

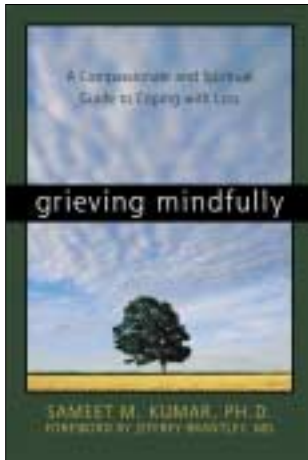
## GRIEVING MINDFULLY

*A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss*  
By Sameet Kumar, Ph.D., with Foreword by Jeffrey Brantley, M.D.

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### None of us will leave this life without first losing relationships that matter.

*My own experiences with grief cover a broad spectrum. One such experience was the sudden loss of a relationship that was very dear to me. To help me cope with my loss, I went back to India to attend some teachings being given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama...*

So begins Sameet Kumar's study of grief and loss and how we as a society experience them. Both a Buddhist and a clinical psychologist, Dr. Kumar carefully integrates psychotherapy, mindfulness, and spirituality in his gentle book on accepting grief for what it is: a sign that you have loved.

In *Grieving Mindfully* Dr. Kumar provides tools for working through the most common emotional and existential issues confronting people who are suffering a loss. People who are grieving often face misinformation, unrealistic expectations, and interpersonal isolation in addition to the emotional distress following a loss. This book will help address the various kinds of grief, as well as the spiral staircase, which is used to describe how the emotional pain ebbs and flows, hitting us at various times, such as with milestone dates, at holidays, or anniversaries. He teaches readers how to cope with their personal grief triggers using mindfulness exercises, and about radical acceptance, a concept that helps people deal with their pain rather than suppressing — or “wallowing” — in it.

Dr. Kumar has observed that grief can become a companion long after the emotional distress has been resolved. Ironically, it is in embracing grief that we can become more fully mindful of life. The strategies presented in *Grieving Mindfully* make life more meaningful by working through grief, and enjoying the present.

**T**his book is about much more than grief. It also offers you insight on how to live life with more richness and more meaning.”

— Sameet Kumar, from  
*Grieving Mindfully*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Sameet Kumar, Ph.D.**, is a Buddhist psychotherapist whose areas of expertise include palliative care, spirituality in psychotherapy, stress management and relaxation, and grief and bereavement. He received his doctorate at the University of Miami, and has also trained with many leading Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

After having traveled extensively in India, China, and Tibet, Dr. Kumar now works at the Mt. Sinai Comprehensive Cancer Center in Miami Beach and Aventura, Florida. In working with hundreds of terminally ill patients, Dr. Kumar has helped many of their loved ones on their journey through grief following death.

Foreword author **Jeffrey Brantley, M.D.**, is founder and director of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program at Duke University, and author of the book *Calming Your Anxious Mind*.

## SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- ◆ How did you come to your understanding of grief?
- ◆ What role does mindfulness have in your life?
- ◆ What can mindfulness teach us about grief?
- ◆ In what ways are the ideas in your book different from other books about grief?
- ◆ Do you have to be Buddhist to read or practice the exercises in your book?
- ◆ What do you tell someone who has just lost a loved one?
- ◆ In the book you say that grief does not necessary mean mourning a death. Could you explain what you mean by that, please?
- ◆ You discuss the benefits of combining Buddhist principles with psychological principles for treatment: how is this done, and how successful is this integrated treatment?
- ◆ Please explain the types of grief that you discuss in your book.

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## PRAISE FOR GRIEVING MINDFULLY

“Grief and loss are dreaded experiences that many wish to either avoid or to rapidly solve. In *Grieving Mindfully*, Kumar offers the alternative of welcoming the experience as an opportunity to develop our humanity. This book offers a path to healthy grieving for people encountering losses of many kinds.”

—**Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D.**, professor of psychology at the  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

“Kumar’s approach to dealing with grief and loss is creative and radically transformative. Drawing on his experience as a practicing psychologist and his training in the Buddhist enlightenment tradition, he suggests that instead of hiding from our grief, trying to forget or get over it, we take a more demanding and rewarding path—walking straight through grief with mindful awareness, fearless observance, and profound compassion. His book has the potential to bring strength and healing to the millions who grieve and to revolutionize the approach of psychologists and counselors working with those in profound grief.”

—**Glenn H Mullin**, Buddhist meditation teacher and author of  
*Living in the Face of Death: The Tibetan Tradition*

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## EXCERPT FROM *GRIEVING MINDFULLY*

### **BUDDHISM AND GRIEF**

Traditional accounts of the life story of the Buddha include an episode that illustrates the relationship between love and grief, as well as the universality of grief—the story of a young mother named Krisha Gotami, who lived at the time of the Buddha.

Krisha Gotami's only child, a baby, became sick and died. Grief stricken, she held the tiny, lifeless body close to her heart and wandered weeping through the streets, asking everyone she met if they could help her. Someone told her that the only person who could help her was the Buddha, who was giving teachings outside the city. Krisha Gotami went to the forest grove where the Buddha was preaching.

Reverently, she presented the lifeless body to him and, with tears in her eyes, asked if he could bring her baby back to life. After contemplating her request for some moments, the Buddha consented, but with a condition: she would need to bring him a single mustard seed from a household that had never been visited by death before he would grant her request.

Ecstatic, Krisha Gotami went to the city. She knocked on the door of every single house, rich or poor. People answered, "My grandfather died last year," "My son died just last month," "My husband died ten years ago," and "My cousin was killed when he was a child." Krisha Gotami went through the entire city looking for that mustard seed, but she could not find a single household that had not been visited by death.

Finally, she understood what the Buddha was trying to tell her. She brought her baby to the cremation grounds and gazed upon the tiny body for the last time. After the cremation, she joined the disciples of the Buddha. It is said that she became enlightened before her own death many years later.

When we experience death or loss on a personal level, we forget the hard truth of Krisha Gotami's story: that death and loss are inevitable, and grief is natural. They are so unavoidable and common in all of our lives that not a single household has escaped their touch. However, although we may never understand why death occurs, we can learn to accept loss and grief as natural processes. Like Krisha Gotami, we may first have to become aware of how much suffering this world holds for everyone else before we can accept our own. But, also like Krisha Gotami, once we accept the universality of loss and grief, we can set ourselves free from the bondage of pain and place ourselves on the path of our spiritual evolution.

The inevitability of death and loss became the cornerstone of the Buddha's teaching. The first of his Four Noble Truths states simply that life is wrought with suffering. This is not just the profound suffering of death; it is also petty suffering—of not getting what we want, of always desiring more, of living without pleasure, or living with emotional,

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physical, or spiritual pain.

For the Buddha, the idea of a perfect and comfortable life was a grand illusion; suffering is what we experience when this illusion vanishes. Because we all buy into this illusion at some point in our lives, suffering is a natural law. We simply don't always get what we want, and so we suffer.

### **GRIEF HAPPENS**

From this perspective, then, there is nothing “wrong” with you if you are grieving. Grief is a part of life. This is a very different perspective from that of our pleasure-driven, youth-oriented society. Most of us, in societies around the world, have a tendency to associate suffering and distress with something being wrong. We all inherently want to experience pleasure and avoid pain.

Yet suffering is a part of all of our lives, and, although not desirable, it will happen no matter what we do. If we view grief as a problem, we will think of one of the most natural parts of life, and love, as a pathology or “disorder.” But grief has always been part of the order of things, and it always will be. As part of suffering, grief too is a natural law.

### **WHY WE GRIEVE**

My years of work with people suffering loss through illness and death have shown me again and again that love and grief are inextricably intertwined—to love is always to open oneself to the grief of loss. However, this loss is not to be confused with the loss of love.

*Grief is the experience of loss in love.*

Simply put, it is only without love that there is no grief. Love is the fuel that drives grief. Rather than point to a deficit or weakness, grief only serves to highlight the depth of our capacity to love and be loved. Just as love depends on the courage to share yourself with another person, grieving mindfully depends on the courage to accept your own feelings.

The relationship between grief and love is easy to forget when you are suffering. By practicing mindfulness, you will find the natural place of grief in your life. I believe that this place is in your heart, side by side with the role of love in your life.

Suffering and frustrated desire are a part of life, but how we respond to them—how we grieve—can vary greatly. Moreover, how we respond can enable us to also experience much satisfaction and enjoyment in life.

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