

LIVING FUNERAL CEREMONY

SCRIPT
(in-person)

Pre-ceremony

(You may say the following casually, however comes naturally to you)

Thank you all for coming.

Make yourselves comfortable where you are sitting, feel free to move around and reposition yourselves during the ceremony if you need to. Please turn off your phone or switch it to airplane mode and place it under your table. Let's do some gentle stretching before sitting for this prolonged period of time. **(I do this with them, usually from a seated position. Start with light bends such as forward folds & side bends and then follow with rolling the shoulders, ankles, and wrists etc. 2 minutes max. You can choose to do something different: grounding exercise, other movement, breath work, etc.)**

A few things to mention before we begin: at a point in the ceremony, you will be covered with a shroud and an eye pillow will be placed over your eyes. I wanted to let you know so that you will not be alarmed when it happens. If at any point you feel trapped or uncomfortable, please feel free to remove these items or alert me to your discomfort.

I also want you to know that it's completely okay if you need to leave during the ceremony if it becomes too intense or too real for you. There's no shame in becoming overwhelmed. You are not trapped in here, so I hope you can relax and feel comfortable knowing that. **(At this point, make sure everyone knows where the exits and bathrooms are)**

There is a handkerchief (or tissues) on your table for you to use.

If you'll all turn around and face your memorial, we will begin.

(Participants are sometimes facing you when you're making these announcements and stretching/grounding/etc).

Begin the ceremony

Welcome to your funeral.

I want to begin this ceremony by setting an intention...a tone for our next few hours together.

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Our intention here is to dive inward, but to also remain aware of our presence within the world as a whole. This is a non-judgmental space. My hope is that you feel free and open to express yourselves in any way you need to. Emotions move through us, sometimes in surprising and unpredictable ways. That movement is necessary for healing. Allow them to flow through. When they stop somewhere and they sit...that's where problems are born.

Be gentle with yourself. Remember that nothing is permanent. To die takes great courage, and even a simulation like this one takes courage.

The purpose of this ceremony is to enrich your life by bringing death, your mortality into immediate and clear view.

Focus on yourself, now. Try to let the awareness that others are around you here slip away a bit. Focus on this voice, and on your inner voice. Every moment brings new possibilities for shifting, healing and growth.

In front of you, you will see your memorial photograph.

(You may alter this depending on what you have decided to do for your ceremony... ie: mirrors, participants gathered their own items. You may want to simply call it "your memorial")

This is how your loved ones have chosen to remember you. Look at your face. Notice how familiar and yet how removed you are from it. It is you, but it is not the full representation of you. It is merely the visual manifestation of you.

This is what you had lead with on Earth. This is how people had categorized you, how people saw you in their minds. This is how people recognized you from across the room...how they judged and placed you upon a first meeting. This is the face that felt tears, wind, sunshine, cold, rain...so many sensations of life here on Earth. This is the face that loved ones will look upon, moments after your essence has left it.

-pause-

Study this face. Look at it closely. Think of the places it's been and the people it's seen.

-pause-

Begin to unravel the story of your life. Start at the beginning. We tend to put our lives on a chronological timeline, like a movie. So start as far back as you feel comfortable going. The movie of your life. Let your first memories come to you...your childhood, where you grew up, where you went to school, some friends...these have all helped shape who you perceive yourself to be today.

When a memory comes up for you, let it fade away into the background of your mind. Release it, as if it is the wind carrying away a dandelion seed.

-pause-

Think of your career, your job, or whatever you do or you did for money. Try to remove that from this image of yourself. We so often entwine our ability to earn money with our sense of self, and maybe even our personality... our value as contributing members of society. Try to start to break that apart. How does it feel to sit without a job, an ability to make money? Who are you without that identifier?

-pause-

Now, let some hobbies come to mind. How did you fill your free time here on Earth?

How did you express your enjoyment for life? These activities you enjoyed engaging in.. begin to realise you are not capable of them any longer. Start to remove those hobbies from this image of yourself as you think of them, one by one. How does it feel to sit without the ability to do the things you once loved doing? Who are you without that? Remember them fondly and then begin to let go of your attachment to them.

-pause-

Now let some belongings come to mind. Even your most treasured belongings. Items you might save from a natural disaster. We often see our possessions as things that are owned by us, they are 'ours'– but the truth is, these belongings will likely outlive us, and must be dealt with somehow after we are no longer here in the physical. Begin letting go of these items, one by one. Imagine them belonging, now, to your loved ones instead of to you. How does it feel to sit without your belongings? Who are you without them?

-pause-

Now, thinking of those loved ones...everyone who makes your life enjoyable to you... Begin to realize that you are leaving your loved ones behind here on Earth. Gently, slowly, you are getting further away from them as you prepare to leave this realm of existence. This is often the most difficult part of separating from life, since we tend to value human relationships above all. Begin letting go of these beloved people and animals in your life.

-pause-

And now think of your name...what you go by. Your name, which has likely been attached very firmly to your identity, to your sense of self. Your name is often what identifies you, and it will not soon be forgotten– but try to feel how it sits to be

without it. A nameless being. How does it feel to be separated from it? Who are you now?

-pause-

Look at this being without all of those things, people and ideas. If you think of someone or something, remind yourself that it is not there for you in the same way anymore. Let the thought pass, like a leaf floating by, down a flowing river. You are reaching the end. You are letting go of earthly connection.

Here's a quote from **Pema Chodron**:

All anxiety, all dissatisfaction, all the reasons for hoping that our experience could be different are rooted in our fear of death. Fear of death is always in the background. As the Zen master, Shunryu Suzuki Roishi said, life is like getting into a boat that's just about to sail out to sea and sink. But it's very hard—no matter how much we hear about it—to believe in our own death. Many spiritual practices try to encourage us to take our own death seriously, but it's amazing how difficult it is to allow it to hit home. The one thing in life that we can really count on is incredibly remote for all of us. We don't go so far as to say, 'No way, I'm not going to die,' because of course we know that we are. But it definitely will be later. That's the biggest hope." end quote.

(You may share whatever quote resonates with you!)

Next to your photograph (**memorial**), you will see a blank sheet of paper. This is the last piece of paper you'll ever get the chance to write on. Take a few moments to write down anything you feel you need to express that you haven't had the chance to say before entering this room today. The beauty of this is, there is no wrong way to use this sheet of paper. You may choose to write last wishes, goodbyes, regrets, hopes, instructions, a poem— simply communicate what you wish to leave behind, if anything. Take your time, and rest comfortably until you hear this voice again.

You may feel your mind wandering, getting distracted by different aspects of your life. Bring your attention back to your memorial if this starts to happen for you. This is it- you have no last phone calls, no last meetings...all there is... is this sheet of paper.

(Let them write for as long as it takes, or until you feel you need to end the writing exercise. Generally this takes anywhere from 20-40 minutes.)

You will now use your voice for one final time.

By reading your last words, you are finalizing your goodbyes and wishes.

If you wish to keep yours private, please place your book underneath your table.

This last effort of reading aloud represents a true letting go of yourself. You are honouring and parting with your voice. The important thing is that you hear and feel your own words aloud, so you may do this at any volume- from a quiet whisper to a loud yell.

When I touch your shoulder, please read the entry you have written.

(Touch each person's shoulder one by one for readings, I do this at random)
(You may also utilise the option of having everyone read at the same time- in which case, I don't usually give the opt-out)

You have used your voice for the final time.

The Dying:

You will now be laid to rest. Please recline fully and get comfortable.

(You may choose to move the tables out for them one by one so that they're not in the way during the relaxation portion)

Once settled, take a few deep breaths slowly. Observe the inhalation and exhalation process while breathing, then allow yourself to breathe normally again.

Your body consists of 6 basic external parts - two legs, two arms, one 'neck & head' portion and the remaining torso. You are going to relax these 6 parts one by one.

I will first explain this method of relaxation, and then we will do it together. You are going to start by taking a deep breath in, while tensing and stretching a particular part of your body. You will feel the tension building as you reach the top of your breath, hold it, and then exhale- while simultaneously releasing the tension.

Let's begin.

Take a deep breath ...and as you inhale, stretch your left leg. Allow tension and stress to accumulate, focusing your awareness on each muscle as you go. Feel all of the bones in your feet...your calf, knee, thigh- the tension building and building. When you have reached your full breath, hold the tension for a moment, feeling the discomfort, and slowly release it with your exhale. With it, all of that tension you were holding melts away. *Your left leg is now as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth. There is no longer anything for your left leg to do.*

(to the best of your ability, match the flow of breath– you don't want to be advising to exhale when there wasn't enough time to get to their full inhale yet. Don't rush!)

Now, repeat with the right leg. Stretch it out fully on your inhale, the tension building, paying attention to all of the muscles, bones, joints, ligaments along the way...hold that for a moment as you reach your full breath. Hold. Now, slowly release with your

exhale. All of the tension and stress is melting away. *Your right leg is as heavy as stone. It is slowly sinking into the earth. Your right leg no longer has anything to do. It is slowly sinking into the earth with your left leg.*

Next, move to your torso. This area often requires extra attention, as we tend to hold lots of turmoil here. You will relax this area twice.

On the inhale, push your stomach muscles out like a balloon is being inflated inside of your stomach. On your exhale, pull your muscles in and as far towards the earth as they will go. Visualize your belly button touching the floor below you.

Once more. Inhale...inflate...hold...exhale...fully relax your torso. *Your torso is now as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth with your legs. It is so calm.*

Your torso, both of your legs, your whole lower half is as heavy as stone, it is sinking into the Earth. So heavy, and still, and calm.

Move to your left shoulder, arm and hand. Breathe in.....stretch it out, let the tension build. Feel the bones in your hand extend... the muscles pulling and stretching. Tension building and building. Nice deep stretch as you hold the breath. Exhale..let it all go. Everything is letting go. There is no longer anything for your left arm to do. *Your left arm is as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth.*

Move along to your right shoulder, arm, hand, fingers. Breathe in...stretch it out completely. Let the tension and stress build. Feel the bones in your hand extend... the muscles pulling and stretching. Tension building and building. Hold. Breathe out, relax. There are no more jobs for it to do..it has done all it can. *Your right arm is as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth.*

Lastly, your head and neck. Upon inhale, turn your head to the left as tension is building..and then to the right. As you reach the top of your breath, pick a place to hold this tension. As you exhale, bring your head back to center while releasing all of that stress and tension in your neck and head. Fully relax.

Your head and neck..your whole upper portion is as heavy as stone. Your whole body, now, is sinking slowly into the earth. It is so heavy, and still, and calm.

Breath normally, without attention or effort.

Your whole body is as heavy as a stone. Your whole body is sinking slowly into the earth. It is so still, and heavy, and calm.

-pause-

There is no longer anything to do but listen to this voice. Your consciousness is here with the sound vibrations, and with your dying body.

When a body begins to die, slowly all parts lose their vitality and energy. Internal organs come to a state of stillness. Metabolism slows down. Each and every cell of the body is reducing its activity. Consciousness starts shrinking from every part, like a plant drying in the hot sun. The consciousness... that was once so present in every single corner of your physical body is preparing to leave it.

All of the muscles of your body are losing their strength... surrendering. Your limbs are losing their warmth. Your kidneys, liver, intestines, stomach, lungs and heart...all of them are slowing down their activities. It is all coming to a halt. Everything that constitutes your body is now dying.

-pause-

You will now move your attention around your body.

Wherever you are moving your attention to, that particular region is growing cold. Gently direct your attention to your toes...

Think of the toes on both of your feet. Your toes....up to your feet and ankles of both feet. You notice that they have grown cold.

(slowly, but not overly so! Think of this as a body scan)

Your shins, your calves, your knees, your thighs... have lost all warmth.
Your pelvic region is now cold.
Your stomach has stopped working and is now lifeless and cold.
The fingers on both of your hands...the tops of your hands, wrists, forearms,
elbows..they have gone cold... up to your shoulders.

Your lungs have stopped working, but your heart continues to beat. Your throat
muscles completely relax... the muscles in your face let go as your heart also stops.
You have reached your brain and the very top of your head. Your whole body has
gone cold... and your whole body is now finally dead.

-pause-

Give thanks to this system which has served you for your entire life, and say goodbye.

Your consciousness hangs on, lingering after the body has ceased to function. It is the
last thing we let go of, because we hang on to thoughts, memories and ideas from
our lives. We cling to loved ones and aspirations. You can let go of these thoughts
and ideas. You will never see your home or family again in the same way here on
Earth. Say goodbye to your pet or animals you loved...don't worry who will take care
of them. That is beyond your control. Say goodbye to the different landscapes and
places you have known. Surrender to the fact that you are leaving it all behind.

-pause-

We all have consciousness inside of us...perhaps even outside of us. We do not know
the nature of this consciousness, yet we all feel its presence. Imagine that this
consciousness inside of you is moving toward your heart, preparing to exit your
physical body.

-pause-

Imagine that this consciousness is a kind of energy or light within you. It might even
have a color.

From every part of the body, it is concentrating around the area of your heart. Glowing, loving, and prepared to exit your physical body.

Though you are dead, the consciousness that remains may *still* be holding on to unfulfilled desires, many dreams to realize, many responsibilities to be taken care of. All of these desires, dreams and responsibilities have lost their relevance at the moment of death. The things which you would have liked to fulfil had you gotten a chance to live longer do not matter. No matter how important they are for you, you are dead. Nothing matters to you. There will be no future, and there will be no past for you.

Try to remove all thoughts from your consciousness. Since physically you have died, it is now time to guide your spirit, your consciousness, to a quiet place.

-pause-

You have centered this consciousness around your heart. The consciousness, with all of its emotions and feelings, is slowly exiting through your heart. Your whole consciousness...flowing out in a continuous stream. It is now floating above your physical body, like a cloud. It is free to go.

And now, that body is beginning to break down...to disintegrate.

All of the water in your body is leaving, and will eventually merge with the rest of the water on Earth.

All of the air in your body escaping, and is merging with the air in the atmosphere.

All pieces of your physical self are dissolving into the Earth. You will become unrecognizable as the person you once were. You will look very much like everyone else who has died before you. You will now look more similar to soil, to ashes. Your belongings, your day-to-day routines, your clothes, your individuality- they matter only to those still living.

Your loved ones have chosen to cover you with a shroud, and place a single flower on your body. ***(Alter this to however you are conducting your ceremony...ex: if you are not putting a flower on their body, do not mention the flower!)***

This shroud placed upon you represents the thin veil between life and death.

You are swimming in the deep mystery that is death.

-10 minutes~approximately. Feel this out and do what is right for your ceremony, however, I would not recommend less than 10 minutes. You may choose to play music at this point.

(Chime/bell is struck, if desired when time is up)

(You may elaborate on this slow re-entering of the body out as much as you'd like.)

Your essence/spirit is appearing from the depths of the universe. Your consciousness is traveling back towards your body, and is slowly entering, once again, through your heart. Consciousness is spreading itself throughout your body, reaching the tiny spaces in-between muscles and bones. It is once again present, everywhere.

Life forces are again starting to function within you. Your organs are springing to life and working beautifully. Your blood is flowing easily around your body. You are perceiving your senses. All emotions, thoughts and feelings that have moved out of your body from the heart, are again entering into the heart. Your thought process has again started functioning. What is coming to mind as your brain is becoming fully active?

Imagine that slowly all of your parts are becoming active, gaining strength and vitality. Visualize every organ of your body and imagine that it is activating again and gaining strength. You notice that your body feels so warm once again...like stepping into a cozy home after a long walk in the cold.

-pause-

One more quote from Pema:

"We already have everything we need. There is no need for self-improvement. All these trips that we lay on ourselves—the heavy-duty fearing that we're bad and hoping that we're good, the identities that we so dearly cling to, the rage, the jealousy and the addictions of all kinds—never touch our basic wealth. They are like clouds that temporarily block the sun. But all the time our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are. We are one blink of an eye away from being fully awake."

Your shroud will now be removed. The light is being let back in.

When you are ready, please sit up easily and take some breaths. Take a moment to immerse yourself in this reality that you are still alive. You have died, and you have travelled back to this life.

I like to get together in a circle with the group and *debrief* before going back into the real world. I say something like this:

"I want to open to floor for those of you who wish to share a bit about any thoughts you're having— related to this experience or otherwise. The goal is simply to re-integrate into this reality before heading home."

After debrief:

Verbally ask if everyone feels okay to go out into the world once again. Let them know you're available to chat about anything they need to express.

I recommend compiling a list of local mental health resources (numbers + emails) in case someone is having a difficult/complex time and requires support.

You may choose to make this debriefing portion more formal/ceremonial than a talking circle. Bring your own unique talents, gifts, and ideas to these sessions!