to elucidate the conversation about grief. Participant words were emphasized in each session. The final chapter will provide a discussion of the results, highlighting the group's impact.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

As for man, his days are like grass; he blooms like a flower of the field.
Psalm 103:15

Pathway into the Garden of Discovery was a seven-session, closed, contemplative, and multi-faith self-discovery bereavement group, addressing the needs of grievers eighteen months after the death of a spouse. The structured curriculum addressed the psycho-spiritual elements of grief, and included clinical and theological constructs. A contemplative communication model, combined with a mindfulness meditation approach was used for group discussions. The use of silence between the speaker and listeners, and the use of breathing techniques were employed throughout every session. Each session began with an opening ritual. Reflections, readings, and narration were offered to stimulate group discussion. Participants shared thoughts, feelings, or issues that arose during the previous week. With each meeting, participants delved more deeply, and provided the narratives of their experiences with spousal loss.

Thematic Findings

The grief group identified seven factors that influenced grief and the grieving process for the participants after the death of their spouses. These areas include physical, sensual, financial, relational, psychological, spiritual, and belief.

Physical factors refer to the needs of the physical body and nature. This area was explored as participants questioned, “Am I properly caring for my body with adequate

sleep, nutrition, and exercise?" The physical environment offered the opportunity for participants to view grief as a metaphor for nature, by understanding the grieving process with the change of seasons.

Sensual factors refer to the participants' need to create ways to feel alive. After the death of their spouses, participants expressed missing the sense of touch, and feeling safe when hugging another person. Participants expressed their appreciation for the sacred space of the group that created a place for intimacy. They were encouraged to create a sacred space at home or work, within a room, or even a corner.

Financial factors resulted from the need to manage finances alone, attitudes regarding money, and financial planning matters that were generally handled by their spouses. Depending on the financial situation, some participants experienced this as an obstacle to their healing from grief.

Relational factors were noted in a variety of ways. Participants found that some family members and friends were emotionally supportive, while others became more distant and abandoned them after their spouses died. With spousal death, one is no longer part of a couple. Waning interpersonal relationships can magnify for the surviving spouse that he or she is now alone.

Psychological factors were recognized through participants' appreciating the opportunity to "look within" themselves during the group meetings. They began thinking of methods they might use to continue this exploration once the group ended.

Spiritual factors took the form of exploring existential questions, such as the role of faith and God as elements of their grief. Participants also were able to address how religion and a sense of spirit includes an understanding of a time for death, planting,

dormancy, and aliveness. Spiritual comfort was provided in the group, as members listened without interrupting or attempting to fix the situation for one another.

Beliefs included what participants trusted as truth. Participants appreciated the safety of the group for allowing them to be vulnerable. Feeling held allowed them to explore their grief, and arrive at a place of acceptance, transformation, and new discoveries.

As a closed group, the six participants who began together remained together for the entire seven-session program. The group included participants from various faith traditions, all married to Jewish spouses, and offered an understanding of religious diversity to the universal experience of grief.

Challenges in the Group Process

A number of challenges were presented during the implementation of the seven-session program. The first occurred with the introduction to mindfulness meditation, and the use of a contemplative model of communication. Time taken to describe and model this method took longer in the initial session than anticipated. While most participants were uncomfortable with this new form of listening, its value as a way of tuning into one's thoughts and feelings became clearer throughout the group meetings.

Member lateness, scheduling the sessions, and member absences presented a second challenge. In the second session, the group start time was delayed while waiting for a member to arrive. The seven-session group occurred over a nine-week period, with two planned breaks. This wasn't ideal, but was unavoidable, and could have potentially broken some of the continuity of the meetings. Related to the break, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) had not anticipated the request by a participant to obtain the group

contact list to schedule a lunch date outside of the group. Despite addressing the issue in a private dialogue with the member who requested the list, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) needed to use time in the third session (the meeting that occurred after the first planned break in the schedule) to address the issue with the group. The importance of maintaining boundaries for all participants to continue to experience the group as a safe space necessitated this discussion. This took time away from the planned curriculum for the session, and was an unplanned disruption in the group process. During the third session, two members were absent (one planned, and the other, unplanned). Simultaneously, the group check-ins took longer with each meeting, and reflected contemplation of the material offered in the group. There was much material that the CF wanted to incorporate into the meetings, and the CF realized that the original time allotment of 90 minutes for the group would not be sufficient to allow each member the opportunity to share, while attempting to cover the curriculum material. While a group consensus determined adding on an additional 15 minutes to the group, perhaps it might have been an easier decision to omit some of the curriculum material, by using fewer meditation exercises, for example. The abundance of material did not leave time to introduce the homework and handouts during the sessions.

Another significant learning occurred during the fifth meeting, when a participant unveiled a flood of emotions, tears, and anger. The CF wondered if the participant would return to the group, and considered contacting her after the group, because of how upset she had been. Ultimately, the CF decided not to, as she realized that the outpouring of emotion was an inevitable occurrence in a group addressing grief and loss.

The challenges of working in the group became extraordinary moments of learning, both for the CF and the participants' understanding the experience of connecting, creating, changing, contemplating, and demonstrating courage, with a sense of curiosity and compassion. Logistically, the use of audio recording failed, and the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) resorted to using handwritten notes to keep accurate records, both during and after each session.

Upon reflection on the interactions that occurred by the challenges presented from a member requesting a list, or a member becoming highly emotional in the group, I would be remiss if I didn't briefly address the issue of countertransference. Hughes and Kerr (2000) define transference as "the response that is elicited in the recipient (therapist) by the other's (patient's) unconscious communication," and "include associated thoughts and feelings" (p. 63). For the participant who wanted the list, as the CF, I was clear that providing this would be a boundary violation and could potentially create a negative dynamic for the remainder of the group. I realized that I needed to consult my clinical advisor to process my feelings about the interaction, and obtain supervision on how I might best address the issue. The request could be seen as a challenge to my authority, as well as her inability to allow for a two-week separation from the group (which, as the weeks went on, it became clearer that she felt a connection to the group). Similarly, in a meeting where a member was emotionally distraught, as the CF, I was initially drawn to take care of her, by reaching out to her after the group. Though ultimately deciding against doing so, I realized that this could also be a countertransferential response in me. I maintained the boundary, but was aware of the feelings stirred up in me in both of these scenarios. Finally, I recall during one of the meetings being aware that I was the only

person in the group whose mother was still alive. I had experienced the devastating parental loss several years earlier, and realize that my choice of vocation and development of this bereavement group was a byproduct of my own personal history with loss. Though I was already a professional hospital chaplain at the time I developed the group, I was also in the role of a graduate student, participating in an educational endeavor. Supiano (2012) notes that the student's personal history with loss and grief is a "formative element" in their development as a professional caregiver, and in the capacity for empathic attunement with others (p. 104). As I've worked on this project, I realize that the losses I've sustained are part of me, and can serve as both a strength that I bring to my work, or an impediment, should there remain any unresolved issues. While the group process has helped participants in their meaning-making approach to spousal loss, I realize that the opportunities for me to address my own experiences with loss will serve to enhance my capacity to continue working to help others on their journeys toward healing the losses they sustain.

Program Evaluation by Participants

Participants evaluated the demonstration project, and identified the program as constructive, effective, valuable, and beneficial. As a group that experienced the death of a spouse, they appreciated the in-depth discussions that occurred during sessions, and found that being with others who experienced the same type of loss allowed for connections and understandings to emerge. Participants stated the group provided a time and a space to listen to another facing universal and unique life changes, by offering the freedom to communicate the impact of death. The participants welcomed the central location of the meeting place, and free convenient parking.

The participants ultimately described the contemplative communication model as a helpful technique that allowed them to become aware of their grief, and seek healthy coping skills for facing their grief. Listening without commenting or responding appeared to be very challenging in the beginning sessions. Most participants acknowledged that this mode of communication was new and uncomfortable. As the sessions continued, the structure became more amenable to the group. Learning ways to "pause and go within," and to notice what is behind the need to "fix, change, and support" one another, became clearer with each session. Psychologically, participants expressed having a sense of safety. They felt free to share, and reflected words of support for each other. Comments included an appreciation of a "holding" environment, and feeling "good enough."

In evaluating the use of color, some members identified the use of color as meaningful, and noted that color offered a sense of recognition for ritual, in anticipation of the next session**.** Others in the group felt neutral, or did not see the value of colors. Although the group was split regarding the use of color, the author supports the use of color to provide another dimension of processing and learning new information.

Most participants had worked or retired from careers in the education or social service fields**.** Mindfulness meditation techniques were a valuable tool for participants facing the pain and pleasure of new learning. For some participants, the use of meditation, visualization, and breathing techniques were accepted, while others resisted. Those participants who had a meditation or prayer practice prior to the group continued this at home, while those without a prior personal practice avoided creating one. The use of contemplative methods in the group had little influence on members developing a new lifestyle practice.

In this highly educated group, participants expressed a desire for more direction, and felt that the abundance of material left little time to process the experience. The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) views this feedback as a reflection of the participants' expectation and desire to get the homework "right," despite being told at the beginning that there were no wrong answers when it came to participants' thoughts and feelings. From a group dynamics perspective, the CF recognizes that the introduction of homework in the context of a support group setting may trigger anxiety for participants, who may, unconsciously, view the facilitator as an authority figure. Paralleling the members' feelings was the CF's desire to offer a meaningful group experience as smoothly as possible. The CF agrees that trying to cover a vast amount of material in each meeting potentially cut off more reflective and sharing time for discussion. Future facilitators could alleviate this obstacle by choosing to use fewer readings or meditations.

Participants offered the following suggestions for improving the program:

(a) Making the connection between a given week's meditation handout and homework theme more explicit,

(b) Providing more direction with the opening ritual question and the homework,

(c) Opening the last homework to any art form, and consider including journal pieces,

(d) Clarifying at the beginning what components are "expected," and what are optional tools,

(e) Simplifying the program, by providing less information, to remove the sense of each session feeling so busy,

f) Encouraging members to highlight (rather than read verbatim) what was most meaningful to them from the homework, and

g) Eliminating titles for each session, as this made the content of the meeting feel forced, rather than spontaneous.

A surprising outcome was the reflection that some members felt they would have benefited from the program during the first year of grieving. Participants may have been responding to a retrospectively perceived need for a structured, organized group closer to the time of their spouses' deaths. It is difficult to know whether members would have been able to attend to the elements contained in this program when they were in the throes of grief immediately after the passing of their spouses. Based on this feedback, the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) would consider modifying the program to provide a distinct focus for those in the first year of losing a spouse. A curriculum that concentrates on the experience of first holidays and other significant first events without the beloved spouse could be adapted. Grief groups can be tailored to address all types of losses.

The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) was responsible for providing an environment that held the integrity of each participant, and developing a sense of trust among the group as a whole. In attempting to follow the Biblical dictum of "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8), the CF strove to create a sacred space for all to enter, and find a safe place for self-discovery. Participants noted that the program provided a meaningful and empowering opportunity to move through their grief.

Clinically, relational theory concentrates on the implication of understanding the relationship of self, other, and God, and this was addressed in the program curriculum. During group discussions, the beliefs and attitudes toward God echoed the relationships toward the beloved spouse, while the participants' attitudes and beliefs about themselves were transformed over the seven-session program.

The relationship with God was examined throughout the seven sessions. In developing the curriculum, the CF was intentional in exploring participants' attitudes and beliefs about God, both before and after the death. The personal experience of facing a violent parental death sparked earlier memories of the CF's rage and anger toward God. As the CF listened to participants' acceptance, rather than anger, toward God, her belief that everyone felt anger and rage toward God after any type of death was shattered.

Providing conversation that included the role of faith and God in the grieving process enriched the group discussion. Some faith traditions incorporate religious and cultural rituals during the first year of mourning. Participant feedback indicated that comfort and healing emerged from their spirituality, rather than through religious practices after their spouses' deaths.

The implementation of the *sefirot*, and connecting each session to the day of creation, offered profound conversations. Questions explored throughout the program included:

(a) "Who am I without you?"

(b) "What is my story?"

(c) "What rituals of remembrances connect me to my loved one?"

(d) "What helps my grief?"

(e) "What are my beliefs?"

(f) "What might I do to heal from grief?"

In alignment with the groups' discussion of shifting beliefs and significant moments of transformation, the introduction of biblical characters (beginning with the biblical character of Sarah) became an example of holding pain and pleasure, as well as

laughter and tears. This paralleled the role of the Chaplain Facilitator (CF), who served as the container for members' emotional reservoir (and whose name was also Sarah).

Suggestions for Future Facilitators

Future facilitators can adapt this seven-session grief program by incorporating readings, meditations, handouts, and homework to meet the needs of various types of loss and grief groups. A trained chaplain facilitator would have an awareness of theology, and can provide the group with modified, multi-faith material by selecting readings, psalms, prayers, and poetry that reflect an understanding of diversity in faith traditions. Clinical and theological aspects of loss and grief would be addressed. The trained facilitator understands the effect of members' psychological backgrounds and narratives, and also has knowledge of spiritual and religious rituals, practices, and beliefs. A model of having two facilitators may be used if the facilitator is a bereavement counselor or mental health practitioner with no clerical training in theology or spiritual care.

In the pre-planning stage of the group, future facilitators need to consider what might be an ideal location for a grief group. Locate a space that is private, and as neutral as possible. Hospital settings and private homes may appear convenient, but could trigger negative emotions, especially if the deaths occurred in these settings. Similarly, those struggling with crises of faith surrounding the death of a loved one may respond poorly to meetings held in religious institutions. The physical location is important, as this space becomes the container of emotions, including loneliness, sadness, and vulnerability.

Group participants need to be seen, heard, and included, even if they choose to remain silent at certain points in the group process, or do not complete homework assignments. Configure the chairs in such a way that all participants can see each other. A

small table inside the circle of chairs that is clothed with fabric before placing objects on it will become the foundational space that allows participants to share group rituals. Initially explain the role of homework assignments, and let members know that the homework material will be incorporated into the group discussions. If participants do not complete homework assignments, re-offer the homework sheets to members of the group in a non-judgmental way, and encourage their participation in the dialogue.

The facilitator needs to consider the element of time in structuring a grief and loss program. The ideal time allotment for a group of six persons appears to be a minimum of one and a half hours, and not longer than one and three-quarter hours. The specific time of day for holding meetings may be specific to the group members. A noon or early evening hour may be best for participants who are employed, while retirees may prefer a morning or afternoon meeting time. Providing an environment that is easily accessible creates a sense of safety that honors the presence of participants, and can contribute to the success of a group.

Beginning with the initial session, articulate and implement clear and consistent boundaries. Be conscious of honoring beginning and ending times. Suggest to participants that, if possible, they should arrive a few minutes before the start time, but do not delay beginning the sessions if someone is late. Explain in the first session that in a closed group, participants do not engage in interactions outside of the designated meetings. Model desired behavior. Develop rituals that consider the collective community. Use verbal and non-verbal communication to convey a trusting environment that is receptive to “holding” stories of the inner voice.

In the formation of a new grief group, the future facilitator needs to consider the number of participants. Although closed self discovery groups can have as many as eight members, six members may be sufficient to provide a rich exchange in a group. In addition, providing a grief group with the same type of loss allows for an understanding and empathy for those facing similar experiences to bond and provide the mutual support needed in the group. A consecutive week seven-session program works best. However, if this is not possible, it is best to schedule breaks in advance.

The experienced facilitator provides participants with a sense of respect, trust, and tolerance of varied voices. The skilled facilitator is intentional in thoughts, words, and action, and models behavior. Competent facilitators will incorporate curriculum with both explicit and implicit material. Future facilitators will have an understanding of group dynamics, contemplative communication, and experience with issues pertaining to death and dying. Continuing education to enhance one's understanding of these complex issues is essential. Ongoing clinical supervision can aid the facilitator when problems arise during a group of this intensity. The program curriculum can be adjusted to fit the needs of participants, and modified accordingly. Each session can stand alone as a single program, or may be offered as a multi-session program.

Reflections of the Author

Loss and grief is, in the words of a famous Beatles song, a "long and winding road.**"** The process of grieving is typically described in phases or stages, although not necessarily considered to be linear in form. The grieving process is circuitous, and meanders through life like the changing of seasons. The first twelve to eighteen months

are profoundly sad. The griever is lonely, and is often left with feelings of fear, excruciating pain, and unfinished business.

For the group participants, grieving the death of a spouse resembled ascending and descending Jacob's ladder, and was dependent upon multiple factors. Metaphorically, grief is symbolically represented in the internal wrestling with an unknown entity, where one is holding on, until receiving a name and a blessing. Participants identified the choice of a new name as a significant moment in the group, and the Chaplain Facilitator (CF) offered a blessing. The movement to a new chosen name provided each participant with possibilities to expand and explore personal growth, appreciate their shifting identity, and be mindful of facing changes, without a sense of fear. The CF was appreciative and grateful for the input and effort of each participant. The group provided opportunities for discussion and decisions with other grievers, by exploring psycho-spiritual possibilities, and equipping members to explore shifting life styles and discoveries.

The Chaplain Facilitator (CF) noted that a belief could imprison the mind of the griever. The exodus out of the contracted and narrow belief is a life journey of facing pain, remembrances, changes, and acceptance. Although grief is universal, the pathway to processing grief is unique to the individual. Though time may lessen the pain, without moving through the process, the griever hardens the heart, and misses the beauty of life after death.

Pathway into the Garden of Discovery exemplifies a program addressing spousal loss greater than eighteen months, and provides ways to face the challenges of life after the death of a loved one. Through each of the seven sessions, new learning emerged. As the program concluded, the CF was left wondering whether grieving ever ends, and if

healing grief is possible. Perhaps, at best, we learn to shift, widen the perception, and transform through the mystery of planning, seeding, nurturing, and patience.

"*May God guide you always,*
May God take away your thirst in the parched places of your being,
and give strength to your bones.
May you become like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail."
Isaiah 58:11

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I began my career trajectory as a certified special education teacher, working in public schools, and psychiatric units in hospital settings. Subsequently, I left the special education field to pursue a career as a yoga and meditation instructor. I developed *YOGATREE*, a yoga and mindfulness meditation program for children and adults. I taught mindfulness meditation to adolescents in a special education school and a Hebrew high school program, developed and implemented curriculum for teachers and students in public and private settings, and offered yoga and mindfulness meditation techniques for the classroom. Teaching yoga and meditation serendipitously expanded my personal inquiry of God, and led me toward certification in yoga therapy. The study of mindfulness meditation and yoga brought me to ashrams in various locations east and west, including Lesvos, Greece. Beyond teaching, I developed, produced, and hosted a cable television program, *Sarah: body, mind, and spirit*, and was the recipient of a merit award "for being a positive example in the community."

The *YOGATREE* workshops focused on my faith tradition. Hearing the call to "return to your roots" inspired me to refocus, and subsequently develop *Yiddishkeit Yoga*. These Jewish content workshops infused ancient texts for modern living for women at Jewish community centers, synagogues, and various Jewish organizations. I was drawn to the importance of visiting the sick, was introduced to the field of spiritual care, and began working with patients and families on end-of-life care issues at the first hospice facility in the country, founded in Connecticut. As a spiritual care volunteer, I came to understand the difficult discussions and decisions patients, families, and friends faced at the end-of-life. Under the tutelage of Sister Eleanor Perfetto, former Spiritual Care Director at the

hospice, I was encouraged to pursue a residency in clinical pastoral education. I continue to work as a hospital chaplain, utilizing a multi-faith approach to the psycho-spiritual needs of patients, families, and staff at an urban medical center and teaching facility.

As a candidate in The Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling program at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, I had the opportunity to facilitate bereavement groups, provide individual grief counseling, and conduct this bereavement group demonstration project. This project was not part of my employment as a hospital chaplain.

The development of a loss and grief group emerged from the personal and tragic experience of murder on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving), 1978. That date is forever enshrined in my psyche. I was unable to cope or find peace after the sudden, unexpected, and violent death of my beloved father. I searched externally for years to find “the answer” to end the anguish of grief. God became the focal point of my internalized anger. Existential questions could not release the fury that lived within my hardened heart. During the seven-session group program, I was astonished to learn that none of the participants maintained anger toward God, whether the death of their loved one was anticipated, sudden, or unexpected. Internally, I became aware that my interest in the griever’s relationship with God stemmed from my personal experience of a violent parental death and subsequent anger toward God, which evoked my personal pain, and kept me trapped in my grief for years. My thoughts ruminated, wondering “how could God do this to me? I felt totally disconnected in my relationship with God. Yet, this anger was the hold that kept me connected to God. Only years later could I reflect on my relationship with God, and feel satisfied. The discovery demonstrated a new

understanding of being stuck in the grieving process, regardless of what the circumstances of the death might be.

The garden became a symbol of hope for me in this project. The garden reflects an opportunity to plant new ways of seeing, hearing, speaking, and breathing after experiencing the death of a loved one. The garden teaches patience, and the possibility of mystery beyond this moment of time.

The image of the garden offers a sense of solace. As the project came to a natural end, so, too, was my experience of parental death. While writing the concluding chapters of this project, I experienced the sudden, unexpected, and peaceful death of my beloved mother, 35 years after the tragic death of my father.

The gardener understands the passing of time, the season to seed, the time to pause, the time to nourish, and the time to enjoy the blooming. The cycle of life encompasses death, and encourages new beginnings. In this demonstration project, *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery,* faith gave birth to new hope. The group discovered love as a significant pathway in moving through grief.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Letter

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Date, 2013

Dear _____

You are invited to participate in a demonstration project. I am conducting a seven-session support group for the purpose of collecting data on the impact of spiritual and traditional beliefs on healing grief after the death of a spouse. The data collected and assessments will honor your anonymity. The demonstration project is for the completion of my Doctor of Ministry degree from Hebrew Union College.

I am asking a specific group of people to participate, and commit for seven Thursdays from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM on the following dates:

April 4	May 2
April 11	May 9
X	X
April 25	May 23
	May 30

The seven sessions will be held in a private room at the Woodbridge Town Library. The address is 10 Newton Road Woodbridge, CT 06525.

I hope that you are able to join this small closed group for this limited time. Please respond and let me know if you have any questions. *I have enclosed my contact information below.

With gratitude for your time and consideration,
Sarah

Chaplain N. Sarah Blum
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
New York, New York

*Contact information omitted for privacy in this document.

APPENDIX B

Acceptance Letter

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

March 20, 2013

Dear _____,

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in the demonstration project, for my Doctor of Ministry program. The purpose of the project is to understand the psycho-spiritual process of healing, after a spousal loss at least eighteen months post death.

Our meetings will be held in "The Meeting Room" in the Woodbridge Town Library, at 10 Newton Road, Woodbridge, CT 06525. When you enter the doorway, turn right and walk into the room.

To honor the work schedule of all participants, we ask that you arrive at 11:20 A.M**.**

Meeting Time: 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM. Meeting Date: Thursdays (please note, **X** is not a meeting date)

1. April 4
2. April11
   X
3. April 25
4. May 2
5. May 9
   X
6. May 23
7. May 30

Enclosed is a questionnaire. Please email, or bring to our first session. Please feel free to contact me. *I have enclosed my contact information below. We value your time, and willingness to commit to the seven sessions.

With gratitude,
Sarah

Chaplain N. Sarah Blum
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
New York, New York

*Contact information omitted for privacy in this document.

APPENDIX C

Reminder Letter

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

April 2, 2013

Dear _____,

Looking forward to seeing you this Thursday, April 4, 2013 in "The Meeting Room" in the Woodbridge Town Library, 10 Newton Road, Woodbridge, CT 06525.

The session will begin at 11:30 A.M. and end at 1:00 P.M. Please arrive by 11:20 A.M.

Enclosed are the original questionnaire, and a consent form. Please bring both to our first session. *I have enclosed my contact information below.

With gratitude,
Sarah

Chaplain N. Sarah Blum
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
New York, New York

*Contact information omitted for privacy in this document.

APPENDIX D

Consent To Participate in a Research Study

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Consent Form

Purpose
Pathway into the Garden of Discovery is a demonstration project to fulfill the Doctor of Ministry program from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The purpose of this project is to determine psycho-spiritual beliefs that support the healing process for spousal loss, at least eighteen months after the death. The *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery* program is a closed, contemplative, multi-faith, self-discovery grief group.

Procedure
The grief group meets for seven sessions, with each session one and half hours long. The participants will experience the use of breathing techniques, meditation, visualization, journaling, sharing, and witnessing. The program includes weekly homework and handouts.

Risks
This is to inform the participants that there are no reasonably foreseeable harm, discomfort, inconvenience and risks that are associated with the demonstration project.

Benefits
The information yielded from the demonstration project could benefit the field of thanatology. Participants may benefit from the group sessions although there will be no promise of direct benefit to the participants.

Confidentiality
A number rather than a name on any record sheets or work product that results from this study will identify the participants. The signed consent form and code assignment list will be kept in a separate location from the data. Audio recorded sessions will be destroyed after the completion of the demonstration project. Written work will be returned to participant or destroyed.

Costs/Compensation
There will be no cost, nor compensation to the participants.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Refuse or Withdraw
Participation in the demonstration project is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. The subject may discontinue participation at any time.

Debriefing
At the completion of the project, participants will receive a summary of results.

Information about Investigator
For questions about the demonstration project please contact: Chaplain N. Sarah Blum. *I have enclosed my contact information below.

Consent Form

Consent
By signing this document you are agreeing that you have read and understand the information listed above and that you agree to participate in this demonstration project.

Signature of Participant _____ Date_____

Signature of Facilitator _____ Date_____

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

Chaplain N. Sarah Blum
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
New York, New York

*Contact information omitted for privacy in this document.

APPENDIX E

Curriculum Outlines

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 1: Connecting
Face-To-Face

Curriculum

Check-in:

Welcome and Intention of the seven-session grief group
Construct of group process:
Confidentiality, commitment, contemplative communication, community
Introduction of methods
Mindfulness meditation: pausing, breathing, visualizing, journaling
Homework & Handout
Pre-Assessment
Question: My Intention
Ritual: Evoke presence of beloved with a stone placed on a White index card

Contemplative: Mindfulness Meditation - Body Relaxation
Core: Face-To-Face
Context: Sharing Own Story
Closing: Ritual, Homework & Handout

Concept:

- Sefirah: Malchut/Royalty
- Creation: First Day/Let there be Light
- Character Biblical: Eve/Mother of murdered and murderer
- Color: White/Candle, scarf, index card, Homework & Handout
- Blessing: May our presence offer a sense of solace, as we share own stories

Schedule:

11:20 AM: Participants arrive. Informed by letter to attend before opening to begin on time
11:30 AM: Opening: Welcome and overview of program. Pre-Assessment
Ritual: Introduction and question
12:10 PM: Meditation: Mindfulness. CF facilitates meditation
12:15 PM: Face To Face/Sharing our Story
When, Who, Where, What, How
1:00 PM: Ritual, and Homework & Handout

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 2: Creating
My Mirror & Me

Curriculum

Check-in:

Welcome & Opening
Question: I want to create
Ritual: Evoke presence of beloved with a stone placed on a Red index card
Review & reflect process

Contemplative:	Meditation - Visualization
Core:	My Mirror & Me (Q & A**)**
Context:	Separating Our Self
Closing:	Ritual, and Homework & Handout

Concept:

- Sefirah: Yesod/Foundation
- Creation: Second Day/Separation of firmament
- Character Biblical: Shei'lah/Anticipatory death & legacy
- Color: Red/creating
- Blessing: Although we are separate entities, may our presence offer a sense of oneness

Schedule

11:20 AM:	Arrival
11:30 AM:	Opening Ritual
	Check-in
11:50 AM:	Meditation: Mirror Meditation
	What do I see, when I look within me?
12:00 PM:	Theme (6 participants = 10 minutes)
1:00 PM:	Ritual, and Handout & Homework

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 3: Changing
Roots, Rhythms, & Rituals

Curriculum

Check-in:
Welcome & Opening
Question: I consciously choose to change
Ritual: Evoke presence of beloved with a stone placed on an Orange index card
Review & reflect process

Contemplative:	Meditation-Visualization, Reading of Psalm 23. Listen with a sense of curiosity. After reading invite silent visualization: "What words have meaning?" Pause. "What memories are evoked?
Core:	Roots, Rhythms, & Rituals - Faith, Seasons, Practices & ceremony
Context:	Sense of Solace - supporting losses/meaningfulness/comfort Back story: Sensuality *(4/6)* Sadness (6/6) Loneliness ((5/6)
Closing:	Ritual: gathering the stone & and sharing "MY take away…" Homework & Handout

Concept:	Transformation/possibilities & patience/Ambivalence
• Sefirah:	Hod/Humility: *acceptance* of qualities, & knowledge as gifts
• Creation:	Third Day/the creation of land and vegetation; earth, and hearth
• Character Biblical:	Sarah/evokes Collapsing in despair & Laughing with wonder
• Color:	Orange – social/community
• Blessing:	May we offer our presence to hear words of despair, and words of wonderment without the need to repair or judge

Schedule

11:20 AM:	Arrival
11:30 AM:	Opening Rituals
11:50 AM:	Meditation: Visualization
12:00 PM:	Theme: 6 x 8 min
1:00 PM:	Ritual, and Homework & Handout

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 4: Contemplating Awareness, Ambivalence, Acceptance, & Autonomy

Curriculum

Check-in:

Welcome & Opening
Question: My relationship with God is:
Intimate, ambivalent, non-existent/Describe
Ritual: Evoke presence of beloved with a stone placed on a Yellow index card
Review & reflect process

Contemplative: Meditation - Visualization, Gabrielle Roth, *Maps to Ecstasy*, poem
Core: Awareness, Ambivalence, Acceptance, Autonomy, Attitude, and Avoidance
Context: Sources of Support: who, what when, where? Conflicts, Challenges, Obstacles
Closing: Summary

Creating a garden needs time to plan and time to toil. So, too, is the process of grieving. In grief, we need to create time and sacred space to have endurance to face the pain, be patient, and trust the outcome. Notice the growth of little buds releasing. Imagine the *blooming buds* as the reflection of new ways of coping, and meaningful moments.

Concept: Movement/Dancing/Trust (between space & togetherness)

- Sefirah: Netzach/Endurance
- Creation: Fourth Day/Sun, Moon, Stars, Light even in Night (Trust)
- Character Biblical: Miriam, leading the people in dance; after moving through a narrow constrictive place, *Mitzrayim*
- Color: Yellow-mental and spiritual
- Blessing: May we receive the energy of Miriam, when we dance and trust the un-knowable

Schedule

11:20 AM:	Arrival
11:30 AM:	Opening
11:50 AM:	Meditation: Poetry see appendix
12:00 PM:	Noon: Theme
12:55 PM:	Summary & Closing Ritual: gathering the stone & and sharing “take away”
1:00 PM:	Homework & Handout

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 5: Communicating
Indulging Spirit

Curriculum

Check-in:
Welcome & Opening
Question: What really matters
Ritual: Evoke presence of beloved with a stone placed on a Green index card
Review and reflect process

Contemplative: Meditation, "The Most Beautiful Heart." CF will offer as a story or storyteller
Core: **Context**: Shadows of Self: The Art of Communicating- speech, song, silence. Listen. Oneness. Contemplative Communication
Closing: Ritual, and Homework & Handout

Concept: Being receptive to all emotions that enter

- Sefirah: Tiferet/Beauty Inner - Heart Center
- Creation: Fifth Day/Birds and Fishes/beneath and above/ Ocean/Heaven
- Character Biblical: Queen Esther - the hidden, and Ishtar - morning star Esther has same name as Ishtar, Goddess of morning star and helper of Love & Abundance. Like the goddess Ishtar – who enters the underworld and then leaves it, Esther descends into a frightening place and emerges whole Esther represents a new dawn
- Color: Green symbolic of nature
- Blessing: So, too, in grieving we enter a period of uncertainly and fear. May we be blessed over time to experience the light of a new morning

Schedule

11:10 AM:	Arrival: Begin new schedule: arrive ten minutes before remain five minutes later
11:20 AM:	Opening
11:50 AM:	Meditation: Self Care
12:00 PM:	Theme (6 participants = 9 minutes)
12:55 PM:	Summary & Closing Ritual: gathering the stone & and sharing "take away?"
1:05 PM:	Homework & Handout

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 6: Curiosity
Begin Anew

Curriculum

Check-In:

Welcome & Opening
Question: What is my focus
Ritual: Evoke presence of beloved with a stone placed on a Blue index card. Evoke the presence of those who are no longer present in the physical realm. Invite participants to "begin anew" by giving themselves a "name" to be known by in the group
Review & reflect process

Reminder: Next week last meeting. Discuss possibilities for concluding session

Contemplative: Meditation: Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose* (pp. 110-111)

Core/Context: Seasons Of Self? Where Am I? What season am I in? Do I Care for:
Dependent parents? Dependent Children? Working? Shifting Attitudes towards life

Closing: Summary: "*The Summer Day*," Mary Oliver
Homework, Handout, & Post-Assessment
Ritual: Gathering the stone & sharing, "My take-away"

Concept: Inner investigation

- Sefirah: Gevurah/Discernment
- Creation: Sixth Day/Intricate and wondrous creation of the Human Being
- Character Biblical: Deborah the Prophetess: Judges Chapter 4-5 excerpted Now Deborah a prophetess was a Judge and she sat under the palm tree and listened to all who came to her
- Color: Blue - Truth
- Blessing: May we find the time to listen to others, and be blessed to listen within, with a sense of curiosity

Schedule

11:10 AM	Arrival
11:20 AM	Opening: Check-in: Review & Reflect & Rituals
11:50 AM	Meditation: Contemplative
11:55 AM	Theme (6 participants = 10 minutes)
1:05 PM	Ritual, and Handout & Homework

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

Session 7: Compassion
Hear, I Am

Curriculum

Post-Assessment: Placed on each chair. Participants asked to fill form first, and then receive the traditional index card with question for opening ritual.

Check-in: Review and reflect process. Question: "My Question?" Ask Participants to write response before turning purple index card over. On the back of card is a poem. When I had so many questions, a friend offered this to me.

> *Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love*
> *the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are*
> *now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers,*
> *which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them.*
> *And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.*
> *Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it,*
> *live along some distant day into the answer.*
> ― Rainer Maria Rilke (p. 31)

Ritual Opening:
Index card, purple. Evoke presence of beloved and those who are no longer present in the physical realm. As read the response, place a stone upon the card from the (sacred/gold) bowl. At closing of circle each participant will get to keep the stone as an offering of remembrance.

Review: Reconstructing the narrative. What have I been saying? What is my story? Is it old? Is it new? You have shown the courage to face all parts of grieving, from the pain of loss, to the pleasures of life.

Contemplative: Meditation, Observing Sensations.
You are invited to view your pathway, as a way to understand your emotions, and thoughts that indulge or inhibit your spirit. Pause.
LISTEN to the external sounds & internal sparks. Pause.

Rilke, R.M. (1975). Rilke's letters on love. In J.J.L. Mood (Ed.), *Rilke on love and other difficulties:Translations and other considerations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc.

Meditation: Observing Sensations

Seeing Inward
Sensing Breath
Swallowing, Speaking, Singing, & Silence
Searching and Mindful of Search
Shedding what you no longer want
Self I AM
Soul Beyond Knowing

GENTLY open your eyes, as we listen and share our stories.

Core: Hear, I Am. Participants read their poetry
Context: *Sense of Sojourn*: As we close the sacred circle, I A
Closing: Summary

> *I close our sacred circle with gratitude for your presence, your courage to show up and share, your willingness to listen without the need to fix or advise, and for exploring unknown pathways. Thank you for your acceptance of boundaries, and for providing comfort even in our discomfort. I value sojourning with you. Thank you for creating time to participate in the seven-session grief group. And may your memories be a source of comfort and care that uplifts your body, heart, mind, and spirit. Your collective sharing has enriched the group.*

No Homework. Handout: Participants receive a Certificate

Ritual Closing:	Participants keep the stone, and index card, then share: My Discoveries!
Concept:	Internal Discoveries
• Sefirah:	Chesed/Love
• Creation:	Seventh Day/Time for Rest, Reflection, & Resilience
• Character Biblical:	The Shekhina, The indwelling Presence of God
• Color:	Purple: Royalty
• Blessing:	May we evoke the Royal Blessing of the Shekhina

Schedule

11:10 AM:	Arrival
11:20 AM:	Opening: Check-in: Review & Reflect & Rituals
11:50 AM:	Meditation
11:55 AM:	Theme: (6 participants = 10 minutes)
12:55 PM:	Closing
1:05 PM:	Lunch/Everyone brings something and we have together
2:05 PM:	Conclusion of lunch

APPENDIX F

Welcome Letter

Pathway into the Garden of Discovery
A Seven-Session Grief Group Addressing
Spousal Loss After Eighteen Months

Welcome to our program, *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery*. During our sessions together, we encourage you to create a set time during the day, (morning, noon, or night) when you can take at least ten minutes to practice a form of quieting the mind through breathing, visualization, meditation, prayer or to just sit. Another suggested daily practice is to journal your feelings, thoughts, awareness's, blessings, and challenges.

To respect the needs of all participants, we ask that you arrive on time, and we will end the session as scheduled. Your presence in each session helps to develop continuity and connection. However, if you are unable to attend a session, please inform the Chaplain Facilitator. *I have enclosed my contact information below.

Meeting Place: "The Meeting Room"
Woodbridge Town Library, 10 Newton Road, Woodbridge, CT 06525

Meeting Time: 11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M. Please arrive by 11:20 A.M. Meeting Day: Thursdays Meeting Dates: Please note, X indicates a non-meeting day
Session 1: April 4

Session 2: April 11
X
Session 3: April 25
Session4: May 2
Session 5: May 9
X
Session 6: May 23
Session 7: May 30

Thank you for your courage to participate in *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery.*

Sincerely,
Sarah

Chaplain Facilitator: N. Sarah Blum
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
New York, New York

*Contact information omitted for privacy in this document.

APPENDIX G

Program Overview

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY:
A Seven Session Grief Group Addressing Spousal Loss After Eighteen Months

Welcome, and thank you for participating in the grief group program. The following information is an overview of the seven sessions, *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery.*

Session 1: Connecting
Welcome and Intention. Discussion of group boundaries and construct: confidentiality, commitment, contemplative communication, and the weekly homework and handout. Introduction of Mindfulness Meditation: Relaxation. Initial pre-assessment and consent form. Theme: **Face-To-Face** through *Sharing Own Story.*

Session 2: Creating
Ritual and Check-In. Meditation: Journaling. Theme: **My Mirror & Me**. Wondering what do I see, when I look at me? Since the death of my beloved, who am I without you? Exploring intimacy, and being a separate entity through *Separating Our Self.*

Session 3: Changing
Ritual and Check-In. Meditation: Breathing. Theme: **Roots, Rhythms, & Rituals.** Identify beliefs, seasons of change, and meaningful practices that offer a *Sense Of Solace*.

Session 4: Contemplating
Ritual and Check-In. Meditation: Contemplative. Theme: **Awareness, Ambivalence, Acceptance, & Autonomy.** Reflecting who, what, when, and where I experience both challenges and comfort. Concentrating on situations that exemplify *Sources Of Support*.

Session 5: Communicating
Ritual and Check-In. Meditation: Self-Care. Theme: **Indulging Spirit.** Voice core beliefs, and the way they are the same or different immediately after the death, mid-point, and now. With mindfulness and courage, identify the *Shadows Of Self.*

Session 6: Curiosity
Ritual and Check-In. Meditation: Visualization. Theme: **Begin Anew**. With a sense of curiosity, express discoveries of re-entering life after the death of your spouse. Discern the grieving process, and pathway toward resiliency through your *Season Of Self.*

Session 7: Compassion
Ritual and Check-In. Meditation: I Am. Theme: **Hear, I Am**. Reflection of the seven-session closed contemplative, multi-faith, self-discovery grief group. Sharing personal path of facing grief. Post-assessment and evaluation. Concluding the sacred circle, *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery*, with a *Sense Of Sojourn.*

With gratitude,

Chaplain N. Sarah Blum

APPENDIX H

Pre-Assessment Form

Participant Information

Date _____ Years together _____

Name/Title _____ First _____ Middle ____ Last: _____

Gender _____ Age _____ Religion _____

Information of Loved One

Date of Death _____ Relationship _____

Name/Title _____ First _____ Middle ____ Last _____

Gender _____ Age _____ Religion _____

Check the Type of Death:

Anticipated _____ Sudden: _____ Traumatic _____

Other _____

Check the Most Profound Feelings After the Death

Anger _____ Blaming _____ Crisis mode _____

Dead inside _____ Excruciating pain _____ Fearful _____

Guilt _____ Helplessness _____ Isolation _____

Jealousy _____ Loneliness _____ Regret _____

Sadness _____ Traumatized _____ Unfinished _____

Other _____

Check Significant Losses After the Death

Confidant _____ Faith _____ Financial _____

Sensuality _____ Support _____

Other _____

Check Significant Changes After the Death

Relationships _____ Sense of Security _____ Work _____

Other _____

Did you Seek Grief Counseling, at Any Time After the Death?

Individual Counseling _____ Grief Group _____

How long _____

How did you Fill Empty Time After the Death?

Relationships _____ Hobbies _____

Physical Activities _____ New Learning _____

Other _____

Pre-Assessment Form

1.What was most significant to you, after the death of your spouse?

2. What long-term changes have you experienced?

3. What triggers your sorrow?

4. What was your relationship with God, after the death of your spouse? Has it changed?

5. How did your Faith Tradition support (or not support) your grieving process?

6. What is your catalyst for growth?

7. Additional Comments

Pre-Assessment Form

Please indicate your response, using the following codes:
Never, **R**arely, **M**onthly, **W**eekly, **D**aily

ID # _____	**Prior to the Death**	**Immediately after the Death**	**Mid-Point**	**Present Day**
I have a **Breathing** practice				
I have a **Meditation** practice				
I use **Visualization**				
I **Journal**				
My relationship with **God**				
I study **Text**				
I connect to **Prayer**/**Psalms**				
I attend **Services** in my faith				
My **Faith** supports me				
I have a **Spiritual** Practice				
Other **Personal Healing Grief Technique**				

Pre-Assessment Form

ID # _____	**Yes**	**No**	**Other**
MARRIAGE			
My only marriage			
My second marriage			
Divorce			
Widow/Widower			
Other			
CHILDREN			
Ours			
None			
Mine			
Yours			
Yours & Ours			
Yours & Mine			
Yours, Mine, & Ours			
Death of a Child			
Grandchildren			
Death of a Parent			
At Time of Death:			
Children at Home			
Ages/Gender			
Presently:			
Children at Home			
Ages/Gender			
I refrain from dating because of children			
My children impact my dating partner			
Is there anything you think important for us to know about you at this time?			

Pre-Assessment Form

ID # _____	**Yes**	**No**	**Other**
Stages of Self: Years			
20-49			
50-59			
60-79			
80+			
Seasons of Self			
If Working:			
Work is satisfying			
If Retired:			
Retirement is satisfying			
Financial:			
Financial ease			
Financial stress			
Sensual:			
Sensual ease			
Sensual stress			
Aloneness:			
Time alone easy			
Time alone stressful			
Relationships:			
Intimacy			
Chaos			
Physically Active			
God:			
Active			
Inactive			
Other Identification			

APPENDIX I

Program Materials, Homework, And Handouts

Session 1: Connecting

Ritual Opening Question
With Responses

"My Intention…"

Journey

Moving through/ forward/on

Sharing

Hearing

Learning

Understanding

Holding Loved One

Exploration

Inner

Self-growth

Healthy ways

Peace

Social group

Session 1: Connecting

Birth is a Beginning
Alvin I. Fine (1988, pp. 138-140)

Birth is a beginning
And death a destination
And life is a journey:
From childhood to maturity
And youth to age;
From innocence to awareness
And ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion
And then, perhaps, to wisdom;
From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness-
And, often, back again:
From health to sickness
And back, we pray, to health again;
From offense to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding-
From fear to faith;
From defeat to defeat to defeat-
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey, stage by stage,
A sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey,
A sacred pilgrimage-
To life everlasting.

Fine, A.I. (1988). Birth is a beginning, in Rabbi's manual, New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1988, pp. 138-140.

Session 1: Connecting
Face To Face

"My heart says: "Seek My Face!"
Do not hide your Face from Me."
Psalm 27:8-9

Grieving takes courage. Share your own story of facing the death of your loved one.

When did you hear?

Who was with you?

Where did your love one die?

What happened?

How did your body feel?

Session 1: Connecting

Meditation: Relaxation

And sometimes the most important thing in a whole day
is the rest we take between two deep breaths, or
the turning inwards in prayer for five short minutes.
Etty Hillesum (1996, p. 93)

Create time to lie down on your back…become aware of your breath, without judging the breath. Gently allow your head to rest on the floor, inhale (breath in) and exhale, (breath out). Imagine breathing into your neck, shoulders, and arms then exhale. Inhale into your belly, hips, and buttocks then exhale. Inhale into your upper legs, and lower legs then exhale. Take a slow gentle breath in and out, allowing your whole body to gently rest upon the earth… Notice the flow your breath…Pause.

Bring your awareness to your toes. Squeeze your toes as tightly as you can…squeeze, squeeze, and release. Attract your attention to your heels and ankles, squeeze and release. Inhale and exhale, breathe into your lower legs, squeeze, squeeze, tighten and release. Shift your awareness to your knees, imaging tightening the knees, breathe …and release. Allow your breath to flow into your thighs, tighten your thighs, tighten, squeeze and release. Inhale and exhale, and begin to tighten your buttocks, hips, and belly…squeeze, and release, allowing your lower body to rest upon the earth… Pause.

Inhale and exhale, increase the upper chest, the side of chest, and the back of your chest…squeeze and release. Draw your awareness of breath into your heart, and lungs. Imagine your breath flowing into your heart and lungs…Pause. Allow your breath to flow into your upper arms, elbows, and lower arms…tighten, tighten, and squeeze then release. Shift your breath into your wrist, palm, and fingers…tighten, tighten, then release. Exhale, relax, and feel your breath…Pause.

Imagine your breath gently flowing in and around your face. Inhale and exhale…slowly begin to tighten your forehead, eyes, ears, nose, and cheeks…. tighten and squeeze, then release and relax. Inhale, exhale and gently begin to tighten the back of your head, then the crown of your head…squeeze and tighten, then release and relax. Let your head gently rest upon the earth…Pause.

Feel the flow of breath from the crown of your head, heart, belly, and to the soles of your feet… Pause. Notice parts of your body that feels tight or tense… Imagine bringing your breath to the area of tension, and then breathe gently into the tightness or tautness. Play with the flow of breath, and visualize a color, sound or fragrance that releases tension. Exhale and release…letting go…letting go and allowing your breath to flow…Pause.

Observe a space within your body that feels light and open. Bring your awareness to that sacred space. Allow your breath to flow into the openness and illuminate light from that

point in your body, down into your toes…Pause. Then guide your breath to flow from that sacred space upward and allow the openness and light to illuminate into crown of your head. Pause. Continue to gently breathe watching the ebb and flow of your breath moving from the crown of your head, through your heart…belly…and to the soles of your feet… Pause.

Know that you are perfect right now at this moment of time. Pause. When you are ready, begin to gently wiggle your toes and fingers. Then slowly roll your body onto the right side. Stay still for a moment, before opening your eyes. Use your arms and gently come up to a seated position. Pause.

Continue connecting to your breath

Create your day

Changes observed?

Contemplate thoughts, words, and actions

Courageous to breathe mindfully

Cultivate an attitude of curiosity

Compassionately communicate experience

Hillesum, E. (1996). *Etty Hillesum: An interrupted life the diaries, 1941-1943 and letters from westbork*, New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Session 2: Creating

Ritual Opening Question
With Responses

"I want to create…."

Love

Peace

Relationship

Self

Children

Partner

Family

Home

Record

Insights

Legacy

Purpose

Meaning

Coping skills

Enjoyment/ Fun

Financial ease

Session 2: Creating

For Equilibrium
John O'Donohue (2008, p. 127)

Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore,
May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul.

As the wind loves to call things to dance,
May your gravity be lightened by grace.

Like the dignity of moonlight restoring the earth,
May your thoughts incline with reverence and respect.

As water takes whatever shape it is in,
So free may you be about who you become.

As silence smiles on the other side of what's said,
May your sense of irony bring perspective.

As time remains free of all that it frames,
May your mind stay clear of all it names.

May your prayer of listening deepen enough
To hear in the depths the laughter of God.

O'Donohue, J. (2008). *To bless the space between us*. New York: Doubleday.

Session 2: Creating

My Mirror & Me

"*Just to be is a blessing.*
Just to live is holy."
Abraham Joshua Heschel (1996, p. 264)

The Mirror Meditation is a Reflective Meditation. Create time for this intimate reflection, and prepare your space for meditation. Place a mirror in front of you, and sit comfortably or you can stand up. You may light a candle, and turn off the lights. Keep it simple, breathe, and allow your eyes to relax, as you focus into the mirror. You may find your eyes going in and out of focus; this is perfectly normal and expected. Each day you may increase your practice. Evoke an attitude of curiosity with whatever appears, be compassionate as you reflect and connect to your essence.

Optional: Mirror Meditation online

When I look into the mirror… I see?

What are the changes or challenges over time?

Who is looking out at me?

Ways I am creating a sense of separation, since the death of my beloved.

Heschel, A.J. (1996). *Moral grandeur and spiritual audacity: Essays edited by Suzannah Heschel*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Session 2: Creating
Meditation: Journaling

"*Imagination is more important than knowledge."*
Albert Einstein (1931, p. 97))

During our sessions together, you are asked to keep a journal. The journal is for you to communicate and concentrate on your personal process. Journal writing is an opportunity to explore your inner self without the critical voice. The journal is confidential, and sharing is optional. Hopefully, you will find writing to be satisfying, and even choose to continue your journal after the group ends.

Journaling:

- *Connecting* thoughts, words, and actions.
- *Creating* a tool for personal intimacy.
- *Changing* constrictive beliefs with humility.
- *Contemplating* possibilities, purpose, and practices.
- *Courage* to authentically express self.
- *Curiosity* discernment of unknown strengths.
- *Compassion* to accept insights with love.

Journaling topics: SOS

- Sharing Own Story: Telling your narrative.
- Separating Our Self: Who am I, without You?
- Sense Of Solace: Comforting changes
- Sources Of Support: Who, What, When, Where?
- Shadows Of Self: Holy Spirit!
- Sense Of Seasons: Discovery of meaningfulness…
- Sense Of Sojourn: *Pathway into the Garden of Discovery*

Hints for Journaling

- Set a time and place to write or not, be spontaneous.
- Buy a designer journal or not, keep a notebook, or pad.
- No erasers either cross out words or skip lines.
- No deleting phases or pages, attend to what you want to reject.
- Capture your inner dialogue without judgment.
- Be comfortable write simply.
- Document your thoughts and feelings as a meditation.

The SOS topics may help you begin journal entries. Be free to choose topics that reflect your circumstance. Letter writing is another way to express thoughts and feelings. Write a letter that clarifies any regrets or unfinished business.

As a meditation, imagine receiving a letter from your loved one and writing the response in your journal. Remember to date each entry, and include the day, year, and time of writing.

Sincerely,

Sarah

Einstein, A. (1931). *Einstein on cosmic religion and other opinions and aphorisms*. New York: Covici-Friede, Inc.

Session 3: Changing

Ritual Opening Question
With Responses

"I consciously choose to change…"

Opening to different perspective

Not worrying that all my I's are dotted, and all my T's are crossed

Being in the moment

"Me" time

Shifting/Time

Session 3: Changing

The Lord Is My Shepherd
Psalm 23

A psalm of David:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want

He makes me to lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside the still waters.

*He restores my soul.

He guides me in straight paths for His Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil

For Thou art with me.

They rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil,

My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

Harold Kushner (p. 66) notes, *If God cannot restore the soul of the one who died, if God cannot bring the person back to life, He can do much to replenish the souls of those who grieve*.

Kushner, H.S. (2003). *The lord is my shepherd: Healing wisdom of the twenty-third psalm*. New York: Anchor Books.

Session 3: Changing

Roots, Rhythms, & Rituals

A season is set for everything,
A time for every experience under heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die,
A time to plant and a time to uproot what was planted.
Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Roots: Identify your belief system.

Rhythms: Describe the seasons of change since the death of your beloved.

Rituals: Share Faith tradition or personal practice that offers a sense of solace.

Describe ambivalence toward God, and your Beloved.

Session 3: Changing

Meditation: Breathing

God breathed into the nostrils the breath of life;
and man became a living soul.
Genesis 2:7

Breathing with intention increases awareness of the body, mind, and soul. A Breathing practice helps to relax, reframe, and release pressures. Breathing exercises can be done anytime, anywhere without special clothes or equipment. Learning various breathing techniques allows you to experience what works best, as you *change* so too will your breathing practice. Begin a breathing practice that offers you a *sense of solace.*

"Practicing regular, mindful breathing can be calming and energizing and can even help with stress-related health problems ranging from panic attacks to digestive disorders."
Andrew Weil, M.D.

Exercise 1: The Stimulating Breath (also called the Bellows Breath)

The Stimulating Breath is adapted from a yogic breathing technique. Its aim is to raise vital energy and increase alertness.

- Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Your breaths in and out should be equal in duration, but as short as possible. This is a noisy breathing exercise.

- Try for three in-and-out breath cycles per second. This produces a quick movement of the diaphragm, suggesting a bellows. Breathe normally after each cycle.

- Do not do for more than 15 seconds on your first try. Each time you practice the Stimulating Breath you can increase your time by five seconds or so, until you reach a full minute.

If done properly, you may feel invigorated, comparable to the heightened awareness you feel after a good workout. You should feel the effort at the back of the neck, the diaphragm, the chest and the abdomen. Try this breathing exercise the next time you need an energy boost and feel yourself reaching for a cup of coffee.

Exercise 2: The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

This exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**.
- Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass.
Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.

Exercise 3: Breath Counting

If you want to get a feel for this challenging work, try your hand at breath counting, a deceptively simple technique much used in Zen practice.

Sit in a comfortable position with the spine straight and head inclined slightly forward. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it. Ideally it will be quiet and slow, but depth and rhythm may vary.

- To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale.
- The next time you exhale, count "two," and so on up to "five."
- Then begin a new cycle, counting "one" on the next exhalation.

Never count higher than "five," and count only when you exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself up to "eight," "12," even "19."

Try to do 10 minutes of this form of meditation.

Three breathing exercises described by Andrew Weil, M.D.

Weil, A. (2013, December 28). *Breathing: Three exercises*. Retrieved from www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html

Session 4: Contemplating

Ritual Opening Question
With Responses

"My relationship with God is…"

Intimate

Ambivalent

Non-existent

Descriptive words regarding relationship with God…

Close

Confusion

Constant

Conflict

Connected

Congregational

Communicating

Session 4: Contemplating

What Is So Great About Hugs?

Author Unknown

There is no such thing as a bad hug - only good ones and great ones.
They're not fattening and they don't cause cancer or cavities.
They're all natural - with no preservatives, artificial ingredients, or pesticide residue.
They're cholesterol-free, naturally sweet, 100 percent wholesome.
And they're a completely renewable natural resource.

They don't require batteries, tune-ups, or x-rays.
They're non-taxable, fully returnable, and energy efficient.
They're safe in all kinds of weather;
in fact, they're especially good for cold or rainy days.
They're exceptionally effective in treating problems like bad dreams or the Monday blahs.

Hugs are free to give and free to get.
There is no minimum age requirement.
You can never get hurt by giving a hug.
You can give someone a hug at anytime - day or night.

There are also many different types of hugs: hugs of sadness,
and hugs of joy, loose hugs with a kiss on the cheek, big bear hugs,
a pat on the back hug, you can hug hello, and you can hug goodbye,
you can have a one on one hug or a giant pull your shoulders out of your socket,
group hug, you can hug a human, you can hug a pet, you can hug a stuffed toy,
you can hug a tree, you can even hug yourself.

Hugs can warm you from the cold, they can comfort you when you are scared,
you can hug while you dance, you can hug while you sleep, there is no time limit on giving a hug.

Hugs never go out of style. There is no restriction on how many hugs you can give.
Hugs cross all racial, sexual, personality, and age boundaries.
Hugs are love, hugs are caring, hugs just feel good!

Never wait until tomorrow to hug someone you could hug today!

Session 4: Contemplating

Your body is the ground metaphor of your life, the expression of your existence. It is your Bible, your encyclopedia, and your life story.
Gabrielle Roth, 1998, p. 29

The five sacred rhythms that are the essence of the body in motion, the body alive:

Flowing

Staccato

Chaos

Lyrical

Stillness

Gardening Wave

Flowing: Spring dreams of the garden; the plans, the preparation

Staccato: Late spring work; planting, digging, organizing, implementing

Chaos: High summer when the garden needs everything at once, watering, pruning, fertilizing

Lyrical: Autumn harvest

Stillness: All growth is over, plants rest into compost for next year's garden.

Juhan, A. in Roth (1998, p. 198)

Roth, G. (1998). *Maps to ectsasy: A healing journey for the untamed spirit. Novato, CA: Nataraj Publishing.*

Session 4: Contemplating

Awareness, Ambivalence, Acceptance, & Autonomy

"*Comfort, oh comfort…All flesh is grass, All its goodness like flowers of the field: Grass withers, flowers fade when the breath of the Lord blows on them."*
Isaiah 40:1, 6-7

Who supports me?
What things and thoughts are most soothing?
When do I feel the sensation of splendor?
Where do I experience a sense of serenity?

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Challenges, constrains, and obstacles that impact **Sources of Support**

Session 4: Contemplating

Meditation: Contemplative

"**Let It Rain**"
Tara Brach (2012, pp. 74-75)

RAIN
Recognize what is happening
Allow life to be just as it is
Investigate inner experience with kindness
Non-identification.

Sitting quietly, close your eyes and take a few full breaths. Bring to mind a current situation in which you feel stuck; one that elicits a difficult reaction such as anger or fear, shame or hopelessness. It may be a conflict with a family member, a chronic sickness, a failure at work, the pain of an addiction, a conversation you now regret. Take some moments to enter the experience—visualizing the scene or situation, remembering the words spoken, sensing the most distressing moments. Contacting the charged essence of the story is the starting place for exploring the healing presence of **RAIN.**

R: Recognize What Is Happening
As you reflect on this situation, ask yourself, "What is happening inside me right now?" What sensations are you most aware of? What emotions? Is your mind filled with churning thoughts? Take a moment to become aware of your " felt sense" of the situation as a whole. Can you feel how the experience is living in your heart and body, as well as in your mind?

A: Allow Life to Be Just as It Is
Send a message to your heart to "let be" this entire experience. Find in yourself the willingness to pause and accept that in these moments, "what is . . . is." You can experiment with mentally whispering words like "yes," "I consent," or "let be."

You might find yourself saying yes to a huge inner no, to a body and mind painfully contracted in resistance. You might be saying yes to the part of you that is saying "I hate this!" That's a natural part of the process. At this point in RAIN, you are simply noticing what is true, and intending not to judge, push away, or control anything you find.

I: Investigate with an Intimate Attention
Now begin to explore what you are experiencing more closely, calling on your natural interest and curiosity about your inner life. You might ask yourself, "What about this most wants my attention?" or, "What most wants my acceptance?" Pose your questions gently, with your inner voice kind and inviting.

Notice where you feel the experience most distinctly in your body. Are you aware of heat, tightness, pressure, aches, squeezing? When you have found the most intense part of your physical experience, bring it into your face, letting your expression mirror, and even exaggerate, what you are feeling in your body. What emotions are you aware of as you do this? Fear? Anger? Grief? Shame?

As you continue to investigate, you might find it helpful to ask, "What am I believing?" If this leads to a lot of thinking, drop it. But you might find that a very distinct belief emerges almost as soon as you ask. Do you believe that you are failing in some way? That someone will reject you? That you will not be able to handle whatever is around the corner? That you really are flawed? That you will never be happy? How does this belief live in your body? What are the sensations? Tightness? Soreness? Burning? Hollowness?

As before, send the message of "yes," "I consent," or "let be," allowing yourself to feel the fullness or intensity of the difficult experience. As you contact and allow what is happening, what do you notice? Is there any softening in your body and heart? Can you sense more openness or space? Or does the intention to allow bring up more tension, judgment, and fear? Does it intensify or change what you are feeling?

Now ask the place of most difficulty, "What do you want from me?" or "What do you need from me?" Does this suffering part of you want recognition? Acceptance? Forgiveness? Love? As you sense what is needed, what is your natural response? You might offer yourself a wise message, or an energetic, tender embrace. You might gently place your hand on your heart. Feel free to experiment with ways of befriending your inner life—whether through words or touch, images or energy. Discover how your attention might become more intimate and loving.

N: Non-identification Rest in Natural Awareness

As you offer this unconditional, kind presence to your inner life, sense the possibility of relaxing back and being that awareness. Like an ocean with waves on the surface, feel yourself as the tender, wakeful openness that includes arising and passing sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Can you sense how who you are is not identified by or hitched to any particular wave of fear or anger or hurt? Can you sense how the waves on the surface belong to your experience, but cannot injure or alter the measureless depth and vastness of your being? Take some moments, as long as you'd like, to simply rest in this spacious and kind awareness, allowing whatever arises in your body or mind to freely come and go. Know this natural awareness as the innermost truth of what you are.

Brach, T. (2012). *True refuge: Finding peace and freedom in your own awakened heart*. New York: Bantam Books.

Session 5: Communicating

Ritual Opening Question
With Responses

“What Really Matters …”

Exploring myself

Touch the spark within

“Obvious” answer came – love

In a word, love.

To love & be loved

Love

Session 5: Communicating

The Most Beautiful Heart
Author Unknown

One day a young man was standing in the middle of the town proclaiming that he had the most beautiful heart in the whole valley. A large crowd gathered and they all admired his heart for it was perfect. There was not a mark or a flaw in it. Yes, they all agreed it truly was the most beautiful heart they had ever seen. The young man was very proud and boasted more loudly about his beautiful heart.

Suddenly, an old man appeared at the front of the crowd and said, "Why your heart is not nearly as beautiful as mine." The crowd and the young man looked at the old man's heart. It was beating strongly, but full of scars, it had places where pieces had been removed and other pieces put in, but they didn't fit quite right and there were several jagged edges. In fact, in some places there were deep gouges where whole pieces were missing.

The people stared -- how can he say his heart is more beautiful, they thought? The young man looked at the old man's heart and saw its state and laughed. "You must be joking," he said. "Compare your heart with mine, mine is perfect and yours is a mess of scars and tears." "Yes," said the old man, "Yours is perfect looking but I would never trade with you. You see, every scar represents a person to whom I have given my love - I tear out a piece of my heart and give it to them, and often they give me a piece of their heart which fits into the empty place in my heart, but because the pieces aren't exact, I have some rough edges, which I cherish, because they remind me of the love we shared. "Sometimes I have given pieces of my heart away, and the other person hasn't returned a piece of his heart to me. These are the empty gouges -- giving love is taking a chance. Although these gouges are painful, they stay open, reminding me of the love I have for these people too, and I hope someday they may return and fill the space I have waiting. So now do you see what true beauty is?"

The young man stood silently with tears running down his cheeks. He walked up to the old man, reached into his perfect young and beautiful heart, and ripped a piece out. He offered it to the old man with trembling hands

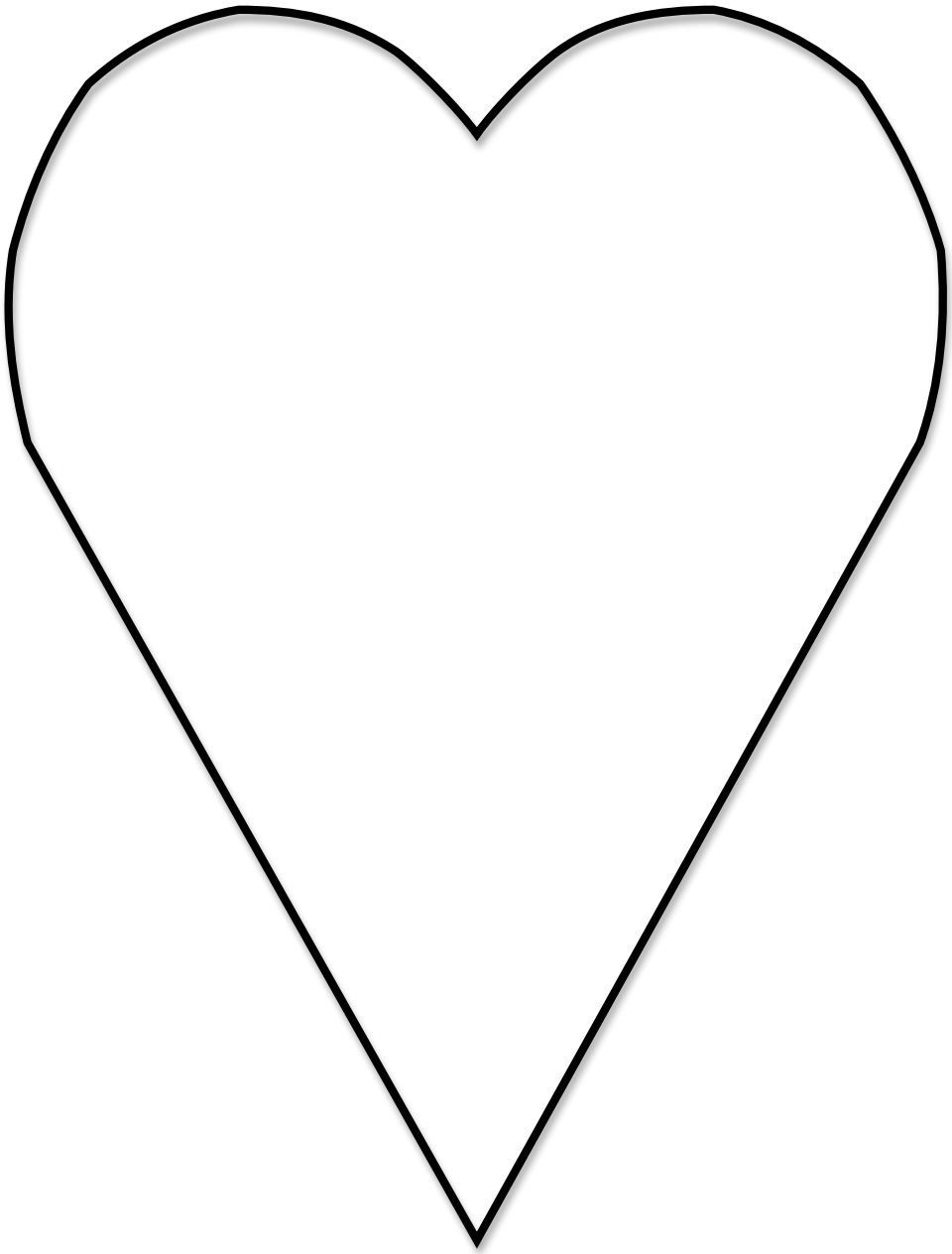
The old man took his offering, placed it in his heart and then took a piece from his old scarred heart and placed it in the wound in the young man's heart. It fit, but not perfectly, as there were some jagged edges. The young man looked at his heart, not perfect anymore but more beautiful than ever, since love from the old man's heart flowed into his.

They embraced and walked away side by side.

Session 5: Communicating
Indulging Spirit

Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death
Psalm 23:4

Shadows of Self: Immediately after the death, walking through, and now.
Identify passage of time with three different colors.



Session 5: Communicating

Meditation: Self-Care

God grant me the Serenity to
accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
and Wisdom to know the difference.
The Serenity Prayer

Grieving takes courage, and proper care of self. Create healthy daily routines. Honor your time; make space for movement and meditation. Respect the needs of your body and personality. Learn to nourish your mind and spirit. Notice your sense of *serenity.*

Physically	**Emotionally**	**Mentally**	**Spiritually**
Eating	Breathing	Expressing	Connecting
Sleeping	Feeling	Reading	Creating
Exercising	Sharing	Listening	Contemplating
Bathing	Hugging	Journalism	Community
Gardening	Laughing	Working	Praying
Nature	Affirming	Reflecting	Purpose
Other	Other	Other	Other

Session 6: Curiosity

Ritual Opening Question
With Responses

"**What is My Focus**…?"

Being true to myself

It's time for ME – to honor me, to listen to me, to be ME!

Peace, sharing, moving forward in learning

Paradoxically-committed and focused on the growth of my children and to learn how to advocate for my own life and development

Getting my house in order-physically, which means I am evolving

Addressing what I have not yet addressed in my bereavement process post/death - concrete issues as well as emotional - Continuing to discover who I am, separate from a partner.

Session 6: Curiosity

When a man learns that just as he broods over himself so does God yearn for him and look for him, he is at the beginning of a higher level of consciousness. . .For in truth it is not one question with two sides but a meeting place of two questions, that of man seeking himself and of God seeking man (Steinsaltz, 2006, pp. 110-111).

Deborah the Prophetess

And she sat under the palm-tree of Deborah
And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.
Judges 4: 5

Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song! Arise
Judges 5:12

Through the window she looked forth and peered, through the lattice:
the mother of Sisera: "Why is his chariot so long in coming? "
Judges 5:28

Steinsaltz, A. (2006). *The thirteen petalled rose: A discourse on the essence of Jewish existence and belief*. New York: Basic Books.

Session 6: Curiosity

Begin Anew

My love has gone down to the garden,
to the beds of spices,
to graze and to gather lilies.
I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.
The Song of Songs 6:2-3

A Letter To My Beloved

Create time to write a letter to your loved one. Make a sacred space for writing your letter. Begin by sitting quietly, breathing softly, and then gently placing the palms of your hands over your eyes, and contemplate. Imagine sharing your feelings and thoughts from the time of death until now. Afterwards, begin writing in a free-flow style, all words welcomed. You may connect to your loved one by describing what happened immediately after, and since their death. You may want to share the conscious changes you made by choice or default. Writing the truth takes courage, write with a sense of wonder as you express from the heart what you want your beloved to know.

Dear _____ Date_____

Session 6: Curiosity

The Summer Day
Mary Oliver (1992, p. 94)

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Oliver, M. (1992). *New and selected poems, Volume one*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Session 6: Curiosity

Meditation - Visualization

Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone.
May it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grasses,
Among all growing things,
There to be alone and enter into prayer.
There may I express all that is in my heart,
Talking with Him to whom I belong.
Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Create time, and the space to center your self. Breathe, gently inhale and exhale. Know that your breath can wake you up or quiet you down. Rub the palms of your hands together, feel the sensation of warmth, then softly place them over your eyes. Ask yourself, "What do I need at this moment?" Imagine watching your needs moving through your mind. Observe without attachment or judgment. When you sense your visualization is complete, record what you need now.

1. I need time
2. I need space
3. I need to contract
4. I need to explore
5. I need relationships
6. I need comfort
7. I need nourishment
8. I need courage
9. I need strength
10. I need hope

Session 7: Compassion

Ritual: Opening Question
With Responses

"My Question…"

Private response, no data collected

Session 7: Compassion

Reflection

Today is our seventh and final session. Session seven is “Compassion.“

What is Compassion?

Compassion means to be with another who suffers. And forces us to face our fears, losses, and pain.

Compassion is the willingness to be vulnerable. And says, I, too, know pain, and I, too, shed tears, without any sense of pity.

Compassion understands that I cannot remove your pain, nor fix your situation, nor change your story. And yet, I can sit with you. I can hold your hand. I can listen with an open heart.

Compassion is reflected in the experience in moments of the silent pause.

Thank you for your Gift of Dignity, and with a deep sense of gratitude for entrusting us with your stories. May you receive blessings of compassion.

Fondly,

Sarah

Session 7: Compassion

Hear, I Am

And God said unto Moses: 'I Am That I Am.'
Exodus 3:14

Create a personal narrative using a word or a phrase reflecting your character at this time.

I Am
I see
I hear
I breathe
I say

I Am
I feel
I laugh
I cry
I hope

I Am
I try
I want
I pretend
I worry

I Am
I dream
I know
I understand
I wonder

I believe

Session 7: Compassion

Meditation: I AM

Deepak Chopra (2010)

Everyone thinks that the purpose of meditation is to handle stress, to tune out, to get away from it all. While that's partially true, the real purpose of meditation is actually to tune in, not to get away from it all, to get in touch with it all. Not to just de-stress, but to find that peace within, the peace that spiritual traditions talk about that passes all understanding. So, meditation is a way to get in the space between your thoughts. You have a thought here, a thought here, and there's little space between every thought

According to wisdom traditions, this space between the thought is the window, is the corridor, is the vortex to the infinite mind -- the mystery that some people call the spirit or god. We don't have to use those terms but it's your core consciousness. And the more we learn about this space between thoughts, we find certain things to be true of it:

#1: It's a field of infinite possibilities -- infinite possibilities, pure potentiality.

#2: Everything is connected to everything else.

#3: It's a space of infinite creativity, infinite imagination.

#4: It is a place where there is something called observer effect, or the power of intention, which means intention is very powerful when brought to this space and it orchestrates its own fulfillment --what people call the law of attraction -- so those are wonderful qualities of your own spirit. And in the two meditations I'm going to teach you we'll get into this space so we find ourselves infinite possibilities, infinite correlation, infinite creativity, infinite imagination, and infinite power of intention. That's what meditation is really about.

So now we're going to do a healing meditation. Very simple.

First of all, the most important thing is sit comfortably like I'm sitting. Do not slouch on the sofa. The sofa is a way to relax so much you might almost fall asleep. Do not lie down. Sit relatively erect like I'm sitting, and have a backrest so you can keep your posture erect. Don't cross your legs, keep your hands open, and be comfortable. That's it. You don't have to be a yogi doing impossible yogic postures. That's it. Sit like I'm sitting on the chair and have your hands open. For now just follow my instructions, OK?

So looking at the camera, repeat to yourself loudly the two words, 'I am. I am. I am. I am.' And now you can close your eyes and you can whisper those two words to yourself, 'I am. I am. I am.'

And now you can stop whispering those two words and keep repeating them mentally, with your eyes closed. And as you keep them mentally make sure that your lips don't move and that your tongue doesn't move and just keep repeating them

What will happen is that you'll have other thoughts. You might feel sensations in your body. You might hear sounds in your environment. Whenever you become conscious of that then go back to repeating 'I am', mentally, without moving your lips and your tongue. I'll let you do that for about five to ten minutes. Preferably ten, but five is good enough. OK, so keep repeating that.

Now let's assume you've done that for five minutes. Keep your eyes closed, and bring your awareness into your heart, right in the middle of the chest. With all of your awareness try to see, sense, feel your heartbeat. See if you can sense your heartbeat either as a sound or a sensation.

Now that you're experiencing your heartbeat as a sound or a sensation, bring your awareness to your fingertips, to your hands. See where my hands are? Bring your awareness into your fingertips. You can open you eyes and peek for a second and then go back with your eyes closed. Feel your heartbeat in your fingertips. You feel that? You've just diverted blood flow to your hands. This is one of the fastest ways to relieve a migraine headache.

Now bring your awareness back into your heart and just mentally repeat the four words that I'm going to ask you to repeat, mentally.

Peace. Harmony. Laughter. Love.

Peace. Harmony. Laughter. Love.

Do that for two minutes and now move your awareness anywhere in your body that you want to bring healing to. You don't have to visualize anything, you don't have to say anything, just bring your awareness. Just bringing awareness to these different parts of your body will bring consciousness, which is healing.

Finally, come back to your heart, and in one minute or so say again those four words: Peace. Harmony. Laughter. Love. Remember those are the goals of all the other goals in our life, whatever we want, ultimately that's what we want. So repeat: Peace. Harmony. Laughter. Love.

Now keep your awareness in your heart and just for one minute, experience gratitude. You experience gratitude by thinking of all the things you're already grateful for. The more you experience gratitude, the more you'll attract things in your life that will make you feel even more grateful. Do that for a second, a few seconds, relax into your body, and open your eyes. This is a healing meditation.

MindBodyGreen (2010, March 10). Meditation techniques for beginners demonstrated by Deepak Chopra (Video). Retrieved December 26, 2013, from http://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-491/Meditation-Techniques-for-Beginners-Demonstrated-by-Deepak-Chopra-Video.html

Compassion: Session 7

When I'm Gone
(also known as) To Those Whom I Love and Those Who Love Me
Mary Alice Ramish

When I am gone, release me let me go.
I have so many things to see and do.
You must not tie yourself to me with tears.
Be happy that we had so many years.

I gave you my love, you can only guess,
How much you gave me in happiness.
I thank you for the love you each have shown,
But now it is time I traveled on alone.

So grieve a while for me, if grieve you must,
Then let your grief be comforted by trust.
It is only for a while that we must part,
So bless the memories within your heart.

I will not be far away, for life goes on,
So if you need me call, and I will come,
Though you cannot see or touch me, I will be near.
And if you listen with your heart, you will hear
All of my love around you soft and clear.

And then, when you must come this way alone.
I'll greet you with a smile
And a Welcome Home.

www.thefuneralsite.com/ResourceCenters/Poetry_and_Quotes/Popular.htm

APPENDIX J

Post-Assessment Questionnaire

I.D. Number_____ Name_____

Describe your experience of the seven-session grief group

My most meaningful moment was…

Seven discoveries I made about me…

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

What worked for you?

What did not work for you?

Please offer your suggestions for improving this program (i.e. what to add, what to omit).

Additional comments…

Post-Assessment Questionnaire

Time since death (years/ months) Education

Check the most profound feelings, after the seven-session grief group

Anger _____ Blame _____ Crisis mode _____

Dead inside _____ Excruciating pain _____ Fear _____

Guilt _____ Helplessness _____ Isolation _____

Jealousy _____ Loneliness _____ Regret _____

Sadness _____ Traumatized _____ Unfinished business_____

Other _____

Check changes of attitude or beliefs, after the seven-session grief group

Physical _____ Sensual _____ Financial _____

Relational _____ Psychological ____ Spiritual _____

God _____ Ritual _____ Sense of Support _____

Sense of Separation _____ Sense of Security _____

Other _____

What do you plan to focus on, after the seven-session grief group?

Confidant _____ Companionship _____

Activities _____ New Learning _____

APPENDIX K

Program Evaluation

Please circle what best describes your experience of the program

I benefited from the breathing techniques.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Meditation was not a helpful tool.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

I found visualization to be useful.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Journaling supported my healing process.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

I did not benefit from interacting in this group.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

I felt safe to share in this group setting.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Witnessing was a beneficial form of listening.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The use of color was meaningless.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Homework assignments were relevant.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Handouts were not beneficial.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The sessions offered an opportunity for self-discovery.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The sessions did not provide for contemplation.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The theme of each session inspired meaningful discussion.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The sessions addressed loss and healing grief.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Seven sessions are too many to attend.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

One and a half hours was enough time for each session.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Psalms, poetry, etc. were respectful of all traditions.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The discussion of faith was not helpful.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The discussion of relationship to God was helpful.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

The use of opening and closing ritual provided connection.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Chaplain Facilitator was knowledgeable of subject.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Chaplain Facilitator presented concepts in an unclear manner.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Chaplain Facilitator modeled mindfulness.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Chaplain Facilitator provided relevant program content.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

I learned new things about myself.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

I would have benefited from this program in my first year.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

This program impacted my sense of transformation.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

This program was not beneficial for me.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

This program addressed the psycho-spiritual aspects of grief.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

I would not recommend this program to others.

1. completely disagree
2. disagree
3. neutral
4. agree
5. completely agree

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX L

Certificate

PATHWAY INTO THE GARDEN OF DISCOVERY

CERTIFICATE AWARDED TO

ROSE

MAY 30, 2013

CHAPLAIN N. SARAH BLUM, M.S.

D.MIN.
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
PROGRAM FACILITATOR

WITNESSES:

DIANA
GLORY
JOAN
LOVE
SHE WHO IS
REACHING IN & REACHING OUT