



# YOGA AND GRIEF

A compassionate journey  
toward healing

**BY GLORIA DRAYER AND KATHLEEN  
DOHERTY**

Balboa Press, \$9.99 print, \$3.99 ebook

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INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR GLORIA DRAYER

## 'GRIEF IS HUGE,' BUT YOGA PROVIDES A COMPASSIONATE WAY

***Yoga and Grief***, the new book from Kripalu yoga instructor Gloria Drayer, reveals how the body-mind-spirit connection unleashes the power to heal from loss. Read about how her own journey strengthened her practice, what she learned from leading her workshops and why she believes we draw strength from community and ritual.

Gloria Drayer is available for interviews on the topics of:

- > Yoga techniques for the grieving
- > Rituals for saying goodbye
- > Yoga and breath work for caregivers
- > Transformational grief stories
- > The vital purpose of bodywork for emotional healing
- > International healing trips and retreats
- > The role of chanting in healing grief
- > Using mindfulness meditation and mindful living as you are grieving
- > Yoga techniques in military settings for post-traumatic stress
- > Yoga for children and teens who are grieving

***Yoga and Grief*** is available from Balboa Press in print (\$9.99) and Kindle editions (\$3.99), as well as Amazon, bn.com (Nook edition is \$3.49) and Books-A-Million.



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## ***What do you know about grief that you didn't know before you wrote the book?***

Grief is huge. Now, I better understand the breadth of it. The universality of loss. It's not just the death of a child, parent, husband, wife, sibling, friend or even a pet. It's the loss of a job, loss of place or relocation, illness or disease, physical changes through the passages of life, aging. It's the heartbreaking end to a relationship, a divorce. It's all of it.

The layers of loss are many. Not one of us escapes it.

## ***It's been eight years since you lost your mother, yet your passion for providing others with a compassionate, calm and clear-eyed journey through loss seems stronger than ever. What has kept you going with this?***

Because of how yoga continues to support me in my everyday life. Yoga sets the tone for my day. It is inward, calming and grounding for me.

It allows me to carry my body throughout the day with awareness. I am more mindful in my words and actions.

I view my yoga practice as an act of kindness to my body each day.

## ***It sounds like this grief experience strengthened your practice to be part of you in a more vital way.***

Undoubtedly. I know that whether I continue to live another year or forty years there will surely be more grief that comes into my life. "We are born and we die," I heard author and grief expert David Kessler say in a workshop.

## ***Can suffering be transformed? How have you seen it transformed in the communities in which you work with Yoga and Grief? How have you been transformed?***

Absolutely. I have seen it in the many faces at my workshops, and I believe I would call it hope. They emerge with the hope that their lives will move forward and the suffering will end.

The grief will not end so much as how we face it will change it. Louise L. Hay says, "Grief is inevitable, suffering is optional."

In my own transformation, it was the hope. I use yoga, breath work and rituals to not feel so heavy in the pain of grief.

This book can help people do more than cope. It can transform with compassion.

## ***What is at the core of your approach?***

Simplicity. Most people I know live very busy lives. The postures and other modalities are geared toward keeping it simple.

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***Tell me about the body-mind-spirit connection, about how the postures, the breath work, even the act of vocalization during chanting, changes emotional energy as it is changing physical energy.***

The mind, body and spirit connection is activated when we slow down. The postures are movements, and movement changes how we feel. Change your breath, and you can change how you feel. More and more studies are documenting this.

Chanting has similar effects. When you chant, you usually take in more breath. The sounds and tones themselves can change the vibration of our feelings.

***But it's more than that, isn't it? Would you say its compassion? Calm? Courage?***

Compassion for sure, giving ourselves permission to be sad or depressed. Compassionate understanding softens the heart and lets it heal.

Remaining calm in the presence of sorrow awakens hope, and courage. The courage to be with what is at any given moment.

***How did you choose the yoga postures you chose?***

My teacher Sonia Nelson helped me with this. From my own personal experience, I needed a more gentle approach in my practice as I was grieving. I didn't have the energy for a demanding practice. For me it seemed more compassionate and doable when I slowed down the movements. Naturally that slows down the breathing, which aids in being present.

I know when we are grieving that is not always easy and we may want to move away from the pain. I wanted these postures to be gentle enough so everyone and every body could do them or at least some of them. Most of us are working with limitations of some kind in our bodies. Everyone can find something in this book that will work for them.

***How did you select the breath work exercises you chose, and how important is breath work?***

Coming back to the basics, keeping it simple. They are simple yet powerful in their simplicity.

Each technique offers different benefits. For example, if you can't sleep, you would do a relaxing breathing technique; if you need more energy, another.

***At Yoga Simple and Sacred, with your very popular Full Moon Yoga and Summer/Winter Solstice Yoga, you have always brought a reverence for ritual. Explain the healing aspects of ritual for those we love who are dying. How do we find rituals that work for us?***

Ritual is a way of honoring someone I love. I celebrate that person's life and what his or her life added to mine.

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To find a ritual that works for an individual, I recommend first drawing from your own faith or belief system. If you don't have a particular belief system, we suggest some in the book. What is most important is that it feels right to you. The ritual could be one you design yourself. Lighting a candle in memory of someone is a ritual.

***In the introduction of the book, you encourage people to seek a new balance between the external processes that fight against your grief process and the internal sense of what you need to grieve. You say our culture is at odds with the grief process, or at the minimum, does not afford the space, time and stillness to allow for us to discovery that in our own way. Would you speak to that?***

When I was in India and saw cremations, a local told me the family takes 15 days to be with their grief, to be around family, and have support from their community to take care of their daily needs.

This seemed so sane to me – not that you are going to get over the grief in 15 days but to feel and be with the grief. Feel your pain. Don't go back to work the next day. This does not allow for the process of grief to be felt.

***You were in the role of caregiver with your sisters and brothers. It's a physically demanding role, at the same time you are facing the emotional loss. I imagine your message is resonating with many who have been thrust into the role of being brave and light while physically exhausted and facing the loss of an emotional anchor, in that loved one. Tell me about the kind of response you are getting from caregivers who have experienced your workshop or this book.***

It is true what you say, for most, if not all of us, going through grief, but especially true for caregivers.

The practices in the book helps aids in having the physically and emotional energy to move forward. If one is taking care of themselves in a loving and compassionate way, which the practices in this book offer; it will only spill into those who are around us. Yes, some days are going to be harder than others, but working from this book you have tools to use.

***Your workshops must be very powerful experiences. Tell us more about them.***

From the beginning of the workshop to the end, bodies and hearts change, maybe not forever, but for a time. Most tell me the shift was the hope or peace that they felt.

Going full-heartedly into teaching these workshops opened me up to realizing the high volume of pain we have from loss and grief. We all are trying to heal, want to heal and will try any modalities to experience less suffering.



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***This journey you have been on has brought you into other people's stories of transformation. It must be magnificent to bear witness to the little shifts of energy people experience. What is that like?***

The word grace comes to mind.

Once I started to teach yoga I knew it was my Dharma, my life's work. So it brings me joy to see yoga touch their lives.

## ***What is your greatest hope for this book?***

That it may help people as they go through their journey from grief to healing. That they share the amazing benefits of what this book has to offer.

That people understand the benefits of yoga for emotional and spiritual healing. That's not the concept that most Westerners have of yoga. It is so much more than the postures themselves. The true essence of yoga for me is that mind, body and spirit connection.

How can we be present if the mind and body is not? With yoga, sometimes it just happens, you can't even explain it. You just know the connection is being made and there is a sense of peace and acceptance for what is.

*With every breath I take today, I vow to be awake; and with every step I take, I vow to take with a grateful heart – so that I may see with the eyes of love into the hearts of all I meet, to ease their burden when I can and teach them with a smile of peace.*

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