unlikely to help anyone, as the Revd Jim Boyd's article stated so well.

Making services more personal

If it is true that an increasing number of funerals include members of the immediate family helping to lead the service, I can think of three reasons for this development:

- the tendency over the past two decades for greater lay participation in leading regular Sunday worship. This could spill over into funerals of regular churchgoers, most noticeable perhaps among Catholics and in Northern Ireland, where churchgoing is common;
- the growing disillusion with 'production line' crematorium funerals has fuelled a demand for more personal funerals; and
- the publicity given to those who dispense with the services of an undertaker and arrange some or all of the funeral themselves has caused other people to review their own involvement in funerals.

Many funerals create a sense of unreality, because mourners are reduced from a congregation (congregated for a common purpose) to a bemused audience watching an incomprehensible show put on by more, or often less, expert clergy. Especially where the priest does not know the congregation, the Revd Jim Boyd's 'expert leadership' is all too often hard to achieve.

In *Funerals and How to Improve Them*[1], I give examples of ways in which the service can become real, and this can often involve participation by mourners. But two important features of helpful participation should be noted.

Firstly, actions work better than words. Even though weeping, you can still: place a flower on a coffin; kiss the corpse (as Orthodox Christians do); or fill in a grave (as West Indians do). You cannot easily read a lesson, poem or prayer when choked with tears. So long as ritual actions are appropriate to family, community and religion, they can make the funeral real without adding to the ordeal. I wonder if the problem for Protestants, and some secularists, is that they rely too much on words, and have lost touch with liturgical actions? (Incidentally, the Anglican funeral rite is essentially the Catholic requiem mass but with the mass omitted, that is, with the actions omitted, leaving only words.)

Secondly, if mourners are to speak, they should preferably not be close family. A nephew might read a poem; at a child's funeral, a teacher might read a lesson. Such people can speak on behalf of close kin. The problem with the kinds of participation that the Revd Jim Boyd has found so excruciating is that they involve close kin speaking in public.

Bruce Read's stimulating book *The Dynamics of Religion*[2] argued that regular Sunday worship involves ritualised dependency on the worship leader. Untrained lay participation in leading services can undermine this, because one cannot relax into dependency. Holy Communion, by contrast, is a communal and personal action that ritualises both participation and dependency. Though not addressed to funerals, Read's book provides a useful frame for understanding the dynamics that the Revd Jim Boyd describes.

Nevertheless, some funerals have worked well with the spoken words of close kin. I am tempted to suggest that this is fine so long as it really is the preferred style. I am wary, however, of anyone in the funeral business who claims to give people freedom of choice. Traditions build up, people want to do 'the right thing', so when offered various options they look around to see what others have selected and their choices become patterned and less than free. It is even more important, therefore, that we develop rituals and traditions of participation that really work.

References

1 Walters T. Funerals and How to Improve Them. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990.* See also Walter T. Settling the Spirit. *Bereavement Care* 1991; **10**(1): 4–5.
2 Read B. The Dynamics of Religion. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978.

* Funerals and How to Improve Them is available from Cruse – Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR. £9.95 + £1.75 p&p.

'Dear Mum . . .'

An adult daughter's anger triggered by her father's death

Anon.

'Dear Mum, You will not like what I am writing in this letter but I feel that what I have to say must be said. I have an anger, a fury, boiling inside me all the time and, unless I get it out, I feel I must explode. To begin with, I want to say that I know that you were the best mother you knew how to be, that when you were bringing us up you were going through very difficult and stressful times, and that you have been generous with me on many occasions. However, it is also true to say that you were very cruel and even vindictive to me while I was growing up. Although I don't believe that your cruelty was

in any way planned, the fact that it was not meant has not lessened any of its effects upon my subsequent life . . . You may try and say that I am imagining the maltreatment and the unequal dealings. I might even have convinced myself that I was imagining it, if it had not been for Grandmother.

By the time I was 13, I was crying into her lap regularly. Indeed, it is probably only because of the affection she gave me that I managed to keep myself on some sort of an even keel in the subsequent years. She knew how heartbroken I was. She was a gentle, timid woman who had no power to stand up against you. The only comfort she had for me were the words: 'Don't cry. When you're 15, you can leave home. You've only got two more years to go.' She certainly wouldn't have said that if she thought I was benefiting from your protection. I don't believe she ever said that to my brother.

From then on, now I look back on my life, I spent a great deal of my energy in constant futile attempts to gain the love from you which I vaguely remembered from my early childhood but which was withdrawn steadily as I approached my teens. I lived a strictly moral life, being as conventionally good as I could be. I didn't involve myself with wild company and I suspect I was the only virgin left of all my friends when I got married. The whole time, my life was governed by the feeling that I must be good, really good, super good and not bring shame on you and Dad . . . I am *not* complaining that I was forced into a moral probity which I found foreign to my natural inclinations, I am complaining only that I was maintaining it for the wrong reasons. I was still trying to be worthy of a love and respect which was not forthcoming – and never would be. Oh, yes. Sometimes you boasted about me to your friends. But not to my face. That was a different matter.

Did you not consider how damaging and hurtful were your constant repetitions that I was stupid and awkward and that in the end the pounding of this into my head would ultimately make me stupid and awkward? Did it not occur to you that I hung on to unsuitable boyfriends I had because I believed I was so awful and worthless that I'd be lucky if anyone would marry me? After all, you had told me that yourself.

When I did marry, I discovered I still hadn't pleased you . . . Mark is a wise, kind and gentle man, who happens to have a very good family background as well. He has had a lot to put up with, both from your scorn and from a good deal of my behaviour which, I now see, stems directly from my picture of myself. That picture was, of course, largely moulded by you (with Dad's collaboration) and I considered myself worthless, ugly and not too bright. Indeed, however many degrees I managed to amass, there was always this little voice inside, telling me I was stupid and would never amount to anything very much. That voice was yours, and I doubt if it will ever leave me entirely. Despite my recognition of the brand you have burnt into my personality, I find I cannot excise it. Every day I face the imprint on my view of myself in the world. I look through it and try to ignore it. But there it is. 'You are a mistake,' it says, 'a first try of poor quality and inferior materials.'

A death in the family always must create the climate for some sort of a re-evaluation, and I believe that this is what I have been doing over the past couple of weeks. I have spent a lot of time crying, mostly in the night because I was not allowed to cry during the day. Wrapped up as you were in your own grief, you displayed absolutely no concern for the way I felt, expecting that I sort out the funeral arrangements, answer the door, take the telephone and make the tea for the people who came to comfort you. To a certain degree, I believe that this was quite natural. After all, you had had an awful shock. What ultimately upset me was the way you took it for granted that this was what I was there for . . .

I did not resent this at the time, and I still do not. After all, if anyone is allowed a time to be selfish, then the death of a husband after so many years of marriage is certainly the occasion. At least you were relying on me. Deep down I liked that, I suppose. Somewhere inside me there was a little girl jumping up and down, shouting 'Mummy! Mummy! Look at me. Look! I can help you! I can take care of you! I'm taking charge and I'm not stupid and I'm not dropping things and making mistakes! Now will you love and respect me?'

But when Bill arrived, everything changed. You will probably now say to yourself: 'Aahh, here it comes. She's eaten up with jealousy of her brother!' Well, jealousy may have been something to do with it, but not in the way you would like to make yourself believe. I was very happy to see my brother . . .

[There follows a detailed exposition of her mother's preferential treatment of her brother, Bill, who is alleged to have been encouraged to remain emotionally fixated at the age of 13 or 14 – Ed.] . . . I don't like him for it and neither do some others, but his wife obviously does and he himself doesn't seem to mind the way he is. I certainly do

EDITOR'S NOTE

Grief is seldom pure and never simple. It is strongly influenced by the attachments we make, not only to the person who has died but also to other important people, particularly our parents. One loss can easily spark off grief for other, previous losses, and it may be necessary to work through these other losses before we are able to come to terms with the more recent one.

A good way to work through a loss is to write about it. The author of this article, who prefers to remain anonymous, did this after her father's death in the form of an angry letter to her mother, which her mother, guessing at its contents, refused to read. The author later showed the letter to a psychiatrist (Dr Lester Sireling) who, recognising the sensitive insights that it contained, suggested that she submit it for publication to *Bereavement Care*.

In shortening it for publication, the editor has deleted detailed accounts of the many psychological injuries that the author sustained. What remains is a passionately felt account of the way in which her father's death triggered a bitter rage at her mother, whom she sees as having blighted her childhood and who remains a continuing source of distress to her. In a way she is grieving for the mother she never had while driven to seek for the approval (which she suspects she will never obtain) of the mother she does have.

Viewed in this light, her diatribe has something of the quality of an heroic stand. At long last she is speaking out against the trauma that she sustained. Her mother, one suspects, may view things very differently. She, too, sees herself as having had a miserable childhood, and we can only guess how this influenced her capacity to relate to her own child. As the author herself says, 'Affection doesn't come to order.'

envy him his complete confidence in his own importance.

I did a great deal of crying when I got time to myself. After a while, I began to wonder why I was crying so much and with such a wrenching passion – after all, I have not lived at home for a very long time and, although I still miss my father, his advice and his interest, after all these years of separation and the building of my own family, it would be unnatural for me to be still emotionally dependent on him. Then I realised that I was so very distressed because I had lost my only ally in the family. Although Dad's attitude to me was not the best I could have asked for, I could usually count on him to appreciate my worth a little bit and to defend both myself and Mark from the worst aspects of your offensiveness. However, now I felt I was alone. Me against you and Bill. I wouldn't stand a chance. I have never felt more lonely in my life. I told Mark I wanted to die. My two fine children, my comfortable home, my qualifications, my job, they all paled into an insignificance that amounted to a total irrelevance. I felt I was worth nothing. I was angry with myself for not seeing any way out of changing this pattern of behaviour. I was angry with myself for not being able to make you see how I felt, for not being so clever, so attractive, so efficient, that you would love me as much as you loved Bill.

My neck, often the barometer of my psychological health, was stiffening up so badly that I thought my skull would crack down into my shoulders. Every time I turned my head, not only did I suffer the most excruciating pain from my cramping muscles, but I could also actually hear the bones grinding against each other. My ears were buzzing violently from the trapped auditory nerve being ground away between my first and second vertebrae. It sounded like an entire orchestra of violins tuning up. As soon as you left the house, my neck started to feel better. At the time of starting this letter, the evening of the Sunday that you left, the pain has almost gone, although the grinding is still there. The violins have faded away to a thin whistle. I cannot let you continue to do this to me. I need my neck and my hearing for being a mother to my own children.

During the afternoon after you went back to Birmingham, I started thinking about my neck. Undoubtedly I was causing pain to myself, but why? I began to think that I had suffered enough pain from my association with you and began also to see that there was no way I was ever going to make you really see the world through my eyes. Over the years, I had desperately tried to tell both you and Dad how I felt. I had often tried to sort things out – sometimes in anger, sometimes almost hysterically, sometimes quietly and rationally. The only response I got – from Father – was that I shouldn't drag up the past but should let bygones be bygones. I did try that, but in the end I realise that those bygones are shaping my life. You also have had bygones, which have shaped your present attitudes. You often say you had a difficult, poverty-stricken childhood, but, for all the straitened circumstances, you were a much-loved, only child. You will never know what it is to be a second-best nuisance . . .

You always felt you could say what you wanted to me and about me and I would still keep up my responsibilities of daughterly duty. You did, however, notice that I didn't seem to be as spontaneously affectionate as you would prefer. Although when I first saw you when I got to America, I hugged you and we both cried in each other's arms, you said later to a friend that I didn't show you enough love. It is true, I have never thought to put my arm around your shoulder. When I was a child it would have been impossible, and when I was an adult the time had passed.

Affection doesn't come to order. If I could order it, I would have done that too. I used to be so desperate for your approval. The instinctive sort of love, that lack of which you point out as yet another deficiency in my nature was there, once. But it was killed off by you many years ago. All that I had left was this childish longing to impress you enough to make you like me again.

Once here, you asked me to ferry you around, to write thank you letters on your behalf, to take time off work to take you on trips. A while ago, I might have done it, too. The preceding week in Birmingham, however, had made me wary. I started to think through my feelings honestly for the first time. Perhaps Dad's death created within me an emotional earthquake, which threw up all the strata of my childhood for me to see. It wasn't that I had never been aware of the things I have written down in this letter. I knew it all before, but I could never have expressed it until now. I don't know. But those feelings became all at once far too much for me to bear. I realised that if I didn't clear them, then I would end up taking it out on my own family. Having had the sort of miserable childhood I would not wish on anyone, I came to the conclusion that, if I could not save my own happiness, then at least I can save theirs. I wasn't an angel as a child, I made mistakes and I was guilty of dishonesty, as is any child. But looking back on what I did and seeing how my own children behave, I can say with absolute conviction that I did not deserve the sort of a childhood which you gave me . . .

After all this, I suppose you would expect that I feel as badly

BEREAVEMENT BY SUICIDE

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) is a self-help group for all those who have lost a loved person by suicide. This national organisation, based in Hull, UK, was set up in 1991 by Alice Middleton, whose brother John had taken his life in 1982. The group exists 'in order to provide a safe, supportive, confidential environment in which survivors may share and work through their pain.' It runs training programmes for professionals and volunteers and produces a newletter containing information, reflections and poetry of interest to survivors.

A conference for survivors of bereavement by suicide will be held on 23–25 September 1994 at Needle Hall, Cottingham, Yorkshire. Interested persons should contact:

Alice Middleton,
SOBS,
82 Arcon Drive,
Anlaby Road,
Hull HU4 6AD,
UK.

disposed towards you as you probably feel toward me by now. When you have cooled off, I hope you will realise that I don't hate you – although I most certainly do hate the things you have done to me and I do hate the effects which I feel in my life up to this present day. It is true, as I have just said, that much of the sort of affection which might have been is missing from our relationship but I still love you and will always. You are my mother and, although I have finally become aware enough of the destructive effects of your human failings that I have at last admitted them to myself and committed them to paper, I will not forget that there were times when you have been good to me, sometimes tried to protect me, in your own way, and, especially early on in my life, you gave me a warm happy home. I'm sorry that I had such an unhappy childhood later on, that's all . . .

I did not write this letter to hurt you but to save myself from drowning in my own helpless feelings. I don't really expect you to understand this, not all at once, although you might understand a bit of it in a while, if you read this letter properly. I also don't expect forgiveness for this. If you had been the forgiving sort, who was willing to talk through problems, then this letter would never have been necessary. It just happened that I came to the realisation over the last few days that you will never forgive me anyway, for being me . . .

Go in peace. Live your life. See things and experience things. Enjoy your grandchildren in Australia. Spend money on yourself. After a little while, we might be able to talk about this – perhaps.'

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

Healing Grief. Workshop on Loss and Recovery. 9–11 September 1994. Stroud, UK (Hawkwood College). Barbara Ward and Dr Uthe Ernst-Muth. Details from: Barbara Ward. ☎ 0822–855619

National Association of Bereavement Services. 11–12 September 1994. Oxford, UK (Westminster College). Annual Training Conference and AGM. Theme: Moral and Ethical Issues in Bereavement. Keynote Speaker: Prof Ron Baker. Details from: Carole Lambert. ☎ 071–247 0617

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide. 23–25 September 1994. Cottingham, Yorks, UK. See notice on p.18.

The 'why?' trick



Colin Murray Parkes

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In his important book *Loss and Change*[1], Peter Marris spoke of the way in which 'structures of meaning' are undermined by bereavements and other major life-change events. Marris was deliberately vague about exactly what it is that gives meaning to life but it is clearly not one thing but many, and that these things that give meaning to life vary in importance.

EXAMINING OUR ASSUMPTIONS

Meaning seems to derive from a perceived fit between our assumptions about the world (and our place in it) and the actual world that we meet. Thus, at one extreme are the habits of thought and behaviour that govern our day-to-day activities and give us a feeling of being 'on course', and at the other there are more fundamental assumptions about our place in a greater sense of things.

This is an attempt to delve, briefly, a little deeper into this hierarchy of assumptions and to clarify how changes at one level can have profound effects on those at other levels. This idea of an 'assumptive world', which must be relearned whenever we are faced with a major psycho-social transition, has been developed in more detail in my book *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*[2]. The bereavement counsellor is privileged to assist in the process of rebuilding assumptions and rediscovering meaning, which is the essence of the work of grieving.

Those who have raised small children will remember a particularly annoying trick that is played by children of around three or four years of age. It consists of repeating the question 'why?' 'Daddy, why do doggies bark?' 'To chase away burglars, darling.' 'Why do they want to chase away burglars?' 'Because if they don't, the burglars will steal all Mummy's jewellery.' 'Why will they steal Mummy's jewellery?' 'Because they are nasty people.' 'Why are they nasty people?' 'Oh, for goodness sake, go away and play with your brother.'

Questions of this kind reveal the layers of meaning that lie behind the simplest question of causation. Ultimately they lead to the questioning of basic assumptions, and this can be dangerous since any change in basic assumptions has a ripple effect that calls into question all the meanings derived from these assumptions. The child, of course, is more interested in asking the questions than listening to the answers, and it is hardly surprising if the adult gets more exasperated as the answers get more difficult and the questions more painful.

God is defined as the 'First Cause', that is the answer to all ultimate questions. Thus, to pursue our child's 'whys' a little further: 'Why are they nasty people?' 'Because that's the way God made them.' 'Why did God make them nasty?' 'That, my child, was St Augustine's dilemma and is the crunch point for Christians everywhere . . .' 'You mean you don't know' 'No, you little monster, I don't.'

EDITOR'S NOTE

Some readers may find helpful the analogy that Colin Murray Parkes draws here of a bereaved person with a computer and its vicissitudes – and others may not. I suspect it depends on how devoted a computer buff one is! We publish it in the belief that it may illuminate for counsellors some of their knottier counselling dilemmas.