

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Small Group Ministry
After Death

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA,

October 2021

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“...I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I have been doing all day. Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” - *Mary Oliver*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention any issues or events on your mind that you would like to share.

Topic: After Death

It has been said that death and taxes are the only things certain in life! It is true that death is a shared reality for us all. So, it probably comes as no surprise that every individual, family, culture, religion, etc. has some perspective, rituals, ideas, traditions, or beliefs about death and what happens after we die. However familiar, it is not always comfortable to sit with the certainty of death—to contemplate what happens after life.

Death is often portrayed as dark and sad—is this an accurate portrayal? Is fear of death greater for those who are facing it or for those who will be left behind? If we fear death, are there things we can do, actions we can take, rituals of living that might help ease that fear?

With this month's topic, After Death, we offer an invitation to pause and consider your relationship with and feelings about death.

“Death is not extinguishing the light; it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.” - *Rabindranath Tagore*

“Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to forgive life, to be at peace.” - *Oscar Wilde*

“A [person's] ethical behaviour should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. A [person] would indeed be in a poor way if [they] had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.” - *Albert Einstein*

“I don’t believe in an afterlife, so I don’t have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.” - *Isaac Asimov*

“Someone has somewhere commented on the fact that millions long for immortality who don’t know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon.” - *Susan Ertz*

“Death ends a life, not a relationship. All the love you created is still there. All the memories are still there. You live on- in the hearts of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you were here.” - *Mitch Albom*

“It is not death that a [person] should fear, but [they] should fear never beginning to live.” - *Marcus Aurelius*

“I cannot live life where I’m deprived. I’d much rather be five, 10 pounds heavier. With my luck, I’ll get myself to that perfect weight, and I’ll get hit by a bus. Then I’ll be like...looking at myself from some afterlife going, ‘You idiot. You could have had that agnolotti, dummy.’” - *Drew Barrymore*

“Let children walk with Nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life.” - *John Muir*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- What do you believe happens to us when we die? Is there an afterlife? Reincarnation? Return to nature? Heaven and hell?
- How does your view of death change based on whether you are thinking about your own death versus that of a loved one? How have you dealt with times you or loved ones were at risk of dying?
- What has helped comfort you as you have grieved someone you loved who died? Could you share any memories or stories of loved ones who have died?
- How do your beliefs about what happens after death affect how you live your life? How have experiences in your life influenced your perspective on death? Do you fear death, and why/why not?
- If you knew you would die within the year, how would you spend your time?

(Take a few minutes to consider the topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“Until we find out who was born this time around, it seems irrelevant to seek earlier identities. I have heard many people speak of who they believe they were in previous incarnations, but they seem to have very little idea of who they are in this one. . . . Let’s take one life at a time. Perhaps the best way to do that is to live as though there were no afterlife or reincarnation. To live as though this moment was all that was allotted.”

- *Stephen Levine, A Year to Live: How to Live This Year as If It Were Your Last*