

## **Partners in Caring**

*End-of-life seminar for faith leaders*

# **Being with the Dying**

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## **Meditation on Loss Exercise**

The goal of this exercise is to sensitize participants to the choices faced by individuals who are dying. When using this guided meditation, it is important to provide emotional support to participants, inviting them to re-center themselves, to feel the space, to touch the earth, to breathe slowly and supportively. Throughout the meditation, it is helpful to remind participants to feel safe and comfortable in the environment. You will find suggestions (in italics) inserted into the meditation.

It is also critical that the small-group facilitators be trained before the meditation. This training can be brief but should include 1) explanation about the goal of the exercise, 2) introduction to the questions they are to explore with the participants, and 3) ideas about how to encourage everyone to speak without anyone dominating the conversation. Small-group facilitators should be given a copy of the guided meditation.

## **Meditation Leader Instructions to Group**

We are going to do a guided meditation that will invite you to imagine your own death and to see the choices that you might well have as it unfolds. You will be using the Activities List we asked you to complete and perhaps your Advance Directive so you might want to have those close by.

Before we begin, we'd like to invite you to sit comfortably in your chair, put your papers down and allow your hands to rest gently in your lap.

Notice your feet on the floor; feel your back against the chair.

As you enter into this meditation, breathe deeply through your whole body. Just allow yourself to feel the comfort that brings.

Close your eyes, and keep your body relaxed but well supported in your chair. And as you center yourself, just begin to breathe normally and mindfully.

Hold deep loving kindness and compassion for yourself as you embark on this meditation.

## **Meditation Leader**

Imagine that you have noticed some changes in your body. Perhaps a new pain or stiffness that doesn't go away. A nagging ache, a blurriness of vision, a weakness in a limb, or an overall sense of tiredness and lethargy that remains even after a good night's sleep. You see your doctor, and she recommends you undergo a series of tests. (pause)

The tests come back, and they are conclusive that you have an inoperable mass that is spreading rapidly. Your doctor tells you that the odds suggest you might die in six months, but

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you agree to undergo both chemo and radiation in the hope that they will slow down the progression and buy you some time. You experience hair loss, nausea, diarrhea, fevers, and weight loss. (*Pause*)

Cross out the activities on your list that you can no longer do.

### **Small Group Facilitators**

The small-group facilitators then will assist those in their circles to consider these questions:

- What are you feeling now?
- Do your priorities need to be adjusted?
- Are your wishes, as expressed in your advance directive form, still valid?

### **Meditation Leader**

So once again, sit comfortably back in your chair. Feel the ground beneath you. Close your eyes and take a few deep cleansing breaths, remembering where you are and that you are safe and supported here. Hold deep and abiding loving kindness and compassion for yourself.

You're beginning to have trouble concentrating, and you can no longer make it through an entire day without a long nap in the afternoon. You've lost your appetite, and you no longer have the stamina to engage in any strenuous activity. (*pause*)

You begin to need strong medications to counter the persistent pain, and you experience difficulty concentrating, remembering things and being clear-headed. You continue to lose weight, and you notice that your friends don't know what to say when they call or visit. You're in bed more and more of the time, and you are inside more and more. (*pause*)

Cross out the activities on your list that you can no longer do.

### **Small Group Facilitators**

The small-group facilitators then will assist those in their circles to consider these questions:

- What are your feelings now?
- Do your priorities need to be adjusted again?
- Are your wishes, as expressed in your advance directive form, still valid?

### **Meditation Leader**

So once again, sit comfortably back in your chair. Feel the ground beneath you. Close your eyes and take a few deep cleansing breaths, remembering where you are and that you are safe and supported here. Continue to hold deep loving kindness and compassion for yourself.

It's time to acknowledge that you aren't going to get better and that the treatment options have failed. You talk with your family about your death and your wishes. You begin to say goodbye to close friends. You engage hospice to help you with your dying. (*pause*)

Cross out the activities on your list that you can no longer do

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### **Small Group Facilitators**

The small-group facilitators then will assist those in their circles to consider these questions:

- What are your feelings now?
- What is important now?

### **Meditation Leader**

So once again, sit comfortably back in your chair. Feel the ground beneath you. Close your eyes and take a few deep cleansing breaths, remembering where you are and that you are safe and supported here. And once again, remember to hold deep loving kindness and compassion for yourself.

It's clear to you that the end is near. You have ceased to eat. You no longer walk down the hall to the bathroom but instead use a bedside commode. Your breathing becomes labored, and you drift from moment to moment until you take your final breath and let go of your body.

### **Small Group Facilitators**

The small-group facilitators then will assist those in their circles to consider these questions:

- Was your death reflective of your values and your wishes?
- Is there something you know now that you didn't know before about how you want to die?
- When did you start to die?

### **Meditation Leader**

As we conclude this meditation, take a moment to look around this space.

Notice what you see, perhaps old friends and some new ones. Notice the sounds in the room. Feel your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Notice that you are alive and in this moment, all is well. Hold in the center of your being deep loving kindness and compassion for yourself.

And finally, allow gratitude to fill your heart – gratitude for your willingness and courage to explore your dying wishes.