

# UNATTENDED SORROW

(Stephen Levine)

Below are a few poignant quotes taken from the Book Unattended Sorrow by Stephen Levine

REVIEW / REFLECT – THEN DIALOGUE WITH SOMEONE (Or Journal)

## Introduction

“The long-range impact of unresolved sorrow flows along a hidden spectrum. At one end are the deaths and innumerable unacknowledged losses that cause the scarring and callusing that numb our surface: they are the obstacles to the heart. Spanning these long-unattended sorrows, which gradually close us down, are the slowly accumulating burdens of disappointment and disillusionment, the loss of trust and confidence that follows the increasingly less satisfactory arch of our lives – until finally, at the far end of the spectrum we are so mired in lost hope that we are barely able to find ourselves.”

**Pg. 2**

## Chapter 1

“Nothing is more natural than grief, no emotion more common to our daily experience. It’s an innate response to loss in a world where everything is impermanent.” **Pg. 3**

“For many people, it is not only the loss of a loved one through death that causes them to lose confidence in what lies ahead but a long-fading trust in life itself; the residue of rejections and abandonments; of the humiliations of illness, old age, and death; of the loss of certainty; the disillusionment of expectations. It’s the reservoir of lost promise, of lost faith, and of the gradually decreasing appreciation for life.” **Pg. 6**

## **Chapter 2**

“LOSS IS THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING WE WERE ONCE ATTACHED TO. Grief is the rope burns left behind, when that which is held is pulled beyond our grasp. I know very few people who are not grieving at some level. Feelings of loss don’t go away; they go deeper. When we lose or never exercise what we need or love, we call the hard contraction in the mind and body “suffering.” This is our unattended sorrow.

I’m speaking not only of unexpected loss but the usual, everyday loss: the loss of dignity due to racial and religious prejudice, or the multitude of finely wrought cultural humiliations suffered by women, the aged, children, the infirm, and the less than “beautiful.” **Pg. 9**

## **Chapter 5**

“REPEATED LOSS ACCUMULATES IN THE RESERVOIR OF SORROW. It is the repository of all we have ever lost, all that died despite our love, all we ever hoped to be, all the disappointment and despair buried over a lifetime. Those places within ourselves that have been dug away by loss, those parts lost, worn away, and excavated by a gradually increasing helplessness and apathy, slowly begin to fill with sorrow.

Unattended sorrow is a stone stuck in the throat from “swallowing our grief,” a boulder rolled into the entrance to the heart against our resurrection. It is a great wounding of hope. We are afloat in unattended sorrow, our head sometimes barely above the surface, struggling against the ever-changing undertow, at times from the long-deferred pain surrounding the death of a loved one, at other moments nearly pulled below the surface by our long absence from life.

It is said that in every loss there is an opportunity to uncover and heal the losses of a lifetime. The deeper the loss, the deeper the opportunity for healing. By opening to the little losses and the little deaths and the small sorrows, we make room for the greater griefs and the bigger losses, as we directly approach our life. The loose ends of grief float, a tangled web of Sargasso on the reservoir of sorrow.” **Pg. 27-28**

“The earth is sodden with grief, and we are picnicking on the slippery banks of loss. Most incredibly, even in our most abject grieving, not a single state of mind is new. Guilt, fear, anger, remorse, bewilderment, a sense of abandonment, confusion – none of it is new, and certainly not the isolation we have been all too familiar with for most of our lives. This isolation is the odd legacy of haphazard social individuation, of trying on all the masks of “a valued someone” and finding that most chafe, of losing our place in an interconnected universe, of wishing to come in from the cold.” **Pg. 29**