

Death and Dying: The Art of Grieving

CH-621

Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper
donnaschaper@judson.org
413 687 1937

Grief is a form of Love. Religious professionals know as much about love as we do about death – and we also know what we don't know and that we can never know enough. This class assists us making meaning out of the mystery of death and its attendant losses. We develop understandings which help us minister, attend, validate and recognize each other and ourselves. From these understandings, skills develop.

The method of the course is experiential learning, which method applies to many more subjects than just grief.

September 27 10 – 4

Private Grief

This first session will focus on the art of individual dying. You will read Dr. Becker's book (see below) before coming and write a two-page paper on what it showed you that you didn't already know. That paper is due in Canvas on September 24. *Read before first class!*

Class will discuss what little we know about the normal reality of death and dying. It will also alert us that we know a lot, which we might not know that we know. It will befriend the mystery of the grief process and its multiple forms.

Be prepared to discuss experiences of death you have had personally. Partners, Spouses, Siblings, Grandparents, Children, Other? Any close calls yourself?

Have you written your funeral service and your will?

Be prepared to talk about rituals. What helped? What didn't help?

Barbara Becker, **The art of Living with the End in Mind**, Flatiron Books, 2021.

Rabbi Mitch Chefitz, **The Rx of Dr. Z: a prescription to redirect a life, in fear of death, in 40 days**, 2021 from Expanding Soul Books..

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/arts/design/maya-lin-smith-college-daniel-wolf.html?referringSource=articleShare>

October 25 10 – 4

Public Grief

How do we handle the ongoing grief of ongoing racism?

It is not just about communities of color; it is about people who are white as well.

How do we handle the ongoing grief about climate change? What level of authoritarian management will be needed to force us to change? Might we choose to change before events or people force us to do so? How does grief work inside the climate change movement? Obviously fear of death and extinction are present. How are they articulated?

Review these two materials, below, one on spirituals and race and the other on The Grid.

Your assignment will be to talk to two black lives matters' activists and two environmental activists and ask them about how grief works inside them and in their organizations. You will write a paper, two pages on each movement and what you learned about grief from these "experts."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/05/t-magazine/black-spirituals-poetry-resistance.html?smid=em-share>

[The Grid: The Fraying Wires Between Americans and Our ...
www.amazon.com › Grid-Fraying-Between-Americans-](https://www.amazon.com/Book-The-Grid-Fraying-Wires-Between-Americans-and-Our-World/dp/1632861110)

[Beyond Climate Grief: Cultivating Aliveness in A Time of Change](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/05/t-magazine/beyond-climate-grief.html)

Please note: This class will be a trauma-informed space that tries to understand the grief around interconnected and interacting issues. It is not designed as a therapeutic space, but as an interactive space where we learn how inner and outer team up in resolving issues of grief.

November 15 10 – 4.

The Three Elements of Ritual

Repetition/ Repeatability

Inwardly experienced

Outwardly experienced.

In this class we will learn how to learn from our experience of rituals and how to replicate ritual making in our work in multiple settings. Memorial services and funerals and last rites and burials

are primary rituals surrounding death and dying. What makes them work? What happens when they don't work?

A coffee klatch can also be a ritual. A breakfast meeting can be a ritual. Getting dressed can be a ritual. Worship is a ritual. Exercise can be a ritual. How can we professionals learn how to help people ritualize behavior?

Readings to be assigned.

December 6. 10 – 4

The role of the Unconscious in Grief

Dreams and folk wisdom will be the subject. What does “folk” teach about how to grieve? What do people mean when they say, “don't change anything for a. year?”

Why do people say “don't say anything bad about the dead?” Or “don't dance on her grave.”

How wise is folk wisdom? How superstitious is it? What is the role of superstition?

How does folk wisdom create community? What happens when a community doesn't share common folk wisdoms or sayings?

Readings to be assigned.

December 20 10 – 4

Grieving the Death of Institutions, while living in Institutions

Unique experience of the death of religious institutions, churches, synagogues, mosques, seminaries.

The Experience of the Loss of the Office

What will it be like to lose access to a car?

What will it be like to tip towards a mostly colorful society in the US?

What will it be like when men do as many dishes as women do, as much childcare as women do? What will be lost? What will be gained?

Grieving the end of this class and these relationships.

Learning how to do a restorative circle any time anywhere.

Learning how to live in the great unknowing of what next

Outcomes

This course will help you explore theoretical and clinical models of grief and the practice of grieving.

This course will push hard on questions about the nature and presence of the divine in the practice of grieving. How did God help? Was God present? Was God present in the ritual or the experience of grieving? If not, why not? If not, how not??

This course will show you how to build community so that communities can be useful in the normal process of grieving.

This course will be circular: grief will change our theologies and our theologies will change how we grieve. Our theologies and our grieving will inform the rituals and communities with which we work.

You will leave the course with new words to use about grief and new ways to grieve, while also being aware that very different people grieve in very different ways. You won't grieve again in the same way but in richer, deeper ways.

You will become a person who grieves while automatically using a multi-disciplinary approach – artistic, sociological, theological, contextual informing the strength and limitations of personal experience.

You will know how to build teams and how to build plans of care.

You will be more expert at working within an individual community where people grieve publicly and privately, on a regular basis. A word on this syllabus: It will change. It is not complete. It will change as our experience of each other changes. We will also change the syllabus depending on what each of us wants out of the course. The course is about experiential learning and we will practice learning how to learn from our experience.

Weekly Assignments will come as the course develops and will use journaling as a primary form of recording, thinking, writing and rewriting. Also you will

- 1. Attend the monthly zoom meeting and participate in discussion.**
- 2. Write at least two pages in your journal each month and turn it into a living document, one that changes over time, responsive to class learnings,**

instructors' questions and what others contribute in class and to you directly online.

- 3. Check in with the instructor personally during office hours at least once per month. (Or schedule another time so to do.)**
- 4. Read Three of the assigned books and write a book review 2 pages telling what you learned from each book. Book reviews are due by November 15th Extra credit is also possible by reading all the books.**
- 5. Prepare a final project by team, teams to be assigned no later than the week before Thanksgiving. Students are encouraged to develop teams as early as possible for the final project. We will decide on the direction of the final projects mid way through the course.**

Required Texts & Readings, from which to choose three:

- *A Beginner's Guide to the End: Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death* Paperback – by Dr. BJ Miller, Shoshana Berger. Simon and Schuster, publisher.
- *Approaching the End of Life: A Practical and Spiritual Guide* by Donna Schaper. Rowman and Littlefield, publishers.
- *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death over the Last One Thousand Years* by Philippe Aries (Author), Helen Weaver (Translator). Vintage Books/Random House, publisher.
- *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawandi, Metropolitan Books, 2014. ISBN-10: 1250081246
- *Reading Scripture after the Virus* by Walter Brueggeman

Grades

Class participation: 25%

Assigned Writing/Journaling 25%

Participation in Online Discussions 25%

Final Project 25%. The final project will accumulate your journal work and your other writing, responding and reading work. It will show how you integrate your personal traditions into your own settings as they work with personal and institutional grief.

Extra credit, up to 10%, may be given for creativity and initiative.

Course Expectations and Classroom Policies:

Attendance Policy: Active attendance in class is required. If you know you will be unable to attend a class session please inform the professor in advance.

The student handbook states: A paper submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course without the prior permission of both instructors. Hartford Seminary strictly adheres to the Plagiarism Policy. Written papers and theses must be typed and should conform to the styles and format for footnotes and acknowledgments announced by the course instructor. For additional information on format, proper footnotes, acknowledgments, etc., students are directed to consult the *Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper*. These guidelines can be picked up in the student forms center or downloaded from our website at: <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>. Students may also consult Kate L. Turabian's, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, (6th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1996), upon which the guidelines are based. Seminary research paper guide <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>

Seminary Grading Scale

- A (95-100) Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
- A- (90-94) Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
- B+(87-89) Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
- B (83-86) Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.

- B-(80-82) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
- C+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
- C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
- F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

- Grades range from A to C and F; A+'s and C-'s are not part of the grading system.
- On a 4.0 GPA scale -- A(4.00), A-(3.66), B+(3.33), B(3.00), B-(2.66), C+(2.33), C(2.00) and F(0.00). A grade point average of no less than B- (2.66) is required to maintain good standing. The minimum G.P.A. required for graduation is 2.75.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one's own previous work used in another course. See "Plagiarism" at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>.

Inclusive Language:

Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another's images of God.

Extensions: Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

Official Handbooks: For all other questions you might have regarding policies or procedures, please check the student handbook <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/> and seminary policies at Academic policies are listed at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>

Prompts for Journaling, unless you can find your own. A prompt is something to which you respond on the subject of grief.

#MemorialForUsAll

Weekly Broadcast Honors Those Lost During COVID-19
Pandemic <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/tnyradiohour/episodes/amid-pandemic-catharsis-seven-oclock>

"The streets of New York City are so desolate now that you half expect tumbleweed to blow along the pavement," David Remnick says of the city under quarantine. Yet he finds hope and joyful catharsis in the daily 7 P.M. mass cheer that celebrates all those who are risking their own health to keep the city alive. A scholar explains how the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare the inequalities of the American health-care system, which creates worse outcomes, in many different ways, for people who are disadvantaged. Yiyun Li explains why she turns to "War and Peace" during times of trouble and uncertainty. And—in lieu of watching baseball—Remnick talks with Roger Angell, the greatest observer of the game, about baseball seasons past.

One of the beauties of vigil-keeping is that we can bear witness simultaneously to [Naming The Lost](#), [Black Lives Matter](#), [Free Them All](#), and ALL of our imperatives to mourn AND organize.*

"Don't mourn, organize!" abbreviates a telegram of immigrant labor activist and songwriter Joe Hill before his execution in 1915 — but his final words actually expressed concern about [what would happen to his body](#). At a time when so many of us face deep questions about how to be most effective during this crisis, the capacity to sit quietly for an hour to honor the dead can help us continue to clarify our priorities for engaged action on behalf of the living. — ["Share the Vigil" Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Today we reached 70 days of "Share the Vigil." We are currently sustaining this multi-faith vigil for 37 out of 168 hours each week — across faith traditions, three generations and three time zones. We still have 131 weekly hours available — and, as one of our daily (7 hours a week) vigil-keepers recently shared, *"It would be nice to have a person to associate with the passing of the torch."*

* ["Naming The Lost" and Sustaining the Vigil: How to Mourn AND Organize](#)

The unclaimed and unnamed dead deserve our caring attention for many, many days and nights to come. We would welcome your committed presence for an hour each week if you are not able to spare an hour each day.

We hope you will join us. Please share this message with others in your networks, and please let us know your questions and concerns.

Rabbi Regina Sandler-Phillips, MSW, MPH
Executive Director, [WAYS OF PEACE Community Resources](#)

Women at the Grave initiated multi faith prayers, via Drone and Zoom, at Potters field to memorialize those who died unattended and unnamed

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/zoom-funeral-covid-19-pandemic_n_5eea1fafc5b68fc6dded380f?ncid=engmodushpmsg00000006
Reimagining Death web site: A Place where Artists create new funeral services and more

https://eolupodcast.com/2020/05/18/ep-247-reimagining-death-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-with-lucinda-herring/?fbclid=IwAR1qya4UVEI_l2DZ8lnyJlSEyRXeT7KNcM7kUzEgDz606zwGdkNsA9VXVpo

Podcast #2

<http://www.buzzsprout.com/627256/1771852-reimagining-death-with-lucinda-herring>

Podcast #3

<https://www.blogtalkradio.com/voicesofwomenwithkrissteinnes/2020/02/03/reimagining-death-with-lucinda-herring>

Podcast #4

<https://anchor.fm/deathdialogues/episodes/17--Reimagining-Death-Lucinda-Herring-e3ed8g>

Podcast #5

<https://americanthanatologist.com/ldt/episodes/019>

Podcast #6 (not her book but may be relevant)

<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/dance-with-god/episode-3-reimagining-death-06w3t1SCbJj/>

TedX Talk on the Subject -

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsRNoUx8w3rNbxS9KQdPNLXtrCBav_aZz

"Share the Vigil" is a [How to Mourn AND Organize](#) initiative of WAYS OF PEACE.

Lincoln Center Weekly Memorials for all who Died of COVID in NYC
Weekly Broadcast Honors Those Lost During COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/11/how-david-beats-goliath>

Robin DiAngelo: How white fragility supports racism and how whites can stop it. By Sandee LaMotte, Sunday June 7, 2020

<https://www.homefuneralalliance.org/home-funeral-books.html>

<https://lucindaherring.com/lucindas-blog/>

“A Sacred Moment – Home Funeral Vigils, Green Burials and Life Celebrations” article by Lucinda Herring for Natural Choice Magazine Seattle.

https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/burial_in_the_age_of_covid-19/

by Editor, Paul Bass.

<https://crosscut.com/2019/10/how-die-good-green-death>

How to die a good, green death

<https://medium.com/@micheleregallie/reimagining-death-a-closer-look-at-darren-aronofskys-the-fountain-8f4059a09500>

Michael Hebb, the founder of [Death Over Dinner](#) and author of [Let's Talk About Death \(Over Dinner\)](#), for use by families in intimate ways.

Adam Gopnick, *New Yorker*, Memorials: Stones and Bones, July 7, 2014.