

## **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 poems or 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

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more connected. Also, some freely available video software, such as Zoom, has time limits. For 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.

Prior to the day of the ceremony, participants should collect at least three small rocks. These can come from a garden, trail, or park, so long as they may be obtained safely. If it is not possible to obtain three rocks safely, use other household objects, such as buttons, marbles, or any object that can serve as a symbol. These objects need not be fancy. Each person should also bring an empty, clean glass jar or vase. If multiple participants are living in the same home, they may use one larger vessel.

Prior to the day of the ceremony, the MC should also ask whether anyone would be willing to share a memory of the deceased at the end. Otherwise, the MC should be prepared to offer a short story about a memory or a gift (tangible or intangible) they received from the deceased. If the MC prefers, they may offer a poem or musical offering that is meaningful to them.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The MC should begin the ceremony by welcoming guests, thanking them for joining, and briefly going over a 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.*

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: Throughout this ceremony, you may come back to your breath at any time. Allow the breath to ground you and sustain you.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Allow yourself to notice who is here.

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

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

MC: Allow yourself to appreciate each other's presence and feel the connection through our shared respect, love, and desire to celebrate [NAME] that has brought us together.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

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

*(Tech person unmutes all. Allow each person to share briefly just a word or two. Then mute all).*

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

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: We know that [NAME] touched many lives, including many who could not gather with us today. We allow ourselves to imagine an even wider web of people expanding outward. This web includes all those who have been touched by [NAME]. As we contemplate this vast web of life, we imagine [NAME] sitting in the middle, with all of us surrounding in love.

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*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: We will now take our jars and our rocks and begin to build together a memorial container that will allow us to hold onto the memories we have about [NAME]. The rocks in this jar symbolize the richness of [NAME]'s contribution to our lives. Although we cannot contain the vastness of everything about [NAME] in this one jar, we fill it with symbols as a reminder of their having touched our lives.

### **RITUAL**

MC: Place the jar in front of you. Pick up one rock. Hold the rock gently in your palm and allow yourself to feel the texture of the rock in your hand.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Allow yourself to call to mind an ordinary, everyday moment when you and [NAME] were together. Maybe it was a time that brought you a sense of happiness, fun, or even sadness. Whatever it is, allow the image of their face to come to your mind as you think of this ordinary, everyday moment. As you hold the rock in your palm, continue to remember this time.

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*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Either silently or whispering softly to yourself, say one word that captures this memory as you gently place this rock into the jar. We will do this all together at the same time.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Pick up a second rock. Again, allow yourself to feel the weight of the rock in the palm of your hand as you call to mind a time when you and [NAME] experienced an unusual or out-of-the ordinary moment that brought you closer together.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Perhaps it was a happy moment, or maybe even a challenging one. Recall what it was like for you to get through this experience together with [NAME]. Reflect on what [NAME] meant to you in this moment. As you hold the rock, think about this time of togetherness.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Either silently or whispering softly to yourself, say one word that captures this memory as you gently place this rock into the jar.

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*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Please pick up a third rock. As you hold this rock in your hand, call to mind a time when [NAME] gave you something. Perhaps it was a tangible object or a gift, or maybe it was something intangible, such as a lesson or even a challenge from which you grew.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC; As you hold this rock in your hand, allow yourself to reflect on this gift [NAME] gave you and what it has meant to you.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Either silently or whispering softly to yourself, say one word that captures this memory as you gently place this rock into the jar.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: Now I would like to ask each of you to hold up your jar so that each of us may see the rocks representing the richness of the contributions that [NAME] has made in our lives.

*MC holds up jar to camera and others should do the same.*

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MC: Now, imagine we combine all these rocks together into one jar. We may actually do this at a later time. Imagine a jar full of rocks, which symbolize the memories, gifts, and meaning given to us by [NAME]. For now, we may continue to add rocks to our jars in the days and weeks ahead, filling our jar with memories of how [NAME] has impacted our lives in big and small ways.

(Pause for 10 full seconds).

MC: 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.

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: As we look at our rocks and imagine all of the memories and gifts [NAME] has given us, allow yourself to offer thanks to [NAME]. We offer gratitude for [NAME]'s life. We know that in the days and weeks ahead, we will continue to reflect on [NAME] and the many ways in which our lives were touched.

## *Spirit Rock*

*(Pause for a few seconds)*

MC: I'd like to open this space to those who would like to briefly share a memory about [NAME]. Please feel free to share so that others may also be enriched by the gifts [NAME] gave.

*Tech person unmutes whomever has volunteered. MC keeps track of time. The number of people who may share is optional and depends on the MC keeping close track of time. This portion of the ceremony should last approximately 10-12 minutes.*

### **CLOSING**

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

*(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; participants keep hands extended as MC reads:)*

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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, keeping hands extended as MC reads:)*

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

*(Everybody lower hands)*

**END**

## **EPILOGUE**

When it is possible to gather in-person, participants should consider combining their rocks into one large jar or vase. If there is a formal service later, organizers could ask participants to bring their rocks and make time in the ceremony to combine them. The rocks can be kept by a loved one or shared by family members and friends to commemorate the deceased. They could also be placed somewhere that is meaningful -- a grave or any place that was special to the deceased.