

Grief and the Ether Element – a Polarity Therapy Perspective

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Polarity Therapy

Polarity Therapy is a healing system which uses bodywork, communication, diet and exercise to support and empower people. The name refers to the way energy flows in the human body, as in all matter, from a positive to a negative pole, through a neutral state. Bodywork forms the core of a Polarity Therapy session. Polarity Therapy bodywork is gentle and non-invasive, working with the body in a rhythmic and intuitive way, without strain or force.

Polarity Therapy draws from many disciplines. One of the main influences is the Ayurvedic system in which all matter and energy is classified as consisting of the five elements: Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. Each element is present in us and has a different chakra, or energy centre, and various associated physiological functions. The focus of this piece is the Ether element and its connection with the experience of grief.

The Ether Element

Ether, or space, is the most elusive of the elements. It is omnipresent, the void out of which everything is made manifest. Because of its all-pervasive presence, it can be considered the mother of the other four elements. We rarely consider it, yet it is fundamental to our existence. It is subtle yet powerful and represents the unmanifested potential of all things.

The Ether element connects us with the unchanging part of ourselves, that which is beyond form. Ether when in balance imbues us with real presence, a spiritual connection that permeates every aspect of our lives. When we are unable to connect with Ether, we may have a sense of meaninglessness, as though something is missing, or that we are somehow disconnected.

In the body, Ether is associated with the various networks that pervade the entire system, e.g. nerves, veins, arteries etc. It is also represented in the joints; it is the space between the bones that give flexibility. The energy centre for Ether is found in the throat. We express our thoughts, feelings and emotions through the throat and an energetic blockage of the Ether element can lead to difficulty expressing ourselves, a constricted voice, or problems such as laryngitis and tonsillitis.

Each of the elements is linked to a sense, and the sense of hearing is connected to Ether. The universal 'Om' sound is the original vibration of the universe, the creation of matter in space.

In Polarity Therapy, the emotion associated with Ether is grief. Grieving, therefore, brings us into relationship with Ether. Understanding this element can help and empower us greatly if we or someone close to us, is grieving.

Grief

Grief is one of the most profound of human experiences and can pierce us to the very core. We grieve when we lose someone or something very dear to us: loss of a partner or loved one, and

children born and unborn are perhaps the most poignant. We may also grieve a lost relationship, loss of a dream, or a job loss if we were strongly identified with the role, and so on.

A Polarity Therapy session may focus on any of the Ether areas in the body to work with grief. An Ether session can also be a good general 'opener', creating space in the system for the energy to begin flowing. As the treatments progress, the focus may shift to working with the other elements as the myriad of emotions that can be triggered by grief, such as anger, guilt, frustration, regret, anguish, fear, etc may begin to present themselves.

Space and Stillness

The energy of the Ether element can be most easily accessed through meditation, stillness and quiet. Regular practice of meditation and mindfulness develops our connection with the stillness within. We may choose sitting meditation, or a form of moving mediation such as Chi Kung or Yoga. In order to grieve fully, we must allow our feelings to be. When we quieten the mind it becomes like still water, reflecting our experience clearly. The practice of watching the flow of thoughts and feelings from a still place helps us to feel our grief while remaining anchored in our timeless selves.

Ether is limitless and infinite; as such it connects us to that which is limitless and infinite in us. It is for this reason that grief can open us to the spiritual dimension within. This is the 'clear water from which we drink' that David Whyte refers to in his poem 'The Well of Grief'. This spiritual connection can be a source of solace and comfort while we are grieving and beyond. It can give us a sense of perspective and help to balance the very human tendency to grasp after that which is lost. By being still, we honour our connection with the infinite. We are reminded that no-one is ever truly lost to us as we are each an inseparable part of the divine and formless source of all things.

During a Polarity Therapy session, the therapist holds a space to allow the client's energy to be. Much like a meditation practice, energy in the form of thoughts, feelings and physical sensations may arise and the therapist gently facilitates their release.

Truth and Trust

Grief can trigger very powerful emotions, which we may feel moved to express. To express our thoughts and feelings is to tell the truth about our experience. When we express our truth through the throat (Ether) centre, either by verbal or another form of communication, we take a step into our power. This helps to heal the divide between heart and mind, between what we feel and what our head thinks we should be feeling/saying/doing. Telling the truth about how we feel as we grieve frees us and allows our energy to flow. We may have the urge to cry out, speak to someone we trust, journal, sing, pray, or express ourselves through movement or dance. There are many modes of expression, what matters is that we find the way(s) that feel right and let it flow.

Unexpressed grief can block the throat centre, disconnect us from our truth, inner knowing and power, causing us to lack trust in ourselves. By telling the truth, we develop trust in ourselves, and others begin to trust us more deeply. Something in us recognises the truth when we hear it and equally we sense when we are not being told the truth. Non-truths damage trust. Children who are told non-truths suffer great internal conflict as their inner knowing senses something which conflicts with the message coming from an external source of power in the form of a parent, teacher, or

guardian. This sets up a lack of trust in themselves which they will have to work to repair in adulthood. If children are affected by grief, either sensing someone else's grief or feeling it themselves, talking to them about it can help them to cope with current and later experiences of loss. Since children are already sensing their parent's mental and emotional state in every minute, being gently truthful with them validates their inner knowing and builds their sense of self-confidence and security. Including them in some kind of ritual around grief can be very helpful. Children create little rituals and ceremonies very naturally so this can be a good way to engage them and help them to make sense of it all. See below for more about the power of ritual.

Expressing ourselves truthfully can seem frightening, especially when we are in a lot of pain, but we must trust our own strength at this time. Being truthful with ourselves and others about what we are feeling helps us to move through any stuck feelings and lightens the heart.

Listening

When we make space for grief to flow, honouring our truth, it implies that we are listening. Holding a compassionate space in which to listen is fundamental to the healing process, whether it is ourselves or someone else we're listening to. Meditation has been described as inner listening, and it is during quiet moments of solitude that we can tune in and listen to the heart.

Author and spiritual teacher, Eckhart Tolle, suggests that when listening to someone, we listen with the whole body. To do this we place attention on our inner selves, our breathing or the aliveness of the body. What does this mean? It means that we listen with the deepest part of ourselves, taking attention away from mental chatter, habitual thoughts, attitudes and judgements. It is from this place that compassion arises. Listening while staying connected to your inner presence deepens the quality of your encounters immeasurably. If you are supporting someone who is grieving, I recommend that you practice this, tune in to your breathing or the subtle aliveness of your body as you listen, and see what happens. This quality of listening holds a space for the other to simply be. It is non-solution focused, listening for the sake of hearing the other, which helps them to feel validated.

This is a gift you can offer yourself or another who is grieving; it also applies to everyone no matter what their circumstance. Everyone you know needs to be heard. This quality of listening creates a clear reflection in which to honour the experience and view it with some degree of detachment. The other person is more likely to sense their own inner dimension in your still presence, which will help them far more than anything you could say or do. This is what is truly meant by just 'being there'. This quality of listening envelops you both in unconditional love.

Listening is fundamental to Polarity Therapy. The Polarity Therapist listens through verbal communication and bodywork. Time is devoted to listening in every session allowing the client to talk about their experiences as they wish. The bodywork is then geared towards helping them with whatever difficulties they may have. During the bodywork, the therapist listens with their hands to the subtle language of the client's energy as they are guided to stimulate, mobilise, hold and clear the energy, helping to restore balance and harmony.

Ritual and the Earth Element

Creating a ritual around grieving gives us a vessel into which we can pour our feelings. It helps us to mark time, pace ourselves and return again and again to the process for as long as we need to. If we have lost a loved one, ritual also helps us to remember them in a concrete way. In the book 'Beyond Endurance: When a Child Dies', R. J. Knapp studied many parents who had lost children. He emphasises the adaptive function of remembering, or making a 'vow to remember' among grieving parents. I think the vow to remember extends to ourselves also, a vow to honour the time we had with our loved one, however short, and our experience of losing them.

There are many forms of ritual. You may want to allocate a special place in your home or outside where you can quietly be with your feelings. Here, you may create some kind of altar or place of remembrance and gather items that resonate with you, e.g., candles, incense, certain colours, cards, pictures, a poem, or an offering from nature. If it is a person being mourned, something they would have liked, or a belonging of theirs can serve as both an offering and a bridge to them. Take your time and do what feels right, this is a sacred place for you to honour that which is lost and your feelings so it should feel safe and comforting.

Ritual may consist of something you do or create. Look to the elements for inspiration. You may feel the urge to write to the person if there were things left unsaid. Write and then bury, burn or drop your letter into the sea, asking the Earth, Fire or Water element to carry it to them. Plant a tree or use your creative energy to make something of beauty in their honour. Make a prayer flag and ask the Air element to carry its message to your loved one. Rituals vary from person to person and doing something practical to express feelings of grief can be surprisingly freeing. Ritual has a powerful effect on the subconscious mind and can unlock and release feelings no matter how long-held. A friend of mine recently accompanied her 84 year old mother abroad to lay a gravestone at the unmarked grave of her daughter, who died many years ago within a few hours of birth. This is a beautiful tribute to both mother and infant and illustrates that it is never too late to honour the loss of a loved one.

Working with the Earth element can balance Ether and support us while grieving. Fear of being overwhelmed is a common reason to suppress grief so we need to feel safe in order to express our emotions fully. In Polarity Therapy, fear is considered to be the emotion associated with the Earth element. The Earth element is the opposite polarity to ether. Earth is the densest of the elements and conveys a sense of safety and support; it is the ground beneath our feet. Connecting with this element helps to ground our emotions. A Polarity Therapy session that focuses on the Earth element can be very beneficial while grieving. We connect to earth by spending time in nature, gardening, tending to plants or simply walking mindfully on the earth. This also reminds us of the role of loss in the sacred and natural cycles of life, death, and rebirth.

Other Sources of Support

There are many ways to support ourselves; it is a matter of devoting time and space to honour the grieving process. You may want to try some of those mentioned or any of the following, depending on what resonates with you: Any conscious act of **creativity** such as painting, drama, pottery, dancing, woodwork, poetry – reading or writing, can help us to explore our feelings of grief. Since sound is the sense associated with the Ether element, **music**, either listening to or making your own,

can help to express grief. **The voice** can be another doorway to healing through singing, chanting, or any other kind of voice work. **Deep breathing** can help us to contact and release deeply held emotions.

Grieving is a fragile time and treating ourselves with **kindness** is paramount. The healing power of self-kindness in the face of loss is captured exquisitely in Naomi Shihab Nye's poem, 'Kindness'. Equally, if you know someone who is grieving, do not underestimate the power of even the smallest act of kindness. The heart is broken wide open by grief, and it is a testament to its profound capacity for love that it can still be touched by an act of kindness while all at once over-flowing with sorrow.

Final Thoughts

Grieving can be such a painful experience. However, if we can bear to embrace it, it has the power to transform us. It can help us to grow, and reveal the depth of our innermost being and potential. It can forge us as whole and compassionate human beings.

If you are grieving, I urge you to take solitude and go within. Your true self is so much vaster than your greatest loss. Above all, be kind to yourself. Support yourself with that which is nurturing, helpful and healing, and leave some space for grace to flow in.



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Published in Holistic Network Ireland magazine, October 2008; Ontario Polarity Therapy Association (OPTA) newsletter, Fall 2008, www.polaritytherapy.ca; and on www.polaritynetwork.com.