

March 21, 2021

Re-Entry

Dear Friends,

It was almost a year ago, in my reflection from last May, when I was naively hopeful that things would open up quickly, that I wrote about some of the hesitation that people may have about 're-entry' into some sense of normalcy once the pandemic calmed down. Now, even though the numbers in NJ don't look so great, there is a much more hopeful light on the horizon as vaccines roll out and things open up again. And so today I have revisited that reflection and revised it considerably with some new insights:

It's no surprise that many of us may be experiencing some hesitation in the midst of our yearning to 'get back out there.' This hesitation may very well have increased for many of us now a year later. Deborah Serani, a psychologist and professor at Adelphi university shared, "The pandemic is a traumatic event. And as with any trauma, re-entry will have to happen slowly. It becomes a very anxiety-producing moment in the life of a survivor, when they return to normal..." There may be something inside us resisting to return; after all, we are returning to a place where many people simply don't understand how profound our loss was and still is. We may fear that they will be going about all the things they missed so much, leaving us behind in our sorrow. "We would rather grieve than fight the battle of coping with new situations," as Granger Westberg would say. "We are more comfortable in our grief than in the new unpredictable world." (Good Grief, p. 69) It is certainly okay to feel these things, and it is important to acknowledge them as well. More people may understand than we think. Serani goes on to say: "Trauma heightens our ability to self-care and that is one of the things we need to take with us. The ability to say no, for example... When you're healing, setting boundaries and setting limits is one of the most important things."

What we need right now are relationships that are nurturing not depleting. This is part of our self-care. Be assured when we do eventually venture out there that there will be other and new experiences in life that can be meaningful and even joyful again. Please do not discard that

possibility for yourself; in doing so, you would be giving into the ‘stinkin thinkin’ voice of grief. Some of us will need “new friends who will gradually help us to find the road to life again, and who will walk that road with us.” (Joshua Liebman)

It is unfortunately true that we will be taking our grief with us wherever we go. “We are emerging from this together, globally,” Serani said, “It’s OK to be gentle with yourself. It’s OK to feel unsure. It’s OK to feel insecure. It’s OK to say, ‘How do I do this dance? I don’t remember. It’s OK to feel anxious and nervous. You’re not alone in that.”

It may also be a possibility, however, that we will find that this quarantined experience has in a sense ‘taught’ us in some ways how to re-emerge. In grief, it seems, that we are always learning how to cope and survive, and for many even to thrive. Quite often, it has been my observation that we are much more resilient and even stronger than we believe ourselves to be. So, even if you don’t want to hear that truth right now, try not to let fear dictate how you will move forward, fear can be our greatest enemy. Springtime is here, the weather seems to be gently inviting us to come out and breathe, to feel the sun on our face again, to get re-energized and refreshed. So, however you choose to ‘get out there’ again, please continue to take good care of yourselves with patience and gentleness.

Peace & Serenity, Kevin