

## The Lost Art of Sadness: & the Meaning of Love and Grief

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### PRELUDE

The basic message of the Buddha embodies a liberation path from the shackles of human suffering, as well as a righteous and harmonious life for the householder. How is this path related to the modern therapeutic quest? The answers may vary for different therapists. For me the relationship is integral both in theory and practice. A crisis of grief and sadness bordering on mild depression and a remarkable emergence of back to normal life, rich, invigorated and robust, made me take to the path of a trained professional therapist—to make it a mission in my life to work at the Springvale community centre for four years offering free treatment for clients, and it was for me a priceless service (de Silva, 2008). Along with this experience, a gradual period of training at the feet of a most cherished meditation guru in the Nissarana forest monastery in Meethirigala, Sri Lanka, helped me to chart new horizons for linking therapy and the spiritual life. Drawing from this nourishing wellspring, I have developed what may be described as a mindfulness-based emotion focused therapy (EFT).

This essay looks at the emotions constellation of grief, sadness, depression, boredom and two faces of melancholy—as depression and existential anguish. Most important, this essay has a focus on the reclamation of the lost art of sadness.

### INTRODUCTION

“Sadness is an inherent part of the human condition, not a mental disorder. Thus to confront psychiatry’s invalid definition of depressive disorder is also to consider a painful but an important part of our humanity that we have tended to shunt aside in the modern medicalization of human problems. As science allows us to gain more control over our emotional states, we will inevitably confront the question of whether normal intense sadness has any redeeming features or should be banished from our lives. Such a momentous scientific and moral issue should not be spuriously resolved by using a semantic confusion in the DSM that mistakenly places states of intense sadness under the medical category of disorder” (Horowitz and Wakefield, 2007, 225: for short H & W Study; term DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)). Thus if we follow the implications of this engaging and erudite study on the loss of sadness, we need to understand as Sigmund Freud observed: Though grief involves grave departures from normal life, “It never occurs to us as morbid and hand over the mourner to a medical treatment condition” (*Mourning and Melancholia*).

Even those who value the DSM criteria for depression as an accepted bench mark for health professionals, agree that the DSM ‘overpathologizes’, many people with quite legitimate sadness in the face of adversity, thus merging the normal experience of sadness with diagnosis of depressive disorder (Biegler, 2011,66).

While accepting the great value of focusing our attention on the importance of grief and sadness in this (H & W) study, it is somewhat thin on the alternative therapeutic orientations and more so the new mindfulness-based western therapies. By the embedded logic of mindfulness practice rooted in the Buddhist world view, these therapies have opened a new pathway to understand depression by focusing on the content of depressive thinking, relationship to negative feelings and changing perspectives by ‘decentering’ or

depersonalizing - thus opening up channels of communication between mindfulness in daily life and in therapeutic settings (Williams, Teasdale, Segal, Kabat-Zinn, 2007).

To some extent, the need for emphasizing on the positive facets of grief and sadness has been rectified by fresh thinking in the therapies of mindfulness-based action commitment therapy (Harris, 2006).

Lewis Wolpert is a biologist who had gone through a severe depressive disorder, eventually recovering, and in a very insightful book, described depression as ‘malignant sadness’. “If we are to understand depression then we need to understand emotion. For depression I believe is sadness that has become pathological. Depression is a disorder of emotion” (Wolpert, 1999, 74). He recommends the study of the logic of different emotions, their constellations and interactions. In addition to looking at the lost art of sadness, the present paper is an attempt to develop Wolpert’s insight by exploring the theme of a mindfulness-based, emotion-focused therapy.

### **Collective Suffering and Sadness in ‘Panic Cultures’**

To strengthen my case for looking at the lost art of sadness, I also wish to show that grief and sadness are central human emotions which we may convert as a time for reflection, keeping the love of the lost one alive, a context for developing resilience and dedicating ourselves to engage in positive acts of generosity and gratitude in the name of those whom we have lost. In the present analysis, I also wish to focus your attention on the more recent dimension of ‘collective sorrow’, in the contexts war and conflict, natural disasters—the poignant loss of life and the emergence of what are described as ‘panic cultures’. A dimension of socially engaged therapies dealing with such panic cultures is becoming important for counseling and therapies. Padmal de Silva captures the basic thrust of this genre of studies in an article on the Tsunami experience of the Buddhists in the coastal towns of Sri Lanka (Padmal de Silva, 2006, 281-87).

As an integral part of this paper, I wish to present to you a context of war and conflict, and also to use as a case study, a work of literature. The use of art helps us to communicate the tensions and the ambiguities of collective suffering. Commenting on the war in Vietnam, it has been said that art, poetry, music and the novel have the power of immortalizing human values, even in the thick of war and violence. It has been observed that one of the crushing ironies of the Vietnam war is that we have been the recipient, time and again, of the gifts of the spirit, gifts of art—the bravery of an artist and poet that faces the cruelty and the horror, and brings to the blood, vengeance and cruelty—a remarkable sea change (Berrigan, 1993, 3, Foreword To, Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action*, 1993).

Grief is of course, a period of silence, space for mourning - followed afterwards - a reassertion and acceptance of the tragic loss. And finally, if one is lucky, endowed, perceptive, brave with the bravery of an artist and poet, one creates something that faces the cruelty, the horror, and he brings to the welter of blood, vengeance, cruelty and deceit, a “sea change” (Berrigan, 1993, 3). Thich Nhat Hanh also observes that authentic Buddhist art by a monk about his people displays real qualities of inwardness, almost austerity, a patience that escapes monitors and timepieces and a serenity misunderstood in the west as stoicism (1993, 7).

### ***Guns and Roses: A Case Study***

The novel *Giniaviyai Rosemalai* (Guns and Roses) by a Sri Lankan novelist, Vineetha Wijeratne, captures the tensions and suffering of a ‘panic culture’. There are four linking threads around which the story is woven. First is the background of war, terrorism and the emergence of panic culture in the north eastern part of Sri Lanka during

the violent ethnic conflicts. The second thread in the story is the remarkable life of a family displaced, injured, incapacitated struggling with remarkable courage-- to rise above depression, anger and hopelessness to generate a resurrection, and a rebirth of the spirit. The author comments—“for people who are drowned in poverty and have no way of spending the day, the rising of the sun marks the emergence of ‘just another day’”. It is this background that illuminates the third thread, the central theme, the meaning of love and grief. This section centers around the intimate love that emerged between Amaranath and Chulani, the girl from a poor family who was able to gain admission to a university for pursuing medical studies. But during the emergence of these strong links between Amaranath and Chulani, an unexpected decision on the part of Amaranath to join the army was a point from which the poignant logic of the story enters a new phase. It was a difficult decision to both of them. As time passed, a false rumor spread that Amaranath had suffered death at the hands of the enemy and the body that was brought to the village was considered as that of Amaranath without any doubt. During this turning point in the story, Chulani summoned lots of courage and pursued her medical studies with great determination to help injured soldiers. But the final turning point of the story was the most unexpected one. While treating an injured soldier—Chulani was bedazzled to discover that this injured soldier is Amaranath. But the tragic part of the story is that Amaranath had lost one of his legs in the battle scene. The remarkable climax to the story is that with all the disabilities of her one time lover, Chulani decides to marry Amaranath.

At this point in the story, I was reminded of a saying of Tolstoy: those whom we love make us suffer, but that same love can heal our suffering. Qualities that emerge at this point in the story is Chulani as a true heroine in the novel—remarkable qualities of resilience, compassion and equanimity. As I was reflecting on this remarkable display of compassion, I was reminded of a statement made by my meditation guru Ven. Dhammajiva from the Nissarana forest monastery in Meethirigala, Sri Lanka: “Real *mettā* is finding a reason to be glad under any circumstance”, and according to him this point is embodied in the novel, *Pollyana*. Pollyana’s father was a Christian missionary and did not have enough money to buy toys for the child and Pollyana expected to find a toy when they received the missionary bag, which unfortunately did not have a toy for her. Pollyana was feeling miserable but her father said she should be able to find a reason to be glad under any conditions and that she should be happy that she had a fine body and her leg was not broken and Pollyana realized that she had a healthy body and regained her pleasant composure. This idea became Pollyana’s philosophy of life. Chulani did not have that same consolation about Amaranath but she did reconcile her to the new challenges with radiating compassion without remorse and anger.

A fourth thread runs through the novel— offering the hand of help and assistance, of shade and space to those in the other ethnic group by this family. We find here remarkable sentiments of love and compassion across religious and ethnic differences—a small oases in a troubled land! Hosking says at a seminar on the power of compassion that a willingness to bear another’s misery brings a degree of strength, surrender and sacrificial love to the word compassion (Hoskin, 2005, 4). Within the rich tapestry of village life depicted in the novel, the remarkable ethnic and religious harmony that pervaded this small village was amazing. Vineetha practically spent time in this area meeting and talking to people. This is a novel very close to what happened in real life.

Catherine Lutz the anthropologist who presented a ground breaking study of grief in the Pacific Island, Ifaluk, discovered that people used the same word, *fago* –to cover compassion, love and sadness and that compassion is a great shock absorber. She observes that this term ‘fago’ compresses a string of ideas - that life is fragile, that connections to others are both precious and yet liable to severance through death—and

that love may equal loss (Lutz, 1995, 235). The Buddhist concepts of *dukkha*, *mettā* and *karunā* also have a similar configuration in Buddhist cultures.

### **The Pervasiveness of Human Suffering**

No doubt fate would find it easier than I do to relieve you of your illness. But you will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. (Freud 1953, vol. ii, *Studies in Hysteria*, p.305).

“Freud Showed real profundity when he stated that the aim of psychoanalysis was to replace neurotic unhappiness by normal unhappiness. A psychiatry based on a purely hedonistic ethics, a psychiatry that does not recognize that periods of anxiety and periods of melancholy are a necessary part of human life, such a psychiatry will be no more than a superficial affair. Our task is not merely to relieve but to interpret.” (M.O’c.Drury, 1973, 22).

Buddhism starts with the normality of human suffering and Freud said he was merely trying to convert neurotic unhappiness to normal unhappiness, and Hays et al express a similar sentiment:

Some mental health problems are pathological in the traditional sense. But short of giving nearly every citizen one or more syndromal labels, no amount of progress in the area of psychological disease will remove our need to explain and address the pervasiveness of human suffering. Most humans are hurting - just some more than others. It is in effect normal to be abnormal (Hayes et al, 2003, 6).

### **Psychological disorders which are not ‘clinical disorders’ & the Call for Counseling Close to Ordinary Life**

It has been observed that there are many instances of psychological problems of varying intensity which are not considered as clinical disorders—loneliness, alienation, boredom, meaninglessness, low self-esteem, existential angst, pain associated with sexual concerns, domestic violence (Harris, 2006). Also, it is seen that some people who go through these problems, add an extra burden of pseudo-suffering by repression, denial and deception that can be handled by self-knowledge, transparency and honesty about one self. Also such normal people, close to ordinary life would gain by counseling geared for ordinary life, and not clinical disorders. Mild depression is also a quality that runs through routine lives as a temporary phase, which has to be handled with wisdom and opening out your problems for friendly conversation with wife, husband, friend or religious adviser. My own counseling practice was focused on what I called ‘the magic of the ordinary’, simple things to do in routine life. For instance, an addict who looks for the bottle, after coming home in the evening, after work, may get use to enjoying a nice samosa or a chicken role with a hot cup of coffee, and then see a teledrama, do some cooking or gardening; also plan some camping and enjoying outdoor life for holidays. As I succeeded in my counseling, if a client cannot be transformed into complete abstinence, following Alan Marlatt, we could convert him to a controlled drinker, without suffering from suppressed temptation (de Silva, 2008). It is not the best solution but a pragmatic and realistic solution resting on compassion for a suffering client, who in this case brought back happiness and love to his family. Stress management and anger management are good examples of issues in routine lives. I found that the advice given by the celebrated Vietnamese monk, Thick, Nhat Hanh, in his essay on, “How to eat a

mandarine” sums up our loss of simple enjoyment by complicating routine lives—what I call the “Magic of the Ordinary and the Elegance of Small Things” ; de Silva, 2008).

### **Lawful Nature of Things (Dhamma Niyama)**

During the time of the Buddha, there was no clinical concept of abnormality but he rather found whole cultures driven by craving, addictions, self-indulgence and reactive behavior. In fact, in *The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint* (MI, 186-1910), the Buddha has virtually predicted the earthquakes, tsunami, bushfires and the tornados. In the way that the disturbance of the ‘internal’ four elements may create disturbances within a person, there will come a time, he says when there will be a disturbance, a kind of revolt of the earth, water, fire and the air elements, which may destroy whole villages. During contemporary times, the pervasiveness of human suffering, as well as the wellspring of human generosity, compassion and kindness has all been seen in these settings of unbelievable disturbance of the normal order of things. The laws of psychology (*citta niyāma*) and morality (*kamma niyāma*) which are two dimensions of the nature of things, explain the consequences of lives dominated by excessive craving and envy (*abijjhā*), reactive anger (*vyāpāda*) and wrong views, as well as a life focused on truthfulness, compassion and goodness of heart.

## **Part II**

### **Mindfulness-Based Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT)**

One of the successful therapeutic methods that I used in dealing with the problems presented by my clients is the mindfulness-based EFT. EFT in the west is associated with the pioneering and celebrated therapist Leslie Greenberg. Long before I came in contact with Greensberg’s work, as a philosopher I had been working with what I call the logic of emotion concepts like anger, sadness, fear, greed, boredom, jealousy and pride (see. de Silva, 2005 4<sup>th</sup> edition). While following Paul Ekman’s work on the Darwinian scheme of basic emotions (Ekman, 2003), I also looked at more emotions in relation to the material in the Buddhist *suttas* like what Gabriele Taylor calls the emotions of self-assessment, pride, conceit, humility, shame, guilt, remorse, and also jealousy (Taylor, 1985; de Silva, 1994). I was equally interested in the positive emotion profiles of loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. The paper on equanimity presented at UNDV 2010 ( de Silva) brings out a new concept in positive emotions, that of emotional balance, very effective in managing intense grief and sadness. It is encouraging to find that Alan Wallace and Paul Ekman have developed the concept of “Cultivating Emotional Balance” (CEB) emerging as an exercise in education but having a great therapeutic potential. Wallace has made a useful contribution to the conceptual clarification of the notion of well-being in Buddhism (Wallace and Shapiro, 2006).

As I moved into professional therapy, I attempted to isolate the emotions that dominated within a client’s profile. For instance, reactivity (*anger, repugnance, ill-will*), attachments to things, symbols (grasping) along with submerged states of conceit. I found different forms of sadness, ranging from those colored by immense love and grief (as found in the novel ‘Guns and Roses’), to those consequent on loss, frustration, remorse and guilt. But any blend of anger and sadness with some ambivalence was a complex and difficult situation. These constellations also move into depression:

If sadness dominates depression, we speak of retarded depression; if agony is more prominent, it is an agitated depression. People who are depressed not only

feel helpless to change their lives, they feel hopeless. They do not believe it will ever get better. In addition to sadness and agony, guilt and shame are strongly felt, for depressed people feel they are worthless... anger directed inward or out, and fear are often manifest (Ekman, 2003, 93).

### **Part III**

#### **The Emotion Profile of Sadness & Working with Emotions**

“Thus promoting emotional processing in cognitive approaches, arousal of fear by imaginative stimulation in behavioral approaches, emotional insight in psychodynamic approaches, increased depth of experience in experiential approaches and communication of feeling in interactional approaches are all aspects of working with emotion that are seen as important within each perspective”. (Greenberg, 2003, 1). All these approaches are important in looking at the management of sadness. But my focus is basically on the management of emotions—emotion focused therapy (EFT). The best exponent and the pioneer of EFT is Lesli Greenberg. I have shown in a separate paper presented at a recent Mahidol University conference on Buddhism and science, basic resemblances and differences between the EFT of Greenberg and my own version of Mindfulness-Based EFT (de Silva, 2011, In the Press). But the new revolution in emotion studies has integrated the *affective, cognitive, motivational* and the *attentional* dimensions of emotions. A full blown emotion has all these facets including the physiological aspect of emotion. The Buddhist guide to mindfulness practice known as the *Satipaṭṭhāna integrates* all these facets: the body, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, thought patterns and the nature of phenomena (both physical and psychological) and the underlying technique is the use of mindfulness/attention (*sati*) (Nyanaponika, 1999). In dealing with sadness, we start with the calming of the body; then looking at the emergence of feelings of pleasure, pain and neutral—if we ‘put our breaks’ here, painful feelings would not develop into sadness or anger; the focus on thoughts and thought patterns deals with what cognitive therapist call the ‘autopilot’, breaking through automatic and conditioned thought processes. We also look at the meaning giving dimension of cognition, that help us to differentiate sadness from the close neighbors of sadness, as well as emotion clusters, like the entry of anger into sadness. It is an extremely fascinating bit of lab work looking at the chemistry of these basic emotions.

In looking at the profile of sadness, in primary sadness there is the experience of parting and separation, loss, feeling of being left out of attachments, and difficulties in communication. Communication is a very important facet of ‘sadness’ and inhibition of genuine communication can be damaging. Apart from the loss of a loved one, shattered hopes, loss of job, and getting uprooted from patterns of comfortable living, as we witness in the context of recent natural disasters are the many contexts for sadness. *In secondary sadness, it is more complex with feelings of being hurt, grief—feelings of being damaged, wounded, ignored, unrecognized, rejected* (Greenberg, 2003, 163). Basically, the distress centers on an irrevocable loss, and there is an emotional need for sympathy and understanding. Collapsing into tears and feeling hopeless is natural but the most important therapeutic step is *acceptance*.

The goal in mindfulness in therapy is to help the patient relate his emotional life, and all of his experience, in a different way. It is not an attempt to eliminate sadness, worry, or anxiety, but to help the patient see things in a different light when they do arise. Thoughts and feelings are not in our control, but come and go on their own (Bien, 2006, 69)

(1) In Greenberg's EFT awareness and acceptance is the starting point. The therapist "works with the client to help the client approach, tolerate and regulate, as well as accept their emotions" (Greenberg, 2010, 22)

(2) Emotional expression: The client must also be in live contact with their emotions, and thus develop effective exposure to previously avoided feelings. While arousal and tolerance of emotions is necessary, optimum emotional processing involves the integration of cognition and affect.

(3) Emotion Regulation. When emotions such as sadness, fear, shame and powerlessness, overwhelm people, there is a need to help people regulate their emotions by getting them some 'distance' from them. Any attempt to regulate emotions by preventing themselves from feeling the disturbing emotions, withdrawing, avoiding, use distraction strategies, transform emotions by psychosomatic complaints or even seek stimulus seeking enjoyment to drown them are all counter-productive. In Buddhist practice, loosening the personal identification and seeing sadness as an *impersonal* process that emerge, stay for a while and pass away is recommended.

In fact, at this point Greenberg integrates mindfulness practice into EFT. Important means of regulating emotion include regulating breathing and mindfulness - the non-judgmental observation and description of one's emotional states. Basic emotion regulation skills includes naming the emotion, describing the emotion in one's body, clarifying the event that evoked the emotion, and understanding one's interpretation of the situation and the actions prompted by the emotion (Greenberg, 2008, 206). Naming and labeling are techniques used in mindfulness practice.

(4) Reflection on emotional experience at the level of deep experience is recommended. Buddhism recommends wise reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*) which can be extended to routine life.

(5) Transformation of one emotion by another is the final method, quoting Spinoza, "an emotion cannot be restrained nor removed by another emotion unless by an opposed and stronger emotion" (Ethics, iv, 195).

### **Buddhist Pathways For Managing Negative Emotions**

1. *The Method of Restraint* takes a preventive stand instead of damage control. The ability to 'step back' and make a choice is a mature achievement in emotion management. This is useful in the case of emotions like anger and lust where the motivational roots are important and one can be aware of emotional triggers without any reactivity. But in the case of sadness, especially grief at the loss of a loved one, there is no choice, it just comes like an avalanche. Restraint would be useful in trying to handle one's sadness in a thoughtful manner.

2. *The Method of Remediating*. The reference to Spinoza reminds one of the method of antidotes in remediating a negative state. The four divine states of loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity are crucial and presented as antidotes for sadness. Loving kindness first begins by directing it towards one self and then reaching others, from the lost one, and others in the family, and then towards a more universal feeling with other beings. The ability to embrace all parts of oneself without guilt and self-hurt and the ability to connect with others helps one to break through feelings of separateness and ego-centric concerns. While compassion and generosity may be practiced in our daily life, it is also a meditative state with positive therapeutic value. Equanimity balances love and compassion by bringing in balance and realism, as well as a sense of acceptance of the tragic as part and parcel of the nature of things.

3. *Transforming negative emotions* instead of demonizing them is a technique where grief may be converted into a patience, resilience, a sense of realism, forgiveness, courage and so on. This is what Carl Jung described as emotional alchemy, converting brass into gold. Venerable Nyanaponika observes that one should not throw away negative emotions, and quotes from *The Little Locksmith*, (Nyanaponika, 1986, 55): “If you throw away a thing it is gone. Where you had something you have nothing. Your hands are empty, they have nothing to work on. Whereas almost all those things that you throw away, are capable of being worked over by a little magic into just the opposite of what they were”.

4. *Liberation from an emotion by insight*. Here one can use what the philosophers describe as the ‘componential theory of emotions’, where emotions are seen as constructions out of bodily sensations, feelings and thought patterns, and if you have a hard look at them gradually you see them emerging and passing away, and with a hard look they appear empty and evaporate. Here the notion of impermanence is applied to these “seemingly rock-like phenomena”.

5. *Dedication Through Gratitude*. Solomon refers to the reflective and dedicatory qualities of grief, where we bring to our mind the good things by the person whom you have lost. What you do on behalf of those whom you have lost, especially in the case of parents are not considered as duties in the Kantian sense but emerges in the context of reciprocity, what parents do for children and what children do for parents, especially in the context aging followed by death. Gratitude and generosity practiced in the name of the lost one and compassion work together and are woven into rituals in Buddhist practice in Thailand and Sri Lanka

6. Living a good life is considered as the best way of respecting those who have departed. A moral life with openness, candour and vibrancy brings trust and confidence in one’s own life.

7. Sadness has to be viewed in terms in terms of mental and emotional balance. One’s experience of sadness has to strike a balance between a ‘deficit’ and ‘hyperactivity’. If a person displays the necessary energy by way of motivation, seeing things clearly and handles issues of meaning at the cognitive level, feels without any deadness or passivity on the affective level combined with a good attentional level, there is no deficit. If a person gets agitated by grief due to the addition of anger, shame and fury, there is hyperactivity. If the way that the person handles his grief leads to more suffering and confusion, his response to grief is dysfunctional. This is a very brief summary of grief in the context of cultivating emotional balance. In a separate study I have shown in detail how the Buddhist concept of equanimity (*upekkhā*) takes up the role of mental and physical balance (de Silva, 2011).

In fact, the tradition of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression developed by Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002), and Williams, Teasdale, Segal with Kabat-Zinn (2007), are not cited in the H & W study. Using the mindfulness approach to therapy emerging on Asian soils, transferred to the west-- does it make any difference to managing depression? Their approach differed from the earlier approach to depression of Aaron Beck in not disputing and analyzing negative thoughts but rather “holding thoughts and feelings in awareness rather than trying to change them”. It is an innovative eight session program directed towards managing depression relapses, using the objective scientific study format for validation.

## **Boredom**

Boredom has a profile of its own and if you understand boredom well, that is one dimension along which you may not merely manage sadness but find positive pathways



to overcome it. Issues of values and meaning are important in understanding boredom, as value constraints play a crucial role in boredom. Boredom may also be described as an attentional crisis.

To realize that boredom does not come from the object of attention but rather from the quality of attention is truly a transforming insight. Frits Pearls, one of those who brought Gestalt therapy to America, said, "Boredom is lack of attention". Understanding this reality brings profound changes in our lives (Goldstein, 1993, 80).

You have an ability to be immensely interested in something that is exhilarating and beautiful in life, there is no room for the infiltration of boredom into your mind. Whatever the object, it is the subjective state of exhilaration which is within you that is important - it may be music, art, gardening, cooking or reading. *One dimension along which one may manage sadness is to have an increasing enlargement and intensification of interest in life.* There has to be values and goals that energize one's life and a dear one that one has lost, may be considered as a source of inspiration. In my personal journey through grief, I found these words of Tolstoy very inspiring: "Only people who are capable of loving strongly can suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them". The boredom associated with sadness may be compared with another form of boredom, just to see its special nature. There is a kind of boredom which emerges out of the manic quality of life with all its "time-compression effect": increased stress at work, sleep deprivation, burn out and workaholism. In contrast, people who are genuinely immersed in whatever they do, and motivated by intrinsic rewards enjoy the experience. So, whatever the type of boredom, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who is an expert on the psychology of the 'flow' experience says that those who enjoy life and work have curiosity and interest in life, persistence and low-self-centredness and are attracted by intrinsic rewards. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Boredom is a window to the properties of time, and novel, creative and meaningful ways of spending time is the answer. To understand the boredom that comes with loss and grief, we need to see it in terms of an attentional crisis.

### **SADNESS & SPIRITUALITY: THE CREATIVE FACE OF MELANCHOLY**

There may be a gradation of differences between sadness in the secular and the therapeutic contexts and in a liberation oriented spiritual context. One point of linkage is that sadness and unhappiness is a basic ingredient of the human predicament. We have already described the sense of tragedy as well as the uplifting resilience and compassion described in 'Guns and Roses'. But yet the young Siddhartha's experience of the tragic (*samvega*) that made him renounce a princely throne, describes best the most profound Buddhist perspective on the lost art of sadness. This spiritual perspective on '*samvega*' do have some close cousins in the therapeutic traditions, especially the existential psychotherapy of Irwin Yalom, and for him looking at the meaning of life and death is the 'creative face of melancholy' (Yalom, 1980, 435). Speaking of the writings of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Kafka and Camus, Yalom says "...they suffered more keenly from a crisis of meaninglessness and with a ferocity born of desperation, plunged into creative efforts". As has been well presented by Jennifer Radden, in Freud himself there is an interesting tension between the notion that melancholic propensities being rare and pathological and on the other hand, even a part of the human condition. This tradition that may be traced to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Burton, 1621, 1927), where he sees

it as a part of the human condition and also that in this condition, sometimes you see exalted energy, different from what is found in depression.

In the Buddha's sermons, *samvega* is considered as an authentic spiritual emotion caused by the miseries of the world. The concept translated as agitation, stirring, trembling can be an invigorating experience. With the help of a graphic metaphor of four types of horses, the Buddha clarifies the nature of authentic *samvega*: the steed that is agitated at the very sight of the stick; the steed that is agitated when its coat is pricked with a stick; the steed that is agitated when the flesh is pierced; the steed that is agitated when the bone is pierced. This is compared to four types of men: a person hears that in a particular town a person is afflicted; a person beholds with his own eyes a person afflicted and suffering; a person sees his kinsman afflicted; the person himself is stricken with pain and suffering. The person who has followed the authentic path of the Buddha would convert this stirring, at whatever stage it occurs, towards enhancing his spiritual journey but others will be bewildered (*paritassanā*) and bemoan that they will be annihilated (Gradual Saying II, 13). Harnessing of such spiritual emotions has to be tempered by equanimity (*upekkhā*) and emotional balance that helps a meditator to avoid on the one hand, the hindrance of restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and on the other hand slothfulness (*thīna-middha*). Authentic and energetic stirring with equanimity and balance is a bit of a walk on a tight rope! Equally important, a mind that is stirred by the suffering of fellow beings opens up to the way of compassion, and as the Buddha transformed the robber Angulimala, re-teaching the loveliness within him.

The bud stands for all things,  
Even for those things that don't flower,  
For everything flowers from within, of self-blessing,  
Though sometimes it is necessary; to re-teach a thing its loveliness.  
--(Galway Kinnel)

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### **Dedication.**

This article is dedicated to the memory of Padmal de Silva, a distinguished psychologist, a pioneer in developing Mindfulness-based Behaviour Therapy, a versatile scholar and a

friend with magnanimity and a compassionate heart. The last article that he sent me before his untimely death was on "Panic Cultures", drawing from his research on the Tsunami experience in Sri Lanka.