

# **Interfaith Dialogues**

**for**

# **End of Life Ministry**

A manual for building successful, faith-based ministries to address death, dying and life at the end of life.

**A Project of the Community State Partnership,**

**The Maine Consortium for Palliative Care and Hospice,**

**and**

**The Maine Council of Churches**

**The Community State Partnership** initiative “Care at the End of Life: A Public Private Partnership” program began in 1999 and ran through 2002. Principle players of this partnership were the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the MidWest Bioethics Center, The Maine Consortium for Palliative Care and Hospice, The Maine Council of Churches, and twelve other partners committed to improving end-of-life care in the State of Maine.

Individuals or organizations interested in receiving further information may contact  
Kandyce Powell at 207-626-0651 or toll-free (800) 438-5963  
or email to: [info@mainehospicecouncil.org](mailto:info@mainehospicecouncil.org)

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## **Table of Contents**

I.	Background .....	2
II.	The Purpose of this Manual .....	4
III.	Growing a Responsible Faith Community Around End of Life .....	5
IV.	Suggested Projects and Resources for a Faith Community Engagement .....	7
V.	Resources .....	10
VI.	Attachments .....	13
	A. Guidelines for Facilitators	
	B. Survey: Human Resource Assessment Form	
	C. Glossary of Terms Associated with End of Life Issues	
	D. Resources for Worship – Sample Sermons taken from <u><i>Compassionate Sabbath Resource Kit</i></u>	

## **I. Background**

Modern medicine has created tremendous moral challenges for our society. We are faced with a population that is getting older, living with chronic illnesses, and often isolated and away from family. Through research and technology we have created a world in which death is often seen as an enemy. Many people feel trapped by a world of hard science that extends life with technology, but is reluctant to manage pain and other symptoms to ensure comfort. When a diagnosis of terminal illness is superimposed on this scenario, people desperately try to find meaning in what is happening, as well as to identify available, accessible resources.

In studying many of the issues that surround end-of-life care, researchers have found that people with life threatening illnesses, such as cancer, chronic heart failure, or chronic lung disease suffer from a lack of support when addressing the many challenges that confront them at a vulnerable time. The health care system primarily focuses on the disease process itself, rather than the emotional, social, spiritual and economic circumstances that are present. Other resources are necessary to improve the care that individuals and families facing a terminal illness need and deserve.

To address some of these complex situations, the Maine Council of Churches convened a study group in 1997 to examine the perceptions and realities of end-of-life care in Maine. Consulting with other groups already involved in this area, the group learned that individuals generally have three great fears and one wish about end-of-life care. The three fears were: 1) dying alone or abandoned in a nursing home; 2) dying in pain; and 3) being a burden on family, friends or society. The one desire that most had was to tell their stories – to have some sense that their lives had meaning and value, that they have loved and been loved. Strongly present were the expressed need for companionship and the search for spirituality.

A national study, conducted by the George Gallup International Institute, “Spiritual Beliefs and the Dying Process,” surveyed 1200 adults. It explored the possible relationship between spiritual needs and the dying process. A majority of the respondents identified the importance of comfort in the form of human contact. They said it would be very important to have someone with whom they can share their fears or concerns. The majority mentioned having someone with them, having someone to hold their hand, or touch them.

A majority, or close to a majority, identified the importance of spiritual comfort: to have the opportunity to pray alone, to have someone praying for or with them, and to have someone help them become spiritually at peace.

The study was based on the assumption that “Dying is not simply the end of existence, but a time of important psychological, emotional and spiritual work” that has practical implications for those involved with dying, whether medically, emotionally or spiritually. It is, for many, a time of transition.

Further key points in the study are to be noted:

“Only four in ten say it would be ‘very important’ for a clergy person to be on hand when one is dying. This finding points, in part, to the need for clergy to be more deeply engaged with persons who are in the final days of their lives. Greater attention could also be given to the role

of ‘hospital callers.’ Old people getting sick need to count on the faith community to which they have belonged. Too often, they cannot do this.”

and,

“Prayer would be of vital importance to those who are dying, because for most Americans prayer is not simply a comforting psychological exercise, but communion with a living and loving God. It is, one might say, the ultimate solace for those in extremis. Faith communities and other groups might fruitfully encourage and train greater numbers of people to pray with those who are dying, as well as appropriately share their beliefs about the afterlife.”

### **Maine Research**

A survey entitled “Hospice Gospel”<sup>1</sup> revealed that 40% of all religious groups did not know about Hospice care. This was especially true in lower income and less educated categories.

The survey, “What Does Maine Want?”<sup>2</sup> was used to identify desired outcomes in seven issue areas. “Increasing the conscious level of the public around end of life issues through community dialogues and other programs” was selected by 30% as their desired outcome for “Community”. In the same category, only 13% selected “Develop and implement additional grief and bereavement supports in the area's communities, work places, *spiritual communities*, and other community gathering places.” Under the category of “Relationships between dying persons and others”, the most selected priority was “Increase the ability of patients, families, and physicians to communicate openly and trustingly in health care at the end of life,” while only 23% selected “Increase the ability of dying persons and their loved ones to discuss issues openly with medical staff, insurance personnel, *clergy*, and funeral personnel at the end of life.”

Some respondents identified themselves as clergy members, and many of their comments indicated a lack of training in dealing with dying persons and their family and caregivers.

The data gathered shows that dying persons and their families are seeking help and guidance from sources other than their faith community. This manual is intended to provide guidance to clergy in establishing faith-based dialogues to improve the faith community’s ability to help dying persons, their families, friends, and caregivers.

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<sup>1</sup> Conducted by Command Research, 155 Hildreth Rd., South Harpswell, ME 04079, January 1998; for the Maine Hospice Council.

<sup>2</sup> Conducted by the Coalition for Dialogue on Death and Dying, 923 Middle St., Bath ME 04530, January 2000 through September 2001; for the Maine Consortium for Palliative Care and Hospice.

## **II. The Purpose of This Manual**

The Faith communities, in some form or other, have long been a source of support and hope for dying people and their family. Though health care has taken over much that once belonged to families and faith communities, the basic sense of compassion and the knowledge of this shared journey, regardless of religious tradition, implore us to respond to the needs of those approaching life's end. But to do this we need proper tools and resources.

This manual on end-of-life ministry is an attempt to provide information on liturgy, dialogues/programs, educational events, and local, state, national and faith-based resources. It is, of necessity, not exhaustive and should be viewed as providing some adaptable examples of how to develop, maintain, or energize this work in your congregations.

Specifically, this manual will help members of interfaith communities improve each of their congregation's ability to accept death as a natural part of life, understand the grief and bereavement process, develop advance care planning training programs, talk openly about their own experiences, develop an end-of-life ministry, and, in so doing, re-energize the faith community as a vital element in the end of life process for dying persons and the people closest to them.

We hope you will use this manual as a guide to establishing a meaningful end-of-life ministry in your community. We further hope that you use this as a stimulus to be creative. "If there is a will, there is a way." This manual offers some suggestions on a 'way.' Each of you must find the will.

### III. Growing a Responsible Faith Community Around End of Life

Developing a viable “community of concern” around end-of-life issues within the membership of a faith community is necessary for a solid foundation. This section presents a series of steps to help build such a foundation. These steps presuppose that a congregation’s end-of-life activities will best be initiated and implemented through broad participation of the congregation’s membership in determining goals and action. This is a nourishing, self-help approach that collaboratively moves towards congregational plans, ownership and action.

#### Steps

1. Initiation: Developing an awareness of end-of-life concerns within the Faith Community

This usually starts with bringing people together to voice their opinions, concerns, and wishes around end-of-life issues – and finding some sense of community. Concern about doing something about end-of-life issues. A small group of people (initiators) aided by the ministry begin a series of meetings to discuss, classify, gather relevant information and reach out for other community members.

This is a small group of people who have an interest in doing something in their faith group, and an ability to attract others “to the table”. Their initial work is to identify issues, concerns, other people, and to find commonalities around the subject of end-of-life care and congregational responsibilities.

A series of questions can bring focus here:

- ☞ What do community members know and what do they need to know?
- ☞ Why are we doing this?
- ☞ Do we have a workable core group that can bring others to the end-of-life issues?
- ☞ How do we involve new members?
- ☞ How do we engage in activities to inform, educate, and involve other members of the faith community?

2. Organization of the Members

This step calls for moving from information and awareness into planning and action. The initial group would continue to involve more and more members of the congregation. The goal would be to develop a vehicle (committee, task force, etc.) for the group to do its work. It can be formal or informal, but this step should answer the question of “How do we institutionalize this congregational commitment as a relevant and important community role?”

Typical question are the basics:

- ☞ Who is to be involved?
- ☞ Who does what and when?
- ☞ How are we going to affirm the faith community’s commitment to end-of-life?

☞ How do we “institutionalize this commitment as a relevant and important community role (formal, informal, committee, etc.)?”

### 3. Locate, Involve and Train Leaders

This step, following answers to the above questions, involves reaching people who are identified and respected by members of the faith community as interested in end-of-life activities. For many potential leaders, there is a need to learn about the many end-of-life issues. On the other hand, some members may be quite conversant about end-of-life issues but need to have their leadership skills honed. Leadership and content materials can be improved through training sessions. Local hospices offer such training and can be helpful in this area.

### 4. Focus on the Issues Affecting and Involving the General Faith Community Members

It is both the personal and group interests, coupled with capable leadership, that involve and mobilize people. This step is an outreach activity that is aimed at achieving inclusivity. There are topics that come to mind that have a universal ‘feel’ to them. For example: dealing with death in the family; grief and bereavement; advance directives; death and spirituality; etc. They are topics that can touch and move all members of the community. The sample sermons listed in this manual can be helpful in crystallizing the topics/issues, as well as the use of community dialogues around such topics.

### 5. Involvement

In light of the previous step, this step aims at encouraging individuals to feel a “community of concern” about end-of-life and a desire to be active in congregational activities.

People need to be actively involved as potential recipients of help. There needs to be a sense of grass-roots involvement, and a need to work at maintaining continuity and communication among the members. As a further aid to establishing a meaningful end-of-life ministry, see Survey Attachment B. The use of this faith community survey enables the initiators to identify potential community members for involvement as well as topics for dialogues.

### 6. Identify with the Faith Community’s Cultural Traditions

Throughout the development of the faith group’s community of concern, beginning with the core group through the involvement of additional members, there is a need to be both representative and understanding of the diversity of the community. This calls for explicit efforts to involve and recruit members that will assure full-fledged representation and participation.

### 7. Action

Members will be fulfilled, empowered, and energized when they move from process and education to action. As the group matures, this will involve developing potential goals and activities for the communal group. This can be an exciting time, as the group moves towards setting the particular role of the faith community regarding end-of-life care. The action needs to be explained, promoted, and then accepted by the community.

## IV. Suggested Projects and Resources for Faith Community Engagement

Congregational dialogues have proven to be a successful method for out-reach, consciousness-raising and generating support. This section presents five examples of projects that can be used by faith communities: interfaith dialogues; “On Our Own Terms” (PBS); “Finding Our Way” (15-part newspaper/web series); “For Everything There Is a Season” (Compassion Sabbath Project); and Advance Directives.

### 1. Congregational Dialogues on Issues at the End of Life

The following suggested dialogue topics are aimed at helping faith groups accomplish a series of goals: a) develop end-of-life conversations among multiple faith communities; b) educate about end-of-life decisions as well as the spiritual dimension of care; c) design a mechanism to assess the human resource potential within congregations with a hope to increase hospice and respite volunteers; d) provide a venue for personal narratives; e) create a supportive environment for those who are primary caregivers, those dealing with aging parents or the dying, and those who are grieving.

#### Suggested Topics

- ☞ To Accept the Things We Cannot Change: The Spirituality of Death and Dying. (i.e.: meaning and death, religious traditions, rituals, spiritual growth)
- ☞ Caring for a Loved One With a Life Threatening Illness. (i.e.: primary caregivers, respite, support groups, chronic illness)
- ☞ The Effects of Life Threatening Illness On the Family System. (i.e.: communication, family dynamics; stress, emotions, support)
- ☞ Grief and Bereavement. (i.e.: process of grieving -- reactions to loss, styles of grieving; mourning rituals; red flags -- potential signs of unhealthy grief)
- ☞ Talking about Death with Your Child. (i.e.: grief in children, discussions with children about death, when a child is dying, the child’s voice and choice, listening to and respecting the child)
- ☞ Courage to Change the Things We Can: Decision Making At the End of Life. (i.e.: advance directives, estate planning, power of attorney, advance care planning, decisions in the critical care unit)
- ☞ How We Die (i.e.: basic physiology and disease processes, signs and symptoms of approaching death, personal death awareness)
- ☞ Providing Freedom From Pain: Palliative Care and Hospice (i.e.: types of pain, medication options, complementary therapies, hospice philosophy, palliative care)
- ☞ How Can I Help? (i.e.: hospice volunteering, lay ministry, organ donations, community outreach, prayer care)
- ☞ To Accept the Things We Cannot Change: The Spirituality of Death and Dying – Part II. (i.e.: meaning and death, religious traditions, rituals, spiritual growth)

- ☞ The High Cost of Dying. (i.e.: meaning and death, religious traditions, rituals, spiritual growth, reimbursement, navigating the health care system)
- ☞ The Details of Dying. (i.e.: calling hours, funeral and memorial services, cremation, other options, legal issues, organ donation)

The topics listed above in the suggested dialogues are examples of conversations that were held in six interfaith congregational study groups that met in 1999-2000 in the greater Portland area. Due to the experiences of these dialogues it is recommended that sessions selected could be grouped to create a mini-series of conversations to be held for three or four consecutive weeks. The topics may be rotated on an annual or biannual basis and at a time liturgically that coincides with reflection on end of life issues (i.e. Jewish High Holy Days, Lent, All Soul's Day, etc.).

Congregational dialogues should be scheduled at a regular time and place for the length of the series. Ideally they should last between 1-1/2 to 2 hours and should be advertised well in advance. It is highly recommended that the clergy introduce the series both through the print media and from the pulpit to encourage attendance. In some communities this series may be done in an interfaith arena to encourage understanding of the commonality of the dying process.

Attachment 'A' outlines potential guidelines for facilitators, session formats and includes a sample of recommended guidelines for session #1, above.

## 2. “On Our Own Terms”

This is an excellent four-part video series from a Bill Moyer's Special on PBS. Accompanying the video is a comprehensive workbook for conducting dialogues around end-of-life and is especially fitting for faith congregations.

## 3. “Finding Our Way: Living with Dying in America”

This is a fifteen-part series published by Knight-Ridder newspapers. The series looks at how Americans approach the subject of death and dying; conversations about dying; widowhood; palliative care; advance directives; cultures and diversity; spirituality and faith; last rites/funerals; care giving; hospice; nursing homes and long term care; when a child is dying; violence and unexpected death; grief and mourning; and visions of the future. On the Web, visit website [www.findingourway.net](http://www.findingourway.net) and get copies of the articles and other resources.

## 4. Advance Directives

The following are some resources which are helpful in directing groups or congregational studies/dialogues regarding advance directives:

- ☞ Five Wishes is a project of the organization, Aging With Dignity, and is a living will which helps people make decisions about their personal, emotional, spiritual, and medical needs and wishes. On the Web, visit the website [www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org) to learn more and order. (888) 594-7437
- ☞ “For Everything There is a Season: Faith Reflections on the End of Life” is a study resource found in the Compassion Sabbath Resource Kit. It provides six sessions for groups to reflect on the meaning of death and dying and the roles of

religious leaders and members of their faith communities in end-of-life care. Contact Midwest Bioethics Center at 816-221-1100 or [www.midbio.org](http://www.midbio.org)

- ☞ “Caring Conversations” is a comprehensive program designed by Midwest Bioethics Center that provides a social ritual to help individuals discuss end-of-life issues and do advance care planning. Contact Midwest Bioethics Center at 816-221-1100 or [www.midbio.org](http://www.midbio.org)

## V. Resources

This section lists a series of resources for congregational use: resources from organizations based in Maine; other resources: websites, books, TV/Video.

### 1. Resources from Organizations Based in Maine

**AARP:** Maine State Office, providing resources for people over age 50. (207) 775-7774

**Aroostock Area Agency on Aging**, serving Aroostock county (800) 439-1789  
<aroostockaging.org>

**Eastern Area Agency on Aging**, serving Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Washington counties (800) 432-7812 <www.eaaa.org>

**Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging**, serving Cumberland and York counties (800) 427-7411 <smaaa.org>

**Seniors Plus**, serving Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties (800) 427-1241  
<seniorsplus.org>

**Senior Spectrum**, serving Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Somerset, and Waldo counties (800) 639-1553 <www.seniorspectrum.com>

**Cancer Community Center** is a nonresidential support center offering free support and programs to people living with cancer and their families and friends. (207) 774-2200 or (877) 774-2200 <www.cancercommunitycenter.org>

**Center for Grieving Children** provides loving support to grieving children and the community through peer support, outreach and education (207) 775-5216, Portland  
<www.cgcmaine.org>

**The Jason Program and Pediatric Palliative Care Program** is a state-wide initiative providing care and support for children and adolescents with life-threatening and terminal illness through direct care, advocacy, education training and consultation. (207) 829-3537 or by email to Kate Eastman at keastman@maine.rr.com <www.jasonprogram.org>

**The Maine Council of Churches** is an organization of more than 600 churches in Maine, providing a forum for faith issues by calling attention to social issues of concern such as end of life, economic justice, criminal justice, etc. (207) 772-1918  
<www.mainecouncilofchurches.org>

**Maine Hospice Council:** A statewide affiliation of hospice programs. Their website provides links to the all hospices located throughout Maine <www.mainehospicecouncil.org> (800) 438-5963.

**Maine Center for End of Life Care.** The Center has information and resources available for loan to individuals and organizations. The Center is located within the Maine Hospice Council and can be reached toll-free at (800) 438-5963.  
<www.mainecenterforendoflifecare.info>

**State of Maine Department of Human Services**, Bureau of Elder and Adult Services: Resource Directory for older people in Maine, with subjects ranging from Adult daycare, Advocacy for Medicare Patients, Consumer fraud, Death and dying to Hospice services, Legal services, Support groups, Transportation services and Volunteer opportunities (800) 262-2232 <[www.state.me.us/dhs/beas/](http://www.state.me.us/dhs/beas/)>

2. Other Resources

Websites

**www.chionline.org** Organization dedicated to supporting and advocating children's hospice services

**www.findingourway.net** Website featuring a 15-part article series focusing on critically ill Americans and their families facing end of life with dignity and compassion, stressing the importance of open discussion Excellent links to nearly 100 resources dealing with conversations about end of life, widowhood, palliative care, advance directives, culture and diversity, spirituality and faith, last rites, care giving, hospice, nursing homes and long term care, when a child is dying, violence and unexpected death, grief and mourning, and visions for the future

**www.medicalert.org** Medic Alert offers a national repository service for members' advance directives and do-not-resuscitate orders. (888) 755.1448 or (888) 633.4298

**www.nhpco.org** National hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

**www.zenhospice.org** Hospice organization with Zen Buddhism flavor; educational resource, Institute on Dying, reaffirming the spiritual dimensions of dying.

Books

Albon, Mitch. *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997).

Bernandin, Joseph Cardinal. *The Gift of Peace*.

Byock, Ira. *Dying Well: Peace and Possibilities at the End of Life*.

Callahan, Daniel. *The Troubled Dream of Life: Living with Mortality*.

Dunn, Hank. *Hard Choices for Loving People: CPR, Artificial Feeding, Comfort Care, and the Patient with a Life-Threatening Illness* (2001 ).

*Light in the Shadows: Meditations While Living with a Life-Threatening Illness* (1999).

Filene, Peter G. *In the Arms of Others: A Cultural History of the Right to Die in America*.

Friedman, Rabbi Dayle A., ed. *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*.

Johnson, Christopher Jay and Marsha G. McGee, ed. *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife*.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *Working It Through: An EKR Workshop on Life, Death, and Transition* (1997).

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*.

Massachusetts Catholic Conference. *In Support of Life: Comfort and Hope for the Dying*. For more information, contact the Conference at (617) 367.6060 or [www.macathconf.org](http://www.macathconf.org)

Midwest Bioethics Center and the Compassion Sabbath Task Force. *Compassion Sabbath Resource Kit*. For more information, contact the Center at (816) 221.1100 or [www.midbio.org](http://www.midbio.org) and click on Compassion Sabbath

Nuland, Sherwin. *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter*.

Olitzky, Rabbi Kerry M. *Jewish Paths toward Healing and Wholeness: A Personal Guide to Dealing with Suffering*.

Quindlen, Anna. *One True Thing* (1994).

Shneidman, Edwin. *Voices of Death: Letters and Diaries of People Facing Death-Comfort and Guidance for All of Us* ( 1995).

UCal, SF School of Nursing Press. *Culture and Nursing Care: A Pocket Guide* ( 1996)  
[www.nurseweb.ucsf.edu/www/books.htm](http://www.nurseweb.ucsf.edu/www/books.htm)

Waters, Brent. *Dying and Death: A Resource for Christian Reflection*.

Webb, Marilyn. *The Good Death: The New American Search to Reshape the End of Life*.

Zerah, Aaron. *As You Grieve: Consoling Words from Around the World*.

### **TV/Videos**

“On Our Own Terms,” Bill Moyers PBS series on death and dying

“One True Thing”

“Shadowlands”

“Six Feet Under,” HBO series

“Steel Magnolias”

“Terms of Endearment”

“Touched by an Angel,” CBS series

“Tuesdays with Morrie”

“Waking Ned Devine”

“W;t” HBO movie with Emma Thompson

## **VI. Attachments**

- A. Guidelines for Facilitators – Sample
- B. Survey: Human Resource Assessment Form
- C. Glossary of Terms Associated with End-of-life Issues
- D. Resources for Worship – Sample Sermons

## 1. Guidelines For Facilitators

Facilitators should be members of the congregation that have experience with either the study circle or with the model below adapted from the PBS Bill Moyer's series "On Our Own Terms". Information about study circle models can be obtained from the Maine Council of Churches office. Experienced facilitators are also available and accessible through your local communities.

Below is a sample format for conducting the monthly sessions. This format should be adapted as needed, to meet the specific requirements and concerns of each particular congregation. Each session should have two facilitators. One will conduct the meeting, while the second person will act as a recorder. The recorder's role is important for the documentation of the types of questions and issues that were presented and for monitoring requests for specific needs of the participants. Individual confidentiality should always be safeguarded by the recorder and addressed by the facilitator when establishing ground-rules for the dialogues.

### **FORMAT FOR SESSIONS**

1. Announcement of theme for the session (each session has a specific theme -- session schedule)
2. Facilitators establish ground rules, perform introductions and describe the format
3. Opening presentation (reading, guest expert, video, recording etc.)
4. <Theme specific education >
5. Three scripted questions about presentations to engage discussion (as needed)
6. Two to three scripted questions to elicit personal narratives appropriate to topic (as needed)
7. <Theme specific education>

### **SAMPLE: RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR SESSION #1**

**THEME: To Accept the Things We Cannot Change: The Spirituality of Death and Dying**

*Topics: meaning and death, religious traditions, rituals, spiritual growth*

Presentation: The clergy from each congregation will be asked to address perspectives and teachings on death and dying that are faith specific and address the topic areas above. A period of questions and answers will follow. (Should allow about 45 -50 minutes total)

Some suggested Questions related to presentation (use as needed)

1. Do you have specific questions about our religious tradition and end-of-life issues?
2. How does the notion of self-reconciliation during the events related to the dying process fit in with our religious tradition?

A five-minute break for refreshments (if available).

Questions related to personal experience around theme of presentation

1. How has a serious illness or death affected you spiritually?
2. During an experience with a death or the dying process, what role did your faith play?
3. During an experience with a death or the dying process what role did your congregation and clergy play?

Evaluation Survey -please have everyone fill one out before leaving

Adjourn

### **SAMPLE: READING PRESENTATION -- SESSION # 1**

from *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, by Lea Tolstoy

Ivan Ilych's physical sufferings were terrible, but worse than the physical sufferings were his mental sufferings, which were his chief torture.

His mental sufferings were due to the fact that that night, as he looked at Gerasim's sleepy; good-natured face with its prominent cheekbones, the question suddenly occurred to him: "What if my whole life has really been wrong?"

It occurred to him that what had appeared perfectly impossible before, namely that he had not spent his life as he should have done, might after all be true . . .

"But if that is so," he said to himself, "and I am leaving this life with the consciousness that I have lost all that was given me and it is impossible to rectify it -- what then?"

He lay on his back and began to pass his life in review in quite a new way .In the morning when he saw first his footman, then his wife, then his daughter, and then the doctor, their every work and movement confined to him the awful truth that had been revealed to him during the night. In them he s-aw himself -- all that for which he bad lived -- and saw clearly that it was not real at all, but a terrible and huge deception which had hidden both life and death. This consciousness intensified his physical suffering tenfold. He groaned and tossed about and pulled cat his clothing which choked and stifled him. And he hated them on that account.

. . . This occurred at the end of the third day, two hours before his death. Just then his schoolboy son had crept softly in and gone up to the bedside. The dying man was still screaming desperately and waving his arms. His had fell on the boy's head, and the boy caught it, pressed it to his lips, and began to cry.

At that very moment Ivan Ilych fell through and caught sight of the light, and it was revealed to him that though his life and not been what it should have been, this could still be rectified. He asked himself, "What is the right thing?" and grew still, listening. Then he felt that someone was kissing his hand. He opened his eyes, looked at this son, and felt sorry for him. His wife came up to him and he glanced at her. She was gazing at him open-mouthed, with undried tears on her nose and cheek and a despairing look on her face. He felt sorry for her too.

2. Survey

**Human Resource Assessment Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle all appropriate responses

1. Are you now, or have you ever been:
  - a. a hospice volunteer
  - b. a caregiver (provided assistance/care for a homebound relative or friend)
  - c. a nurse
  - d. a social worker
  - e. a physician
  - f. other health care provider (please specify)
  - g. an attorney
  - h. an estate planner
  - i. a funeral director
  
2. Would you be willing to be listed as a volunteer or resource for your congregation to provide any of the following services?

companionship/reading, etc.	transportation
grocery shopping/errands	meal preparation
house cleaning/yard work.	legal assistance
bookkeeping/paying bills	nursing or medical care in the home
funeral/memorial planning	other
  
3. Have you designated someone to make health-care decisions for you, should you become unable to do so?

YES	NO
-----	----

Have you discussed your preferences in detail with that person?

YES	NO
-----	----

4. Have you prepared an advance directive, a legal document that states your individual preferences for end-of-life treatment in the event you are unable to make health-care decisions?

	YES	NO
Living Will	YES	NO
Health Care Power of Attorney	YES	NO

If you answered YES to any part of question 4, who has a copy of the document(s)? Circle all appropriate responses.

minister, rabbi, priest	family member(s)
physician	attorney
hospital, nursing home, assisted living center	friend(s)
other	

If you answered NO to question 4, would you like information about or assistance in preparing an advance directive, living will or health care power of attorney?

YES NO

POSSIBLE TOPICS: Please choose and rank by order of preference the top ten topics you would most like to see included in the dialogues:

Advance Directives	Palliative Care	Rituals
Death and children	Primary caregivers	Legacies
Funeral arrangements	Religious traditions	Death
Attending the chronically ill	Community outreach	Grief
Advanced planning	Estate planning	Hospice
Long-term care	Personal narratives	Elder care
Emotional support	Organ donation	Volunteering
Decision-making in critical care environments		

**LITERATURE, VIDEOS, PERSONAL NARRATIVES and CASE STUDIES**

Please list from the various collections you may have or have knowledge of examples which would serve as short introductions for monthly themes. For example, an excerpt from “Tuesdays with Morrie” exploring the theme of attending the chronically ill.

### 3. Glossary of Terms Associated with End-of-Life Issues

**Advance directive:** Describes two kinds of legal documents, living wills and medical powers of attorney, which allow you to give instructions about future medical care and appoint a person to make health-care decisions if you are unable to make them yourself. Each state regulates the use of advance directives differently.

**Benefits and burdens:** Guideline for deciding whether to withhold or withdraw medical treatment for you. A benefit can refer to the successful outcome of a medical procedure or treatment. But a benefit from one point of view can be a burden from another and might be viewed differently by doctors, patients and families. For example, if you are resuscitated, this may be a benefit from your doctor's point of view. For you, though, resuscitation may be a burden if it causes unnecessary suffering.

**Best interests:** A standard for making health-care decisions based on what others believe to be “best” for you by weighing the benefits and the burdens of continuing, withholding or withdrawing treatment.

**Brain death:** The irreversible loss of all brain function. Most states legally define death to include brain death.

**Capacity:** A patient's ability to understand the nature and consequences of health-care decisions and to make an informed decision.

**Clear and convincing evidence:** A high measure of proof that may be required legally to prove your wishes if you are unable to express them. A few states require clear and convincing evidence that an incompetent patient would want to refuse life support before treatment may be stopped unless there is an advance directive authorized by the state's law.

**Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR):** An attempt to resuscitate the heart and lungs by compressing the chest and providing artificial breathing.

**Do-not-resuscitate order (DNR):** A physician's written order instructing health-care providers not to attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation in case of cardiac or respiratory arrest. Although the DNR order is written at the request of you or your family, it must be signed by a physician.

**Double effect:** Results that would be morally wrong if caused intentionally are permissible if foreseen by unintended. An example would be pain medication administered with the intention of relieving pain but has the possible unintended secondary effect of hastening death.

**Euthanasia:** Traditionally used to refer to the hastening of death or “mercy killing.” In voluntary active euthanasia you have given your fully informed consent to an intervention administered to cause death, such as a lethal injection. Involuntary or non-voluntary active euthanasia involves a physician engaging in an act to end your life without your fully informed consent.

**Hospice care:** A program that delivers palliative care to you in the final stages of terminal illness as well as support for your family. Specifically, as defined by Maine Statute:

“a distinct, clearly recognizable entity that exists to provide . . . a range of interdisciplinary services provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to a person who

is terminally ill and that person's family. Hospice services must be delivered in accordance with hospice philosophy”<sup>3</sup>

**Hospice philosophy** : a philosophy of palliative care for individuals and families during the process of dying and bereavement. Hospice philosophy' is life affirming and strengthens the client's role in making informed decisions about care. "Hospice philosophy" stresses the delivery of services in the least restrictive setting possible and with the least amount of technology necessary by volunteers and professionals who are trained to help clients with the physical, social, psychological, spiritual and emotional needs related to terminal illness.<sup>4</sup>

**Life-sustaining or life-support treatment** : Medical procedures such as CPR, mechanical ventilation, artificial nutrition and hydration and dialysis that replace or support an essential bodily function.

**Living will**: A type of advance directive that documents wishes about future medical treatment to guide your family members and doctors in deciding how aggressively to use medical treatments to delay your death. Also called a “directive to physicians,” “health-care declaration,” or “medical directive.”

**Medical power of attorney**: Document that allows you to appoint someone else to make decisions about your medical care if you are unable to do so.

**Palliative care** : “Palliative care is the total active care of patients who have received a diagnosis of a serious, life-threatening illness. Aggressive control of pain and other symptoms and attention to the psychological, social and spiritual issues is paramount. The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best possible quality of life for patients and their families.”<sup>5</sup>

**Physician-assisted suicide** (sometimes referred to as physician-assisted dying): A physician supplies the means, usually a prescription for a lethal dose of medication, by which you can end your life.

**Substituted judgment** : Permits a relative, friend or doctor to make medical decisions for you when you are unable to communicate, basing those decisions on what you would have wanted.

**Surrogate decision-making laws** : Allow an individual or group to make decisions about medical treatments for you in the absence of an advance directive, once you have lost decision-making ability.

**Withholding or withdrawing treatment** : Discontinuing life-sustaining measures.

From the newspaper series “Finding Our Way” part 1, .”A Better Day for Dying” published in the Maine Sunday Telegram, September 16, 2001.

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<sup>3</sup> Rule Chapters for the Department of Human Services, Chapter 120 “Regulations Concerning the Licensing and Functioning of Hospice Programs”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, 1990

#### 4. Resources for Worship – Sample Sermons

The building of an end-of-life community of concern can be aided immeasurably by ritual and prayers. The following list offers a sample of sermon and worship resources. They are a collection of rituals and prayers which convey an understanding of death and dying of specific faith and spiritual communities. The materials which follow are, by necessity, brief and incomplete. It is the wish of the compilers that readers get a sense of how ritual and prayer in community can connect individuals during emotional and sometimes difficult times when dealing with end-of-life issues. One of the strengths of faith and spiritual communities their its ability to be present with those in crisis or pain. Community members stand together and provide strength for those who may be weak and in need of comfort and compassion. Ritual and prayer are two vehicles which may create a safe and caring space.

These offerings are taken from the *Compassionate Sabbath Resource Kit*. These resources are, in turn:

- ☞ Christians: The Dance of Time – A Compassion Sabbath Sample Sermon
- ☞ Jewish: Death and Dying in the Jewish Tradition
- ☞ Islamic: Islamic Worship Resources
- ☞ Native American: Death and Dying from a Native American Spirituality Perspective.

# The Dance of Time— A Compassion Sabbath Sample Sermon

By Mike Graves, PhD



*Genesis 48, Tuesdays with Morrie,*

*One True Thing, Mark 14, and Ecclesiastes 3*

The first four scenes are familiar even if the details are not. The plot of each scenario is timeless even if the particulars are unique. In the first one an old man lies on his bed; he is dying. Everyone knows it, no one more so than he. Call him Jacob, or call him Israel. He is both.

He was born Jacob, the "heel grabber" or "supplanter." The second of twin boys, he was born just minutes after his brother Esau. Many hard years later, he is Israel, "one who strives with God." After a lifetime of wrestling with God and anyone else who got in his way, he is now a tired, old man. His years have been 147 on this earth, and for the last seventeen of these he has lived in Egypt.

His family is summoned, twelve sons and grandsons, too. He struggles to sit up, and there in bed the aged patriarch recounts the faithfulness of God who promised him and his descendants a land of their own. With fading eyesight, he awkwardly places his hand on their heads, blessing each of them one at a time. His time with Joseph though is special. Joseph, his favorite child, the one he thought had died. And now Joseph is there for his father's death.

The text says, "When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people"

(Gen 49:33). They buried him in God's promised land, just as Jacob had wished.

It is a familiar plot indeed, despite the ancient peculiarities. And no wonder it is familiar, as the Ecclesiastes preacher writes, "A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: A time for being born and a time for dying" (Eccl3:1-2). And those scenes get replayed all the time—birth and death, birth and death. The dance of time. It is the story of us all.

It is the story of Jacob. It is also Morrie's story, the second scene. Have you heard of the book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*? Morrie Schwartz was a sociology professor at Brandeis University who died from Lou Gehrig's disease. Mitch Albom, one of his former students, tells the story. He opens with these words:

The last class of my old professor's life took place once a week in his house, by a window in the study where he could watch a small hibiscus plant shed its pink leaves. The class met on Tuesdays. It began after breakfast. The subject was *The Meaning of Life*. It was taught from experience.

It was not just the hibiscus that was shedding its leaves but Morrie as well, so to speak. Morrie had been a bundle of energy, a person who dearly loved to dance. The style of music wasn't the point, Morrie enjoyed dancing:

He used to go to this church in Harvard Square every Wednesday night for something called "Dance Free." They had flashing lights and booming speakers and Morrie would wander in among the mostly student crowd, wearing a white T-shirt and black sweatpants and a towel around his neck, and whatever music was playing, that's the music to which he danced. He'd do the lindy to Jimi Hendrix. He twisted and twirled, he waved his arms like a conductor on amphetamines, until sweat was dripping down the middle of his back.

"Then the dancing stopped." What a powerful image! "Then the dancing stopped."

Morrie was diagnosed with ALS and told that he was dying. He was stunned, to be sure, but not stopped. He couldn't dance but he refused to quit living. Listening to music became one of life's gifts, something to be treasured. It would move him to tears, and often at night he would close his eyes and soar with the sounds of opera.

Three times he would appear on "Nightline" with Ted Koppel, telling his story and inspiring those who were dying to keep on living until they did die, and inspiring others to care for the dying. In his dependence on others, Morrie quipped, "I get to be a baby one more time." And he was right, the same way parents sprinkle powder or rub baby oil on their little one, Mitch rubbed lotion into Morrie's dying skin. It was a therapy of touch.

The Tuesdays came and went, Morrie's body slowly failing him, his breathing strained and raspy. Then came one last Tuesday. They spoke of their love for each other. Morrie's "eyes got small, and then he cried, his face contorting like a baby who hasn't figured how his tear ducts work." Mitch writes, "I held him close for several minutes. I rubbed his loose skin. I stroked his hair. I put a palm against his face and felt the bones close to the flesh and the tiny wet tears, as if squeezed from a dropper." They said goodbye that Tuesday, and a few days later Morrie died.

"A season is set for everything," says the preacher, "a time for every experience under heaven: A time for being born and a time for dying." It is the story of Morrie and Jacob and Kate Gulden too. Did you see the movie "One True Thing"? It's based on Anna Quindlen's novel by the same name. The story is told by Kate's daughter, Ellen, who describes herself as, "smug, self-involved, successful, and what in my circles passed for happy." She has a budding career in front of her, so it is with reluctance that she moves back home to care for her dying mother. In one scene, Kate claims to feel fine, "but her smile was bleak, without light or warmth." Ellen begins to realize more fully what is happening: "For the first time I thought of what it must be like to know that you were going to die, that the trees would bud, flower, leaf, dry, die, and you would not be there to see any of it. It was like standing too close to the fire; my mind leapt back."

At first the young Ellen figures they will simply drift without anything much to do, but surprisingly her mother suggests a project, a book club for two. What a marvelous idea! They decide on three titles: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, and *Anna Karenina*. It turns out to be a gift from God, the time together, the books, the discussions. "Those books gave shape to our days," writes Ellen in telling the story. "They were distinct from the chemotherapy regimen, although we always took books with us when we went to the hospital to wait, and my mother often read while she was lying on the recliner as the chemicals dripped slowly, tiny raindrops into the tributaries of her body."

Kate Gulden manages to keep her composure throughout the whole ordeal, except on one occasion. The two of them were passing through the lobby of the hospital "just as a woman was rising from a wheelchair at the automatic doors, turning to take a sleeping newborn from the arms of a nurse to carry it out to a waiting car." The rhythms of life, the dance of time.

As time goes by the Gulden living room is transformed into a bedroom of sorts, with hospital bed and other paraphernalia. Like the patriarch Jacob, Kate's eyesight fades so that she can no longer read, but the daughter Ellen determines that she will finish *Anna Karenina*, even though she knows how it ends. The same could be said about caring for her mom. Death is coming but they will live until it does, and Ellen is there for her when finally it comes.

The plot is familiar indeed. It's even in the gospels. Jesus dies willingly, to be sure, but his coming death weighs heavy on him. Those closest to him seem incapable of noticing his pain, but not everyone is oblivious. This story in Mark's gospel, for instance, tells of a nameless woman who anoints Jesus with a costly ointment. The flask is broken, never to be resealed. Gently the oil pours down on Jesus' head, making its way into his beard. Somehow she knows he needs to receive this as much as she needs to give it. The scene is intimate. She ministers to him before his death. Those who are present call it waste, but Jesus calls it a "good service," literally a "beautiful work." Jesus declares, "Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark 14:9). What an amazing statement, and what a beautiful work indeed!

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Interfaith Dialogues for End of Life Ministry

The four scenes are different, to be sure, and yet the same. If the truth be known, there is a fifth scene—the story of us all. Ecclesiastes describes the rhythms of life~ the life of everyone of us—a time for this and a time for that. Interestingly enough, the preacher employs two different terms, "a season, and a time." The translators of the Septuagint use the words "Chronos" and "Kairos."

From Chronos, we get the word chronology. Chronos is the ticking of the clock. It refers to time as a quantity. Chronos denotes the never-ending march of one event after another. Chronos is writing down in your Day-Timer, "Doctor's appointment, mow the grass, wash clothes, change the oil in the car, attend a concert and dinner out that evening." That's Chronos. Then the doctor says a word, maybe "malignant" or "inoperable." Suddenly the dance of time changes rhythm.

But Kairos is more about a quality of time than a quantity. Kairos is not something you write down in your daily planner. If you're lucky, it is something that happens to you. Kairos is mowing the grass and suddenly giving thanks to God for the brilliant greens woven throughout the yard. Kairos is reading a good book to a dying friend and being moved, not simply by the words on the page but by the gift of the moment shared.

Even as our loved ones run out of Chronos, we can be there to make the most of it, a kind of holy Kairos:

A time of weeping.

A time of laughing.

A time of mourning.

A time of maybe even dancing. A time of speaking.

A time of keeping silence. A time of embracing.

And finally a time of letting go.

The dance of time. Amen.

## **Resources for Corporate Worship**

### **Compassion Sabbath Celebrations**

February 2000

#### ***Invocations***

Most Holy God,

We gather this day to direct our thoughts toward dying. We hardly know the words to speak. But we do know that your presence is with us, that your healing goes beyond our brokenness, that your peace touches our fears and anxieties. Gather us up in love that transcends our living and our dying, and bless us in this service of worship. Amen.

Eternal One (Holy, Immortal One),

We come to you to think about life and all its possibilities. ..we come to think about approaching death and what that means for the rest of our days. ..we come to weave our yesterdays and tomorrows into your love. We come to this present moment to respect old vows and make new ones, to replenish our hope and deepen our faith, to confess our transgressions and receive your forgiveness. Be with us now and in the hour of our death. Amen.

#### ***Litanies***

Leader: To everything there is a season.

People: Some move from the season of life to death. Leader: We know all people die.

People: We know all people ought to die with grace and dignity and compassion.

Leader: How do we help that happen?

People: May God's presence bless our uncertainty and embrace our fearful hearts as we learn new things together.

Leader: It is Compassion Sabbath. A day to speak of death and dying. It is not a subject we welcome.

People: We bring our anxieties, our fears, our silence and our tears and lift them before our God.

Leader: God knows our emptiness and dread of loneliness and will bless us with love and mercy.

People: We are reminded that even in the face of death, the gift of new life is offered.

### ***Communion Prayers***

As friends, family, and body of Christ, we gather at the table of the Lord. Here we touch hearts; exchange glances filled with joy and wonder, and try to grasp the mystery of what it means to be created and recreated in a holy image. We receive with thanksgiving this loaf and cup—we return our thanks for these gifts for they remind us that we are loved from life to death to life again. Let us pray:

God, in remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, we eat this meal. Though we may face dying in our own lives, we remember the one in whose name we gather -- we remember the life that gives our lives meaning, the death that blesses our own deaths, and the resurrection that gives us all hope. Amen.

### ***Benedictions***

Bless our leave taking that in life and death, we may share the bread of life and the cup of salvation with those who hunger and thirst for God's love and forgiveness. Amen.

May the blessings we have received here sustain us and strengthen us for all the days ahead, so that we might be witnesses of God's grace, love, and mercy in the world. Amen.

In the spirit of our Lord, may you be able to preserve life and embrace death, remembering his words, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age." Amen-

Go now in peace, and not in pieces, for the God of peace goes with you. Amen.

Depart now in the fellowship of God our Creator and as you go, remember: in the goodness of God you were born into this world, by the grace of God you have been kept all the day long, even unto this hour, and by the love of God (fully revealed in the face of Jesus) you are being redeemed. Amen.

***Prayers for the Gathered Community***

O gracious Creator, Giver of Life,

We come to you in a time of worship to celebrate the gift of life. We strive to live the good life but give no consideration to what a good death might be like. Yet life is a gift, and its end an important beginning.

Why is it, God, that death seems so much larger than life. ..that illness seems to last so much longer than health? Why is it that we fall silent in the moments we should have the most to say. ..and feel the most helpless around the ones who need us most?

How easy it is to turn away from those who are hurting-to retreat from all that frightens us, to recoil from everything that reminds us that death comes to us all. When we see heartache and pain in others, help us to respond with your love-to speak a watchword of hope-to open our hearts in your divine compassion-to be present for others in life and in death as we desire others to be for us in our time of dying.

God, grant us opportunities to speak to those we love while there is time. ..to exchange gifts of honesty and forgiveness as they are needed ...to tell the stories that shape and form us. ..to eat and drink deeply of the laughter and tears that fashion our days. Help us to speak our souls' desires so that when the end comes, we will have no regrets.

You show us how to love and tell us that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Reveal a new vision of that love so that our faith may be assured and our courage strengthened in the days ahead.

May we arise every morning in your love and lie down at night with your name on our lips-that when we close our eyes in death, our lives will have been a song of praise to you. Amen.

Most gracious and faithful God,

Your people come before you not knowing how to admit there is anything wrong. We hurt and will not confess it. We do not mention our inner struggles even to those closest to us for fear they will leave us alone. We need to cry, so we wait for rain so no one will know. We hope our clenched teeth will pass for a smile. We build a house with a fearless facade, but the foundation stands on shifting sand. We let ourselves and our loved ones suffer illness and disease enclosed by tubes and machinery and monitors-because we see death as an ultimate failure and downfall that we must always resist. We keep on until our bravado is exhausted and our confidence gone. We know that we are only a heartbeat away from eternity, but we live as though we are immortal.

Good God, show us the truth. Enfold us in your arms and hold us close. Whisper a tender word of mercy and love; kiss us with your grace. Show us that beyond our sorrow and suffering is your great kindness that never abandons us to ourselves. Help us hear the promises you have made and believe them. Unite our hearts in gratitude and praise for the blessings you have bestowed on us.

God, you create each day as a new season of grace and time for healing-but salvation and healing come in mysterious ways. When the recovery of our bodies is no longer possible-touch our emotions and souls. When we begin to slip away, gather us under your wings. When we can only close our eyes and turn our heads to the wall, recall our spirits to the center of life to dwell in your peace and grace. ..until the day we are made whole again on the other side of death. Amen.

### **Rituals for Impending Death**

Rituals are celebrations that support a very humane and natural event. They create a sense of place and belonging that surrounds the dying and those close to them with support and care, whether they are at home, in a J

resident care facility, or in the hospital. The following components of ritual may be used to help the faith community minister to the seriously ill and dying.

### ***Preparation***

It is very important to create a bit of "sacred space," especially if the person is in a sterile, impersonal environment. What each person's sacred space looks like is dependent on what that person finds meaningful; what has been most important to that person in life. For example, on a table within sight of the dying person, you may wish to drape a piece of beautiful fabric or hang a banner nearby. Place objects that have meaning to him or her. .. photographs, flowers, and candles (do not light candles if oxygen is being used!) and other religious items, including the communion elements, should be present but so should the person's keepsakes ( e.g., teddy bears or books, or one's favorite music or perfumes). Remember it is the body that houses the spirit, that lets the mind soar. Remember too, that the divine often uses ,natural things to reveal itself to us-God is our "rock," and we are the "apple" of God's eye. It is the "hound of heaven" that pursues us to our destiny.

### ***Call to Worship***

We come together in this time and place because we love and are loved by N . As she prepares for death we want to show how much we care and support her in this venture. This is not easy for any of us, for in helping prepare for this death, we face our own mortality. So we also come to share in her wisdom and viewpoint; and the culmination of all her life's happenings.

### ***Opening Prayer***

Loving God, you have been constant during the changes in our lives, our refuge during life's storms, our strength in times of weakness, and our hope when we are desolate or devastated. We know that you never desire or will that any of your children should suffer. We gather this day as people in special need.

We are fragile; we need to know your presence. We need you to enfold us in your everlasting arms and bear us up on eagles' wings. We turn to you knowing that you have promised to walk with us, knowing that you love us, knowing that when joy comes to us or life departs-you are there in the coming and the going. We are thankful for the gift of life shared with us and with this our beloved. We are grateful for the many ways this beloved touched our minds and hearts.

We have the promise of your presence. We know our names are written in the palm of your hand, that the hairs of our heads are numbered, that not even a sparrow falls without your noticing -- how humbled and gladdened we are that you should be mindful of us.

God, hear the unspoken and unspeakable questions of our hearts. Gather them up to your great heart and gather those who have been trying to speak these mysteries. You know that the death of this beloved one is so close-and that our own death looms large within us. Today, death seems bigger than life itself. It closes in on us. It threatens to destroy our last thread of faith and hope. But you have told us that you will be alight in a darkness, that in death, you will show us life, that in our fear of being separated from all that is vital and joyful and lovely, you will be our firm assurance that love will not let us go.

God, you know us. You suffer with us. You care about our anguish. In you, love endures all things, bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things.

In your love, we find faith and courage to live and breathe and have our being. When understanding stumbles, sanity waivers, and reason fails-all that is left is your love and our trust-trust in your goodness and mercy, in Christ's resurrection, in the power of your spirit to give us wholeness when we are broken and brokenhearted, serenity where there is none, to give us life in the face of death.

Have mercy on us all, God. Lift our heavy hearts, give us good hope in your promise of eternal life and courage for living the rest of our days. We are in pieces, grant us your peace. Amen.

### *Scriptures/Words*

Because children, young people, and the elderly will often respond to different texts, and because we often fall back on familiar, personal favorites, it is wise to consult the church on these matters. Various lectionaries offer a list of readings arranged thematically for ministering to the sick, or for funerals, and related services.

In God even our death finds meaning. We come into the presence of God in trust and faithfulness, for God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord (Lamentations 3:25-26).

For your part, Lord, do not withhold your kindness from me! May your love and faithfulness constantly preserve me (Psalm 40:11).

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High . . . to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night (Psalm 92:1-2).

Jesus said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do r give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).

We also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far-gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:11-12).

### ***Reconciliation***

In any intimate partnership, family, or community, the unspeakable happens and must be put right. Someone's feelings have been hurt, or angry words have been spoken or outright harm has been done. Now, once and for all, let the blame be lifted-give and receive the word and signs of forgiveness. Nothing causes greater pain than leaving words and deeds unspoken and undone. Confession and pardon are very healing acts. If anointing with oil is a significant gesture in your tradition, it may be used at this time.

O, God of compassion and redemption, hear our prayer. No one's life is perfect, we are all creatures of light and darkness, good and evil, forgive us as we forgive each other. Gather us up, heal our hurts, and renew the bonds between us now and beyond this life. Amen.

### ***Handing over obligations and sharing hope***

Part of being human is our love for the world that is no less strong for being transitory. The dying one may have a vision of the future that he or she would like to share, or the need to entrust his or her responsibilities to another. The passing may be made easier if those present promise to remember this vision and to carry on these tasks in the person's absence.

Most gracious God, who created the world in fullness, it is so hard to let go. We have held on tightly; now we are afraid that in our absence something or someone will be forgotten. We even fear that we will be forgotten. We pray you: gather up our unfinished plans and dreams-we hand them and ourselves into your keeping-you who promised never to forget us. Open the heart of N so that all the responsibilities and hopes he has had may overflow on us. Open our hearts, too, to accept and treasure these responsibilities and to recognize N in them. May we all be able to share in the peace that you give. Amen.

### ***Sharing Goodness***

Are we able to tell the dying all the ways their goodness has surrounded us throughout our time together? Recall the good times and memories, recount

the good things this person has done, share when you have most felt their goodness in your life. When everyone has shared, join hands and pray:

O most gracious God of Goodness, bless this circle that stands before you. We have had the privilege of sharing so much in life, work, and play: humor and sadness, celebration and sorrow. As you take our beloved back to be with you, help us keep these memories alive in our hearts. In the trust and affection that has grown among us our lives have been touched and enriched. We have known N\_\_\_\_\_ support and love all of our days-and will return it full measure until our last breath. We believe in the blessing of keeping vigil-bless these days and hours. When the circle is finally broken by death, strengthen the circle of love that brings us fully into eternal life. Amen.

All present may gently lay hands on the dying person and say together:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

End with a little private time and a hug or kiss from each one present.

### **Other suggestions for rituals**

“Ribbons, baubles, bangles, and beads” -- all of us, have accumulated cherished objects. They are precious, semiprecious, or meaningful only for sentimental reasons. These objects, too, can help us tell our story, and create new meaning even as the old life is dying.

Assist the dying one in telling where personal possessions should go and perhaps even helping in dividing up cherished objects (e.g., fishing tackle, golf clubs, photographs, collectibles, jewelry, books, favorite toys, quilts, medals, and trophies) among loved ones and friends. Accompany this with a time of prayer.

Viewing photographs and videos together can provide a marvelous time for memory and life review; and putting remembrances down on paper can also be helpful. Use dictation or a recorder, if the recording device is not obtrusive.

Celebrate with the dying: offer the sacraments unique to your faith community (e.g., communion, anointing, and baptism) and create new rituals. Once a dancer I knew was treated to a liturgical dance, celebrated by her friends in her own backyard. The dancers were dressed in all colors of the rainbow-which the dancers knew was very symbolic to the dying woman. She was included in the dance even though she could not participate. The colorful scarves swirled around her as she laughed and reached out for them. After her death, this same dance was shared at her memorial service -- this time the scarves embraced her husband and children. It created a bridge between the two events and was a source of great comfort to the family. This same couple (when death drew near) melted their wedding rings down together and had a piece of gold jewelry designed for each of their children, a powerful reminder of the love that had created them and the woman who bore them.

Another example of a powerful ritual that can be given a Christian interpretation included a number of children in a family that was losing a child. A family friend who also performed as a clown came to the celebration in costume bringing bubbles and balloons and all the traditional clown paraphernalia. After performing several magic tricks to gain the children's interest, the clown joined with them in a game of "Ring around the Rosie." After the song ended, the clown went around the circle, lifting each child heavenward and setting them back down on the floor. At last, the clown approached the dying child, pretended to lift her, and gave her "spirit" a little toss toward the heavens and then stood looking up and waving and smiling. Everyone joined in-everyone understood (without words being uttered) the deeper meaning the action. It gave the children (the living and the dying) a powerful feeling of inclusion and a chance to say goodbye in their own frame of reference.

### ***Prayer for One Who Is Approaching Death***

Merciful and loving God, on a day when I have made the decision to look my death squarely in the face, I ask your blessing of courage, hope, and faith. Give me patience in my treatment, laughter in days of despair, and the strength of your love in all of my needs.

I know that you are my great physician, and I give thanks for the many gifts of healing that have been granted to me over the course of my life. They have been part of the wholeness and holiness of my days. I am also most painfully aware that the gift of health is no longer mine. I had come to know life as a balance of health and sickness, just as time is a balance between day and night. It will take some getting used to-this new situation I find I am in.

Precious Lord and gracious God, teach me that true and total healing that includes healing of my soul and my attitudes. Even as my physical health fades, help me find new soundness in my soul and spirit and heart.. I ask now for your touch of healing and a right relationship with you, that I might prepare for the life to come.

I know you as the divine healer and I continue to ask for healing -- knowing that healing may now take place on the other side of the experience I call death. I place myself in your hands. Whatever comes, I ask for acceptance of your holy design for me. Help me embrace whatever you have decreed for my life. Help me notice anew all the blessings of this life that are still mine so that I might carry them with me as I am reborn to everlasting life.

God, I have rested in your goodness all my days. Continue to pour out the benediction of your peace and grace on me so I might forever know myself as your precious child. Wherever I am, and in whatever condition I find myself, make me holy. [Optional: God, I have made enemies in my life and never acknowledged you. Yet you have found me now, forgiven me, and called me to rest in your goodness-pour out. ..and the rest follows as before. ]

God, I believe that you are all powerful and mighty. Be with me as I celebrate my life. I believe your love has the power to transform lives. Be with me as I seek new life.

I believe that you always sanctify the life force within us. Let your spirit loose in me so that all of the days I have left I might create hope for others. Accept my love and my thanksgiving. Amen.

### **Hymn Selections**

Hymns that deal with illness, compassion, hope, courage, comfort, emotional, and spiritual healing can be a great comfort to the dying and their families and faith community. Death is perhaps not the time to try new music but to use the music that is well known and meaningful to those whose faith is bodied forth in song. Today, more and more hymnody is being sung-much of which cuts across the traditions. The following selections are from a variety of hymnals (Christian Church/Disciples of Christ, Catholic, Lutheran, Nazarene, and United Methodist). Although they are from Christian sources, some of the texts are based on the Old Testament only and make no specific Christian references. Some are excellent hymn choices for corporate worship; some are better for private devotions or small bedside services. Many of the titles are found in all the hymnals, some are exclusive to one.

*RitualSong* (GIA Publications, 1996) -- Roman Catholic

"Be Not Afraid," Isaiah 43:2-3; Luke 6:20ff., No. 734

"Come to Me, O Weary Traveler," Luke 23:42, No. 769

"On Eagle's Wings," Psalm 91, No. 740

"Remember Your Love," Psalm 27, No. 550

"How Can I Keep from Singing?" No. 733

"Precious Lord, Take My Hand," No. 754

"Eye Has Not Seen," 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, No. 758

"With A Shepherd's Care," No. 738

"You Are Mine," No. 762

"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say," No. 768

"Covenant Hymn," Ruth 1:16, No. 904

“Steal Away to Jesus,” No. 873

This hymnal also includes a Service for the Anointing of the Sick.

*Sing to the Lord* (Lillenas Publishing, 1993) -- Nazarene

“Balm in Gilead,” Jeremiah 8:22, No. 563

“Day by Day and With Each Passing Moment,” Deut.33:25, No. 105

“God Leads Us Along,” Isaiah 43:2, No. 92

“Children of the Heavenly Father,” Psalm 103:13, No. 93

“God will Take Care of You,” Peter 5:7, No. 107

“He Leadeth Me,” Psalm 23:2, No. 99

“His Eye is on the Sparrow,” Luke 12:6, No. 103

“How Firm a Foundation,” Psalm 119:89, No. 689

“I Need Thee Every Hour,” John 15:5, No. 600

“It is Well With My Soul,” Colossians 3:15, No. 554

“Under His Wings,” Psalm 91:4, No. 557

“Abide with Me,” Deuteronomy 31:6, No. 584

“Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,” Deuteronomy 33:27, No. 596

The *United Methodist Hymnal* (United Methodist Publishing House, 1989)—Methodist

“Come, Ye Disconsolate,” No. 510

“O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go,” No. 480

“Dear Lord, For All In Pain,” No. 458

“Near to the Heart of God,” No. 472

“Be Still, My Soul,” No. 534

“O Thou, In Whose Presence,” No. 518

“Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior,” No. 351

“Because He Lives,” No. 364

“Hymn of Promise,” No. 707

*Lutheran Book Of Worship* (Augsburg Publishing, 1978) -- Lutheran

“The King Of Love My Shepherd Is,” No. 456

“Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer,” No. 343

“I Know Of A Sleep In Jesus Name,” No. 342

“My Faith Looks Up To Thee,” No. 479

“The Lord's My Shepherd,” Psalm 23, No. 451

*Chalice Hymnal* (Chalice Press, 1995) -- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

"Sweet Hour of Prayer," No. 570

"Stand By Me," No. 629

"I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," No. 677

"Blessed Quietness," John 14:16-19, No. 267

"In the Garden," John 20:11-17, No. 227

"If You Will Trust in God to Guide You," Psalm 55:22-23, No. 565

"Comfort, Comfort You My People," Isaiah 40:1-8, No. 122

"All the Way My Savior Leads Me," No. 559

"Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah," No. 622

"Out of the Depths," Psalm 130:1, No. 510

The following would be ideal for corporate worship:

"Fill the World with Love," No. 467

"Heal Me, Hands of Jesus," No. 504

"Healer of Our Every Ill," No. 506

"Sometimes God Begins a Project," No. 507

# Death and Dying in the Jewish Tradition

by Rabbi Nathan Goldberg



Writing about Jewish worship confronts the author with many difficulties. Imagine trying to explain the Christian approach to this subject: one would have to include everything from the liturgical to the free church tradition -- from Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism to the Pentecostal churches, from high church Episcopalianism to Unitarianism and all points in between. This author has chosen texts from the more traditional elements in Judaism. The Jewish tradition is, however, far richer than this one strand. The resources listed at the end of this section can help you fill in any gaps in your understanding.

## Prayer before Dying

It is written that everyone who makes his confession before his death has a share in the world to come (San.6:2).

The following prayer is traditionally said by the dying. Its historical nucleus is the confession of sins (May my death be an atonement for all my sins that I have committed before you). It has, however, been embellished over the years to include a declaration of absolute trust in God and to end with the *Shema* -- the affirmation of faith based on Deuteronomy 6:4.

I give thanks to You, Lord my G-D and G-D of my ancestors, in whose hands is my healing and death, for all the life and necessities of life you have given me. May it be your will that I receive a whole recovery, and if G-O forbid I die, may my death be an atonement for all my sins that I have committed before you. Give me my portion in the Garden of Eden, and may I merit a place in the world to come with the righteous. G-D, please heal me.

I believe wholly in the true G-D, whose name is Truth, and in the thirteen basic principles. I forgive everyone and ask that everyone forgive me.

Who is like you, G-D, forgiving and overlooking iniquity for the remnant of G-D's people; who does not remain in anger for he desires to be kind.

He will return us in compassion, conquer our sins, and cast into the sea all our iniquities.

In your hand I trust my spirit. Redeem me, O Lord, the true G-D.

May the Lord bless and guard you. May the Lord shine his countenance on you and be gracious with you. May he turn his face to you and bless you with peace.

For your salvation I long, G-D, I long for your salvation; G-D, for your salvation I long.

The Lord is the true G-D as is Moses and the Torah.

Blessed is the name of his honorable kingdom forever.

Psalms 121, 130, and 91. These psalms may be recited at choice. Each of them, but perhaps especially Psalm 91 expresses the worshiper's absolute trust in G-D even as it offers G-D's reassurance to the worshiper that all will be well. (Psalm 91 has traditionally been recited after a death by mourners carrying the corpse to the cemetery, and for the same reasons: that mourners may be reassured in the midst of sadness and rededicated in trust.)

Master of the universe who reigned before the creation. At the time when all was made according to his desire, G-D was proclaimed king. After all has ceased, he will reign alone. He was, he is, and he shall be in glory. He is one; there is no other to compare with him. Without beginning, without end, power and dominion belong to him. He is my banner and shelter, the portion of my cup on the day I call. In G-D's hands I entrust my spirit, at the time of sleeping and awakening. As long as my spirit is with me, G-D is mine and I will not be afraid.

Therefore we hope before you, Lord our G-D, to speedily experience your powerful glory when idols shall be removed from the land and false gods will be destroyed. A perfect world shall be in G-D's kingdom. All humans will call your name and all the wicked will face you. All will know

that every knee must bend and every mouth must swear by you. Before you, Lord our G-D, they will bend and prostrate, and give honor to your name in grace. They will embrace the yoke of your kingdom, and you will hasten to lead them forever. For dominion is yours and you shall reign in honor for eternity. As it is written in your Torah, the Lord shall reign forever and it is said, the Lord will rule over all the land and on that day the Lord shall be one and his name one.

Hear, a Israel, the Lord is G-D, the Lord is one.

Blessed is the name of G-D's honorable kingdom forever.

The Lord is G-D.

### **After the Time of Death**

The Lord has given; the Lord has taken away. Blessed is the name of the Lord for now and forever.

The Rock, his work is pure for all his ways are just. He is a G-O of faith without blemish, righteous and fair is He.

### **Other Jewish prayers That May Be Used to Comfort the Dying**

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we remember them.  
In the glowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.  
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.  
In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer, we remember them.  
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.  
In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.  
When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.  
When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.  
When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.  
So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us, as  
We remember them.

-- Jewish prayer, from the *Rabbi's Manual*, 1988

Birth is a beginning and Death a destination;  
From childhood to maturity and youth to age,  
From innocence to awareness and ignorance to knowing,  
From weakness to strength or strength to weakness, and back again,  
From health to sickness and back, we pray, to health again,  
From offense to forgiveness, from loneliness to love,  
From joy to gratitude, from pain to compassion,  
From grief to understanding, from fear to faith, from defeat to defeat  
Until looking backward or ahead, we see that  
Victory lies not at some high place along the way,  
But in having made the Journey, stage by stage.

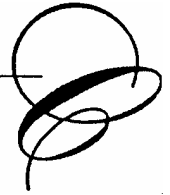
-- traditional Yom Kippur prayer

### **Further Resources**

1. Rabbi Nathan Goldberg, Jewish Community Chaplain will be glad to answer any inquiries you may have or link you to other local Jewish resources. He can be reached by phone at 913498-7416.
2. Maurice Lamm, 1972. *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishing. Rabbi Lamm's text is widely used by both liberal and Orthodox seminaries.
3. Smith Weintraub, editor. 1994. *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. This book is a compendium of essays by rabbis of all denominations dealing with the use of psalms in healing.

# Islamic Worship Resources

By Kathy Riegelman



These worship resources were selected for the *Compassion Sabbath* project from materials provided by members of the Kansas City Muslim community. They are intended for corporate worship and private devotions focusing on the spiritual aspects of death and dying. I am deeply indebted to Dr. A. Rauf Mir of the Muslim community in Kansas City for his help in selecting and editing these prayers and scriptures; and to Abdallah Idrees Ali, PhD, for his able editorial assistance. The Reverend Vern Barnet, minister in residence of the Center for Religious Experience and Study, has also been instrumental in this project. Rev. Barnet provided the author with an overall vision of the resource packet, and his commitment to guiding her and clarifying particular issues is deeply appreciated.

## **Prayers .**

### ***Prayers of Petition***

From *The Ring of the Dove* by Ibn Hazm

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe. May Allah's peace and blessing be upon Muhammad (S.A.W.). There is no deity but Allah, Most-Forbearing, Supreme in Honor. Glory be to Allah, Lord of the Great Throne. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe. O Allah! I seek of You the means of (deserving) Your mercy, the means of (ascertaining) Your forgiveness, the protection from all mistakes, the benefit from all virtue and the freedom from all sins. O Allah! Leave no mistake of mine without Your forgiveness, nor any stress without Your relief, nor any need of which You approve without being fulfilled by You, O Most Merciful of the merciful."

(After reciting this du<sup>ʿa</sup>, one should state the specific need for which the du<sup>ʿa</sup> was made).

Finally, there is separation that is caused by death, that final parting. .. Here all tongues are baffled: the cord of every remedy is severed. No other course remains open but patient fortitude.

O Allah! Grant health to my body, to my hearing and to my sight  
(repeat 3 times).

#### A Prayer of Light

O God appoint for me light in my heart and light in my tomb and light before me and light behind me; light on my right hand and light on my left; light above me and light below me; light in my sight and light in my perception; light in my countenance and light in my flesh; light in my blood and light in my bones. Increase to me light, and give me light, and appoint for me light, and give me more light; give me more light!

#### The "Old Age Prayer"

O Lord may the end of my life be the best of it, may my closing acts be my best acts, and make the best of my days the day when I shall Meet Thee.

#### Prayer When Retiring to Sleep

In your Name, O Lord, I lay my side (to sleep). And by (Your leave) I raise it up. So if You take away my soul (during sleep) forgive it, and if You send it back (after sleep) protect it even as You protect Your pious servants.

#### Prayer after an Unpleasant Dream

Grace to Allah under all circumstances.

#### *Prayers When in Distress*

##### When faced with a hardship

O Allah! There is nothing easy except what You make easy, and You make the difficult easy if it be Your will.

##### When visiting a sick person

O Allah! Remove the hardship, a Lord of mankind. Grant cure for You are the Healer. There is no cure but from You, cure which leaves no illness behind (recite while touching the sick person).

## Prayer on the Death of the Righteous

My Lord how can I despair of thy good regard for me after death, when ,  
in my life-time Thy treatment of me has been nothing but beautiful?

Cause us at the hour of death to repeat the *shahada* knowing what it  
is that we say. And be compassionate to us with the compassion of the  
lover to his loved one.

Give us the happy ending that You didst give to Thy saints, and make  
the best of our days the day when we shall meet Thee.

Have a good confidence in God that He will generously grant you a  
good ending, and that He will ease for you the pangs of death and the  
constriction of the grave.

The Prophet said: "Verily none of you shall die except confident in  
God the Most High." And he went to see a man in his death agony and  
said to him, "How do you find yourself?" He replied, "I find myself in fear  
of my sins and in hope of the mercy of my Lord." Then the Prophet said,  
"These two are never united in the heart of a servant in this world without  
God giving him what he hoped for and securing him against what he  
feared."

## *Prayer on the Afterlife*

I bear witness that Thy promise is a verity, and the meeting with Thee is a  
verity, and the Fire is a verity and that the Hour is coming without a doubt,  
and that Thou will raise up those in the tombs.

I reckon against the two tempers of the tomb, "There is no god but  
God,"

I reckon against the darkness of the tomb, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against [the] blast of the trumpet, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the prolonged standing (at the assize) and the sweat  
from fear and heat, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the exposure before the All-Powerful, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the standing before the Generous Forgiving One, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the questioning on the small and the great (sins), "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the erection of the scales and the knowledge of the weights, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the bringing out of the books, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the waiting for the call when the decrees of destiny are allotted, "There is no god but God,"

I reckon against the crossing of the Bridge, "There is no god but God,"  
I reckon against the arrival in Gehenna, "There is no god but God."

#### On Death and the Existence of the Soul

Our Lord, forgive us our sins and acquit us of our evil deeds, and take us among the pious.

#### On Loneliness and Constriction (Arabic prayer)

Have mercy on me, laid on my bed, when the hands of my loved ones turn me over. Have mercy on me, laid on the washing table when compassionate neighbours wash my corpse. Have mercy on me, borne along, when my relatives hold the sides of my bier. Have mercy, in that dark house, on my homesickness, my strangeness, my solitude. For whom has the slave to show mercy to him save his Master?

#### ***On Resurrection to the Judgment***

##### A Traditional Prayer Before Sleep (attributed to Muhammad)

O God deliver me from Thy chastisement on the day when Thou wilt raise up Thy servants. .

##### A prayer for waking during the night (also attributed to Muhammad)

O God I take refuge with Thee from the tribulation of this world and the tribulation of the Resurrection Day.

#### Two traditional prayers

Have mercy on me on the day when I come before Thee alone, my gaze turned towards Thee, my deeds tied round my neck, all creatures dissociating themselves from me, yes even my father any my mother and those for whom I toiled and strove. Then if Thou dost not show me mercy who will have mercy upon me? Who will teach my tongue to speak when I am alone with my deeds and am asked concerning those things that Thou knowst better than I. If I say, "Yes (I did them)," whither can I fly from thy justice: If I say, "I did them not," Thou wilt say, "I am the witness against thee."

Whiten my face a Lord in the day when thou dost blacken the faces and grant me safety on the day of the tremendous terror.

#### Scripture

##### ***The Mercy and Compassion of God***

[To the righteous soul will be said]: "O (thou) soul, in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord, well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then among my Devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven" (Sura Al Fajr: 27-30) ,

##### ***Death for the Righteous***

To the righteous (when) it is said, "What is it that your Lord has revealed?" They say," All that is good." To those who do good, there is good in this world, and the Home of the Hereafter is even better and excellent indeed is the Home of the righteous-Gardens of Eternity which they will enter: beneath them flow (pleasant) rivers: they will have therein all that they wish: thus doth God reward the righteous-(Namely) those whose lives the angels take in a state of purity, saying (to them), "Peace be on you; enter ye the Garden, because of (the good) which ye did (in the world)" (Sura Nahl: 30-32).

##### ***Death in the Context of Creation and Resurrection***

## On the integral relationship of Creation and Death

Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (fetus) lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the Best to create! After that, at length ye will die. Again, on the Day Of Judgment, will ye be raised up” (Sura Al Mu'minun: 14-16).

It is God Who has created you: further, He has provided for your sustenance; then He will cause you to die, and again He will give you life. Are there any of your (false) “Partners” who can do any single one of I these things? Glory to Him! and High is He above the partners they. attribute (to Him)! (Sura Al Rum: 40)

It is We who have created you; why will ye not witness the Truth? Do you then see?-the (human Seed) that ye throw out-Is it ye who create it, or are We the Creators? We have decreed Death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated. From your changing Forms and creating you (again) in (forms) that ye know not. And ye certainly know already the first form of creation: why then do ye not celebrate His praises? (Sura Al Waq'ah: 57-62)

### ***On Humanity's Complete Dependence on God***

He said: “Do ye then see whom ye have been worshipping?-Ye and your fathers before you?-For they are enemies to me; not so the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds; who created me, and it is He who guides me; who gives me food and drink; and when I am ill, it is He who cures me; Who will cause me die, and then to live (again); and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of judgment” (Sura Al Shu'araa': 75-82).

### ***On the Relationship of Creation and Death***

From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again (Sura Ta Ha:55).

Woe to man! What hath made him reject God? From what stuff hath He created him ? From a sperm-drop: He hath created him, and then

moldeth him in due proportions; then doth He make His path smooth for him; then He causeth him to die, and putteth him in his Grave; then, when it is His Will, He will Raise him up (again) (Sura' Abasa: 17-22).

### ***On Death and the New Creation***

Resurrection is tied to nature and the fruitfulness of the earth in the following three passages

And God sends down the rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death; verily in this is a Sign for those who listen (Sura Al Nahl: 65).

Then contemplate (O man!) the memorials of God's Mercy!-How He gives life to the earth after its death: verily the Same will give life to the men who are dead: for He has power over all things (Sura Al Rum: 50).

It is God who sends forth the Winds do so that they raise up the Clouds, and We drive them to a land that is dead, and revive the earth therewith after its death: even so (will be) the Resurrection (Sura Fatir: 9).

How can you reject the faith in God?-Seeing that ye were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again to Him will ye return (Sura Al Baqarah: 28).

Those who listen (in truth), be sure, will accept: As to the dead, God will raise them up; then will they be turned unto Him (Sura An'am: 36).

### ***Sleep and the Nature of Death***

It is God who takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: Those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed. Verily in this are signs for those who reflect (Sura Al Zumar: 42).

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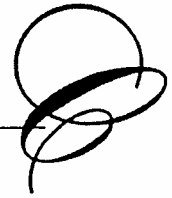
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# Death and Dying from a Native American Spirituality Perspective



By Rev. Karalee Hawkins Boyle

In ministering to the needs of Native Americans, especially in the area of death and dying, one must first become acquainted with their cultural view that spirituality is a way of life, not a religion. Intrinsic to this view is the belief that all things and beings are imbued with Spirit and, therefore, must be treated in a sacred manner. Most tribal peoples believe in a universal kinship between individuals and the rest of creation, and it is understood that one is responsible for right action with “all one's relations,” not only for one's own good, but for the good of all peoples-now and for generations to come.

Unlike most religions, the practice of Native American Spirituality does not recognize a religious hierarchy or intermediary between the individual and his or her Creator. The individual is solely responsible for determining right action and the spiritual practice he or she learns orally-through tribal orientation, from a mentor, or through a personal vision. Therefore, in ministering to the needs of Native Americans, it is important to keep in mind that rituals and belief systems are highly personal, even within a specific tribal orientation, and that it cannot be assumed that what might be true for one, is true for another.

However, there are basic universal Native American Spirituality principles that the minister or health care worker may use as a guide:

First, it is not uncommon for Native Americans or individuals practicing Native American Spirituality to combine another faith, such as Christianity, with their spiritual practice. The legendary Frank Fools Crow, Ceremonial

Chief and Holy Man of the Teton Sioux, was also a practicing Catholic. The Native American Church (the Peyote Religion) combines elements of Native American Spirituality and Christianity and is as tightly run as a Catholic Mass.

Second, almost all Native peoples believe in an afterworld of some kind. Among some groups, the afterworld is a place where souls live on for eternity; among others, it serves as a way station *for* individuals destined for reincarnation.

Third, most Native Americans believe that separation from the living is a source of anguish for the dead. Funeral rites -- which often last for days -- are designed to protect the survivors and drive the soul of the deceased safely away from the living. These ideas are illustrated in the following paragraphs from *The American Indian, Cycles of Life* (1994):

. . . The funeral rite was usually decorous, even gentle. In a Winnebago funeral, a warrior designated as chief mourner would address lengthy speeches to the spirit of the deceased. Holding out a pipe, he would say: "Here it is, the tobacco. I am certain that you, a Ghost, are not very far away, that in fact, you are standing right in back of me, waiting for me to reach you the pipe and tobacco, that you might take it along with you. That likewise, you are waiting for your food to take on your journey. You have made us long for you, and therefore, do you see to it that all those things that belonged to you and that you would have enjoyed had you lived longer- such as victories on the warpath, earthly possessions, and life -- that all these you leave behind for us to enjoy. This do you ask for as you travel along. This also I ask of you. Do not cause us to follow you soon; do not cause your brothers any fear. I have now lighted a pipe for you."

. . . The living usually grieved for the dead. The Hopi expressed their sorrow with wailing on the day of death-and wailing again a year later. Among the Crow and several other peoples of the Plains, men and women would slash their head and arms and legs, or they would cut off a finger at the first joint. In many cultures, mourners cut their hair, blackened their faces, wore old clothes, ate sparsely, and abstained from sexual relations for a designated period. The Iroquois recited messages linked with special strings of wampum. "By these words, we wipe the tears away from your eyes that you may again see," one message says. "When a person is mourning the loss of a loved one, his ears are stopped and he cannot hear. By these words we remove that obstruction so that you may hear again. Since our brother has died, the light has dropped from the sky. We now lift up the light and replace it in the sky."

Finally, for many Indian peoples, it is critical that the deceased not be addressed by name. If in doubt as to the individual's belief system, refer to the deceased other than by name -- as "your loved one," or "your father." It is believed that saying the name draws the dead one's spirit back to the Earth plane.

Given the complexity of Native American Spirituality, those who minister to Native Americans in respect to death and dying should first determine the family's and friends' wishes in relation to their loved one. Do they want a minister or priest called to the bedside, or do they have an elder that might be called to pray over the sick and dying? If an elder is called, it is important for the health care community and the nonnative friends of the sick and/ or dying to welcome the elder as respectfully as they would a priest or minister.

As health care workers and hospitals become aware of the unique nature of Native American Spirituality, the elder's performance of a purification ritual or the smoking of the Sacred Pipe will become as commonplace in a hospital's setting as a priest's administering of the Last Rites. These two spiritual practices are described briefly below:

### **The Saging Ceremony**

The practice of Cedaring or Saging (also called "smoking off" or "smudging") is performed for purification and healing purposes prior to most Native ceremonies, as well as for praying for the sick and dying. Dried sage or cedar is placed in a bowl (usually an abalone shell) and lit. The smoke from the burning sage or cedar is first fanned to the Grandfathers of the Four Directions: West, North, East and South, and to the Father Above and Mother Earth Below. Then the purifying smoke of the sage or cedar is fanned over the one being prayed for and perhaps over all those present in the room.

As the smoke from sage has often been mistaken for marijuana, it is important to instruct hospital staff and visitors about the religious purpose of this ritual. Prayer Songs may also be sung over the dying. A rattle, drum, or flute may accompany these prayers for the one passing on to the other side. Praying with the Sacred Pipe is also commonly performed in the presence of the sick and dying, or during the last rites for the deceased.

## **The Sacred Pipe**

For those of the Plains Indians and some Native peoples, the smoking of the Sacred Pipe is included in prayers for the sick and dying. The elder, or pipe carrier, fills the pipe with pinches of unadulterated tobacco, representing prayers for the one in need, for that one's family and friends, and for all one's relations. The pipe is lit and offered to the Four Directions, all that is above (Father) and all that is below (Mother). Here it is important to stress again that this offering is for the many aspects of the One God; that is, for all that is to the left of self, to one's right, before and behind oneself, above and below. All is God. The Sacred Pipe may not be shared with participants.

An important consideration for those unfamiliar with Native American Spirituality, is that women in their Moontime (menstruating) should excuse themselves in the presence of the Sacred Pipe.

Also, smoking the Sacred Pipe is a matter of choice for participants. If one chooses not to do so, it is important to accept the offered pipe in a respectful manner, and offer it clockwise to the next person on one's left. The best advice to be given is, "Watch and *do*."

## **Songs Tell the Story**

Perhaps the best way to convey an understanding of the varied and complex nature of death and dying from a Native American perspective is through its poetry.

The first song, anthologized in *American Indian Poetry* (1991), comes from the Far North, "Songs for the Great Feast of the *Dead*" The Native practice of the Giveaway is sung wherein the spiritual essence is offered to the departed loved ones of the presents of food, reindeer skins, and sealskins for a tent.

### ***Songs for the Great Feast of the Dead***

I

For our children are gone,

While those of our friends remain.

Ai-ya-ya-yai

Come back, nephew, come back, we miss you;

Ai-ya-ya-yai

Come back to us, our lost ones,

We have presents for you. .:

*Ai-ya-ya-yai*

Oh, my brother, come back to me,

*Ai-ya-ya-yai*

My brother come back and we

Will give you a small present,

*Aiya-ya-yai-yae-yai*

My children, where are you?

*Ai-ya-ya-yai.*

Come back to us, our children.

We are lonely and sad.

*Ai-ya-ya-yai.*

II

Come, my brother,

Return to us again;

We wait for you;

Come, brother, come.

*Ai-ya-ya-yai*

*Return once more.*

Our mother, come back to us.

*Ai-ya-ya-yai*

Return, our father;

We wait for you;

Come back to us,  
And we, who are lonely,  
Will give you food.

*Ai-ya-ya-yai*

III

Dead ones; come here;

*A-la 'ai'ya,*

*Come here, do.*

Sealskins for a tent you will get,

*A-la 'a.i'ya*

Come here, do.

Reindeer skins for a bed you will get,

*A-la' ai-ya'*

IV

We will sing a song.

We will go down the current.

The waves will rise;

The waves will fall

The dogs will growl at us.

From "Songs for the Great Feast of the Dead" in *American Indian Poetry*  
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