

The Collective Inheritance of Grief



"Pain that is not transformed will be *transmitted*" - Richard Rohr

I recently had the honor of attending an African "community grieving ritual" conducted by a spiritual teacher from the Dagara tradition named [Sobonfu Some](#). This ritual is conducted whenever a village has experienced trauma or loss, and in Sobonfu's words, it helps us "regain a lasting sense of connectedness with ourselves and with spirit, and to find a proper place to release our grief about the loss of loved ones, the loss of our dreams and the loss of our connection with the ancestors."

Prior to experiencing this ritual, I didn't realize how much influence our ancestors have on the way we work with grief. In the West, we are taught to grieve quietly and politely; most of our ancestors placed a high value on being strong, stoic and independent, and as a result, they ended up handing down a collective inheritance of grief that was never released or healed in their own lives. By participating in rituals like Sobonfu's and finding deeper meaning in our losses, we have the opportunity to break the cycle of suppression so that we don't bequeath a legacy of unresolved pain to our own descendants.

In African tribal life, the idea of personal independence or self-sufficiency is unimaginable. A village experiences everything as *one*, and grieving is done communally... fully, fearlessly and publicly. In the grief ritual, the villagers cry, wail, dance, drum and sing for two or three days as they discharge their grief onto sacred objects that are part of an altar, which is dismantled at the end of the ceremony and ritually purified and buried.

Suffering without community and grieving without a mystical connection can deprive us of the great lessons pain can offer. If we grieve only within the confines of our three-dimensional understanding of the universe, we risk missing out on true spiritual healing and the unity that binds us to our collective responsibility to build communities that know how to heal. Our pain should not be denied, dismissed or defeated. It must be lovingly cared for and honored as a sacred messenger.

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