My Religion, My Spirituality, My Coping

Do you ever feel that life is meaningless?
Do you wonder why bad things happen to good people?
Have you experienced loss without a chance to grieve?

One of the highest human needs is to find meaning and purpose in life. This may include the need to connect to something bigger than ourselves, a creative force that can give us strength to face life. Trauma and grief can impact us on a spiritual level, causing feelings of emptiness, isolation, and disconnection from meaning and purpose. Religion and spirituality can be powerful coping mechanisms to help us navigate life's problems, traumatic experiences, and losses.

Religion usually refers to a set of practices, rituals, and guidelines that advise many of our everyday behaviors. Religious rituals can help some of us cope with death and grieving, celebrate weddings and births, connect to the seasons and each other. Religion can relate to specific cultural traditions and symbols, such as the Cross or the Star of David or the Crescent.

Spirituality refers to an experience of oneself on a spirit or soul level. It includes a sense of connection to something greater than yourself that gives meaning to life and provides an inner peace. Some people feel spiritually connected to nature, art, or a faith community. For others, spirituality is linked to one or more Gods or another higher power. Spirituality may be open-ended and can be practiced by individuals or in groups, and in most any surrounding. Spiritual practices such as lament, meditation, revelry, and making room for uncertainty can calm the nervous system and have been practiced for thousands of years.

During times of stress, we may not have a chance to grieve losses, and it can be hard to find a quiet time to calm ourselves. Trauma can take us to a fight, flight, freeze, or appease response. So, calming ourselves to a more peaceful place helps us make better decisions and choose better actions. Participating in culturally relevant rituals and practices, such as the Mexican Día de los Muertos, can help us face death and carry on the memories of loved ones. Prayers, chants, and songs can also bring meaning during loss and help heal the soul.

Consider, are there particular sacred symbols or spiritual practices that help you feel more connected to the transcendent, the world, or the universe? Do you find special comfort in connecting with a religious or worship community? For some, these practices can be helpful if you engage them. They may not totally erase all sense of a loss or pain, but the meaning they help to bring to the loss can be a valuable, lifelong process.

Local shamanic healers, rabbis, imams, priests, pastors, and other spiritual leaders can be beneficial on the healing journey. Religious and spiritual leaders are valuable resources, and often offer spiritual support and provide important perspectives and connection to a larger story, force, and power in life. We can use the same tips for identifying supportive people (here) to identify supportive faith leaders.

However you choose to heal on a spiritual level is up to you. The important thing to remember is that you do not have to do it alone. If it feels right for you, consider seeking support from your local church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other faith organization. Be uplifted by joining with others. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, *see* here. To learn about collective trauma, *see* this. To learn more about how to heal and thrive, *go to* here.