
The Beacon

Guiding You Through the Process of Change

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Loss and the Process of Healing

We have recently gone through “that time of year” – “the holidays” which are such a mixed bag of anticipation, business, joy and memories. Memories come in many forms: good times in a childhood home, a special Christmas or Hanukkah celebration with a new spouse, the addition of children and also sad times which for many include the loss of family members who were such an integral part of what made past celebrations and holidays feel “right”.

The recent loss of a parent, grandparent, spouse, child or friend is, of necessity, a dominant aspect of the closing of the year for many of us. The newness of celebrating holidays without a central participant can make the holiday season feel strangely empty and difficult.

For many, the loss can remain as dominant, and oppressive, year after year, and even day after day, well beyond the holidays. It is difficult for many people to adequately grieve and mourn the loss of a loved one. Particular types of loss; sudden death, suicide, violent, accidental and death resulting from prolonged illness can be quite complicated, making resolution even more difficult.

The pain of death and loss, often accompanied by guilt and other strong feelings can be so painful that the normal process of grieving is put on hold. Unresolved loss can be debilitating, resulting in depression, anxiety, and emotional reactivity or emotional numbness. While some people become chronically and clinically depressed and are unable to function at a normal level, others become so engrossed in work or other activities that there

is no time or awareness that a significant part of their self is no longer accessible.

For those who have become affected by loss in these ways and are wise and brave enough to seek the help of a therapist, it is possible to address the loss in a safe environment, facilitate the process of emotional healing, and reclaim the lost parts of the self.

In a recent case, the death of a woman’s parents many years ago had become something she was unable to speak of without the onset of a panic attack. There were aspects of their deaths which were horrible to recollect and consequently she avoided anything which touched on her pain and guilt. Over time, and during the course of her therapy, she began an opening up process. She was able to remember the difficult and traumatic aspects of the deaths and understand her own fears in a new light. She was able to speak about what had been unspeakable and being to heal in a way that allowed her to function without the deaths touching almost every part of her day to day life.

Healing is a process. It takes time and work. Even though the sense of loss may remain, the intensity of the pain can diminish.

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