

To Grieve and Praise Together

This we know: whether a moment, a season, a lifetime—all will come to an end. Both grief and praise acknowledge the ephemeral quality of all that is *sacred* in life – all that we have nourished, all that has nourished us. Grief and praise are mutually co-arising and co-creative; each takes its turn in expression while the other waits quietly below the surface. They dance and trade places in rhythmic measure throughout the course of our lives.

Grief and praise spring from the same source; from our longing for the sacred, our devotion to a life which we know someday will be released. So too, anything worthy of praise, anything we have praised well and truly, will call forth our grief when we are parted from it. What is praised deeply can be surrendered to grief's unabashed and ecstatic waves of tears and tremors. Moving *fully* through grief, we emerge exhausted and tranquil to find ourselves awestruck by the beauty of life, and the humility of our own realized mortality.

The act of grieving is not the same as sorrow. Sorrow is something that we house within ourselves. It rests heavily on our lungs, strangles the breath of our inspiration and, before long, weighs down our very soul. Grief bound too tightly to an event or a person will turn to sorrow; grief unexpressed will do the same. When not fully expressed, sorrow nests in the dark and forgotten hollows of our body. Coming to rest there long enough it will precipitate into cynicism, sarcasm, bitterness, and eventually becomes violence - either towards ourselves or others. When projected outwards, it takes shape in various types of assault, or in less obvious forms such as neglect, dream stealing, shaming, forced poverty, or contempt. Experienced inwardly, it may manifest as shame, self-reproach, workaholism and other addictions. Much later on, on the physical level, un-metabolized sorrow may take shape as serious illness.

Grief longs to be heard. It celebrates life through breath, sigh, moan and lamentation. Grieving cannot be conjured, or cajoled into being. It is brought to life by opening to what we hold as sacred. Once unleashed, grief comes alive. It rises and falls in salty waves, returning with some regularity, though unlike the tides, not so predictably. And grief is not always characterized solely by tears. It may contain bouts of laughter and even song. Unlike the eyes of sorrow that stare inward towards lightless depths, the eyes of grief turn outward and shine.

Similarly, Praise is not the same as gratitude. Gratitude, while beautiful in its own right, is something that one owns, clutching it tightly like a small nugget of gold – easy to talk about, but careful not to leave it exposed for too long lest others be too allured by its luster. Praise on the other hand is something that one *gives* in honor of the sacred. True praise commands no envy because it celebrates what all know is true. Praise does not judge, evaluate or condone. It sings to the grandeur and mystery of the Sacred. Praise is something that one *gives* in honor of the sacred. Praise is the heart song of beauty made manifest through the language of poetry, and prayer, and graceful movements that celebrate that which is holy, lavishing it with reverence, art, and offerings of love. Praise is also specific. It has accountability and focus. Praise goes somewhere intentional, and it must arrive intact.

We cannot praise what we take for granted. To take that which we feel we are “given grant to” is *to wrongfully assume both constancy and ownership*. Further, it is privilege, license, convenience and all other forms of entitlement that drown praise before it can surface and give breath in honor of life-giving beauty.

For the uninitiated, both grief and praise need courage to find their voice, for it is no small act to openly grieve in a culture that sees it as a “negative” emotion, and as such, to be avoided in our eternal pursuit of happiness and “positivity,” or at least pleasant distraction. And if heartfelt praise, expressed in clear and certain tenor, is met with rolled eyes, or downward gazes of shame or embarrassment, we must not despair. We need not believe that the practice of praise should be relegated to the ordained. Showing outward praise cannot be blasphemy.

Grief and praise also share no company with self-pity or narcissism. We embrace grief and praise as our own. We pay tribute to something greater than just the self, and which can never be fully claimed as ours: such as the sun, the ecstasy of eros, or a deceased loved one. Ultimately, grief and praise belong to us all, bound as we are to one another, to the earth and to the lineage we all share. And so what we grieve is never really ours to begin with – it is love that is leased, stewarded and finally returned to source.

We cannot grieve that which we do not know we have lost, *and yet*, we share a deep-seated ancestral memory of experiences that we have not actually lived. From this stems a powerful but unexpressed grief. We experience this grief but often have nothing to attach it to. Instead it metastasizes into nameless sorrow, anxiety, depression, or deep loneliness. Subsequently, we come to believe it is our personal failing. Though in actuality, we, both individually and collectively, are experiencing an overflow of grief deferred to us from our ancestors. Sadly, in this time, without the nurturance and kinship of tribe that our indigenous soul so deeply longs for, there is no ritual container to hold our grieving.

It is the act of grieving, especially together, that is the healing emancipation from sorrow’s weight. *Grieving is our pathway out of sorrow!* And so too, praise becomes the elated cry of joy, the celebration of everything we most deeply love and the companion of our grief. When expressed fully, grieving and praise together complete the cycle of renewal, union and dissolution with the Sacred.

Grief Leads To Praise. Praise Nourishes And Loves Life. Life And Love Come To End... So We Must Grieve, And In So Doing, We Keep Our Promise To The Great Turning Of Life...

So let us grieve together, let us praise together and come to rest together in the fullness of our loving, returned at last to the source that made us.

~ By Jon Carlson ~
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