

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES MIDNIGHT: THE ART OF LETTING GO

When the clock in Times Square strikes midnight... we are acknowledging the importance of “letting go.” People may not connect it with “grief work,” but it is just one of the “letting go” traditions. The basic skill for coping with life’s changes is the art of “letting go.”

Life has a way of throwing us curves and no matter how well we think we have mastered the art of “letting go” or how much we think we understand the process, as long as we live it will be our ultimate challenge. No one ever graduates from “Loss College.”

The ability to “let go” is the ability to heal when we have been forced into a change we don’t want, when we have to live with a situation that is beyond our control. It is the ability to forgive and “live and let live.” It is our ability to withstand the emotional pain of change or losing something or someone that is very important to us. It is our ability to pick up the pieces and go on when our inner being has been deeply shaken.

One of the greatest lessons we can teach our children is how to let go – how to deal with simple losses and endings in their lives, how to maintain their faith and a sense of hope in the midst of crises. This is the “college” that prepares them for the “biggies” and, ultimately, death.

Loss is uniquely personal because it is related to our individual meanings. Until I can understand what something or someone means to another person, I cannot understand their reaction to their loss.

Grief is the clearing process for loss. It provides closure. This is the time when every aspect of our relationship with the loss, our attachment, our feelings, our thoughts, our past, present and future are examined and reexamined. This is why talking, and talking, and talking some more help us to place the loss in a new perspective and integrate it into our lives. This is why support groups provide the safe environment that is so helpful. The outer structures of our lives can change in an instant, but the inner reorganization takes time and the timing cannot be rushed.

What it takes to recover is a willingness to hope, a desire to go on with life, a willingness to let go of the pain, and a desire to heal and be whole again. It means mentally and emotionally acknowledging that it is over. It means to give in to the emptiness and to stop struggling to escape it.

Letting go is the end result of the whole process of grief. Sometimes it happens as a clean cut. More often, it is a gradual back-and-forth, up-and-down process. Sometimes we are not even sure how or when it happened. In essence, we come to an acceptance – or an acceptance of non-acceptance.

The task is finished when our feelings of loss do not control us, when we can think of the loss without pain, when we have integrated the loss into our lives, and we are able to move on.

We need to have faith in the healing process. We need to have faith in our ability to heal. We need to have the courage to “let go” gracefully.