

BEYOND SURVIVAL: Tools for Facing “Special Occasions”

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From Grief to...Growth™: A Handbook of Enlightened Healing

Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and other special occasions can re-stimulate grief and bring up feelings of sadness or pain because they remind us in ways - both big and small - that we have experienced a loss. The absence of a loved one or the inability to have a special occasion be like it “*used to be*” due to changed circumstances or a current lack of resources is the simple explanation as to WHY this can happen. This, of course, is very easy to understand and perhaps an expected occurrence. I know this from my own personal experience with grief, and I have also witnessed countless others go through such a period. The question then is not “why” this happens, but rather, **WHAT** exactly can be done about it when it does? Every person is different in terms of what is appropriate or most useful as they address these trying times, as a Grief Recovery Professional I know this to be true. However, there are things that I will share here that can offer great help to anyone. They will appear below in a step-by-step process.

The first “Special Occasion” after the passing of a loved one, a break-up or divorce, the loss of a job or business and any other major life transition, can start a roller coaster of unpleasant feelings and challenging emotions. Those special days that are commonly set aside for celebration and good times can be the source of much pain and unhappiness when we are in the delicate condition of newly adjusting to a major change. Healing always unfolds in stages with a progression of “moods” or emotional climates. In fact, the initial period of *coming to terms* with what has happened is typically one of the most difficult things we will have to face. As a Transpersonal Coach, Minister and a specialist in the area of grief, my job is to facilitate recovery and help bring about comfort, while also supporting people to reach for new meaning and purpose in life and discover where they want their life to take them from here?...Yes, I realize that this task is a BIG one, which is exactly why I wrote this article so that I can help!

If these statements capture what you are feeling or what you may be going through at this time of year, ***You can learn to not only cope, but to begin to go “BEYOND SURVIVAL”...***

“I just want to make it through the day or this holiday or special occasion.”

“I just want it to be over; how can I possibly get through this.”

“I don’t want other people to feel sorry for me.”

“I don’t want to be traumatized all over again.”

“I want things to be like they used to be.”

“I wish I could just skip this day and never have to face it again.”

“I can’t imagine celebrating or feeling happy... In fact, I may never feel that way again.”

“I want to avoid other people and especially other people’s feelings at this time.”

“I only want to do what I feel that I can handle, I don’t even know if I can cope.”

“I don’t know what I want; this is all very confusing and upsetting to me.

“I simply can’t do this - no matter what anyone says - it is more than I can take.”

Ten years ago, I lived through a similar time of great “churning” during the holidays. My only child, my precious son Sean, had committed suicide in July of 1994 and within a few months the countdown to the holiday season had begun. The onset of Winter Festivities and our annual family celebrations had been quite a tradition for us for many years. Sean was born on November 18th, Thanksgiving came right after, and then my granddaughter’s birthday on December 21st, the holy days of December, New Years Eve, New Years Day, my own birthday on January 4 and finally my daughter-in-law’s birthday, Sean’s beloved partner on January 10th! This stretch between the middle of November and the first two weeks in January contained four birthdays, three major holidays, several special seasonal gatherings and the planned as well as spontaneous occasion to see way to many people for me... When I think of it now, I can hardly believe that I successfully -- and with some semblance of peace -- faced this concentration of what had

been the “fun times” and survived! **HOW DID I DO IT?** -I will happily share that below!

With all the, what could have been, unraveling back-to-back reasons I had for noticing that my life had **DRASTICALLY** changed, one thing stayed with me no matter what...**I TRULY WANTED TO BE OKAY AGAIN, AND I KNEW THAT THIS DESIRE WAS THE FIRST STEP IN MAKING IT POSSIBLE!** Yes, it was quite amazing what happened to me in those seven weeks during the winter holidays between 1994 and 1995, but what's even more amazing is that I have some gifts that I can share with you because of it! Here is how I was able to go **“Beyond Survival”...**

THE DAYS BEFORE . . .

Several days (or a week or two) before the impending occasion, holiday or special date allow yourself to really be in touch with what feelings may be coming up for you in relationship to it -- Don't suppress your emotions or seek to run away from your thoughts. **INSTEAD...** be proactive with the expression of what you are feeling at this time, and do all that you can to embrace what is natural by looking at what is true for you with open eyes and a compassionate willing heart. ***Make time in your schedule to be alone and to feel.*** Here are some ways you can do this:

- Assemble photographs of previous years when the loved one you just lost was with you, and allow yourself to **REMEMBER** all that those times may have meant to you. **PRINCIPLE:** Remembering and telling stories is an excellent way to celebrate the past and, most importantly, to **release** so that you can move into the future. Knowing that memories live in you supports a healthy integration of reality and **acceptance**.
- Picture the day in your mind. Plan consciously how you will face it by imagining everything that will come up or what will probably happen, and **decide beforehand** how you want to handle these experiences and your feelings...Facing it is the key.
PRINCIPLE: Choosing is one of the most powerful things that we do as human beings, although most of the time we aren't aware that we can work with our selves in a conscious way to take command. This is not about forcing something; it's about **looking inside** yourself to discover what resources may be there waiting for you.
- **Commit to taking care of yourself** in a manner that may feel a little selfish, but is necessary when you are in this more fragile state. Which means you will have to schedule ample amounts of time for relaxation and quiet time, indulge yourself with the company of trusted friends, listen to healing music, watch movies that touch your heart, pray more, meditate, take yoga or do tai chi, take long walks, eat your favorite foods, splurge on yourself and don't forget to cry if you want to--whenever you want!
PRINCIPLE: You are your own best caretaker, or the person who knows **best** what you need at any given time--You must commit to **pamper** yourself something fierce!

THE DAY OF THE HOLIDAY OR SPECIAL OCCASION. . .

- Don't be afraid to do what is **most meaningful to you**, no matter what it is! This includes things that may seem outrageous or even insane to others, like wearing something that clues people in on what is going on with you, or allowing yourself to fantasize or pretend about something that others may think is weird and, especially, by **bringing your tender feelings out in a way that you feel celebrates them**, in perhaps a ritualistic form that allows you to be authentic, honoring and vulnerable.
PRINCIPLE: **“Living your truth”** frees you to move beyond what can become frozen or stuck inside of you, the sorrow and sad emotions that you may begin to be imprisoned by if you don't let them out -- not emoting is much more harmful than emoting in honest healthy ways. **Please don't ever hide from yourself or others.**
- Be compassionate with yourself and look at things with **curiosity** and in a forgiving manner.

Grief is an exercise in self-reflection and an excellent time to look deeply into yourself to uncover the things that live within your heart of hearts...A time for taking stock of what makes you tick and for re-acquainting yourself with your deepest values and core beliefs. Grief is about love, and all the feelings that are sacred to us.

PRINCIPLE: The assessment that we can make when we are grieving and our guard is down can shine a **spotlight into things that we may have never seen before**, things about our selves, people we love, our own life's purpose and/or our lives in general. The raw feelings of grief can somehow give us a different kind of *insight* and knowing about what we are doing, or WANT to do in our lives -- you simply have to use this heightened sight to help your healing as you journey further on your path!

- Don't ever feel guilty about excluding yourself from things that are just too much for you, or for replacing them with things that feel better. It is natural to want to please others and fit in, but **this is not the time to put others first**. You are the only one who can know what is appropriate for you on all the levels, so you must be prepared to safeguard the precious balance that allows you to be present at all. It is not unusual for you to have a variety of intense moments that come on without warning, nor is it out of the ordinary for them to leave unexpectedly. In my practice I call this a **"dance of sentiments"** with constantly changing music and scenes, which can be a powerful ride of emotional waves or highs and lows...this I can say is quite normal.

PRINCIPLE: Nothing will be as it has been when we are moving from the past to the so-called future in life. Change always brings a kind of displacement and the highly anticipated and challenging *unknown*, and when you feel anxiety just remember that these elements are change's nature -- **and that you WILL find "center" again!**

THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW . . .

- Upon awakening the next morning, and before you start your daily activity, review what happened the day before and stop and give thanks for your ability to get through what you thought you might not. After that take a look at what you can hold dear about the day that just passed, and really allow whatever it is to sink in and touch you. You have made progress and, more than that, you have faced the day being different and re-worked it, if only in a small way. That is your task from now on...**to get good at re-working your life a little at a time**, and in just the ways that you want. Later you may see that after some time passes this process gets exciting!

PRINCIPLE: What we experience in life is a lot more subjective than we think... In fact, **everything in life is what it is to us because of HOW we perceive it**, so it is important to slow down to get in touch with what ACTUALLY happened as opposed to what we thought would happen. Very often life surprises us by delivering things we never expected, those that will help us smile again and receive the many gifts of being alive... ***As long as we are breathing, we can be visited by renewal and joy.***

- Make a **CONSCIOUS** transition back into the ongoing business of discovering how to effectively bring into manifestation the healing that you desire for yourself, and all that this will mean to you when you have attained it...Find what inspires you! **PRINCIPLE: Human life evolves around three essential things: 1) Loving, 2) Achievement and, 3) Evolution or Change...** It is up to us to seek out and embrace the benefits of each of these key human motivators. During times of grief these elements of our human experience can become the cornerstone of all that we do, and provide the solid, sacred and very worthwhile reasons for our existence. Make a list of all that you **LOVE** -- all the people, all the places, all the things and then connect with them every chance that you get. Next, journal about what you have already achieved in life and what it means to you and, most importantly, what you desire to achieve in the future -- pay attention to what really ignites you in terms of a goal or a calling to do something, and do it. Lastly, just **witness** evolution unfold.

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