

BODHI DAY

The holidays are upon us, it is inevitable that grief will feel more intense. During this holiday time, we wish you moments of lightness in the midst of the pain. .

Comfort and Joy by Rev. Pam

Diwali, the festival of lights, a key celebration for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and some Buddhists began the winter holidays on November 4th. Chanukah and Advent begin this Sunday. December 8th is the feast of Rohatsu (Bodhi Day), the day when Buddha made his vow to sit under the Bodhi tree until he reached enlightenment. Bodhi day has the same weight as the Christian celebration

honoring Jesus on Christmas.. The Wicca and Pagan traditions celebrate the winter Solstice on December 21st. Clearly, light is a universal and central theme in all of these celebrations.

It is no wonder that so many traditions celebrate light during earth's dreariest cycle, winter darkness. Like autumn when the leaves fall and die, winter's barrenness, and short days seem suitable for a grieving heart. Indeed, it can be painful living in a celebrating world when your heart feels so dismal. Anytime of year, but especially during the holidays, one of the more challenging tasks of grief is to honor the sorrow but allow the heart some pleasure. If you are experiencing acute grief, a healthy approach to the holidays is to respect both the need for comfort and the need for the genuine joys of the season. In balance, each is essential to healing.

Several years ago when someone I loved dearly was experiencing her first holidays after a horrific loss, I made her a comfort and joy box with items ready to meet her need to be comforted and things to simply make her happy. As a pro-active step to facing the inevitable moments you will need reassurance or to remind yourself it's okay to celebrate,

I encourage any grieving person to build their own comfort and joy box. Some items that heal the mind, body and spirit might include:



COMFORT & JOY BOX

- Your grieving heart's wish list
- Poems, short stories
- Photograph of your loved ones – living and deceased
- CD or other means of music
- Treats – chocolate, favorite snack
- Letters, cards that have been comforting
- Flavored Teas, Coffee, energy drink, Emergen-c ,mineral water
- Journal and pen
- Soft, comforting items – socks, blanket or wrap
- Clothing with the scent of your deceased loved one
- Foot soak, face mask or bath bomb
- Candles
- Trail book or a prompt for activities that uplift you
- Envelope with something you have always wanted to try or do
- Envelope with inspirational quotes
- Phone number of someone you have been meaning to call or connect with
- Letter writing supplies
- An enjoyable book

Grief seems to have its own heartbeat, a very life of its own. We might want to control grief - to banish it entirely, push away the pain, and dissolve the unrelenting tears.

But, despite our desperation, the heartbeat of grief throbs on. Grief seems determined to have its own life, its own voice, its own say.

“I tend to think of death as being like changing your clothes when they are old and worn out, rather than as some final end.” - The Dalai Lama

Yet there is a potent countermeasure to grief, a way to heal our troubled spirit, which we can find in the the balm of love and compassion.

Grief came to visit me this week when Bodhi, our sweet, loving, elegant tuxedo-style cat, met the end of this life, hit by a car in the dark of the night. Of course, my heart felt like a train wreck. Suddenly, a palpable hole existed in our former family of two humans and three cats.



It wasn't the death of a spouse, a child, a parent, or a sibling. It wasn't the massive destruction of a hurricane. Yet Bodhi was unique, a special friend who taught me how to love in a deeper, stronger, and more enduring way.

You can't deny grief, or it will only haunt you more.

So, with each bittersweet memory, I initially let the tears flow. But I also knew my anguish would not help Bodhi. Released from his body, the time had come for Bodhi to move on. In his transition, he needed my help, my prayers, and my clarity, not my despair.

Helping After Death

So as we embraced each other in heartache, I meditated and prayed, transmitting my love and good wishes to assist Bodhi on his way.

“The radiant power and warmth of the compassionate heart can reach out to help in all states and all realms.”

In my spiritual tradition, there are many special practices to help the dead, which can also bring us great consolation. We can help the “deceased” because there is no separation between what we usually think of as “life” and “death”. The subtlest level of consciousness continues beyond death. Only the physical body dies.

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In the Buddhist teachings, it is said that the qualities of the “mental” body - clarity, mobility, sensitivity, and clairvoyance - characteristic in the interim period between death and rebirth, make it especially receptive to guidance. Due this extra-sensitivity, we can actually help direct the consciousness of the deceased to a better rebirth and favorable circumstances in the next life through the power of prayer, meditation practices, and positive thoughts.

“Khandro Tsering Chödrön, the spiritual wife of Jamyang Khyentse, often says that if you really have a good heart, and really mean well, and then pray for someone, that prayer will be very effective. So be confident that if someone you love very much has died, and you pray for them with true love and sincerity, your prayer will be exceptionally powerful.”

The most powerful time to engage in spiritual practice for someone who has died is the 49-day period after death, especially the first 21 days when the consciousness of the deceased continues to have a stronger link to this life. However, it is never too late to help someone who has died, even if they departed many years ago.

If you are not the type to pray, simply send your love and positive thoughts, whenever you think of the person who has died.

There are two mantras commonly recited in my tradition after the death of a loved one, which you can recite for your loved one too.

·OM MANI PADME HUNG (pronounced Om Mani Peme Hung) is the mantra of the Buddha of Compassion, which purifies the negative emotions that are the cause of rebirth.

·OM AMI DEWA HRIH is the mantra of the Buddha of Limitless Light, Buddha Amitabha. You can pray that your loved one is born in a pure realm like the Heaven of Great Bliss, where Buddha Amitabha resides.

There are several other complex meditation practices to help the dead, but these are the most simple ways you can be of assistance.

More Ways to Help After Death

It is said there are many other ways to help the dead in addition to engaging in your own prayer and meditation practices. For example, you can:

- Offer donations in their name to the needy.
- Give their possessions to the poor.
- Contribute on their behalf to humanitarian or spiritual ventures.
- Sponsor prayers to be done by great masters and spiritual practitioners.
- Offer lights.

For these practices to be most effective, be sure to dedicate them in the name of your loved one and to the benefit of all beings as well.

Engaging in positive thoughts, words, and actions can be empowering and comforting to you and reassuring to the consciousness of the deceased. In fact, it can gradually change your whole perspective about dying and begin to heal your grieving heart.

Dissolving the Heartbeat of Grief

Naturally, I still choke up with tears when memories of Bodhi come to mind. I practice using each of these moments to transform my personal pain into prayers, mantras, and positive thoughts for my unforgettable beautiful friend. Each time, the heartbeat of grief becomes fainter and fainter and love glows in its place. As I gift Bodhi, he gifts me in return.

Written credit

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The holidays are upon us, it is inevitable that grief will feel more intense. Whatever small measure of self-care you can take is good. Reach out to those around you, make your needs known, and remember, like all steps of the grief journey, this too shall pass. As each tradition celebrates its winter festival, let us be reminded there is light in the darkness.

During this holiday time, we wish you moments of lightness in the midst of the pain.

We wish you companionship of beloved people in the midst of the loneliness.

We wish you healing as you learn to endure these days. Most of all, we wish you peace.