

NOTES

This short ceremony is designed for family members and friends to gather remotely via phone or video technology to remember the life of a loved one who has died. It is not meant to replace a formal in-person service. It offers a way to commemorate a loved one while offering timely solace to family and friends. The format and readings are just suggestions. While the ceremony can be used as-is, is also perfectly okay to modify it in any way that suits your needs. For instance, you may opt instead to swap the rituals for ones that are meaningful to you.

It is not necessary that this ceremony be led by clerical, spiritual care, or other personnel. You may certainly invite these people to participate and/or lead the ceremony. However, any friend or family member can also serve as the facilitator, functioning in a “master of ceremonies” (MC) role throughout the service. The MC role may also be divided up and shared among several people, as long as you determine ahead of time where you will hand off. It is suggested that whomever is serving as the facilitator read the script very slowly to allow everyone to follow along. It is encouraged to take silent pauses throughout the ceremony. This allows the words and ritual to be more fully absorbed by all participants as an intentional, meaningful, and sacred ceremony. Please see “Lead Facilitator ‘MC’ Guide” for more detailed information.

It is strongly suggested that a different person be in charge of setting up, hosting, and trouble-shooting technology. Please see the “Technology Guide for Online Ceremonies” for more detailed information about technology. It is not necessary to use video; this ceremony can be done via telephone. However, video is the preferred method, as it allows participants to feel more connected. Also, some freely available video software, such as Zoom, has time limits. For

Breathing Together

example, without a paid account, Zoom will abruptly end the meeting after 40 minutes. This can be upsetting and painful for participants, so it is extremely important that the facilitator know how much time is available and manage that time to avoid getting abruptly cut off. Towards the end, there will be time for sharing. It will be especially important to watch the time here.

It is suggested to limit the ceremony to no more than approximately 10 people so that extensive personal sharing does not extend the duration. Keeping the group small preserves an intimate setting, although it is certainly possible for more to attend. Although you may choose to allow participants to announce themselves when they arrive, it is strongly suggested that the technology organizer / meeting host mute all participants before getting started to reduce background noise.

INTRODUCTION

The MC should begin the ceremony by welcoming guests, thanking them for joining, and briefly going over technology basics (please be sure to have read “Technology Guide for Online Ceremonies” beforehand). Especially important is explaining how participants can mute/unmute and that they should remain muted when not speaking.

CEREMONY

After the introduction and technology instructions have been given, MC begins.

Breathing Together

MC: Thank you all for gathering to remember [NAME]. Please take a moment to get settled and take a few deep breaths (*pause for a few seconds*). Notice how this simple act of breathing unifies us altogether.

(Pause for a few more seconds)

MC: I invite you to allow your breath to ground and sustain you throughout the ceremony. We will be breathing together, but if at any point you want to return to your natural breath, please do so.

(Pause for a few seconds)

RITUAL

After the introduction and technology instructions have been given, MC begins.

MC: We have come together to remember [NAME]. Please take a moment to allow yourself to notice who is here.

EITHER *if on video*: Take in the images of everyone who is gathered on the screen

OR *if by phone*: Call to mind the images of those gathered on the phone.

Breathing Together

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: Next, I would like to invite you to either close your eyes or allow your eyes to take a soft gaze downward in front of you. Allow yourself to notice your breath.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: I would like to invite you to call to mind a memory of [NAME]. Allow yourself to see them in your mind's eye. Maybe they are sitting in a chair in a special place in a house, or maybe they are walking somewhere outside. Maybe several different images have appeared. That's fine. Wherever and whenever they have appeared in your mind, allow yourself to focus on the images of [NAME].

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: As you hold the image of [NAME] in your mind, allow yourself to begin to direct your breath in towards your heart. You may even choose to play one or both hands over the middle of your chest as you direct your breath towards your heart. Be gentle as you do this.

(Pause for a few seconds)

Breathing Together

MC: As you breathe in slowly, allow the image of [NAME] to grow stronger in your mind. Imagine there is light all around them as their image becomes brighter, stronger, more vivid. Continue to follow your breath.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: Feel your hands on your heart. Continue to direct your breath towards your heart as the image of [NAME] remains in your mind. Allow the breath to wash over your heart, bathing it with oxygen and energy.

(Pause for a few seconds)

You can imagine [NAME] held in lightness, free from earthly suffering. Be gentle with yourself with this as you continue to breathe into your heart.

(Pause for 10 seconds)

MC: Slowly, gently...allow yourself to let this go. You may lower your hands to your lap if they were raised. Return to a normal breath.

(Pause for a few seconds)

Breathing Together

MC: Now, I would like share with you a short reading from Geri Larkin:

“Breathing in, I return to the island of just this moment.

Here is where the sky, the ground, and the air hold me up, comforting me.

Breathing out, I begin again.”

MC: Allow yourself to again focus on your breath. Slowly, breath deeply in. As you do, imagine a soft glow of light. Imagine that you are pulling this light down all the way deep into your heart. As you slowly exhale, imagine the light gently spreading outward from the heart throughout your body, flowing all over to your arms and hands, your legs and feet.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: As you gently breathe in, allow yourself to pull the light into your heart. And as you gently breathe out, notice the light spreading throughout your entire body.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: Continue on your own for a few rounds like this, breathing gently. Notice the light moving with your breath.

(Pause for 10 seconds)

Breathing Together

MC: Gently allow yourself to notice any pulsations or sensations in your body. Notice any tingling, maybe in hands, fingers, or legs or feet. These sensations of energy—as well as our breath—connect us with everything in the universe. Allow yourself to feel this connection deeply.

(Pause for a few seconds).

MC: Now I would like to read an excerpt from the poem “A Seeming Stillness” by David Whyte.

“And this breath, in this body, able,
just for a moment to give and to take,
to ask and be told, to find and be found,
to bless and be blessed, to hold and be held...

...Breathe then, as if breathing for the first time,
as if remembering with what difficulty
you came into the world, what strength it took
to make that first impossible in-breath,
into a cry to be heard by the world.

Your essence has always been that first vulnerability
of being found, of being heard and of being seen,
and from the very beginning
the one who has always needed,
and been given, so much invisible help.”

Breathing Together

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: Allow these words to settle over you for just a few moments.

I'll read the last line one more time:

“Your essence has always been that first vulnerability of being found, of being heard and of being seen, and from the very beginning the one who has always needed, and been given, so much invisible help.”

Perhaps you'd like to imagine this act of breathing as [NAME] coming to offer you some invisible help or comfort right now. As you breathe in, imagine they are directing this comfort towards your heart. As you breathe out, imagine this comfort spreading throughout your entire body, washing through you, bringing a sense of ease.

Breathing in, [NAME] comforts you.

Breathing out, this washes throughout you.

Continue on your own with this for a few moments.

(Pause for 10 seconds)

Breathing Together

MC: Go ahead and return to a normal breath.

Now let's go around and say just one word describing [NAME]'s relationship to you, for example "Parent" or "Friend".

(Allow each person to unmute and share briefly a word. Then the tech person mutes all).

MC: Let us allow ourselves to notice the breadth of connection to [NAME] that is present here.

(Pause for a few seconds).

MC: Seeing the vastness of these connections, I'll invite you to imagine [NAME]'s presence as we breathe. Let us imagine [NAME] in the middle of a circle, with all of us surrounding them. We know that [NAME] touched many lives, including many who could not gather with us today. So let us allow ourselves to imagine an even wider circle of people, with [NAME] sitting in the middle, and all of us surrounding in love.

As you breathe in, imagine you are breathing in the invisible gift or comfort [NAME] has given you. As you breathe out, imagine your breath combines with everyone else's breath to surround [NAME] in the middle of our circle. Breathing in, [NAME] is comforting us. Breathing out, we are comforting [NAME].

Breathing Together

Breathing in, [NAME] comforts us.

Breathing out, we comfort [NAME].

Continue on your own for a few moments.

(Pause for 10 seconds).

MC: And allow yourself to slowly let that go and gently return to a normal breath.

Now, I'll read the short poem "The Uses of Sorrow" by Mary Oliver

(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I loved once gave me

a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand

that this, too, was a gift.

MC: Allow these words to wash over you as you continue to breathe normally. During this difficult time and unsettling time, allow yourself to feel held by your breath, which remains steady.

Breathing Together

(Pause for 10 seconds)

MC: Now, I'd like to invite you to think of that invisible help or gift that [NAME] gave to you. Perhaps it was a kind word when you yourself were struggling. Maybe it was helping you with a project, learning a new skill, or supporting you financially. If nothing immediately comes to mind, just reflect on their name and their image.

MC: I'd like to go around and invite anyone who would like to briefly share just a word or two that summarizes the gift [NAME] gave them.

(Allow participants to briefly share just a couple of words or sentences. If no one starts, MC can go first, setting the example for others by keeping it very short. If others share, it is important to watch the time. This part should take no more than 10 minutes).

MC: Thank you, everyone, for sharing your memories of the gifts [NAME] gave you.

CLOSING

MC: Now, as we begin to draw this service to a close, let us now take a brief moment of silence, remembering [NAME].

Breathing Together

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: I would like to ask everyone to please extend your hands out towards the camera. In this way, we join together. Though we cannot be physically present at this time, the spirit of our joining together to celebrate [NAME] remains strong.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: May these loving memories of [NAME] remain in our hearts, bringing us comfort during these difficult times. As we remember [NAME] in the coming days and weeks as we await a chance to celebrate in-person, let us feel each other's presence through the strong connection and the celebration of our memories of [NAME] that we have made together here today.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: May each of us find peace and comfort in remembering [NAME]. Thank you all for gathering. This concludes our ceremony.

END