

# Moments Like This

tips for dealing with life after the election

Hard moments like this are... well... hard. There's a lot to learn about how we cope in moments like this because each of us handles the stress and strain in different ways. People around the world have given us some great thinking about what seems to help people "deal," and even become more powerful as a result.

It's only two days after the election and I can already notice different states I've gone through: total shock, anger, sadness, righteous indignation, more anger, disappointment, grief and despair, more shock, feeling like my mind was blown away, unexpected exhaustion and fatigue (some expected, too!), craving isolation, craving people, craving ice cream and so on. You probably have your own list.

It's true that we all have our own processes about how we handle bad news. Some of us get energetic and get super-involved. Some of us pull out. Some of us go crazy trying to do both. We might journal a lot, read a lot, pray a lot, find ourselves blanking out a lot. We might try talking about the elections all the time – or completely avoiding it (I've been doing both).

And here's the bottom line about trauma and how to handle it. Researchers about trauma say that the number one, most cross-cultural, most widely applicable rule is this: Whatever you're feeling, it's 100% normal.

That's right! Some of us sometimes feel like we're not processing it the "right" way. In fact, the way we're doing it is perfectly normal and a fine way of doing it. Shutting down, being super-angry, restlessness, being sad and feeling bad, all of them are different ways of coping (plus hundreds of other ways).

That also means it's okay for others to be feeling what they're feeling. I was at a meeting here in Philadelphia where someone began to talk about how bad they felt – it felt like a failure to them. A second person interrupted, "But we won Pennsylvania! Don't feel bad."

It's great to cheer each other up. But the way that second person interrupted, it didn't help the other person in *their* state – that person needed to feel bad for a little bit. I made a small intervention: "It's okay for each of us to feel what we feel."

The powers-that-be would love for us to begin attacking each other. Let's not give them what they want! You have your process. That's normal. I have mine. That's also normal.

## A Special Note: Paying Attention to the Body

Moments like this can be great times to take special care of your body because a lot of stress shows up in the body. I'll tell you the obvious: eat well, sleep well, drink well. (I'll even mean it for real!)

One of the things experts say about stress and trauma is this: physical exercise is particularly important soon after stressful events. Why? Because people often create a lot of adrenaline in their body when they're anxious (like the lead up to the elections!). When it's not released, it becomes absorbed into the body (you might notice it as knots in your back, for example).

So what helps? Physical exercise is great. That doesn't just mean the gym, of course. I bike to work. You might take walks with friends. Do some carpentry in your house.

What also helps are things like yawning and crying. They're great for releasing tension in the body (physically they're proven to get rid of toxins in the body!). Massage. Laughing is super, too. I've been loving Jon Stewart and Chris Rock! Find what works for you and your body.

What else helps?

People that I have worked with in places hit by war keep telling me the same thing over and over again: when things are hard, seek community. Hang out with friends. Find some new people to hang out with, too (what a great time to reach across traditional community lines and make new friends).

Capitalism depends on keeping people separate. People who are separate are easier to scare. But people who turn to each other can support each other and can find commonality. So solidifying community is great.

Everyone can do this in their own way. A group of anarchists organized a rally on November 3rd that brought together several hundred folks to do a speak-out and share in community – a great event for community. In my church community we've been sharing lots of prayers.

In summary:

- Number one rule: It's okay to be feeling what you're feeling. It's okay for others to be feeling what they're feeling.
- Eat well. Drink well. Sleep well.
- Exercise and move your body.
- Seek community. Accept support. Give support.