

Healing from Grief and Loss Naming our Losses During the COVID Experience

In addition to fear, I know I have experienced grief and loss during the past six months. We usually think of grief and loss related to a loved one who died. And for those who know someone who died from COVID, or any other reason this past year, I offer my condolences and send you a warm hug through Zoom. The loss of being able to mourn a loved one properly has been changed. At first, funerals were limited to immediate family. Now, if you go to a funeral you need to wear a mask and social distance. People are not supposed to hug at the cemetery. Shiva is done on Zoom. No meal of condolence, no in person Shiva gatherings to offer comfort to the bereaved. According to Jewish tradition, when you are at a house of Shiva, you are there just to be present. You are not supposed to talk to the mourner unless they begin the conversation. That is hard to do on a zoom call.

But there are many other "losses" that each of us has experienced unrelated to death. Some of you may say that have been depressed, but I would propose that you are experiencing grief and loss instead. Both have a deep sense of sadness. The difference – depression is pervasive and unending generalized sadness, but grief is related to a specific losses. the best way to heal from loss, is to talk about it. So I invite you now, to go on Chat while I continue to talk, and offer things you feel you have lost these past six months and are grieving.

The first that come to mind for me is freedom. We took for granted that we could go anywhere we wanted, see anyone we wanted, do anything we wanted. For now, and certainly in the near future, that freedom is gone. We have to think twice about going outside, about who we might pass close to, about going food shopping, about going inside a store or restaurant.

We have lost our sense of safety and security. We have lost our sense of trust of others. Judaism tells us to welcome the stranger. But now we need to be weary of strangers, do they have the virus, will they get too close to me.

This morning I showed a video called Eilu D'varim. It is from Talmud and tells us, "These are the mitzvot that we are supposed to do including dealing graciously with guests, visiting the sick, providing for the wedding couple, accompanying the dead for burial. These are things we can't do now in the way we are used to, because of COVID.

We can no longer visit friends and loved ones. Steve's parents are in a nursing home. He was able to visit them for the first time in six months, a couple of weeks ago. But it was outside, under a tent, with masks, social distancing, and he could not give them hugs.

We have lost the ability to do right for our family, friends, and congregation.

So acknowledge your losses. Name them. It is OK to feel sad about them. And then, after naming all the losses, also name all the things you have gained because of COVID. Healing from grief and loss involves the ability to put things in perspective and truly appreciate what you DO have. Perhaps more time to read. Connecting with friends you haven't thought about in a while. Having more time to participate in worship services. While services are not being done in the sanctuary, through Zoom we have had the opportunity before Shabbat services to check in with each other. At onegs in the temple, we usually talk to just a couple of people, conversations are scattered throughout the room. We usually don't talk to people we don't know well. On Zoom, we have gotten to know each other better. We look forward to checking in with each other every week before services start. And look at all the people who have come together last night and today. Some of you are not local, and would not have been able to participate in our High Holy Day services if we were actually in the sanctuary.

As Jacob said, "How filled with awe is this place, (this Zoom space), and we didn't know it!

How can we better appreciate what we do have? There is a journal that I recommend to my clients called, The Five Minute Journal. It helps them to focus on the positive rather than the negative in their lives. In the morning, when you wake up, you are supposed to list three things you are grateful for. They don't have to be big. It can be, something simple such as, I got out of bed, or I have a roof over my head. Or I have food on the table. Then you are supposed to list three things that would may today great. And in the evening, reflect on the day and list 3 amazing things that happened today. Again it doesn't need to be something giant or significant. And then reflect on how you could have made the day better.

In Judaism, we have the Modim prayer.

" God of goodness, we give thanks, for the gift of life. Wonder beyond words. For the awareness of soul and our light within.

Baruch atah Adonai, Hatov shimcha ulcha naeh lohodot.

Blessed are You Adonai, Your Name is Goodness, and you are worthy of Thanksgiving.

The opposite of sadness is appreciation and gratitude.

In his prayer, For Grace, Alden Solovy reminds us:

All I am,
All I have,
All I'll become
Are present in this moment:
Warmth and breath,
Love and compassion,
Silence and celebration,
Everything is here.
All gifts are present.

Blessed are the gentle moments of grace.

Let us continue to find the gifts in our lives.