

Worship Service

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lee

Read the standard blurb. And then: This morning's worship service, called "None of Us Gets Out of This Alive", is presented by the Final Choices Committee. Lay-led worship is a tradition at this and many other Unitarian Universalist Societies. At Allen Avenue, the Worship Committee either sponsors or presents one set of Sunday services out of every four.

CHALICE LIGHTING

Minty

CALL & RESPONSE AFFIRMATION

A Common Destiny

David H. Eaton

All living substance, all substance of energy, being and purpose, are united and share the same destiny
all people, those we love and those we know not of, are united and share the same destiny.

Birth-to-death we share this unity with the sun, earth
our brothers and sisters, strangers,

flowers of the field, snowflakes, volcanoes and moon beams.

*Birth-Life-Death
Unknown-Known-Unknown*

Our destiny: from unknown to unknown.

May we have the faith to accept this mystery and build upon its everlasting truth.

OPENING WORDS

"Death" (an excerpt)

Khalil Gibran

Mike

You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

*HYMN #347 Gather the Spirit

LESSON FOR ALL AGES

The Tenth Good Thing about Barney

Judith Viorst (Delene)

Hymn # 413 "Go Now in Peace" (The children will go to their programs at this time)

JOYS & CONCERNS

We have a tradition at Allen Avenue to share with each other our important joys and concerns, so that all of us might carry the burden or join in the celebration. All are invited to write your joys and concerns at the table in the rear, to be shared on the bulletin board in the foyer.

9am: those who wish to light a candle quietly may do so now

11 am: *If you wish also to speak aloud a sorrow or joy from your heart, please come forward to light a candle, tell us your name, and **briefly** share.*

(After the sharing, light a candle and say this) I light a final candle for all that remains unspoken in our hearts. Let us take a moment of silence as we think about what we have heard.

INTRODUCTION

MIKE LUCE

“Death comes like the hungry bear in autumn... like an iceberg between the shoulders,” in Mary Oliver’s words. This morning, why sit through a service about the dread-inducing topic of death? Perhaps because despite our discomfort, bringing death out into the open and talking about the reality of it can give us opportunities that are just too valuable to lose. Our culture strongly encourages avoiding and denying death. Yet intellectually we all know that we are terminal, we just don’t know when. It is the hope of the members of the Final Choices Committee that this morning’s service will provide an opening to more thoughtfulness, more honesty, more freedom of choice and fulfillment of our individual wishes by encouraging a dialogue about death ... first with ourselves and then with our loved ones. Who can’t recall the regret of not saying what was in our heart to someone whom we would never see again? Or the regret of not speaking up about what we felt or wanted regarding something really important? By opening up and talking about our final time, our final choices, we may find that despite the pain of loss that death always entails, peacefulness is possible. We may find, as so many attest, that the preciousness of life and preciousness of each other becomes much clearer. May our time together this morning be a step toward that greater appreciation and peace for us all.

SHARING

Courtesy

MINTY HYSLOP

Last year I received a diagnosis of a blocked artery in my heart, and surgery was recommended. For considerations that were, and are still, important to me, I declined the treatment. It was explained that a heart attack could happen at any time. In order to confront the possibilities remaining, I met with a trusted hospice counselor. There followed the implementation of Do Not Resuscitate directions, the purchase of a green burial site, arrangements with a local funeral director, a conversation with my attorney. Now I carry the DNR direction on bracelet and a laminated orange form in my purse. There is a DNR form over my bed and on the refrigerator, along with the name and number of the person who will see that my cats are cared for. I’ve told friends of my wishes, and asked that if they’re with me when an attack occurs, that they emphasize to the emergency service people who may appear that my wishes are conveyed on the bracelet and form that I carry.

I’ve made these arrangements perfectly aware that I may live for a long time yet, and attend many funerals before my own comes due. But this time since the diagnosis has given me an opportunity to simultaneously treat my life as the precious gift it is, and to recognize that I may choose to greet death – my last guest – with courtesy and curiosity.

OFFERTORY

MINTY

*Our offering each week supports the work we do with each other and also the work we do in the world. This week, half of our offerings will be shared with **THE TELLING ROOM – THE PLACE WHERE STORIES GROW***

The Telling Room is a non-profit writing center in Portland, which seeks to build confidence and strengthen literacy skills in young writers ages 6 to 18. The writing center offers free afterschool workshops and tutoring, hosts field trips for school groups from all over Maine, publishes bestselling anthologies of student work, and brings acclaimed writers to give public readings and to work with small groups of students. It serves children who are reluctant to write as well as those who already identify as writers, including immigrants and refugees, those with behavioral challenges, homeschoolers, and young writers who need more support than their schools can provide.

At this time, the offering will be given and received.

Choir ??

REFLECTION**The Buddhist View**

Judith Moll

From an early age I was acutely aware of death. It greatly saddened me to find dead birds and other little dead creatures. Rather than avoid them as other children did, however, I would hold burials, carefully nestling the dead bird or turtle or mouse in a tissue-lined box, placing it in the earth in the garden and adding a little stone marker. I was both fascinated by death and greatly frightened by it. Lying in bed at night, I wondered what would happen to me when I, like these little animals, died. Where would I go? Would life just end? It was terrifying to think of.

As I got older I tried to come to grips with my fears, reading about death, trying to understand it from an intellectual perspective. My search for meaning and an understanding of death and of life eventually led me to Buddhism, over twenty years ago. I immediately resonated with the teachings, particularly the teaching of how suffering is caused by our desire for things to stay the same and only when we give up our clinging to that false notion can suffering be overcome. In Buddhism the acceptance of impermanence extends to how birth and death are understood.

One of the teachers who has greatly influenced my own and countless others' lives is Thich Nhat Hanh. He describes the Buddha's teaching about no-birth and no-death as the cream of the whole body of teaching. He writes, "in order to understand what happens to us when we die, we need to answer another question... what happens when we are alive? What is happening to us now? We say we are alive, but it would be more proper to say we are becoming... because things are always becoming. We are not the same person in two consecutive minutes. A picture of you as a baby looks very different to you now. You are not exactly the same as that baby and not exactly a different person either. In Buddhism we speak of the middle way. In the middle way there is no sameness and no otherness." Nhat Hanh explains the Buddhist notion of no-birth and no-death using examples from nature. He says, "a cloud was once water in an ocean, then the sun's heat gave it birth... it doesn't die or become nothing... it becomes water, rain... it is all continuation. So, too, is it also impossible for us to die. Speech, action and thought continue in the future. The person who dies still continues. They continue in us and around us. All our ancestors are alive in us."

In his book, *No Death. No Fear*, Nhat Hanh teaches that meditation can take us to a place of fearlessness. As a student of Buddhism, I continue to attempt to move beyond my own fears and limited notions of life and death. Larry Rosenberg, another meditation teacher with a wonderful sense of humor, is fond of saying that the good news and the bad news about meditation practice is that it is the work of a lifetime. How true that is, I find, with each day providing more opportunities to practice, more opportunities to show up and face the confusing and difficult questions, not seeking answers so much as learning to be present to it all.

POEM**Native American Prayer**

Elizabeth

I give you this one thought to keep -
I am with you still - I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift, uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not think of me as gone -
I am with you still - in each new dawn.

MUSIC "In Sweet Fields of Autumn" Dale's arrangement with Mike or Choir

SHARING

Approaching the Fear

Lee Shenton

My grandfather was an undertaker – that's what Funeral directors were called in those days. So I was aware that people died, but it wasn't personal. When I was fourteen, my grandmother's sister Letitia died, and since my parents were away, I was my family's representative at the funeral. I had helped take care of Aunt Tish her in her final days as she died. Now there her body was, laid out in a casket. Death was real; this was what it looked like.

Afterward, I remember lying in bed at night, trying to empty my mind completely, to imagine what it must be like to be dead. I scared myself silly, needless to say. Throughout my teens, I would think about dying, and then quickly put it aside. I couldn't do anything about it - why think about it?

Like all young adults, I got caught up in the busyness of living: college, marriage, work and children. I didn't have to think about dying – being busy is good insulation against thinking too much.

Gradually, my older relatives died. My father's death had a very strong impact; he wasn't prepared and lashed out angrily at everyone. He did not go peacefully. Suddenly, with grown children, I was on the front lines. Grandchildren came along. When my grandson Alex was 16 months old, I learned I had breast cancer.

I was shocked and frightened for awhile. I particularly remembered my father, and resolved not to be as he had been in those last days. Then I wanted information; I desperately needed to make a plan. Planning energized me and enabled me to confront cancer, treatments and the possibility of death. The worst thing is feeling helpless. I recognized that I could take control of how I approach living – and dying.

It was a revelation to realize that death itself is nothing to fear – after all, I won't be around to know about it. But the process of dying – that's another matter, and one I can take control of in many ways, with planning and discussion with family and friends. My thinking is still evolving, and has changed as I've discussed issues with friends.

I agree with my friend Ruth: I would gladly give up a few weeks of living, to go quickly when the time comes. Once I know that cure is not possible and quality of life is deteriorating, let me be active as long as I am able and keep me comfortable.

I have written a living will so no extraordinary measures will be taken to prolong my dying. I certainly will arrange for disposition of my remains. If family wants to have a memorial service, that's fine. I want to live well and go with grace and dignity and without fear when the time comes. That's the greatest gift I can leave my family.

In the meantime, I appreciate every new day. I still "Have miles to go before I sleep"

In 1959 my brother Tom was killed in a hunting accident. There was a whirlwind of activity; the ambulance came to the house; the neighbors came; the funeral; the neighbors; the burial; the neighbors. Then...the silence. I was 14 and I was a typical, oblivious, self-absorbed adolescent. I have lots of memories about it, but I *felt* like a disconnected bystander. I didn't have any sense of participating in the process or grieving the loss.

My mother-in-law died in the emergency room in 1984. It was also very sudden and unexpected. The doctor informed us in the waiting room. Then a social-worker-type person came in and asked who should she call "For what?" my husband asked. ... "What funeral home do you want to use?" He gave her the name of the one he knew from church.

That funeral director called him the next day and asked my husband what he wanted to do. My father-in-law had been cremated and scattered, so my husband decided to do the same for his mother. Several days later he picked up a box of ashes. That was it. Again, I was an observer. I was trying to be supportive, but I wasn't really involved in the process. It was a time of managing details, not grieving the loss.

When Dad died I was living at considerable distance. I visited him once while he was sick, and then he died quite suddenly. Mom took care of all the arrangements, and I got there in time for the funeral. I was able to stay with Mom for about a week, but then I had to go back to work. It was *painful* to be so disconnected from it all.

In none of these situations did I have to make any of the choices, but I did *learn* something.... There are no "do-overs".

When my mother died I had the responsibility for making most of the final choices. Because Mom had Alzheimer's, I was not able to get much direction from her, but I knew my mother well. We had had a close relationship ... a *lifelong* relationship ... and I loved and cherished her. I would follow my heart.

As her condition declined she was in the emergency room several times. The last time she was there the doctor called me to say there was a space available at the Baron Center and that ...it was probably time.

I contacted them and went over the next day. The intake worker walked me through the paperwork and explained that when or if Mom needed to apply for Medicaid, they would allow her to keep a certain amount of cash and also to prepay her final expenses.

I suppose the bewildered look on my face told her that I didn't have a *clue*. She gave me a brochure about the Funeral Consumers' Alliance and said they might be a source of information for me.

This was 1998. The Funeral Consumers' Alliance had quite a lot of general information, but the most useful thing to me *at that moment* was the list of the participating funeral homes, one in central Maine and one in Southern Maine. I went to see the one in Windham.

They explained their services; we talked about my preferences and the relative costs for each service. I made the basic decisions about what to do, how and where. We signed a contract; I paid the bill.

At the time I took it all for granted. I have since learned how unique that experience was - especially the part about the itemized price list and having a menu of choices. I chose direct cremation because of the relative costs and the issue of transporting a body across the state line. Later, in the Spring, our family gathered in New Hampshire to bury her ashes in the family plot with Dad and my brother.

There are some things I would do differently now. Aren't there always? I did the best I could with what I had at the time. That's all any of us can ever do, so the choices will naturally be different for each of us.

Through this Final Choices project I'm discovering that there are even more choices available now

and I am working to set up my own affairs so the process is environmentally sound, simple, and peaceful for me and for my family.

Mom's death was a profound loss for me, but I was able to accept it and process it, because I wasn't preoccupied with details. Most importantly - I was able to stay present with my mother in her passing.

READING

RACHEL CARSON

Delene Perley

Rachel Carson at age 56 had incurable breast cancer and was reluctantly leaving her home in Maine to return to her home in Maryland ostensibly to die. She wrote this from Southport Maine to a friend after they had seen a flow of monarch butterflies on a walk together earlier in the day:

“We spoke of... that unhurried drift of one small winged form after another. Each drawn by some invisible force. We talked a little about their life history. Would they return? We thought not. For most, at least, this would be the closing journey of their lives. But it occurred to me this afternoon, remembering, that it had been a happy spectacle, that we had felt no sadness when we spoke of the fact that there would be no return, and rightly. For when any living thing has come to the end of its cycle, we accept that end as natural. For the monarch butterfly, that cycle is measured in the known span of months. For ourselves, the measure is something else. The span of which we cannot know. But the thought is the same. When that intangible cycle has run its course, it is a natural and not unhappy thing that a life has come to its end. That is what those brightly fluttering colored bits of life taught me this morning. And I found deep happiness in it. So, I hope, may you.”

HYMN # Dale to choose something appropriate

“Please continue to stand and hold hands for the closing words”

Lee

CLOSING WORDS

In Black Water Woods (excerpt)

Mary Oliver (Lee)

To live in this world, you must be able to do three things: to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it; and, when the time comes to let it go, to let it go.

CLOSING MUSIC

(Please remain seated for the Closing Music)

* Rise as you are able

Planner of and participants in this morning's service include: It's on the order of service.