Grief Primer
Compiled by J. Block, 2011

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Give sorrow words.
The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o’erfraught heart,
and bids it break.  ~ William Shakespeare
Definitions of Grief
from *The American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd Edition*

Grief:
Grief: n., Deep mental anguish, as from bereavement; an annoyance or frustration, trouble or difficulty.
To grieve, grieving: v., To be sorrowful, to experience or express grief. Synonyms: lament, mourn, sorrow. The central meaning shared by these verbs is ‘to feel, show, or express grief, sadness or regret’.

Mourning:
To mourn, mourning: v., To feel or express grief or sorrow; to show grief for a death by conventional signs, as by wearing black; to feel or express deep regret; to grieve over the dead
Mourning: n., The actions or expression of one who has suffered a bereavement, conventional outward signs of grief for the dead, such as a black armband; the period when a death is mourned.

Bereavement:
Bereaved: adj., Suffering the loss of a loved one.
Bereave: tr. v.: To leave desolate or alone, especially by death

Types of Grief
Anticipatory Grief: The grief that occurs prior to the potential death or loss. Dynamics can be similar to those seen in post-death grief.

Expected Grief: Loss is expected and people have an opportunity to prepare for it and make efforts at closure.

Unexpected or Acute Grief: Loss in unexpected, perhaps sudden. Assault is felt. There is trauma, shock, and/or horror. Without having had time to prepare for it, denial must protect people longer.

Shadow or Anniversary Grief: Grief reactions prompted by holiday, anniversary of death, or other dates/times/days. Often catches the griever unaware.

Grief over Secondary Losses: Grief over losses/changes resulting from the primary death/loss, such as financial loss, moves, loss of identity, loss of freedom/increase in responsibilities.

Complicated Grief: Non-linear grief with complicating factors such as lack of support/isolation trauma, multiple losses, loss of a long-term relationship, loss of an infant/child, etc. The griever may not heal in a healthy manner without professional intervention.

Disenfranchised Grief: A form of complicated grief occurring when the loss is not or cannot be recognized, validated, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported.
Realistic Expectations During the Grief Process
Adapted from ‘How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies’ by Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.

Grief will take longer than most people think.

Grief takes more energy than we ever imagine.

Grief shows itself in all spheres of our lives – emotional, social, physical, and spiritual.

Grief is not only for the actual person lost, but also for the hopes, dreams, unfulfilled expectations and unmet needs.

Grief involves many changes and develops continually.

New losses bring up grief from the past, often creating an array of confusing feelings at once.

Sometimes grief makes one feel “crazy”, confused, or disoriented.

Grief spasms (acute upsurges of grief occurring suddenly with no warning) are common.

In the future, some events can stimulate grief, especially the “firsts” (holidays, celebrations, travel, appointments, etc.).

Society has unrealistic expectations about grief and the mourning process, so well-meaning people may respond inappropriately.

Family members cannot always provide the support one expects, and their grief process may be very different.

Sometimes people have enough social support to help them through loss. But more often, they need to reach out for support, let others know what they need, and actively build a network that facilitates personal growth and transformation.
## Common Grief Reactions

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<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL</th>
<th>MENTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Disbelief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of energy</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Distracted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sympathy pains</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Absent-minded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hollowness</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Forgetful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gut Sensations</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Low motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tightness in chest</td>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>Dreams of deceased</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shortness of breath</td>
<td>Yearning/Longing</td>
<td>Poor concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry mouth</td>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>Preoccupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased noise sensitivity</td>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Images of deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Lack of focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep disturbance</td>
<td>“Grief Attacks”</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Memories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>“Crazy”/Out of Control</td>
<td>Disorientation</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL</th>
<th>BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>SPIRITUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social withdrawal</td>
<td>Searching</td>
<td>Questions about God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminished desire to</td>
<td>Crying/Tears</td>
<td>Why would God allow this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying special objects</td>
<td>Changes in daily routine</td>
<td>Where are they now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being single</td>
<td>Going to grave site</td>
<td>How are they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of need to “take care of others”</td>
<td>Keeping an altar</td>
<td>When will I die?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping belongings intact</td>
<td>Will I see them again when I die?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looking at photos</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Talking to the deceased</td>
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## The Mourner’s Bill of Rights

Revised 12.15.12
by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief.

No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell what you should or should not be feeling.

2. You have the right to talk about your grief.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief. If at times you don't feel like talking, you have the right to be silent.

3. You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.

Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.

4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

5. You have the right to experience "griefbursts."

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

6. You have the right to make use of ritual.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8. You have the right to search for meaning.

You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give...
you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9. You have the right to treasure your memories.
Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.

10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.
Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.
### Theoretical Tasks of Grief

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Denial</td>
<td>1. Alarm</td>
<td>1. Numbing</td>
<td>1. Accept the reality of the loss</td>
<td>1. Recognize the loss and death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Anger</td>
<td>2. Searching</td>
<td>2. Searching and longing</td>
<td>2. Experience the pain of grief</td>
<td>2. React to, experience, and express the separation and pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Acceptance</td>
<td>5. Gaining a new identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Readjust and adapt to the new role while maintaining memories, and form a new identity</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Reinvest</td>
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</table>
Principles of Grief Counseling

1. Help the mourner actualize the loss
   *i.e. talk specifically about the circumstances surrounding death*

2. Help the mourner to identify and express feelings
   *i.e. anger, guilt, anxiety & helplessness, sadness*

3. Assist living without the deceased
   *i.e. decision making, problem-solving and coping skills*

4. Facilitate emotional withdrawal from the deceased
   *i.e. in time, form new relationships*

5. Guide the mourner in taking time to grieve
   *i.e. help the mourner recognize that grief takes time; anticipate and prepare for special times, like holidays and anniversaries*

6. Interpret ‘normal’ behavior/grief process
   *i.e. reassure that his/her feelings and experiences are relatively normal*

7. Allow for individual differences
   *i.e. recognize there are a wide range of responses to grieving*

8. Provide continuing support
   *i.e. maintain some contact for first year; encourage participation in support groups & other resources*

9. Examine defenses and coping styles
   *i.e. help the mourner evaluate his or her coping mechanisms and develop healthy alternatives*

10. Identify pathology and refer
    *i.e. recognize your limitations and refer to another professional when necessary*

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A Soulful Philosophy of Grief Care:
The Art of Supporting and Standing with the Bereaved
Adapted from the writings of Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D

1. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about being present to another person’s pain; it is not about taking away or fixing the pain.

2. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about going into the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

3. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about honoring the human spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.

4. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.

5. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about bearing witness to the struggles of another; it is not about judging or directing these struggles.

6. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about walking alongside; it is not about leading or being led.

7. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it does not mean filling up every moment with words.

8. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.

9. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.

10. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.

11. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about curiosity; it is not about expertise.

12. Supporting and standing with the bereaved is about acknowledging spiritual mystery; it is not about finding solutions or answers to this mystery.
# Treatment vs. Standing With Model of Care

Adapted from the writings of Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment Model</th>
<th>Standing With Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To return the mourner to a prior state of homeostatic balance (“old normal”)</td>
<td>Emphasize the transformative, life-changing experience of grief (“new normal”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control or stop distressful symptoms; distress is bad.</td>
<td>Observe, “watch out for”, “bear witness” and see the value in soul-based symptoms of grief.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follows a prescriptive model where counselor is perceived as expert.</td>
<td>Bereaved person guides the journey; “teach me” is the foundational principle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathology rooted in sustained relationship to dead person</td>
<td>Is a normal shift from relationship of presence to relationship of memory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positions the griever in a passive role.</td>
<td>Recognizes the need for mourner to actively mourn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grieving person ranges from compliant to non-compliant.</td>
<td>Grieving person expresses the reality of being “torn apart” as best they can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of care judged by how well grief was “managed”</td>
<td>Quality of care monitored by how well we allowed the griever to lead the journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial interferes with efficient integration of the loss and must be overcome</td>
<td>Denial helps sustain the integration of the loss from the head to heart. It is matched with patience and compassion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish control; create strategic plan of intervention.</td>
<td>Show up with curiosity; willingness to learn from the griever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide satisfactory answers for all emotional, spiritual questions and dilemmas.</td>
<td>Honor the mystery; facilitate the continuing “search for meaning”; no urgency to solve or satisfy the dilemma.</td>
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</tbody>
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Revised 12.15.12
The Caregiver’s Bill Of Rights

As a caregiver I have the right ...

... to be respected for the work I choose to do.

... to take pride in my work and know that I am making a difference.

... to garner appreciation and validation for the care I give others.

... to receive adequate pay for my job as a professional caregiver.

... to discern my personal boundaries and have others respect my choices.

... to seek assistance from others, if and when it is necessary.

... to take time off to re-energize myself.

... to socialize, maintain my interests, and sustain a balanced lifestyle.

... to my own feelings, including negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration.

... to express my thoughts and feelings to appropriate people at appropriate times.

... to convey hope to those in my care.

... to believe those in my care will prosper in mind, body, and spirit as a result of my caregiving.

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In the Service of Life

By Rachel Naomi Remen

“In recent years the question How can I help? has become meaningful to many people. But perhaps there is a deeper question we might consider. Perhaps the real question is not how can I help? but how can I serve? Serving is different from helping. Helping is based on inequality: it is not a relationship between equals. When you help, you use your own strength to help those of a lesser strength. If I’m not attentive to what’s going on inside of me when I’m helping, I find that I’m always helping someone who’s not as strong as I am, who is needier than I am. People feel this inequality. When we help, we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity and wholeness. When I help, I am very aware of my own strength. But we don’t serve with our strength, we serve with our selves. We draw from all of our experiences. Our limitations serve, our wounds serve and even our darkness can serve. The wholeness in us serves the wholeness in others and the wholeness in life. The wholeness in you is the same as the wholeness in me. Service is a relationship between equals.” Read the full article at www.jenniferblock.org

Exploring Our Intention in Service

By Frank Ostaseski

“...the act of caring is always mutually beneficial. We understand that in nurturing others we are always caring for ourselves, and this understanding fundamentally shifts the way we provide care. I’m not the good guy coming to the rescue: I have no white horses. Instead we become what I call ‘compassionate companions.’ ‘Compassion,’ when literally translated means ‘suffering with others’ and ‘with’ is the most important word, because it implies belonging. ‘Companion’ is ‘one who travels with another.’ So in this relationship there is no guide, there is no healer and no one healed; we simply accompany one another. And as my friend Reb Anderson says, ‘We are simply walking through birth and death holding hands.’

Caring for those who are suffering, whether or not they are dying, wakes us up. It opens up our hearts and our minds. It opens up to the experience of this wholeness that I speak of. More often than not, though, we are caught in the habitual roles and ideas that keep us separate from each other. Lost in some reactive mind state, busy trying to protect our self-image, we cut ourselves off and isolate ourselves from that which would really serve and inform our work. To be people who heal, we have to be willing to bring our passion to the bedside; our own wounds, our fear, our full selves. Yes, it is the exploration of our own suffering that forms a bridge to the person we’re serving.” Read the full article at www.jenniferblock.org

Books About Grief

The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion
The author honestly describes her confusion, grief, and derangement as a mourner.
Healing After Loss, Meditations For Working Through Grief by M.W. Hickman
Full of thoughtful reflections, wise words and healing affirmations.

The Mourning Handbook by Helen Fitzgerald
Written and organized in an accessible style punctuated by real stories of loss.

The Courage to Grieve by Judy Tatelbaum
Provides the specific help for facing grief fully and growing from the experience.

Journeying East: Conversations on Aging and Dying by Victoria Jean Dimidjian
Buddhist spiritual leaders share wisdom from their challenges of later life.

Learning to Say Goodbye: When a Parent Dies by Eda Le Shan
This book shows how death is perceived when one is “protected” by others.

Part of Me Died Too: Stories of Creative Survival Among Bereaved Children and Teenagers by Virginia Lynn Fry
Presents ten graceful studies of children and teenagers in mourning.

Words to Comfort, Words to Heal Compiled by Juliet Maybey
An anthology for celebrating lives that have passed and offering consolation to those left behind.

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times by Pema Chodron
Buddhist advice for coping with the grim realities of life, including fear, despair, rage and loss.

The Soul in Grief: Life, Death & Transformation by Robert Romanyszyn
The author beckons the reader to do the psychological work grief demands for self-healing.

Companioning the Bereaved: A Soulful Guide for Caregivers by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.
This book advocates a model of “companioning” the bereaved by being totally present.

Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner, Fourth Edition by J. William Worden, PhD
The gold standard of grief therapy handbooks drawn from extensive research and clinical work.
Poems About Grief

**Funeral Blues** by W.H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the
public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton
gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever; I was
wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

**Wild Geese** by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert,
repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you
mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the
rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue
air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and
exciting--
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

**Talking to Grief** by Denise Levertov

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you
like a homeless dog
who comes to the back door
for a crust, for a meatless bone.
I should trust you.

I should coax you
into the house and give you
your own corner,
a worn mat to lie on,
your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been
living under my porch?
You long for your real place to be readied
before winter comes.
You need your name, your collar and tag.
You need the right to warn off intruders,
to consider my house your own
and me your person
and yourself
my own dog.
In Blackwater Woods by Mary Oliver

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars
of light

are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails are bursting
and floating away over
the blue shoulders

of the ponds
and every pond, no matter what its
name is, is

nameless now. Every year everything I have learned

in my lifetime leads back to this: the fires and the black river of loss whose other side

is salvation whose meaning none of us will ever know. To live in this world

you must be able to do three things: to love that which is mortal; to hold it against your bones knowing your life depends upon it; and, when the time comes, to let it go, to let it go.

Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the sham, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Bird Wings by Rumi

Your grief for what you’ve lost lifts a mirror up to where you’re bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead, here’s the joyful face you’ve been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding, The two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birdwings.

The Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house
It is Love that Fashions Us by Daphne Rose Kingham

It is love that fashions us
into the fullness of our being –
not our looks, not our work, not our wants,
not our achievements, not our parents,
not our status, not our dreams.

These are all the fodder and the filler,
the navigating fuels of our lives;
but it is love: who we love, how we love,
why we love, and that we love
which ultimately shapes us.

It is love, before all and after all,
in the beginning and in the end,
that creates us.

Today, remembering this,
let yourself acknowledge and remember
the moments, events, and people
who bring you, even momentarily,
into a true experience of love,

And allow the rest, the inescapable mundanities
of life, like a cloud, to quietly drift away.

Thaw by Martha Courtot

No matter how long the Winter is
Thaw comes
season by season
we learn this too slowly

No matter how long we have spent
wrapped in a frozen season
no matter how deep under the snow
the private grief lies
one day...
thaw comes

we are never prepared for it
and what was once safe for our feet changes
water released from ice and mud and madness
and we open our eyes to
earth-shift, stone-change

everything thawing
thawing like a madness
the earth opening
water running
and all of our secrets
exposed.

Kindness by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white
poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing
inside,
You must know sorrow as the other deepest
thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense
anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters
and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.