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GRIEVING PROCESSES AND THE ROLE OF BEREAVEMENT  
DREAMS IN TURKISH ADULTS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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Grieving Processes and the Role of Bereavement Dreams in Turkish Adults: A  
Qualitative Inquiry

Yetiřkin Trklerde Yas Sreçleri ve Yas Ryalarının Rol : Kalitatif Bir Çalıřma

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to understand in depth the functions of the dreams that bereaved adults who have lost significant ones have during the grieving process and the effect of the dream contents that change in the process on the grieving process. It is also to investigate the influence of religion/spirituality in experiencing mourning. For this purpose, "How do people experience the grieving process?", "Do the contents of dreams change during the grieving process? If it is changing, how is there a change in terms of dream themes in the process?" and "How do dreams have an effect on grieving" questions were attempt to be understood according to the perspectives of the participants and the emerging themes. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis method was used to achieve these themes. In this study, there are no hypotheses as in the study where many other qualitative methods were used. The important point is to access the personal experiences of the participants. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 participants, aged between 26 and 50, who lost their loved ones between 1 and 5 years and volunteered to remember and explain in detail at least two dreams that this person appeared. According to the results of the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, a total of 5 major themes and 24 sub-themes emerged. The major themes are: a) feelings and thoughts after the loss, b) idealization of the lost person, c) supporting factors in the grieving process, d) personal transformation, e) bereavement dreams. The findings were discussed in the light of the existing literature, suggestions for future research were presented and the contribution of the subject to clinical applications was discussed.

**Keywords:** loss of loved one, mourning, dreams, bereavement dreams, transformation after loss



## ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı yakınlarını kaybetmiş yaşlı yetişkinlerin yas süreci boyunca gördükleri rüyaların fonksiyonlarını ve süreç içerisinde değişen rüya içeriklerinin yas sürecine etkisini derinlemesine anlamaktır. Ayrıca yası deneyimlemede dinin/maneviyatın etkisini araştırmaktır. Bu amaçla “İnsanlar yas sürecini nasıl deneyimliyor?”, “Rüya içerikleri yas süreci boyunca değişiyor mu? Eğer değişiyorsa, süreç içerisinde rüya temaları bakımından nasıl bir değişim söz konusu?” ve “Rüyaların yasla başa çıkmada nasıl bir etkisi var” soruları katılımcıların bakış açılarına ve ortaya çıkan temalara göre anlamlandırılmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu temalara ulaşmak için Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada da diğer birçok nitel yöntem kullanılan çalışmada da olduğu gibi herhangi bir hipotez yoktur. Önemsenen nokta katılımcıların kişisel deneyimlerine erişmektir. Bu amaçla, yakınlarını 1 ile 5 yıl arasında kaybetmiş ve bu kişinin içinde bulunduğu en az iki rüyayı hatırlayıp detaylıca anlatmaya gönüllü 26 ile 50 yaş arasında değişen 8 katılımcı ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz sonuçlarına göre toplam 5 ana tema ve 24 alt tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Ana temalar: a) kayıp sonrası ortaya çıkan duygu ve düşünceler, b) kaybedilen kişinin idealize edilmesi, c) yas sürecinde destekleyici faktörler, d) kişisel dönüşüm, e) yas rüyaları. Bulgular mevcut literatür ışığında tartışılmış, gelecek araştırmalar için öneriler sunulmuş ve konunun klinik uygulamalar katkısı ele alınmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** yakının kaybı, yas, rüya, yas rüyaları, kayıp sonrası dönüşüm

## INTRODUCTION

When an individual experienced the loss of a loved one, it has a considerable impact on the lives of individuals and the others around them. For many people, the experience of losing a beloved one is seen as the most critical stress that an individual can face throughout the whole life. This loss inevitably leads to significant changes in the life of the bereaved person, and it evokes a wide range of emotions such as sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, depression, emancipation, relief, and numbness (Parkes, 2001; Worden, 2009). Whether these changes are related to financial, inter-relational, spiritual and religious, or self-perception, the loss can predominantly be a debilitating experience (Parkes, 2001; Worden, 2009).

By definition, the experience of losing a loved one to death is referred to as *bereavement*, whereas the accompanying psychological response is called *grief* (Germain, 2013). Many theoreticians believed that dreaming of the deceased might be an essential component in this challenging process (Worden, 2009; Hess, 2004; Moss, 2002; Garfield, 1996; Barrett, 1992). These mostly vivid, filled with emotions and meaningful dreams that the deceased appeared in, are generally referred to as *bereavement dreams*. These bereavement dreams primarily reflect the particular task of the grief process that the bereaved one is struggling with and help the bereaved individual to deal with troubling emotions (Worden, 2009; Garfield, 1996). Even though the meaning-making of these dreams and the reactions to bereavement will vary among individuals, human beings need to make sense of the death by asking why and what happened, which is quite a significant part of the grief resolution (Walter, 1999 as cited in Mallon, 2008). After gone through such intense psychic pain, it is known that people can recover by initially find a way to make sense of their experiences which mediates to personal growth (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

In the light of all these, the primary purpose of this study is to qualitatively examine the personal experiences, coping mechanisms and transformation of bereaved adults who report dreams after a significant loss and explore how these

bereavement processes are linked with their bereavement dreams. Besides, the intent is to investigate common themes in the bereavement dreams that the deceased involved as a character. Also, the study aims to inquire into the time-dependent changes in dream content during this process, which reflect waking day progression through the healing processes in bereavement. Although studies in this field are found in the literature, empirical study on the function of dreams in the grieving process that is carried out with the Turkish population is sparse, and the existing researches focus on the grief reactions, coping mechanisms, or transformational experiences after the loss of a loved one. According to Worden (2009), in order to deeply understand the grief experience of a bereaved individual, we need to know his or her cultural, religious, and spiritual background. Hence, this study also aims to explore the effect of religious/ spiritual beliefs of Turkish participants in terms of both making sense of their dream experiences and their grief responses.

Within the scope of this study, the following research questions are examined:

1. How do bereaved individuals experience their dreams in relation to the process of grieving?
2. What, if any, are the changes in the content of bereavement dreams throughout the mourning process for a bereaved adult?
3. Does focusing on bereavement dreams aid the bereaved adult in transformation or growth after losing a loved one?
4. How does religion/spirituality affect the process of bereavement and the meaning-making process?

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The experience of losing beloved ones is seen by a majority of people as a profound and unfortunate tragic experience, and it can potentially become the most significant difficulty that almost all might face during their lifetime. Freud also was deeply affected by his grief following the death of his father in 1986 and expressed his loss in “The Interpretation of Dreams” as “the most important event, the most poignant loss of a man’s life.” (Freud, 1900).

According to psychodynamic views of grief and bereavement, it is multidimensional, depending on the nature of the loss, the ways the loss is metabolized, the meaning of the loss (Klass et al., 1996; Neimeyer, 2001), the ante-mortem nature of the relationship that had been maintained with the deceased, and the ways in which it might transform the bereaved person (Berzoff, 2003; Klass et al., 1996; Worden, 2009). In the light of all these, various ideas and theories about grief have emerged over the years. It can be said that over the decades, we have witnessed a conversion of the idea that successful grieving thoroughly requires breaking the ties with the deceased to the idea that it is quite healthy to maintain continued bonds in the matter of understanding the human experience of loss (Hall, 2014). Hence, in the following section, I will summarize some of the grief and loss theories succinctly. Respectively the models and works of Freud, Bowlby, Lindemann, Kübler-Ross, and contemporary models of Worden and Klass will be highlighted. Following the grief models, the impacts of loss on personal growth and transformation will be portrayed. Then an overview of the dream works and literature on dreams in the grief process will be presented. Finally, the effect of religion/spirituality on the mourning process will be portrayed.

### **1.1. MODELS AND THEORIES OF LOSS AND GRIEF**

Some distinctive theories and models examining the concept of loss and grief in the literature. Mourning refers to the response after the death of a loved one, and according to Pollock (1961) the mourning reaction, an ego-adaptive

process, contains both the reactions to the loss of the object and the readjustment to the environment that the lost loved one does not exist anymore in reality. In this section, an attempt will be made mainly to present more specifically the various theories and models of loss and grief from Freud's monumental work "Mourning and Melancholia" to more contemporary models.

### **1.1.1. Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"**

The first in-depth study on loss and grief was conducted by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. He conceptualized mourning in one of his most significant and evocative papers, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917/1957), as an evolving reaction not only to the loss of a loved object but also to the loss of abstract values such as country, liberty, and ideal. In his paper, he distinguished between mourning and melancholia, in other words, healthy and pathological mourning. Mourning as a reaction to losing a loved one contains a painful mental state similar to melancholy. According to him, the mourner feels dejected, depletion, a loss of interest in the outside world, a loss of capacity to acquire a new object of love since it would mean replacing the deceased and inhibiting all activity (Freud, 1917/1957). A melancholic might experience these feelings as well; however, unlike the mourner, the melancholic also experiences a notable decrease in self-regard and a substantial weakening of the ego. According to Freud, the main difference between these two concepts is that in mourning, the world becomes poor and empty, whereas in melancholia, the poor and empty one is the ego itself. The emphasis of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; APA, 2013) on self-esteem as the differential criteria for the major depressive episode and a grief episode also supports Freud's definition.

Freud (1957) also believed that when a meaningful figure died, the mourner had lost the significant object it requires the psychic energy, which he called libido, to be decathexis or withdrawn from all its attachments to the lost object and detached from the loved one in order to form new attachments, re-

establish ties and invest the libidinal energy to a new object. Even though reality-testing has shown that the beloved object no longer exists, it is universally observed that the initial reaction to the loss might be renouncing reality rather than renouncing the loved object. Thus, a struggle develops between the acceptance of the reality of loss and the desire to hold on to the object that has been lost. According to Freud, herein, what the mourner needs is “the work of mourning,” which is currently known as grief work, to gradually detach from the lost object by reviewing thoughts and memories of the deceased. He asserted that eventually when the work of mourning is completed, the ego will get rid of inhibition and be free (Freud, 1917/1957).

However, it is worth noting that Freud (1960) revised his stance on mourning especially with the death of his daughter, Sophia. As a bereaved father, he acknowledged that decaathexis from a lost object is not possible, and after such a loss, one cannot find a replacement no matter what fills the void. Besides, he recognized that it is the only way of maintaining this love that people are not willing to abandon (Berzoff, 2003; Hall, 2014). Even though his point of view has changed after the significant losses that he experienced in his life and he understood that the grief work was never a process that could be completed by cutting old attachments and forming new ones, he did not give theoretical forms to these feelings (Klass et al., 1996). However, his words are the precursor of the idea that one always needs continuing connection with the deceased loved one, which is a center of the continuing bond theory suggested by Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996).

### **1.1.2. Bowlby’s theories on attachment, loss, and the experience of grief**

Psychoanalyst John Bowlby, the father of the attachment theory, proposed another influential theory of loss, and he asserted that mourning is directly related to a child’s tie to the mother (Bowlby, 1963,1969,1980). He designed his theory of loss in the light of his observations on how the infants reacted to the temporary or permanent loss of a mother figure. According to Bowlby, human beings have an

innate tendency to develop solid affectional attachment bonds with significant others, and the disruption of these bonds causes the experience of grief which is an instinctive universal response to the separation (Bowlby, 1980). He demonstrated that when the tie to the mother or a primary caregiver is lost, the child experiences separation anxiety, which manifests itself with some ego disorganizing behaviors such as protest, despair, and denial (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby likened pathological mourning to the first reaction of the infant who was experiencing separation anxiety, that is, protest. A bereaved adult whose loss is permanent may protest the loss and experience anger like a raging infant deprived of his essential ties to the mother. (Berzoff, 2003)

According to classic psychoanalytic theory, the goal of the mourning work is to accept the reality of loss, finally separate from the lost object, and form new attachments (Bowlby, 1961; Freud, 1917/1959; Pollock, 1961). The process of detachment from the lost loved object covers a wide range of emotional responses and consists of divergent stages of acceptance of reality. Hence, similar to the other theoreticians like Lindemann (1944) and Kübler-Ross (1969), Bowlby (1980) divided the grief process that bereaved individuals go through in their response to losing a loved one into four stages which include numbing, yearning and searching, disorganization and despair, and reorganization. Within the first phase which is estimated by Bowlby to last from a few hours to up to a week in the normal mourning process, and there is a feeling of disbelief. At this stage, the bereaved experiences a period of numbness which can comprise intense emotions such as outbursts of severe distress, wailing, or anger; however, for the most part, there is an obvious lack of affect. During the second phase of mourning, there is an urge to recover from the loss. The bereaved individual has difficulty accepting the reality of loss and applies various mechanisms to deny the loss or the emotions that are connected with it. Even though denial may not be the primary defense mechanism, Bowlby believes that the other responses in this stage, such as anger and weeping, occur unconsciously for the purpose of holding onto or retrieving the lost object (Bowlby, 1961). One way to hold onto the lost object is to internalize the aspects

of the deceased and make them part of the self through the identification with the deceased. (Freud, 1917/1959). Besides, bereaved individuals might be prone to exhibit an interior preoccupation and internal dialogue with the deceased in this stage, accompanying by feelings of anxiety, anger, self-reproach, and confusion (Bowlby, 1980; Pollock, 1961).

Eventually, when the mourner cannot maintain the attempt to hold onto the lost object, he/she will be constrained to face the reality of the loss. As the hopes of reunion fade, the bereaved begins to experience feelings of emptiness, exhaustion, depression, aimlessness, and despair (Bowlby, 1961). The old patterns of relating to the lost object are unexpectedly ceased without promptly replacing them. All of these lead the mourner to primarily experience disequilibrium and the feelings of chaos that are not only painful but also frightening and confusing. However, Bowlby states that, even though such disorganization is rather painful and has potential risks such as the inability to achieve satisfactory reorganization ever again, this is an indispensable preliminary preparation for the new adaptation (Bowlby, 1980). Therefore, the mourners need to accept this collapse which is necessary for rebuilding a new life. At the last stage of mourning, it is believed that the mourner successfully renounces ties with the lost loved object and initiates to establish new ties with the world. Bowlby (1980) asserts that the bereaved must get through these stages before mourning is finally resolved.

Moreover, Winnicott suggested another understanding of how mourning is facilitated from the object relations perspective. According to him, the child can only manage the mother's physical absence by creating an internal representation of her. Winnicott denominated this as a transitional space in which the infant may use a song, a blanket, or a teddy bear as a symbolic representation of the ministrations of the mother, and it may symbolize the union of the two (Winnicott, 1971 as cited in Berzoff, 2003). These transitional objects can provide soothing and comforting functions for the infant; however, babies ultimately give up these objects under normal circumstances since they internalize the mother's functions (Berzoff, 2003). When a loss occurs for an adult, the capacity of the bereaved



individual to maintain internal representations of the deceased becomes significant in terms of dealing with the loss and separation in the grieving process. Transitional phenomena help the bereaved maintain a symbolic tie to the lost loved one (Berzoff, 2003). Some objects representing the memories of the lost loved one or some photographs and diaries may provide a soothing function for the bereaved individual, and when he or she can internalize, these transitional objects are eventually given up as it happened with the babies.

### **1.1.3. Lindemann and characteristics of grief**

Eric Lindemann, a psychiatrist and one of the pioneers in grief and mourning research, worked with the family members of people killed in a fire in the Coconut Grove nightclub in the 1940s, Boston. He observed 101 recently bereaved patients and listed the characteristics of normal grief as somatic or bodily distress of some type, preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt feelings relating to the deceased or circumstances of the death, hostile reactions, and the inability to function as one had before the loss (Lindemann, 1944). He further added a sixth symptom that is not as discernible as the others, nonetheless observed, which is the occurrence of some characteristics or behaviors of the deceased in the bereaved individual. These characteristics of grief can appear directly following a crisis or can be delayed, exaggerated or absent. In addition to being the first theoretician that describes acute grief as a psychological syndrome, Lindemann (1944) also distinguished normal grief from pathological or complicated grief (Berzoff, 2003). He considered some grief reactions as pathological such as the development of symptoms that represented a combination of the lost person, overactivity without a sense of loss or manic behavior, delayed reactions, salient hostility without sadness, self-destructiveness, or agitated depression includes insomnia, feelings of worthlessness, self-accusation. His contributions to grief and bereavement literature help clinicians to make clear distinctions between normal grief and abnormal grief reactions.

Similar to Freud, Lindemann believed that individuals could alleviate their symptoms of grief through grief work. He theorized that grief work should incrementally aim at the emancipation from bondage to the deceased, readjustment to a new environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships (Lindemann, 1944). According to him, unhealthy responses to grief substantially stem from the avoidance of grief work and suppressing the intense emotions associated with grief. Therefore, he believed that grief work is crucial for freeing oneself from emotional bonds to the deceased and establishing new relationships. Even though Freud and Lindemann's psychoanalytic grief theories are conceptually fascinating, it should be noted that they have not been systematically tested for validity (Wright & Hogan, 2008). However, their ideas still lay the foundation of subsequent studies on grief and bereavement.

#### **1.1.4. Kübler-Ross' Five Stage Model**

Another remarkable formulation of the stages of grief was developed by Kübler-Ross (1969), which is based upon her studies with the terminally ill patients in her book "On Death and Dying." She believed that facing the event of dying is a loss experience and an occasion for grief. Thus, from this point of view, she identified five stages of grief that dying individuals experience when expecting their own death which are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). According to Kübler-Ross, the first stage, denial, includes a sense of disbelief and shock which decreases gradually in time and leaves its place to the second stage, anger. According to her observations, in the first stage, while the participants said "it cannot be true" in shock, in the second stage, they started to ask "why me" in the accompanying feelings of rage, envy, and resentment. In the third stage, bereaved or the terminally ill person needs to make an agreement with the person or the God that the anger was directed to in order to accept the feelings of desperation that evoked because of the death. In the fourth stage, the person has a sense of emptiness and depression since he/she realizes that

his or her efforts for denial and bargaining do not work without the acceptance of the reality. Finally, in the fifth stage, the bereaved person fully accepts reality. (Kübler-Ross, 1969).

Even though this stage model has been widely utilized in the field of grief and bereavement, it has also been a focus of criticism for being a stage-based model, especially with the occurrence of contemporary approaches in the last decades. It has been widely criticized since the model is implied as if all individuals follow specific behavioral patterns within the stages or exhibit the same behaviors and experience the same emotions. However, the truth of the matter is that in the process of mourning, each individual can experience these stages in different ways and move back and forth between stages in their journey of bereavement. Besides, people may experience more than one stage simultaneously, may not experience any of them, or experience the combination of these stages (Hall, 2014). According to Hall (2014), stage theories overlook the multiplicity of psychological, social, physical, and spiritual needs that bereaved individuals experienced and fail to address the complexity, variety, and idiosyncratic quality of the grief experience (Hall, 2014).

#### **1.1.5. Contemporary Models of Grief**

Although the theories that are mentioned above have considerably contributed to our understanding of grief and bereavement, some contemporary approaches have criticized that the stage or phase models of bereavement for being too rigid and unable to consider the actual reality of an individual's bereavement journey (Hall, 2014; Worden, 2009; Wortman et al., 1993). According to Wortman and her colleagues (1993), these models cannot be as functional as formerly believed due to the lack of evidence to support them and the problems in subjecting such models to a meticulous empirical test. They declared that stage models fail to take into consideration how people can differ in their emotional states following a loss and they can cause inappropriate expectations in the bereaved. Scroebe et al.

(2001) further noted that the bereaved individuals do not recover from their loss and go back to “normal,” instead, they adapt to the changed situation that still contains a bond with the deceased. Besides, the idea of completely detaching one’s self from the bond and letting go in order not to be stuck in the bereavement has also been criticized. (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). According to Klass and his colleagues (1996), bereaved individuals never completely let go of their loved ones, and staying connected and continuing the bonds with the deceased is a healthy response. Thus, it can be said that stage-based models of mourning cannot explain the variety of consequences that occur in response to a loss.

#### **1.1.5.1. Worden’s Task Model**

Worden (2009) conceptualized the grieving process in terms of “tasks” that the bereaved has to take action as an actor rather than passively experiencing it as stage models offer. According to him, by taking an active role in this bereavement journey, a bereaved individual can gain control when he or she felt out of control or helpless and a sense of hope that there is something that he/she can accomplish in order to adapt to the loss of the loved one. (Worden, 2009) In the lights of this, he suggested a four-task model for adaptation to loss that includes accepting the reality of the loss (Task 1), working through the pain of grief (Task 2), adjusting to an environment without the deceased (Task 3), and emotionally relocating the deceased (Task 4). For the first task of grieving, the bereaved needs to come full face with the reality that the loved person has died, will not return and reunion with the deceased is not possible, at least in this lifetime. Some people deny the reality or the meaning of the loss, which leads to hinder the completion of the first task and get stuck in their mourning process. Acceptance of the reality of the loss takes time since it includes not only intellectual acceptance but also emotional acceptance of the loss. Worden (2009) stated that traditional rituals such as the funeral might help the bereaved. The second task contains the bereaved processing the pain of the loss. Even though the intensity of the pain may vary depending on some factors such as who the person that died was, the nature of the attachment to the deceased, how the person died, historical antecedents, personality variables, social mediators, and

concurrent stressors, it is barely impossible to lose someone that has been attached without experiencing some level of pain (Worden, 2009). Worden believed that if it is not allowed to be experienced and inhibited by avoiding or suppressing painful thoughts and feelings, it can manifest itself through physical symptoms, and the individual can carry the pain throughout his or her life.

Worden (2009) specified three areas of adjustment that needed to be addressed for the third task. External and internal adjustments are needed to deal with both the loss of roles previously played by the deceased and the challenges of adjusting to a bereaved person's own sense of self, as bereavement can affect a person's sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem and also self-definition (Worden, 2009). The third one within this task is named "spiritual adjustments," which comprises one's sense of the world since the loss through death can challenge the bereaved individual's fundamental life values and philosophical assumptions that are influenced by our life experiences, families, education, and religion. According to Worden (2009), people may fail to adapt to these adjustments when they promote their own helplessness, cannot develop coping skills, or withdraw from the world. In Worden's (1991) first edition of *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, he defined the fourth task of mourning as "withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and reinvesting it in another relationship," which supports Freud's concept (1917/1957). However, later on, he discerned that individuals do not deattach from the dead loved one instead detect adaptive ways to develop continuing bonds with the deceased (Klass et al., 1996; Worden, 2009). Thus, eventually, he suggested that the last task of mourning requires finding an ongoing connection with the thoughts and memories with the deceased while still allowing oneself to continue with one's life after loss (Worden, 2009). In other words, to cope with the loss of a loved one more adaptively, the bereaved needs to find a healthy way to remember and remain connected with the deceased without feeling uncomfortable reinvesting in life, which refers to the "continuing bond model" of Klass et al. (1996). Worden expressed that the best descriptive words to define the non-completion of the last task were "not living" (Worden, 2009 p.52). Hindrances to the fourth task, which

might be the most difficult one to complete for many people, encompass holding on to the past attachment in a way that prevents the individual from forming new relationships (Worden, 2009). According to Worden (2009), these tasks of mourning can be revisited and worked through repeatedly. Besides, varied tasks can be worked on simultaneously in the fluid process of the bereavement journey (Worden, 2009 p.53).

#### **1.1.5.2. Continuing bonds**

Whereas the older models on grief and loss asserted that the aim of grieving was to rebuild one's autonomy by breaking the bonds with the loved deceased ones (Freud, 1957; Lindemann, 1944), Klass and his colleagues (1996) expressed in their book "Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief" that the continued connection to the deceased through internal representations of them facilitates the bereaved individual's ability to cope with the loss and the accompanying changes, and they argued that bonds do not need to be broken for completing the grieving process (Klass et al., 1996). During the 20th century, the bereaved individual's need to maintain an ongoing attachment to the deceased was seen as pathological grief. However, as from the mid-1980s, some theoreticians have conducted noteworthy studies on grief and bereavement, and based on the findings it is proposed that continued relationship to the deceased loved one frequently provides solace, comfort, and support to the bereaved rather than causes detrimental consequences (Klass 1988, 1996; Silverman et al., 1992; Normand et al, 1996; as cited in Baker, 2001). Hence, they expressed that maintaining an internal representation of the deceased by holding the deceased in a loving memory is normal instead of pathological or abnormal. In one of the studies conducted by Silverman and Worden (1992), they were interviewed with 125 children who were between 6 to 17 years old and lost their parents. According to the results of this study, they proposed that these children tried to continue their relationship with the deceased parents through five stages which can be listed as locating, experiencing, reaching out to the dead parent, waking memories and valuing the linking objects. Moreover, 81 percent of these children believed that their lost parents were still watching them

(Silverman et al., 1992). The expression of this continuing bond can be seen in various ways. (Hall, 2014) The deceased might be seen as a role model and may guide or assist the bereaved person. The relationship with the deceased can be developed by repositioning the deceased in the inner world of the bereaved or heaven. On top of that, the bereaved can experience the lost loved one by feeling the deceased's presence in his or her dreams (Hall, 2014).

## **1.2. PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION FOLLOWING BEREAVEMENT**

It is known that when individuals face major traumatic life events, they are highly at risk for psychological distress due to their predicament. However, it is also suggested by the theoreticians that the occurrence of these difficult events can be an impetus for psychological development. It is relatively common for individuals to emerge from crises such as divorce, physical illness, natural disasters, war or bereavement with enhanced social and personal resources, and new coping skills, including an increased appreciation for life, the experience of the emergence of new possibilities, a stronger sense of meaning and purpose, more intimate and authentic relationships, and a greater sense of confidence and competence (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2007; Calhoun et al., 2010; Schaefer et al., 2001). In a study which is conducted by Calhoun and Tedeschi (1990), the majority of respondents who lost either their spouses, a close friend, a sibling, a parent, or other relatives in the last four years expressed that they have changed into a more mature, independent, competent, wise and strong person, and better able to deal with other crises afterward the death of a loved one. In addition to the changing self-perception, they reported that their experiences with bereavement also positively affected their experiences with their social support system and fostered the depth of religious beliefs (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2008). According to Taylor (2020), these changes might take place dramatically and suddenly and is so fundamental in one's life that denominating it as "transformation" would be more appropriate rather than using the term "growth." (Taylor, 2020). Thus, he expresses that posttraumatic transformation encompasses

a sudden and profound shift into a new higher-functioning identity with a different perception of life, a new awareness of reality, and new values and goals (Taylor, 2020).

There are several studies in the literature that have investigated the positive personal aspects that are perceived after the death of a loved one. For instance, Malinak, Hoyk, and Patterson (1979) have interviewed bereaved adults who had lost one of their parents, and the findings of this study demonstrated that half of the participants reported that dealing with the loss has produced psychological growth (Malinak et al., 1979). In another study on parental grieving following the death of a child, it is found that all seven couples reported that their relationships had deepened and improved in terms of emotional intimacy (Helmrath & Steinitz, 1978, as cited in Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990). Moreover, in one of the studies with bereaved parents who lost their children in murder, participants expressed that they feel stronger and discover their capacity to live through the depths of despair (Parappully et al., 2002).

More recently, Taylor (2020) conducted a study to investigate the transformational potential of bereavement. Based on the findings of this study, he asserted that 15 out of 16 bereaved participants expressed a permanent or ongoing change and a less materialistic and more altruistic orientation, 14 participants reported a different attitude to death, 13 participants stated more inner well-being, personality, and relationship changes and also 10 participants expressed an appreciation and sense of connection to nature (Taylor, 2020). Besides, while half of the participants reported a sudden transformation, the other half felt a gradual transformation. Thus, his study revealed that suffering and endurance of adversity might transformed into a meaningful and productive experience for the bereaved individuals at one point. According to Taylor, all the psychological attachments break down with the death of a loved one, as it happened during states of trauma. As a result of these attachments broken down, the sense of identity of the bereaved person might collapse just like a house collapses when some of its bricks have been dislodged (Taylor, 2020). At this point, even if the individual may feel empty and



desolate in this intense psychic pain, this emptiness and desolation may pave the way for a new, more authentic sense of identity occurrence (Taylor, 2020).

Since bereavement also challenges individual's values and beliefs about themselves and their worlds, in order to recreate an existence that has a purpose and meaning, the bereaved person needs to go through a reconstructive process that includes collecting the remaining parts of the assumptive world (Holland et al., 2006). While bereaved individuals reconstruct the meaning in their lives in response to loss, they also reconstruct themselves by adapting to new roles and take on new responsibilities (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Therefore, researchers asserted that meaning reconstruction not only has an ameliorative impact on adaptation to loss but also plays a contributing role in transformation through loss (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

Gillies and Neimeyer (2006) expressed that the process of meaning reconstruction contains three main components, which are making sense of loss, finding benefit in the experience, and undergoing identity change. Sense-making indicates the bereaved individual's capacity to find a benign explanation to the loss, primarily framed in spiritual or philosophical terms. Benefit-finding is focused on the ability of the bereaved to find benefits in the experience, such as stronger bonds with family members or changed priorities, which may be seen months or years after the loss (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Holland et al., 2006). Lastly, identity change is parallel to posttraumatic growth, which includes positive changes in the sense of self (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). It should be noted that the positive by-product of grief is enhanced if we are able to give a space for the expression of feelings of anger, guilt, and abandonment (Fiefel, 1977 as cited in Balk, 2004). Personal growth and transformation can occur in a company with psychological distress and substantial suffering (Calhoun et al., 2010), and it needs to allow the bereaved individuals to redefine and reintegrate themselves into life (Balk, 2004).

### **1.3. DREAMS**

The meaning and the nature of dreams have been of interest throughout history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the landmark work of Sigmund Freud (1900) has generated a way of interest in the therapeutic value of dreams. Subsequently, various models on the role and functions of dreams have been proposed (Germain, 2013). This section will focus on the thoughts of psychoanalytic theoreticians about the dream, starting with Freud's pioneering work of "The Interpretation of Dreams" in psychoanalytic theory. Then the effect of the dreams that occur during the grieving process, the prevalence, and its function has will be explained. Finally, it will be examined what the contents of the bereavement dreams are and how they have changed in the grief process according to the studies carried out in this regard.

#### **1.3.1. Psychoanalytic theory on dreams**

According to classic psychoanalytic theory, dream images serve as a symbolic expression of some of the inner dynamics of the dreamer, and also, they comprise valuable psychic information (Freud, 1900/1963). Freud (1900) states in his seminal work "The Interpretation of Dreams" that dreams are the "royal road" to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind (Freud, 1900). He proposed that dreams have two interrelated functions, which are protecting sleep from being disturbed as guardians of sleep and serving for wish-fulfillment. According to him, dreams are a way of expressing the wishes that are previously suppressed by the id. These wishes, which are predominantly sexual in nature and anxiety-provoking, needed to be disguised and transformed into more benign and less threatening images or symbols in order to be acceptable for the dreamer and to be able to allow psychic tension to be released without incurring punishment from the superego (Pesant & Zadra, 2004). This task is known as dream censorship that is occurred by way of the defense mechanisms such as condensation, displacement, symbolization, and secondary elaboration (Pesant & Zedra, 2004). Freud (1900) also made a significant distinction between the manifest and latent content of

dreams. According to him, the former refers to the experienced and reported content of the dream that the dreamer consciously perceives, whereas the latter refers to the true meaning behind the dream. In other words, the manifest content of the dream is only a disguised version of the latent wishful thought (Gilmore & Nersessian, 1999). Thus, the goal of the dream interpretation is to gain access to the latent content of the dream (Freud, 1900).

Subsequently, a student of Freud, Carl Jung, developed his own theories about the analysis of dreams and extended dream interpretation into the deeper layer of the psyche through broader individual practices (Wray, 2005). Unlike Freud, who believed that the unconscious is the reservoir of undesirable primitive impulses, Jung affirmed that the unconscious hold “the unknown at any given moment” (Jung, 1934/1974, as cited in Roeder, 1981; Bateman, 1999). He stated that the purpose of dreams is to allow the conscious mind to access to the knowledge and guidance of the unconscious mind which may contain memories, thoughts, emotions, desires, or insights. According to Jung (1948/ 1974), dreams serve a compensatory function by drawing attention to aspects of a situation that may have been previously overlooked or undervalued (Roeder, 1981; Bateman, 1999). He disagreed with Freud’s assumption that the manifest content of the dream is disguised. By contrast, he believed that the dream language is directly the language of the unconscious; hence it is rather complicated for the consciousness to comprehend (Roeder, 1981). Besides, his theory encompasses the universal or common themes, symbols, or ideas present in all dreams, which he termed as archetypes, the psychic structural components of the collective unconscious (Roeder, 1981; Wray, 2005). Thus, in order to understand dream symbols, it is significant to inquire into their meanings at a level of both universal and the meaning for the individual dreamer (Roeder, 1981). Besides, according to Freud (1950), increased dream recall can be seen as an attempt by the subconscious to heal itself (Freud, 1950). If it is considering that generally bereaved individuals recall more dreams (Duval, 2010; Parkes, 2001), it can be assumed that dreams of the departed in the grieving process hold some power to heal (Bateman, 1999).

On the other hand, the contemporary psychoanalytic theoreticians presented significant new insights about the psychological functions and meaning of dreams. While the classic psychoanalytic theory had viewed dreams as indicators of latent wishes and emphasized regression, primary process, manifest and latent content, Fosshage (1983) revised this model and emphasized the function of integration, synthesis, and mastery of dreams. According to him, dreams continue to regulate psychic processes of a sexual, aggressive, or narcissistic nature that are not adequately regulated in waking lives. They also contribute to the development of new psychological organizations. (Fosshage, 1983) In other words, the central function of dreams is the development, maintenance, and restoration of psychological organization and emotional regulation (Fosshage, 1983). For instance, when an individual could not sufficiently express his or her anger in reaction to a perceived threat during the day, he or she might try to set the situation right, which can be called self-righting, in his/her dreams by expression of anger that serves to affect regulation and restoration of self-equilibrium (Fosshage, 2000). Besides, he disaffirmed Freud's manifest-latent content distinction and instead, suggested that dreams reveal the immediate concerns of the dreamer through affects, metaphors and themes. Dream images are selected for their evocative power and actual effectiveness in thinking imagistically about the issue at hand rather than the purposes of disguise (Fosshage, 2000). Stolorow and Atwood (1982) also discussed the functions of dreams in a similar vein with Fosshage (1983) and they suggested that dreams represent the subjective concerns of the dreamer based on his or her significant emotional issues. According to them, dreams serve to crystallize and preserve the organization of the subjective world of the dreamer by using concrete symbolization (Stolorow & Atwood, 1982).

### **1.3.2. Dreams in bereavement**

After the death of a loved one, most bereaved individuals may dream of the deceased loved ones. Researches have provided evidence that it is rather common in bereaved individuals to dream about the departed loved ones and also in many

cases these bereavement dreams have had a life-changing effect upon the individuals' lives (Barrett, 1992; Black et al., 2019; Cookson, 1990; Garfield, 1996; Roeder, 1981; Worden, 2009). Wright and his colleagues conducted a study on whether the bereaved individuals had ever dreamt of the deceased and they found that 58 percent of the 278 participants reported that they had a dream about someone who had died (Wright et al., 2014). Similarly, Germain et al. (2013) investigated the dream experiences of the participants with complicated grief and they found that 18 percent of the 77 dreams included deceased loved ones. Moreover, bereavement dreams are more easily remembered than other dreams that people had throughout their lives due to their emotional impact (Barrett, 1992; Wright et al., 2013) However, why some people do not experience bereavement dreams during the grieving process, whereas others do? Moss (2002) realized in his group work with bereaved individuals that those who do not dream about the departed loved ones can develop distressing beliefs like the deceased do not love them anymore, is mad at them or the deceased do not reach to heaven (Moss, 2002). Thus, in order to enlighten this question, Black and his colleagues (2019) have conducted two studies; one involving participants who lost their romantic partners within a year or two and the other containing participants who had lost a companion animal. In both studies it was found that recalling a dream of the deceased is related most strongly to one's aptness to remember dreams in general. Besides, they suggested some indirect predictors for dream recall in bereavement process such as grief intensity, the personality disposition of openness to experience and the quality of attachment to the deceased (Black et al., 2019). According to Black et al. (2019) great grief intensity, openness to experience, and having anxious attachment style increased the probability of recalling dreams of the deceased (Black et al., 2019).

As described in the previous section, after the death of a loved one, the grief which is the accompanying psychological response to the loss makes it difficult for the bereaved individual to adjust in emotional, cognitive, physiological, social, and spiritual domains. Vivid, emotionally laden, and meaningful dreams in which frequently the departed is involved can also be incorporated into the myriad changes

experienced during the bereavement (Germain et al., 2013). Among theorists, it has been a common observation that dreams about the deceased are a healthy attempt to resolve conflict, access severe emotions, and deal with abandonment feelings by the bereaved individual (Barrett, 1992; Garfield, 1996). Besides, another overarching function of most bereavement dreams is that they can help the bereaved in maintaining a relationship with the deceased loved one since they serve as psychological and emotional meeting place with lost loved ones (Black, 2014; Barrett, 1992; Belicki et al., 2003; Garfield, 1996; Moss, 2002; Worden, 2009; Wright et al., 2014). In the study by Begovac & Begovac (2012), bereaved mothers expressed that if they did not experience dreams of their deceased children, they could not deal with the loss and that dreams brought them relief.

Freud was the one of the scientists who addressed the issue of the appearance of the deceased in dreams from a psychological perspective. According to him, the dreams that involves the deceased is solely function as a wish fulfillment of the bereaved (Freud, 1911/1953 as cited in Bateman, 1999). However, he acknowledged that his wish fulfillment theory of dreams cannot explain all bereavement dreams (Freud, 1900/1963 as cited in Roeder, 1981). Worden (2009) observed in his Harvard child bereavement study that dreaming the deceased is alive was not entirely wish fulfillment, instead it was the mind's way of confronting the reality that the person is gone and will not be coming back when one awakens from the dream (Worden, 2009). The dreams of the bereaved often reflect the mourning process and the particular task of mourning that the bereaved individual is struggling with (Barrett, 1992; Hess, 2004; Moss, 2002, Worden, 2009; Wright et al., 2014). Dreams can be helpful in understanding where and why one is stuck in this mourning process, integrating intense affects and making sense of the loss (Worden, 2009 p.171; Hess, 2004). In the light of this empirical finding, several researchers have made efforts to identify archetypal categories of bereavement dreams (Barrett, 1992; Cookson, 1990; Garfield, 1996; Belicki, 2003). Though these models differ considerably in terms of dream content, yet all have themes of reunification and separation.

Dreaming of the deceased can include both pleasant and unpleasant feelings (Garfield, 1996; Wright, et al., 2013). According to Garfield (1996) dreams of the deceased incline to be negative in nature initially, however, they become more positive in time (Garfield, 1996). Wright et al. (2013) explored the dreams that the deceased appears and they found that 56% of the respondents reported that their dreams were pleasant, 31% reported the dreams being both pleasant and disturbing in nature, and a minority of 7% reported that they experience only disturbing dreams. Belicki and his colleagues (2003) found while they are investigating dream themes that Back-to-Life, Alive Again and Passionate Encounter dreams have positive correlations on positive emotions, while Dying-Again dreams have positive correlations on negative emotions (Belicki et al., 2003).

#### **1.3.2.1. Dream themes throughout the grief process**

When the bereaved person eventually accepts the reality of the loss of loved one, he or she subsequently experiences emotional and physical pain and in order to progress through the mourning process, the bereaved needs to work through this pain (Parkes, 2001; Worden, 2009). However, if the bereaved individuals avoid or suppress this pain in their waking lives, they confront with these feelings in their dreams (Hess, 2004). With regards to empirically measuring the content of the bereavement dreams, researchers reported great variety in the number of dream categories. A doctoral dissertation that is written by Roeder (1981) was one of the first valuable contribution to the literature and more attention was given to this field after her groundbreaking work. She conducted a qualitative research on the experience of dreaming following the loss of a parent and she identified a number of recurring dream themes which can be listed as the image of the parent returning from death, the images of the parent half death or half alive, images of illness and dying, images of struggle and resolution with the deceased, images of loss, images of childhood, images of travel and transportation, and good byes (Roeder, 1981). According to Roeder (1981), the bereavement dreams reflected many of the crucial issues of grief. Subsequently, in two preliminary exploratory studies in grief and mourning that concerning the role of dreams in resolving grief, Garfield (1996)

reported eleven common dream themes in grief process, while Barrett (1992) reported only four categories of dream types (Black et.al., 2014). These studies are the most detailed studies that focus on the content of the bereavement dreams during the mourning process and the feelings these dreams are evoked. Therefore, this study will mainly focus on these two studies.

Garfield (1996) proposed that the bereaved person's dreams may facilitate or hinder the accomplishment of the tasks of grief. Based on this idea, she conducted a retrospective study in order to explore the role of dreams in the journal of bereavement. In this study she collected her data from three different group of samples. One of them was her own 2-year dream diary following the death of her own father that contains 44 bereavements dreams. Also, she interviewed with 15 bereaved women for this study. Lastly, she investigated the data contains 101 bereavement dreams from another study that conducted previously by Patricia Keelin (1992) for another study. As a result, she concluded that that eleven distinctive dream themes may occur under the three general grief phases based on Kübler-Ross' (1975) work which are numbness, disorganization, and reorganization.

In the first phase of grief, the numbness phase, *alive-again* or *dying-again* dream themes can occur. According to Garfield (1996), in the early stages of loss the dreams about the deceased frequently contain the theme of shock at finding the deceased alive again. In *dying-again* dreams the dreamer replays the incidence of death either as it happened, in an exaggerated or distorted form. On awakening from such dreams, the bereaved is generally overwhelmed with the pain of the loss once again (Garfield, 1996). It can be said that *alive-again* and *dying-again* dreams assist the bereaved individual accept the reality of death (Garfield, 1996; Hess, 2004) and pave the way for working through the painful emotions of grief (Garfield, 1996). During the phase of disorganization, dream themes of *saying-goodbye*, *taking-a-journey*, and *telephone-call* might be present (Garfield, 1996). In *saying-goodbye* dreams, the deceased show up, the dreamer knows that the loved one is dead and it includes an affectionate goodbye. In *taking a journey* dreams, the deceased or the



dreamer takes a trip, leaving the other behind. Some common settings may occur in these dreams such as airports, bus or train stations, and docks and the trip might symbolize the separation from the deceased loved one (Garfield, 1996). According to Garfield (1996) another common image in bereavement dreams is a telephone call from the deceased or speaking to him or her on the phone. Receiving a telephone call from the deceased may symbolize the communication with the spirit of the dead loved one and also these dreams can help the bereaved individuals believe that they have an intact communication with the dead person and he or she is at peace (Garfield, 1996).

During the reorganization stage where the bereaved individuals begin to adjust to their changed environment, *young-well-again*, *approval-disapproval*, *advice-comfort-gift*, *passionate-encounter*, and *daily-activity dreams* can arise (Garfield, 1996). *Young-well-again* dreams generally produce rather positive feelings with a sense of peace to the dreamer and they contain the image of deceased as young and healthy. The dreamer may describe the deceased in these dreams as wearing elegant clothes, having shining hair and a radiant face. Whereas the *approval dreams* that contain the strong approval from the deceased transpire in the reorganization phase, *the disapproval dreams* that include severe criticism to the dreamer arise in the disorganization phase. Garfield (1996) believed that people that had excessively ambivalent relationship with the deceased mostly still yearn for approval in dreams. The *Advice-comfort-gift dreams* which has a high emotional charge include that the deceased gives advice, comfort, or a gift to the bereaved person and frequently are described as quite vivid or real. When dreams contain a message from the deceased person particularly relevant to the dreamer's current life, these dreams also have a soothing effect for the dreamer (Garfield, 1996). As a variation of the advice-comfort-gift dream, *passionate-encounter dreams* involve a romantic or passionate encounter usually with the deceased spouse or lover.

Another dream theme that is described by the bereaved dreamers is the *daily-activity dreams* in which the deceased is seen as performing normal routine activities such as shopping, driving, or cooking. Lastly, Garfield (1996) added the

*deadly-invitation dreams* which comprise an attempt from the deceased to draw the dreamer toward death. Garfield (1996) alerts the mental health workers to consider these dreams meticulously since they are rarely seen but a remarkable indicator of severe depression. In addition to all these, it should be mentioned that dreams not only vary throughout the mourning process but also change according to the nature of the death, the relationship of the dreamer to the deceased, and the symbolic images related to death (Garfield, 1996). Moreover, categories of dreams may overlap as phases of grief process.

Barrett (1992) conducted another preliminary study which includes two parts. For the first part, she reviewed 149 dream diaries from 128 undergraduate students that the data were gathered from a previous experiment and for the second part, she asked some specific questions to 96 college students in order to gather more bereavement dreams. As a result, she classified these dreams into four categories which can be listed as *back-to-life dreams*, *advice dreams*, *leave-taking dreams*, and *state-of-death dreams*. Besides, she found that there were certain changes in the content of the dreams throughout the grief process. (Barrett, 1992)

According to her findings, *back-to-life* dreams occur shortly after the loss and in these dreams bereaved individuals see the deceased alive. She reported that back-to-life dreams are the most frequent theme that occur in her sample (39%). In the *advice dreams*, the lost loved one gives advice to the dreamer and these dreams prone to occur in several months to years after the loss. Barrett (1992) stated that 23 percent of her sample has reported *advice dreams*. 29 percent of the participants reported *leave-taking dreams* in which the deceased comes and relieves the bereaved individual by explaining the conditions surrounding the death. These dreams are likely to occur more later in bereavement journey and often have positive tone and frequently help the dreamer in resolution of his or her grief. The final category, *state-of death* dreams occurs when the deceased and the bereaved discuss the nature of death and also when the dreamer expresses his or her concerns about mortality. In the Barrett's study (1992) 18 percent of the total dreams was in

this category and interestingly, 53 percent of these dreams included telephone calls from the lost loved ones (Barrett, 1992).

More recently, Black and his colleagues (2014) conducted an exploratory case study in order to investigate whether the time-dependent changes will be observed in dream themes and whether these changes reflect waking day progression through the healing process in bereavement. They investigated eleven dream themes that Garfield (1996) have categorized, and their findings showed that only three themes are present in their sample which are alive-again, advice-comfort-gift, and daily-activity dreams (Black et.al., 2014). Moreover, the results which are also in agreement with the research of Garfield (1996) revealed that these dreams incline to arise in a specific order with alive-again themes occurring in the first sequence, much earlier in the grief process (Black et.al., 2014). In other words, their findings empirically demonstrated the consistent time dependent-changes in dream content. In the same vein, a study by Belicki et al. (2003) in which 16-year dream diary of a widowers is examined found that with nine other common dream themes, the majority of themes are dying-again and passionate-encounter. Besides, Belicki et al. (2003) stated that Alive-again and back-to-life dreams, which are the categories that have similar content, tend to occur earlier in the grief process whereas dreams of being separated from the deceased arise later on (Belicki et al., 2003). On the other hand, even though Belicki et al. (2003) believed that some common dream themes are exist as Garfield (1996) and Barrett (1992) found, they laid emphasis on the uniqueness and subjectivity of the dream experience. Therefore, they asserted another category of bereavement dream called “reminiscence” which has a unique function and idiosyncratic meanings for the bereaved individual (Belicki et al., 2003).

Another study on assessing the dream contents in which the deceased loved one is appeared as a character was conducted by Wright et al. (2014) Within the scope of the research, the contents of 161 dreams were examined and as a result they concluded that the most commonly reported dream themes were the pleasant past memories or experiences, deceased free of illness, memories of the deceased’s

illness or time of death, the deceased in the afterlife appearing comfortable and at peace, and the deceased communicating a message which are validated the aspects of the existing models of bereavement dreams (Wright et al., 2014). However, they declared that they did not find Deadly-Invitation or Telephone-Call dreams themes when compared their findings with Garfield's (1996) dream categories.

#### **1.4. THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUALITY IN GRIEF PROCESS**

There are many individual factors that determined how the grieving process is experienced, and one of them is religious/spirituality. According to Worden (2009), to adequately comprehend how a person is grieving, we need to know the bereaved individual's social, ethnic, and religious background (Worden, 2009). The reason for his statement must be due to the fact that, in the bereavement literature, there is a positive relationship between adaptation to loss and religious faith. By definition, religiosity is the expression of belief in a higher power in accordance with the practices or rituals of a particular religion or denomination. On the other hand, as a more abstract and complex term, spirituality is related to the universal quest of making sense out of existence, which is a characteristic of human beings, and it is not necessary to depend on any religious belief (Becker, 2007; Mallon, 2008). Some people may not identify themselves as religious or may declare that they do not believe in God, but they still consider themselves spiritual, believe in the afterlife, or revert to familiar belief systems to deal with bereavement (Wortmann & Park, 2008). In both cases, it is the most commonly used and most effective component in coping with death. However, there is no clear consensus in the literature about whether religion/spirituality assists people in coping with loss (Becker et al., 2007). For instance, Frantz et al. (1996) conducted a study and interviewed 312 bereaved people one year after losing a loved one. According to their findings, 42% of the participants reported that their religious beliefs such as faith in God, attendance at rituals, the belief that the loved one is in a peaceful place, and belief in an afterlife had been helpful in the grieving process. On the other hand, 23% of the participants stated that religion was not helpful, and for some participants, they even had lost the existing faith previously (Becker, 2007).

According to Wortmann and Park (2008), religion is a multidimensional concept that contains affiliation, attendance, general religiousness, beliefs, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations, coping, social support, and spiritual experiences (Wortmann & Park, 2008 p.705). Their in-depth examination of 73 published studies concluded that religion/spirituality is positively associated with adjusting to the loss with an inconsistent relationship. They also added that this relationship depends on various factors including bereavement-specific factors, and different results may be obtained depending on how religion/spirituality is measured (Wortmann & Park, 2008). A study was conducted by McIntosh, Silver, and Wortman (1993) in order to examine the role of religious participation and religious importance in coping with bereavement. The researchers interviewed bereaved parents who recently lost their children from a sudden infant death syndrome. They asserted that while being high in religious participation is positively correlated with the social support that the bereaved perceives, greater religious importance is positively associated with more cognitive processing and finding meaning in the loss (McIntosh et al., 1993). It is found that both of them make a positive contribution to making sense of loss, and it enhanced their well-being. Besides, previous studies have shown that religious coping, personal religious practices, and organizational religious activities are significant factors in personal growth (Neimeyer et al., 2013). Parappully and colleagues (2002) recognized, through qualitative analysis of interviews, that spirituality which encompasses the faith in God, beliefs in an afterlife, gratitude, prayer, and spiritual rituals, encourage parents whose children had been murdered to personally transform after this trauma (Parappully, Rosenbaum, Daele & Nzewi, 2002). As a result, after the death of a loved one, the bereaved either acquire a new spiritual or religious path or return to a known one with greater depth and commitment (Mallon, 2008) in which either way it leads the bereaved person to personally transformed.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. THE PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR (PI)**

As the primary investigator (PI) of this dissertation thesis, I am a 27 years old female student at the Istanbul Bilgi University Clinical Psychology Graduate program adult track. Throughout my clinical psychology training, I have learned that human beings can face losses throughout their lives not only with the death of a significant other but also in many areas of life. I have always been interested in the variety of people's reactions in dealing with these losses. However, especially with the loss of my grandfather in 2016, the fact that all my family members reacted differently increased my curiosity about human reactions during the grieving process. Besides, my grandmother has often told me about her dreams in the aftermath of my grandfather's death, and she has tried to make sense of them in her own way. It led me to think that she was somehow looking for a way to maintain a connection with his lost loving husband through these dreams and these bereavement dreams had a function of dealing with grief-related emotions such as longing. Thus, I sought to gain in depth understanding of what kind of functions bereavement dreams have in the grieving process and how they relate to the healing process. Besides, as an intern psychotherapist, I had the opportunity to observe how helpful working on the dreams with my patients who have experienced a significant loss was to make sense of the unique experiences during the grieving process. Therefore, the study is also aimed to broaden the psychotherapists' perspectives that work with bereaved Turkish patients.

### **2.2. PARTICIPANTS**

This study included eight bereaved adults who were 25 years old and over, have experienced the death of a loved one between 1 and 5 years, have had at least two bereavement dreams related to that person, and able to remember and describe these dreams in detail. The age range of 25 years old and older was chosen for this study because it is known that the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until 25

(Tanner & Arnett, 2009). Thus, preferring this age range was appropriate for this study since these adults were believed to have more capacity to reflect on their bereavement experiences and were believed to be more stable in their cognitive, emotional, and mental functioning. The death of the significant other was expected to be between 1 to 5 years to allow the bereaved person sufficiently distance from the initial pain and also to be able to inquire about the changing contents of dreams over time and their meanings for that person. In order to maximize the homogeneity of the sample, the criterion was added that the loss should have occurred within 5 years at the most. As an exclusion criterion, the participants were expected to have not experienced any other losses that led them to experience grief within 5 years.

5 female and 3 male participants, ranging between the ages of 26 and 50 were interviewed, the mean age being 35. All participants were from different professions such as quality control manager, environmental engineer, architect, account manager, marketing communication specialist, data specialist, financial consultant, and the remaining participant was retired. They had different levels of educations. One of them had a master's degree, one was a high-school graduate, and the others had bachelor's degree.

All the participants had experienced the loss of a significant other such as; mother, father, spouse, and grandfather. Three of them lost their father because of a heart attack, two of them lost their spouse due to cancer, two participants lost their grandfather due to old age, and one of them lost her mother to old age. The time elapsed on the loss was also varied among the participants. The mean of the time taken on loss is 2,7 years. The participants were mentioned with letters assigned randomly for confidentiality. (Table 1)

*Table 3. 1 Information of participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Lost Significant Other</b>	<b>The Time Passed since Loss</b>	<b>Cause of death</b>	<b>Age of death</b>	<b>The degree of religious/s pirituality (0 to 5)</b>
Mrs. Ö	F	33	Father	5 years	Heart attack	57	3
Mrs. A	F	50	Mother	1 year 4 months	Old age	84	3
Mrs. R	F	42	Spouse	2 years 6 months	Cancer	42	3
Mrs. B	F	30	Father	3 years	Heart attack	54	5
Mrs. İ	F	26	Father	1 year 1 month	Heart attack	49	3
Mr. M	M	27	Grandfather	2 years 1 month	Old age	85	0
Mr. A	M	45	Spouse	1 year 8 months	Cancer	39	3
Mr. H	M	26	Grandfather	4 years 6 months	Old age	96	0

### **2.3. PROCEDURE**

Following the İstanbul Bilgi University Ethics Committee's approval, the study and the participation criteria were announced in WhatsApp groups and social media. Participants were reached by using convenience and snowball sampling methods. Each potential participant was contacted via telephone in order to informed about the aim of the study, and to decide whether they met the criteria for



participation. Furthermore, this short telephone call was made in order to determine if they show the picture of an acute grief process. In this call they were asked questions about some of the symptoms of acute grief that Lindemann (1963) has described universally which can be listed as somatic distress, preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostile reactions, and the loss of patterns of conduct. When the participant met the inclusion criteria for the study, an appointment was scheduled for the interview.

Before the interviews, an informed consent was sent to their email addresses, and they were expected to reply to that email by writing as they give their consent to participate in the study voluntarily. Besides, a demographic form was sent, and asked to fill this form before the interview starts. This demographic questionnaire has been developed for this study in order to obtain characteristics of the sample, and the questions addressed the following; age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, education, SES, employment, relationship status, bereavement history, and dream frequency.

Nine semi-structured in-depth interviews had done with nine participants via online channels which are Zoom or Skype due to the pandemic. With one of the participants, in the phone call it was decided that she had met all the criteria for this study and that's why an appointment was scheduled for the interview. However, during the interview it was realized that the participant could describe only one dream while she was expected to remember at least two dreams in detail. Therefore, this participant's interview was excluded from the research data. At the beginning of the interviews the researcher informed the participants once again about the purpose of the study and confidentiality. They were also reminded that they could ask for the recording to be stopped whenever they want or that they had the right to completely retrieve from the study, since it is a difficult issue to talk about. To prevent any harm, their emotional states and how they are influenced by the questions were observed during the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for this study which was influenced by the literature review.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 70 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and then these audio records of the interviews transcribed for data analysis.

## **2.4. DATA ANALYSIS**

In this study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith & Osborn, 2003) was used in order to understand the experiences of participants who lost their loved ones. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it is believed that qualitative methods focus on the uniqueness of experiences of the participants and explores them through the process of sense-making. After completing the transcription of eight interviews, each transcript was read several times before the coding process and was investigated very carefully in order to understand how the participants experienced the phenomenon. MAXQDA Software program was used to code each interview and to form the themes. First of all, notes were taken by using the memo function of the software, and each significant segment and the word was coded for each case. Gradually the most common codes created the themes. The themes that were mentioned by less than two participants were eliminated. As all the interviews were in Turkish, all the emergent themes were translated into English and were listed in a separate word document. Finally, 5 major themes and 24 subthemes were arrived, which will be reported in the results section.

## **2.5. TRUSTWORTHINESS**

For the trustworthiness of the study, several methods were followed. First of all, the analysis process was carried out carefully. The transcripts of the interviews were read many times and the notes were taken in order to find the most appropriate themes that can reflect the common experiences of the participants. Besides, throughout the data analysis process, the supervisor of the thesis was part of each step of data analysis as the triangulated researcher, and the consistency was

established between the supervisor and the researcher for final results. Themes have been reviewed and reorganized many times with my supervisor to shape the study coherently. Lastly, member checking method was used. When the analysis was completed, the text was prepared which contains the summary of the themes that emerged from the interviews and sent to the participants via e-mail and they were expected to give feedback. 6 out of the 8 participants responded to this e-mail by saying that these themes are generally covered their personal experiences.

### **3. RESULTS**

In this section, the results of the analysis of the data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with participants who experienced the loss of a significant other and had bereavement dreams after that loss. The narratives of the eight participants which are the translated version into English will be presented with the transcribed quotations throughout this section in order to be able to discuss all themes in detail. 5 major themes and 24 subthemes were emerged which best exemplify the lived experiences of the participants. (Table 2)

Begin with, the first major theme which is about the feelings and thoughts that the experience of loss was evoked in the participants will be discussed. Then, the second theme which is about the idealization of the deceased and emphasizing how big the loss is for the participants in their lives will presented. It is continued with the third theme that contains factors that play a supporting role in the grieving process, will be discussed. At the same time, the benefits of bereavement dreams and their roles in the journey of mourning which was one of the main purposes of this study will be explained as a subordinate theme. Within the scope of the fourth major theme, personal transformations and changes in different areas of life after the loss for the participants and subsequently, how participants are seeking the ways to maintain the bond with the deceased after the loss will be mentioned. Finally, the dream contents that change over time in the grieving process and the perceptions on these bereavement dreams of participants will be presented.

Table 4.1 Major and subordinate themes

Major themes	Subordinate themes	Participants
1. Feelings and thoughts after the loss	<p>1.1. “Something happened, but I could not figure it out”</p> <p>1.2. Losing the sense of being secure</p> <p>1.3. Feeling aggressive</p> <p>1.4. “The pain does not remain the same”</p> <p>1.5. Worrying about those left behind</p> <p>1.6. Attempts for making sense of the death</p> <p>1.6.1. Developing thoughts of his own death and mortality</p> <p>1.6.2. “Where did he/she go?”</p>	<p>Ms.A / Ms.Ö / Ms.İ / Ms.B / Mr.M</p> <p>Ms.B / Mr.H / Ms.Ö / Ms.A / Mr.M</p> <p>Ms.İ / Ms.Ö / Mr.A / Ms.R</p> <p>Ms.A / Mr.M / Ms.Ö / Ms.B / Ms.R / Mr.H / Ms.İ</p> <p>Mr.M / Ms.Ö / Mr.H / Ms.A / Ms.B</p> <p>All of them</p> <p>Mr.A / Ms.A / Ms.B / Mr.H / Ms.Ö / Mr.M</p> <p>Ms.A / Mr.A / Ms.B / Ms.Ö / Ms.İ / Ms.R / Mr.M</p>
2. Post-grief idealization		<p>Ms.İ / Mr.H / Mr.A / Ms.Ö / Ms.A / Ms.B / Ms.R</p>
3. Supporting factors in the grief process	<p>3.1. “Pain decreases as you share”</p> <p>3.1.1. Talking about the loss, during the study itself, feels individuals relieved</p> <p>3.2. Religious/spiritual belief system</p> <p>3.3. Seeking ways to continuing bonds with the deceased</p>	<p>All of them</p> <p>Ms.B / Ms.R / Ms.Ö / Ms.A / Mr.M / Mr.H / Mr.A</p> <p>Ms.B / Ms.R / Ms.Ö / Ms.A</p> <p>All of them</p>

4. Personal transformation	4.1.Changes in sense of self 4.2.Changes in religious/spiritual beliefs 4.3.Changes in interpersonal relationships	All of them Ms.B / Ms.Ö / Mr.A / Ms.R / Ms.A Ms.H / Mr.A / Ms.Ö / Mr.M / Ms.R
5. Bereavement dreams	5.1. Dreams as a connection to the deceased 5.1.1. Reaching out 5.1.2. Connection with the afterlife 5.1.2 Connection with past memories 5.2. Happiness within the dreams 5.3. Will s/he ever come back 5.4. Taking responsibility 5.5. Power of the lost one 5.6. Changing nature of the content of the dreams	All of them Ms.Ö / Ms.İ / Ms.R Ms.A / Ms.B / Mr.H / Ms.R / Ms.İ / Mr.H Ms.Ö / Ms.A / Ms.R / Ms.B / Mr.M / Mr.A All of them Ms.Ö / Ms.İ Ms.A / Ms.İ / Mr.M / Mr.H Ms.A / Ms. İ / Mr.A / Mr.H All of them

### 3.1. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS AFTER THE LOSS

The first major theme is about the participant’s feelings and thoughts after the loss of a significant one and it also comprises changes in these emotions and thought in relation to the experience of loss during the grieving process. It should be noted that for each participants all the struggles they have to deal with in order to come to terms with the loss of a loved one was divergent. It was observed that for some of them it was much more painful process than the others. Nonetheless, it was seemed that the experience of the loss of a loved one is evoked a variety of intense emotions and thoughts in all participants regardless of how much the grieving process compelling was. Most commonly participants expressed that they experienced an intense psychic pain accompanied with the “the feeling of emptiness”, “an intense

feeling of yearning”, “the loss of the feeling of being secure”, “loss of the meaning of life”, “feeling of despair”, “feeling of loneliness” and “anger” behind the deceased. Besides in the interviews it was noticed that 5 of the participants showed some depressive symptoms after the loss.

### **3.1.1. “Something happened, but I could not figure it out”**

Almost all participants described the days right after the loss as being in shock, disbelief, and numbness. 5 participants out of 8 commonly stated that when they received the news of the loss or in the days that followed, they did not react as they predicted, could not make sense of what had happened, and did not cry too much. Although all 5 participants expressed a common experience, it was realized that its duration shown variable based on the way of the death. Besides, 4 of the participants who had experienced such feelings reported that the loss of their loved one was sudden and unexpected.

Ms. A, who found her mother dead when she woke up one morning, described this experience as an unexpected and sudden loss though she knew that this is about to happen due to her old age, and expressed her feelings in the first days of the loss with the following words:

“I was so calm, I couldn't believe myself. I always thought that this loss was going to beat me up. I mean in the first shock, I was incredibly calm. The first week you don't understand anything. To be honest, the first week is a state of shock. I don't remember what we did. It's like you're drunk.” (Ms. A)

Ms. B who lost her loving and kind-hearted father to a sudden heart attack on the day they emigrated to Istanbul from another city, expressed how she felt in the first months of the loss.

“I mean, how can I put it at first, I mean, for three or five months, I didn't realize what's happening. I didn't feel much at first.” (Ms. B)

Ms. Ö had also lost her father due to a heart attack, but on the day her father passed away, she had just come out of an operation, and the last time she saw his father was by video chat. The participant, who could not say goodbye to his father due to this unexpected loss, was also unable to attend his father's funeral and missed another farewell opportunity. She stated her feelings as following:

“Something happened but it was kind of like you don't know what it was. I mean, in those first six months I was always trying to make sense of it and denying it.” (Ms. Ö)

Some participants expressed that they didn't accept the death and denied it in the first days, even in the first months of loss. They stated that at first, they still had the hope that the loved one was not dead, and they just could not see each other. This was occurred the idea that reality and fantasy were intertwined early in the grieving process. One of the participants stated that she heard her mother's voice in the days following her death and was sure she was calling out her. Other participants expressed that;

“I probably denied it for the first six months, like everybody else. I don't know if that's something happens for everyone, but I really refused to accept it. I mean, sometimes I was calling him on the phone. His phone wasn't working, but I was just talking, doing such stupid things. For me, it's like someone told me a movie script, and I just can't see my dad. You know how they always tell kids, he's gone somewhere and he's not coming back.” (Ms. Ö)

“In the first days, I thought, like when I look back, I didn't cry much and I didn't feel much. I'm thinking about how I could stay so strong because I mean, I was in shock. I just couldn't figure out what was going on. ... I mean,

honestly, I still don't get it, so I can't accept it. I feel like he's alive, but we can't see each other because the more I think about it, the more I can't get out of it, so I think my brain refuses to accept it.” (Ms. I)

### **3.1.2. Losing the sense of being secure**

In the interviews, 5 participants reported that they lost the sense of protection and being secure after the loss of loved one. It is important to note that, the loss of a sense of being secure was especially expressed by participants who had lost their father or grandfather which was a significant male figure in their families.

“My father run a pharmacy so we never went to the doctor when we had a medical problem. So is he. For example, did he have a stomach ache? He would open the closet, take the medicine and that’s okay. Like, did we have an ache? My dad would give us the right pills and we’d be fine in two days. But now there is that void. I mean, I’m wondering what are we going to do if something happens to us? Also, my father took care of everything with us. The electricity, the water etc. I don't know anything about these. I mean, I don't know how to support a house. Okay, I lived a life on my own in college. I know things, I'm more or less standing on my own two feet, but I mean, of course, it's different when you have a factor that stand behind you.” (Ms. B)

Mr. H who lost his grandfather, whom he saw as an idol especially in the face of his father’s emotional absence, explained the feelings that was evoked by the loss of his grandfather with the following words:

“I've always felt like he is an individual who protects me like he's my superior. I always felt like he was the protector or something. So, there was a little bit of a lack of it of course.” (Mr.H)



Mr. M explained his suffering of not being able to feel the unconditional acceptance and support by his grandfather again in these words:

“In the end, since the people you call family are a group of people who love and support you unconditionally, no matter what you do, no matter how bad you do. You know that when you go to your grandfather, your grandfather won't care about anything you do wrong, or a bad decision. I mean, these people are exactly what you call a comfort zone. And the fact that they're leaving your side one by one and that these people will never be able to offer you that comfort again, and you're going to have to face it.” (Mr. M)

Another participant expressed the loss of the strength and support that she felt behind her for 28 years after the loss of his father, as follows;

“... And then there's the comfort of having my father behind me. You do everything, but someone picks it up after you and you always know it. You can do anything, you can get yourself into anything. No matter what you do you feel that he was always there for you. Now I don't have someone like that behind me.” (Ms. Ö)

Moreover, when I asked one of the participants that what she thought about losing someone has a strengthening side as well as the compelling aspects, she expressed that she experienced that she grown up when she had lost her father 20 years ago instead of experienced the same thing after the loss of her mother even though we interviewed about the loss of his mother, and she states that;

“When you have your father, you're always more, how can I say, you always feel like you have something to lean on. So, no matter how old you are, no matter how old he is, but when your daddy's gone, it's like you've fallen into the sea without knowing how to swim.” (Ms. A)

### **3.1.3. Feeling aggressive**

Another feeling that most of the participants felt in common was “anger”. 4 out of 8 participants mentioned during the interviews that they felt quite angry which were directed in several different ways, especially in the beginning of the grief process. For instance, a participant who lost her husband expressed that she was angry at her husband in the first days and weeks after he died for leaving herself and her children since she believed that he had made the decision to leave. She felt that she was abandoned and left behind. In the following days, she mentioned that she was channeled this anger towards his husband’s family in the face of their judgmental and insensitive attitudes.

Two of the other participants who lost their fathers also mentioned that they felt very angry and aggressive for no reason in the first days of the loss. Besides, one participant who lost his wife after a long cancer treatment process said that while he used to be a very kind and calm person, he turned into an aggressive man after this tragic loss, and felt that this anger was growing day by day. He stated that he could not control his anger and at times he could become aggressive enough to carry the discussions he had with people into a fight.

As observed during the interview, the participants also displayed an angry picture while expressing their thoughts about the funeral home. The two participants were rather annoyed by the rituals that typical of Turkish traditions after the loss such as condolence visits in which mourners are serving these people for days. One participant who lost his grandfather criticized these customs and states that;

“Thousands of people come home and ask, "May God have mercy, how did he die?". They keep asking the same question but mourners are already exhausted due to this situation. I understand that this tradition had a purpose like distracting the relatives of the deceased because it is a preoccupation to host guests. However, it is an environment where questions about the

deceased are asked and served to the crying guests. You continue this for 7 days, so there is always a service at home. I was very disturbed by this. “(Mr. M)

Ms. I was also very angry at the funeral home that the other family members, especially her grandmother, were crying loudly. At the same time, this participant, like the other participant that mentioned above, found the post-funeral rituals too meaningless and was disturbed.

“I was very angry and aggressive in the first days. People were coming to house constantly. It was nonsense. Cakes and donuts were being prepared for them. I mean, that whole ceremony seemed very meaningless and absurd to me. In fact, my grandmother was crying so loudly. I was very angry with my grandmother, I remember her very well.“ (Ms. I)

It was realized that two of the participants were focused their anger to inward and blamed themselves since they believe that they could prevent the incident. One of the participants, who lost his grandfather left his family for a short time and went for a walk in the hospital garden while his grandfather was in the intensive care unit in the hospital. He expressed that his grandfather wanted to get out of bed in his absence and since his grandmother couldn't hold him, he fell to the ground and never opened his eyes since then. The participant, who felt guilty about this incident, said that if he did not go for a walk and was with his grandmother in the room, he could persuade his grandfather not to get up, so that his grandfather might not have died at that time. Another participant that lost his father as a result of a heart attack while she was in another city, spoke about his feelings of guilt as follows;

“... The idea that maybe he wouldn't have died if I'd been there with them. Actually, I'm pretty sure I can't do anything. I mean, even though I was away, I did what I could. I had convinced him to go to the doctor, but still I guess

you are blaming yourself. I don't know if it is easier to blame, but you tend to it." (Ms. İ)

#### **3.1.4. "The pain does not remain the same"**

Almost all of the participants (7 out of 8) mentioned changes in their feelings compared to the beginning of the grief process when describing their current feelings and thoughts. 5 of the participants emphasized that they do not forget, will not forget the person they lost, and that their lives will be much different and challenging from before the loss. However, they explained that the pain does not remain the same, but evolved into different shapes in the process.

For example, one of the participants who lost her mother described the pain as "the heart being squeezed like a laundry." However, she also added that this pain did not remain the same and it was replaced by longing for her presence and the old days spent together.

"There is no such thing as forgetting. I have lost my father for 19 years, and I have not forgotten my father, which is still aching here (showing her chest), but that intense pain is now replaced by longing. You can remember her with a smile. Now I don't cry every time I remember her as before." (Ms. A)

Similarly, Mr. H reported that when he remembered his grandfather, negative emotions did not awaken anymore since the pain lessens. 3 of the participants explained how the loss of a parent left a mark on their souls even if the pain changed shape and that this mark will always remain in their inner world with these words:

"But I don't know, something breaks inside you, and I feel like you're always living with that fracture. For example, I always feel like my arm is broken, I have this feeling." (Ms. Ö)

“I'm not saying it's killing my feelings, but something is still sinking into me. I'd say something is going on in my stomach. My chest hurts.” (Mr.A)

“The pain is, of course, not as it was in the first days. It lessens gradually. However, that void is not filled and it will not be. I know that we will always be half from now on, I know that.” (Ms.B)

Ms. R had gone through very difficult times with her two children after she lost her husband from cancer, whom she married out of big love and overcame the difficulties together. The participant, who also had to struggle with both financial and emotional responsibilities all alone, stated that she felt that she was starting to recover.

“I can say those first 2 years were really like hell. I think I can handle his absence a little bit more. What I do without him doesn't hurt me anymore. We're just at the end of the line. I think I've learned to survive on my own with my kids. I feel like I can give my daughter and my son more support now. I'm much better now. I saw that one could start over, stand up again. I think I have overcome the torment given to me by his absence.” (Ms. R)

Of all the participants, one participant seemed quite confused about what the loss felt. The participant, who was observed having difficulties expressing her feelings during the interview, reported that during the time that passed, she only left herself to the routine and felt that she was not in control. Unlike others, it was thought that the reason this participant had more ambivalence thoughts and feelings about the experience of loss might be due to the fact that she was the one that experienced the loss most recently among all participants. She expressed her feelings as following;

“...there are moments that are more difficult than the first time, and there are also moments that are easier. Now something is getting more routine. It doesn't mean I am used to or accepting it. I can never accept it, I am very

aware of this. You know, what I'm experiencing right now is like caught up in routine. I am getting caught up in the flow of life right now." (Ms.I)

### **3.1.5. Worrying about those left behind**

Many participants (5 out of 8) expressed that they had to care for other family members so that their own responses in the face of loss became obscured. For instance, Mr.M had lost his grandfather due to old age after living a long and healthy life, and this loss occurred while he was abroad for his education. He had only 1 week to spend time in his country after the loss. He expressed that the most challenging point for him during this time was that his mother was shaken more than he expected in the face of this loss and she was lack of social support in his absence. His mother's struggling and pain had affected him so much that he had to delay his own grief reactions. He explained his experiences with the following words:

"It's a different experience to see how the people around me are handling this issue and how they're dealing with it than I'm facing it, so it felt so different. My mother was very badly affected, very devastated. She was collapsed and she was crying whole day. I was seeing his eyes are swollen and red, his hair was fringed. I mean, I'm not used to seeing my mom like that. Seeing my mother in that state affected me very badly. I didn't expect that because my mother is such a resilient woman. Also, the fact that she didn't get sufficient support from my father, my father would like to support but the marriage was breaking down mentally at that time. There wasn't a very good bond from there, and it was hard for me to witness that my mother trying to absorb the pain so alone. The hardest thing was seeing my mother like that." (Mr.M)

Similarly, Mr. H put aside his own pain after the loss of his grandfather, worrying more for his grandmother.

“Most of all, I felt sorry for my grandmother because my grandfather was a man who was almost there for her all her life. I mean, if we say they got married, like, 20, she was seeing the same face for 70 years. I feel so sorry for her. I mean, because she was quite upset when he passed away. I put my own sadness aside and felt sorry for her from time to time.” (Mr.H)

Another participant stated that even though she did not want to, she forced her mother to go out or take a walk together to distract her and make her feel a little better since she was worried about her mother. Also, Ms. A stated that she was very careful with her mourning reactions in order not to upset her brother, and her brother also showed the same care.

Besides during the interview Ms. Ö whose father had died suddenly due to a heart attack and the tragic truth had been hidden from her for a while because she had had a surgery on that day was talking about that she felt compelled to accept that loss at some point. When she was asked how she got to this point, she said as following;

“It was like, you know, you burn yourself out and then you say, you know, it hurts, yes, but there are people around me, and I'm supposed to have a process of accessing that consciousness and accepting it. And that's because I had my mother and sister to help me survive, to support each other because they were thinking about me all the time. So, my mother almost did not even experience her own pain because I was going to be sad, I've had surgery and because I've been through a lot more, had a much more difficult process. My sister and my mother, they both put a lot of effort into me, they survived. They lied to me for days. It's too heavy for them, either. So, after a while, I thought that it hurts more when you deny and ignore. Because when people around you see you talking nonsense, they get more upset.” (Ms. Ö)

### **3.1.6. Attempts for making sense of the death**

It was observed that all of the participants tried to make sense of the death by asking some questions such as why and where had the deceased gone and whether he or she was happy and fine in there. During the interviews, all participants expressed their answers and their inquiries that varied and shaped by their cultural, religious/spiritual and social background. It was worth to note that 3 participants who lost their loved ones due to old age also made sense of death in a similar way. According to them, after living a full and healthy life, the person they lost complete their tasks, finish everything they could, and chose to left this world when the time came. In addition, all these participants were happy and relieved since the deceased passed away without suffering or dependence on others.

Participants with high religious beliefs interpreted this loss as God's will. One participant thought that the God took her husband with him because the God loves him and left her alone to complete some tasks in this world. Another participant thought that because it was written in the destiny of death, the death will happen that day no matter what it takes and that God knows it. It was realized that the 6 participants who somehow found a way to make sense of death were able to cope better with the grief process and were more advanced in the recovery process compared to the other two participants who were still looking for an answer.

#### **3.1.6.1. Developing thoughts of his own death and mortality**

During the interviews, it was noticed that most of the participant (6 out of 8) gave place to their thoughts about their own death and mortality while talking about how they experienced the loss and their perceptions through death. It was observed that after the loss of a loved one, these participants were prone to think about how their own deaths will occur, how they will leave traces behind and where they will go.



When a participant who lost his wife after a long period of illness was asked what he thought about afterlife, he expressed that his wife was completely an accurate and perfect person, and therefore he was sure that if there was a place called heaven, she should definitely be there. But he had concerns about being able to meet her there one day, and he laughed and said, "I don't know if I can meet her there. I still do a lot of wrongs, I hurt people, I make them sad.". When another participant who lost his grandfather was asked the same question, he stated that he believed that people just disappeared when they died, and then he added that he would not live anywhere else when he died, either. Other participants expressed their thoughts as following:

“Now I am 50 years old. I think that there is no guarantee how long we will live, maybe we don't have a tomorrow. We don't know that, only God knows.” (Ms.A)

“I thought that how much life is short and meaningless. So, anything can happen to me at any time, I could die. One day we will die, either, and that day is predetermined. We know that one day it will end and death will find us too.” (Ms.B)

“...Yes, it would be much better if we were together, but sometimes people get tired and go. I think so now. I can also get tired and go one day.” (Ms.Ö)

After the loss of his grandfather, one of the participants began to consider about what he would leave behind after his own death. He shared his concerns as follows:

“I questioned a little more like, when I am 50-60-70 or something and die at that age, I wonder what I have achieved, what has been able to do or who have made happy. For example, I think I could die tomorrow. If I die tomorrow, what have I done so far that people can talk behind me?

For instance, my grandfather has a lot of good adjectives. But what about me? If something like that happens to me, what will they say behind me?" (Mr.H)

### **3.1.6.2. "Where did h/she go?"**

In the interviews, it was also realized that the biggest question that preoccupied almost all of the participants' minds (7 out of 8) in terms of making sense of death was where the deceased had gone and whether h/she is happy and fine in there, especially in the beginning of the grief process. Even the participants who did not have a belief in the afterlife and who defined themselves as an individual that did not have any religious or spiritual beliefs in this sense, they, like the other participants, hoped that the lost loved one would be very happy and well wherever h/she had gone. It was also noteworthy that some of the participants utilize their bereavement dreams as a way to find an answer to their inquiries about where the deceased went.

For instance, one of the participants was preoccupied with inquiring about where his husband who lost his long fight against cancer had gone and was holding to the hope that he could still watch her and the children from somewhere. This hope was keeping her alive and she stated that knowing that her husband is in a good place and in peace makes her feel relieved. Besides, in one of her dreams, she was in a room which has green walls and she stated that she interpreted this as a sign that her loving husband in a peaceful place. Some other participants also interpreted their bereavement dreams as a sign that the person they lost was happy and well.

Another participant mentioned that she could not understand where his father went and she was persistently looking for answers to her questions since the first days. She stated that;

“I think my religious belief is not strong enough, because I have too many question marks in my mind. Especially after the loss of my father, these question marks increased even more. Where is he now? How did such a thing happen? What does this mean? Questions like where he is. I've been thinking about where he is from the beginning. In this process, for example, my grandfather knows such issues and that's why I was constantly asking him about where he is now, where is my father.” (Ms.İ)

### **3.2. POST-GRIEF IDEALIZATION**

During the interviews, it was observed that almost all of the participants (7 out of 8) made statements that glorified the person they lost and the relationship between them. They particularly highlighted the idealized aspects of the deceased person, and it was noticed that they were mostly prone to keep good memories of that person in their minds. This finding was also interpreted as another way to express how big the loss was for them.

Mr. A, who lost his wife, described her as a very honest, sincere, beautiful woman who lived life completely right. He stated that throughout their relationship, they never hurt, disrespected or deceived each other;

“She was a person who lived totally right. If she didn't love you, she was kind of person that could say it to your face, and she would. Also, I never see her while talking behind someone or doing anything bad. She was a very decent person. I will always remember her that way. I want my daughter to look like her, not me. We have never lost the respect. We never fought, we never insulted each other. Of course, after a long time of marriage, maybe it was bad words, I wouldn't lie, but we did not say anything insulting to each other.” (Mr.A)

In the interview, Ms. R explained in tears how huge the loss she experienced was as follows;

“He was a very honest, very kind and sincere person. We were getting along really well. We were complementary to each other and indeed I loved him very much. There was a great love between us. Our marriage was his first marriage while it was my second marriage and I had a child from my first marriage. He had serious problems with his family because of this. But somehow, he resisted and somehow persuaded them, and then we had decided to marry. Everything started very well, it was going very well. I felt being loved for the first time with him. For the first time I felt so cherished like a princess.” (Ms. R)

Ms. A, on the other hand, described her lost mother as a rather elegant, kind, polite woman who chooses her words very carefully in order not to hurt people. She also said that she is a woman who attaches great importance to education and that she is trying to follow her path and is proud of her. She described their relationship as quite intimate and friendly in which she could share everything and felt very listened.

During the interview, Ms. B frequently emphasized how good and different her father was, in words like these:

“For example, after I graduated from university, I worked with my father at the pharmacy for 2 years. At that time, I also experienced the business relationship with my father. I would say how patient you are with customers. He would not hurt anyone. I wanted to react to some people but he was very patient, he would not hurt anyone. He was very different. So is our relationship. He was very nice to my mother, my brother and me. It was against all people. So, against his own family.” (Ms. B)

Ms. I also explained that she had a very special bond with her father, whom she lost, and that her relationship was very different compared to the other father-daughter relationships she observed around her. Moreover, Mr. H mentioned how important and idealized her lost grandfather was to both him and other family members. He explained that his grandfather was a hardworking person who had a significant impact on other people, so he started doing his best to be like him after the loss. Inasmuch that how idealized his grandfather was can be understood from the themes of his dreams, which will be examined in another subtheme in detail.

### **3.3.SUPPORTING FACTORS IN THE GRIEF PROCESS**

The third major theme of this study contains the resources that participants had during the grieving process. It was realized that all of the participants were found something that support them in the days of emotional turmoil. It was observed that the most common supportive sources expressed by the participants were social support from significant others, religious and spiritual belief system, finding the ways to maintain the bonds with the deceased, and bereavement dreams. However, 4 of the participants also reported that creating other preoccupations or having a job during the grieving process also played a supporting role in handling with the loss.

#### **3.3.1. “Pain decreases as you share”**

In the interviews, it was realized that for all of the participants, getting social support had protective and facilitative factor that were useful in helping them adapt to the bereavement. Even though they sought the required social support from different resources around them such as from family, from friends, from romantic partners, from psychotherapy, from a pet or from their children, it was found that all of these kinds of supports helped participants in terms of dealing with emotional difficulties in mourning process. Moreover, participants who felt that they did not get enough social support from their environment for various reasons felt the

deficiency of it. One of the participants expressed her comfort in the silence present of her friends with these words:

“I guess what was best for me was when no one was talking to me. I'd say it wasn't when my friends came and said, "Oh dear," but instead when they were silent, just quiet with me, and only being there with me.” (Ms. Ö)

One of the participants who felt obliged to consider the well-being of his family and had to repressed his feelings to not hurt his mother further had found the emotional support he needed with his girlfriend and felt freer to give grief reactions.

“... my girlfriend at the time recently lost her grandmother. It was very easy to connect, so there was a situation where both sides could understand each other very easily, and sharing it with her, having a conversation with her about the loss, was the best thing for me in this process. I didn't cry much at first when my grandfather left us. I guess there was a little bit of tears in the shock of that moment, but then I moved on. You know, I thought he was old and dead, but that's when I thought he was going to talk to my friend like that, knowing that I was so sure she understood me. I cried like that the first time. I mean, it was a relief. It was mutually best to talk to someone outside my family who could empathize with me very easily.” (Mr. M)

However, for some of the participants, it was not possible to obtain that kind of social support and they were experiencing the lack of it. Two of the participants away from their families emphasized the importance of social support in the grieving process and said;

“The hardest thing is probably not being able to tell someone how I feel. Because my partner at the time was a foreigner, and I didn't want to talk to her about the things like the death or the person that I loved. She hadn't had any religious belief, either. I can say that it was a quite difficult for me to not

being able to share, being alone with all these emotions. I was already in Ankara and my family and everything, everyone was in Istanbul. I have a cousin I loved, who I grew up with and four or five years younger than me. He was in Istanbul, either so I couldn't share my feelings with him. I wasn't really into my uncles there anyway. I mean, keeping these emotions inside of me and overcoming my grief on my own was hard.” (Mr. H)

“I think the most difficult thing in this process was that I was here alone. All my family members are in Karabük. I sometimes go there and I feel better when I'm there with my family.” (Ms. İ)

For the two widowed participants who lost their spouses due to cancer, the presence of their children was the greatest emotional support in their painful days. Ms.A said that there was nothing good for him in this process, except for the presence of his daughter. He stated that he had a period where he'd rather be alone than agree to someone's support. He mentioned that he sent her daughter to a vacation with her aunt for 2 months after the loss of his wife and that he could barely eat and sleep in this process, but he began to recover with her daughter's return and now he can hold on to life only with her daughter's presence. A participant in her 50's who has not been married before said that if she had a child, the mourning process might be different for her. Also, another participant stated that in addition to the support of her close friends, her children gave her the greatest support during his recovery process.

“I am glad my daughter was there. Sometimes when I cried she would come and hug me. I was looking out the window so that she wouldn't notice. I don't even sniff so that she doesn't hear and she was hugging my neck. Her presence was very precious.” (Ms. R)

### **3.3.1.1. Talking about the loss, during the study itself, feels individuals relieved**

During the interviews, participants got in touch with their emotions and feelings about their loss. At the end of the interview when they were asked how it felt to share this experience in here, the majority of participants (7 out of 8) expressed that they had never thought so deeply about the experience of loss and the accompanying emotions, and that they had never been able to talk to anyone in this way before. Thus, this interview was felt very good and relieved for them.

Furthermore, three of the participants had received psychological support after losing their loved ones, and two of them was continuing psychotherapy for a while. One of the participants had already been in a therapy process before the experience of loss. It was observed that the therapy process and to have a safe place where they can share their feelings, and the presence of someone who supports them in this sense, was quite helpful in dealing with the feelings of bereavement and the grief process.

### **3.3.2. Religious/spiritual belief system**

It is known that religion has a significant role in Turkish culture. Although all of the participants reported that they grew up in Muslim families, half of the participants did not describe themselves as a religious person. While the other half of the participants were trying to make sense of death, they interpret this death as a part of the big plan of a power higher than themselves, which was God, and this experience is a test that God has given them. It was found that surrendering and thinking that a supreme power knows better have a supportive role in dealing with loss. At the same time, it was noticed that having a religious belief was a supportive factor in the grieving process, as they believed that God gave strength and helped to them after loss.



“We know that everyone has a certain lifespan. That's how we console ourselves. I also think that if we hadn't come to Istanbul, for example, my father would have died wherever he was that day. Everyone's fate is sealed. We know that the day we were born and died is predetermined. That's how we motivate ourselves, of course. God decided that it should be on that day, and we were going to lose my father on that day. Every cloud has a silver lining. There's always a silver lining to that, but we don't know. God, of course, knows better, but we humans don't know. There must be good in this death like everything else. So, we're leaving it to God by praying.” (Ms. B)

“I believe God did it right. Whatever happened, I believe something good happened. If God didn't kill you, he still has plans for you. So, I was saying myself “Get up!” and pull yourself together and get on with it. I thought walking around in half-dead mode meant not being able to complete the task you were given.” (Ms. R)

One participant who lost his father as a result of a sudden heart attack reported that her religious belief was not firm and mentioned her confusion about where her father was gone. The bereaved, who received help from most religious family members in order to make sense, could not interiorize the explanations made on this issue and none of it set right. However, she said that she wished to have faith like them and added;

“For example, my family, I mean, my parents and my grandparents, are more religious, I think they're going through this process a little bit better because they have something to hold on to.” (Ms. İ)

Furthermore, in accordance with their spiritual beliefs, it was thought that the three of the participants, who believed that the soul did not die and that the deceased continued to live somewhere in a different dimension, were looking for ways to continue their bonds with the lost loved one.

“I know that the soul does not die, only the body dies. He’s in somewhere and we just can't get in touch right now. So, the soul didn't die for me and it's a living thing in another dimension.” (Ms. R)

“I believe that not in the extent of belief, but in a little bit of meditation and knowing that it exists in another body with these energy studies, or that we know that we can share the same emotions in another dimension.” (Ms. Ö)

### **3.3.3. Seeking ways to maintain the bonds with the deceased**

During the interviews, it was observed that all of the participants were looking for ways to continue the bond with the deceased and that they all had their own way in this searching. For example, one of the participants was visiting the grave of his lost wife every week and planted flowers and cleaned her grave routinely. Photos of the deceased were also seen as another way to continue the ties with the lost loved ones. The same participant insisted on not taking the photographs of his lost wife off the wall, since it was relieving to see his wife every morning when he woke up. Another participant mentioned that he became more interested in the photos of his grandfather after the loss of him. Similarly, Ms. A who lost her mother reported that she sometimes talks with her parents' photographs.

“... for example, there are photos here and I became the type of person who winked at them from time to time and talked to her like "what are you doing mom, this happened that happened" or something. We have a picture is a room, the three of us, my brother, my mother, and me and sometimes something happens and I talk to her like, "Mom, see, it happened like this, mom, look, did you see it?". Since I talk to them, my mother and my father when I go to the cemetery, I also tell it to the photographs.” (Ms. A)

It was noticed that two of the participants tried to maintain the bond by honoring their deceased loved ones. A participant that lost his mother who attaches great importance to education and made substantial efforts for girls to read, was doing her best to contribute to the education of the children just like her mother. Moreover, she said that she participated in this study specifically for this purpose and she felt that she was doing something beneficial to his mother's memory. Likewise, the participant who lost his grandfather was also struggling to be a hard-working person just like his grandfather. It was observed that he tried to fit an idealized feature belonging to his grandfather to his own personality in order to leave an appropriate legacy to his grandfather in order to honoring him. Identifying with a feature of the person lost suggests that there is another way to try to maintain ties with that person.

In addition to these, two of these participants who believed that the soul does not die, mentioned some preternatural events which seemed to be beyond the normal understanding during the interview. One of the participants stated that she had two relatives who saw her mother alive in the cemetery during her mother's funeral. Another participant said that her husband sent a message to him through a friend with a "clear view". She expressed that receiving the message from her husband that he was constantly thinking of herself and his children, and that he was in peaceful place made her feel his presence of her husband from that moment on again. Lastly, having a dream that the deceased appeared was also seen as another way to maintain bond, but this will be examined in more detail in the next themes.

### **3.4. PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION**

In the interviews, it was observed that the experience of losing a loved one which is a significant life disruption was caused transformative life changes for all of the participants in different ways such as psychic, relational and spiritual. However, it should be noted that two of the participants had a hard time figuring out how this loss produced a change or growth in their lives. It was also noticed that participants

who had a hard time seeing the transformative side of the loss had much more trouble coping with the loss and making sense of the loss experiences than those who could see it.

### **3.4.1. Changes in sense of self**

All of the participants reported a changed sense of self. Four of the participants reported that their priorities had changed after the loss of their loved ones and they started to reevaluate what is important. For example, a participant who lost her mother mentioned that she was very meticulous about cleaning before her mother's loss, that she cleaned the whole house every day until her hands were injured, but she started to think that life was too empty after her mother's loss and that she was no longer as attentive to cleaning as she used to be. Besides, it was realized that she focused on enhancing her well-being aftermath of her mother's death.

“...There's no guarantee of how long we'll live, maybe we don't have tomorrow, God knows that. So, I've analyzed in my head that it's meaningless to spend our lives with things that don't make sense, or, I don't know, worrying about cleaning something that's going to be dusted again.” (Ms. A)

Besides it was observed that this participant, who shared a common experience with three other participants, also displayed a more surrendered and accepted attitude towards what life brings after the loss. She stated that she experienced major changes in terms of her attitudes towards life and death.

“For example, I realized that I had extremely afraid of losing someone. And I've seen that I can't actually do anything. She just passed away right in front of me, you know what I mean? She breathed and couldn't get a new one, it's as simple as that. I've seen it, no matter what you do, you can't stop it. If it's going to happen, it's

happening. So, I think I've decreased that anxiety or that fear a lot.”

(Ms. A)

One of the participants mentioned he recognized his personal strength after the loss of his grandfather. He expressed that when he witnessed other people's reactions when they lost their relatives, he had concerns about how he would deal with those feelings, but realized that he had a much stronger self than he thought and his understanding of his own strength was increased.

“This loss has shown me to be at a higher level of maturity than I expected. I've never experienced the loss of a loved one before. I've always seen people around me, and I didn't really know what it felt like. I understood that people are very upset, and I was thinking about how I'm going to react when this happens to me one day. How's my reaction to that going to be? Will I be able to hold back? But when that day came, I saw that I could handle it.” (Mr. M)

Three of the participants stated that they experienced an increase in self-confidence, similar to the experience of the participant mentioned above. One of the participants had to face with lots of responsibilities that she had never done before and had to handle financial responsibilities that her husband had taken in their marriage. She reported that she experienced positive change and growth that arising from her struggles.

“...You are tidying up that life that is in shambles. You become both a mother and a father to your children. You become the mother and father of the house because you are trying to tidy up the house not only emotionally but also materially. For a long time, I would put aside my own pain and was trying to calm my husband's sister down. You are getting stronger. If this did not tear me down, nothing can tear me down easily. And indeed, I feel stronger. One could start over.

I say one could stand up again. You know, if you asked 6 months ago, I couldn't use the word the “stand up”. Because that was when I was trying to get up. But yes, so I can say that right now. I guess I overcame the torment that his absence gave me.” (Ms. R)

Besides, three of the participants reported that they were much more resilient to emotionally challenging events aftermath the loss experience. A participant expressed that after she lost her father, she became a calmer, more confident, mature and patient person. Her father died of a heart attack when she underwent surgery in another city and was unable to travel to the city where the tragic incident occurred for almost 10 days. She couldn't even attend his father's funeral, and during that time she had to be alone with all the painful emotions. She expressed that this experience taught her to be patient. Besides, she added that she is now more emotionally resilient.

“In the past, when I was a child, I was badly affected by even the smallest things such as the death of a person that I did not know at all. I was a crying person. I am a Pisces and I can cry over anything. Indeed, the concept of suffering has changed a lot for me after my father. The loss of people no longer affects me that much. You feel less upset about the things you used to feel madly upset about. Even to such ridiculous pangs of love. I can now say that it's okay while I was worn out before.” (Ms.Ö)

The other two participants were also expressed their personal transformation as following;

“...I say to myself “You got out of there and came here”. So, if you can get out of that pit, I think that the rest of the road will be easier, you can continue on the road.” (Ms.R)

“But I guess I used to be affected by the events such as someone getting sick or someone dying and think of my own family. Right now, I guess I am not as sad as I was before losing my father, for such losses or illnesses in other people's lives, because I was going through such a thing.” (Ms. I)

### **3.4.2. Changes in religious/spiritual beliefs**

5 out of 8 of the participants stated that there were changes in their religious and spiritual beliefs, however, it should be noted that since two of the participants described themselves as people that did not have any religious/spiritual beliefs, they did not feel any change in this sense. In addition, it was observed that some of the participants reported stronger religious beliefs whereas others felt that their faith was decreased after the experience of loss. Ms. B was one of the participants that became more religious after the loss of his father. She expressed the increase in her religious belief with the following words:

“After my father, my faith grew even more. So is my mother. We pray, we read the whole of the Koran, and help to people so that he will be happier there and his sins will be reduced. Our prayers are always in that direction. Of course, my faith has increased even more. After he died, I realized that the more we pray and the more we serve to God the more he will benefit us there. In fact, after losing my father I thought how short and meaningless life is. Anything can happen at any time. I felt like that and I said on my father's 40<sup>th</sup> day that I want to cover my head. I mean, there has been such a change in my life after my father.” (Ms. B)

Another participant expressed that she turned to spirituality after the loss of her father started to meditation and energy studies, and as a result she began to believe in reincarnation. Similarly, one participant explained that even though she was not a religious worshipper before the loss of her husband, she believed in God, but with

the loss of her loving husband, she began to read books to understand God and his purposes. At the end of her research her faith had evolved into the idea that the world was a simulation, that this pain was not real, that energy had never been lost, and that her husband still existed somewhere.

“I think my spiritual side and my faith to God has increased a little more. Everyone was telling me that one would be more rebellious after that kind of loss, however, on the contrary, being rebellious is probably a choice, but I believe that God is doing it right. Whatever happened, I believe something good has happened.” (Ms. R)

Unlike these participants, one participant mentioned that his religious faith was shaken after the loss of his wife and during the long illness process and in the first months of the loss he had rebelled about why this disease and all the pain happened to them.

“I'm not a person who can experience religious things much, even though I'm right-wing. I don't know why but I can't. In fact, I've been questioning why this disease came to us. I thought there was a chance I'd go to the worst of it. I would almost even have something like stripping away from religion completely but then, I thought that it is something like a test.” (Mr. A)

### **3.4.3. Changes in interpersonal relationships**

Five of the participants reported that they had experienced changes in their interpersonal relationships after the loss of their loved ones. While some participants felt that their relationships had deepened and improved with people around them, for the others the death of their loved ones led to difficulties in relationships.



One of the participants mentioned a sense of connectedness especially to his romantic partner that had undergone a similar loss. Another participant shared her gratitude for a close friend's affectionate care for her every day after her husband's death. Also, the other participant stated that all of his family members got together after the loss of his grandfather.

“I felt the family was getting together more and more. For example, there were those who were offended at each other and after my grandfather's death they made peace. Everyone talked to each other, became closer to each other. I mean, it could have happened without death, but maybe this loss caused them to come to their senses, I don't know. I can say that is the only good thing about the loss. After that, there was a WhatsApp group or something, the family did not normally exist until that day. When something happens, it is spoken from there, or when it is a birthday, it is celebrated from there.” (Mr.H)

However, the other two participants stated that they started to experience problems in interpersonal and social relations after the loss of their loved ones. The participant who lost his wife both had difficulty in establishing new relationships and felt a decrease in tolerance towards people around him. Another participant stated that she had conflicts with other family members after the loss of his father. As a result, she had a hard time trusting people, became more cautious in interpersonal relationships, and tried to protect herself against possible damages.

“People who were good to you when you had a father started to treat you differently when your father was not there anymore. It was very hard to see people in different faces. While my father was alive, my father's family and I were in an incredibly intimate and loving relationship. After my father, everyone became different people. They started to talk about money and everything. Now, for example, I can foresee the damages that people may

inflict on me in the future, because I approach cautiously towards the people I have just met.” (Ms. Ö)

### **3.5. BEREAVEMENT DREAMS**

During the interviews all the participants seemed excited to talking about their dreams and it was observed that they were trying to make sense of these dreams. As it was revealed in some of the transcripts, it was found that the bereavement dreams had a supportive role in the grief process, especially in terms of lessening the feeling of longing. Six participants reported that they woke up with a sense of comfort and relief due to being with the deceased ones again. One of the participants who were worried about forgetting her husband’s voice expressed that she was rather pleased to hear his voice in her dreams. She stated that whenever she saw her husband in her dreams, she felt much better. She also explained the supportive role of bereavement dreams when she had the most challenging times with these sentences:

“...I think I learned how to survive alone with my children. That's why I think he left me alone. I think that as he realizes that I don't need his support anymore, he does not come to my dreams too much.” (Ms. R)

Similarly, another participant reported that the dreams that her father appeared helped her to remind her father’s face. She stated that she missed her father so much on some specific days, and in those painful days, bereavement dreams help her facilitate her longing.

“I forget the lines on my father's face in time. I wonder how would he do if he were there? How was he laughing? Sometimes I can't really remember, it's very interesting. But seeing him in dreams reminded me how was he look like. I think that because you always live with those things about the

past, it actually satisfies your longing a little more. I can say that dreams may be contributing positively to the grieving process.” (Ms. Ö)

One participant who lost both parents reported that after seeing her mother in her dreams happily together with his father, she started to cope better with the emotions evoked by the grieving process, and these dreams had a soothing effect for her.

“For example, I thought my mother and father found each other and they are together. I mean, they are not alone there, they found each other and they are in a good mood. After that, I saw more improvement in myself, to be honest, in an emotional sense.” (Ms. A)

### **3.5.1. Dreams as a connection to the deceased loved one**

Bereavement dreams, which this study focused on and aimed to examine in-depth, were found to be another way of maintaining the bonds of participants with their lost loved ones. It was realized that all of the participants felt as if they could communicate with the deceased’s spirit through these dreams. Besides, again all the participants reported that bereavement dreams are such vivid dreams that they can feel the presence of the deceased right after they woke up. The statement in which one participant expressed how vivid dreams have reflected the experiences of all other participants:

“I swear to you, there were times when I woke up in the morning and said that my wife is alive. This is not a long time, it happened even in a dream I had 3 months ago. I got up in the morning and looked at my bed to understand where my wife was because these dreams are so believable and vivid.” (Mr. A)

When the dreams were experienced so vividly and realistically, the possibility of maintaining the connection with the lost person through these dreams increased. The same participant mentioned how these dreams affected him as following:

“When I see her in my dreams, of course her presence became more alive. These dreams contribute to me because I feel as if I live her inside me. Her presence becomes more alive. Seeing her in my dream is not bad for me after all. I know that I still feel her in my heart.” (Mr. A)

Another participant stated that after seeing her deceased mother in a dream, she felt that she was still with her mother when she woke up in the morning and added that these dreams gave him comfort. Besides, Ms. Ö believed that she could meet her father only in dreams. Through these dreams, she could still keep in touch with her father, who was in a different dimension.

“These dreams definitely contribute to me. Being able to talk to him in my dreams and communicating with him in some way makes me feel more comfortable.” (Ms. Ö)

In the interviews, some participants (4 out of 8) shared that bereavement dreams provided an opportunity to interact with the deceased. At the same time, some of the participants stated that their longings decreased, as they could see their lost loved ones through these dreams and feel their presence once again.

“When I woke up in the morning, I felt that my longing was relieved. I felt she was still with me, even if not physically. I feel stronger most of all. I felt very strong and felt the yearning diminished. I don't remember seeing her in my dreams sometimes, but some mornings, I felt as if my longing was gone.” (Ms. A)

The participant who lost her husband stated that he came to her dreams at the most struggling moments and always made his presence felt. She explained that she could still feel the presence of her husband thanks to the dreams, in the following words:

“He never really left us. Only his body is not here, but in fact, he is always with us, always at our bedside. I mean, I always thought that he were around. So, I thought he never left us actually. I thought he was somewhere and with us. And I thought this love continued even if he was in somewhere else.” (Ms. R)

One of the participants believed that her father was trying to contact them, her sister and her mother, from wherever he went by way of the dreams.

“And it's a very interesting thing, I don't know, maybe because we believe this, my sister is also doing energy work, meditation and so on. The day I had a dream about my father, my mother and sister had also dream on the same day. This interesting thing started to happen. I believe that he's somehow trying to communicate with us somewhere, and it can't be that much coincidence. I see it, but the other two people living in the same house also see it.” (Ms.Ö)

In addition, when the bereaved person came into contact with the deceased in dreams, he or she also felt that he/she was receiving messages from the lost loved one. During the interview, Ms. A. expressed that her mother wanted her to wear two of her favorite rings, which were valuable for her in one of her dreams. Although her mother wanted the participant to wear these rings before she died, she refused this offer because Ms. A thought she had not as impeccable taste as her mother. However, she interpreted this dream as a message to tell her what to do or a will from his mother, and thus she immediately had those rings adjusted to her finger at a jeweler, and since that day, she continued to carry an item belonging to

her mother in her own body. This dream experience and clinging to the possessions of the deceased was also thought to be a way of maintaining the participant's bond with her mother. Another participant who lost his grandfather shared his thoughts as following:

“He might be trying to show me that he's happy because he always seems positive when he comes into my dreams.” (Mr. M)

### **3.5.1.1.Reaching out**

In the interviews, three of the participants reported that they had dreams that they cannot reach out to the lost loved ones. Although it is more common that such dreams are occurred in the very early stages of the loss, it has been reported that a participant had dreams with such content at the end of the first year of the loss.

Ms. I who lost his father in a sudden heart attack and had a very intimate father-daughter relationship kept a dream diary in which she noted all the dreams he had about her father. In his first dream which occurred 40 days after the loss, she was watching her father from an old videotape, and in the video recording, her father's back was turned. The participant remembered waiting to see his father's face in his dream but she could not.

Another participant who lost her husband expressed that she could not reach out to her husband in two different dreams that she had two months apart. In one of these dreams she and her husband were sitting away from each other and there was a table between them. She cannot touch her husband, even though she was standing at a distance where she can touch him. She described the other dream she had with these words:

“He was sitting very quietly in front of me. We sleep with my daughter, but he is sitting on a chair. My daughter and I were sleeping in the same room

back then. I made myself a place to sleep on the floor next to her crib. There isn't actually a chair in the room, but it's as if there is a chair in front of the bed and my husband was watching us. This is the first time I saw him in my dream. There was no speech. I just remember he was watching us. It seemed strange to me because I know that he was gone and I was wondering whether he was really there or not. I remember I said that this is a dream. I remember he was sitting so thoughtfully but we didn't speak anything. Neither he spoke nor I. I do not remember my feelings very clearly, but I thought that if I said something, he would go away and I was completely standing still. It was as if I was sleeping and I was watching him without notice either. Reality and dream were very intertwined back then.” (Ms. R)

Ms. Ö mentioned that before seeing her second most memorable dream, her grandmother passed away but she did not go to the funeral since they were not on speaking terms. After the funeral, she had considered that what her father would have thought and felt about this situation if he was alive, and then she had the following dream.

“I see that we are sitting together but my father is not talking to me. I guess I was probably affected by my grandmother's death. I tell my father, "daddy, why don't you talk to me?" My father is not talking to me, but we sit face to face. I feel the sullen face on his face, he is offended by something but he does not tell me what it is.” (Ms. Ö)

### **3.5.1.2.Connection with the afterlife**

Five of the participants mentioned they had dreams that the lost loved one were talking to others who died before, that another deceased relative delivered messages from a loved one, or that the deceased gave comfort to the bereaved by saying he was in a good place and happy. Besides, it was realized that these dreams mostly occurred in the first weeks to a few months after the loss.

For instance, Ms. B, who lost her father unexpectedly, expressed that in her dream her father came and informed her that he was in a good place and there is no need to worry. Another participant who lost his grandfather had a dream that his grandfather is in a car trip and chatting with people who have formerly passed away. In his dream, when his grandfather saw the signboard of the city where he passed away, he tries to throw himself out of the car and resists to go there.

Ms. A mentioned that she also had dreams before her mother's death. In these dreams, she saw her mother getting off the bus during a journey, as a foreshadowing of her mother's approaching death. In the other dream, she sees herself walking in the cemetery where his father's grave is and her feet burning in the fire. Her first dream after her mother's loss is on the 10th day of the loss, however, in this dream she dreamed that her father who passed away years ago brought message from her mother and she could not see the deceased physically.

“In this dream, my mother is not there but my father is there. But of course, I always wonder about my mother. Where is my mom? What is she doing? You know, there is such an uncertainty. I see my father in the house we live in now, at the bedroom door in the hallway. I'm in the hallway, my dad walks out the bedroom door and says to me “don't worry your mom is sleeping”. That was my first dream, and I had dreamed about my father for 18,19 years but never heard his voice. I heard his voice for the first time in this dream. It was like he was bringing news from my mother.” (Ms. A)

Another participant who lost her husband had dream about him one or two months after his death. She described her dream with these words:

“In one of my dreams I said to him that I missed him so much. I remember saying "Why did you leave us? I miss you so much". It was the first time he



had spoken to me and said to me, "Distance doesn't matter in the face of the bond between us." (Ms. R)

### **3.5.1.3.Connection with past memories**

In the interviews, it was noticed that the participants saw their daily routines with the people they lost or good memories of the past in their dreams commonly with a pleasant feeling. 6 out of 8 participants reported seeing a memory they had in childhood or an activity they often did with their loved ones, especially later in the grieving process. Furthermore, 5 of these 6 people added that they experienced such dreams recurrently. For example, one participant expressed that he and his wife used to go to the beach for breakfast on the weekends and that he saw these memories from time to time in his dreams. He also said that he dreamed of sitting together at home, watching TV, cooking, or going on vacation with friends. The other participant described her dream with the following words;

“We have a table where we always have breakfast. Interestingly, my father was there this time. My father started having breakfast at the table, and after that, she came and sat down where she always sat, said, “let's have a tea”. I poured tea for her and we all had breakfast together. Actually, the clearest thing I see about her is that she is very stylish, those details, that brooch. Her hair is very smooth and beautiful and we had breakfast together. It was the last longest dream I had about my mother, but it was a very joyful moment.  
“(Ms. A)

Besides, it was observed that three of the participants who experienced the dreams that contain daily routine or a happy memory also mentioned about walking in a road with the deceased.

“We are walking on the road as if it was a very normal time when we were just walking on the road. A feeling as if I had never lost him. When I wake up in the morning I feel as if he was there.” (Ms. R)

One participant who dreamed of a childhood memory as a recurrent dream described it with the following words:

“When I was a child, my grandfather and I used to walk up a hill. My grandfather is holding my hand, and we're walking to a grocery store with him. It's something that comes and goes in my dream from time to time.” (Mr. M)

Another participant had experienced a similar dream;

"Apart from that, I remember walking together in my dreams and mostly I am a child in these dreams. In my childhood we always went to a picnic on Sundays. My father used to play a lot with us and we would do something. I always see these memories in my dreams.” (Ms. Ö)

It is worth to note that another participant also mentioned she was walking with her father towards her grandmother's house in her dream. Even though the content of this dream did not contain a daily routine or a past memory, it showed that walking together with the lost person in the dream was frequently seen during the mourning process.

### **3.5.2. Happiness within the dreams**

It was observed that all participants were rather pleased to see the person they lost in their dreams, even if it evokes negative emotions when they woke up. 4 of the participants reported that whenever they had dreams in which the deceased

appeared they woke up with a sense of relief and comfort which its effect continues throughout the day.

“I was delighted in that first dream. I was very happy that he came to my dream. Because you know that he's completely gone, you believe you will never see him. You think that he will never exist again, but suddenly he comes for even if it was half an hour, I don't remember how long it took, it was a very nice feeling. It was a very good feeling to see him again, to see him in flesh and bones, and that day was so beautiful. It had gone very well.” (Ms. R)

“Every time I dream of him, whether he talks to me or not, I really feel good. The next day I wake up with a good feeling.” (Ms. Ö)

Three of the participants had ambivalence feelings about these dreams. They were happy to be with the person they lost in the dream, but when they woke up and faced the reality that it was only a dream, they were very disappointed and sorrowful. However, despite this, all participants, including these three participants, had a desire to see the person they had lost in their dreams more often, regardless of the content of the dream. One of the participants said that when he woke up, he felt frustration and sadness to realize that it was a dream, however, he was still extremely happy when he saw his grandfather in his dreams since he knew that he could not have seen him any other way.

“Because I accept that I will never see my grandfather again in real life, when I see my grandfather in my dreams, I feel incredibly happy. My grandfather is always cheerful and, in my dreams, he is also cheerful. I want to sit down and chat with him. I speak with excitement and incredible joy when I see my grandfather in my dreams.” (Mr. M)

Another participant expressed her feelings with these words:

“I always say like “at least let me see him in my dreams”. But I don't know, when I wake up after seeing him in my dream, I feel both good and bad. Actually, I feel good to see him, but you know it was a dream and I feel bad because it is over. It's such a mixed feeling actually. Still, for example, although I feel bad, I want to see him again when I wake up in the morning.”  
(Ms. İ)

One of the participants could not see his lost wife in his dreams for a long time and he felt bad because of this. Although he expressed that he was so badly affected when he had dreams about his wife that he could not go to work the next day, he experienced the absence of his wife as if she had abandoned him and suffered.

### **3.5.3. Will h/she ever come back?**

It was found that in another content of dream that mostly occurred in the beginning of the mourning process, three of the participants questioned if the person they lost will ever come back. At the same time, in these dreams they were waiting for the lost loved one to return, or the deceased was coming back. In all of the dreams that the deceased returned, participants reported that there was an awareness that the loved one was dead.

When Ms. Ö went to the funeral home after her father's death, she said that as soon as she entered the house where her childhood passed, she first encountered the photograph of her father hanging on the wall and she emphasized that she still could not forget that scene. She stated that she was always in that house in her dreams. She had recurrent dreams, especially at the beginning of the grieving process, looking at her father's photo and waiting for him to enter the door.

“On the one hand, I know that I lost him, on the other hand, I say will he come, I look at his picture, but I know he won't. I am waiting for him to return but he does not. I am waiting him constantly.” (Ms. Ö)

Another participant who unexpectedly lost her father had three dreams in a row in which her father came back. She described one of her dream as following:

“We were all sitting together in the living room. I wish my dad was here, and I wonder what he's thinking. There's been a conversation. And then all of a sudden, my dad shows up, where he always sits. I'm sure that only I saw him and I'm pretty sure no one else did. At first, I was afraid if I said that he came, he'd leave, so I couldn't tell anyone. And then I said, "Dad, what do you think?" And then everyone looked at me. “Can't you see?” I said to them and they said no. He was wearing a light blue suit. He supported me with his thoughts.” (Ms. İ)

Ms. R had a dream in which her husband came back 10 days after she lost her. Just as the participant whose dream was described above felt, Ms. R. waited in her dream without making a sound, afraid of that if she said anything about her husband coming back, her husband would leave.

#### **3.5.4. The power of the loss one**

Another subtheme that contains one of the common dream contents that 4 of the participants reported is the power of the loss one. It was noticed that these dreams occurred relatively later in the grieving process, within 10 months to 1 year. In these dreams, the participants talked about seeing the person they lost as a very powerful figure, younger and beautiful, or in a very elegant and well-groomed way. Moreover, in the dream, the deceased was saying that he or she had left them for a very significant duty or was giving great news to the bereaved. For example, a

participant had a dream that his lost wife gave birth to a son. At the same time, his wife looked beautiful.

Besides, one of the participants saw his deceased grandfather as a transcendental and supreme figure. He described his dream as following:

“There is a blue world in Avatar movie, they break it down afterwards. There was something like a glowing tree of life there. There was something like that in dream, how should I explain the script, something like a small mountain that is on the earth, but this mountain is made up of my grandfather's beard. In other words, it is as if a source of life flows from the top to the bottom. Water flows from there. It is connected to the world, like a part of the world, but at the same time as if it knows, understands, and feels the thoughts of everybody living in the world. There is a series called sense 8. There, too, people from different parts of the world can share the same things, feel the same feelings with each other through telepathy. The dream was like this. I saw him as if he was sacred. There was only that scene, in the dream.” (Mr. H)

In one of Ms. A's dream, her mother was dressed in very elegant clothes, well-groomed, and although she died in her 80s, she saw her younger appearance. The dream that one part of it is described in the “Connection with past memories” sub-theme, was described by the participant in the following words:

“...and my mother was 45 or 50 years old in this dream. At that time, my mother had her clothes sewn by her tailor. She had a beautiful dress, I'm talking about the times when she was working at the fraternity. She had a small but very cute gray dress with such pink flowers, buttoned down the front. I saw my mother wearing that outfit and I saw my mother in that form. Also, my mother was a person who did not sit at home with the clothes she wore outside. She would definitely change her clothes. In my dream, she was

going somewhere with that clothes on. She was wearing that dress. We have breakfast in the kitchen. She says that she was going to go out, but gave up and she will have breakfast with us. She wore something like a dressing gown, over that dress, and on her collar was a beautiful sparkling bird brooch. It is still in front of my eyes right now. It was like a peacock.”

Ms. İ who lost his father and had dreams about his father returned for a long time after the loss, in one of her dream which occurred at the 10th month of the loss saw that her father came back again, however, this time he both explained her where he was and told her that he had gone for a very important mission.

“We were in my grandmothers in my dream. My grandmother was crying out loud again. Then my father came and I said "my father came, okay, grandmother, do not worry anymore." My grandmother looked at me with her unbelieving face, and I doubted myself as I was dreaming. Then I went to the living room to my father and said, "How will be dad? Will we be able to see you?" and he made a sentence like "you said to me, the universe is in the hands of Asia". And when I woke up in the morning, I remembered this sentence very clearly, even though it sounded ridiculous. He said "I went to one end of a country to investigate this”. “(Ms. İ)

### **3.5.5. Taking responsibility**

In the interviews, four of the participants reported that they saw scenes in their dreams where they had to take responsibility for some issues. Two of the participants saw in their dreams that the person they lost gave them a mission or demanded that they fulfil a will. These dreams also made the bereaved person to think that the deceased trusts them. For instance, Ms. A described her dream as following:

“My mother stands in front of something like a console. We are not in this house but somewhere else, another place. My mother is turned back like this, but there is a mirror in front of it, and there is furniture like a console, like a dressing table. After that, her back turned, I enter the room, my mother turns towards me and there is something in her palm. "Please use these," she tells me. She opens her palm and there were 2 rings that my mother loved very much, they are still in her palm. It was the first dream that I saw my mother and clearly remembering all the details after I lost her, but with a younger version of my mother.” (Ms. A)

Two and a half years after the loss of his grandfather, who was 96 years old but hardworking and enjoyed to be occupied with construction works, Mr. H expressed that he had a dream that his grandfather had left him a will to continue his unfinished projects.

“We were sitting on a hill with my grandfather. A place like a mountain, close to the summit. While watching the view, my grandfather and I are sitting on a stone. He says I will give you 1 million liras soon. And I said, "Where did this come from? Where did you see the 1 million liras, where did you find it and now you will give it to me? Why 1 million liras, why so much?" I say. He says, "I can't finish this thing, I want you to keep them going. Make a pool here, do something else here, make a road here." He tells about his own projects. I say 1 million is too much. He says, "I will give you a few new missions in the future. I have a few more projects." He says “I haven't finished them yet and you do them”, and he tells what he wants to do. The sky changes at the end of each sentence he speaks approximately. The sun is leaving, the moon is coming, the seasons are changing. It rains for a moment, the sun shines for 5 seconds, and then lightning flashes after 10 seconds. Everything is constantly changing. I remember that detail. I saw that he was offering me money to finish projects. He said he would give new missions in the future.” (Mr. H)



Two participants saw in their dreams that they were trying to save the deceased from a danger or death. These dreams occurred later in the mourning process (between 10 months and 2,5 years) and the participants stated that they felt very helpless in this dream. Below you can see the narration of the dreams of the two participants in their own words.

“We're watching a game and we're in a very big stadium. There's a very big café-restaurant section at the back of the stands. My sister and my mother are sitting in that restaurant section in the back while we are watching the game with my grandfather. After that, all of a sudden there's an earthquake. When there's an earthquake, the stadium changes shape, and it turns into 60-story Soviet buildings with 600 apartments in one block. My sister says, "Okay, let's not try to get down the stairs because we're too high right now. The stairs are too dangerous. We're going to go to this corner, we're going to lie down, we're going to lie in the triangle of life, and we're going to wait for an earthquake like this to stop, and then we're out." Then, we're all going there and lying in that corner. Grandpa doesn't understand what's going on, and he's surprised. After that, the earthquake ends. My grandfather is with my sister, and I'm like, "Let's get out, the earthquake's over, if we're going to land, let's get off now. Otherwise, we'll wait until the building collapses." I say and they say “Let's stay here, son." I say, "Guys, are we just going to wait for someone to save us? Let's get out of here." I'm exhausted from my anger in the dream. As a result, I can't convince anyone. I try so hard, but I can't convince people, and I'm fighting and I'm saying, "Guys, what if someone can't come and save us? So, we're just going to wait to die here forever?”. (Mr. M)

“We are at our house, I think my father has returned or time has passed back. I know he's dead again so I'm trying to convince him. I cry. You will quit smoking, you will have angiography. I tried to convince him by saying “I will quit all my work and come to you if you don't.”. (Ms. İ)

### **3.5.6. Changing nature of the content of the dreams**

The last subtheme of this study includes the changing nature of the contents of the bereavement dreams over time in the bereavement journey of the participants. It is worth noting that, although this study aimed to examine the common experiences of the participants who lost their significant others, the lost experience of each participant is idiosyncratic. Since the dreams show us the material that is coming from the unconscious, each dream is unique and idiosyncratic, as well. However, during the interviews, it was observed that the content of dreams of all of the participants changed in connection with the grief process. Table 3 and Table 4 below show the varying dream contents and changing dream frequency over time. It can also be seen that some bereavement dreams intertwined with several different themes at the same time.

According to the results of this study, while, at the beginning of the mourning process, the participants had dreams in which they tried to reach the person they lost, questioned where he or she had gone, or the deceased person appeared and announced that he or she was well and happy, in time, they began to have dreams in which they continued their daily activities with the deceased, took responsibilities that were given by the deceased or the lost person had turned into a powerful figure. Besides, among the dreams reported in the interviews, in some of the dreams that occurred early phases of the grief process, the bereaved individual could not communicate with the deceased and did not speak, by contrast with the dreams that occurred much later phases of the process.

For example, Ms. İ had dreams frequently during the first 40 days after losing her father, and in general, she waited for her father to return in these dreams, tried to reach him, and tried to make sense of where he had gone. However, later on, these dreams evolved into dream contents where she tried to save her father from death. Similarly, whereas Ms. Ö saw in the first dream after the death of her father, and afterward recurrently, that she was waiting for her father to enter through the door. She reported that, after the intervening years, she began to have dreams in which she and her father did some specific activities as they did in her childhood.

Ms. A. reported having a similar dream experience. At the beginning of the mourning process, the participant had dreams about where her lost mother went and whether she was fine there, however, after a year, these dreams changed shape and she started to have dreams of having breakfast together as a family, just like every morning when her mother was alive. Likewise, in the first dream of Ms. B that she experienced right after the loss, her father was giving her the good news that he was well and happy and giving the message that she should not worry about him. However, in the intervening years, she had begun to had recurrent dreams that includes her happiest childhood memories with her father.

*Table 4. 1 The contents of the bereavement dreams*

Partici pants	1 <sup>st</sup> dream content	Time	2 <sup>nd</sup> dream content	Time	3 <sup>rd</sup> dream content	Time	4 <sup>th</sup> dream content	Time
Ms. Ö	Will h/she ever come back	Recur rent (in the begin ning)	Reaching out	A year	Connection with past memories (walking)	Recur rent (later)		
Ms. A	Connecti on with the afterlife	10 <sup>th</sup> day	Taking responsibility / the power of the loss one	40 <sup>th</sup> day	Connection with past memories / the power of the loss one	A year		
Ms. R	Reach out	10 <sup>th</sup> day	Connectio n with the afterlife/ Reaching out	1-2 month s	Connection with past memories (walking)	recurr ent		

Ms. B	Connection with the afterlife	1 <sup>st</sup> week			Connection with past memories	recurrent		
Ms. I	Reach out	40 <sup>th</sup> day	Will h/she ever come back / Connection with the afterlife	50 <sup>th</sup> day	Connection with the afterlife/ the power of the loss one	55 <sup>th</sup> day	Taking responsibility	10 months
Mr. M	Dying again	1 year	Connection with the past memories (walking)	Recurrent	Taking responsibility	2 years		
Mr. A	The power of the lost one	1 year	Connection with the past memories	Recurrent				
Mr. H	Connection with the afterlife	2 weeks	The power of the lost one	A year	Taking responsibility	2,5 year		

*Table 4. 2 Bereavement dream occurrence*

Participants	First Dream After Loss	Most Recent Dream	Frequency	Change in frequency over time
Ms. Ö	Two days	A few months before interview	Once a week	Increasing/decreasing from time to time
Ms. A	Within a week	A day before interview	A few times in a year	more frequent in the beginning
Ms. R	Within a few weeks	A few months after the loss	Several times in a week	Less frequent in the beginning
Ms. B	Within a month	A week before interview	Several times in a week	Increasing/decreasing from time to time
Ms. İ	Two months	Two months before interview	Once a week	Increasing/decreasing from time to time
Mr. M	One month	A month before interview	Once a year	No
Mr. A	One year	Three months before interview	A few times in a year	Less frequent in the beginning
Mr. H	Two weeks	1,5 years after loss	Less than once in a year	No

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences, coping mechanisms and transformation of eight Turkish bereaved adults after losing a loved one and to explore how these grieving processes are

linked with their bereavement dreams. At the same time, since this study was conducted with Turkish participants, one of the main goals was to understand how Turkish participants deal with mourning, as well as the impact of culture, religion, and spirituality on making sense of dreams and loss while coping with the intense psychic pain in the grief process. Based on the results of the semi-structured interviews with the bereaved adults, five superordinate themes emerged as proposed thoroughly in the previous section: feelings and thoughts after the loss, “He was a very powerful and divine figure for me”, supporting factors in the grief process, personal transformation, and the bereavement dreams. In this chapter, these five major themes will be discussed in the light of the literature on this field by assessing each major and subthemes respectively. Besides, the differences and similarities between the present study and the previous studies and ideas will also be discussed. Even though the central focus of this study was on the dream experiences of the participants, I believe that initially, the experience of grief needs to be explored. Hence, in this chapter, first the grieving experience and then the dreaming experience will be discussed. After discussing the themes, possible clinical implications will be discussed with the knowledge of the existing literature. Lastly, the remaining sections of this sections will be the limitations to the present study and successions for future research.

#### **4.1. GRIEF EXPERIENCE**

The feelings and thoughts after the loss of a loved one were one of the subordinate themes generated in the light of the responses of the participants. In the current study, the bereaved individuals described many common emotional reactions such as sadness and pain, shock, numbness, loneliness, emptiness, guilt, helplessness, and anger consistent with the recent literature. It was stated in the literature that after the death of a significant one, the bereaved initially experiences shock and numbness (Shuchter et al., 1993; Pollock, 1961; Bowlby, 1961; Parkes, 2001). This process has been evaluated as a shutting down of the psychic apparatus to protect itself from the overwhelming emotions that were evoked by the loss

experience. This universal first response is exhibited in the present study, as well. The majority of the participants in this study reported that they could not figure out what had happened in the first days and weeks, were in shock, and could not react as they expected from themselves. Another universal and recurrent reaction to the loss of a loved one that has been reported in the literature was anger (Bowlby, 1961; Pollock, 1961; Parkes, 2001). The participants of this study declared a considerable amount of anger which was channeled towards the deceased, living others, the God, or focused inward due to his/her inability to prevent the death. Consistent with the findings of the present study, Worden (2009) stated that when a beloved one dies, the bereaved individual tends to regress, to feel helpless, to feel that they cannot exist without that person, and to experience anger with the anxiety that accompanies all of these. The person experiences abandonment and, while all anger is expected to be directed to the deceased, this displaced anger is directed to God, other family members, an insensitive friend, or oneself. In this sense, Bowlby (1961) emphasized the pervasiveness of anger in bereavement and proposed a developmental explanation. According to him, anger is an instinctive reaction to the young child's separation from the primary caregiver and prompts the child to seek reunification. This anger serves unconsciously to hold onto or retrieving the lost object (Bowlby, 1961). Besides these emotions, participants mentioned the loss of a sense of being secure after losing a father figure who provides support and protection. Among the participants in this study, those who had lost a spouse or lost a mother did not mention the loss of a sense of being secure in contrast to participants that lost a father or grandfather. In the literature, the protective and supportive role of the father figure not only for the individual but also for the family was discussed (Burlingham, 1973). One of the main research questions of this study was "How do bereaved individuals experience loss," regardless of which family member or significant other had been lost. However, the loss of "sense of protection" and "sense of being secure," especially after losing a father figure, shows the significance of the specific meanings attributed to the deceased such as losing a mentor or supporter, as it was revealed in this study.

Another point stated by the participants in this study was that some feelings do not remain the same and evolved into different shapes over time. In this study, the participants expressed their current feelings and thoughts about the loss, underlining that they know that they will never forget the person they lost and that their lives will never be the same again. Nevertheless, most of the participants stated that their grief was not debilitating to them anymore, and they could function without the deceased by finding a way to adjust to life in time. It is also discussed in the literature that mourning is a long-term process that is not proceeding in a linear fashion and the culmination of this bereavement journey should not be pre-grief state (Worden, 2009; Parkes, 2001). This process may differ according to each individual, and when the bereaved person can think of the deceased not in as much pain as before, but in a way that the intensity of pain has decreased, it can be thought that he or she is moving towards healing. Inevitably, sadness will always be felt when considering someone who has been loved and lost; however, this feeling will not include the quality of heart-wrecking that previously had. (Worden, 2009). The current study is consistent with the literature by showing that although the deceased has never been forgotten no matter how many years had passed and took some part of the bereaved in company with his or her absence, the feeling of intense psychic pain leaves its place to feelings of longing, emptiness, and deficiency. Even if sadness is experienced when the deceased was remembered, after a while, the time varied from person to person, the reminders of the deceased or their memories are not as painful as before.

Another finding of this study was that majority of the participants were worried about their family members who were left behind after the loss they experienced. Some of the participants expressed how shaken they were at the grief reactions of their relatives rather than their own sorrow. It was also noticed that they had to regulate their grief reactions not to upset their loved ones. Bateman (1999) argued the act of caretaking others aftermath the loss of a loved one in her doctoral dissertation. She asserted that this might be a reaction of the bereaved person to unconsciously protect himself or herself in order to alleviate the existing



stimuli. In this study, participants were questioning what caused the death, why it happened, and where the deceased had gone to make sense of the death. Besides, after the loss they experienced, their own deaths and mortality began to come to their minds. It is also discussed in the literature and asserted that our own death and mortality awareness, which usually exists at a relatively low level, is generally heightened with the death of a significant other (Worden, 2009; Frantz, 1998). Furthermore, almost all of the participants, especially at the beginning of the mourning process, in an effort to make sense of death, questioned where the person they lost went to and whether they were good at the place they went. Regardless of their religious beliefs, all of these participants were hopeful that their lost person was in a good place. In a similar vein, recent literature argues the fact that bereaved people develop thoughts about whether the person they have lost is safe and well (Sormanti & August, 1997; Bonanno, 2009 p.145).

The second major theme that will be discussed is the idealization of the deceased and the relationship. It was stated in the literature that when a loved one died, the bereaved tend to idealize or glorify the positive qualities of the deceased (Aiken, 1994 as cited in Hayes, 2016; Hayes, 2016; Futterman et al., 1990; Malinak et al., 1979). Malinak et al. (1979) conducted a study on bereavement reactions of adults who have lost a parent, and the findings of this study demonstrated that the bereaved individuals somehow idealized the deceased. Even though they recognize the human faults of the deceased, they maintained the aspects of reverence. According to the results of the research conducted by Hayes (2016), individuals tend to praise and idealize the deceased in order to cope with the death of a loved one. By idealizing and eulogizing the positive attributes of the deceased, the bereaved individuals can provide themselves some solace while they are in the midst of anxiety, distress, and despair (Hayes, 2016). Parallel to the literature and previous studies, the participants of this study were prone to glorify and idealized the lost loved ones. Besides, throughout the interviews, they often emphasized how valuable and perfect the deceased was, what a meaningful life he/she lived while he/she was alive, and how their relationship with the deceased was special for them.

Under the problems and purpose of this study, the participants were asked how they coped with the loss and the supporting factors in this process. According to the results, one of the supporting factors in this emotional turmoil was receiving social support from significant others such as family members, close friends, or romantic partners. All the participants emphasized the importance of social support during the grief process. While those who could get this support expressed it as one of the best things in this process, those who could not get this support expressed its deficiency. Consistent with the findings of the present study, in the literature, social support was identified as a crucial factor for managing grief-related emotions and for successful adaptation to the loss (Mallon, 2008). Also, lack of social support, having an absent or unsupportive family, and social isolation are seen as risk factors for complicated grief in the grief literature (Parkes, 2010). Also, it was found in this study that women are more prone to seek social support and share their feelings with others compared to men. The three male participants in this study either complained that they could not find the appropriate social support they were looking for and could not share their emotions with anyone, or they expressed that they could only get this support from their romantic partner or child since they did not prefer other's support. Supporting this finding, according to a study by Stroebe et al. (2001), men had more health problems, depression, and mental problems than women after the loss of a spouse. The reason for this difference was seen due to the fact that men more hardly expressed their feelings compared to women with other people and could not have a social support network. (Stroebe et al., 2001)

However, the preferences of participants on whom they sought social support varied according to their religious/spiritual beliefs and cultural background. For example, for participants with strong religious beliefs, post-funeral rituals were the most prominent social support. It was one of the good things for these people during the mourning process that family members visited the funeral home and did not leave the mourners alone, occasionally checking whether they were well. However, participants who identified themselves as deists or had questions about

their religious beliefs were uncomfortable with these rituals and preferred the support of a closed circle, such as a partner or nuclear family members. Moreover, for some participants, religious belief, surrendering to God, believing that this tragic loss was part of God's grand plan was a supportive factor, whereas there was no supportive side of religious belief for other participants. In the literature while some of the researchers asserted that faith in God, belief in afterlife and having religious belief were powerful resources for meaning-making the death and finding comfort (Parapully,2002) other studies demonstrated the opposite (Stroebe et al., 2001 p.218). Thus, consistent with the literature, there is no clear consensus about whether religion/spirituality assists bereaved individuals in coping with loss (Frantz et al., 1996; Becker, 2007)

Seeking ways to maintain the bonds with the deceased was another supporting factor in the grief process. According to the results of this study, bereaved individuals try different ways to continue their relationship with the lost loved ones which led them to find a soothing anchorage in this psychic turmoil. These ways contained internalization of the idealized characteristics and values of the deceased, visiting the grave regularly, looking and talking with the photographs, somehow sensing the presence of the lost one, and bereavement dreams. Winnicott asserted that when an adult face the loss of a significant other, the capacity of the bereaved individual to continue internal representations of the deceased becomes significant in terms of dealing with the loss and transitional phenomena help the bereaved individual to maintain a symbolic tie to the lost loved one. Some objects representing the memories of the lost loved one or some photographs and diaries may provide a soothing function for the bereaved individual (Winnicott, 1971 as cited in Berzoff, 2003).

It was found that continuing ties with the deceased through these ways facilitate the bereaved individuals' ability to cope with the loss, as it is supported in the recent literature (Klass et al., 1996). Silverman and Worden (1992) conducted a study, and they found that children who lost their parents maintain a relationship with them by keeping their personal stuff, by making inner conversations with

them, by memories, and dreams. Besides, some other theoreticians suggested that finding a way for continuing the relationship with the deceased loved one frequently provides solace, comfort, and support to the bereaved (Klass 1988, 1996; Silverman et al., 1992; Normand et al., 1996; as cited in Baker, 2001). In this study, participants with strong religious/spiritual beliefs believed that the lost person could watch them from where he/she had gone and that his or her soul did not die, even if he/she was in a different dimension or heaven. This belief allowed the participants to maintain a sense that their loved ones were still in their lives. In fact, others who did not have religious convictions also enabled the person they lost, in reality, to continue to exist in their minds through the ways as mentioned above. These findings were consistent with the results have been reported in the literature (Silverman et al., 1992; Kernberg, 2010). According to Volkan and Zint (1993), bereaved individuals unconsciously try to close the gap in their lives and strengthen themselves by imitating the aspects of the lost loved one that they admire or need. In this way, our dependence on it also decreases. This process, which initially begins as an expression of the desire for closeness, helps the person stand independently. In this study, the participants reported that they tried to make some of the characteristics of the deceased that they liked and appreciated a part of their own identity by identifying with the loved ones after the loss. This situation showed that it not only plays a supportive role for the participants in the grief process but also is a way to maintain the bond with the deceased.

The fourth subordinate theme that I would like to focus on is the personal transformation aftermath of the loss. In the current study, it was found that the experience of the loss of a significant one led to significant changes in the participants' lives in terms of interpersonal relationships, attitudes to life and death, sense of self, and religious and spiritual orientations. Half of the participants mentioned that their priorities had changed, and they began to reevaluate what is essential for them. Besides, participants of this study expressed that they recognized their personal strengths, felt an increase in self-confidence, and became more resilient. These findings were consistent with the grief literature where argues that

the arduous events can be an impetus for psychological growth and thriving (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2007; Calhoun et al., 2010; Schaefer et al., 2001; Malinak et al., 1979; Parappully et al., 2002; Taylor, 2020; Frantz, 1998). For instance, the results of Calhoun and Tedeschi's (1990) study proposed that bereaved individuals changed into more mature, independent, competent, wise, and strong people and better able to deal with other crises afterward the death of a loved one.

Another change in the lives of the participants noted was related to their interpersonal relationships. According to the results of this study, some of the bereaved individuals stated that their post-loss relationships started to become more profound and intimate, but for others, this loss caused distrust, intolerance, and conflicts in their relationships with others. In the literature, it is asserted that after the loss of a beloved one, the relationship with other people deepened and a greater intimacy is felt with family members and friends, especially with the others who had undergone similar losses (Tedeschi, 2007; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Taylor, 2020). Although the literature frequently suggests positive changes in the quality of one's relationships after the loss of a loved one, Shuchter et al. (1993) mentioned that conflicts and distances could be felt in relationships, especially in family relationships due to lack of empathy and lack of tolerance for the pain of the bereaved person which supports the findings of the current study.

Furthermore, another area in which participants in this study experienced changes was their religious/spiritual beliefs. Even though the change was a common experience among the participants in this study, the increase or decrease in their beliefs differed. It is also discussed in the literature by Mallon (2008), and she asserted that after the death of a beloved one bereaved individual has changed in terms of their religious/spiritual beliefs regardless of whether they acquire new religious or spiritual path or return to the known one with greater commitment. In a study on widows and widowers which was conducted by Schuchter et al. (1993), some of the participants reported that their religious beliefs were shaken after the

loss of their spouses. Wortmann et al. (2009) also conducted a study on the role of religion/ spirituality in the meaning-making process after the loss, and they reviewed thirty-nine studies in the literature. The current study is consistent with the results of this study by showing that some bereaved individuals experience a decline in their beliefs, whereas others felt spiritual growth and stronger faith (Wortmann et al., 2009). In other words, as seen in the literature, in this study, there was no definitive opinion on the direction in which the change in religious belief would be after the loss like a general opinion could not be established for the supportive role of the religious/spiritual faith in the grieving process.

Many empirical studies suggested that some loss-related variables might affect the bereavement outcome, the personal growth aftermath of the loss, and the bereaved individuals' ability to adjust to the absence of the loved one, such as the passed time since the loss (Mallon, 2008), cause of death (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001), and closeness to the deceased (Sander, 1980). The current study is consistent with the literature by showing that to experience the positive by-products of grief, a certain amount of time needs to pass after the loss. One year after losing her father, one of the participants expressed that she could not see the strengthening and transforming side of the loss yet, and that maybe she could see it in the future. Similarly, another participant stated that the experience of the loss of his wife did not have a strengthening side despite the two years that passed. This situation showed that the degree of closeness with the deceased also affected the severity of the grief process and the process of personal growth. According to the results of the study conducted by Sander (1980), it was proposed that among those who experienced the loss of a spouse, loss of parents, and children, those who showed the most intense grief reactions compared to others were the participants who lost their children. A participant with a child loss was not included in this study; however, among the participants who had lost a grandparent, a parent, and a spouse, those who showed the most intense grief reactions during the mourning process were those who experienced spouse loss. Taylor (2020) asserted that personal transformation after loss might occur either suddenly or gradually. In this study, contrary to Taylor's conclusions, all participants stated that the growth and

transformation was experienced in the process and realized that it could only occur when the bereaved person can reconstruct the meaning of life. As mentioned above, such an intense psychic pain after losing a beloved one causes many negative emotions and significant changes in the lives of those left behind. In order to cope with this emotional burden and experience the positive transformations it brings, one needs to restructure the meaning in their lives, make sense of loss, find a benefit in this experience and undergo an identity change (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

#### **4.2. DREAM EXPERIENCE**

One of the primary purposes of this study was to explore in-depth what role bereavement dreams play in the mourning process and understand these dreams' developmental sequence depending on the phase of the mourning process. In this context, one of the assumptions was that dreams that the deceased appeared support the bereaved individual throughout the grief process and aid the bereaved to deal with the loss more effectively. It was found in this study that bereavement dreams have a supportive role in the grief process, particularly in terms of facilitating the feeling of longing. Almost all the participants expressed that they woke up with a sense of relief and comfort since they were with the deceased loved one. Besides, the results of this study showed that dreams provide an opportunity for the bereaved to interact with the deceased and serve as a way of continuing the bonds with the deceased in another meeting place. These findings are consistent with other studies which put emphasis on the significance of the bereavement dreams throughout the mourning process (Sormanti & August, 1997; Belicki et al., 2003; Worden, 2009; Black, 2014; Barrett, 1992; Wrights, 2013). Besides, these dream experiences were

considered as an attempt to continue internal representations of the deceased in a transitional space as Winnicott asserted (Winnicott, 1971). Through these dreams, bereaved individuals maintain a symbolic tie to the lost loved one and it assists them in terms of dealing with the loss experience and associated intense emotions and provides a soothing function for them.

Another point stated by the participants in this study is that they were pretty gratified to see the person they lost in their dreams, even if it caused negative emotions when they woke up. In a similar vein, recent literature argues that the bereavement dreams where the bereaved had a sensation that they have an opportunity to contact with the deceased's spirit lead them to wake up with a feeling of peace (Worden, 2009; Garfield, 1996; Barrett, 1992; Belicki, 2013); however, not for all the dreams since some dreams, such as dreams that the deceased person is dying again, can cause discomfort (Garfield, 1996; Barrett, 1992). Wright et al. (2013) declared that according to the findings of his study, 56% of the respondents reported that their dreams were pleasant, 31% reported the dreams being both pleasant and disturbing, and 7% reported that they had only disturbing dreams. In the current study, 23 dreams were gathered from 8 participants. The two of these dreams that were reported by two separate participants were both pleasant and disturbing components. They were delighted to see and be together with the lost loved one again, but they were disturbed since the content of the dream was unsettling, or they realized that it was only a dream when they woke up. One participant expressed that, in general, all of her dreams have both pleasant and disturbing sides. Apart from these, all the remaining bereavement dreams had a quality that made people feel comfort and relief. In other words, contrary to the literature, a wholly disturbing dream was not reported in this study, and despite the bad feelings of dreams, it was realized that all participants had a wish to see the deceased person in their dreams more often. It was thought that this situation might be related to the way mourners make sense of dreams, and therefore a different result was obtained from the literature due to the change of religious/spiritual beliefs and cultural background. Most of the participants in this study (5 out of 8) were adults with religious beliefs or who believed in the afterlife. They understood



dreams as an opportunity to maintain a connection with the person they lost, as a way to communicate with them, as a visitation of the lost loved one or as a way of receiving messages from them. Participants who had no faith in any spiritual/religious beliefs and afterlife reported that especially the first dream they had about the deceased had both comforting and disturbing sides. In addition, they believed that dreams were only shaped by the events experienced in daily life, including the loss experience, and the feelings that these events evoked.

In the present study, dreams gathered from participants were clustered into sub-themes depending upon their content, as reported in the previous section under the fifth major theme. Garfield (1996) and Barrett (1992), who were the researchers of the two preliminary studies in this field, also categorized more likely dreams to occur in some specific phases of the grief process. Besides, they suggested that more pleasant dreams were seen later in the mourning process, whereas disturbing dreams occurred relatively early in the mourning process, especially in the first phase of the grief process, which was named as “numbness”. These dreams, which are experienced in the immediate aftermath of the loss and had a supportive role in accepting the reality of the death, were categorized as "alive-again" dreams by Garfield (1996) and Barrett (1992) categorized under the name of "back-to-life" dreams. Additionally, Garfield (1996) mentioned another dream category called “dying-again”.

In contrast with the results of these studies in the literature, a linear time order was not found in the recent study in terms of how the contents of dreams make bereaved individuals feel as well as how bereaved individuals experience the grief process. In other words, even though rare disturbing dreams are more prone to be seen at the very beginning of the mourning process, it was noticed that disturbing dreams could also occur one year after the loss. In this study, dreams that occurred at this phase were reported under the themes of "*connection with the afterlife*" and "*will h/she ever come back*". In these dreams, people saw that the lost loved one was returning, giving comforting messages by assuring that he/she was fine and informing where he/she had gone, waiting for the return of the lost person, or even if they thought that he/she had returned they were worried that he/she would go

back because they were aware in the dream that the loved person had died. These findings were consistent with the literature (Garfield, 1996; Barrett, 1992; Belicki, 2003). However, Garfield's "dying-again" dream where the deceased dies again either as it happened or an exaggerated form was encountered in only one of the dreams in this study, and it was reported that this dream occurred a year after the loss. Thus, while the assumption that alive-again dreams were experienced in the relatively early period of the mourning process is consistent with the results of this study, it is hard to say the same thing for dying-again dreams. In the current literature, it is suggested that "dying again" dreams help the bereaved individual to accept the reality of death (Garfield, 1996; Hess, 2004) and pave the way for working through the painful emotions of grief (Garfield, 1996) as well as the "alive-again" dreams. For this participant, the loss aroused intense painful emotions and subsequently led to personal transformation and growth; however, it may have been suggested that he may not have had difficulty accepting the reality of death early in the grieving process or he had some other spaces for working through these emotions such as psychotherapy. Therefore, dreams of "dying again" or "alive again" may not have been seen in the early phases of grieving process and these dreams could be experienced much later in the grieving process due to other personal triggering life events.

Another dream theme in this study was "*reaching out*". In these dreams, the participants wait to see the face of the person they lost or want to touch or speak with the deceased but could not. These dreams were also occurred in very early phases of the grief process, generally as the first dream. However, one participant reported that the person she lost was offended by her in the dream, and the deceased person was not talking to her, albeit she tried to talk. She had this dream a year after her loss. This dream suggested that the bereaved could not reach her father despite all her efforts, but at the same time, it was akin to Garfield's (1996) "disapproval dreams," in which the deceased criticized the bereaved in the dream. Before seeing this dream, the participant had done something that her father would not approve and would be angry with her, and then in her dream, she believed that his father was angry with her and therefore did not talk to her. It is suggested that such dreams

serve to re-interpreting the relationship with the lost loved one and questioning the dynamics of the relationship. Garfield (1996) hypothesis that "disapproval" dreams are seen in the disorganization stage, that is, in the later stages of the mourning process while the person is trying to adapt to the changing environment after loss. Garfield's (1996) other dream categories such as Telephone-call, taking-a-journey, and saying-goodbye dreams that she suggested to occur in this phase were not encountered in this study.

Moreover, she asserted that young-well-again, approval, advice-comfort-gift, passionate-encounter, and daily-activity dreams could occur during the reorganization phase. The other subthemes of this study, "*the power of the loss one*" and "*connection with past memories*", were consistent with the dream themes put forward by Garfield (1996). Initially, the dreams presented in the sub-theme of "*connection with past memories*" are generally seen as recurring dreams for the participants. They repeatedly had dreams of continuing to do whatever they were doing in their daily lives before the beloved one passed away. Besides, they were prone to see their childhood memories in these dreams. In "*the power of the loss one*" subtheme, the dreams that included a young and beautiful version of the deceased or the lost loved one had been seen as a powerful and sacred figure was proposed. It was noticed that these dreams were seen by the participants much later in the grief process. All these experienced dreams supported the themes of bereavement dreams in the literature and the changing nature of dreams in the process (Garfield, 1996; Barrett, 1992). However, in the present study, it was strikingly realized that among the dreams of "connection with past memories", taking a walk with the departed person was a commonly experienced dream theme which was a finding that not coincided in the previous studies. This finding of current study was thought to be quite significant. When it was looked in more detail at the reason for the occurrence of dream content "taking a walk with the deceased one," it was noticed that these dreams were experienced at a later stage of the grieving process, at least a year after the loss, and were seen as recurrent dreams. However, apart from these communities, there were no common experiences

observed in terms of closeness with the deceased, religious/spiritual belief, age, or gender. This finding has raised more questions and is thought to have a cultural effect. Lastly, another dream theme has occurred in this study which named as “*taking responsibility*”. In these dreams the deceased gave a task or a mission to the dreamer and these dreams, which were akin to Garfield's (1996) "advice-comfort-gift" dreams, were interpreted by the participants as showing that the deceased trusted them. Moreover, in some dreams, the bereaved person had a dream that he or she was trying to protect his loved one from death or danger. It was remarkable that the people who saw these dreams were away before losing their loved ones and felt guilty about not being with them when the beloved one died.

When the participants were asked how they interpret these dreams, it was observed that there were differences between people with firm religious and spiritual beliefs and those who did not have this faith in terms of meaning-making of dreams. People with firm religious beliefs or beliefs about the afterlife believed that the lost loved one sent them a message, trying to communicate and support them through dreams. On the other hand, the participants who did not have religious beliefs or questioned it thought that their dreams were affected by their waking-day mood. In brief, although some dream themes that have been encountered in this study consistent with the literature, the meaning making of these dreams is completely reflected the unique experience of the bereaved individual. The importance of the idiosyncratic meanings of dreams in the journey of coming up with bereavement was also argued in the literature (Belicki, 2003; Gulko, 1996 as cited in Belicki, 2013). In this study, some dreams shed light on what was happening at a specific moment in the bereavement journey, which some of them were not mentioned in the previous chapter since they could not fit into any dream content themes. In addition, as mentioned above, it was realized that the theme under which the dream will be evaluated might differ when the participant's unique experiences are considered. The grieving process did not follow a linear path, and that people might go back and forth between phases. For instance, one of the participants reported a dream in which his grandfather had died again and this

dream had occurred one year after the loss when he had just moved to another country and did not feel sense of secure in his current life period. It shows us that grieving does not proceed in a linear fashion.

During the interviews, it was observed that the participants were quite willing to talk about their dreams in particular and shared their dream experiences in an exciting and curious attitude. In contrast, they struggled in expressing their loss experiences, such as the hardest parts of this challenging process and their experiences in the days, months and years following the loss due to the emotional burden of the experience. However, it is worth noting that all of the participants of this study were highly educated, at least a high school degree, and defined themselves as mostly moderate level in terms of socioeconomic status. It was thought that this could have an effect on making sense of dreams and working on both the dreams and the grief process. All participants were rather interested in understanding the connection between their dreams and their loss experience in-depth and sought to make sense of them both during the interviews and internally or through therapy in their daily lives.

Although the participants did not address the impact of their bereavement dreams on personal growth and transformation after the loss experience and stated that it was the experience itself that caused the actual transformation, it was realized that there is a significant relationship between the dreams and their personal transformations. It was thought that keeping a diary about the dreams that bereaved individuals had, processing these dreams internally, in therapy, with a significant other or in interviews within the scope of this study, and seeing the change of these dream contents in the process, would help to reevaluate and understand the dynamics of their relationship with the deceased and to make sense of this loss. At the same time, this will help them to live their new lives without the lost loved one with greater awareness of the growth and transformation that comes with this experience and thus it aids for their healing process. According to findings of the current study, personal transformation can occur over time when bereaved people make sense of the experience of loss and are able to restructure their lives in the absence of the person they lost. Dreams appear as a way to maintain the bonds with

the deceased in this process which is essential for adaptation to the loss, but it was also thought to be a supporting factor for post-loss growth and transformation.

### **4.3. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this study have significant implications for clinical practice. Each individual will inevitably face a loss at some point in their lives. Hence, the clinicians need to know the best ways to meet the needs of bereaved individuals when they search for support. In this sense, dream images may reflect unresolved issues and the feelings of the bereaved individual about the loss of the beloved one. Bereavement dreams may provide valuable information to the psychotherapists about the grief process of the patient and help the dyad of therapist and patient to contact more profound responses to the loss experience (Freud, 1900; Jung, 1934/1974, as cited in Roeder, 1981; Fosshage, 1983; Stolorow & Atwood, 1982).

Even in the interviews conducted for this study, participants reported that thinking about their dreams and discussing them increased their awareness and insight. Since it has been observed that, even in a one-hour interview, discussing dreams and expressing their emotions on this issue positively affect the grief processes and personal growth. Thus, studying bereavement dreams in a therapy process will contribute to the bereaved person's awareness of where he or she is in the grieving and the healing process. Hill et al. (2004) and Worden (2009) believed that working on bereavement dreams in a therapy setting may serve as a tool for the clinician to bypass the bereaved one's defenses and paves the way for psychological closure.

However, one of the most significant factors that therapists must be cautious is the cultural and religious background of the client, which has a significant influence on the experience of dreams and the grieving process, as it happened in the results of this study. Grief reactions and the meaning making process of dreams have universal and individual as well as the cultural and religious components. For instance, dreams can be heard as a way for continuing bonds for bereaved individuals with religious beliefs since they might interpret bereavement dreams to

communicate with the person they have lost and receive messages from them. However, for people who do not have a strong religious belief, the interpretation of these dreams might be different. At the same time, the grief reactions and the painful process that the bereaved person goes through are met with acceptance in some cultures, while the other cultures expressing feelings of grieving can be inhibited for various reasons, and it can be difficult for the person to express these feelings and work through which can cause the grief more difficult to resolve. Besides, the therapists need to be sensitive to the unique needs of the patient and the idiosyncratic meanings of losing a loved one in order to understand the related emotions, complications, and transformations appropriately.

#### **4.4. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

There were some limitations in this present study. The main limitation stems from the retrospective nature of the experiences of the participants. People were asked to describe their dreams and grief experiences which had occurred many years ago for most of the participants. Although some participants remembered their dreams, they found it difficult to remember the details of the dream and when exactly they had this dream during the grief process. This factor made it difficult to understand clearly the relationship between bereavement dreams and the different phases of the mourning process. In further studies, if the experiences and dreams of the participants will be followed and they will be interviewed regularly from the beginning of the grief process, the answer to the question about the mourning process and the change in the themes of dreams can be obtained much appropriately.

Secondly, this qualitative study was largely based on the interpretation and coding of the data by the researcher who was both the interviewer and the coder at

the same time. Even though the researcher uses some trustworthiness provisions to maintain objectivity, readers might consider the researcher bias as a possible limitation.

As mentioned above, many factors affect how to experience the mourning process, its severity, and personal transformation after loss, such as time, the degree of intimacy of the relationship with the deceased, the personality of the bereaved or the way of death. Among the criteria in this study was to feel emotional pain after the death of a significant other, and there was no restriction, such as just parental loss or just loss of a partner. In further research, it is more beneficial to make such a limitation by specifying the type of loss instead in order to keep the participants' experiences more homogenous.

Understanding the role of religion/spirituality and culture both in terms of making sense of bereavement dreams and the experience of the grieving process was another goal of this research. However, when participants were asked about their religious beliefs and level in demographic form, only one participant gave the highest score, two of them described themselves as a deist, and the rest of the participants expressed that they had an average level of faith with question marks in their minds. During the study, the effects of the differences in religious beliefs were seen in terms of both making sense of dreams and experiencing mourning. However, since a homogeneous community of participants was not formed, it was difficult to conclude what influence religion/spirituality had on this challenging process. Therefore, to understand the effect of this in more depth in further studies, it may be recommended to conduct a study consisting of participants who identify themselves as believers.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: THE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<b>Arařtırmayı Destekleyen Kurum:</b>	<b>İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi</b>
<b>Arařtırmanın Adı:</b>	Rüyaların Yas Sürecindeki Rolünün İncelenmesi: Niteliksel Bir Arařtırma
<b>Arařtırmacının Adı:</b>	Selin Günkaya
<b>Arařtırmacının E-mail Adresi ve Telefonu:</b>	
<b>Arařtırmanın Danıřmanı:</b>	Yudum Söylemez
<b>Danıřmanın E-mail Adresi ve Telefonu:</b>	

Bu alıřma İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi'nden Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Yudum Söylemez'in akademik danıřmanlığında Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Selin Günkaya tarafından yürütölmektedir. Nitel yöntemle yürütölen bu alıřmanın amacı kayıp sonrası yas süresinde görölen rüyaların bu sürece etkisini arařtırmak ve bu rüyaların içeriklerindeki deęiřimlerin yas süreciyle baęlantılarına dair ortak temaları bulup incelemektir.

Bu arařtırmaya katılmayı kabul ettięiniz takdirde 60-90 dakika sürece bir görüřmeye katılmanız beklenecektir. Bu görüřmede, yakınınızın kaybının sizi nasıl

etkilediğine, bu kayıpla ilgili yaşantılarınıza, bu süreçte gördüğünüz rüyalarınıza, bu rüyalarla ilgili bakış açınıza ve kayıp sonrası deneyimlediğiniz değişimlere dair sorulara yanıt vermeniz istenecektir. Yanıtlarınız, sonraki analizlerde kullanılmak üzere ses kaydına alınacaktır.

Bu araştırma bilimsel bir amaçla yapılmakta ve katılımcı bilgilerinin gizliliği esas alınmaktadır. Verdiğiniz tüm bilgiler gizli tutulacaktır. Ses kayıtları araştırma süresince yalnızca araştırmacının ve danışmanının erişimi olan bir harici bellekte muhafaza edilecek, araştırma sona erdiğinde silinecektir. Araştırma bulgularının sunumu ve raporlamasında kişi isimleri kullanılmayacak, elde edilen bilgiler toplu olarak değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayınlarda kullanılacaktır. Görüşme kaydınız ve kişisel bilgi formunuz çalışmanın bitiminden 5 yıl sonra tamamen silinecektir.

Bu araştırmaya katılmak tamamen isteğe bağlıdır. Bu görüşmeye katılmanın, olumsuz bir etki yaratması beklenmemektedir. Ancak görüşme sırasında yanıt vermek istemediğiniz, size kendinizi rahatsız hissettiren sorular olursa bu soruları yanıtlamadan geçebilirsiniz. Görüşme sırasında dilediğiniz zaman kaydın durdurulmasını isteyebilirsiniz. Görüşme başlamadan önce, görüşme sırasında veya sonrasında dilediğiniz zaman soru sorabilirsiniz. Katılmayı kabul ettiğiniz takdirde çalışmanın herhangi bir aşamasında herhangi bir sebep göstermeden araştırmadan çekilme hakkına sahipsiniz. Araştırmadan çekildiğiniz durumda verdiğiniz bilgiler değerlendirmeye alınmayacaktır. Bu çalışma katılımcılara, terapi ya da psikolojik destek vermek amacını taşımamaktadır. İstemeniz durumunda size psikolojik yardım alabileceğiniz yerler hakkında bilgi verilecektir.

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Bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum. Bana anlatıları ve yukarıdaki açıklamaları anladım. Çalışmaya katılmayı ve verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlı yayınlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.

## APPENDIX B: THE DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

1. Yaş:
2. Cinsiyet: Erkek Kadın Diğer(\_\_\_\_)
3. Medeni Durum:
  - Evli
  - Bekar
  - Eşini Kaybetmiş
  - Boşanmış
  - Diğer (\_\_\_\_)
4. Eğitim durumunuz nedir?
  - İlkokul Ortaokul Lise
  - Lisans Yüksek Lisans Diğer (belirtiniz)
  - Doktora
5. Mesleğiniz nedir? Belirtiniz. (\_\_\_\_)
6. Ekonomik gelir düzeyiniz:
  - Alt Alt-Orta Orta Orta-Üst Üst
7. Dini inancınız nedir?

Müslümanlık     Hristiyanlık     Musevilik     Yok     Diğer (belirtiniz)

8. İnançlı biri misinizdir?  Evet  Hayır

Evet ise, dini anlamda kendinizi ne kadar inançlı olarak tanımlıyorsunuz?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

                                                                                      

Çok az

Çok fazla

9. Kaybettiğiniz kişi ile olan ilişkiniz / bağınız neydi?

Annem / Babam / Kardeşim / Eşim / Çocuğum / Partnerim / Yakın arkadaşım /  
Akrabam (belirtiniz) Diğer (belirtiniz)

10. Kaybettiğiniz yakınınızın kaç yaşında vefat etti?

11. Yakınınızı ne kadar zaman önce kaybettiniz?

12. Yakınınızı kaybettiğinizde siz kaç yaşınızdaydınız?

13. Yakınınızın ölüm nedeni neydi? Belirtiniz.

14. Yakınınızın kaybı sizin için beklenen bir durum muydu?

Hayır, ani bir kayıptı.

Evet, sağlık sorunları ve/veya yaşı nedeniyle bu ihtimali biliyordum.

Diğer (belirtiniz)

15. Yakınınızın kaybından sonra çevrenizdekilerden destek aldınız mı?

Evet Hayır, ihtiyaç hissetmedim Hayır, ihtiyaç hissettim ama destek almadım

16. Yakınınızın kaybından sonra bir uzmandan psikolojik destek aldınız mı?

Evet Hayır, ihtiyaç hissetmedim Hayır, ihtiyaç hissettim ama destek almadım

17. Evet ise, yardım türünü ve süresini belirtiniz.

Psikoterapi/ Psikolojik danışma (\_\_\_\_)

Psikiyatrik yardım/ İlaç kullanımı (\_\_\_\_)

Psikoterapi/psikolojik danışma ve ilaç yardımı bir arada (\_\_\_\_)

18. Kaybettiğiniz kişiyi ne sıklıkla rüyanızda görürsünüz?

Yılda bir seferden az. 6 ayda bir

Yılda bir kez Haftada bir

Ayda bir kez Haftada birçok kez Hiç görmem.

19. Kaybettiğiniz kişiyi rüyalarınızda görme sıklığınız zaman içerisinde değişti mi?

Hayır Evet; ilk zamanlarda daha sık görüyordum, sonra azaldı

Evet, ilk zamanlarda daha az görüyordum, sonra arttı

Evet, dönem dönem artıyor ya da azalıyor

## APPENDIX C: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Öncelikle araştırmaya katıldığınız için teşekkür ederim. Bugün burada sizin kayıp deneyiminizi, rüyalarınızı birlikte konuşacağız. Başlamadan önce sizi biraz tanıyabilir miyim?
  - Günlük hayatınız nasıldır?
  - Neler yapmak sizi mutlu eder? / Neleri yapmaktan hoşlanırsınız?
2. \_\_\_\_\_inizi kaybettiğinizi belirtmişsiniz. Başınız sağ olsun.\_den biraz bahseder misiniz?
  - Nasıl biriydi?
  - O hayattayken nasıl bir ilişkiniz vardı?
3. Bu kaybın sizin için nasıl bir anlamı var?
4. Bazı insanlar manevi inançları doğrultusunda, ölümü belirli sebeplere bağlayabilirler. Sizin ölümle ve bu kişinin ölümüyle ilgili nasıl bir inancınız var?
5. Bu kayıp sizin için nasıl bir deneyimdi biraz bahseder misiniz?
  - Kayıp sonrası takip eden günlerde/aylarda/yıllarda nasıl hissettiğinizi, aklınızdan neler geçtiğini anlatabilir misiniz?
6. Bu süreçte size en iyi gelen şeyler nelerdi?
7. Bu süreçte sizi en zorlayan şeyler nelerdi?
8. Bu kişiyle ilgili rüyalarınızdan biraz bahsetmek istiyorum. Bu kişiyle ilgili rüyalar görüyor musunuz?
  - İlk kez ne zaman bu kişiyle ilgili rüya gördüğünüzü hatırlıyorsunuz? Bu rüyanın içeriğini anlatır mısınız?
  - Sizce bu rüyanın zihninizde kalmasının sebebi ne?
  - Bu rüyanın sizin için anlamı ne?
  - Ne sıklıkla bu kişiyle ilgili rüyalar görürsünüz?

- Bu kiřiyle ilgili rüya görmek size nasıl hissettiriyor?
  - Tekrarlayan bir rüya hatırlıyor musunuz?
  - Sizce rüyalarınızın içeriđi zaman içerisinde deđiřti mi? Deđiřtiyse nasıl?
  - Size içeriđin deđiřtiđini düřündüren en son gördüğünüz rüyayı anlatabilir misiniz?
  - Bu rüyalarda kendinize, kaybettiđiniz kiřiye ya da aranızdaki iliřkiye dair daha önce fark etmediđiniz bir řey fark ettiniz mi?
  - Bu rüyaların sizin bu kiřiye dair hislerinizi etkilemiř olabileceđini düşünüyor musunuz?
  - Manevi inançlarınızı düřündüğünüzde, bu rüyaların nasıl bir açıklaması olabilir?
9. Bu kaybın sizi bir řekilde deđiřtirdiđini düşünüyor musunuz? Eđer öyleyse nasıl bir deđiřim?
- Sizce bu deđiřime rüyaların katkısı olmuř olabilir mi? Eđer öyleyse nasıl bir katkısı oldu?
10. Ölüm sonrası yařamla ilgili inancınız nasıl?
- Bađlı olduđunuz bir dini inanç varsa, bu anlamda bu rüyaların nasıl bir açıklaması olabilir?
11. řu an bu kayıpla ilgili ilk anlarla kıyasladıđımızda nasıl hissediyorsunuz?
12. Bütün bunları burada paylařmak size nasıl geldi?
13. Yakın birini kaybetmek, çođumuz için zorlayıcı olsa da insanı güçlendiren bir deneyim de olabilir. Bu konuda ne düşünürsünüz? Neler paylařmak istersiniz?
14. Benim sormadıđım ve sizin anlatmak ya da eklemek istediđiniz bir řey var mı?

## **ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL**

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.