DEATH MAKES LIFE POSSIBLE

DISCUSSION GUIDE with TIPS for HOSTS & FACILITATORS

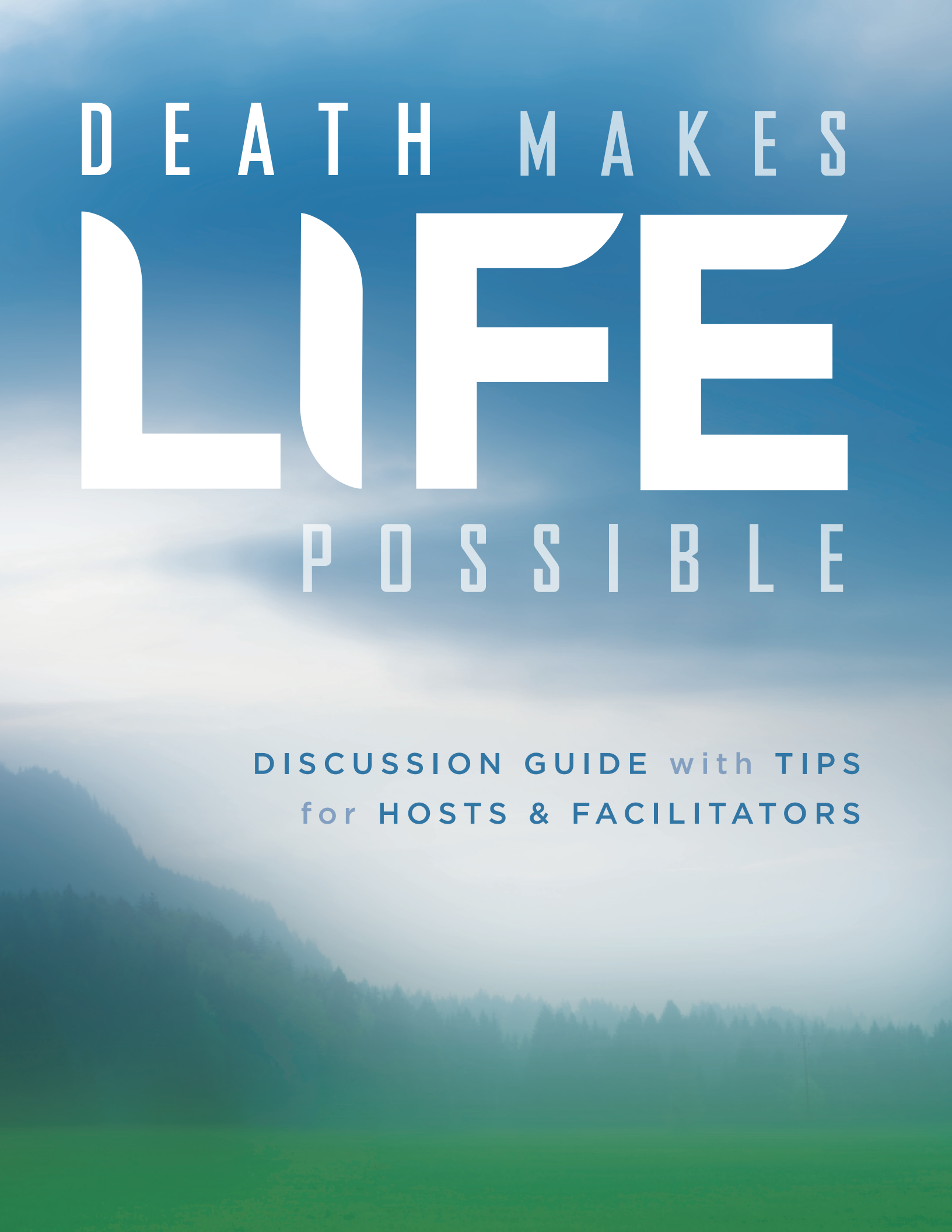


TABLE of CONTENTS

About the Film 3
- How this film can be helpful

Before Viewing the Film 5

After Viewing the Film 6

Tips for Hosts & Facilitators 6

Centering Exercises 7

Questions to Consider 8
- General focus questions & conversation starters 8
- Additional chapter-by-chapter questions 9

Featured Speakers 14

Suggested Resources 17

Credits 17

ABOUT the FILM

Death is something most people would prefer not to think about.

But what if contemplating death and facing our mortality allowed us to live our lives more fully – without fear – and to be more present to the preciousness and beauty of life?

"This is a movie for anyone who is going to die."

– Deepak Chopra

It is with this sense of curiosity and hope that ***Death Makes Life Possible*** approaches an often taboo topic. The film follows cultural anthropologist and scientist, Marilyn Schlitz, PhD, as she explores the mysteries of life and death from a variety of perspectives and world traditions. Sparked by her own near-death experience as a teenager, Schlitz has been delving into the nature of consciousness and death for the past three decades.

"The cross-cultural evidence suggests that people all over the world and throughout history have thought that consciousness is more than just our physical being," says Schlitz. Building on these cultural belief systems, the film asks, "What does science have to say about consciousness after death?" With this convergence of new science and spiritual traditions, ***Death Makes Life Possible*** seeks to understand various worldviews, evidence of an afterlife, and how these inform an emerging new paradigm around life, death and their fundamental interconnectedness.

As we accompany Schlitz on her journey, we learn from eminent scientists who point to particularly compelling stories from their experimental and clinical studies. We hear from the dying and from people who have had mystical near-death and out-of-body experiences. We meet health practitioners who focus on the body and mind's complex systems. And we listen to spiritual teachers who share their traditions and inspiration.

In the end, the question of what happens when we die remains a great mystery. This film reminds us that we don't have to have definitive answers to open up the conversation. The exploration itself can help us shape a new story about death and can ultimately help us live happier and more satisfying lives.

HOW THIS FILM CAN BE HELPFUL

Since these topics touch us all, anyone can benefit from this film. That said, there are particular audiences who may be more likely to integrate what is presented into their lives and work, such as hospice staff and volunteers, health care professionals, educators, spiritual counselors, caregivers and those facing end-of-life issues themselves.

Death Makes Life Possible can help:

- Start conversations and explore questions and concerns people have when faced with the dying process.
- Activate people to reevaluate what really matters in life and how they can experience life more fully.
- Deepen one's understanding of cross-cultural views, as well as various scientific and spiritual perspectives, on death and what happens next.
- Offer comfort to those who are dying, their loved ones, and the bereaved by exploring possibilities of the afterlife.
- Provide concrete research, studies and resources for those interested in the field of consciousness.

BEFORE VIEWING

- Welcome people and thank them for choosing to spend their time in this way. Introduce yourself and share your enthusiasm for watching the film.
- Pass around a sign-in sheet for those who would like to get information about future events and stay in the loop.
- Let people know where the bathrooms are and any other important logistics of the space.
- Share the agenda of how you'll be spending your time together.
    - o Let people know the film runs about an hour, followed by a conversation about the film. Let them know how long the discussion will be - we recommend at least half an hour, and ideally an hour or so.
    - o It's ideal to have a set closing time, and to actually close the gathering as a group to honor the expected end time, and so that those who need to leave are able. You can invite people to stay longer and continue the conversation if they'd like to and the venue allows.

- Remind people that the topic of death can bring up a range of emotions, and acknowledge that people will respond to the film in their own way.
- Before watching ***Death Makes Life Possible***, please let everyone know the final song and credits are part of the experience. As the host, please plan for the audience to watch and listen until all is complete. Thank you!
- Invite people to participate in a brief centering exercise before the film begins (suggestions below).

AFTER VIEWING

If there will be a discussion following the film:

- Please see *"Tips for Hosts & Facilitators"* (below).

After the entire gathering (post-discussion):

- Invite people to share a few breaths together in silence as a way to close your time together.
- If it is a small group (fewer than 20), invite everyone to say ONE word to describe how they are feeling after watching the film and/or having a discussion.
- If you choose to, announce a date and time for continuing the conversation about the film, and let people know you will email them a reminder.
- Invite people to sign-in if they hadn't when they arrived.
- Share how they can get more involved and host a screening of their own (hand out postcards).
- Share how they can spread the word to those living in different areas.
- Thank everyone for coming!!

TIPS for HOSTS & FACILITATORS

(Please see the ***Death Makes Life Possible*** "Guide for Community Screening" download for things to consider when hosting a community screening).

Whether you are facilitating a discussion at a house gathering, community center or theater, place of worship, Death Café, support group, or classroom, the following suggestions are intended to support a positive and rewarding event.

TIP: If there are fewer than 25 people, consider sitting in a circle for the post-film conversation. If shifting into a circle isn't quick and easy, then have people stay where they are.

RIGHT BEFORE THE DISCUSSION

- Invite people to be curious, open-minded and open-hearted.
- Invite people to express their own perspectives and speak from their own experiences. Consider reminding people that the conversation isn't intended to be a debate of what's "right" or "wrong," but an exploration and reflection.
- Let people know that no one will be required to speak at the discussion – not talking is okay.
- If you will be sharing in a more intimate setting and intend to have deep personal sharing, ask participants to agree to confidentiality – what is shared in the room stays in the room.
- If there are fewer than 25 people, invite people to speak their name into the circle before the discussion begins.
- Regardless of group size, invite people to share their name when they speak so you can build community.
- Invite people to sit with the question for a bit in silence before responding so that everyone has a chance to reflect on it.
- Invite people to "share the airtime" and self-regulate this. If only a few people are sharing much more than everyone else, consider saying something like "I'd like to invite anyone who has not yet shared, but would like to speak, to respond first to the next question (or topic)."

CENTERING EXERCISES

If you choose to, you can offer a brief centering exercise before the film, after the film, or at the end of the event (or more than once).

Share that you are offering an invitation to participate in a brief centering exercise and that it is optional. Let people know that the purpose is to call their focus and energy into the room so that they can be more present to one another, to the film, and to themselves.

Here are some sample options that work well with any size group – a handful or hundreds:

BASIC MEDITATION: BREATHE & SMILE

"I invite you to sit comfortably and close your eyes or gaze softly ahead. Give yourself a nice deep breath. (Pause). And now slowly exhale. Give yourself another deep breath (pause) and slowly exhale. Continue at your own pace, allowing the corner of your lips to curve up into a smile if you choose."

MEDITATION OF LIGHT: BREATHE & IMAGINE LIGHT WITHIN

"I invite you to sit comfortably and close your eyes. Give yourself a slow deep breath. Feel your connection with the ground beneath you. (Pause). Now imagine a small ball of light in the center of your heart, and simply be with it. If your awareness drifts to other thoughts or external sounds, just bring your attention back to this small flame in the center of your chest. As you breathe in, simply notice this ball of light. As you breathe out, offer gratitude to this light, to your inner light. We'll continue this for a minute in silence. (Pause). Now slowly wiggle your fingers and toes, open your eyes, and come back to the room. Look at the people next to you and silently smile or nod to acknowledgement of their presence."

GOLDEN SUN MEDITATION: BREATHE & FILL THE BODY WITH LIGHT

"I invite you to sit comfortably and close your eyes (or gaze softly ahead). Give yourself a nice deep breath, and slowly exhale. Feel the ground beneath both of your feet. (Pause). Now imagine a beautiful golden sun a few feet above your head. If you don't see a sun above your head, simply pretend that you can. Now imagine this fresh sunlight pouring into the top of your head, and gently saturating every cell of your body. Allow it to flow into your head, your neck and throat, down your torso and arms and fingers, down your legs and into your feet. (Pause). Allow this golden sun to fill all of your body's cells and the spaces in between. (Pause). Now slowly wiggle your fingers and toes, open your eyes and stretch your arms up to the sky! Look at the people next to you and silently smile or nod to acknowledgement of their presence."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following questions are intended to help you focus a group conversation after viewing the film and serve as a guide. Audiences might have their own questions they would like to raise, and it may be appropriate to tailor some questions to your group. We suggest beginning with a couple general focus questions before diving into more specific chapter-by-chapter questions. Chapter-by-chapter questions can also be used for more topic-related conversations, or for in depth study group sessions that meet weekly or monthly.

TIP: If you have a group of 12 or more, consider inviting people to talk about at least one question in pairs. This can be very effective for facilitating large groups (over 20 and up to many hundreds) and allow for deeper connection. If you do this, we suggest that each person gets 5 minutes to share. Let everyone know when the first 5 minutes is up (ring a bell, etc.), and then invite the second person to share. When everyone comes back together, you can invite a few people to share an insight they had with the entire group.

GENERAL FOCUS QUESTIONS & CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Is this film about life or about death? How so?

2. Based on the film, what do you think is the most compelling evidence, if any, that consciousness or energy survives physical death? Do you find yourself more drawn to scientific studies or personal accounts? Why?

3. What surprised you in this film? What ideas or information are new to you?

4. Who do you relate to the most in this film? Which person's perspective most resonates with you? Which person's perspective would you like to learn more about?

5. What memories do you have of your families' reaction or response to someone's death? How have these experiences shaped your current perspectives on death?

6. What are some ways your religious or non-religious upbringing has influenced your beliefs about death & the afterlife? What are some ways the culture and society you've lived in have influenced these beliefs?

7. How can learning about other cultures' traditions inform and expand your own beliefs about death? Which tradition – that is different from your own – are you most curious about or drawn to? What are some concrete ways you can explore this more deeply?

8. In what ways are science and spirituality converging? Why is this important?

9. At the beginning of the film, Marilyn Schlitz asks Deepak Chopra: "Have you had an experience yourself that give you an insight into what happens when we die?" Have you ever had an experience like this? If so, what is the most significant insight you gained?

10. Edgar Mitchell talks about learning to feel happy & successful in THIS life rather than having "answers" to what happens after death. Even if you don't have answers, how can simply exploring the question of what happens after death contribute to your happiness and success now?

11. Knowing he is dying of cancer, Lee Lipsenthal says, "Being okay with dying is a weird place to be. They don't get it . They think I've 'given in.'" What do you imagine Lee means here? If someone is okay with dying, does that mean they've given up? At what point in the dying process is it okay to accept your death / someone else's death, rather than continue to hope that the body survives?

12. Gary Malkin, who wrote the song at the end of the film, mentions connecting to "that which never dies." What do you imagine he is referring to? What is it that "never dies?" And how can you connect to this?

13. Marilyn Schlitz asks, "How do we let the fact that we'll all die inform our lives?" What is your response to this question?

14. If a friend asked you about this film, what would you say to him or her?

CHAPTER 1: CYCLE OF LIFE

- When did you first start asking questions about death and what happens after we die?

- Jane Hughes Gignoux says, "Death is our birthright." What does this mean to you?

- What do you imagine is the value of "Death Cafés" and other regular gathterings where people get together to talk specifically about death and dying?

- Do you imagine that the experience of Nico, the gibbon ape described by Margaret Rousser at the Oakland Zoo, is similar to human grieving? Why or why not?

- Rick Hansen says that every being knows how to die. He tells the story of the rock climber and people seeing him "open out" and relax after flailing. "There's something in us that knows how to 'open out'". What is your understanding of what this means? Do you agree with Rick that we – as humans – know how to do this?

Additional Chapter-by-Chapter Discussion Questions

Chapters

1. Cycle of Life
2. Consciousness
3. The Evidence
4. The Afterlife
5. Gifts of Life & Death
6. Honoring Life
7. Ways of Coping
8. Conquest of Death

CHAPTER 2: CONSCIOUSNESS

- What are some examples of incidents or evidence that may suggest consciousness is more than the brain?

- Have you ever wondered, as Dean Ornish had, that death may be like going to sleep? How do you imagine it might be similar? How might it be different?

- Marilyn Schlitz shares a story about her son when he was very young, who says with certainty their friend who died could still see the full moon. Has a child in your life ever offered you a kernel of wisdom like this, suggesting we are more than our bodies?

- Michael Shermer from the Skeptics Society says, "When you die, nothing happens. You just die. You're in the same place you were before you were born, which is no where." What do you imagine is the basis of this point of view? Do you now hold or have you ever held this worldview?

- Edgar Mitchell says when we ask these ancient questions about death, we are asking "what's the nature of reality?" How do inquiries about death ponder the nature of reality?

- Deepak Chopra says there are two views of consciousness from science: one is the materialist science perspective which views consciousness as "an emergent property of evolution." The other is a post-modern science perspective that says consciousness is "non-local, transcendent, eternal" and is "not subject to birth or death." How might the perspective of new science change the way we think about life and death?

CHAPTER 3: THE EVIDENCE

- What surfaces for you when you reflect upon the following statement by Marilyn Schlitz? "People have all kinds of experiences that lie outside what we accept as truth or what is possible. I think that the kind of science we're doing – which really looks at the powers and potentials of consciousness – helps to expand our sense of possibility. And more importantly, it allows us to ask questions that have been put down, that have been considered taboo."

- Do you believe people can communicate or receive messages from those who are physically dead? How does your own experience inform your perspective?

- Julie Beischel shares the case of a medium who solves the murder case of someone's deceased aunt in Peru. What do you make of this case? Do you believe the accuracy of mediums is evidence that consciousness survives physical death?

- Marilyn Schlitz talks about her out-of-body experience when she was in the motorcycle crash as a teenager, and then says, "If that hadn't happened to me personally, I might not believe something like this is possible?" Have you ever had an experience that made you feel this way?

- Peter Fenwick, who studies near-death and out-of-body experiences, says, "If it's true that you really do have experiences when the brain isn't working, then it means consciousness or mind are not the same as the brain." What are the implications of this?

- Dannion Brinkley describes his near-death experience after being struck by lightning. He says he could see what was happening in the physical world, and he also shares his moments in the non-physical world. What does his experience tell you about life and death?

- Dean Radin discusses the case of Pam Reynolds, who he refers to as having been "triple dead." How would you explain what Pam reported she saw when she was "officially dead" in surgery?

CHAPTER 4: THE AFTERLIFE

- Lee Lipsenthal says he believes "we get recycled" after we die. What do his words mean to you?

- Deepak Chopra says, "Death affects the body, but not the spirit." What is your understanding of this? Do you agree? Disagree? Why?

- What do you make of evidence showing young children who recall past lives which are then verified? Does this make a strong case for reincarnation?

- When Michael Shermer mentions having heard his deceased mother's voice, he explains this as an auditory hallucination. Does this explanation resonate with you? What could some other explanations be?

- Would you welcome having an experience with the non-physical world, such as an out-of-body experience, past life recall, a medium connecting to a deceased loved one, or directly sensing their presence? If so, why is this appealing? Does hearing about others' experiences satisfy your curiosity or do you prefer having "firsthand" experiences?

- What is your experience of dreams of deceased loved ones? Do you consider this a form of communication?

CHAPTER 5: GIFTS OF LIFE & DEATH

- Michael Bernard Beckwith says people often make decisions based on whether they are going to die. But he says our choices need to be made by asking "What gifts am I going to give before I leave here, what talents am I going to cultivate, how am I going to be a beneficial presence on the planet?" What is at least one concrete choice you can make based on these questions?

- What are some other ways of looking at and responding to aging and dying, that are different from the "anti-aging movement"? How does the message that "you're a loser if you die or get old" affect our society and perspectives on death?

- Why do you feel many people are determined to live as long as they possibly can, staying alive at all costs?

- The young boy Josh says that he afraid of death. Are you? How do you think people learn to be afraid of dying? Is it a natural reaction to immortality, or a conditioned response?

- Luisah Teish says she has "more fear of an unfulfilled life than of death itself." What is your understanding of her statement? Does it resonate for you? Share your experience.

- How can gratitude for the life you've already lived up to this point help you feel more at peace with death?

- Tony Redhouse, a Native American practitioner, says when you are close to death, you will look at your life and "whether you've lived true to yourself, or whether you've lived your life for the expectations of everybody else." He encourages people to learn from this, and to live more fully in the present. He asks, "What dream do YOU want to fulfill in your life right now?" Please share your response.

- The Buddhist monk says, "If no change, no life." What does this mean to you, in relationship to death and dying?

CHAPTER 6: HONORING LIFE

- Lee Lipsenthal says dying is "just what we do." What emotions does this statement bring up for you? Does it offer relief? Fear? Tension? Peace?

- What are your feelings about Lee Lipsenthal deciding to lead a meditation at his own memorial celebration? Do you imagine wanting to participate in planning your memorial celebration? Have you ever spoken to family or friends about this?

- Have you ever felt connected to your ancestors at a family cemetery or place of burial? What was that experience like for you?

- Different cultural and religious groups have created practices to honor the transition of death. What is one tradition you have practiced in your life to honor the transition of someone you cared about?

CHAPTER 7: WAYS OF COPING

- What are some creative ways to express grief that you have found helpful in your life? Art? Writing? Activities? Rituals? Ceremonies?

- How have you been challenged by grief and how have you managed it? Describe an experience you had in which grief was an opportunity for personal transformation.

- Do you believe it's possible to have a relationship with someone after they die? How so?

- Do you believe consciousness can also be called the "soul" as Lauren Artress suggests?

- Yassir Chadly says everybody meets in that point we call death. How can acknowledging death as a common human experience bring people together across social and cultural boundaries?

- Rupert Sheldrake says people are less afraid of death if it is considered "transition," as is taught by many religious beliefs. Is this true for you? Also, saying death is a "transition" is common language. What does this mean to you?

- Do you consider yourself as being on a spiritual path? If so, have your direct experiences on your spiritual path helped you feel "part of something larger that connects us all," as Dean Ornish suggests?

CHAPTER 8: CONQUEST OF DEATH

- Deepak Chopra quotes the poet Rumi: "You are not just the drop in the ocean, you are the mighty ocean in the drop." Do you feel this is an accurate metaphor for the relationship between the individual mind and the cosmic mind?

- Lothar Schafer offers a metaphor from Indian sages to express the worldview of one consciousness: "When you take a million pots, fill them with water, and put them in the sunlight, the sun is in each one of them but there is only one sun. You take a million people that all are conscious, and there is only one consciousness." Does this image encourage a sense of connection for you? If so, in what ways?

- How are metaphors helpful for talking about death and consciousness?

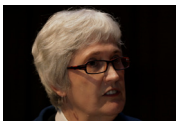
- Dannion Brinkley says, "No one ever dies. You just shift from one frequency into another frequency." Does this seem possible? Probable? How does this idea of shifting from one frequency to another connect spirituality with science?

- Deepak Chopra shares the metaphor that "we are the strings on which memories are strung on." WE are the strings. What is your own understanding of what Deepak is saying?

- At the end of the film, Deepak Chopra reads a poem by R. Tagore about death that says "a summons has come, and I am ready for my journey." What do you imagine would make you feel "ready" for your own death journey? "Ready" for the journey of those you love?

- Gary Malkin's song that ends the film is called "Do you remember who you are?" What is your understanding who are you in your essence? What practices and choices can support you in remembering who you truly are?

FEATURED SPEAKERS



REV. DR. LAUREN ARTRESS

Author, Canon of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, Founder of Veriditas: The Worldwide Labyrinth Project

MICHAEL BERNARD BECKWITH

Founder and Spiritual Director of Agape International Spiritual Center

JULIE BEISCHEL, PhD

Co-Founder and Director of Research at The Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential

DANNION BRINKLEY

Author, Speaker and Hospice Volunteer

FARIBA BOGZARAN, PhD

Author, Artist, Founder of The Dream Studies Program, JFK University

YASSIR CHADLY

Adjunct Professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley; Imam at Masjid-Al Iman Mosque in Oakland

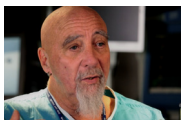
DEEPAK CHOPRA, MD

Physician, Author, Founder of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing, and Founder of the Chopra Foundation; Executive Producer of film *Death Makes Life Possible*

PETER FENWICK, PhD
Neuropsychiatrist and Neurophysiologist, Lecturer King's College, London

JANE HUGHES GIGNOUX
Author, Teacher, Certified Celebrant

MINGTONG GU
Qigong Master, Teacher, Founder of The Chi Center



STUART HAMEROFF, MD
Anesthesiologist and Professor at the University of AZ

RICK HANSON, PhD
Founder of Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom

SATISH KUMAR
Author, Editor of *Resurgence* Magazine

SIMON LEWIS
Author, Film Producer of *Look Who's Talking*

LEE LIPSENTHAL, MD
Author of *Enjoy Every Sandwich*

GLORIA McALLISTER
Co-Chair, El Dia de Los Muertos Petaluma

PAUL MILLS, PhD
Professor in Residence, Department of Psychiatry, UCSD

DEAN ORNISH, MD
Founder and President of the Preventative Medicine Research Institute;
Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco

DEAN RADIN, PhD

Chief Scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences

TONY REDHOUSE

Native American consultant, Navajo Hoop Dancer, and Grammy-nominated musician

MARGARET ROUSSER

Zoological Manager, Oakland Zoo

LOTHAR SCHÄFER, PhD

Author, Professor Emeritus Department of Chemistry, University of Arkansas

MARILYN SCHLITZ, PhD

Cultural Anthropologist, Behavioral Scientist, Author; Executive Producer, Writer, Co-Director, Narrator of film ***Death Makes Life Possible***

RUPERT SHELDRAKE, PhD

Biologist and Author

MICHAEL SHERMER, PhD

Founding Publisher of Skeptic Magazine, Executive Director of the Skeptics Society

LUISAH TEISH

Teacher, Author, Oshun Chief in the Yoruba Lucumi Tradition

RUDY TANZI, PhD

Professor of Neurology, Harvard Medical School

JIM B. TUCKER, MD

Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Death Makes Life Possible website http://deathmakeslifepossible.com

The Conversation Project http://theconversationproject.org
An organization dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care.

Death Café http://deathcafe.com
At Death Cafés people drink tea, eat cake and discuss death. Their aim is to increase awareness of death to help people make the most of their (finite) lives.

Death Over Dinner http://deathoverdinner.org
Resource for people getting together to have dinner and have conversations about how we prepare for and spend our final days.

CREDITS

FILM CREDITS

Marilyn Schlitz, Writer and Executive Producer
Deepak Chopra, Executive Producer
Angela Murphy, Producer
Mark Krigbaum, Director
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DISCUSSION GUIDE CREDITS

Written by: Jennifer Mathews
Graphic design & layout: Erica Wong