

March 26, 2020

Dear Friends,

One of the most practical and helpful aspects of our support groups is when people share what they find most helpful, or not, in the experience of grief and mourning. Often this opens us up to try different coping skills that perhaps we had never thought about before. During this time of what I call 'the Corona isolation,' I have found some things most helpful that I would like to share with you today that are pretty much getting me through this. The first is a shift in perspective which has pretty much been forced by this situation, but it is a positive shift for me and I find it most helpful. The shift that I am experiencing is about finding new contentment. In his book, "Perspective," the psychologist Robert Wicks, he says, "contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want but the realization of what you already have." Sometimes, quite often actually, grief can make us so fixated on what we do not have that we tend to forget, at least for a while, what we do have or what we did have. I think it's very important to try to be in touch with what and who we have and have had in our lives. We cannot allow grief to steal these most precious treasures from us. As I hear about the suffering here and in other countries and the struggles so many people are enduring, I can't help but to feel blessed, lucky, and grateful for what I do have. Right now we need to be grateful for our homes, which have become our bubbles for survival. While 'stuck' in our homes it is a good time to take inventory of all the things and memories that have been created; these memories are our greatest treasures for sure. And although we do not have the people we loved so dearly who have died, perhaps we can let our broken hearts be grateful for having had them, having known them, having shared some of our life with them and they with us. There are still other people in our lives that perhaps we have neglected because of our deep sorrow and pain, maybe this is a good time to start to reach out to them and allow our perspective to change regarding their presence in our lives. Even if they are not living under our roof and we are separated right now, thanks to technology we can still be in touch. A few months ago someone in one of my groups mentioned that he had heard from a friend who he had lost touch with long ago. I think they were friends in childhood and beyond. This person mentioned that at first he wondered why this old friend was reaching out after all these years? He was dreading the conversation. He hesitated, in his grief, to respond because he didn't feel he had the energy to talk about anything. But when the friend finally got in touch, all he wanted to share was that he was very grateful for having had this man as a friend and that he wanted him to know that. He basically said, "I just wanted to thank you for being my friend." This was a wow experience, completely unexpected and quite healing for the participant in our group. His perspective had changed in one conversation.

The contentment that I am experiencing now during this time has been brought about by two things which we often talk about in group and they are gratitude and mindfulness. Gratitude helps us gain a healthier perspective by getting us out of ourselves; being focused inordinately on self does not lead to greater happiness, in fact it is a black hole that can lead to deeper loneliness, despair and isolation. Gratitude is essential in our healing of grief, in our becoming, and in our survival of this particular pandemic. Gratitude can definitely lead to contentment, it has for me. I know I have mentioned this before and I certainly will again and again because gratitude is just that important.

The other helpful tool, or skill or whatever you want to call it is mindfulness. When I mention mindfulness all I am talking about is allowing ourselves to be present to the present, trying to keep our brains out of the future that does not exist or a past that is haunting or painful. If we are ok right here and right now I think it's important to allow ourselves to be ok, to find contentment in the right here right now. Sometimes this is very difficult, especially in early grief, as feelings of guilt or even despair can creep right into our momentary contentment seeking to destroy it. But we must resist these waves of guilt and what I call 'stinkin thinkin.' Being present to the present means taking inventory of the now; allow yourself to be ok in the now, give yourself permission to find contentment in the now. This takes a bit of practice, and a lot of breathing. The other day we were sent a "Meditation Minute" from Angie, Stephy's sister. I loved it and didn't want it to end, so after the minute I continued to sit for ten or fifteen more minutes to be mindful, to breathe and find serenity in the now. Perhaps Angie or someone can email us with recommendations of websites or apps that are most helpful in mindfulness meditation. I find myself utilizing it throughout these days of isolation, and it is incredibly helpful.

I hope some of what I shared will be helpful to you as it is helpful to me. I am mindful of all of you and hope you are staying healthy and that you can find some contentment during this uniquely challenging time.

***God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.***

Peace and Contentment, Kevin