

Maximum Living Newsletter

“Dedicated To Our Families As They Take The Grief Journey”

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Bereavement Rituals

Making the Transition, Moving on with Life

By John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D.

Bereavement rituals, which are practiced by all societies in a variety of ways, have one common theme. They have tremendous therapeutic value in areas of transition, that is, moving on with one's life. Rituals provide healing, continuity, and balance if the griever believes there is meaning in them (Van Der Hart 1983).

Moreover, Theresa Rando (1984) offers, “A ritual is a specific behavior or activity that gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts of the actor or actors, individually, or as a group. It may be habitually repeated or a one-time occurrence” (p. 104). An example of ritual is the committal service (see illustration at right), in which we take the deceased from the land of the living to the land of the dead (cemetery).

We, the living, commit the deceased to another state. We have a processional or parade acknowledging our commitment, then get back in our cars and journey back to the land of the living to live without the one who has died. This is the outward symbol of what we do during the grieving process. In our grief, we let the loved one go to the life hereafter, then we journey back to the land of the living to form new relationships.

The committal service happens in the first two or three days after the loss, when the mourners are deep in grief, so it is not easy. Even so, we leave the land of the dead to start our life again. The journey back is what we must strive to complete.

Rituals are an essential element in our journey through the grief process. They provide various means of expressing emotions and talking through our feelings. Rituals give us permission to discharge our distress over the loss. More specifically, rituals permit the following:

- ◆ **A well-defined acting out**—for instance, sending flowers for the funeral, contributing to a memorial fund, delivering special, home-cooked dishes to the home of the bereaved, and helping with the funeral arrangements

are all actions we might take to demonstrate support, comfort and caring. Through these actions, we try to beautify death to make it more palatable. Rituals allow us to experience the closeness we had with the deceased one more time. We

celebrate passing into life after death, sensing that our loved one is moving on to a better life. “Better is the day of the man's death than the day of the man's birth” (Ecclesiastics 7:1). Rituals bring us comfort. They initiate the acceptance of our loss.

- ◆ **Expression of feeling**—During the ritual, we can express feelings that we might otherwise withhold. Rituals provide an environment in which grieving and crying are acceptable.

- ◆ **A rehearsal of the entire grief process**—Every ritual is a miniature grief process. It channels grief into a defined

activity with a beginning, an ending, and a well-defined purpose.

- ◆ **Healthy interaction with the deceased**—It is nearly impossible to participate in a ritual without thinking of the deceased, especially one that focuses on an object or idea associated with the deceased. For example, before death, the deceased might have asked others to pray for him if he died. The ritual might entail prayers for the deceased during mass each week. In doing “what my loved one wanted,” the bereaved exercises a healthy interaction with the deceased that can promote healing.

The living and the dead leaving the land of the living to commit the dead to the land of the dead.



Land of The Living

Land of The Dead (Cemetery)

The living leaving the dead in the land of the dead to reestablish life in the land of the living without the dead.

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Travel Tips for the Journey through Grief



As you contemplate a journey, do you ever read travel books or magazines? Do you talk to friends to see where they've been and what a place was like? Are their tips valuable, like dos and don'ts, detours that may send you down a different road, speed limits and rest stops to watch for? Do you work with a travel agent, whose professional expertise smoothes the way? You may learn lots, and then take the trip that best suits you.

Many people talk about a journey, using that metaphor when describing the ongoing, unpredictable, necessary process we go through following the death of a loved one. Many who've traveled this journey share their wisdom and experience in books, articles

and stories told at support group meetings and workshops. They pass tips on through family and friends.

Following are a few "travel tips", thoughts from professionals and from ordinary people who have "been there". Check them out. See if anything rings true for you. Use them as discussion points in a support group.

An odd by-product of my loss is that I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet. At work, at the club, in the street, I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll "say something about it," or not. I hate it if they do, and if they don't. - C. S. Lewis, in [A Grief Observed](#) (1961) after the death of his wife.



"Everything happened so fast. Once the funeral was over there was nothing left to do for you....I wish I could wear a mourning band so people would know I'm not in my right mind. Maybe then they'd offer to help me find my car....But, no, that's not the American way. *Don't look back, I'm told. Look forward.* So I do. I just don't see much. Not yet anyway." - Susan Evans, in [A Mother Says Goodbye](#) (1997) following the death of her daughter, Courtney.

If you are to grow and heal, you will have to make changes in your thinking and manner of living. Prepare to make changes in your habits, your relationships with others, and your general life style. Reassessing your values might become a continuing need throughout your life in order to keep growing. Once you stop changing and your existence becomes stale, you are a prime target for depression. It will take courage, but if you can accept and adjust to change, you will find life to be an exciting adventure. - Dr. John Canine, in [The Challenge of Living](#) (1983).



I was 6 when my Grandfather died. Mother bought me a new blue dress for the funeral. When we arrived at the funeral home, my mother let my older brother go in and see Grandfather, but

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Bereavement Rituals

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♦ **Full acceptance of the loss**—Engaging in a ritual happens only when the bereaved have begun to accept the loss. Otherwise, the ritual does not occur. The existence of the ritual is a sign of healthy grief progress.

A support group is a good place to share ideas about grief rituals and how they may have helped.

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Arkansas Dept. of Health Hospice
Russellville, AR

Tomorrow's Child
Lansing, MI

Grief Resource Center

For Additional Resources, please visit the [GRIEF RESOURCE CENTER](http://www.maximumlivingconsult.com) at: www.maximumlivingconsult.com

SUGGESTED READINGS

- [Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies](#), by M. Felber. Ave Maria Press, 2000.
- [Living with Grief: Children, Adolescents and Loss](#), by J. Gordon and K. Doka. Hospice Foundation of America, 2000.
- [What's Heaven?](#) by Maria Shriver. St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- [The Challenge of Living](#), by John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D. (call 866-540-0047 to order) Ball Publishers, 1983.
- [Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief](#), by M. W. Hickman. Avon Books, 1994.
- [The Mourning Handbook](#), by H. Fitzgerald. Fireside, 1994.
- [When Your Pet Dies: A Guide to Mourning, Remembering and Healing](#), by A. Wolfelt. Companion, 2004.
- [The Year of Magical Thinking](#), by J. Didion. Knopf, 2005.
- [Sibling Grief: Healing After the Death of a Sister or Brother](#), by P. G. White. iUniverse, 2006

COUNSELOR RESOURCE

North Shore Wellness Services, Ltd., Northbrook, IL
 Noah C. Weinstein, MA, LPC (312) 513-1629.
www.northshorewellness.com

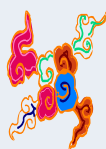
WEBSITES WORTH SURFIN'

- [Centering Corporation](http://www.centering.org) - www.centering.org
- [Willowgreen](http://willowgreen.com)-(James E. Miller)-<http://willowgreen.com>
- [Bereavement Magazine](http://bereavementmag.com)-<http://bereavementmag.com>

ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUPPORT

- [**Compassionate Friends for Bereaved Parents**](#)
 P.O. Box 3696 • Oak Brook, IL 60522 • 630-990-0010
<http://www.compassionatefriends.org>
- [**Widowed Persons**](#)
 1909 K Street, NW • Washington, DC 20049
 WidowNet: <http://www.fortnet.org/WidowNet>

What happens to you today will never quite happen to you in the same way again. Tomorrow will be different. Don't dwell on the past or fear the future.
 You are surviving... - Joseph Pfeiffer



Travel Tips...

(Continued from page 2)

made me sit outside. I was so mad that I would never put that dress on again and wouldn't talk about him to my mother. - Cathy, 27, in [Thank You for Coming To Say Good-bye: Involving Children in Funeral Services](#), (1994) by Janice L. Roberts and Joy Johnson.

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 "My mind is frozen."... "I'm just numb. I can't study or be with friends or do anything." - Enrico.

The shock of a sudden death makes some people feel as if their minds are frozen. This may be nature's way of protecting your mind so that everything can sink in slowly and you won't be overwhelmed. If you talk to others and share your sadness, your mind will slowly begin to defrost and you will start to adjust to your loss. - Marilyn Gootman, in [When a Friend Dies: A book for Teens about Grieving & Healing](#) (1994).

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 (American sculptor) Louise Nevelson once described her life status not as "single," or "unmarried," but simply as "solitaire."...When (those) who have lost their partners discuss their lack of identity they say, "Who am I now? I used to be Mrs. Robert Johnson or Betty Johnson. Who am I now - the widow Johnson? Who is that?"...A person who has been in a partnership is considerably different from a person who has been going solo. Partners depend on each other to carry at least half of life's burdens. Income, labor, children, and pleasure are just a few of the experiences that are no longer shared...while I encourage widows to become a solitaire in their own right, I do not encourage them to play the game of life like a game of solitaire....consider the game from both sides of the board - kind of chess game for one...(and) all the moves are yours. - Ted Menten, in [After Goodbye: How to Begin Again After the Death of Someone You Love](#) (1994).

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 The bad days never quite leave us completely. Like a sudden rainshower in the middle of a sunny day, our urge to grieve can seem to come out of nowhere....Usually the bad days or moments seem to leave as quickly as they came. And like the rainbow that follows the storm, the aftereffects of our grief may possess a splendid surprise; we may feel closer and more intimate with our loved one. - Elizabeth Levang & Sherokee Ilse, in [Remembering With Love: Messages of Hope for the First Year of Grieving and Beyond](#) (1992).

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 I package, pack, stack and bundle.... What do I do with it?... Everyone else's closet is full. The only sensible thing is to leave it in the only empty closet in the house. So I have accomplished what? It is still Lee's closet....It is still Lee's room. I know he 's not coming home again. I know I should move everything out and re-do the room....Maybe someday I'll be ready. But not now. So be it. - Linda Leith-Musser, in [Remember Lee: The End Is the Beginning](#) (1991), after the death of her 18-year-old son.

Maximum Living Support Groups

The purpose of the Support Group is to come together and draw strength and support from each other during this time of loss. The meetings are part of the community outreach program of our Funeral Home and are available at no charge. Please feel free to attend and know that your friends and family members are always welcome.

The following Support Group is available in your area, for a complete listing, please go to: www.maximumlivingconsult.com
