

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Greenspan, M. (2003). *Healing through the dark emotions: The wisdom of grief, fear, and despair*. Boston, MA: Shambhala. ISBN 1-57062-877-7. 314 pages.

Reviewed by: Debbie Grove, Campus Alberta Applied Psychology

Healing through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair delivers a stimulating and refreshing narrative about the role of emotions in daily living. Uncovering the transformative power of emotion to heal, change, and renew life, the author draws on personal stories, her work with clients, global events, and theory. Practical techniques specific to working with grief, fear, and despair are offered. The book invites readers to view their own worlds from a variety of perspectives. Miriam Greenspan, a psychotherapist, writer, and speaker, has an international reputation for her contributions to the psychology and psychotherapy of women.

The book is divided into four sections. Part One of the book sets the stage with an exploration of how emotions are typically filtered through cultural, familial, societal, religious, historical, and gendered lenses. This section describes five common ways of coping with emotion, and the author uses life stories to exemplify the consequences when emotions are ignored.

The second part of the book presents a well-organized discussion specific to grief, fear, and despair with an in-depth description of each emotion, some typical coping mechanisms, helpful skills, and seven exercises related to each emotion. The author masterfully weaves a tapestry of philosophy, both Eastern and Western, development across the life span, theory, practice, and cultural influences to illuminate the many dimensions of emotion. Real-life vignettes situate these dimensions within meaningful contexts and healing processes are illustrated.

Part Three extends the conversation beyond the self, family, and local communities to historical, cultural, and environmental influences that affect all of us at different levels of consciousness. A poignant depiction of relational theory, transpersonal psychology, and gender development imparts a powerful message about the creation and healing of emotional pain.

The fourth and final part of the book provides 33 exercises that, together, are intended as both a self-help guide for readers and a facilitation guide for therapists working with client emotions. Some of the exercises are geared to individual work while others also apply to group work. Strategies range from intentional focus and meditation to physical activities such as drawing, writing, and movement. This section highlights how any number of exercises can combine to create personally meaningful approaches to healing and change.

I found the text moving, educational, and engaging on many levels, akin to a spiritual journey. Entering this dialogue about emotional alchemy is a beneficial and necessary read for anyone looking to dispel socially constructed myths about emotion. This candid discussion about emotion is an overdue exploration of its

healing elements. Practitioners and educators will find this book helpful for personal self-development as well as their work in the field. Lastly, it is a useful resource for professional mental health workers and graduate students interested in understanding and working with emotions.