



grief and
recreation

a guidebook
by gabes torres

PART ONE

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notes on belonging

abolition + mental health

anti-colonial therapeutic approaches
to racial & migration trauma
(*a community syllabus*)

seasonal depression: a survival guide

movement

PART I

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PART II

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i. author's intentions

- I choose to create a guidebook that assists us in **making friends with grief**
- With you, I choose to **revere the sacred moments when grief and creation embrace**
- I choose to audaciously participate in a **rowdy and radiant renaissance**, where artists emerge from abandoned, banned, and marginal places to disrupt the oppressive status quo through play and expression
- I co-build with you: **sanctuaries, playgrounds, and gardens for grief**— places where grief is honored and witnessed in its own time and pace
- I embolden you to **surrender** and **give your all** to your creations and divinely transmitted visions — **not** out of capitalist impulse or greed
- I accompany you in **fostering a deep compassion for yourself** in moving through grief and recreation
- I intend to believe in what's possible

ii. your intentions

With the space below, write down what you hope and intend to learn, unlearn, and (co-)create with this guide.

Consider:

What/who are you intending to let go?

What/who are you calling in?

How do you want to transform your relationship
with grief and loss?

How do you want to transform your relationship
with beauty and creativity?

Music suggestions before you begin or in the background:

'Life Doesn't Frighten Me' - Maya Angelou
Cathartic Release

ii. your intentions

Music suggestions before you begin or in the background:

'Selfish Art' - Noah Gunderson

'I'm Blue' - Kimmortal

All suggested songs on
this guidebook are found [on this Spotify playlist.](#)

iii. invitation to support human rights activists

Here in the global South, I have been co-creating grassroots support systems for human rights defenders, activists, and justice-oriented artists and storytellers. They are doing invaluable and often unpaid and dangerous work to protect and organize with the most vulnerable communities and most endangered ecosystems in the world.

It is my mission to offer different types of support for them, especially in processing the trauma and suffering they've been exposed to and absorbed. The need to address and avoid compassion fatigue and burnout is high.

The need for care is high.

My hope is to raise at least \$2,000 for a few retreats lined up for human rights defenders and refugees in the upcoming months.

I ask that in exchange for your free access to this resource, you'd donate to our efforts. I especially urge those of you who are white or have a close proximity to power in the contexts of class and ability.

If a range is helpful: This resource would cost at least \$100 USD with the extent of labor and research it took to complete it.

Donation platforms (Please add note: 'Grief guide')

Venmo & CashApp handles: @gabestorres

PayPal

nayyirah waheed:

“expect sadness

like

you expect rain.

both,

cleanse you.”

iii. differences between grief & trauma

People have asked me about the difference between grief and **trauma**, just enough to feel the need to write about it. Please note that this approach is one of many. Like other models, it is not the standard one. May it only invite more discourse and self-understanding. **Here we go:**

Trauma is the ongoing *response* to an event of injury, harm, and abuse. It is not the event itself, but the recurring coping strategies and survival mechanisms that followed after the event. It is the way our body fights, flees, freezes, or fawns to avoid past injury or defeat past danger.

What gets complicated is if the traumatic response becomes *a core part* of one's identity, to the point where **trauma** hijacks one's personal agency and their ability to explore more options other than avoiding or defeating the threat and danger, even in times when the threat and danger are no longer there.

In a way, **trauma** convinces us that past harm is still happening or is about to happen again. Therefore, the body is convinced that it needs to respond similarly as before: to fight or escape threat and danger whether or not they are there. This means there is a repetitive nature to **trauma**, and it dissociates us from the present moment.

While there is a repetitive, if not stagnant nature to **trauma**, grief can be more dynamic than that.

iii. differences between grief & trauma

Grief can be repetitive at times, too. But while **trauma halts**, **grief regenerates**.

While **trauma** can dissociate us from the present time, **grief demands presence**.

Grief demands to be known in the weight of memory — the memories of who and what we lost — of who and what was missing in our lives — of who and what was taken away from us.

Trauma is worth processing, especially when the nature of the injury was unjust and violent.

Trauma responds to violence that shouldn't have to happen in the first place. **Trauma** is an indication that the unnatural happened, and that oppressive contexts and harmful situations are normalized.

Grief, on the other hand, responds to phenomena that are usually natural to life: loss, endings, and death.

This doesn't dismiss the fact that the causes of **grief** can be systemically and societally wrong as well, such as the **grief** from losing one's land and culture because of colonialism.

iii. differences between grief & trauma

Of course, **grief** can be a result of systemic oppression, but **grief** mustn't always be pathologized nor categorized as abnormal.

Endings and death happen all around us.
It happens and is necessary in the natural world.

But the natural reality of losses and decay shouldn't be the excuse to justify losses and deaths caused by exploitation, climate catastrophe, and state violence.

It can be tricky to navigate the differences between **grief** and **trauma** these days because of the countless unnatural and violent deaths caused by systemic oppression. But it's important for us to know the difference, so we can avoid bypassing the systemic and violent causes of loss and death that shouldn't have to happen at all.

Reflection Questions:

How do we reshape our relationship with and language around **grief** in light of societal and systemic oppression?

How have dominant Western and patriarchal ideas shaped your ideas on **grief**? Is there an automatic tendency to always fix, downplay, or ignore it?

Makoto Fujimura:
“Artists are the
stewards of the
old earth, but the
imaginative conduit
of the New.”

Kahlil Gibran:
“Out of suffering
have emerged the
strongest souls;
the most massive
characters are
seared with scars.”

music to move through:

‘Lost One (Live)’ - Jazmin Sullivan [*explicit*]

[YouTube](#)

[*lyrics in video description*]

[Spotify](#)

‘Day After Tomorrow’ - Phoebe Bridgers

[YouTube](#)

[Spotify](#)

‘Nobody Sees Me Like You Do’ - Japanese Breakfast

[YouTube](#)

[Spotify](#)

‘You’re Gonna Live Forever In Me’ - John Mayer

[YouTube](#)

[*lyrics in video description*]

[Spotify](#)

‘United in Grief’ - Kendrick Lamar [*explicit*]

[YouTube](#)

[Spotify](#)

‘I Gotta Find Peace of Mind’ - Ms. Lauryn Hill

[YouTube](#)

[Spotify](#)

**All suggested songs on
this guidebook are found [on this Spotify playlist.](#)**

conversations to muse over:

Ocean Vuong's Brief But Spectacular Take
on grief and language

Processing Grief Through Art
Chrystal Seawood | TEDxBoston

"I Hope This Grief Stays With Me" -
Andrew Garfield Celebrates His Mom

iv. the companionship: grief & recreation

There are known to be 5 stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

What if we added another stage and call it recreation?

Another distinction between trauma and grief:
While trauma **doubts** the security of its surroundings, grief **trusts** you. It trusts your capacity to feel its depth and heavy force.

Grief demands presence, because it knows you have what it takes to be present with the ache, the longing, and the massive knot you feel in your stomach as soon as you wake up in the morning.

Grief demands presence, and presence is needed in creation. Grief can compel us to create.

However, at times when I'm grieving, the internal knot can feel more like a boulder that rests on my stomach. Its weight keeps me from getting up in the morning— let alone do things.

If you resonate, you might even wonder, how on earth would we create anything when the burden of grief feels too invasive and heavy?

iv. the companionship: grief & recreation

There will be moments (even days or months) when all you need to do with grief is to simply feel it.

There will be times when it is okay (even necessary) to do nothing more than move through the pain and cry it all out. Pound the table. Lay on the floor in fetal position for hours. Crumple paper. Listen to sad songs. Sing to sad songs.

Feel and release— that's it.

If it's uncomfortable to do nothing more than feel and release, remember that we've internalized this capitalist principle in different ways:

To capitalism, it's unacceptable to access our emotions, because we won't be as efficient machines in the system.

We are conditioned to constantly produce and have tangible outcomes. And so, to feel uncomfortable might actually be a good sign that you've reached a level of vulnerability that divests capitalism.

With that, remember that *to allow yourself to feel* is a powerful and revolutionary act of creation. Our tears came from a force within us, ready to be known and to grow.

This is the dynamic part of grieving, where we can oscillate between stages of being present with emotions and nurturing our creativity and creations.

iv. the companionship: grief & recreation

Remember: Production is different from creation.

We produce for survival.

We create for the sake of life and bliss.

Production is in service to institutions
without or with little personal agency.

Creation is in service to oneself with creative autonomy.

Sherri Taylor once talked about sacred discipline. It is the type of discipline that is not punitive nor authoritarian, but a choice to diligently become “a disciple to oneself”— being true to one’s body and spirit through an energized, life-giving dedication unto one’s work and craft.

The companionship of grief and recreation takes us a step further from being a disciple to oneself, and towards becoming a disciple to our Lost One. *We may also use the word ‘steward,’ if the previous word carries strong religious associations.*

Our creations can be a living devotion to our Lost One:

We remember them. We honor them.

We let our hearts break for how much we miss them.

Breathe. Grief asks for your presence.

In the post from which this guidebook originated, Martín Prechtel said that **“Grief is praise, because it is the natural way love honors what it misses.”**

Breathe.

*If you're open to it or are able,
please read the following while playing this tune on repeat
in the background. You can read out loud or
have a loved one read it to you*

Feel free to add or revise the invocation:

*May the wound from my Lost One's absence call forth:
the colors and outline,
the script and storyline,
the poetic and lyrical verses,
the major and minor chords,
the life-enhancing prose,
the revolutionary imagination,
and the most loving messages and visions
for a better world
and for a deeper, more peaceful breath within me.*

*May my grief be a channel of ever-yielding love,
reaching my Lost One*

*My Lost One (or you may state their name or essence),
my grief is praise
for how much I miss you
for how much you mean to me
for how much you taught me how to love*

Thank you

Michelle Phillips:

“I am imminently grateful for the impermanence of horrifically shining moments.

They never stay — coming in and out of focus. What else can die and be reborn inside the death of you?

I am here for my falling apart and my coming back together — a little more me each time, and for who I am as I am no longer.”

—from ‘Protracted Grief and the Fleshiness of Gratitude’

end of part i

May your grief—your tears, your cries, your release
— alchemize you by adorning your creations.

Whatever you make doesn't have to be tidy for
now. It doesn't have to rhyme, resonate, or
make sense at this time.

Welcome the chaos and dissonance.
For now, let it gestate and regenerate.

I bless you and your beloved medium,
and I'll see you again soon for part ii.

cool down:

Meditation: Energy Cleanse: Sacred Waters

If you benefited from this resource,
please donate to our grassroots efforts in
supporting and providing care for
human rights defenders, activists, and
justice-oriented artists in the global South.

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