

## **Rebuilding Faith and Hope After Loss**

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Please note: The information provided on this program is intended for educational purposes only.

If you or a loved one needs professional support, please contact TAPS 24/7 at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

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## **Personal Bio**

- Studied theology for over a decade
  - Served as hospice chaplain
     Served as Navy chaplain
- Deployed to Afghanistan in '03
- Became a Licensed Professional
- Founded Conversing with Death
- Owner of Body Mind Metaphor LLC
- Author of three books and over a dozen articles



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## Introduction

- Exploring spiritual beliefs and concepts is a sensitive task
- Goal: Examine how your beliefs have been impacted by loss
  - This takes an honest and courageous look
- My presentation is not founded upon the notion of an absolute
  - My spirituality is flexible, evolving = Personal truth
  - Not always the case Personal experience
- My approach is threefold:
  - Helping people who wish to maintain what they hold as sacred
  - Give people permission to tweak their spirituality if they so desire
- Validate individuals who feel they need a "theological face lift"

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## **My Theoretical Orientation**

- My theological studies and experiences provide insight into the process of constructing and deconstructing beliefs
- I specialize in treating depression, anxiety, trauma and grief
   Mindfulness based Being with feelings and thoughts without identifying yourself by them (i.e. stories)
  - Exposure therapies facing not avoiding internal experiences

  - Existential in nature a beginning and an end; impermanence
     Yoga includes breath work, asanas, meditation, chanting, mantras

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## **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- 1. Understand how belief systems work in light of loss
- 2. Describe the three faces of belief after impact
- 3. Rebuild faith and hope after loss

## The Impact of Belief Systems After Loss

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## **Belief Systems**

- A belief is composed of a number of factors:
  Personal experience

  - Family history
  - Culture
  - Needs (personality, attachment)Identity: Who am I?

  - Patterns of thinking
  - · Previous beliefs



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## **Beliefs Naturally Change**

- We gravitate toward different ways of seeing things based on human development
  - Minor sometimes unnoticed
     Major obvious
- Think of things you once believed and now don't
  - Circumstances
  - Events
  - · Cultural influences



## **When Loss Occurs**

- · Loss is sometimes irrational
  - "Why"
- · Loss doesn't fit into our belief systems
- While belief is structured, life isn't
   Brain needs to simplify/generalize
- Loss carries strong emotional components
  - · Whereas beliefs are strongly rational
- Loss is potentially isolating
   Beliefs bring people together

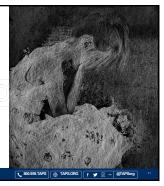
  - Need for attachment gravitates people to people; people to ideas

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## **Internal Responses to Loss**

- Common reactions
  - Conflicting ideas

  - Confusion
     Blurring of assessment
- Psychological
  - Depression and anxiety
  - Inflammation of symptoms
    - Physical
       Psychological
- Relational Isolation



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## **Three Faces of Belief After Loss** While you can find these soon after loss, this section focuses on belief after considerable time has passed since the event(s)

## **Maintaining One's Faith**

- · Faith of our fathers
- Perhaps the most common (?)
  - Culture
  - · Inability to survey
- · Loyalty is a priority

  - Heritage
     Spiritual devotion
- Goal: Realign experience into faith structure
- Social praise

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## A Second and Third Response

- · Modify one's faith system
- A method that raises minimal concern
  - Any shift in belief causes disturbance
- Social structures remain intact
- Changes are subtle
- This is a step some take before moving onto the third
- Complete change
- Often seen as a reaction
- This response is long

  - · Deconstructing the old Searching for the new
- · Creates the most change
  - Internally guilt, grief
     Socially loss of friends, family

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## **Experiential Response**

- For some painful events, move them into a mystical moment
- The experience is positive, unexplainable
- This felt sense response is important to remember, since the other three are logically entertained





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## **Embrace Experience**

- Normalize internal experiences
- Suspending judgment
- See experience as experience
  - Thought as thought
  - Feeling as feeling
- Doesn't mean you have to like
- · Lotus grows out of mud



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## **Characteristic of Belief**

- Beliefs evolve
  - Religious and otherwise
- Contingent on life experiences
- In every faith system there are
   Things one can't explain
   Apparent or actual conflicting
- Coping strategy: Stress one belief over another
  - All loving--all powerful
     Harold Kushner



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## For Maintaining One's Faith

- Recall memories of how one arrived at faith to begin with
- Use other moments to nurture
- Focus on a few characteristics at a time
  - Avoid trying to make sense of it all
- · Most faith structures have paradoxical and unexplainable links
- Connect with others who not only believe the same but also have suffered
  - Mimic others of like-minded faith
- Maintain activity such as exercise, yoga, biking, etc.

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## For Modifying One's Faith

- Know that modifying beliefs is normal
   And can be done without cashing in the whole
- · Read about how others who have made minor shifts
- Harold Kushner: Why Bad Things Happen to Good People
- · Understand the psychology of belief
- Find someone in your community who has a lean toward the objective
   Non-judgmental
- Embrace the emotional unease
  - Emotions are transitional Understand the role of guilt
- Anticipate some relational response

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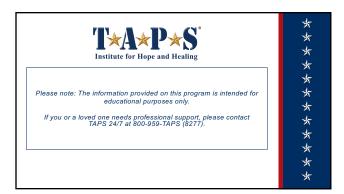
## **Theological Face Lift**

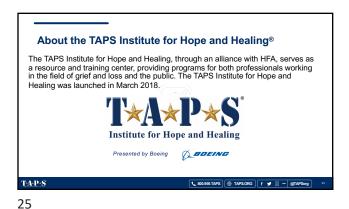
- - · Make this decision after time has passed
  - Difference between response and reaction
- · Avoid a right or wrong approach
  - Highly sensitive
- Know that a positive experience can be located in various places
- · Be aware of cultural reactions
- Social change
- · Understand that emotional discomfort does occur
  - · Could even be depression

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# Resources • Fowler, James W., Stages of Faith • Moody, Harry R., The Five Stages of the Soul • Newberg, Andrew, Why We Believe What We Believe • Rambo, Lewis R., Understanding Religious Conversion







Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

November 14

Collage Therapy: Grief, Loss, and the Expressive Arts
In-person workshop at TAPS Institute 10am-4pm, 5 CEs available
With Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT, Art Therapist at the Kristen Rita
Strouse Foundation/ Artful Grief, TAPS Advisory Board Member

November 20

So Much Has Changed: Managing Secondary Loss During the Holidays
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 pm ET
With Ken Doka, PhD, Mibr, TAPS Advisory Board Member

December 03

Understanding the Role of Medication in Coping with Grief and Loss
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 pm ET
With Eric Bul, PhD, MD, Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress Disorders,
Massachusetts General Hospital; Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School
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