

## Chapter 5. Inner Pain, Fear, and Hatred During the War

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Through teachers' questions, we received valuable information about their problems. Overall, these can be organized into three closely related categories:

### 1. Inner pain

Teachers described deep inner pain caused by losses such as the death of loved ones, the loss of a beloved home, or the loss of their previous way of life. These losses often become lasting wounds and are frequently accompanied by loneliness.

### 2. Fear

Teachers reported fear for their own lives, fear for their future, and fear for their children's futures. This fear is not limited to the present moment but extends into uncertainty about what lies ahead.

### 3. Hatred

Some teachers raised questions about whether and how one can live with hatred—toward aggressors, injustice, or those responsible for suffering.

These three experiences—inner pain, fear, and hatred—are deeply interconnected. They can be understood as arising from a shared external condition: ambiguous loss.

### What Is Ambiguous Loss?

The concept of ambiguous loss refers to “a loss that remains unclear and is neither resolved nor terminated” (Boss, 1999; 2005). Unlike clear losses, ambiguous loss does not allow for closure, making it particularly difficult to cope with.

There are two main types of ambiguous loss:

Type 1: Psychologically present but physically absent

Examples include a missing family member, or a hometown that has become a combat zone, forcing relocation. It is unclear whether reunion or return will ever be possible.

## Type 2: Physically present but psychologically absent

Examples include family members affected by severe illness or addiction, or returning to one's hometown or home only to find it fundamentally changed. The place or relationship still exists, but no longer feels psychologically accessible or familiar.

In both types, there is no clear farewell. The uncertainty itself is what makes ambiguous loss especially painful and persistent. The situation many teachers are facing today closely resembles this condition.

## Self-Reflective Work

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

What is the most painful ambiguous loss you are experiencing at the moment?

Which type does it most closely resemble (Type 1 or Type 2)?

How have you been coping with this loss so far?

## Why Ambiguous Loss Causes Ongoing Distress

Ambiguous loss often leads to continuing psychological distress, including inner pain, fear, loneliness, anxiety, guilt, helplessness, and sometimes self-destructive behavior. People may begin to devalue themselves, believing they are failing as parents, teachers, or individuals, and may feel unable to initiate new actions.

One reason ambiguous loss is so distressing is the presence of strong “should-be” beliefs, such as a belief in a just and logical world, or the expectation that one must always cope courageously and competently. When people face insoluble problems like ambiguous loss, these beliefs can intensify stress and self-blame.

## Living with Ambiguity: Core Principles

Because ambiguous loss cannot be fully resolved, Morita Therapy and ambiguous loss theory emphasize a different approach: living with ambiguity.

This involves adopting “both A and B thinking”, rather than choosing between one option or the other. Binary thinking (A or B) often increases distress, while recognizing that both can coexist (A and B) can reduce inner tension.

For example:

Continuing to love someone who is lost and building new relationships or enjoying life

Holding grief and engaging in meaningful daily activities

Living with ambiguity in this way can strengthen resilience at the individual, family, and community levels. Communities function as a kind of psychological family, providing shared meaning and support.

### Guidelines for Dealing with Ambiguous Loss

Based on the work of Boss (2012) and Kurokawa et al. (2019), the following guidelines may be helpful:

1) Name the situation

Identify the experience as ambiguous loss, using both A and B thinking. This helps externalize the problem and reduce self-blame and blame of others.

2) Separate what can and cannot be controlled

Acknowledge that war-related loss is unfair and uncontrollable. Letting go of the belief that everything should be just can reduce guilt and shame.

3) Reconstruct identity

Gradually release rigid images of the past self and build a more flexible sense of identity suited to current conditions.

4) Accept ambivalent feelings

Conflicting emotions—such as love and anger, attachment and resentment—often coexist. Recognizing and accepting these feelings reduces inner conflict.

5) Find new attachments

Forming new relationships or communities does not mean betraying those who were lost. What was lost can remain in one’s heart, while new connections are

also formed.

### The Role of Pain

Inner pain is often seen as something that must be eliminated. However, attempts to eliminate pain may intensify distress. In situations of ambiguous loss, pain can sometimes serve a constructive role, marking a turning point that makes change possible. When endurance reaches its limit, people may begin to reorganize their lives in new ways.

### Living with Hatred

Hatred can sometimes serve a protective function, helping people recognize injustice and unite against harm. From an evolutionary perspective, hatred and fear have supported survival. However, prolonged hatred can weigh heavily on the mind, diminish peace, and make trust and joy difficult.

Distinguishing between friends and foes without being consumed by hatred is extremely challenging. Rather than attempting to eliminate hatred, it may be more realistic to acknowledge it as natural, while choosing not to become absorbed in it. When hatred becomes overwhelming, stepping away from situations that intensify it can help protect psychological well-being.

### **Discussion Note: Voices from the Group**

When one of the authors joined one of the discussion groups, she saw that the participants were hesitant to start talking about their losses and feelings of loss during the war. So, after a long silence, the author took the initiative and began to talk about her own losses, experiences, psychological family, and coping strategies. The participants expressed their sympathy and began to share their experiences of physical and psychological loss.

Regarding support within the team, two participants noted that such topics are

not usually brought up in conversation. Most often, colleagues formally express words of support and sympathy and provide material assistance, but at the same time, the person remains alone with their pain and difficult experiences. Therefore, even just crying in the company of people who have also experienced certain losses is a great relief.

Another participant noted that she had experienced difficult physical losses and was suffering greatly because of this, as four close people had passed away. She noted that prayer and going to church provide her with psychological support, and she is also considering seeing a psychologist, because many of her colleagues communicate with psychologists, receive counseling, undergo therapy, and note its effectiveness.

The next participant noted that she is experiencing psychological loss, extreme pain, and very often suffers from uncertainty because her son has been in captivity for three years. She finds a way out and help in helping others—through work and volunteering. It is her work that helps her keep herself in shape. She realizes that she is important and needed by her students. She understands her mission as a teacher through support and compassion, not just her educational function as a teacher.

The next participant noted that she was experiencing psychological difficulties related to her husband. Her husband is a veteran. He returned from the war and, fortunately, did not suffer any significant physical injuries or wounds, but he was severely traumatized psychologically and continues to suffer. He often tells his wife that he needs to be alone, in peace. This is especially evident when he receives news that one of his comrades has been seriously wounded or killed. After that, her husband tries to isolate himself, his mood drops, and he becomes depressed. His wife notes that she finds the strength to stabilize him, charge him with positivity, and tries to involve him in joint activities. He also tries to respond and be a support for her. In this way, the couple supports each other.

During reflection on their own losses, there were many thoughts, tears, and a

mostly depressed mood. However, after analyzing their condition, the participants said that they noticed that when we express our emotions, reveal such complex topics, and open up, it becomes easier for us because taboo topics that we had kept inside for a long time and did not express are released. Such difficult emotions are very hard to bear, but when there is a space where it is possible to talk about one's complex experiences, it feels like a relief to share one's pain.

One of the participants noted that the meeting was both difficult and moving. She said, “We were silent a lot, cried, thought, and seemed to experience what we heard from others. It was striking that when one of the participants spoke about the pain her students had experienced, it seemed as if she herself was going through it.”

The participants noted that since the beginning of the war, their circle of communication has narrowed significantly to their closest relatives and friends. The participants also note that even with loved ones, relatives, and friends, it is difficult to talk about losses, deep psychological trauma, and wounds. On the one hand, this is to avoid showing their own weakness, and on the other hand, to protect others from being traumatized by their complex experiences and feelings.

In the words of one participant: “Most of our teachers are caring and sensitive people, and we really want them to find as much support and comfort as possible, which the participants found during these training sessions.”

The participants thanked for the sensitivity, sincerity, and openness of these meetings. They said that it is precisely the opportunity to talk about such complex and painful topics that allows for the creation of a space for free communication. In this space, an atmosphere of support is created, which happens because people share their pain with each other. Such meetings give hope through the exchange of experiences of living through difficult losses, as if the strength of our community is nourished by the fact that each participant finds their own ways of comfort and opportunities to cope with their difficult experiences, and when there is the ability and strength to share their findings, it increases the resilience of everyone present at such meetings.