Embracing the Fear of Dying
The implications and consequences of dying in a death-phobic culture

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SAKED CROSSINGS
The Institute for Conscious Dying

FEARS of DYING

• Pain
• Loss of control /Helplessness
• Being dependent on others
• Being alone
• Loosing all we love
• No more time - stuff left to do
• Loss of identity
• Fear of the unknown / death

WHY ARE WE DEATH-PHOBIC?

• Death is viewed as failure
• Dying and death are not a natural part of our human experience
• We have inherited our understandings of dying based on false ideas and beliefs
• We are over-identified with our body
• Our culture focuses on individuality, self-sufficiency and being in control of our destiny
• Our language promotes fear
FIGHTING

VS.

WRESTLING

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HOPE

“Hope is at war with the present”
-Stephen Jenkinson

HOLD ON!

Holding on requires energy and creates tension and anxiety

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WE CAN LEARN TO RECEIVE DEATH

CONTRACTED vs. OPEN

“Dying is not something that happens to you. Dying is something you do.”
- Stephen Jenkinson
Death Midwifery

A Death Midwife shepherds individuals toward a conscious, peaceful dying experience; guides loved ones in after-death care of the body and supports the family in holding a vigil and funeral at home.

The role includes…

* Talking openly about dying
* Completing advance directives
* Creating a legacy project
* Healing relationships

* Offering tools for relieving anxiety and softening pain
* Spiritual support
* Planning the funeral/memorial
* Supporting the family throughout the transition
* Guiding the family with after-death care of the body, if required.

Laying the body 'In Honor' for a vigil

Creating personalized and meaningful funeral services
Supporting the family with final disposition of the body

Decorating the cremation box

Including children in death rituals
Tools for Reducing Death Anxiety

1. PUT YOUR THINGS IN ORDER
   • Complete Advance Health Care Directives
   • Write a will or trust
   • Create a ‘death file’

2. BECOME THE WITNESS
   • Meditate
   • Practice awareness:
     ‘I have a body, but I am not my body’
     ‘I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts’
     ‘I am loving awareness’
   • Notice - ‘Am I contracted, or open?’
3. HEAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Offer forgiveness, 'I forgive you.'
- Apologize for past mistakes, 'I'm sorry.'
- Ask for forgiveness, 'Please forgive me.'
- Offer love and gratitude, 'Thank you. I love you.'

4. BE PRESENT TO WHAT IS

- Take a deep conscious breath.
- Ask yourself, 'Is everything okay right now?'
- Accept everything as it is, without judgment.
- Be curious - lean into the experience

5. LET GO OF THAT ‘STUFF’!

- De-clutter
- Keep your home clean and tidy
- Give things away
6. SEEK DEATH EDUCATION

- Learn what to expect when the body dies
- Learn about your options for end-of-life. Make decisions and write them down.
- Learn about your options for after-death care/funerals and final disposition of your body. Share your wishes with loved-ones.

‘Who you think you are, can’t do it, who you really are, can. So who you think you are must die in the process.’
- Ram Dass

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