

Lesson 3 Homework

Creating Your Own Personal Grief Ritual

In Lesson 3 we looked at a few ritual examples. Rituals are used in many ways by people around the world. Sometimes we aren't even aware that we are enacting a ritual. It can be something as simple as walking the dog at the same time every day or brewing your morning coffee and taking the first sip. Consciously going for a grief tattoo or taking time to read a story to a stillborn child are some ways of using ritual. It can be a way to give meaning and comfort to us in our grief and sorrow. There are rituals around holidays, birthdays, graduation, birth, puberty, marriage, and death. When we are in grief during a holiday, it can be difficult for us. People are smiling and saying, "Happy Birthday" or "Merry Christmas" or "Happy New Year," but we may not feel at all happy. So, in this homework exercise, you will get creative and think of a new ritual that will come out of an experience of loss.

To give you an idea about this exercise, let's take an example. There is a grieving father, Kevin, whose son, Elijah, drowned three years ago at the age of six while they were out in a boat together. There was a sudden storm, and the boy fell off the boat without a life jacket. By the time he got to Elijah, it was too late. The pain of this loss has been deep and debilitating for a long, long time. Every time Kevin sees a boy walking down the street, he wonders about Elijah. How would he walk? Where might he be going if he were alive? Would he be playing soccer or a musical instrument? Kevin has a family to support. His wife and the two older children are suffering, too, each in their own private way. Kevin continues to have so much guilt and pain about his son's death, he doesn't know how he can live with himself. At times, he thinks it would be easier to die, but he won't consider suicide because of the pain it would cause his family members.

Kevin searches for ways to give himself relief from the pain of his loss. He is going to a grief specialist, who suggests that he develop a plan to integrate a ritual into his life each day. It's up to him to create something that works for him. He decides that he will take his lunch break in the park where they always used to play together. Before opening his lunchbox, he would talk to Elijah about something important. As he acknowledges his own goodness in these conversations, Kevin starts to feel a bit better about himself. After a couple of weeks, he talks with his wife and other children about this new practice, and they start having conversations with Elijah as a family. They become closer and the whole dynamic changes, as they come to terms with the situation and see how important it is to actively love one another.

For your homework, find a memory of a loss that is lingering inside of you and bring it out into the light. You might wish you or someone else had done things differently, but you can't go back and change what happened. You can only help yourself to see things differently now. You have tucked this grief deep inside. Now it is time to bring it out. Start writing down the story and notice which emotions you have been holding onto. Reach deeper inside and search for your medicine. Find the antidote that will take the sting away and soothe your heart. As you are writing, thinking, and feeling, allow you to breathe deeper. Allow the energy to shift. Jiggle what has been stuck. Be gentle with yourself. Make it meaningful. Soothe your soul. Do it your way.

When you come to our next class, consider sharing what this experience was like for you. You may want to read something you wrote or talk about some of it. You are free to keep what you have learned private. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is no right or wrong way to do this assignment. The important thing is to put some effort into it and create something new for you!

As always, it is important to practice self-care and treat yourself with kindness and compassion.