

## "Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways—  
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.  
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—  
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.  
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways,  
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.  
—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

## The Covenant

### *I commit myself:*

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

## Covenant Groups

# Death



Sacred trees, representing the power of life to grow from the underworld realm of the dead, are a common motif in the art and literature of the ancient Maya of Mesoamerica.

# Death

## *Chalice Lighting*

That nothing is static or fixed, that all is fleeting and impermanent, is the first mark of existence. It is the ordinary state of affairs. Everything is in process. Everything—every tree, every blade of grass, all the animals, insects, human beings, buildings, the animate and the inanimate—is always changing, moment to moment.

—Pema Chödrön

## *Sharing of Joys and Sorrows*

### *Silence*

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

### *Shared Readings*

I tend to think of death as being like changing your clothes when they are old and worn out, rather than as some final end.

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama (foreword, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*)

The leaves move in the garden, the sky is pale, and I catch myself weeping. It is hard—hard to make a good death.

—Katherine Mansfield

All men should try to learn before they die what they are running from, and to, and why.

—James Thurber

The end is where we start from.

—T. S. Eliot

The dying process begins the minute we are born, but it accelerates during dinner parties.

—Carol Matthau

There are so many little dyings that it doesn't matter which of them is death.

—Kenneth Patchen

Someday I'll be a weather-beaten skull resting on a grass pillow,  
Serenaded by a stray bird or two.

Kings and commoners end up the same,  
No more enduring than last night's dream.

—Ryokan

Paradise

I see flowers

from the cottage where I lie.

—Yaitsu's death poem (1807)

## *Deep Sharing and Deep Listening*

**Round 1:** Using your homework as a guide, briefly share your personal feelings and beliefs about death.

**Round 2:** Spend a few more minutes talking about death and what it means to you. For example, what do you believe happens after you die? Are you afraid of death? Have your beliefs changed over the years?

**Round 3:** What did you learn about your feelings and beliefs about death that was new or unexpected?

## *Closing Words*

The meaning of death is not the annihilation of the spirit, but its separation from the body, and the resurrection and day of assembly do not mean a return to a new existence after annihilation, but the bestowal of a new form or frame to the spirit.

—Al-Ghazzali (1058–1111)

## *Closing Song*

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

## *Group Business*

Homework for the next meeting.

## Homework: Death

Death happens. After life's ups and downs, its discoveries and mysteries, its smells, and sounds, and colors . . . it ends. And we know that it will. We know that we will die; that is part of our journey. And like any journey, we have the choice of planning for it or not. Rejoicing in it or not. Fearing it or not. After the wondrous surprise of having been born, we are often surprised again when it comes time to die. Though family and friends, mentors, and even spiritual guides may have died before us, none have been able to tell us of their experiences, of what to expect. Though we may be surrounded by loved ones when it comes time, this journey is ours alone.

For what is it to die, but to stand in the sun and melt into the wind? And when the Earth has claimed our limbs, then we shall truly dance.

—Kahlil Gibran

Death twitches my ear. "Live," he says. "I am coming."

—Virgil

Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room I shall be able to see.

—Helen Keller

From my rotting body, flowers shall grow and I am in them and that is eternity.

—Edvard Munch

Life is better than death, I believe, if only because it is less boring, and because it has fresh peaches in it.

—Alice Walker

[When asked what they would say to a close friend who is near death] There is only one thing you can say to give the deepest comfort. Tell him that in his death a part of you dies and goes with him. Wherever he goes, you go also. He will not be alone.

—Jiddu Krishnamurti

Most Unitarian Universalists I know are concerned with life before death, rather than life after death, and it is love that grounds us for the work of redemption and enhancement of life in the here and now.

—Rev. Carmen Emerson, "Walking Together in All Our Ways"

Now he has departed from this strange world a little ahead of me. That signifies nothing. For us believing physicists, the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.

—Albert Einstein

Today is a good day to die.

—Tasunka Witko (Crazy Horse)

Snowflake,  
an intricate unique beauty,  
falls through the sky  
then nestles with others as it rests on the earth  
intertwined in a glistening soft quilt  
of separate jewels . . . particularity.

Snowflake  
becomes spent,  
reduced in size and sparkle.  
It melts and seeps into the earth.  
The separate beauty merges with others  
into a universal flow of life . . . the essence.  
I'm losing my edge.  
My hearing,  
my sharp mind,  
my grip on things  
are beginning to fade.  
I'm losing my sparkle.  
A mysterious transition—  
this movement from particularity to essence.  
Some believe that upon death  
the individual soul loses its distinct identity,  
and is dissolved  
into the great ocean of life.  
So what's the point here?  
I am in the time of the unique separateness,  
a time of connecting with others to soften the earth.  
Looming in the distance is the transition time  
of melting into the unity flow of life  
which serves to sweeten this time of the gentle fragile snowflake.  
—Alicia Hawkins

### *Questions to Ponder*

Is there an afterlife? Will we see pearly gates and streets paved with gold? Will we come back, in some form or other? Or is there nothing more? As you ponder the idea of what happens after death, consider the following questions and activities.

- When you were a child, what did you think would happen after you died? How has that view changed over time? What contributed to the change?
- What of us lasts, even after we die? What doesn't? How does paying attention to the difference change our living?
- Does your view on death have an effect on how you live your life?
- What plans have you made to deal with your own death? For example, do you have a will? A trust? An advance directive? Organ donation card? Life insurance? A burial policy? Why or why not?
- What cultural myth best reflects your belief about what happens when we die?

Consider doing one of the following activities as you think about what your life and death look like to you:

- Plan your own memorial service. Would you like it to be quiet and reflective? Or loud and boisterous? Should the music be Ragtime, Native American flutes, classical? Where should it be held? What ritual element might be important to you?
- Write your own obituary. You don't have to share what you write with the group, but consider sharing how it felt to write the obituary.
- Start a bucket list, a wish list of things you would like to do before you "kick the bucket."

## Leader's Guide: Death

This session focuses on the subject of death, our feelings and beliefs about it as well as our sense of preparedness for it.

### *Chalice Lighting (2 min)*

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

That nothing is static or fixed, that all is fleeting and impermanent, is the first mark of existence. It is the ordinary state of affairs. Everything is in process. Everything—every tree, every blade of grass, all the animals, insects, human beings, buildings, the animate and the inanimate—is always changing, moment to moment.

—Pema Chödrön

### *Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)*

Ask group members to check in, telling in one or two sentences how they are doing this week. Share information about absent members.

### *Silence (3 min)*

Start with the following words: “Get comfortable in your seat. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in, and then a deep breath out. And now just breathe gently.” Then give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it!

### *Shared Readings (5 min)*

Have each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

### *Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)*

Read the following quote, and then do three rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that everyone gets a turn to share.

Deep listening is miraculous for both listener and speaker. When someone receives us with open-hearted, non-judging, intensely interested listening, our spirits expand.

—Sue Patton Thoele

**Round 1 (10 min):** Using your homework as a guide, briefly share your personal feelings and beliefs about death.

**Round 2 (40 min):** Spend a few more minutes talking about death and what it means to you. For example, what do you believe happens after you die? Are you afraid of death? Have your beliefs changed over the years?

**Round 3 (15 min):** What did you learn about your feelings and beliefs about death that was new or unexpected?

### *Closing Words (1 min)*

The meaning of death is not the annihilation of the spirit, but its separation from the body, and the resurrection and day of assembly do not mean a return to a new existence after annihilation, but the bestowal of a new form or frame to the spirit.

—Al-Ghazzali (1058–1111)

*Closing Song (1 min)*

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

*Group Business (5 min)*

Pass out the homework for next time.