



The Emily Dahl *Foundation*

The Emily Dahl Foundation on coping with the loss of a loved one



This question has come up many times since Emily died, "Do you have any suggestions about how to handle a great personal loss, such as the loss of a child?"

It was the wisdom of the Dalai Lama that made me reflect that this does depend to some degree on people's personal beliefs. If people believe in rebirth, then accordingly, I think there is some way to reduce sorrow or worry. They can take consolation in the fact that their loved one will be reborn.

For those people who do not believe in rebirth, then I think there are still some simple ways to help deal with the loss. First, they could reflect that if they worry too much, allowing themselves to be too overwhelmed by the sense of loss and sorrow, and if they carried on with that feeling of being overwhelmed, not only would it be very destructive and harming to themselves, ruining their health, but

also it would not have any benefit to the person who has passed away. This was very important for me, as I just knew that Emily would want me to be strong for her.

For example, in my own case, when I lost the physical form of my amazing daughter Emily, of course, I felt very, very sad, and was not even sure I would survive the initial shock. Then somehow, I realized because I really love Emily, then I must try to fulfill her wishes with a calm mind. So, I tried my best to do that. I think if you've lost someone who is very close to you, that's the proper way to approach it. You see, the best way to keep a memory of that person, the very best way, is to see if you can carry on the wishes of that person.

Initially, of course, feelings of grief and anxiety are a natural human response to a loss. But if you allow these feelings of loss and worry to persist, there's a danger; if these feelings are left unchecked, they can lead to a kind of self-absorption. A situation where the focus becomes your own self. And when that happens you become overwhelmed by the sense of loss, and you get a feeling that it's only you who is going through this. Depression sets in. But in reality, there are others who will be going through the same kind of experience. So, if you find yourself worrying too much, it may help to think of the other people who have similar or even worse tragedies. Once you realize that, then you no longer feel isolated, as if you have been picked out. That can offer you some kind of comfort in a terrible time.

As some time went by and I was able to further consider the reality of the way things actually are, other wonderful thoughts began to emerge. I would and still do, every day, visualize a cloud in the sky. Maybe one part of the cloud has become rain; half of the cloud remains in the same form and half has taken a different one. And you cannot say that the rain is less beautiful than the cloud, or the cloud is less beautiful than the rain. They can both be beautiful.

It was the teachings of the deep thinker Thich Nhat Hanh that made me think of Emily like a cloud in the sky. My personal experience has transformed and become fully aware that she is a kind of cloud. My wife Katie and my son Jackson are also kind of like clouds, and they also are not entirely here in their bodies that I know, because every day they produce thoughts, speech, and action which continue independently of me, just like Emily. I no longer have any fear of death.

So, we are all really like clouds in the sky: every day it can produce rain or snow or hail. We can see the continuation of the cloud, even if it is still there in the sky.

Human beings produce thoughts, speech, and action every day. And that is our continuation. We must meditate in order to see ourselves not only in our bodies, but also outside of them.

The person that you believe is already lost is not lost; he or she is still there in other forms. Look for him or her inside yourself, look for them in your family members and their friends. So many of Emily's friends tell me stories and send me pictures of Emily that bring happy thoughts to me. Any person that has gone is still available in the here and now.

My deeper realization came to me immediately when Emily left her physical form, and it is that nothing is born, nothing dies. Somehow, I knew instantly that it was impossible for Emily to completely disappear, so it is impossible for anything to die, to become nothing. That is why meditation on death is so helpful: it helps you to see that there is no death. There is no birth and death, there is only transformation. Nothing can be lost.

I just know that Emily can hide herself and take another form, and that allows me to cherish her presence.

The meditation on death is a very important meditation. When you meditate on death, you love life more, you cherish life more. We can learn many lessons from it and Emily teaches me more every day.

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