



It's Spring time and the world is filled with new growth, color, and cheerful Passover greetings. There is so much to do! It is a festive time of year, filled with joyous celebration and family gatherings. But when your family circle has been broken by death, holidays may only serve to remind you of the empty space at the table, the hole in your heart.

The holidays are a time when the past and the present collide. We either try to recreate the wonderful memories of our past or to clean the slate completely and start all over again. When the family fabric has been torn apart by death, a holiday season becomes one of the most difficult experiences the bereaved must endure. The period leading up to Passover can be filled with despair and renewed grief. Yet, the holiday season can also be a time of reflection and renewal, of recollection and reconnection.

No one can grieve for you. We each must walk that path one footstep at a time.

Handling the holidays isn't a matter of eliminating the pain, but rather how we manage the pain we experience. The most important thing to remember is that this is YOUR TIME and YOUR GRIEF and DO WHATEVER IS COMFORTABLE AND "RIGHT" FOR YOU. Your family and friends want to help and perhaps the best gift they could give you is the love and patience you need to help you through this season of despair.

The following are offered as suggestions for handling your holiday grief:

Become AWARE of your FEELINGS and ACKNOWLEDGE THEM. Tears, depression, anger, guilt and loneliness are all a natural part of grief. These feelings may return again and again during the holiday season as well as other "earlier symptoms" you may have experienced. Once you can acknowledge them and embrace them, they will dissipate more quickly. Do not be afraid or ashamed of your emotions.

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF. Grief hurts! Be kind and patient. Let go of the "oughts" and "shoulds." Try to forgive yourself for surviving the death of your loved one. Let go of the guilt you may experience if you happen to find yourself enjoying a moment or two during the holiday. Your loved one enjoyed holidays with you, let those memories surround you now.

MAKE LISTS. The bereaved often can't remember things, so make lists of everything you have to do. Ask yourself the following questions about everything on your list:

- Do you really enjoy doing this?
- Do others expect me to do this?
- Can someone else do this?
- Will it still be Passover without this?
- What would happen if it didn't get done?

CHANGE THINGS.

- Have seder at a different time or place, or using a different Haggadah
- Attend a different synagogue service
- Ask others to help or take over hosting the holidays

SHARE YOUR HOLIDAYS

- Visit a nursing home or day care center
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or shelter
- Invite a child to go for a walk
- Take a friend shopping

SHOPPING CAN BE DONE!

- If you make out the entire list ahead of time
- Go on one of your "good" days
- Take a friend along
- Shop when the stores are the least busy

PLAN A SPECIAL MOMENT OR MEMORIAL. Order a special bouquet for your synagogue's bima or give a book to a nursing home library in your loved one's memory. Plant a tree in the yard or place a favorite flower on your breakfast table or mantle. Keep your loved one's picture where you can see it often. Mention your loved one or share memories during the seder as your family gathers to celebrate.

THE EMPTY CHAIR

- Have dinner somewhere else
- Acknowledge it
- Make it a place of honor

FIND SOMETHING TO BE THANKFUL FOR. Think of all the things your loved one shared with you...love, happiness, joy, laughter. Write these "gifts" on pieces of paper and keep them someplace close to you. Read a "note" as you count the Omer (beginning the second night of Passover). Some place the written notes in a memory book while others keep them under the pillow or in a secret place. Wherever you place them, know that these small pieces of paper are tangible evidence that someone lived and loved us and that we are rich beyond measure because of the gifts they shared with us!

LIGHT A CANDLE. Light a special candle in celebration and gratitude of your loved one's life. This can be done on the eve of Yizkor (the last day of the Passover week), or at any other time of the year that was significant for you and your loved one. Know that you carry this light within you always. No light that was born in love can ever be extinguished.