

Loneliness

“I feel lonely. I don’t want someone around, though; I just want my loved one. There is a hollowness inside me.”

This comment was spoken during a grief support group session by a woman who seemed to capture fully the notion of loneliness experienced after the death of a loved one.

Loneliness does embody the notion of hollowness that cannot be filled, not with other family members, not with friends, not with work. This feeling can contribute to other feelings which colors one’s personal landscape: isolation, helplessness, vulnerability, anger, and a diminished sense of self-worth.

This loneliness is opposite of the concept of solitude in which one is also alone yet embracing aloneness as a time of “sorting things out” or as a time for relaxation and renewal.

As I have worked with persons who are grieving and as I know from my personal time of loneliness, loneliness is a necessary part of grieving. It reminds us of what is gone, never to return. There is no grieving unless one has “had” and lost; there is no sense of loneliness unless there has previously been a feeling of belonging, of being with.

This loneliness is one container (containers are hollow) in which one faces self and wonders:

- Who am I now?
- How will I find meaning in life?
- Can I learn to treasure me as a valuable human being?
- Can I begin to heal by embracing this loneliness?

To heal involves risk and to begin risking involves a glimpse of hope. “What new experience could I risk?” “Do I dare to step out?” Risking and healing are intertwined as are coffee and cream, toast and butter, salad dressing and salad. The griever must eat and be nourished. Even as loneliness is bitterly distasteful, one embraces loneliness because in our loneliness we begin to face our own self. Slowly we find our strengths, a new and radically altered meaning to life as it is now, and a landscape seen through a hopeful lens whose colors are lovely and beautiful though altered by the previous storm called mourning.

“And the risk is to risk nothing is to risk even more.” Erica Jong
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