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Bridging Inner and Outer Worlds

A Psychodynamic Approach to Meaningful Mourning

HANNEKE MUTHERT

Meaningful Mourning: An Introduction

Every summer Geertje (48) has a very difficult time; she feels physically so listless, numb and literally heavy that she can accomplish very little. For weeks she lies in bed and hardly sees anyone. Then, after a slow recovery, she forgets what she has gone through until Spring comes into view again. People around Geertje insist on her seeing a general practitioner or psychologist or at least trying medication. She did try antidepressants once, but being convinced that she is not depressed, she is against medication. A friend who keeps an eye on Geertje, told her that it struck her that after another "heavy" period, Geertje had "survived June again". The word "survival" touches Geertje. Gradually she has come to realize that her physical reactions are related to the loss of her stillborn baby after 32 weeks of pregnancy, now more than 20 years ago. "Then I could not even think about it," she says. "Only now, after all these years, I can be sad in a safe environment." Taking the advice of a friend, she contacted a spiritual caretaker. During one of her conversations with this professional about the loss of her child, Geertje was overwhelmed with emotions when she told her counsellor about a melody that recently had sprung to her mind and kept singing in her head. As she hummed it, the spiritual caretaker recognized a liturgical song in the melody about a God who sees people and takes care of them before they are born (Oosterhuis and

Keywords: mourning, religious meaning, modes of being, spiritual care

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> Oomen 1996).[1] That image moves Geertje. The situation in which she gave birth to her stillborn child was such that she had to be strong. Her family members treated her very harshly and did not show compassion. In their view, there should have been no baby in the first place. Therefore, Geertje felt extremely lonely and thrown back on herself. But this song tells a different story ...[2]

The consoling effect of the religious meaning of the song that Geertje carries in her head, a meaning that thus far she had been unaware of, in addition to the social support she now receives, helps Geertje to look differently at the child she lost more than twenty years ago. What exactly makes a religious interpretation of what happened to her and her baby back then so crucial to her now? Why was this interpretation not possible before? These are the kind of questions that interest me as a psychologist of religion with a specialization in spiritual care. My research interests concern the psychological dimensions of meaning-making processes in mourning and the role that religion may play in such processes.

Being confronted with loss and having to come to terms with that is an unavoidable part of life. I therefore consider mourning over one's losses in life a normal process. In this chapter I focus on bereavement after death in particular but this theory is applicable to a broad range of losses. Mourning basically entails learning how to live with loss both in a practical way in one's everyday life, but also learning how to integrate the experience of loss in a meaningful way in one's life story (Muthert 2007). Mourning can sometimes be quite complicated, however, to the extent of people getting stuck in the process. Therefore, we need a theoretical framework that addresses the question of how individuals mourn, in order to enhance our understanding of the development of individual psychological abilities and limitations in relation to coping with loss.

In this chapter, I suggest to combine so-called constructional models of mourning (Attig 2010, 2001; Neimeyer et al. 2011), with object relational theory (Ogden 2000, 2005; Melzer 2008) to develop a more adequate theoretical framework and model to work with in counselling. The first perspective emphasizes an active construction of reality; the second adds the impact of important attachment relationships during the construction of these representations of reality. My main argument is that intra-psychic models to understand mourning or effectively

1. Dutch verse: "Omdat Gij het zijt, groter dan ons hart, die mij hebt gezien, eer ik werd geboren." See Psalms 139.15-16.
2. This is a depersonalized vignette discussed at expert meetings of senior spiritual carers (including the author), "Train the trainer, spiritual autobiography" in 2016–2017.

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support mourning people do not suffice. Not only may individuals with different temperaments respond very differently to "similar" losses, but depending on one's specific personal situation and on the cultural context in which one is embedded the impact of particular kinds of loss can vary greatly. This is illustrated in the vignette above; now that her social circumstances have improved, Geertje's mourning process has also changed and she is now able to find consolation in the songs from the religious community that she belongs to. Her case study illustrates that the socio-cultural context that people live in and relate to always plays a role in mourning. Therefore, building on several scholars in the field of psychodynamic psychology, the point I want to make in this chapter is that how people relate psychologically not only to the object of mourning but also to their environment in the event of loss deserves more attention both in the academic study of mourning processes and in effective counselling. Moreover, the dimension of meaning-making, including religious meaning-making should be taken into account (Winnicott 1969; Mooij 2002; Muthert and Schaap-Jonker 2015). In current theorization and counselling, psychological and social theories about mourning often remain unconnected. Whereas most psychologists tend to focus on intra-personal processes, I would argue that insights into how different socio-cultural circumstances inform the sources that people draw on to make sense of loss in their lives (Leader 2008) are at least as important.

By explicitly linking an intra-psychic model to the social-cultural context, this chapter aims to clarify the relationship between people's inner and outer worlds in the context of mourning. On a theoretical level I will connect psychological and social aspects of mourning by concentrating on religious meaning that can be experienced in what Winnicott has coined "the space in between" (cf. Winnicott 1971; Bion 1965, 1970). My argument also ties in with current counselling literature and political care policies, in which there is a growing interest in spiritual meaning making when dealing with recovery, palliative care, coping and prevention (Boevink 2017; Leget et al. 2010; Huber et al. 2016; ZonMw 2016). As in theorization, in literature on counselling and health policies a person's ability to adapt is often stressed without taken into account changeable contextual factors. To remedy this one-sidedness I suggest that we explore the meaning of grief from a psychological perspective that explicitly includes both people's inner and outer worlds.

Besides theory, counselling is therefore an important dimension in my research. The analysis of case studies of people's mourning processes enhances our insights into how people attribute meaning to their grief, as well as shedding light on effective and less effective counselling. My specific focus in studying counselling practices concerns the field of

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spiritual care. Theorization and practical interventions in spiritual care concentrate on meaning-making processes. For my own research, this means that I focus on case studies in which mourners get stuck in the process of making sense of their loss and have turned to a professional spiritual caregiver for help. The underlying idea is, however, that studying case studies of problematic grieving can also help to get a clearer picture of mourning processes that do not require professional support.

Outline

In what follows, I will address the question of how a psychodynamic vision of mourning that is based on different modes of being can contribute to a better understanding of variations in mourning behaviour and (religious) meaning-making in everyday life. I will do so by examining first of all which psychodynamic concepts underlie the current psychological mourning models and how these concepts relate to (religious) meaning-making. I will explore where these mourning models offer room for meaning-making processes and what additional psychodynamic knowledge is needed. Next, I will present Thomas Ogden's theory on different modes of being to explain how a diversity of responses to loss can be understood by using his model. Finally, I will address the relationships between intra-psychic grief capacities and social grief reactions. I will link Ogden's model to the theory of his colleague psychoanalyst Darian Leader. In doing so, the various ways in which relationships between the psychological inner world and the social outer world of a grieving person can take shape will come into view, as well as the role of meaning-making in these relationships. Although religion potentially fits in well with all the three modes of being, a good match is not obvious in all cases. In the concluding section of the chapter I will reflect on how the theoretical framework I suggest can be put into practice and what its limitations are. Throughout the chapter, Geertje's case study will be used to illustrate my argument.

Core concepts Concerning Meaning in Mourning Theories

According to object relational scholars, mourning is a fundamental relational capacity (Ogden 1989, 2000, 2005; Bion 1962a, 1962b, 1965, 1967, 1970; Melzer 2008). This means that the so-called "subject-object relation" is at the heart and not the mourning person or "subject" as

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such, nor the lost "object". The popularity of this approach is reflected in current mourning theories (Attig 2010; Neimeyer 2001; Neimeyer et al. 2011). Whereas earlier models understood mourning predominantly in terms of *decathexis*, that is, the loosening of the ties between the mourning subject and the deceased, nowadays the idea of *renewal of this particular relation* dominates.

In the Freudian line of thinking about *decathexis* (Freud 1917), mourning is a complex and exhausting activity. It includes retrieving the libidinal investments that the ego or mourning person put into the object that is now lost. To put it simply: growth demands investing energy into other persons, ideas and activities. By doing so, one increases room for reality at the expense of purely egotistical wishes and desires. If people, ideas, activities or expectations that are "charged with energy" die, disappear or become less important, one needs to withdraw this energy and reinvest it elsewhere. This fundamental idea of loosening ties with the lost object is reflected in various phase-based mourning models. As a consequence, proper mourning behaviour is considered to consist of withdrawing the investment correctly,[3] ultimately resulting in acceptance.[4] In the former century when these models dominated, the emphasis was on literally creating distance: children were therefore often kept away from dead people and from funerals,[5] for instance, and stillborn children were directly separated from their parents in order to prevent the development of attachment relationships. Looking at Geertje's experience from this perspective, we can observe that for a long period in her life "good" mourning activity was missing. No distance was created at all, and the energy invested in her baby was completely blocked and therefore not available for reinvestment. Years later, the mourning process apparently changed, but still there seemed to be no acceptance.

Leaving behind the *decathexis* perspective, we nowadays look at mourning from the opposite position: the idea of "continuing bonds" (Klass et al. 1996; Hagman 2001). In this perspective, continuation of the relation between the bereft subject and the object lost by transforming it in a specific way becomes central in the mourning activity. Since the lost object is no longer physically present, effective mourning is placed in

3. As an example of this proper behaviour people used Kübler-Ross's phases of moving from denial and isolation to anger and eventually sadness (Kübler-Ross 1969).

4. For critical reflections on the various phases and task based mourning models, see Neimeyer (2001), Neimeyer et al. (2011), De Mönnink (2017) and Muthert (2007: 47–50).

5. Many 50–60- or 70-year-old carers and volunteers appoint this practice when they recall the grieving habits of their youth at workshops on loss and longing for (mental) health workers (Muthert et al. 2008).

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the light of what supports the mourning subject to redesign the relationship with whom was lost. As a consequence, meaning-making comes into the picture by focusing on the significance of the lost to the subject and how this significance can somehow be preserved in a different form. In this approach, the construction of personal stories are put centre stage. Taking this perspective, it becomes clear that no two concrete processes of mourning are ever the same. This is precisely why transformation and meaning-making are the core concepts in today's more widely used constructionist mourning models.

Relearning the World

One of these models is the *relearning the world* model by the philosopher Thomas Attig (2001, 2010). Attig assumes that every loss causes chaos and that this chaos is hard to endure. To gain insight into people's efforts to control this chaos, Attig distinguishes three processes that mutually influence each other. First, people who experience chaos search for meaning in their specific situation. Secondly, they seek recognition from others for their unique story. Finally, there is the question of more or less acknowledging this experience or event as a loss. All three processes together lead to providing "an answer" to what a specific loss means for a certain person in their specific context (Muthert 2012: 61–69).

Such "answers" are not merely cognitive, but are emotional, physical, cognitive/intellectual, spiritual, social, behavioural and psychological. Therefore, a holistic approach is required to grasp the mourning process. Precisely because the whole person is involved in responding to loss, this individual activity is central to the *relearning the world* model. What I find particularly helpful in Attig's model is that he emphasizes the importance of the context of the mourning person by identifying four interconnected worlds; the physical world delimits which answers are possible. The social world indicates which of these answers are more or less accepted in a specific environment. The world of the self provides insight into which answers the mourner finds easy or more difficult to digest. The world of the person or object lost pertain to answers that are or should be abandoned. Finally, this whole procedure of "answering" is conceived of as a dynamic and continuous process without a necessary end. Attig's approach acknowledges that depending on the circumstances, responses to loss can change over and over again, whereby personal vulnerabilities and contextual options define the limits and inform one's ever evolving biography (Muthert 2007).

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For an illustration of such a dynamic process we return to Geertje's story. In retrospect, we could describe Geertje's different responses to the loss of her baby as somewhat speculative: "They said the baby should not be there, so it did not happen", "I'm absent for a while and when I return, I do not look back", "I survived the month of June but ... my baby did not"', "I believe God saw me and my baby back then and there", "God and people do see me. Meanwhile the grief over my lost child is still there as well as the tragedy of what happened all those years."

Attig's model lists many factors that can be translated into useful recommendations in counselling (Muthert et al. 2008). However, within this framework the extent to which a loss affects a person is not always visible from the outside. To remedy this, I consider adding De Mönnink's (2001) various layers of experience to the model as valuable. In De Mönnink's view, people experience loss on different levels; on the level the facts, on the level of meaning and on what he calls the level of "existential design". The latter combines having a sense of self-control, of self-worth, of justice and of hope for the future. As I have argued elsewhere, in my view a sense of belonging should be added to this existential design (Muthert 2012: 63). Distinguishing these different layers alerts mourning researchers and counsellors to the fact that people's stories about loss consist of different levels and that all these levels should be listened to in order to understand their personal mourning processes.

Summing up, current theorists on mourning criticize older mourning models for the strong normative link they suggest between "good" mourning and the extent to which one should actually let go of the mourned object over time. It is now acknowledged that in fact, mourning is a much more complex activity than the idea of having to "let go" suggests. New constructionist mourning models see the transformation of the relationship of the mourner with the lost as the core task, in which the importance of personal meaning-making is emphatically emphasized.

I would argue, however, that even the constructionist models cannot adequately explain the big variety in grief reactions that can be observed in people that mourn; people show an enormous creativity in formulating answers, even in mentally very difficult circumstances (Muthert 2012, 2007). How to assess the value and efficacy of these answers to handle loss does not become directly apparent in Attig's model. More specifically problematic in my view is that in Attig's *relearning the world model* religious "answers" do not differ substantially from other kinds of "answers". Nor does it become clear which factors influence the dynamics between different "answers" in the story of one and the same person. In the next section, I will therefore demonstrate that psychodynamic mourning concepts have a greater potential to explain differences in

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intra- and interpersonal dynamics of formulating "answers" to experiences of loss.

Different Modes of Being in Relation to Meaning-Making

The object relational school in psychology focuses on relations between subject and object. Definitions of what constitutes a human subject vary. Following Verhaeghe, I understand human identity as the continuous dynamic between the body and other, social dimensions of the self (Verhaeghe 2012). The "I" in this conception is no fixed entity. Human identity moves between autonomy and identification, that is, the wish to be connected to others, to belong to a group. This movement between the desire to be independent and the desire to be embedded in meaningful relationships with others is necessarily characterized by tensions. From a psychodynamic point of view one can state that the human subject is that field of tension (Thys 2018: 100). This implies that relations between subjects are by definition also dynamic.

Differences between various kinds of relationships that people engage in can be explained by looking at three overarching psychological organizational structures. Each structure defines a subject's psychological capacities. These capacities, also called functions, influence concrete subject-object relations. This refers, for example, to Hanneke Schaap's discussion about "mentalizing" elsewhere in this volume. If a person cannot mentalize, they cannot imagine what their behaviour means to others. This hinders their developing relationships to others. Each organizational structure has also its own defence mechanisms. For example, if sensory impressions dominate, reactions are quite different then when extensive reflection dominates. Other relevant characteristics in respect to my subject are different basis fears and several ways of using symbols (for example, using symbolic equivalence or symbols as referring to something else) (Muthert and Schaap-Jonker 2015).

Thomas Ogden calls these psychological organizational structures "modes of being" (Ogden 1986, 1994: 34–39; Raguse 1994: 213–216). He conceives of these "modes of being" as "different dimensions of experience", indicating that although the three modes can be distinguished, they are also interconnected. This interconnectedness implies that a person usually does not operate from one mode only. On the contrary, in order to function healthily, all three modes are of value, according to Ogden. "The subject is not located in any given position, but in a space (tension) created by the dialectical interplay of the different dimensions of experience" (Ogden 1994: 48). However, at a certain moment within a

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specific relationship one mode of being will always dominate. In the following subsections, I will first present the different modes. I will refrain from using and explaining the various terms that Ogden uses to refer to the modes, as this would require much more explanatory text on psychodynamic theory. I will therefore refer to the modes by simply calling them mode 1, 2 or 3. Next I will discuss how the three modes of being connect to mourning.

Table 9.1. Modes of being as internal organizational structures

Features	Modes of being		
	Mode 1	**Mode 2**	**Mode 3**
"Self-image"	No (dominant) "self"	"Self" as object	"Self" as subject and object
Organizing principle	Sensory sensations	Partial-objects (Splitting)	Whole objects (Repression)
Basic fear	"To deflate"	Destruction of "the good"	To be abandoned
Mode of symbolizing	Presymbolic	Symbolic equivalence	Use of symbols
	"It is"	*"It is what it is"*	*"It is as if…"*

Mode 1

Mode 1 provides much of the "sensory floor" of experience, as Ogden (1994: 144) puts it. Central in this mode is the body with its sensory perceptions, whereby feeling with the skin is leading. Sensing that things are hard, soft, hot, cold, wet or dry by rubbing, pinching, caressing, for example, is linked in the literature to the early interactions between primary carer(s) and the young child. Being the largest organ of the human body, the skin remains a very important sense throughout one's life. As an intermediary, this outer layer of a person is in constant contact with the outside world. The main psychological function of the skin is that it is able to "contain" many sensations and experiences (long) before it is even able to connect words or meaning to them. Ogden argues that as long as the body is able to store sensory experiences, fear of disintegration (Ogden 1994, 2009) or deflation (Van Bouwel 2003) cannot prevail. Key terms of sensory experiences that make up mode 1 are rhythm, proximity, continuity and boundaries. These first-mode-experiences

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prepare a person to develop feelings of safety, comfort, connectedness and security (Dehing 1998; Van Bouwel 2003: 126–128; Calsius et al. 2016; Kinet et al. 2015).

Mode 2

In the second mode the self exists predominantly as object (Ogden 1986: 41–66). This means that there is no personal awareness of having experiences. Thoughts and feelings are simply there. More precisely, there are no feelings or thoughts, but rather a continuous flow of ''raw sensory data''. The organizational core principle that characterizes mode 2 focuses on distinguishing what is threatening from what is harmless. The two must absolutely not come into contact with each other to prevent the good from being destroyed by the bad. A person is equipped with defence mechanisms to establish this radical and immediate separation of love and hatred, good and bad. For example, the subject can magically and omnipotently think away a hating object to the extent of removing the object from experience. Another strategy is to project one's own fear onto another person, who becomes the ''container'' of that fear. All this is done without interpretation. General meaning is automatically attached, feeding the experience with vitality (Ogden 1994: 141–144). When the good manages to survive, the subject experiences control and is no longer completely at the mercy of fear. By surviving threats through distinguishing the good from the bad, important psychological functions are prepared for a more personal way of assigning meaning.

Mode 3

In mode 3, danger is no longer experienced as totally destructive. Good and bad can be tolerated to exist side by side in one's experience. Gradually the self and others are experienced as complete persons. In the event of a threat, one is aware of distance between the threat and their own person. Increasingly, they experience that there is room to think about what is happening, to assign meaning to it and finally to respond appropriately. Whereas in the event of indigestible fears and threats in mode two, ''containers'' are automatically searched for outside the self, now space is found inside the self. As a result, relating to others changes. The subject is no longer entirely dependent on other people's potential to cope with fear and threat, but can be more independent. Thus the human subjectivity expands with the help of all kinds of interconnected psychological developments. As Ogden puts it, the subject develops:

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"an enhanced capacity for self-object differentiation, the development of the capacity for symbol formation, increased capacities for affective modulation, reality testing, and memory" (Ogden 1986: 71–72) next to biological maturational factors.

Meaning in Modes of Being

According to Ogden's model of three modes of being, learning to endure new or difficult events is fundamentally connected to a person's relationships with others and to meaning-making. If an experience arouses too much fear and if physical reassurance fails (mode 1), one needs the second mode to deal with that threat. The whole of raw sensory data generating the fear is then projected onto another person (mode 2). Young children are therefore dependent on their primary carers; older children or adults turn more broadly to reliable others. The person they turn to ideally shows how to live with this particular danger by interpreting and labelling it. In doing so, the other person sends the message that the difficult and fear-generating initial situation can be handled. Being able to identify with this message, the subject can create meaning. Once a person knows how to link meaning to what is happening, one can really speak of "experiencing" (Ogden 1994: 81; Bion 1962a). If this whole process repeats itself often enough, the subject is eventually capable to give meaning to potential threats within the self (mode 3). People are confronted with events that are potentially too threatening at any age. They usually tend to appeal to a person in their environment who can act as a "container" of that fear who is capable of handling it. If, however, good examples are absent, the opportunity to give meaning to what is happening to one is also lacking. When Geertje lost her baby, for example, she was unable to meaningfully share the raw loss of her child with other people because they took the stance that her baby should never have been there in the first place. Summing up, to arrive at meaningful interpretations, sufficient distance between self and sensory experiences is required, which the subject can only acquire with the help of others. Only Ogden's third mode offers this space between "I and others". The space between "I and others" in the third mode of being is alternatively referred to in psychology as the "transitional space" (Winnicott 1953, 1971) or the "mentalizing capacity" (Allen et al. 2008; Muthert and Schaap-Jonker 2015). Supporters of these concepts usually emphasize the development of an independent self. In my view, the space between I and others should not be narrowly understood to relate to separation or individuation only. After all, by distinguishing themselves from others,

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people simultaneously learn to relate to those others. Precisely because relating to others is a crucial factor in meaning-making, in my view both theorists and counsellors who focus on mourning should therefore pay more attention to the growing relational capacity between I and others in this third mode than most tend to do presently. Returning to Geertje, for example, it becomes clear that she could only begin to confront or reflect on her loss once her context offered her a safe space. Only in relation to external persons and religious sources that provide appropriate gestures, forms and words, the capacity to make meaning of what happened to her grew in Geertje.

What does that imply for making sense of loss? Because space and meaning are crucial factors in relating to others and developing a narrative sense of self, the third mode appears as the most mature psychological structure (Klein 1958). Ogden indeed stresses the great variety of psychological functions within the third mode. At the same time, however, he disputes a purely development-oriented conception of the modes and underlines their constant interaction. In my view the three modes can be conceived of as the corners of a triangle, which represents the inner space in which the dynamic self moves. In this representation, alternating between all three functions rather than unilinear development towards mode three loses it normative connotation of signifying regression. Indeed, only when a subject gets stuck in one of the three poles, Ogden speaks of pathology. What I find particularly valuable in this model is that it implies that relational dimensions of meaning-making play a role in all three modes. Besides the verbal or symbolic attribution of meaning (mode 3), one could think of a sensory/physical dimension (mode 1) and a dimension of distinguishing between good and evil; moral sense (mode 2). Conceiving of the inner space thus helps to see how religion can be of significance within all these modes. By explicitly linking the model of the three modes of being to mourning, we take the theorization about mourning one step further.

Different Modes of Being in Relation to Mourning

Ogden (2000) describes mourning as a capacity and experience that is situated in the third mode of being; in order to mourn, it is necessary that one can experience continuity between past and present. Only when one realizes that behaviour in the past has consequences for the present and perhaps also for the future, one can be persuaded to repair what went wrong or adapt one's behaviour. Acknowledging that one's actions can be inappropriate and that others also have power over oneself, affects

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one's sense of control in the sense of having to admit that there are always things in our lives that are beyond our own control. Feelings of dependence (Winnicott 1953; Niers 2017) must therefore be tolerated, as must strong feelings of sadness. Ogden sees this as the capacity to mourn. When the "I" can connect meaning to the complexity of feelings, activities and physical sensations when suffering loss, Ogden speaks of experiences of mourning.

Creating new meaning is a crucial dimension of such experiences (Ogden 2000: 65–66). A clear example can be derived from novelist David Grossman's *Falling Out of Time* (2014) about parents who lose their child. Grossman knows how to give words to an experience that other bereaved people recognize while at the same time showing new ways of expressing such experiences. His novel does not prescribe how to mourn when a child is lost, but offers space, which in turn offers solace. Other creative examples with the power to console mentioned by Ogden are new memories, stories, dreams or poems. He concludes that: "What one makes in the process of mourning ... is far less important than the experience of making it" (Ogden 2000: 66).

The art of mourning is thus connected with the creation of something new, which brings with it a lively feeling that paradoxically stems from the experience of loss and death (Ogden 2000: 65). However, situations of loss can be so extreme that the capacity to mourn falls short and the mourner cannot but seek recourse to other modes of being. The healing sense of creative mourning in these cases is absent. The mourner has insufficient distance to what happens and attaches no meaning to the experience. As a result, feelings of deadness and emptiness dominate. In these situations, therapeutic interventions should focus on restoring relationships (De Kroon and Verplancke 2017). However demanding the conditions may be, efforts to maintain or re-establish relationships with the outside world are necessary in supporting the capacity to mourn. The issue that remains to be addressed here is how social support can take shape in relation to each of the three modes of being.

Effective Mourning Matches between Social Aspects and Different Modes

On the basis of the above, we can conclude that all modes of being are fundamentally helpful in responding to loss. While the mourning capacity is most developed in the third mode, some losses cannot be handled so that the mourner must rely on objects outside the self. A scholar who has moved beyond intra-psychic models to look at the more psychosocial

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dimension of mourning is the psychoanalyst Darian Leader (2008). Leader outlines a historical development from public to more individual mourning since the First World War. The enormous numbers of deaths in the Great War hampered farewell rituals that focused on individuals and were often collectively organized. After the war, collective rituals declined and personal mourning became the norm. Leader convincingly argues, however, that we may have underestimated the importance of public mourning. People need the examples of others that show that one does not necessarily completely fall victim to mourning. Put in the words of a psychodynamic perspective one could argue that symbolic mourning examples or frames help the grieving self to identify with their own mourning. It is therefore that professional mourners or funeral professionals play a crucial role in mourning rituals. By "playing" their role within a recognized form, they provide the space in which one's own mourning becomes possible. Like Ogden, Leader therefore also sees an important role for writers or artists in public expressions of mourning. These expressions provide forms for experiences that could not come to the surface and be shared without them.

I would argue that religion is very well suited to take on a similar function (also see: Westerink 2017). Religious rituals for example, show a great "containing" potential (Jongsma-Tieleman 1996). Connecting Leader's theory (Leader 2008: 60–99) to that of Ogden (1986, 1994, 2000), it becomes clear that the kind of support for mourning that Leader points to differs per mode. Again, Geertje's case study can be used to illustrate how this may work. Mode 1 is about physical mourning reactions. When this mode dominates, only periodic mourning reactions are visible. This can be recognized in Geertje's story who, for years experiences physical complaints that she cannot place every time during the season in which her baby died. Her body acts as a "carrier of memory" with all kinds of sensations of listlessness; Geertje feels "heavy and dead". Getting recognition and social attention are supportive for her in this situation. As the effect of the words of her friend who shared her observations about the pattern in Geertje's physical pain illustrates, it is necessary for significant others in the environment of the grieving person to recognize their physical responses, before the mourning person can do so themselves. In the second mode of being loss is experienced as a potential threat, which becomes visible to the outside world through isolation, idealization or anger. This can be also recognized in the case of Geertje, who withdraws from everyday life for a number of weeks or months each year. When fear associated with loss emerges, it is considered a threat and all efforts are aimed at thinking it away. For many years, Geertje could not mourn the loss of her baby, because her environment judged that the baby

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should not have been conceived. Suggesting that one cannot lose what should not have been there in the first place precludes mourning over what happened. The supportive community that Geertje presently finds herself in, on the other hand, acts as a witness to what has been happening to her. Her friends take care of her because they see that something is wrong and they also make an effort in finding a suitable form to express it. They do this concretely by their repeated attempts to stay close to Geertje when she is having a hard time. Ultimately, they also help her by putting how she feels it into words, as in the "You survived June again" observation. Once in the third mode of being, Geertje can recognize the loss and experience her mourning self, she undertakes numerous attempts to capture that loss in words or images so that it can be lived with. What is of particular interest in my argument about the power of religion in mourning, is that, with the support of her spiritual caretaker, Geertje realized that religion can help her find ways to tell her story; she realizes that the religious song that has been singing in her head provides a sense of consolation. The supportive attitude of the spiritual care giver and other significant persons in Geertje's social context recognize these attempts and provide her with creative examples. Religion, in other words, provides Geertje with images that she understands very differently now that she can experience her loss as a loss. She no longer believes that she was alone at the time; God must have been near. It is just that at the time she was not able to see this. This transformation in Geertje's self-narrative does not suddenly make up for everything. But while her loss remains painful, it does change her perspective on the meaning of what happened to her. In the end, what she could perceive only as a threat is transformed and she experiences her new way of thinking and her relationship to the lost baby as meaningful (see Table 2 for an overview).

Table 9.2. Mourning matches between internal modes of being and social aspects

	Mode 1	**Mode 2**	**Mode 3**
"Visible" signs of grief	periodic mourning reactions (physical expression)	withdrawal, isolation and idealization, anger	efforts to transform own mourning using mourning dialogue
Supportive mourning behaviour in the public domain	social awareness and attention	available (symbolic) witnesses	recognition of subjective bereavement processes and available creative mourning models

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8/18/23, 8:55 AM Religion as Relation

Religion as a Cultural "Container'

I return to my initial question. How does a psychodynamic vision of mourning, based on different modes of being, contribute to a better understanding of variations in mourning behaviour and (religious) meaning making in everyday life? A well-known statement about mourning attributed to Rabbi Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760) summarizes the theoretical insights I discussed above: *"Forgetfulness leads to exile while remembrance is the secret of redemption."* When a person's response to loss corresponds to the first part of this statement – "forgetfulness leads to exile" – periodic grief reactions, idealization, isolation and anger characterize their mourning, while the capacity to transform images or words is lacking; they do not understand their loss. Responses in the category "remembrance is the secret of redemption" on the other hand are characterized by personal creativity in dialogue with the specific mourning models at hand in the cultural context that the bereaved is embedded in. Both types of mourning are common and neither is fixed; people can move back and forth between the two. The latter turns out to be more effective to come to terms with loss and is therefore the healthier option; people who can creatively transform their relationship to loss to make meaning of what happened feel alive instead of being defined by their loss and feeling empty and powerless.

In some situations, a person confronted with loss is too vulnerable to experience the space between themselves and others and lacks the capacity to create meaning. In such cases mourning requires physical action and a supportive environment as adequate social responses so that mourners are not obliged to immediately turn their suffering into a success story. Religion here can come in the form of a community of fellow-believers who support the grieving person. In situations where the mourner does recognize that good and bad coexist, then religion has a lot to offer as a source for the mourner to transform their relationship to the deceased and create meaning. For all three different modes of being, then, religion offer potential support in mourning by providing rituals, social support and an abundance of strong images, stories, songs, art and materials to draw on. In this sense, alongside art, philosophy or science, religion is one of the cultural sources, which generates potentially meaningful mourning models (Winnicott 1971).

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Mourning Theory in Practice

The potential of cultural sources to offer vitalization in relation to mourning is one of the main points of argumentation in this chapter; cultural sources, among which religion, offer continuity, space and meaning by adequately integrating good and evil, among other things. The theoretical framework presented in this chapter can be applied at various levels. I will restrict myself here to one-on-one counselling, in which applying the theory to practice consists of three steps. In case that the current response to loss is seen as problematic by the mourner, first, the spiritual caregiver asks what the response to loss means exactly for the mourning person. Next, an assessment is made of how the grieving person relates not only to their loss but also to important others in their lives. On the basis of these first two steps, the spiritual caregiver examines which intervention if most suitable to help the client in coming to terms with their loss. In Geertje's case, the counsellor recognized her longing for witnesses and for symbolic forms to help her shape her loss more effectively. In addition to the song already mentioned, biblical images of a God who catches people when they fall (Deuteronomy 32.11) and holds them in his hand also proved to be valuable to help Geertje make sense of her loss. These images provided alternatives to the original experience of rejection that she had suffered. By letting God and others witness her story and support her in her search for a new response to her loss, Geertje experiences grief but she also feels alive. One may wonder why Geertje did not experience religion as supportive before. Although religious sources were present, they did not fit in well with her specific second mode needs at the time. This illustrates that religion does not offer a number of metaphors that do good by default. Metaphorical images only work when the third mode of being is dominant. It was precisely support and witnesses that were previously lacking in Geertje's life. Therefore, her response was one of forgetting. But what was forgotten became a heavy weight. Geertje's case study illustrates that it is therefore crucial to recognize which forms of support match with which modes of being of a person who suffers loss. It draws our attention to the fact that, while religion meets the conditions of sufficient playfulness and also offers room for ambivalence and can therefore function very well as a "container" in the western cultural context (Westerink 2017), social awareness of and attention to physical grief as well as the courage to witness suffering are also necessary conditions for assisting people who suffer loss.

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Discussion

Besides the possibilities that the theoretical model I have presented in this chapter has to offer, it also has its limitations. It does not, for instance, provide static truths about mourning in the sense of identifying certain subsequent phases or task-based prescriptions. This openness is productive in allowing specific personalized assessments and interventions, but it is also demanding on the counsellor; it requires an ongoing reflective attitude and a constant playfulness in relation to people's various "answers" to loss (mode 3). Recognizing the different modes in oneself and others is crucial for effective counselling. Regarding the process of meaning-making, the counsellor must have an eye for first, second and third mode signifiers, and avoid prioritizing the most mature third form. Such an attitude is not obvious in the western cultural context, which is, among others, strongly characterized by a discourse of the individual as independent agent and being fully responsible for their own lives, a discourse about "winners and losers" that corresponds with the second mode of being (cf. Hermsen 2017; Johannisson 2010; Dehue 2014; Verhaeghe 2012; De Wachter 2012). This discourse diminishes the space or scope for mourning in the third mode and is accompanied by an increase of people suffering depression, burnout and feelings of emptiness. Another complication concerns the models'' emphasis on invisible inner processes. This contrasts with the popularity of observable facts and objective knowledge through numerical transparency.

A second limitation concerns the internal standard of the model itself, which characterizes the third mode as the most mature and healthy. This leaves less room for playfulness than suggested. Besides, what this model describes as healthy capacities may be different in other than western cultural contexts. Maturity and health are culturally informed concepts. Finally, while the concepts of "subject" here understood as the person suffering loss, and "object", here the deceased are central to the model, variations exist within psychodynamic thinking as to what actually constitutes a subject and object and what characterizes subject – object relations. These alternative views will emphasize other conceptions or psychological functions that lead to other counselling models.

About the Author

Hanneke Muthert is professor of psychology of religion and spiritual care at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen. Her current research projects focus on (1) disaster chaplaincy, (2) meaningful work

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and (3) psychopathology, religion and good spiritual care practices. The overarching theme is characterized by how to support people in diverse care contexts (home, healthcare, work) to live their daily lives coping with significant losses and longings. In relation to an observed lack of common language sharing existential issues, she elaborates on the idea of concrete practice places in the near future. For publications see www.rug.nl/staff/j.k.muthert/research.

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