

UTS Faculty Round Table: Understanding Death, Dying, and Grief

Yoshie Manaka
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On Tuesday March 23rd, the fourth Virtual Faculty Roundtable of this academic year took place, where Dr. William Selig spoke on the topic "Understanding Death, Dying and Grief."

In addition to his adjunct teaching role at UTS, Professor Selig volunteers at the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland, CA as a board-certified chaplain, and is Communications Director for Universal Peace Federation International, and Advisor of the End-of-Life Ministry for Family Federation for World Peace and Unification-North America.

"[Death, dying and grief] is a really important topic," Selig said. "It's really the main topic right now, because of COVID." Even talking about this topic a little bit, and taking it "out of the shadows, and demystifying it" has great value.

Selig began his presentation with an overview of the staggering COVID-19 deaths, and the acknowledgement that everybody has been touched by this pandemic. Even if we have not personally lost a loved one, fear has permeated our society, and this is not a normal time, Selig said.

He then moved on to talk about how various religions view death, that we are spiritual beings in a physical body, and that physical death does not mean the death of the spirit self.

What, however, is the purpose of death? Dr. Selig read a quote from Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who said that the reason we must die is because our ability to love in this physical body is limited. Our destiny, then, is to go and be with God. "When I heard this, I began to interpret death in a different way," Selig said. "To know that there is this higher purpose to death, then it begins to make sense."

"If we believe in an afterlife, and we do, why shouldn't we prepare for it in a practical way?" Selig asked. However, he found that in his local community, only 1/3 of the Unificationist population was willing to purchase a plot in their local burial ground. This is consistent with the rest of society, and indicated to him that Unificationists have the same fear of death as the rest of America. "It was through education and discussion that people were able to change their mind and recognize the need for preparation."

Selig then suggested two practical steps to take in order to prepare for your own death: Step one, have the conversation, especially with the young people; Step two, external preparation, making sure things are in order and easy to find.

He spoke about his experience as a hospital chaplain, and how no matter how religious or nonreligious people are, they feel that something sacred and holy takes place in death. He also spoke about the cycle of grief.

The presentation was followed by a QandA session, which had a slightly different format than other Roundtable discussions: some students had submitted questions to him earlier, so he addressed those before the floor opened for participants' questions. Click [here](#) to view the recording of Dr. Selig's presentation, and stay tuned for the details of our next Roundtable event!