

Creating Rituals, Creating Meaning

Everything we know has changed and we grieve. We grieve as a nation and as individuals. We grieve the unbelievable numbers of deaths daily, we grieve and are fearful of the unknown out there that seems to keep growing and lurking all around us. We grieve not seeing our family members and friends, we grieve our empty calendars. We grieve anticipating the possibility that we might die alone in a hospital with no loved ones around us, or that our loved ones will die this way. We grieve the changes in our financial resources and loss of jobs. We grieve and worry about how we can continue to care for our families and ourselves. We grieve the loss of freedom and control over where we go and what we do. How do we survive all of this grief rather than letting it overwhelm us? These worries, fears and losses could take over our lives and keep us from finding meaning in our minute by minute, day by day, lives. However, we are resilient survivors. We work at finding meaning, connections and even joy in these new covid-19 days.

Zooming, texting, phoning, e-mailing and Facebooking keep us connected to each other. We have virtual happy hours. We use our technologies for meetings, to worship and to study. We wear masks, hoping to protect each other, and we wave from safe distances. We play more games, do puzzles, sew masks, call neighbors to encourage them, clean closets, organize photos, work on political concerns via the internet and more. We do more introspective work on our lives and relationships, and we give forgiveness and ask for forgiveness. We feel more grateful for all we have, and we say thank you and I love you more often.

While we grieve the deaths of friends and loved ones, the cruelty of the coronavirus has destroyed our ability to be together for the cultural, religious and family rituals and traditions of mourning. We can no longer be with our loved ones as they die or stroke their bodies after death to say goodbye. We cannot have wakes, sit Shiva, have viewings, funerals, ritual washings of the body. To protect us, the bodies of our loved ones are whisked off for cremation or burial with no time to say goodbye. We are left to grieve alone or with the nuclear family we live with.

Creating new rituals, even now, while the virus rages around us, is one of the challenges of our time. After this is over and we can be together again, creating new personal, family and national rituals and memorials will remain our task. Together we did a spectacular job of expressing our national grief after 9/11. We told our stories and memorialized our heroes and loved ones and continue to do so. We will do it again after this virus.

We will build deeper bonds and connections in our families and with friends as we develop new forms of grieving. We will find new personal and family meaning in creating rituals to express our grief and to celebrate our loved ones. On special days such as Thanksgiving, birthdays, mothers' day, we will find new ways to honor, remember and celebrate our deceased. There is no limit to our longing to honor those we love. Our longing and creativity will build stronger bonds and connections with the deceased, but even more important, among our families and friends.

Both our national grief and our personal/family grief can strengthen us. We can use our grief for those we loved to reach out to love again in our daily lives.

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