

The Absence of Funerary Rituals in the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Perspective from Analytical Psychology

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Abstract

The primary objective of this research was to examine the psychological function of funeral rituals, highlighting their significance in the grieving process and exploring the impact of their absence during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, two scientific articles and one academic dissertation containing reports from bereaved family members during that period were analyzed, based on Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology and his concepts of symbol and archetype, as well as contributions from other authors addressing death and grief. The analysis of these reports revealed how the lack of ritualization compromises the symbolization of what cannot be expressed in words, hindering the elaboration of grief. It highlighted how symbolic elements favor the understanding of loss and psychic transformation. In conclusion, the relevance of funeral rituals to the bereaved's psychic health was demonstrated, especially in critical contexts such as the pandemic. Furthermore, the role of analytical psychology in interpreting the psychic impacts of the absence of ritualization was emphasized, highlighting the importance of symbols in modern society, where the dematerialization of death and grieving experiences threatens to compromise emotional elaboration and the construction of meaning.

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Descriptors

death rites, symbol, junguian psychology, death, grief.



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A ausência de rituais fúnebres na pandemia da Covid-19: um olhar da psicologia analítica

Resumo

Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo principal o estudo da função psíquica dos rituais fúnebres, destacando sua importância no processo de luto e investigando os efeitos da ausência dessas cerimônias durante a pandemia da Covid-19. Para tal, foram analisados dois artigos científicos e uma dissertação acadêmica contendo relatos de familiares enlutados naquele período, com base na psicologia analítica de Carl Gustav Jung e em suas concepções sobre símbolo e arquétipo, além das contribuições de outros autores que abordam a morte e o luto. A análise desses relatos permitiu compreender como a ausência de ritualização compromete a simbolização do que não pode ser expresso em palavras, dificultando a elaboração do luto, e evidenciou como os elementos simbólicos favorecem a compreensão da perda e a transformação psíquica. Como conclusão, demonstrou-se a relevância dos rituais fúnebres para a saúde psíquica dos enlutados, especialmente em contextos críticos como o da pandemia, e ressaltou-se o papel da psicologia analítica para a interpretação dos impactos psíquicos da ausência de ritualização, constatando a importância do símbolo na sociedade moderna, onde a desmaterialização das experiências de morte e de luto ameaça comprometer a elaboração emocional e a construção de sentidos.

Descritores

ritos de morte; símbolos, psicología junguiana; muerte, luto.

La ausencia de rituales fúnebres en la pandemia de Covid-19: una mirada de la psicología analítica

Resumen

El objetivo principal de esta investigación fue estudiar la función psíquica de los rituales fúnebres, destacando su importancia en el proceso de luto y examinando los efectos de la ausencia de estas ceremonias durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Para eso, se analizaron dos artículos científicos y una tesis doctoral con relatos de familiares enlutados en dicho período, con base en la psicología analítica de Carl Gustav Jung y en sus concepciones sobre símbolo y arquetipo, además de las contribuciones de otros autores que escriben sobre la muerte y el luto. El análisis de esos

relatos permitió comprender cómo la ausencia de rituales compromete la simbolización de lo que no puede ser expresado con palabras, dificultando la elaboración del luto, y puso en evidencia cómo los elementos simbólicos favorecen la comprensión de la pérdida y la transformación psíquica. En la conclusión se demostró la relevancia de los rituales fúnebres para la salud psíquica de los enlutados, especialmente en contextos críticos como el de la pandemia, y subrayó el papel de la psicología analítica para la interpretación de los impactos psíquicos de la ausencia de ritualización, constatando la importancia del símbolo en la sociedad moderna, donde desmaterializar las experiencias de muerte y luto amenaza comprometer la elaboración emocional y la construcción de sentido.

Descriptores:

ritos de muerte; símbolo; psicología junguiana; muerte, luto.

Introduction

Throughout history, humanity has consistently faced diverse adversities across all spheres of life, including wars, food shortages, climate crises, life-cycle stages, and diseases. In each of these, people found ways of "elaboration"—that is, ways to persist and learn to continue. These forms are not reduced merely to physical or external means; they encompass the mechanisms of the psyche that assist in experiencing and attributing new meanings to human experiences.

It is well known that the practice of rituals and the performance of ceremonies are characteristics of all cultures (Eliade, 1963/1972). Even though many have lost their sacred character today, contemporary daily life is still marked by rites with psychic value, especially for navigating life stages and moments of difficulty.

Death is an unavoidable theme for everyone. Since the earliest times, it has figured among the most impactful experiences for human beings. Each civilization attributes its own meaning and form of relationship to it; however, in contexts of multiple simultaneous deaths—such as wars, epidemics, pandemics, or climate disasters—death manifests itself extremely. Such situations generate significant psychic instability, shattering daily routines and provoking pain and fear, both for the loss of loved ones and for the risk to one's own life.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and was declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020, the world underwent profound transformations (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). In March 2020, the disease was classified as a

pandemic due to its rapid spread (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). In response, containment measures were adopted, including social distancing, school closures, suspension of public transport, and prohibitions on gatherings (Ministério da Saúde [MS], 2020).

In addition to the epidemiological crisis, a psychological crisis emerged, as the pandemic brought losses of human lives, jobs, social bonds, and routines, giving rise to various forms of large-scale grief (Giamattey, 2020). There was, therefore, a collective mourning: many simultaneous deaths, with family members often lacking information about the status of their loved ones in Intensive Care Units (ICUs). Sanitary measures prevented many from seeing the body of the deceased or performing funeral farewell rituals.

Aniela Jaffé et al. (1980), in "Apparitions: An Archetypal Approach to Death, Dreams and Ghosts" (translated in the Brazilian language as "A morte à luz da psicologia"), states that:

Jung's sadness was rarely directed toward the deceased, but toward the survivors. "I cannot mourn for those who have died" — he once wrote in a letter —; "they remain, and it is we who are passing." His compassion was directed at the survivors, "those who perceive the transience of life, having to endure farewells, suffering, and loneliness across the span of time." A person is snatched away, and what remains is a deathly and icy silence (Jaffé, 1980, p. 21, author's emphasis).

This passage shows that death leaves deep marks on the psyche of those who remain and reinforces the need for rituals for the elaboration of grief.

Methodology

The present study is situated in the field of qualitative research, specifically an exploratory approach, as it enables an understanding of the meanings, values, beliefs, and attitudes that permeate funeral rituals and the grieving process. This approach does not seek generalizations but rather the apprehension of the phenomenon in its singularity, prioritizing the understanding of the meaning attributed by the subjects. In this context, intersubjectivity constitutes a central scientific criterion, since knowledge emerges from the dialectical relationship between subject and object (Minayo, 1993/2007).

The analysis was conducted through the lens of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology and other Jungian authors, with an emphasis on the symbols and psychic processes involved in rituals

and grief. As a corpus of analysis, reports from bereaved family members were used, extracted from two scientific articles (Cardoso et al., 2020; Dantas et al., 2020) and a master's dissertation (Giamattey, 2020), obtained from searches in databases such as SciELO and Google Scholar, using the descriptors "funeral rituals," "grief," and "pandemic." These reports are addressed throughout the text to support theoretical reflection, illustrating the connection between Jung's analytical psychology and the psychic processes related to death, grief, and the absence of funeral ritualization. Contributions from Maria Júlia Kovács and other psychology authors were mobilized in a complementary way to contextualize and expand the analysis.

Rites and rituals

Rites and rituals are recognized by psychology for their symbolic character and their emotional expression in the lives of individuals and societies. People's daily lives are marked by ritualizations, representing stages of cycles that one wishes to mark and reveal. Rituals are practices composed of symbols that give concrete form to what cannot be verbalized. According to the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1909/2011), living in society involves passages, which are ritualized; in other words, human development requires rituals at every stage of life.

The rite is a broader class, such as a rite of separation or aggregation, whereas the ritual is the cluster of representations and attitudes that comprise the rites. In general terms, rites are an idea—a socially shared mental representation. In analytical psychology, it is understood as a container for any psychic content or factor of a dynamic character that needs to be executed or ritualized: this process is the ritual. That said, rituals are the attitudes, the practiced ceremonies—more generally, the series of acts that serve as a container for something characterized by disparity (Pieri, 1998/2002).

Van Gennep (1909/2011), in the work "The Rites of Passage", classifies various types of rites. Throughout the study, it is observed that, for each category, several types of rituals compose it; from another perspective, for every kind of ritual, several rites are part of the signification of that cycle. For example, rites of passage represent the end and the beginning of a cycle. Within these rites, Van Gennep (1909/2011) describes several classes, such as rites of separation or aggregation, which are the psychic idea of concretely realizing this transformation. Thus, the ritual, as a practice, is the action to be performed, and each ceremony consists of stages, each a specific rite to be materialized.

From this perspective, rituals enable—both on a psychic and practical level—the expression of the most profound feelings, as their function is to allow the symbolization of what cannot be revealed in words; that is, they facilitate the transformation of unconscious contents into acts that represent them. In this way, rituals help the individual face the phases of their life and understand the various forms of passage that permeate daily existence.

In addition to all these functions and meanings regarding rituals, for analytical psychology, rite and ritual are forms of expression of the unconscious, charged with symbolism and archetypal manifestations, serving to enable psychic transformations. According to Jung (1935/2017), when studying the psychology of primitives, it is understood that all important life events are linked to elaborate ceremonies, whose central purpose is to release man from the preceding stage of resistance and help him transfer his psychic energy to the next phase. This symbolic function of rituals is possible only because they are grounded in archetypal images that emerge from the unconscious and structure human experience.

Archetypes are understood as inherited possibilities that inhabit the unconscious and order psychic elements, forming specific images called archetypal images, which can only be recognized by their effects. The archetype, as an invisible nodal point, rests in the unconscious and does not belong to the individual's psychic realm; only after being expressed by individual psychic material and gaining form does it become psychic and enter the space of consciousness, describing itself as an image (Jacobi, 1957/2016). Based on this, Jung (1916/2014), in the work "Psychology of the Unconscious", discusses the experience of the archetype and its manifestation in the psyche:

The experience of the archetype is frequently guarded as the innermost secret, since it strikes us at the core. It is a primordial experience of the non-self of the soul, of an inner confrontation, a true challenge. Understandably, one seeks help in parallel images; the original event can be reinterpreted with the utmost ease according to foreign images (Jung 1916/2014, p. 90, para. 119).

Therefore, the archetype itself is not yet part of the individual's psyche. Only when it is awakened by psychic energy will it produce an archetypal image, which is led to consciousness and manifests mainly as a symbol; this, in turn, can be understood as a transforming motor of psychic energy, creating a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious. According to Nise da Silveira (1968/2023):

Whatever its origin, the archetype functions as a nodule of psychic energy. When this energy, in a potential state, is actualized and takes form, then we will have the **archetypal image**. We cannot call this image an archetype, for the archetype is solely a virtuality. (...) Not every archetypal image is a symbol in itself. In every symbol, the archetypal image is always present as an essential factor, but to build it into that image, other elements must still be joined (Silveira 1968/2023, p. 89, 91, author's emphasis).

Thus, symbols are the contents that mobilize meanings for the individual and, being this bridge, carry both archetypal and individual themes; therefore, the expression of symbolic contents will have the archetypal image as its core, along with individual and cultural issues/themes.

Because of this, rites and rituals can be understood as collective symbolizations and as individual symbols, given that, even in the collective, the way each subject relates to the symbolic content—and its effect—is individual and will produce a form of transformation. As Jolande Jacobi (1957/2016) states in her book "Complex, Archetype, Symbol", as an "image," the symbol has an evocative character and excites the entire nature of man toward a global reaction, which will produce effects throughout the psyche.

Regarding funeral rituals, they mark the transience of life to delimit a state of mourning, legitimize the value and importance of the loved one who was lost, and facilitate changes in roles and the transition to new life stages (Cardoso et al., 2020). Thus, the funeral ritual transcends the moment of death, aiming to provide social recognition of it; that is, the deceased must die socially to achieve the concreteness of death at the psychic level and ritualize this passage (Souza & Souza, 2019).

The role of funeral rituals in the mourning process and their importance to the psyche

According to Van Gennep (1909/2011), funeral rituals consist of rites of separation, transition (liminality), and incorporation. Rites of separation serve to detach the deceased from society: the individual is no longer part of concrete reality and, as Giamattey (2020) notes, the loved one must "die" to the family and the culture in which they were embedded. For the bereaved, similarly, the rite of separation marks the detachment from the loved one; as long as the incorporation of the deceased into the afterlife does not occur,

a sense of suspension remains, as if the departed were without a defined destination.

The rite of transition corresponds to the deceased's stage of passage: they no longer belong to social life and, therefore, are on the margins. In this context, rites of incorporation symbolically reintegrate the dead into the afterlife, allowing the living to formalize the deceased's transition to the post-life and thereby enabling the acceptance of the new reality established by the loss.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, as discussed, it became impossible to perform funeral rituals or maintain tangible and close contact with the deceased, which generated intense anguish and suffering. In Van Gennep's (1909/2011) perspective, the dead remain in a liminal state, and those left behind are consequently adrift in their grief. The following passages from bereaved individuals can illustrate this aspect: "I hope you never have to stay home motionless while your family member's body is being cremated without any relative being able to say goodbye or pay tribute (daughter-in-law) (. . .)" (Cardoso et al., 2020, p. 5).

My mother died, and I was hospitalized here (also due to Covid). There was no wake, no seventh-day mass, nothing. It becomes a matter of 'hearsay.' It feels like it is not reality... [sic].

(. . .)

There was nothing, nothing! They told us the body could only be cremated after 48 hours, and after that, there is a queue for cremation that takes up to 10 days to happen. So we did not even know what day or time it was... or even where the body was during all that time. It is too strange! It is hard to believe... 'something' is missing, it feels like it [the funeral ceremony] is still going to happen... it feels like a pending matter, an expectation... (Dantas et al., 2020, pp. 516, 517).

The excerpts above exemplify how this liminal period, marked by the absence of ritualization, generated a sense of emptiness—a kind of gap in daily life—for the surviving family members. For the subject to assimilate the loss, it is necessary to recognize the new order—that is, to integrate the reality of life after the death of the loved one.

From this perspective, the importance of funeral rituals for the psyche lies in understanding the experience, facilitating role changes and life-cycle transitions, and assisting the individual in facing concrete loss, thereby entering the mourning process and allowing for the collective manifestation of their anguish. The ritual is indispensable for participants, producing a moment of synchrony,

togetherness, complacency, compassion, and renewal, creating a connection with the sacred (Souza & Souza, 2019).

That said, the funeral ritual is of paramount importance for the initial expression of grief, as it provides the bereaved with resources to symbolize their affection for the deceased. Thus, these rituals are seen as support resources, providing a farewell, expressing pain, and reducing the potential risks of complicated grief. Through the enactment of the ceremony, it becomes possible to share feelings, understand the loss and its re-significations, and create a space to speak about the affections that permeate how each person experiences sorrow (Giamattey, 2020; Ferreira et al., 2022).

For an act to perform the symbolic function of a ritual, it must possess personal value and meaning. Thus, for some, visiting a cemetery may constitute a rite of passage, while for others, scattering ashes in a specific location may serve this purpose. Rituals are not restricted to standardized practices but are defined by their symbolic value, which is unique to each subject.

Jung (1935/2013), in his book "The Practice of Psychotherapy", highlights that the transition from one stage of life to another has always existed and that the difficulty of this transformation is felt at a subjective level; therefore, as mentioned, the psyche possesses systems that facilitate these complex passages. The author states that even at the most primitive levels, incisive measures were already taken during moments of psychic transition, such as puberty, birth, marriage, and death.

The observance of all these ceremonies, which at a primitive level remain free from foreign influences, is as rigorous and exact as possible, perhaps above all to ward off potential psychic damage that threatens at these moments, but also to prepare the initiate and provide them with the necessary teachings for life. The life and prosperity of a primitive tribe depend very especially on the conscientious execution of ceremonies (Jung, 1935/2013, p. 112, para. 214).

In light of this, the importance of these rituals in psychic life is emphasized. As evidenced in the passage above, primitive peoples followed ritual ceremonies with precision to avoid damage and obstacles in the tribe's practical life. As argued, funeral rituals serve to assist in the elaboration of grief and the concretization of the loss of a loved one, but they also have a teaching objective, since the existence of death, and the fear and uncertainty surrounding it, have always haunted the human mind.

This fear and uncertainty are part of daily life; however, death—and with it the experience of grief—can facilitate transformations and

lessons in individuals' lives, which explains the importance of rituals. As highlighted, the ritual is a form of symbolization, a psychic mechanism that enables the subject's entire trajectory through the experience of grief; thus, it is necessary to understand its purpose for psychic life and how it manifests.

In his book "On Psychic Energy", Jung (1928/2013) states that the symbol can transfer libido to other forms, allowing for the transition to new activities. According to Jung, "the rituals with which sacred objects are surrounded often clearly reveal their nature as energy transformers" (1928/2013, p. 61, para. 92). This is the ritual function proper in the psyche: to allow not only the aforementioned symbolization but to be the path to concretize the passage of the deceased, learn from it, and give new meanings to daily life after the loss.

To further clarify, archetypes—in their potential form—allow the translation of the physical into the psychic. Thus, when a loss occurs, something is mobilized in the psyche, and the libido can condense in parts of the unconscious, giving rise to archetypal images—in this case, related to death. Consequently, the image will emerge for the individual, charged with symbolic content, as a means of navigating the period. This is where the ritual is found: as a symbol, the bridge that connects the psyche to the concreteness of the world, allowing palpable acts to be experienced also within the psyche, enabling this entire transformation (Jacobi, 1957/2016).

By asserting that death can be a form of psychological growth and the experience of grief a means of transformation, it is necessary to understand the relationship society maintains with these issues to comprehend the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mystery of death

Death here is a woodcutter. In the visual arts, it is often represented as a reaper holding a scythe. This artistic theme derives from the pre-Christian iconography of the god Saturn, who was often depicted as a god of the harvest holding a sickle. Something is "reaped" in death; it is "cut." Death is always a brutal event, as Jung aptly observes, and "brutal not only in the physical sense but even more so psychologically: a human being is torn from us and what remains is the silence of death" (von Franz, 1984/2021, p. 71, author's emphasis).

Human beings are the only living creatures possessed of the awareness of their own finitude; to exist is to live with the certainty of death. From birth, the subject is already part of the process of dying, as death integrates the vital cycle and manifests in all phases

of life. In this context, it reveals human vulnerability and imposes the limits of being, representing an undecipherable enigma (Giamattey, 2020). Since the earliest civilizations, there have been records of death as loss, rupture, and degeneration, but also as fascination, journey, rest, and transcendence (Kovács, 1992). Each individual, however, constructs their own representation of death, marked by unique images, beliefs, and symbolisms.

In contemporaneity, value is placed on a death that goes unnoticed—fast and distant from the eyes of the living—precisely the kind of death feared in Antiquity (Kovács, 1992). Contemporary society avoids confronting finitude, turning death into a hidden phenomenon and emptying the rituals that once gave it meaning. Even when funeral ceremonies exist, they have lost their symbolic function. Modern man, focused on productivity and rationality, finds himself alienated from his own death and from reflection on his own end.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a time when finitude, direct contact with death, and the fear of loss haunted the lives of nearly the entire population. Furthermore, due to the impossibility of being close to loved ones, the importance of performing funeral ceremonies and providing dignity to the deceased became evident, highlighting the repercussions of the absence of ritualization and proximity to the sacred.

Marie-Louise von Franz, in her work "On Dreams and Death" (1984/2021, p. 19-20), observes that in many cultures, archaic and pre-Christian man reflected intensely on the meaning of the body and its decomposition in death, admitting the existence of an immanent "mystery" in the body, associated with the soul's post-mortem fate. Thus, it can be understood that an individual's sense of identity is intrinsically linked to the body, which is why the corpse is perceived as the representative of the deceased.

These considerations are particularly relevant for deepening understanding of the human relationship with death and the importance of rituals, as a gap emerged during the pandemic due to the absence of these practices. This liminal period was closely related to the mystery of the body, as many mourners could not view the deceased or even know what happened to their body. The following accounts illustrate this experience:

I dreamed I saw "him" [my father] in person, in the coffin... because I had only seen a photo. I think I dreamed it because I wanted to see him so much... not seeing the body contributes to not understanding that he died, it feels like it is not real. It is strange...

(...)

I wanted to be with him during those days he was hospitalized. This disease is so horrible because you cannot visit, you cannot see, you cannot talk. A gesture of affection —a hug — at these times—that is deeply missed. However, this disease takes even that away. It is very sad not being able to touch, not being able to see. Thirty-three days in the hospital without being able to see him, and when he leaves, he leaves in a coffin, and you still cannot see.

(. . .)

They blamed COVID for everyone who died. Moreover, empty coffins are being buried out there. My brother-in-law wanted to dig him up and have that exam done [exhumation and autopsy] to prove it was not that disease. However, what good would it do? We convinced "him" to let it go... (Dantas et al., 2020, pp. 517, 519, 524).

All these reports highlight the importance of the body and of knowing what occurred with the loved one's remains. As seen in the presented excerpts, not knowing the whereabouts can lead to the non-acceptance of death and raise other doubts about what happened to the person, generating increasing anguish and negative impacts on the process of accepting the loss.

Regarding the symbolism of the body, von Franz (1984/2021) discusses the funeral rites of Ancient Egypt, based on the belief in post-mortem resurrection involving the soul power of the tomb of Osiris. The Egyptians performed various rituals to prepare the body; similarly, the early alchemists conceived of the tomb not just as a sarcophagus for the corpse, but as a vessel of life, since in numerous mythological traditions all life springs from water.

Following this example, the body corresponds to the beginning of the assimilation of loss, to the care for the loved one and the life that has passed. Symbolically, the tomb of Osiris is that mysterious place from which life sprouts again, in a process that, in a way, repeats the creation of the world itself, presenting itself as the principle of all vitality and renewal. Thus, the symbolism of the funeral ritual can be an opportunity for change, and death can be the beginning of a reorganization of the psyche to renew a new form of life.

From this perspective, the much-feared death and its repercussions for close relatives can be a bridge so that, psychologically, a transformation and assimilation of contents can occur, leading to psychological growth. There are caveats, however, as Kovács (1992) mentioned: the vast majority of societies in the contemporary world have lost their connection to rituals and their psychological functions.

In this sense, the relevance of funeral rituals in the mourning process is evident. As Jung (1928/2013, p. 59, para. 89) highlights, the magical ceremony confers the newly invested object the capacity to exert influence over the psyche, reinforcing its symbolic and transformative character. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic period constituted an expressive example of how the relationship with death and grief manifests, especially in the Western context, reinforcing its impacts on both the individual and the collective.

Grief and Its Reminiscences

"Grief" has, however, been, until our days, the pain par excellence, whose manifestation was legitimate and necessary. The archaic designations of the word pain remained in the language, but with the restricted sense that we recognize in the word grief (in portuguese "luto"). Long before it received a name, the pain in the face of the death of someone close was already the most violent expression of the most spontaneous feelings (Ariès, 1975/2012, p. 227, author's emphasis).

Grief is an inherent response to the dissolution of a significant bond, not restricted to death, but including losses such as separations or retirement. It is a subjective and contextual process, for there is only loss when there is affection for what was lost. More recent conceptualizations understand grief as a set of reactions to loss—an inevitable, unexpected, and uncertain experience that escapes rational logic. For this study, grief is understood as a natural process of re-signifying the relationship with the deceased, enabling its elaboration. The goal is not a return to the previous "normalcy," but the assimilation of the loss into the mourner's life, allowing for the continuity of existence with a new organization of routine and the maintenance of a symbolic and healthy bond with the lost loved one (Bousso, 2011).

Circumstantial factors are those that render a person's grief unfeasible or hinder its satisfactory conclusion, such as uncertain loss, which occurs when a person dies without the death being visibly confirmed—that is, when the body is not found. Consequently, the mourner does not recognize the death, as they have not visibly confirmed the loss of their loved one. Because of this, grief becomes inconclusive, creating a complicating factor for the subject's relationship with themselves and with the idea of death. Another factor, called bereavement overload, occurs when individuals suffer subsequent losses—such as the death of a father, a sibling, other family members, or friends—within short periods and intervals (Taverna & Souza, 2014).

Therefore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is evident that most of the aforementioned circumstantial factors were present, which, as highlighted throughout the text, caused great anguish that reverberates in the psyche for an indefinite time, also considering the cultural factors in the subject's relationship with death. More accounts from the period follow:

I arrived at SETEC [General Technical Services – the municipal agency responsible for managing municipal cemeteries and wakes], and they asked me: "You here again?" I said, "Can you believe it?" In a few months, I buried three family members...

(. . .)

It has been a month since he left (the husband), but it still feels like he is here, that he will arrive at any moment. I still have an illusion that it is not true. (. . .) Until the penny drops that he died, I think he is still in the hospital. As long as I am not seeing anything of him, he is still there...

(. . .)

It seems like there was not even time to suffer for one loss, then I have to be strong for the other, who is hospitalized... then I suffered for the other and already had to be strong again... It feels like you are suffering for everyone and not suffering properly for anyone at the same time (Dantas et al., 2020, pp. 522, 517, 522).

In view of this, unexpected deaths are especially complicated due to their abrupt nature, without the chance for preparation. Furthermore, in cases of sudden death, when there is no information on how it occurred, difficulties may arise in the process of conscious mourning. Thus, the elaboration of loss becomes a complex process with psychic reverberations that can be detrimental; in this regard, funeral rituals and their symbolic function become fundamental, as they are a personal and cultural means of expressing emotions (Kovács, 1992).

For Edward F. Edinger (1989/2020), grief is caused by the loss of an object or person that carried an important projected value; to assimilate it, one must experience the loss of that projection and reintegrate its content into one's own psyche, in a process of inner growth. In this sense, the elaboration of grief implies accepting the inevitability of death and performing a painful detachment from the feelings, memories, and expectations linked to the deceased. It is a reality check that confirms the object's definitive absence, requiring the affective disinvestment of each bond. Although difficult and sometimes permeated by the fantasy that the loss did not occur—as evidenced in the context of the pandemic—this process allows

the subject to remain open to new possibilities of bonding while reclaiming the lost symbolic value as part of their own psychic totality.

More specifically, this detachment refers to the process of assimilating the loss of a loved one and reorganizing one's own feelings to resume routine and live with the absence. In this context, as Jacobi (1957/2016, p. 119) explains, the symbol can advance from synthesis to synthesis, continuously transforming the libido, redistributing it, leading it to meaningful activities, and enabling new meanings for the psyche.

Grief triggers a chain reaction; the soul is flooded by pain and becomes disorganized by the loss. In other words, the mourner is reacting to a situation of imminent danger, which represents the danger of losing oneself. Therefore, death is not synonymous with a final point, but a unique means of transformation that reason cannot comprehend. To elaborate the loss and integrate it—to accept the death of the other and one's own finitude—the individual is compelled to aggregate it somehow through the symbolic universe (Guarnieri, 2022/2023).

The suffering of grief mobilizes the unconscious, enabling the reorganization of the psyche; that is, death is denied, and something profound in the unconscious emerges in a search for ever-greater meaning. Jung (1947/2013) states that "never does the question of the meaning and value of life become more pressing and more painful than when we see the last breath leave a body which but a moment ago was living" (p. 361, para. 796). The fact that the subject rejects death as a psychic defense reveals a tension that typifies the individual's conflict and their capacity to overcome (Guarnieri, 2022/2023).

Thus, Jung (1964/2016), in *Man and His Symbols*, conceives the psyche as a self-regulating system, grounded in the existence of opposite poles, which seeks to maintain balance between these contrasting qualities while constantly promoting the individual's growth. In this perspective, the funeral ritual, understood as a symbol, fully exercises its function of transforming psychic energy, as discussed throughout the text.

More concretely, the psyche, as a self-regulating system, has the capacity, in the experience of grief, to transform it into psychological growth through the function of the symbol. According to Jacobi (1957/2016), the symbol unites opposites and, simultaneously, transcends them, allowing them to separate again afterward to avoid rigidity or stagnation. In this way, psychic life is kept in constant flux, leading it toward the goal to which it is destined.

As stated, the symbol has at its core an archetypal image, manifested whenever an archetype is mobilized. Grief and death constitute archetypal themes, since human beings have dealt with these experiences since the beginning of time. Thus, when experiencing such events, individuals have their archetypal images pushed into consciousness as symbolic content. Regarding death, it is inextricably linked to life, as one does not exist without the other, and it is in this context that the psyche's self-regulation system operates.

To establish a mature archetypal image, the individual must recognize the subjective value of these images, even when they seem to represent obstacles to their life, assimilating them into their own psychology and discovering how they are part of themselves (Jung, 1935/2017). Thus, symbolic and archetypal images not only represent experiences of grief and death but also enable psychic integration, allowing the subject to understand, internalize, and transform these experiences into psychological growth.

Consequently, life and death can be viewed as opposite poles, and grief, as an experience of conflict between these states, constitutes an opportunity for psychological transformation, since the symbol offers a path of assimilation that assists in psychic reorganization. Thus, this period, often perceived as haunting, can provide a passage that expands how the subject lives and relates to themselves and others, given that death remains an integral part of the life cycle.

Final considerations

The space of an article is certainly too small to capture the full scope of the theme and its complexity, especially given that the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic are only beginning to manifest in recent years. Thus, it is hoped that the importance of rituals for the psyche and society has become clear, given that their symbolic properties are closely linked to the psyche's structural basis, assisting the subject in navigating the stages of life and giving new meanings to experiences.

As discussed, death is a recurring theme, and during the pandemic, there was an eruption of deaths and uncertainties in the daily life of society—a society permeated by immediate perspectives and the perceived certainties of its routine. This study allowed for reflections and conclusions on the impact of the theme of death for modern man, as addressed by Kovács (1992), highlighting how this relationship can constitute a challenge to the subject's life and emphasizing the relevance of rites, especially funeral rituals, for the psyche.

Death, as both a concrete reality and an archetypal theme, is always present. The experience of grief and ritualization—or the absence thereof—establishes a reciprocal relationship with the psyche, which can be analyzed under the perspective of analytical psychology. Furthermore, the entire function of the symbol is evidenced through the funeral ritual as a means of symbolization, as well as through the value of the connection with the sacred, highlighting the importance of rites and ceremonies that hold subjective meaning for each individual. After all, as Jung (1947/2013) states: "If we assign a purpose and a meaning to the ascent of life, why not also to its decline?" (p. 365, para. 803).

Grief is a psychic phenomenon involving multiple shifts in perspective and the interiorization of the lost loved one; that is, for the individual to continue their life after the loss, it is fundamental that the contents of the relationship, now impossible to be lived externally, be assimilated in their totality by the psyche. Thus, this study did not intend to establish parameters of pathology, nor mechanical and standardized ways of experiencing this feeling, but to make evident that grief and death are typical human experiences and that the symbolic life of the subject and society cannot be disregarded, as it constitutes the core of attributing meaning to adversities and to existence as a whole.

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