

# SELAH - PAUSE AND REFLECT

## Survival Guide During Festivals

The festive season is a time of joy, warmth, and celebration, bringing families and friends together to exchange gifts and create memories. We follow traditions and rituals of illuminating our houses with bright lights, getting sweets for our loved ones, spending time decorating the house and even going shopping together. These little things make times like these special. However, many hidden emotions of grief and anxiety may also resurface while we struggle with setting and maintaining boundaries with our close ones.

Grief can significantly impact the holiday season, as the festivities can trigger painful memories of happier times spent with loved ones. The absence of a familiar laugh, the noticeable change in the arrangement of a familiar gathering, the missing piece in the picture, or the void left by someone's passing can make it difficult to find joy during this time.

Furthermore, setting and maintaining boundaries can be challenging due to the expectations of these gatherings and social events, as well as the fear of disappointment or conflict, which can complicate asserting one's needs and limits.

Anxiety can also stem from various social and cultural rituals and traditions, including social expectations, financial stress and presumption from gift-giving, and the pressure to create a 'perfect' holiday experience.



Let's try to create a survival guide for ourselves that we can refer to in times of distress. Certain steps can look like:

**Recognizing emotions:** It's essential to acknowledge and accept our feelings. Grief can manifest as sadness, anger, or even numbness, which might show up in social situations as we find ourselves feeling distant or annoyed. Thus, allowing ourselves to feel these emotions is important. We can keep a check on ourselves by reflecting on how we feel physically. Are we experiencing any body aches, headaches, gut issues? How is our sleep and energy levels throughout the day? How has our mood been throughout the day? Do we feel any discomforting emotions? Are we experiencing these emotions in our bodies, shoulders, or legs?

**Prioritising self-care:** Making time for self-care is a non-negotiable part of our routine during the holidays. This can include meditation, exercise, maintaining a routine for our sleep, being mindful about our eating habits, or just a quiet time for ourselves, as this allows us to reflect on our feelings. Self-care during the holidays and festivities can also look like setting strong boundaries for ourselves and people around us to be able to best navigate through difficult times.

**Setting realistic expectations:** The pressure we put on ourselves to create a 'perfect' holiday can be draining, it's important to remind ourselves about our capacity, how much space and energy we have and it's also okay to say no to certain commitments. Celebration of holidays and festivals does not need to happen at the expense of our well-being.

**Using grounding exercises:** A break in our everyday routine can bring up anxieties which can be difficult to manage. Practicing grounding can help us soothe ourselves and be more present for things going on around us. These can include various physical and emotional/mental grounding such as box breathing, body scans, or just simply going for a walk or taking a cold shower.



**Communicating assertively:** Communicating our boundaries with others in a polite, respectful, and firm manner is crucial during the festive season. Our boundaries can be easily blurred which might bring in difficult emotions for us, not knowing how we can navigate through them. We might also find ourselves avoiding certain social gatherings and how it will be perceived by other people. Thus, expressing our needs and limits to family and friends can help everyone enjoy the festivities.

**Planning exit strategy:** Having a predetermined exit plan for social gatherings can come in handy in times of anxiety. When our body starts feeling heavy, knowing we can leave when we need to can help alleviate the anxiety and stress.

**Creating new traditions:** We do not always have to stick with the traditional norms of celebrating festivals or holidays. What feels right to us may differ from what we have seen growing up, thus, establishing new holiday traditions or rituals that honours us and the people we love, can help us find meaning in the season.

**Seeking support:** We might find ourselves wondering if it is a burden to reach out to people, especially during these times. But talking about our feelings might help us feel less alienated and more connected with people. Let us identify people who we feel comfortable reaching out to, and keep them in mind if we do experience distress during these days. These could be our friends or family or even mental health professionals who help us sail through the season.

In the end, the holidays offer an occasion for introspection and a chance to rediscover the joy that persists despite sadness and anxiety. We may transform this season into one of adaptability, self-empowerment, and, most importantly, a path toward recovery and rejuvenation by taking care of ourselves and embracing our own needs in our own time.



# What's the verdict?

The anticipation leading up to a same-sex marriage verdict was filled with hope, and optimism and the moment of waiting represented the possibility of an inclusive and equal society, one where love, marriage, and other basic rights are not bound by gender, sex, and sexuality. To our dismay, the verdict not only challenged the legal recognition but also the validation of one's identity and acknowledgment of their life being equal.

Consequently, it is also a personal loss, a collective loss. It is a loss of a dream of having our rights in an institution of marriage which, while fostering basic human rights, also gives a sense of belongingness. While we have been invalidated and alienated for years together, the verdict was a ray of hope to curb some of it. In contrast, we have to welcome a pervasive feeling of helplessness and a deep sense of hopelessness towards the future.

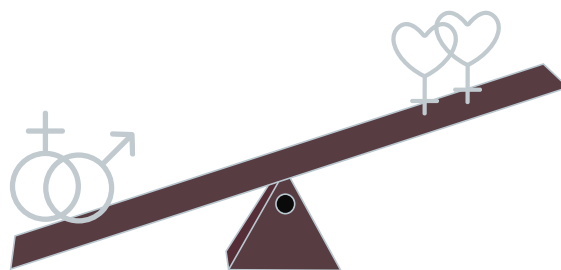
Talking about basic rights, we have heard arguments made in the courts rejecting individuals of their feelings of security, safety, recognition and belongingness, financial security as well as rights over having children. Marriage provides a legal safety net for spouses, including the ability to make critical medical decisions and inheritance rights. When these protections are denied to same-sex couples, it leaves them exposed to prolonged stress and anxiety. The denial of these legal safeguards can also foster feelings of isolation and estrangement. Furthermore, financial advantages like tax breaks and health insurance may be withheld, imposing extra financial burdens on queer couples. The ability to have children can be critical for same-sex couples, yet denying these rights may exacerbate family planning and cause anxiety among those hoping to become parents. As a result, the verdict created a significant sense of uneasiness and vulnerability among same-sex couples.





For the sake of the argument, even if we were to disregard the financial and emotional impact of the verdict, the desire of any individual to live a fulfilling life remains a question. For the last decade, India has grown tremendously in terms of international relationships, technology, and entrepreneurship. India, on the one hand, strives to be at par with the developed world on the other hand, it loses out on the opportunity to keep the talent, dedication, and respect of the people of the community. With decisions like these, people are forced to move to places that give them the freedom to just be while also giving them the recognition that any human being deserves. It is important to recognise that decriminalisation of same-sex relationships was never enough.

While the constitution says that the first and foremost fundamental right of any citizen of the country is the Right to Equality, isolating the people of the community for something unconventional seems unfathomable. This brings us to wonder, what it means to live in a society that wouldn't recognise our love and commitment. Abraham Maslow would argue that the need for love and belongingness when not met, can cripple the sense of self of an individual. To expect ourselves to function and grow, in hiding, seems too much to ask for.



### ***Monthly Takeaway***

*“Festivals are occasions to empower ourselves in the course of humanity - they are the occasions to rekindle the promise of humanity in our heart - the promise that we keep forgetting in the cacophony of manmade labels.”*  
— Abhijit Naskar, *I Vicdansaadet Speaking: No Rest Till The World is Lifted*



# Survival Guide Worksheet:

Here's a worksheet for you to check in with yourself:

- What are my strengths?

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- What are my triggers during these times?

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- What coping practices help me?

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- What can I practise more to help me feel better?

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- How do I feel physically today?

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- How do I feel emotionally today?

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- What boundaries do I need to set to protect my well-being?

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- What am I grateful for right now?

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# Things happening at Room:

- **Emotional Regulation Workshop:** This workshop is spanned across 2 days and is open for everyone. It will be held virtually on 22nd and 23rd of December. It focuses on getting an understanding of our emotions, how they play a role in our daily lives and what we can do to regulate them better. For queries and updates on dates, keep an eye out on our website and social media pages.
- **Basic Counselling Skills Training:** A one-month program on developing and upskilling the basic counselling skills required for assisting clients in their journey of healing. The program is open for students who are enrolled in a Master's program for psychology and related fields and also for those who have completed their post-graduation.
- **Crisis Intervention Training:** This training is open for students who are currently pursuing or have completed a Master's in Psychology and related fields. It is also open for psychiatrists and social workers, working with at-risk populations. This workshop is designed to assist you in crisis counselling skills necessary for dealing with/ managing clients experiencing crises or engaging in self-harm.
- **Humanistic Psychotherapy Training and Supervision:** Training and Supervision program in the Humanistic approach to psychotherapy, with real-life clients and personal and peer supervision, offers a strong foundation course for novices and professionals alike. It is a 4-month intensive program with an opportunity to build professional connections. Applications for the batch starting January 2024 are now open.

