



Happy Tears

LAUREN SACHS

When my husband died in August of 2020, I struggled to find an answer when people posed the familiar question: "How are you?" Initially, I felt I had to provide an answer that would make my interlocutor feel at ease, saying things like, "I'm OK. Thank you for asking."

My nephew became a bar mitzvah just a few months later, and I distinctly recall Brad's brother asking me this very question at the subsequent celebration. My answer was as direct and honest as possible: "Please don't ask me that question; I don't want to ruin your party." In other words, at the height of my grief when people made genuine inquiries about my well-being, I knew that the most truthful answer was not socially acceptable, and certainly not something I could discuss at a family simcha. At some point, my answer became a compromise of sorts, offering a bit of insight about my family's well-being while also shielding the questioner from too much behind-the-scenes drama. I would often say, "My girls are doing really well, so I guess I must be doing alright, too." Eventually, as I worked on healing from my grief, I felt comfortable saying: "I am doing as well as I can."

Once I started attending a spousal

loss support group through hospice, I learned that I was not alone in struggling to find the right way to address this commonplace question. Many in the group felt compelled to hide their pain and answer the question with a plastered smile. Some who were bereaved chose to avoid social outings altogether, too worried about how they would be perceived, or too exhausted from grief to even consider such scenarios. Often we discussed the challenge of finding ways to balance our need for connection with the worry of either burdening friends and family or being met with a blank stare. For all these reasons, many participants spoke about how the group was one of the few places they could show up as their most authentic selves - a setting where they could allow themselves to feel unburdened and inherently understood.

As I began to consider the hustle and bustle of the holidays this year,

I thought about how many people struggle with their mental health throughout the season. Though it is a time of celebration and happiness for many, it can also be a fraught time for those who are dealing with financial stress, the loss of a loved one, or who lack a solid system of social support. It occurred to me that anyone who is managing these or other burdens may feel as I once did when well-meaning people make such innocuous inquiries. Obviously, it may not always be safe or appropriate to open up about our stressors. At the same time, I believe that our society has made significant progress in helping people feel comfortable discussing emotional difficulties. As a mental health professional and someone who has experienced profound grief, I am grateful for the destigmatization of mental health challenges that has arisen through awareness campaigns, conversation on social media, and even the personal disclosures of various

celebrities and public figures.

As the secular year draws to a close, it feels like a critical juncture and an ideal time to ask that most basic question of yourself: "How are you?" Even if you cannot be as open as you would like with those in your orbit, it is imperative that each of us take stock of where we are and conduct an honest self-assessment about how we are feeling and doing. If you are able to find a safe haven where you can unburden yourself and get emotional sustenance from others, even better. Perhaps that sanctuary will come in the form of a support group, a close friend, a therapist, a yoga studio, a family member, a clergy person, or a significant other. No matter where you find that refuge, I believe that establishing, or building upon, those relationships is the true gift of the season. With the end of 2025 approaching, here are my New Year wishes for you: the inner peace that comes from finding self-trust, the hope that you will connect with those around you, and the chance for you to be your most genuine and authentic self.

Lauren Sachs holds a bachelor's degree in English and Psychology, and a Master's Degree in Social Work, from the University of Michigan. After completing advanced clinical training at Yale University, she worked as a therapist and consultant in a variety of settings. During her time in Jewish Toledo, Lauren has received the Harry Levison Young Leadership Award and the Shining Light Award, and is currently serving as the Chair for the 20th Annual NW Ohio Jewish Book Festival. In addition to her involvement within the local Jewish community, Lauren serves as a volunteer for Hospice of Northwest Ohio. She is also the author of a forthcoming book about her late husband, his joyful approach to life and work as an oncologist, and how examining his life helped her better cope with her grief. To learn more about Lauren's journey and her work on living well after loss, visit www.literally-lauren.com.

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Attorney General commemorates lives lost on October 7

On October 7, 2025, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost delivered to Jewish Toledo "A Proclamation Commemorating the Israeli Lives Lost on October 7, 2023."

The Proclamation states, "As Attorney General of the State of Ohio, it is my honor to recognize and commemorate the immense loss on October 7, 2023, to Israel and its families, to honor the victims, and to pray for prosperity, peace, and security for Israel as its people continue to heal and move forward."



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