

Queries: For Explorations on Living and Dying Well

Many of us are coping with unarticulated fears about our mortality during these days of social distancing and serious hand washing. As Friends seeking truth and love in a considered life, we recognize that this virus affords us the opportunity to become more conscious of this hard topic about the end of our life. Especially for older Friends, it probably is already on our minds, however clandestinely.

Since the risks of becoming terminally ill are higher during a pandemic, the Baltimore Yearly Meeting's End of Life Working Group proposes that Friends take some time now to review our preparedness for the eventual event we have long lived to avoid. Recognizing that we all have different experiences that factor into how we think about our own personal deaths, we have gathered a set of queries to guide your explorations about what matters most to you during this last transition. We suggest you have a conversation about these queries with your nearest and dearest family and/or friends. Give them the gift of this tender conversation. It will empower them to know your wishes. And please, write down your wishes for medical care in an Advanced Directive, that you can give to your doctor as well.

Getting older:

How we see the possibilities of our older years change the way we age. Even as our physical world shrinks, we can expand spiritually, culturally, and creatively. Our lives are part of a much bigger story, some of which we can control and some of which we can choose to make a difference. We often have choices in how we respond to change.

What are the gifts that aging has presented to me? How do my diminishment become opportunities for new inspiration, inner transformation, and realistic optimism?

Am I open to grace as my physical and/or mental capabilities change?

What has helped me in the past to deal with fears, change, loss and grief? Is this useful now?

Now, while I can communicate, what is important for me to say?

- are my legal affairs in order? Is my will current? My power of attorney designated?
- beneficiaries named for all financial resources and properties?
- Advanced Directive for my medical care completed and up to date?
- do I want to make legacy gift(s)?

Do my loved ones know what is important to me, where my papers are, and who does what?

What do I need to keep my heart and soul together when I watch my loved one die?

What support would I like from my Meeting considering and dealing with these issues?

Letting Go and Being Peaceful:

Do I feel burdened with material possessions and their disposition upon my death? Have I communicated my wishes for distribution? Would parting with some of them before my death be helpful or even pleasant for me?

Is there anyone in my life I need to forgive before I die? Are there current problem situations in my life with any relationships—things unsaid or undone—that I want to resolve, or people I want to forgive or be forgiven by? How can I restore more healthy relationships with them?

Do I give myself and others enough time and opportunity for forgiveness?

Are there matters that I want to communicate with others before I die?

What am I grateful for now?

Death often comes by surprise, interrupting lives in the midst of life's progress. What if I should die before I wake? If I knew my death was imminent, how would I devote my remaining time? Do I want to do any of that activity now, or on a regular basis?

Completion of my life's work and purpose:

We are not human beings on a spiritual journey. We are spiritual beings on a human journey.

Do I have a sense of completion about my accomplishments? Are there other tasks I need to do before I die? What are the most important loose ends that should be tied up before I die or become incapacitated?

Can I let go of the uncompleted parts of my life? Can I mentor others to fill in the gaps that would be caused by my death or disability? What can I do now that will make letting go easier or better?

What has been meaningful to me in my life? How am I giving support to that meaning? Have I communicated those priorities to those people who will survive me?

How do I want to communicate with those who will survive me? Do I want to express myself through writing, videos, recordings, or speaking with someone? Do I have more that I want to share, and with whom?

If I died today, would I have any regrets? Can I do something now to reduce or eliminate those regrets?

Are there things I can do now that would ease the experience for those who would suffer or be burdened in the event of my sudden death? Are there words of comfort or pieces of information that I can prepare to help those people with their grief or their new responsibilities when I die?

When I contemplate dying, what have I learned about life? What has held meaning in my life?

Do I want to share my spiritual journey with others?

If I were to write my own obituary, what do I want the world to know? How do I want to be remembered?

Getting prepared to think about my death:

Am I prepared to meet my Maker? What do I need to do or feel now, to be ready for death? Can I accept that I did all that I did, and can't undo it?

What happens to me after I die? Do I believe in an afterlife?

Do I need help now in preparing for my death or decline? Do people close to me need that help?

To what extent do I want my nearest and dearest to minister to my needs if I have a long illness or other incapacitating disability? If outside help is needed and can be afforded, do I prefer to be at home, in assisted living, or a nursing home?

How can I best respond to others in my life whose tendency to deny my mortality interferes with my peaceful preparations for my death?

Am I comfortable with, or afraid of, my own death? Do I need to heal from my past experiences of others' deaths?

Can I accept dying and living as they coexist in me now?

How can I help my survivors, now, before I get too sick to help them?

Queries about my death:

How would I describe a "good death"? What are my hopes and fears for my own death?

Does it matter to me where I die, at home or in a hospital or hospice facility?

Do I want one or more of my nearest and dearest to be with me as I die?

What do I want to know about what is "normal" at the end of life given my particular health conditions?

How do I avoid medical mismanagement and make sure my doctors listen to me?

What forms of life-saving care would I be willing to accept? Do I want cardiac resuscitation when my heart stops? Do I want to be on a breathing machine? Do I prefer to let nature take its course and do not resuscitate me? How do I feel about use of blood transfusions, and artificial nutrition and hydration?

Do I want my pain controlled in all cases, or are there circumstances in which I would not want pain medicines? If pain controls changed my level of consciousness, is this an acceptable tradeoff to me?

Would I possibly want medical assistance in dying, if this is legal permissible in my state or jurisdiction?

If faced with an incurable terminal illness, would I want to be treated for secondary conditions that could kill me if left untreated?

Are there contingencies in which the quality of my life becomes more important to me than the quantity of life?

How will I know if I need more help? When I need it, will I seek it out? When it is offered, will I accept it?

When is it time to call hospice?

*From hospice we learn the five things that need to be said to a loved one:
Thank you, I love you, please forgive me, I forgive you, and goodbye.
The good news is that you can start saying the first four anytime.*

After Death:

Do I want to prepare for what follows my death? Are there any special rituals I want others to do after I die?

If I want to have my body available for science after I die, how do I make this happen?

Do I have requests for music or speakers for my funeral?

What options are there for burials – embalming, cremation, green burials in shrouds? Are there any green burial companies that will accept my body? How do I get help figuring out my options? If I am cremated, does it matter to me where my ashes are placed? Is there a family plot somewhere that matters to me?