

Course # URAWI-505X

Spirituality and Bereavement

Thursdays, June 24 – August 12

4:00 – 5:30 pm

Zoom link:

Instructor:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

When facing a profound a loss of any kind, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, job loss, pet loss or loss of health, we cannot separate psychology from spirituality. Regardless of one’s belief system, spiritual outlook or concept of God, loss and grief almost always triggers existential questions, because searching for meaning is an intrinsic part of the grieving process.

Anyone who works to support the bereaved inevitably encounters this struggle, but often feels uncertain of how to examine it. Indeed, a Christian might wonder, “Why would a loving god let this happen?” or “Is God punishing me?” A person who is *Spiritual But Not Religious* (SBNR) might ask, “What am I supposed to learn from this experience?” or “How is this experience challenging me to deepen my spiritual practice?” An atheist might question whether painful events are truly random, or if there is some deeper purpose to our losses.

It can be unclear how to engage productively with these questions while respecting the uniqueness of each person’s spiritual journey. This class will introduce us to a variety of perspectives and practices that will help us develop interfaith, multi-cultural tools for meeting grief in ourselves and others.

COURSE FORMAT

We will meet each week on Zoom for 30-45 minutes to check in with each other and discuss assignments. These meetings will be recorded for students who are in a different time zone. Assignments, announcements, reading materials and discussion forums will be posted on Moodle.

IMPORTANT! The assignments for each week are due on the day of class. In other words, you will work on the assignments during the week prior to the class date. So be sure to look ahead on Moodle and in the syllabus for upcoming assignments.

IF YOU ARE TAKING THE CLASS FOR ACADEMIC CREDIT: You will be expected to submit a short final paper (5-7 pages), which will be due in Week Seven. Choose any subject from the course material, and describe how you would apply that learning in your professional capacity to assist someone with loss and grief. Cite at least three of the articles/videos we used in the class, plus outside academic sources of your choosing. Write your paper in the academic writing/citation style used by your department.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course, students will be better able to:

OUTCOME	ASSESSMENT
Explain the significance of spirituality in the grieving process	Attendance and participation in class, and final project
Assess and guide another through the existential questions asked by the bereaved	Experiential process and group work
Explain approaches to death and grief from a variety of diverse cultures and religious traditions	Attendance and participation in class, and final project
Explain and demonstrate the importance of ritual for healing	Class assignments, final project
Utilize hands-on therapeutic tools for grief processing	Class assignments, experiential processes, final project
Discuss current research on spirituality and bereavement	Attendance and participation in class, and final project

WEEK 1 – June 24: Meeting Grief in Ourselves and Others

1. Please read the articles in the [Week One Files](#) folder prior to class

- . Does Grief Counseling Work?
- . Complicated grief article
- . Types of Losses
- . Stroebe & Schut: Are Stage Models Misguided?

Post your answers to ONE of the following questions in the [Week One Forum](#):

COMPLICATED GRIEF: Briefly describe a situation in which you've observed complicated grief, either in your own grief journey, or in encounters with friends, clients or family members.

TYPES OF LOSSES: How are some of these loss types being played out during the Covid 19 pandemic?

2. OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Watch [this video](#) on "The Dual Process Model," and (as an optional activity), use the *Loss and Restoration Tracking Sheet* in the [Week One Files](#) folder to monitor your own grief healing trajectory. Feel free to discuss in class if you'd like.

WEEK 2 – July 1: Religious Responses to Loss

This week we will look at perspectives on loss and grief from several spiritual traditions, along with tools for understanding different views.

Read the four articles in the Week Two Files folder:

- . End-of-Life Spiritual Perspectives from World Religions

- . Embedded vs. Deliberative theology
- . Fowler's Stages of Faith Development
- . The Problem of God in the Presence of Grief

In the Week Two Forum, post your response to ONE of the four articles, and reply to at least one other student's comments.

WEEK 3 – July 8: Embracing/Avoiding Death

1. Watch [this video](#) (Facing Death) which originally aired on PBS in 2010.

2. Answer these questions in the [Week Three Forum](#):

. Did the dilemmas of the patients and their families bring up any existential issues or theological conflicts for you? If so, how would you cope with your feelings if you were providing spiritual care to these families?

. How you would have supported these patients? How would you have supported the doctors?

WEEK 4 – July 15: Death and Grief Rituals

This week we will explore death and grief rituals from a variety of spiritual and cultural traditions around the world.

1. Watch at least three of the videos listed in the [Week Four Videos](#) folder:

[A JOIK \(grief song tribute\) from the Sami people of Northern Europe](#)

[A DESPACHO from the Quero people in Peru](#)

[KEENING chants in the Celtic tradition](#)

[Christian Grief](#)

[Grieving as soul-cleansing in the Dagara tradition \(Ghana\)](#)

[Maori Haka Dance](#)

[Hindu Death Ritual](#)

[Viking Funeral](#)

2. In the Week Four Forum, discuss what did or did not resonate with you about your chosen videos. What spiritual processes, symbolic representations or tools for connecting with the divine seemed useful and practical, and which did not?

NOTE: We will be doing an experiential process during our Zoom time today called "The Story String." Part one is this week, and part two will be next week. Please bring with you to our meeting TWO pieces of string, yarn or ribbon about 3-4 feet long for this process.

WEEK 5 – July 22: Healing and Support Skills

We are now going to explore practical tools and experiential processes for supporting others in the grief journey while also tending to our own healing. In spiritual counseling, we often use rituals and symbols as tools for expressing our pain and guide us through the healing journey. This week you'll have the opportunity to experience some of these tools.

1. Create an ancestor altar or grief healing altar at home. Post a photo (with description) or a video of your altar in the Week Five Forum. Be prepared to discuss in class if you wish (not required).

These links and videos will help you get started with creating your altar:

- . [Rituals to Move Through Grief](#)
- . [How to Build a Personal Altar](#)
- . [BRIAN'S ALTAR](#)
- . [TERRI'S ALTAR](#)

2. We will be doing Part Two of the Story String exercise today during our Zoom time. Remember to bring your second piece of ribbon or yarn.

WEEK 6 – July 29: Is Spirituality Necessary?

For this week, please read the article in the Week Six Files Folder on *Grieving without God*. Then choose one of the following activities:

Option 1. Can atheists be spiritual? What does it mean to be "Spiritual But Not Religious?" - Write a 300-word reflection and post it in the Week Six Forum. Reply to at least one other student's comments.

Option 2. Create non-religious ceremony or deathbed prayer. Use "Interfaith Prayer Samples" in the Week Three Files as a guide. Post your prayer/ceremony in the Week Six Forum, and be prepared to share with the class during our Zoom time.

WEEK 7 – Aug. 5: Mystical Experiences and Afterlife Schemas

This week we will journey into other worlds to explore the dreams and visions of the dying and the bereaved. We will begin today's class during our Zoom meeting with a guided meditation.

1. Please watch the two videos in the Week Seven Videos folder (two are required and one is optional).

- [Dreams and Visions of the Dying](#)
- [Readings with a Medium](#) :

OPTIONAL:

- [Multicultural afterlife](#)

2. In the Week Seven Forum, write a reflection about any personal or professional experience you may have had with mystical experience related to death and grief.

WEEK 8 - Aug. 12: Family Dynamics

According to *The Conversation Project*, 90 percent of people believe talking with their loved ones about end-of-life care is important, but only 27 percent have actually done so. Death comes in its own way, in its own time. None of us can predict when our final day will arrive, but we can engage now in uncomfortable conversations with our loved ones to explore their end-of-life wishes and goals

1. Please read these articles in the Week Eight Files folder:

- [Family Dynamics at End-of-Life](#)
- [One in Five Adults were Raised in Interfaith Homes](#)
- The Native Way in the ICU (in the Week Eight Files folder).

2. In the Week Eight forum, describe how you might help a family that struggles with mixed spiritual perspectives or other conflicts that can make dying and grieving more complicated. If you've been in such a scenario before, please describe it as a case example (even if it's your own family). Remember to respond to at least one other student's comments.

3. OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Watch [this video](#) about how to create a *Deathbed/Illness Family Dynamic Genogram*, and then create one of your own. If you choose, you can share it with the class during our Zoom time this week (optional). You will find a blank *Deathbed/Illness Family Dynamic Genogram* in the Week Eight Files folder.