



# Journey

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## *Home or Hope for the Holidays*

**By: Harold Ivan Smith**

"May your days be merry and bright..." and "Oh there's no place like home for the holidays..." are common musical and emotional sentiments in late autumn. Many griever find the holidays to be significant emotional and spiritual challenges. Friends, colleagues, and sometimes family members expect grievers to take a sabbatical from active grieving to join in the all-too-frantic merry-making and tradition-keeping.

Whatever your religious tradition, there is probably a holiday or holy day in the last quarter of the year: All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day in liturgical Christianity; Day of the Dead, Dia de los Muerto for Hispanics; Eid, for Muslims; and Chanukah for Jews, are blended observances of faith and memory. During the African American observance of Kwanzaa, a day is set aside to celebrate the ancestors. Absence is felt more keenly as the leaves begin to color and fall, as the weather changes, as the days shorten, as the holiday blitz begins.

Thanksgiving (ironically shaped by the persistence of a widow, Sarah Josepha Hale), Eid, Chanukah, Christmas, and New Year's are a triathlon to be survived, somehow. For many the first holidays are a nightmare; others are numb and find the second or third year holidays to be difficult.

Although other red letter days on the calendar can be demanding, November and December offer "in your face" challenges. "It's everywhere!" one griever moaned. Even my church is caught up in it." Moreover, every year the holidays seem to come earlier as merchants drag out the latest "have-to-have." A simple, "What will you do about the holidays?" reverberates the corridors of the grievers' hearts.

You are not the first griever to want to mutter or yell, "Bah humbug!" You may well be "ambushed" during the holidays by a scent, sound, or sight in a mall, restaurant, or community of worship. How can the griever protect hearts and minds from the emotional rug-tugs of the season?

Audit your tradition. Some grievers believe they must purge traditions to limit the memories. Others hear, "Don't spoil it for others." Thomas Attig captures the pressure: "Sometimes we feel guilty as we join this complicity of silence and succumb to its pressures. We hold our hurt inside and leave



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memories unspoken to meet others' expectations and avoid censure." Silence has a corrosive effect on spirituality.

Do what you can, not what you can't! Give yourself permission to suspend tradition. Seek out the spiritual current beneath the commercialized trappings. Look for something in this holiday that can help you embrace your spirituality and grief.

Give yourself permission to miss those with whom you have celebrated previous special days. Cindy's brother completed an act of suicide fifteen minutes before the family was to leave for midnight mass on Christmas Eve. Every December, the conflict between what her faith teaches that she is supposed to believe and what she believes is rekindled. Cindy discounts her own spiritual wisdom to accept the wisdom of religious authorities. My gift to her, in the form of a suggestion, was to trust her heart. I urged

her to give herself permission to grieve her brother's absence during the family gathering, to call that absence to the attention of others, and to recall his gifts of love across the years.

Struggles with spirituality and grief during what is supposed to be a "holy" event or season can, in time, become resources to share with others whose today is your yesterday.



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### Excerpt

#### Why Ritual?

Rituals are at once familiar and comforting. The Catholic liturgy on Sunday mornings is certainly a ritual many people identify with, whether at home or away. People do not function without some ritual in their life, even if it is not recognized as ritual....

Many people have daily "hello" rituals and "good-bye" rituals, especially with family members, such as a greeting hug or an oral reminder of "I love you" when saying good-bye.

## “Ya Llegan las Fiestas”

A pasos agigantados se nos acercan los días festivos. Parece que fue ayer cuando estrenábamos este año 2009, pero lo cierto es que ya como se dice al doblar de la esquina se nos acerca Diciembre.

Un mes muy difícil para aquellos cuyos seres queridos han partido a la Casa del Padre, porque vienen a nuestra mente muchos recuerdos e ilusiones tronchadas. Si la partida ha sido reciente, todavía el dolor se agudiza más porque en muchos de los casos no ha habido tiempo para procesarlo. En cualquiera de los dos casos es duro y difícil este tiempo de fiestas.

Realmente no hay nada que podamos hacer, porque somos finitos, infinito solo es Dios, venimos de Dios para un día regresar a El. Somos simples peregrinos y caminantes de este mundo y nuestro ciclo se completara cuando regresemos a disfrutar de esa Vida Eterna en Su presencia.

Solo nos queda abandonarnos a su misericordia, y confiar en Su promesa que es el vivir en Su presencia, como El mismo nos dice: “Todo aquel que crea en mi jamás morirá, más tendrá Vida Eterna.”

Mis queridos hermanos, en este tiempo de fiesta que se nos avecina que son el día de Acción de Gracias, las Navidades y el Nuevo Año pongamos nuestro corazón y nuestra esperanza en Cristo que murió y resucito para ganarnos así una Vida Eterna.

Muchas bendiciones para todos.

***Diácono Ray Ortega***



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