

Darrelyn Gunzburg

Astro Logos, UK

ASTROLOGY AND GRIEF

An Introduction

I received an email the other day from a client who wanted a consultation and as always I asked him what he wanted from the reading. He wrote back: "I would like to know if my book will be published? If so, will it be successful? Will I find the love of my life? *Will I be healthy and die a natural death?*" This last one is a good question to ask and one of the tools in every medieval astrologer's toolkit was to be able to answer the question of length of life. However, it also begets the question of what is natural death. We would like to think that it is one where, after a life of fulfilment at a ripe old age, we go to bed and "go gently into that good night", in stark contrast to Dylan Thomas. We would like to think that there is a wisdom and order to how life is lived. When asked the meaning of life, a wise sage answered: "The grandmother dies, the mother dies, the daughter dies." However, all around us we see that this is not the case. Those we love die young in accidents, from illness, murder, suicide, premature heart attacks, cancer, errors in surgery, acts of terror, and so on, and we come to realise just how fragile and hazardous is this thing called Life. We who are left are the ones who have to pick up the pieces of a shattered life. How would you, as the consulting astrologer, deal with someone if they came to see you seeking answers after such an experience? How would you deal with their illogical fear that their known world, previously felt to be so structured and tangible, had shredded before their very eyes, dissolved and fallen apart?

What is Grief?

The experience of grief is one of the most fundamental and inescapable aspects of the human condition. Grief is the emotional response to loss and the process of adjustment to a new situation. Grief occurs when there are conflicting emotions caused by the end of or the change to a frequent pattern of behaviour. *For example*, you may have been nursing someone who has a terminal illness. They die and part of you feels immense relief that their pain has now ended, yet there will be another part that feels immensely sorrowful, understanding that one can never continue that relationship in the same way ever again. These are the conflicting emotions of grief.

Grief is a human response that lets us know that things are different now than they were before the loss.

Statistically, once every nine-to-thirteen years, we will encounter the loss of someone we love and given that we come from a family where we know both our parents, at least twice in our life we will make funeral arrangements for someone we love. In the USA, we are told that 8 million people, out of a population of 293 million have first-time encounters with loss and bereavement each year due to death. In the UK, over 600,000 people die every year, leaving an estimated 1.5 million out of a population of 58 million facing a major bereavement. However, since major emotional loss is not a regular occurrence in our life, we're not taught how to deal with it, either within ourselves or as part of the family into which we are born.

We have all been educated on how to acquire items - a job, an education, a house, a swimming pool, a partner, children, and so on - to push forward in linear time but no-one teaches us what to do when we lose things. Every loss, every death we encounter throws us into a balsamic phase, the phase of letting go, when life clears a space for us to reprioritise our life without immediately filling it with other people and events. What we are taught instead is Replacement Theory: Breakdown = Substitute or Replace.

How do we learn this? From a young age we begin to imprint the world around us through our parents' behaviour. We watch intently for how they deal with such issues and we duplicate their behaviour exactly. When the washing machine breaks down, we watch our parents replace it with another. When as adolescents we encounter puppy love which goes nowhere, our parents tell us: "Don't worry, there are plenty more fish in the sea." Add to this the fact that we, in the west, live as a death-denying society which prefers to believe in a scientific model where we are separated from other beings, a medical profession which views the loss of life as a failure, advertising with its directive to look young, the change in our religious/spiritual focus and the fast-disappearing rituals of life and what we gain is a society unconsciously believing that

aging and death are to be feared. So when we come to face this loss, we have few tools with which to handle it. Furthermore, apart from the first few days after a loved one dies, the extended family is usually no longer physically around to support and help the person in grief and even in the precious few days when they are, we have been socialised to believe that there are certain behaviours that we should do which are not always to their benefit. We are also taught that within a few weeks of the loss we should be feeling better, back at work and exercising our normal routines.

Here is an example of this social misunderstanding. I was told recently that my cousin aged fifty-two years had “passed away a couple of months ago after a brief and very brave battle with cancer, which shocked us all deeply. His wife and the children are putting on a brave face to the world and we are all trying to be supportive as possible.” The question I ask is this: why should anyone who has been happily married for some thirty years, after only a few months of being on her own have to be the one who “puts on the brave face to the world”? Why has it come to this, that we, as a society, do not wish to see or acknowledge the deeply intense, bewildering, confusing and real emotions of loss and instead force the individual in grief to become invisible? Grief is a process of adjustment to a new situation and this process of adjustment takes time; indeed it is not uncommon for it to last up to five years, not as a linear ongoing state but tidal and cyclic in its effect. This tells us a significant fact, that whilst loss through death may be an uncommon occurrence in our personal lives, if every thirteen years or so we encounter a major loss and the grief process takes around five years to unravel, then thirty percent of our life may be spent dealing with some degree of loss. Hence it is likely that thirty percent of all adult clients we see as consulting astrologers will be going through this process, also.

There are only two ways to avoid grief in human life: the first is to die young before anyone you love precedes you; the second is to avoid ever really loving or caring for someone. That way you never have to be emotionally involved with death. Grief is the price we pay for living a full life. So if a third of our client base is experiencing some level of grief, then as astrologers we need to know the process of grief, to understand how the natal chart will respond to loss and to recognise that both of these factors weave together when considering the predictive work of the client. The length of this article allows me to focus briefly on the first and then to look at key signatures which gives us clues as to how a client will or will not react to loss.

So how can we help a client in grief?

Let me segue for a moment and talk about the brilliant and pioneering work of Dr Elisabeth Kubler Ross. She identified five emotional stages that a person may go through when they have been diagnosed with a terminal illness. These are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. One of the difficulties in doing such brilliant work is that the work gets kidnapped and applied inappropriately to other emotional processes. Grief is much more fluid than the rigidity of “stages” and the nature and intensity of the feelings caused by the loss will be in proportion to the uniqueness of the particular relationship that you have had with the person who has died.

All of us encounter loss in some form or another when we are young and impressionable. If grief is repressed in any way, it pushes a person into stasis, a jammed state where they can remain for years. There are many ways we can get jammed and it occurs extremely early in our lives, along with Replacement Theory. There is no blame here but let us recognise that the majority of people around us have never had the opportunity to successfully complete their own issues around grief and parents only pass on to us what they were taught which is the unsuccessful conclusion of grief events. We are often unwittingly encouraged to act recovered, as my cousin’s wife was expected to do in the story above. Here is how it works. We are told: “If you’re going to cry you can go to your room” and we translate this to mean: “Express your grief alone.” We are told: “You have to be strong for the others” and we take this to mean: “Don’t show emotion”. Here are some more taught beliefs: “The best thing is to throw yourself into your work” translated into: “Don’t let it interfere with your life.” “Be glad they are no longer in pain/ She had a long life /She’s in heaven now” translated into: “Ignore your feelings”. “You don’t need to see the body” translated into: “Don’t make this a concrete reality.” “Don’t worry, we’ll get you another dog/cat/horse” translated into: “Replace the loss”. “God will protect you” translated into: “Use religion to handle strong emotion. Don’t handle the strong emotions oneself.” “Be glad you’re still young enough to have another baby” translated into: “Pay no attention to the other emotions you are feeling”. One of the most pervasive and insidious beliefs we anchor is this one: “Laugh and the world laughs with you. Weep and you weep alone.”

These beliefs are harmful because they lead to behaviours which are used to repel the pain of grief and stop us from facing what we are feeling, behaviours such as the excessive use of food, alcohol/drugs, prescribed

medication, anger, exercise, crying, fantasy such as movies, TV or books, isolating ourselves, sex, shopping or becoming a workaholic. They create the illusion of healing by causing us to forget or bury our emotions and do not allow us deal with the emotional issues that lie at the heart of the grief. There is also the possibility that a substance or action taken in the short-term can become habitual and turn into long-term dependency.

One of the great attitudes we uphold in our western society is that time heals all wounds. However, "Time" not only doesn't heal but it diminishes our memory the further we move away from the death. It's not time that heals those wounds but what you do within that time frame that causes the completion of the pain of the loss.

Chart Signatures

I have found the following chart signatures in client work gives us clues as to how the client will or won't deal with the grief process:

- Charts with a lot of *fixity* or *earth* may find it more difficult to allow introspection and change and may instead project anger as a way of defence. Such people may have been taught to avoid showing emotion, to be strong for others and not to let it interfere with a person's life. These include: charts with a predominance of *planets in Taurus*, with its fear of emotional change; charts with a predominance of *planets in Scorpio* with its fear of betrayal; charts with *Sun-Saturn* combinations; *Saturn in the 10th house* or *Saturn conjunct the Ascendant* which suggest a need to control their world through fear of domination or suppression; and charts with heavy *Virgo*, *Virgo rising* or *Virgo Moon* can produce a desire for perfection and clear boundaries that causes difficulties in accepting change.
- Charts with *8th house planets* generally probe beneath the surface of events and if the death of someone close occurs while they are young, going through the grief process, rather than being shielded from it, is necessary in the understanding of how to utilise that 8th house.
- *Sun-Neptune* combinations or charts with a lot of *mutability* may avoid facing loss, preferring to romanticize the memory of the person who has died. They may have been told when young: "Be glad she is no longer in pain, she had a long life, she's in heaven now".
- Strongly *Uranian/Aquarian* charts may refuse to acknowledge the emotional intensity of grief, preferring to intellectualise it, instead skating over the deeper issues involved. They may have been told when young to grieve alone.
- Charts with "*wounds*" may experience grief more deeply and hence find they need more time in processing the event and the changes it brings than what society allows. These include: *Sun-Pluto* connections which confront the father's mortality at an early age and have to learn to build inner trust as a way of dealing with betrayal; *Moon-Saturn* connections with their unconscious patterns of separation-anxiety and "skin hunger," the unconscious need for human touch that remains unfulfilled, leading to feelings of insecurity and a fear of rejection; *Moon-Pluto* connections which describe an awareness of very intense, adult emotions surrounding them at birth for which they have no resources or understanding and which get pushed into the unconscious; *Pluto in the 12th* which implies a dramatic or intense birth, the memories of which are usually repressed and later expressed as a fear of death and loss of control; *Pluto on the IC* signifying violence encountered in the home or an intense childhood filled with passionate adult emotions, possibly including the death of the mother or an immediate family member which, in adulthood, requires an intense home-front.
- *Pluto conjunct the Ascendant* indicates someone who doesn't run away from deep emotions and is naturally confronting, who feels at home with deep emotional intensity and may confront grief as a way of understanding themselves.
- Charts with a lot of *angular planets* will take action and be effective in challenging situations, and often respond to predictive work as a way of future-pacing.

Conclusion

This article is a brief introduction to astrology and grief and offers some insights regarding what clients in grief bring to the consulting room through their natal chart. If thirty percent of all clients we see as consulting astrologers will be going through this process, we need to be aware of how a client might be reacting to loss and to read their natal and, ultimately, predictive work accordingly.

Darrellyn Gunzburg Dip FAA (1988) is a consulting astrologer and co-principal of Astro Logos, a school dedicated to the education and qualification of practising astrologers. Her book, *Life After Grief: An Astrological Guide to Dealing with Loss*, is published by the Wessex Astrologer: www.wessexastrologer.com