

Session 17: UU Perspectives on Death and the Afterlife

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Session Metadata	
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Head / Hands / Heart	Hands
Has Exercise	No
Has Ritual	No
Has Spiritual Practice Presentation	Yes
Special Blocks	None

by [uuwellspringdirector](#) | Jul 1, 2021 | [Curriculum: Sources](#) | [0 comments](#)

Preparation

Email to Participants

At our next session on [date], we'll be reflecting on death and the afterlife. This is a difficult topic and also one that can't be ignored as a part of an authentic spiritual journey.

In her book, *Heartwood: The Art of Living with the End in Mind*, Barbara Becker writes, "in our culture, we are told that death is the last and greatest taboo—as welcome as a skunk at a garden

party. Yet most often when I spoke of my experiences with loss, people opened up about their own.”

In this session we will explore what keeps us from opening up about our losses in our culture and how this does, or does not, play-out in our UU faith communities.

We will also consider how our own belief and understanding of an afterlife informs our experience of death, loss and grief.

Since this session will bring up losses, fear and grief for many of us, we will approach our time together with deep love and acceptance. You are invited to share at whatever level you are comfortable; if the grief in your life is still raw, know you are welcome to share much or little of it. If you want additional support, please reach out to me and I'll connect you with pastoral care resources.

Readings

- Read several more chapters of your choosing, or complete the book ***Heartwood*** if you haven't done so yet, and then read the Postscript. Continue your critical reading of the text.
- View the video with Barbara Becker Author [of *Heartwood: The Art of Living with the End in Mind*](#)
- [“Introduction” and “June 6-12”](#) from Rev. Nancy Schaffer's *While Still There is Light: Writings from a Minister Facing Death*, edited by Mary McKinnon Ganz. Available from Skinner Books and the [UUA Inspirit Bookstore](#).
- [“Where God Is”](#) by Kenny Wiley

Reflection Questions

- What have been your experiences with death and dying? How have they shaped you? What do you believe about an afterlife?
- Rev. Nancy Schaffer writes about her experience of living knowing she is dying. How do you live with the end in mind? Is this comforting or frightening to you?
- In her book *Heartwood*, Barbara Becker describes the core of a tree, the Heartwood, that is actually inert, supporting the new life continuing to grow around it. How do you consider this metaphor as you think of loved ones who have died? Who is the pillar of strength that, though gone, supports your life?
- How do you consider this metaphor in relation to your own death? Who do you support? What legacy will you leave when you die?
- How is death held in your UU community? Is it where you turn, or would turn, in times of loss? Why or why not?

Reminder: If you haven't yet ordered [Parker Palmer's book *Let Your Life Speak*](#) for Session 18, you can order it at an online bookseller or from the [UUA Inspirit Book Store](#).

Also, check in to the [UU Wellspring Facebook****Page](#) for Spiritual Practices and UU Wellspring Community.

Thinking of you all.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Please listen as I read [**“Let Me Die Laughing”**](#) by Mark D. Morrison-Reed. Let's take a few minutes of silence to bring ourselves fully into this circle.

If you want to add music, play [“Meditation”](#) played by Yo Yo Ma.

Check-In

What are you carrying in your heart tonight? How is your spiritual practice or spiritual companionship going?

Covenant Review

Use whatever process your group has established to stay current with the covenant.

Is there anything about the covenant that we should address?

Spiritual Practice Presentation

Reflection

- What have been your experiences with death and dying? How have they shaped you? What do you believe about an afterlife?
- Rev. Nancy Schaffer writes about her experience of living knowing she is dying. How do you live with the end in mind? Is this comforting or frightening to you?
- In her book *Heartwood*, Barbara Becker describes the core of a tree, the Heartwood, that is actually inert, supporting the new life continuing to grow around it. How do you consider

this metaphor as you think of loved ones who have died? Who is the pillar of strength that, though gone, supports your life?

- How do you consider this metaphor in relation to your own death? Who do you support? What legacy will you leave when you die?
- How is death held in your UU community? Is it where you turn, or would turn, in times of loss? Why or why not?

So What?

How does this reflection relate to your spiritual journey? What are you inspired or challenged to do next?

Gratitude and Closing

Have everyone focus on the chalice. Each person, as moved, says one or two words about something from this session for which they are grateful or how they are feeling in this moment. After everyone has said a word, close with a brief statement of thanks and appreciation such as, "For all this and more, we are grateful."

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