

## **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

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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.

If possible, attendees should bring something that reminds them of the deceased and, when willing, will have the opportunity to share briefly why it does so. These objects can be anything: photographs, an article of clothing, a gift they gave the speaker, or even something more abstract like a rock or work of art that evokes a memory. Additionally, everyone should have a jar, tupperware, or other waterproof container with a lid as well as some salt (table salt or kosher salt is perfect).

Prior to the ceremony beginning, the MC should ask the attendees who feels comfortable sharing a memory about the deceased. Care should be taken to avoid putting pressure on anyone; some people won't feel up to doing so, others might have in other circumstances but might feel uncomfortable doing so because of the technology involved. If possible, the MC should double-check with those who will speak during the ceremony right before things get started both

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to confirm their involvement and, in practical terms, to be sure their microphone is working correctly.

Also prior to the ceremony, the MC should also ask whether anyone would be willing to share either a poem or play/sing a piece of music at the end. Otherwise, the MC should be prepared to offer a short poem that is meaningful to them. If there's no one to perform, maybe a YouTube video of the deceased's favorite song or band can be watched by the attendees. Again, please see "Technology Guide for Online Ceremonies" for detailed information to help this go as smoothly as possible.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The MC should begin the ceremony by welcoming guests, thanking them for joining, and briefly going over a few rules of etiquette for video conferencing such as staying on mute. Especially important is explaining how participants can mute/unmute and that they should remain muted when not speaking.

## **CEREMONY**

Next, the MC should do one of two things. If they knew the deceased well and feel capable of doing so, they can speak about them briefly in their own words. Otherwise, if an obituary was written for them, the MC can read that instead. Once they have done so, the ritual begins.

**RITUAL**

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)*

MC: Your breath can sustain you throughout this ceremony, so feel free to come back to it at any time.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: I'd like to invite those who have brought an item to speak briefly on why this item reminds them of [NAME]. After each person shares, we will each take a pinch of salt and sprinkle it into the water we have each brought. Families with children may find this is an activity kids can help with, taking proper care with any glass containers. Salt is a part of the earth. It represents the earth to which [NAME] has returned, but also the soil from which life turns anew in the spring. Many people around the world use salt as an element to purify.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

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MC: Water also has deep symbolism. In ancient Greek mythology, the souls of the dead crossed a series of rivers before entering the Underworld, which was neither heaven nor hell but the place to which all souls went. We washed ourselves and our loved ones clean with water, and it is also one of the first signs of a birth when a pregnant person's water breaks.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Together, salt and water remind us of the tears we shed for [NAME]. Sometimes the salt may not fully dissolve. That's okay. Each pinch of salt is a memory of the deceased, and any undissolved salt represents our lingering memories of [NAME]. Any salt that does dissolve is not gone, but has become part of the water, which continues to flow throughout the world.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC; I'd like to invite participants to now share one at a time for just a few minutes each. After each share, we will each take a pinch of salt and sprinkle it into the water.

*The MC may now call upon participants, asking them to unmute themselves and share briefly, 2-4 minutes each, sharing the item they brought that reminds them of the deceased and speak briefly about why it does so.*

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*After each person's share, the MC demonstrates taking a pinch of salt and sprinkling it into the water. Be sure that everyone is doing this for all shares, not just their own.*

*Once the original volunteers have been given the chance to speak, the MC should ask if anyone else wishes to speak (or speak again). The MC should be keeping track of time to ensure the ceremony does exceed any time limits (e.g. if using the free version of Zoom). When everyone has spoken who wishes to do so, the MC resumes talking.*

## **CONCLUSION**

MC: Thank you all for sharing. We have heard the many ways that [NAME] has touched our lives. By mixing salt and water together, we have created a symbol of their presence in this world and beyond.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC Please now close your container and be sure to place it somewhere cool, dark, and safe. We will join these waters later on, once it is safe and possible to celebrate [NAME] together.

*If a volunteer has agreed to read a poem or play/sing a piece of music, ask them to do so now.*

MC: Let us now take a brief moment of silence, remembering [NAME].

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*(Pause for 10 seconds)*

MC: As we draw this ceremony to a close, I would now 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 we have made together here today.

*(Pause few seconds)*

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

**END**

## **EPILOGUE - DISPOSITION OF THE WATER**

Participants should keep their jar of water until they have the chance to get together with everyone else at a later date. Then, they can mix the water together into one vessel, sharing a summary of their memory or a short blessing, such as “Be well, [NAME].” Each person can take some of the water away with them after it is mixed if they choose to. The rest of the water can be kept by the family as desired or left to evaporate. However, it shouldn’t be poured into plants, outside, or into a waterway if it is very salty, as it could harm the environment.

This epilogue to the ceremony is especially important because many, perhaps all, of the attendees may not have had the chance to say goodbye to the deceased. The ritualistic combining of the water into one vessel can represent the reunification not just of this group but also their shared experience with the deceased.