

VIRTUAL LIVING FUNERAL

SCRIPT

Pre-ceremony Checklist:

Join your meeting ~10 minutes early to make sure everything is in order!

- **Your phone is on silent/airplane mode**
- **Music is cued up, levels checked, commercials/ads skipped**
- **Computer sound share turned on in Zoom**
- **Check that other tabs in browser will not make any sounds**
- **Your physical space is calm, quiet, and free from distraction**

It might be a good idea to write or print out a list of your participants' names. This will be used during the reading portion. Make sure you also have a pen handy. If a participant's Zoom handle is not the same as their name, make a note of this on your sheet to avoid future confusion.

Enable 'waiting room' in Zoom. Allow participants to congregate in the waiting room until everyone has arrived (you are able to type to participants in the chat in the waiting room). If not everyone has arrived, but it is a few minutes past the start time, let people into the room. Whenever you choose to begin, do not allow late-comers to enter past about 10 minutes into the call..they will not have an adequate experience and it might disrupt other participants. You can catch up with them later to reschedule, etc..it is up to you whether or not you will offer refunds for people who are late.

Your participants have been instructed to create a peaceful space for themselves, and also on how to set up their cameras. If you see issues with how someone has set up their space (ex: if you are not able to see them well) this is OK..try not to put any pressure onto your participants about how they are appearing on screen. Some may have their cameras completely off– you will need to utilise the chat function in these cases.

Don't feel the need to fill the space with chat- simply hold quiet space and a smile for your participants. You may even choose to have your camera off and music playing to "hold the space" for you before formally greeting your participants.

Optional..

Once all of your participants have arrived, let them know that you have muted each of them until the group conversation at the end of the ceremony. Now is a good time to demo Zoom for anyone not familiar- this should take no more than 5 minutes. Explain the mute function, the different 'views', and video on/off function. Instruct them to put their Zoom screen in "speaker view" so that your screen is the one visible. You may also want to check that they can hear you clearly as well. At this time, explain that you will be controlling the audio they hear, so they do not need to have music or sound on in their space.

Music:

***note*: Do not attempt to speak over the music- participants will not be able to hear you. Adjust the volume in whatever player you are using, not on your computer. Always mute your microphone while it is not in use.**

I recommend playing music **during the writing portion of the ceremony as well as the period of time the participants are laying 'dead'**. You may choose your own music, or pick from the selection I have put into our folder. If you are going to choose your own, please make sure the music follows these specifications:

- No lyrics/vocals
- Long-form (more than 30 minutes uninterrupted, ideally)
- Minimal instrumentation
- Somewhat ambient/not overtly dramatic or emotional

The goal is to provide something for the mind to grab onto ever so slightly so that it does not wander as much during those times of 'waiting'. If you are using Youtube or

another music platform, make sure that there is no possibility for an ad to start playing. Additionally, test the volume level of the specific piece you will be playing within a call. We can do this together during our training session, or you can enlist a friend to join a call with you to determine the ideal base volume. Of course, your participants will have their volumes turned to different levels that they may adjust- but your volume should be at a balanced level in relation to your voice as a baseline.

Please use Zoom's 'share computer audio' function to play the music (in the advanced tab)

If you choose to focus your camera on something else such as a candle or an image instead of your face, now is a good time to casually mention you will be doing so. You may also choose to use the 'virtual background' function within Zoom.

Begin reading:

***note*: If this is a private ceremony, simply make the small adjustments in language as needed for one person. These time suggestions are simply suggestions! Feel the room, intuitively decide how long to pause.**

Thank you all for joining in for this virtual living funeral ceremony.

Please make yourselves comfortable, and remember, it's okay to move around and reposition yourselves during the ceremony. Please turn off your phone or switch it to airplane mode to avoid distraction. Let's do some gentle stretching before sitting for this prolonged period of time. ***(If you'd like, give some specific instruction here so that no one is confused about what to be doing. Start with light bends such as forward folds & side bends and then follow with rolling the shoulders, ankles, and wrists etc. 3 minutes max. You may also choose to do something different, such as breath work, other movement, grounding...)***

I want you to know that it's totally okay if you need to pause or even quit during the ceremony if it becomes too intense or too real for you. There's no shame in becoming overwhelmed. You are not trapped, so I hope you can relax and feel comfortable

knowing that. If you need to leave suddenly, no need to explain yourself...I will touch base with you afterwards.

If you will turn your focus to what you have gathered for your personal memorial, we will begin.

(If you are choosing to reposition or block your camera, do so now!)

Begin the ceremony

Welcome to your funeral.

I want to begin this ceremony by setting an intention...a tone for the time we are about to spend together. 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. This is your 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 unusual and unpredictable ways. That movement is necessary for healing. Allow them to flow through. When they stop somewhere and they sit...that's where the problems are born.

And be gentle with yourself. Remember that nothing is permanent. To die takes great courage, and even a simulation takes courage.

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

Focus on yourself, now. Try to let the awareness that others are here with you slip away a bit. Focus on my voice, and on your inner voice. You are not who you were when you began this ceremony today. You are new, and without boundaries.

In front of you, you will see your memorial. This is how your loved ones have chosen to remember you. Look at your face— whether it be a photograph, in the mirror, or an image in your mind. Notice how familiar and yet how removed you are from it. This is what you had lead with on Earth. This is how people had categorized you, and 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. 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. Think of your first memories...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 gently fade away into the background of your mind, as if you are watching a film, or flipping through a photo album.

-pause-

Think of your career, your job, or whatever you do or did for money...and then try to remove it from this image of yourself. We often entwine our ability to make money with our sense of self, and maybe even our personality... try to start to break that apart.

-pause-

Think of your hobbies. How did you fill your time? These activities you enjoyed..you are not be capable of them any longer. They are in the past. Start to remove those hobbies as you think of them, one by one.

-pause-

Let some belongings come to mind, and start removing them, too. Even your most treasured belongings...items you might save from a fire, or a flood. Try and begin letting go of these items. Imagine them belonging, now, to your loved ones instead of you.

-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 value human relationships above all.

-pause-

Now think of your name. What you go by. Your name which has maybe... been attached so firmly to your identity, to your sense of self. Your name is often what identifies you. Your name will not soon be forgotten– but try and feel how it sits to be without it. How does it feel to be separated from your name?

-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.

I want to share with you 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 memorial, there is a blank sheet of paper. Imagine that this is the last piece of paper you'll ever get the chance to write on. Write anything you feel you need to say that you hadn't said before walking into this room today. The beauty of this exercise is, there is no wrong way to write this message— write last wishes, goodbyes, regrets, hopes, instructions...write the words you wish to leave behind.

Please 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. Try to 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. You may need to keep an eye on the time, but generally this takes anywhere from 20-40 minutes. If it is going too long, you may need to begin the next part before everyone is done- but that does not often happen. If it does, give an indicator by fading the music down, and waiting a minute to begin the next section. **If someone has chosen to keep their camera off, verbally instruct them to type "done" or any letter, in the chat when they're done writing.)

****Fade music up****

MUTE YOURSELF

(visually assess that everyone is done writing. If you had someone with their camera off, await their "done" message before moving on.)

****Fade music down/off****

UNMUTE YOURSELF

You will now use your voice one final time.

By reading your last words, you are finalizing your goodbyes and wishes. If you prefer to keep your writing private and on mute, please raise your hand and keep it up until I say otherwise.

(At this time, go down your list and put a check mark next to those who do not want to read unmuted so that you can remember not to unmute them. If you cannot see someone, ask them to type a response in the chat. If you have many people who wish to keep muted, you may want to have them read all at once and honor them in those moments of silence. Have the ones that are not visible type "done" or another indication in the chat.)

This last act of reading aloud, this effort, represents a true letting go of yourself. When you are dead, your words are out of your control. When I speak your name, please read what you have written. The important thing is that you hear your own words aloud, so do not worry too much about reading clearly or loudly for others.

Begin calling names, and leave a few seconds of quiet after each reading before moving on to the next person. Be careful to make sure the participant is either muted or unmuted per their request. *UNMUTE EACH PERSON INDIVIDUALLY, THEN RE-MUTE*

We have now heard your last wishes and words. At this point, I welcome you to dim or turn lights off completely if you'd like. You may also want to put an eye mask on and/or pull a blanket over yourself once you have reclined or gotten comfortable.

The Dying:

You will now be laid to rest.

-pause here-

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 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.

Here we go.

Start by taking a deep breath ...and while you inhale, stretch out your left leg. Stretch it out completely, putting your attention into all of the muscles along the way. Feel all of the muscles and 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, and slowly release it with your exhale, and with it, all of that tension you were holding. *Your left leg is now as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth.*

(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!)

Let’s repeat with the right leg. Stretch it out fully on your inhale, paying attention to all of the muscles, bones, joints, ligaments along the way...hold the stretch for a moment. When you have reached your full breath, slowly release with your exhale. *Your right leg is as heavy as stone. It is slowly sinking into the earth.*

Next, you will stretch your torso. Upon inhale, push your stomach muscles out, as if a balloon is being inflated inside of your stomach. As you exhale, pull your muscles in and as far towards the earth as they will go. Visualize your belly button touching the floor beneath you...traveling towards your spine. This area may require a few breaths for you to achieve a nice stretch. **(Give enough time for them to do this stretch 2-3 times)** *Your midsection is now as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth with your legs.*

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, now, to your left shoulder, arm and hand. Breathe in.....stretch it out completely. Feel the bones in your hand extend... the muscles pulling and stretching. Tension building and building. Nice deep stretch. Exhale..let it all go.
Your left arm is as heavy as stone. It is sinking into the earth.

Right shoulder, arm, hand, fingers. Breathe in...stretch it out completely. 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, stretch this section however feels comfortable for you. Hold the stretch at a couple of points...and release back to center. 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 heavy, and still, and calm.

-pause-

There is no longer anything to do but listen to this voice. Your consciousness is here with the sound in the air, 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 relaxation. Metabolism slows down. Each and every cell of the body...reducing its activity. Consciousness is shrinking slowly from every region, 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.

All of the muscles of your body with their tissues and cells, arteries and veins, are surrendering and letting go. Your limbs are losing warmth. The internal organs of your body –your kidneys, liver, intestines, stomach, lungs and heart...all of them are slowing down their activities...coming to a halt. Everything that constitutes your body is dying.

Take this section fairly slowly, pausing at the different body parts.

Now you will move your focus around your body. Wherever you are moving your attention to, that particular region is growing cold.

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.

Give thanks to this system which has served you, 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 them all behind.

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.

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.

Though you are physically 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 fulfill 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 this consciousness. Since physically you have become completely inert, it is now time to guide your spirit to a quiet place.

You have centered this consciousness around your heart. The consciousness 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 the body is leaving , and will eventually merge with the rest of the water on Earth.

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

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

Your loved ones have chosen to cover you with a shroud.

This shroud has been specifically made for you... a beautiful, light and soft fabric of fine-woven linen. Your loved ones gently unfold it by shaking it out above your body. They let it fall naturally upon your body, covering you from head to toe, enveloping you. Darkness, stillness, finality.

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

You are swimming in the deep mystery that is death.

****Fade music up****

MUTE YOURSELF.

-10 minutes~approximately. Feel this out and do what is right for your ceremony. It's going to feel like a long time, but remember– they are dead! I would not recommend less than 10 minutes.

****fade music down****

UNMUTE YOURSELF.

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

Your essence 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. Your 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 beginning to function within you. Your thought processes have begun.

The brain is becoming fully active. Slowly all of your parts are becoming active, gaining strength and vitality, and warmth. You notice that your body is feeling so warm once again, like coming into a cozy home after a walk in the cold.

-Pause-

I'll share with you one last 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 is being slowly 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 the reality that you are still alive. You have died, and travelled back to life.

After a few moments, tell your participants that when they're ready they can meet you in this Zoom space for a quick chat to re-integrate into this reality. Give some time before you appear back on camera to allow others to sit up, have some water, etc.

I would like to get together in this virtual room with the group and *debrief* before going back into the 'real world'. I'm going to unmute you all, and we can maybe have a conversation here before returning to our everyday lives.

UNMUTE ALL PARTICIPANTS. If a particular person's environment is distracting, simply mute people as needed.

Don't be afraid to let silence take over here, for several minutes if need-be.

Conversation will start naturally- but if no one is speaking, sometimes I like to share my own experience of the ceremony, or some thoughts that have been on my mind. It doesn't always have to directly connect with the ceremony itself.

After the conversation has come to its natural end, more or less, you might choose to make yourself available to people who wish to talk to you longer, have questions, or are having a hard time.

It is advisable to compile a list of mental health resources with numbers and emails should someone come to you needing support.

