

You Don't Have to Let Go of Love

You do not have to let go of love in order to loosen your hold on pain.



There is a phrase people often use after someone dies.

You have to let go.

Perhaps that language helps you. Perhaps it doesn't.

Because when the person who died is someone you deeply love, a reasonable response might be:

Let go of what, exactly?

The pain? The regrets? The things left unfinished? Perhaps.

But the person? The relationship? The love?

No.

You do not have to stop loving someone because they died.

Death Ends a Life, Not Its Meaning

Someone lived. They affected you. You affected them. Things happened between you. Years may have been shared. Conversations. Meals. Arguments. Trips. Illnesses. Holidays. Ordinary Tuesdays.

The relationship became part of your history. Death changes what can happen next between you. It does not erase what already happened. Nor does it remove the ways the relationship shaped you.

You cannot continue the relationship exactly as it existed when the person was alive. But that does not mean the relationship becomes meaningless.

Love Does Not Require Physical Presence to Have Been Real

This sounds obvious. Still, grief can make absence feel as though it has swallowed everything. You cannot call. Visit. Touch. Ask. Listen. Care for them in the ways you once did.

The activities through which love was expressed have changed. The love itself may not have. You may continue loving someone for the rest of your life. There is nothing pathological about that.

We do not usually tell people to stop loving someone simply because the person is no longer physically available to receive that love.

What You Let Go of May Be Something Else

Perhaps there are things you eventually want to release. The expectation that the phone will ring. The guilt over something you cannot change. The argument you keep replaying. The belief that you should have somehow prevented the death. The question that has no available answer. The need for an apology that can no longer be



given. The responsibility you carried while they were alive. The idea that suffering is the only way to remain connected.

Those things are different from love. Sometimes grief recovery is not about releasing the person. It is about becoming less burdened by what remains unfinished around the relationship.

You Can Complete Something Without Erasing It

We understand this in other parts of life. A conversation can be complete and still matter. A book can end and still change you. A season can finish and remain important.

Completion does not mean:

This meant nothing.

It means something no longer requires the same kind of attention. That distinction matters in grief. You may be able to complete what remains emotionally unfinished while continuing to carry love, memory, gratitude, and connection.

The relationship does not have to remain painful in order to remain significant.

You May Still Talk to Them

Many people do. In the car. At the cemetery. While cooking. In prayer. Standing in the kitchen.

Perhaps you say:

"You would not believe what happened today."

Or:

"Look at your grandson."

Or:

"I wish you were here."

Perhaps you ask questions even though you do not expect an audible answer. You may find this comforting. You may never do it at all. Neither tells us anything about how well you are grieving. There is no required form for continuing connection.

Your Beliefs About Death Belong to You

People hold very different beliefs about what happens after death. Perhaps you believe the person remains present in some way. Perhaps you believe you will see them again. Perhaps your faith gives you a particular understanding of death and relationship. Perhaps you are uncertain. Perhaps you do not believe consciousness continues after death at all. Grief does not require you to adopt someone else's theology.

And it does not require us to pretend certainty where you do not have it. You can work with what is emotionally unfinished while allowing questions about death, God, heaven, consciousness, or what comes next to remain within your own beliefs. You do not have to resolve eternity in order to grieve honestly.

You Can Say Their Name

Sometimes people stop mentioning the person because they worry it will make others uncomfortable. Or because everyone becomes quiet when the name comes up. But the person had a name. A personality. Stories. Preferences. Ridiculous habits. Opinions. They were part of life before they became someone who died. You are allowed to talk about them. Not every mention needs to become a solemn moment.

Sometimes:

"Mom used to do that."

is simply part of a conversation.

Sometimes the person can be present in the story without the entire room having to become sad.

You Can Keep Things

There is no moral schedule for clearing out belongings. Keep the sweater. The letters. The tools. The coffee cup. The chair. The terrible decorative object nobody else wants. If having something matters to you, it matters. You do not need to defend it.

And someday, if you no longer want it, you are allowed to release it. Keeping an object does not prove love. Giving one away does not disprove it. The relationship is not stored inside the possessions.

You Can Carry Traditions Forward



Perhaps you make the recipe. Use the ornament. Tell the story every Christmas. Visit the place. Listen to the music. Continue something the person began. These acts can create continuity.

They say:

This person belonged to our life.

But traditions are invitations, not obligations. You do not have to preserve everything. You can choose what still feels alive and meaningful. Love does not require becoming the curator of a permanent museum.

Their Influence May Continue in Ways You Barely Notice

You hear yourself use one of their expressions. Respond to a problem the way they taught you. Make something the way your mother made it. Tell a joke with your father's timing. Offer someone the kindness your friend once offered you. Perhaps you disagree with them now about something you once shared. That belongs too. People shape us. Sometimes we carry them forward not through deliberate memorials but through who we have become.

Their influence has entered the living world through you.

Continuing Bonds Do Not Require Continuing Pain

This is the distinction we have been moving toward. You can remain connected to someone's memory without continually reopening the wound of their death. You can tell the story without always crying. Look at the photograph without being undone. Celebrate the birthday without spending the entire day in grief. Think about them and smile. None of that makes the bond less real. Pain may accompany love.

Pain is not the bond itself.

Love Can Become Quieter

At first, grief may be loud. It interrupts. Demands attention. Arrives in the grocery store. Wakes you at night. Changes holidays. Fills empty rooms. Years later, love may become quieter. A recipe. A phrase. A photograph on the shelf. A story told to someone younger.

A thought:

She would have loved this.

Then you continue with your day. That may once have seemed impossible. Perhaps even disloyal. But quiet love is still love. It does not have to hurt every time you touch it.

You Do Not Have to Choose Between Love and Life

This is where "letting go" can become especially misleading. It can make life sound like something waiting on the other side of the relationship. First you release the person. Then you move forward. But perhaps that is not how it works at all. Perhaps you carry the relationship differently while participating more fully in life. You remember. And make new memories. You love the person who died. And love people who are living. You honor what mattered. And discover things that matter now. You carry the past. And inhabit the present.

The word **and** is useful here too.

Love Does Not Need to Occupy the Whole Landscape

There is another side to this. Continuing love does not require organizing your entire life around the person who died.

Every decision does not need to be:

What would she want?

Every holiday does not need to revolve around remembrance. Every room does not need to remain unchanged. Every new relationship does not need to be compared with the old one. Love can have a permanent place without requiring every place. That is not abandonment. It is proportion. The person mattered.

Other things are allowed to matter too.

Perhaps You Are Not Letting Go

Perhaps you are letting something settle into its rightful place. The person existed. The relationship happened. The love was real. The death was real. The grief is real.

And your continuing life is real. None has to cancel another. What was unfinished can receive attention. What was painful can change. What cannot be changed can gradually stop demanding that you change it. And what you love can remain.



You do not have to let go of love in order to loosen your hold on pain. You can carry the relationship without requiring the loss to remain the organizing center of your life.

The person you loved belongs to your story. They do not have to disappear for you to keep writing it.

CONTINUE THE SERIES



Next: Making Room for Life Without Making the Loss Smaller

If love can remain, perhaps life no longer has to compete with grief. Next, we'll explore what happens as curiosity, pleasure, relationships, work, plans, and ordinary interests begin taking up more room - not because the loss has become insignificant, but because your life is becoming larger around it.