



LOVE STORIES REVISITED

Chapter 9: Loving Loss Salon



RESOURCES & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In the face of loss, there are some practical things that we can do to prepare ourselves and our beloveds. Here are some thoughts to consider and some practical steps you can take now.

AVOIDANCE OF DEATH

We asked AI to explain why death is avoided in the US and how that compares to how death is viewed in other cultures. Here's what it said:

The avoidance of the topic of death in the United States can be attributed to a variety of cultural, social, and historical factors. While it is important to note that there is diversity in attitudes towards death within the United States, certain trends can be observed.

One major factor is the cultural emphasis on youth, vitality, and individualism in American society. There is often a focus on prolonging life, maintaining a youthful appearance, and pursuing personal success and happiness. Consequently, death is seen as a taboo subject, associated with negativity, fear, and loss. Discussions about death and dying are often considered morbid or uncomfortable, leading to avoidance of the topic altogether.

Religious beliefs also play a role. The United States has a diverse religious landscape, with a significant Christian influence. In some Christian traditions, there is an emphasis on the afterlife and the hope of eternal salvation. While this can provide comfort and a sense of purpose, it can also lead to a reluctance to confront the reality of death, as it is seen as a transition to the next life rather than a natural part of the human experience.

Furthermore, the medicalization of death has contributed to the avoidance of the topic. Advances in modern medicine have prolonged life and created a perception that death can be "defeated" or delayed indefinitely. The focus on medical interventions and the expectation of a "fight against death" has led to a denial of death as a natural and inevitable process.

DEATH IN OTHER CULTURES

In contrast to the US perspective on death, many other cultures have different attitudes towards death and dying. For example:

1. Mexican culture: In Mexico, death is embraced and celebrated during the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) festival. It is a time to honor and remember deceased loved ones, with colorful altars, offerings, and gatherings at cemeteries. Death is seen as a continuation of life, and the

festival serves as a way to maintain a connection with those who have passed away. Celebration of the past and who they were and what they brought to the living.

2. Buddhist culture: In Buddhist traditions, death is viewed as a part of the natural cycle of life. Meditation and contemplation on death are encouraged to cultivate an understanding and acceptance of its inevitability. This perspective aims to reduce fear and attachment, promoting a more peaceful transition.

3. Native American culture: Many Native American tribes have a holistic view of life and death, considering them interconnected and part of a greater spiritual whole. Rituals and ceremonies are often incorporated to honor the deceased and provide support for the grieving community.

If Americans were to embrace death more openly, several possibilities could arise. Firstly, it could lead to more honest and open conversations about end-of-life care, allowing individuals to express their wishes, preferences, and values regarding their own deaths. This could foster a greater sense of control, dignity, and peace during the dying process.

Embracing death could also promote a healthier grieving process. By acknowledging and accepting death as a natural part of life, individuals may find it easier to cope with loss and find support within their communities. This could lead to a greater emphasis on rituals, ceremonies, and collective mourning, allowing people to process their grief in a more meaningful and connected way.

Furthermore, embracing death may encourage a shift in priorities and values. Recognizing the finite nature of life could inspire individuals to focus on what truly matters to them, fostering a greater appreciation for relationships, personal growth, and the present moment.

EMBRACING DEATH

We asked AI what the common fears of death are and how to alleviate them. This is what it came up with:

Overall, embracing death could lead to a more death-informed and death-accepting society, where discussions about mortality are common.

People have various fears and anxieties about death, which can stem from different aspects of the unknown, loss, or existential concerns. Here are some common categories of fears people have about death and suggestions for alleviating those fears:

1. Fear of the unknown: Many people fear death because it represents an unknown state or transition. To alleviate this fear, individuals can explore and engage in discussions about death, such as reading books on near-death experiences, spiritual beliefs, or philosophical perspectives. Engaging in open conversations with loved ones or seeking guidance from religious or spiritual leaders can also provide comfort and understanding.

2. Fear of pain or suffering: Some individuals fear the physical process of dying or the potential pain associated with it. Learning about palliative care, hospice services, and advancements in pain management can help alleviate this fear. Understanding that medical professionals strive to provide comfort and minimize suffering during end-of-life care can also provide reassurance.

3. Fear of loss and separation: Death often involves leaving loved ones behind, which can evoke fear and anxiety. Building strong relationships and connections throughout life can help alleviate this fear by fostering a sense of legacy and knowing that one's relationships will endure beyond death. Additionally, discussing end-of-life plans, such as wills, funeral arrangements, or organ donation, can provide a sense of control and ease concerns about leaving unfinished business.

4. Fear of the afterlife or lack thereof: Many people fear what comes after death or question the existence of an afterlife. Exploring various religious and spiritual beliefs, studying different philosophical perspectives, or seeking guidance from trusted spiritual leaders can provide comfort and offer different interpretations of the afterlife. Engaging in personal introspection and reflection can also help individuals find their own beliefs and understanding of death.

5. Fear of unfulfilled dreams or regrets: Some people fear they haven't accomplished everything they desired or have unresolved issues before death. To alleviate this fear, individuals can focus on setting and achieving meaningful goals, pursuing personal growth, and resolving conflicts or unfinished business while they are still alive. Engaging in therapy or counseling can also help individuals address regrets, find closure, and develop a sense of acceptance.

6. Fear of the impact on loved ones: Many individuals worry about the emotional, practical, or financial impact their death might have on their loved ones. Developing a comprehensive end-of-life plan, including financial arrangements, life insurance, and clear communication with family members, can help alleviate this fear. Encouraging open discussions about death and providing support to loved ones can also help them navigate the grieving process.

It's important to acknowledge that fears about death are deeply personal, and what helps alleviate these fears can vary from person to person. Seeking support from professionals, such as therapists, counselors, or support groups, can provide tailored guidance and assistance in addressing individual fears and anxieties about death.

GET YOUR AFFAIRS IN ORDER

Getting your affairs in order can also mean making decisions about organ donation and funeral arrangements, or what you want to happen to your body after you die. Deciding and sharing your decisions can help your loved ones during a stressful time and best ensure your wishes are understood and respected.

Here are some steps you can take to prepare for death:

- Protect your right to die and who you want to be able to make decisions on your behalf. This is especially important if you and your beloved have any type of relationship other than a traditional marriage.
 - **Power of attorney:** Nominate someone to make legal and financial decisions on your behalf.
 - **Power of attorney for health care:** Nominate someone to speak on your behalf if you are incapacitated.
 - **Create a living will (See also below):** Write down your wishes and give a copy to your loved ones.
 - **This included organ donation decisions as well.**
- **Discuss funeral arrangements:** Research cremation and other end-of-life options.
- **Estate planning:** Decide how your assets will be managed and distributed after death.

- Obtain legal documentation of death: Get a legal pronouncement of death.
- Review your life: Discuss your regrets, accomplishments, hopes, and dreams.

Other steps you can take include:

- Writing your last will and testament
- Documenting your passwords
- Sharing locations for important paperwork
- Making a list of who needs to be told
- Considering your social media accounts

A **living will** is a legal document that outlines your preferences for future healthcare treatments. It can include:

- **Medical treatments:** What treatments you would and would not want to be used to keep you alive. For example, you can instruct that you should be put on a ventilator if needed or instruct that you should never be put on a ventilator.
- **Medical decisions:** Who you want to make medical decisions on your behalf if you're unable.
- **Comfort care:** Your preferences around comfort care, bodily donations, and posthumous decisions.
- **Procedures:** A list of procedures that you allow, or if it's easier, make a list of the procedures that you refuse.
- **Medications:** A list of medications that you allow, or if it's easier, make a list of the medications that you refuse.

Other components of a living will can include:

- Doctors and hospitals that should be contacted for emergencies
- Wishes about funeral arrangements
- A durable power of attorney
- Breathing assistance
- Supplemental feeding
- Palliative care
- Posthumous decisions

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sorry for Your Loss, A Comedy Show about Greif, By: Michael Cruz Kayne; Audible Originals. In 1.5 hours, Cruz Kayne tells the story of losing one of his twin boys at 34 days old. Riveting, funny, and transformative.

When Breath Becomes Air By: **Paul Kalanithi**; Random House. At the age of 36, on the verge of completing a decade's worth of training as a neurosurgeon, Paul Kalanithi was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. One day he was a doctor treating the dying, and the next he was a patient struggling to live. And just like that, the future he and his wife had imagined evaporated. *When Breath Becomes Air* chronicles Kalanithi's transformation from a naïve medical student "possessed", as he wrote, "by the question of what, given that all organisms die, makes a virtuous and

meaningful life" into a neurosurgeon at Stanford working in the brain, the most critical place for human identity, and finally into a patient and new father confronting his own mortality. *From the publisher.*

A Year to Live By: Stephen Levine, Sounds True Publishing. Levine challenged himself to live an entire year as if it were his last - and in this revealing narrative he shares what he learned. Through a series of month-by-month practices anyone can do, and including special meditations and exercises, *A Year to Live* teaches a way to live every day of your life with vivid fullness. *From the publisher.*

Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul, By: Stephen Jenkinson. North Atlantic Books. Dying well, Jenkinson writes, is a right and responsibility of everyone. It is not a lifestyle option. It is a moral, political, and spiritual obligation all people owe their ancestors and their heirs. *Die Wise* dreams such a dream and plots such an uprising. How we die, how we care for dying people, and how we carry our dead: This work makes our capacity for a village-mindedness - or breaks it.

The Alchemy of Life: Embracing the Mystical Dance of Death and Rebirth. Step into the mystical realms of self-transformation and discover the profound wisdom that lies in the interplay between life and death. In this captivating video, we delve into the spiritual and mystical journey that invites us to shed our old selves, embrace authenticity, and find true meaning in the dance of existence. https://youtu.be/8_niKhH_0Sk?si=AWmOnj3y9metH36

You Are This Moment – Award-Winning Life Changing Spiritual Documentary Film. Carrying all of life on our shoulders is too much to bear for any of us. But each of us can rise to meet this moment, right here, right now. With each inhale, we can welcome each new moment. With each exhale, we can let it go. At times, our lives can feel dark and chaotic. It can feel like nothing goes right and that we are cursed. But the dark times are nothing more than little dots peppered onto the vast timeline of our lives. The dots don't take up much space, but they can cast large shadows. The deeper we can live each moment, the more joy and peace we can invite into our lives. It doesn't matter what happened yesterday. It doesn't matter what will happen tomorrow. We are not our mistakes, nor are we our successes. We are this one, eternal, priceless moment. The more we take care of this moment with mindful awareness, the more we tend to it with care and love, the more our lives can blossom. <https://youtu.be/HO3ovPHEY7c?si=K0r4lV-AXXx4bbTv>

Miracle of Death - 17 Minutes to Change Your Life FOREVER. Fear of death is a remarkable evolutionary advantage. Without it, our species wouldn't have fought so hard to survive such challenging times. That fear is an incredible drive for us to keep on living. And that's what this YouTube film is all about. The dead don't mourn. It's us the living that must cope and find a way to move forward. The more we understand loss, the easier it is to survive it. I hope this film brings some understanding and comfort as we confront our impermanent nature. May we all learn to see the beautiful healing nature of loss and grief, and may that teach us how to live more fully during our brief and precious time on this planet. <https://youtu.be/7-WAMUxjlZU?si=N7A11G3rY6bXETfi>

HEY GOD, a poem by John Roedel

Me: Hey God.

God: Hello, My love.

Me: What should I say to somebody who is about to die?

God: The exact same things you should say to everybody else whenever you have a chance.

Me: What's that?

God: I love you.

I love you so.

I forgive you.

I'm sorry.

I'm blessed to know you.

I'm so grateful to you.

I think that you are beautiful.

I can't wait to see you again.

I love you.

I love you so.

{we are roommates in hospice care together and every conversation we share
could be the most important moment in our lives}

{you and I are both dying right now so let's not leave a single word unspoken between us ~ let's
speak the softest poetry to each other by moonlight
because one of us might not physically be here in the morning}

{we are fading stars calling to each other across the vast universe to bathe each other in the softest
light of love one last time
before we slip through the vortex and back into time}

{together we can build a confessional out of the gentle glances we give each other while we hold
hands
and quietly pardon every scar we carved into each other before we knew any better}

{if we remember that every heartbeat is being counted then there will never be any ordinary
seconds spent between us
~ each breath we share will be draped in importance}

{in this planet of 8 billion hospice patients there is so much magic and so many chances to brush
each other with rose petals
before we are swept away by resurrection}

let's lace our hands
as if eternity is opening
up the veil into the great
mystery right in front of us
let's feel our fingers against
each other as if this is the
last time we will touch before
we become celestial kites
let's part our lips and say

what we should have said
to each other years ago
I love you.
 I love you so.
 I forgive you.
I'm sorry.
 I'm blessed to know you.
 I'm so grateful to you.
I think that you are beautiful.
 I can't wait to see you again.
 I love you.
I love you so.
 ~ john roedel

