

ADVANCING THE INTEGRATION OF SPIRITUAL CARE IN WHOLE PERSON CARE

Caring for the Human Spirit[®] magazine

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THE TRUE POWER OF LOVE: WE'RE NEVER ALONE

A REFLECTION FROM AN INTERFAITH HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN

As an interfaith hospital chaplain, I'm often present during life's most emotional and challenging moments—serious illness and the end of life. These are raw, deeply human experiences where emotions and vulnerability are laid bare. No matter how many times I find myself in these situations, I'm never fully "ready." Each moment is unique, and the sacredness of these encounters always touches my heart.

Walking into a room where someone is gravely ill or nearing the end of life, the atmosphere is thick with emotion. Machines hum softly, and loved ones gather, their faces etched with sadness, love, and unspoken fears. These experiences have taught me profound lessons about life, death, and the extraordinary power of love.

LESSONS FROM DEATH

1) LIFE IS A GIFT

In our fast-paced society, life can feel like a drudge—a series of tasks to complete. Yet, in moments of crisis, I've seen families wish desperately for just one more day with a loved one. The frustrations, misunderstandings, and trivial concerns that sometimes dominate our relationships suddenly disappear and lose their significance. What emerges instead is the deep yearning to connect, to express love, and to be present.

I recall a personal experience caring for my parents years ago during a difficult day at the mall. Despite the physical and emotional challenges, the fact is I'd give anything to relive that day—to have one more moment with them. This is the transformative power of love: it redefines what truly matters.

In hospital rooms, the ordinary becomes sacred. Patients and families often find gratitude in the simplest of things—a chance to say, "I'm sorry," "please forgive me," "thank you," "I love you," what is known as the Ho'oponopono Hawaiian practice.

I've come to realize that life is not a puzzle to solve but an extraordinary gift to welcome and accept. Recognizing this allows us to live

each day with gratitude, and to reshape how we approach both life and death.

2) WE ARE MORE THAN OUR ACCOMPLISH- MENTS

Illness and end-of-life situations peel away external markers of identity—titles, awards, and accolades. What remains is the essence of a person, defined by their love and relationships, not their achievements.

I recall sitting with the family of a renowned scientist. Despite his professional success, the stories they shared were not about his awards but about his warmth, humor, and the memories he created—teaching his nephew to fly a kite or making holidays special. It wasn't his résumé that defined him; it was his character and love.

3) BE PRESENT IN THE MOMENT

One of the most profound lessons I've learned is the importance of presence. In the sacred space between life and death, simply being there is everything. In our rushed lives, we often forget to appreciate the present, like that phrase, "to stop and smell the coffee." Yet, it's often in those final moments of life that families rediscover the power of presence.

I've witnessed families singing hymns, sharing stories, and holding hands with their loved ones. These are the moments that transcend fear and sadness and create meaning and purpose. Being present is a powerful reminder to appreciate the time we have—now. Each moment becomes an opportunity to love and connect deeply.





4) HARDSHIPS CAN BRING RECONCILIATION

While death is a moment of loss, it can also be a catalyst for healing. Many times, I've witnessed families separated for reasons long forgotten find their way back to each other in the face of a loved one's passing.

I remember one patient who had been estranged from his son for nearly two decades. Yet when they finally met in the hospital, a simple "I'm sorry" and "I've missed you" bridged those years of loss and pain. They held hands, tears flowing, and found peace in a moment they never expected to happen.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are a testament to the transformative power of love. Death has a way of revealing what truly matters, washing away negative feelings of bitterness or anger, and bringing light to

the darkest places within our hearts.

Sitting with Muslim families who's loved ones are nearing death, I've seen how important forgiveness is to the Muslim faith. One of Allah's most prominent names is "Al-Ghafoor" (The Most Forgiving), therefore Muslims strive to emulate this quality by extending forgiveness to others.

5) LOVE IS WHAT TRULY MATTERS

Above all, walking with individuals and families through the shadow of death has taught me that love is what truly matters. In hospital rooms, love reveals its true nature—selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional. It is not the romanticized love of movies but the profound, lasting love that gives life purpose and meaning.

As Mitch Albom wrote in *Tuesdays with Morrie*: "Death ends life, not a relationship." The love we give and receive lives on in the hearts of those we touch. Buddhism believes that we are never alone because we are all part of a greater whole. Love is the bridge between life and death. It is the light that guides us through our darkest moments and gives us the strength to move forward when all seems lost.

CONCLUSION

As an interfaith hospital chaplain, I am humbled by the privilege of witnessing that in the most challenging and uncertain moments of life—moments marked by pain, grief, and the passage of death—there is always a presence that sustains us, a love that never fades.

This love is not confined by time or space. It is the love of family and friends, who offer comfort and companionship. It is the love of caregivers, whose hands and hearts extend deep compassion. And ultimately, it is the divine love of God—unwavering and eternal: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"

(Hebrews 13:5).

Long before the birth of Judaism and Christianity, the concept of "we are never alone" was deeply embedded in Hindu philosophy. Sitting with followers of this faith, I've come to appreciate the ancient wisdom and belief that every individual soul (Atman) is a part of the universal consciousness (Brahman). So even in times of physical isolation, and even death, we continue to be inherently connected to a greater, divine presence.

Through our faith and love, we find hope, healing, and the assurance that we dwell forever in the presence of the divine, whether it is named God, Heavenly Parent, Allah, Brahma, the Divine, or simply hope.

The words of the psalmist resonate deeply with this truth: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me... Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:4,6).

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