

## **Down ... Are You Out?**

**By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

You are in a terrible place. You don't get out of bed in the morning. You cry for hours. No one knows what to say or do with you. They're more than a little tired of the drama, actually. They want you to be done with this already. "Done with this" is others' glib dismissal of you. Why can't you get the sympathy you deserve? Look how dreadful this is!

Part of the problem is that the rest of us are dealing with our own lemons that feel to us even bigger than the one you're sucking on. We have a disabled child; feeble parents in our care; severe chronic pain; a perennially underemployed spouse; a drug-addicted daughter; amputated legs; Lou Gehrig's disease; ovarian cancer. Pardon us if we don't stay at your bedside. We're struggling to stay upright ourselves.

This may sound cruel and heartless to you, but you have choices and their respective consequences in front of you. As a fellow traveler who also has been down painful roads, let me suggest that you do everything you can to rise above what's going on with you.

1. *Take your life a day at a time.* Any person I've asked how they've gotten through suffering has said this got them through. Just do what you can do today, and take tomorrow when it comes.
2. *Set aside morning time to be as mad and sad as you are.* Go to a gym or your basement workout area. Punch a bag. Hit a racquetball. Hit the pavement. Get out your anger. Then, go to your room, close the door, and cry your eyes out. Journal, paint, wail; get your sadness out. You will gradually rediscover the foundation of you that's willing to face the day, to pick up your burdens and deal with them. Doing this is better and healthier than tightening up, being brave, and ignoring the very real pain you're feeling. Go to your bottom and see how you can rise from it.
3. *Keep a gratitude journal.* When big things are falling apart around you, go looking for the things that are positive in your life for which you're grateful: your children, your job, your friends, an unexpected kindness, a friend going the extra mile for you. Write these down every day. Review them every day. Remind yourself that you're part of the human race, and there are elements of the universe that are being kind to you.
4. *Find a spiritual home and community.* If you don't have a god, make one up. Go to a church or synagogue. Find mantras to say, like the Serenity Prayer. Go be where this community is. The presence of others can be comforting.
5. *Find something to get lost in.* Embrace your work. Read trashy novels on the subway to your office. Take up tap dancing in the evening. Doing these things will make your situation less miserable and will take you out of yourself for awhile.

6. *Put a brave face on it.* Trust me, even your best friends want you to shut up about this for awhile. It may be the time when you're leaning on them after they've done the same to you in times past. Even so, give people a break. At least sometimes say, "You know, I'm okay ... what about you?" when asked.

7. *Spread it around.* You may be going through a hellacious divorce, the details of which your nearest and dearest find boring. This has been going on for over a year! You're living it, and you need the ear of others. Find new ears. Join a support group. Enlarge your circle of friends. You may obsess until this ordeal is over, but you won't wear out the ones who love you.

8. *Look for the gift.* You probably don't want to hear this right now, but what are you being asked to learn from this. Mercy? Forgiveness? Selflessness? The capacity you have for strength? What you're going through is not a cosmic payback for some misdeed you never did; but, again, sufferers will often say what they got as a result of the experience: greater dedication to a healthier body, passion about mental illness, starting a horse riding program for kids with disabilities, a life again.

You can get through this, and the friends who are only being sympathetic are not doing you a favor. Know others care about your plight is, frankly, little help. It's when you put a hand firmly on each bootstrap (by following the above advice) that helps you feel you can get through a day.

I'm sorry you're going through this. I know you have the ability to take care of yourself through it.