

# Death Over Dinner, Jewish Edition



The way we die – end of life decisions, death rituals, what happens after we die – is probably the most important conversation Americans aren't having. We believe that talking about death not only better prepares us to approach life's most challenging moments, but also helps us articulate and affirm who we are and what we ultimately care about, leaving us better able to embrace the mysteries of death and to appreciate life.

We have gathered rabbis, theologians and medical and wellness leaders to cast an unflinching eye at end of life, and together we've created an interactive experience that transforms this otherwise difficult conversation into one of engagement, insight and empowerment.

Whether you're a Jewish insider or find yourself more on the margins, we welcome you to tap into some age-old Jewish wisdom around grieving and ritual, living and dying.

We hope this conversation will be not only personally clarifying but also deeply bonding, healing and even uplifting. We invite you to gather friends and family and fill a table.

[GET STARTED](#)

## Who's Coming to Dinner?

In just a few steps, we'll help you plan a dinner, invite your guests and prepare to lead a meaningful and inspiring conversation.

To get started, who will be joining you? We recommend a small group of 5-10 people.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Neighbors</li><li>• Parents</li><li>• Co-Workers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strangers</li><li>• Community Members</li><li>• Family Members</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grandparents</li><li>• Total Mixed Bag</li><li>• Friends</li></ul>
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## Your Intention

Which of the following best describes you  
and your interest in this conversation? Your  
selection will help us guide you toward  
some curated content.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I think being prepared for end of life is really important. We NEED to have this conversation.</li><li>• I recently lost someone close to me and I'm looking for wisdom from the Jewish tradition that could bring me comfort.</li><li>• I am curious to learn about Jewish perspectives on death, dying and the afterlife.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Death freaks me out, but I understand that difficult conversations are often the most important.</li><li>• I am caring for a loved one who is dying and I am eager to have a real conversation about death.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I'm interested in exploring alternative Jewish approaches to death rituals and traditions.</li><li>• I am, or someone I love is, critically or terminally ill and I want to talk about what's happening openly, honestly and lovingly.</li></ul>
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## Read/Watch/Listen

In advance of your dinner, a little homework. We've curated some of the best articles, videos and audio content out there, which we hope will inspire deeper conversation at your table. Some of these resources are explicitly Jewish; others speak more generally to contemporary ideas about death and dying.

Click below to select one from each section for you and your guests.

[WHAT'S YOUR INTENTION?](#)

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# 1

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# Review and Edit

## Guests

- Invite Someone!

## Intention

- What's your intention?

## Read

- Please Select Your Media

## Watch

- Please Select Your Media

## Listen

- Please Select Your Media

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## **Activate**

**You are now ready to activate your dinner. Enter your email address and click ACTIVATE. We will send you a personalized email with invitation language to send to your guests that includes your Read/Watch/Listen selections and a guide to hosting and moderating the dinner discussion.**

**We're in beta!**

**We'd Love to Hear Your Feedback**

**Your Name \***

**Your Location \***

**Your Email \***

**[SUBMIT](#)**

## Next Steps

We've found that once this conversation is started, many people want more. We encourage you to explore our library, spread the word and share your story!

<b>Additional Resources</b>	<b>Share Your Story</b>	<b>Spread the Word</b>
<a href="#"><u>View All Library Resources</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Share your story with us!</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Email</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Facebook</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Twitter</u></a>

[\*\*PREVIOUS\*\*](#)

## Library: Read

- [It's Time We Talk](#)

In this exceptional Yom Kippur sermon, Rabbi Ed Feinstein implores us to do the hard work – have the difficult conversations, draft wills, complete advanced directives – in order to leave gifts of peace, wholeness and gratitude in death.

- [Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night](#)

Poet Dylan Thomas offers a hypnotic composition about the dying process. His chutzpadik charge rails against more conventional approaches.

- [A New Vision for Dreams of the Dying](#)

Dreams and visions of the dying have captivated cultures for thousands of years, including numerous accounts throughout Rabbinic literature. Explore what anthropologists, theologians, and sociologists have learned from these “deathbed phenomena”.

- [Becoming a Friend to the End](#)

The greatest kindness (hesed) we can offer is to participate in the burial process. But we can also bring holiness and comfort to someone approaching death. A story of an unlikely friendship.

- [In Search of a Good Death](#)

In order to honor a dying person until the last moment, it helps to know what that process will look like. Jane Brody describes the potentially confusing final hours or days when a person is “actively dying”.

- [Jewish Burial Equals Green Burial](#)

Each year, more than 90,000 tons of steel and over 2700 tons of copper and bronze are made into caskets. That’s enough metal to build a Golden Gate Bridge. But Jewish burial, like green burial, fosters returning to the earth as naturally as possible.

- [A Ritual to Remove a Wedding Ring](#)

The process of removing a wedding ring after the death of a partner is a significant milestone in the journey of grief. This Jewish ritual draws on traditional liturgy to make that moment meaningful.

- [How Millennials Mourn](#)

Was shiva ever meant to be sat alone? A twentysomething with no kids, no partner, and few adult obligations reflects on coping with parental loss without a conventional family structure in place.

- [Ghosts in the Machine](#)

A profound and unanticipated side effect of technology is that death no longer obeys any laws of finality. Funneled through social media, death lingers longer than a traditional Jewish mourning period of 30 days or 11 months might prescribe.



- [Prayer at the Funeral of Someone Who Committed Suicide](#)  
When someone commits suicide, most people struggle to know what to say. Rabbi Joseph Meszler composed this prayer – the words we say when we have no words.
- [To Be Happier Start Thinking More About Your Death](#)  
Every year, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) pushes us to consider, “What if this is it? Have I made the most of my time?” Like Buddhist death meditation, these questions can help us reconnect with our existential goals. Arthur Brooks asks, if we applied the “last-year test” to our lives, how much less time would we spend doing bupkes and how much more would we nurture relationships or nourish the soul?
- [Turn Into A Tree When You Die](#)  
From the earth we were created, and with these burial pods developed by Anna Citelli and Raoul Bretzel, to the earth we can truly return. You can even choose the type of tree your seed pod will nourish.
- [How Doctors Die](#)  
The Torah instructs us to “choose life.” But is that referring to quantity or quality? Ken Murray, MD shares why most doctors choose little end of life treatment for themselves, and are able to die gently.
- [Dying With Dignity and the Final Word on Her Life](#)  
In the book of Samuel, King Saul asked his armor-bearer to help him die mercifully. Jane Lotter writes her own raw and poignant obituary before using Washington’s Death With Dignity Act to die peacefully.
- [Waking Up To Your World](#)  
When Rabbi Eliezer told his students to repent one day before they die, they asked the obvious question: “how do we know when that day is?” Of course, we never know how much time we have left to fulfill the potential of our precious human birth. Given this, Pema Chodron asks us to consider, what is most important?
- [The Bitter End](#)  
The students of Rabbi Judah the Prince desperately prayed that he should be stay alive, but a handmaid saw his suffering and intervened to help him die peacefully. Sometimes, as Jesse Ellison describes with her 92 year old grandmother, the most graceful thing one can do with death is accept it. But is this possible in America’s health care system?
- [Ten Commandments for the Caregiver](#)  
Rabbi Earl Grollman offers ten practical and compassionate commandments for concerned caregivers.
- [Top Five Regrets of the Dying](#)  
So long as we are living, we are capable of reflection and growth. Having worked for many years with patients in the final weeks of their life, Bronnie Ware shares the five

most common regrets she encountered and the life lessons gained from facing one's own mortality.

- [Reconsidering Kaddish: Four New Approaches to an Old Ritual](#)

Esther Kustanowitz interviews four people who are adding their own spin to the traditional practice of reciting the Mourner's Kaddish.

- [Traditional Jewish Mourning Practices](#)

The Kavod v'Nihum society explains the stages of mourning in the Jewish tradition, from the moment of death through the yahrtzeit, the annual anniversary of death.

- [Good Grief: Is there a Better Way to be Bereaved?](#)

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross famously changed the conversation around grieving when she articulated the stages of grief, yet in Western cultures, we don't know how to grieve anymore. Meghan O'Rourke says we underestimate the power of ritual and community in the grieving process.

## Library: Watch

- [What Really Matters at the End of Life](#)

A rabbinic teaching says that the greatest gift of all is simply being alive. BJ Miller, palliative care physician at Zen Hospice Project, creates a dignified, graceful end of life for his patients that includes staying present to the beauty of that gift, up to the very end.

- [New Ways to Think About Death](#)

For thousands of years, sacred space has played a central role in Jewish tradition. But when was the last time you considered the importance of where we die? In this short, provocative talk, architect Alison Killing looks at the buildings where death and dying happen, and asks us how where we die impacts how we die.

- [How Do we Heal Medicine](#)

Our medical systems are broken. Doctors are capable of extraordinary (and expensive) treatments, but they are losing their core focus: actually treating people. Doctor and writer Atul Gawande suggests we take a step back and look at new ways to do medicine — with fewer cowboys and more pit crews.

- [A Strange Relativity: Altered Time for Surgeon-Turned-Patient](#)

The Jewish calendar challenges us to sanctify and mark the passage of time. In this video, neurosurgeon Paul Kalanithi, MD, describes how his perception of time as a neurosurgeon, cancer patient and new father changed when he was diagnosed with lung cancer in his mid-30's and had to face his own mortality.

- [Before I Lost My Hair](#)

In this heartwrenching interpretation of the Psalm 90, Rachel Lopez Rosenberg reflects on her cancer treatments.

- [A Good Goodbye](#)

Certified thanatologist Gail Rubin delivers a humorous but insightful Jewish approach to mortality and end-of-life planning.

- [Having a Child Diagnosed with a Life Limiting Illness](#)

Jewish tradition offers a meaningful process for mourners after someone dies. But what about the grief that inevitably comes when a loved one is diagnosed with a terminal illness, and particularly when it is one's child?

- [Mushroom Burial Suit](#)

Jewish burial seeks to return us simply to the earth. Artist Jae Rhim Lee wants us to go further: can we commit our bodies to a cleaner, greener Earth using a special burial suit seeded with pollution-gobbling mushrooms?

- [Before I Die I Want To...](#)

It's the greatest Yom Kippur exercise ever. In her New Orleans neighborhood, artist Candy Chang turned an abandoned house into a giant chalkboard asking a

fill-in-the-blank question: “Before I die I want to \_\_\_\_.” Her neighbors’ answers — surprising, poignant, funny — became an unexpected mirror for the community.

- [The Coffinmaker](#)

For Marcus Daly, building coffins is his avodah, his sacred service, a deeply personal and religious craft of love.

- [The Grieving Process: Coping with Death](#)

This highly accessible guide to mourning gives advice that we all could stand to be reminded of, whether we are the bereaved or in the role of comforter.

- [Find a Place of Rest](#)

Frank Ostaseski, Founder of the Metta institute, discusses the power of finding a Shabbat-like place of rest amidst chaos and activity, and in this case, right on the cusp of death.

- [Can We End Aging?](#)

If you could maintain optimal health up until the day you die, would you? Or is that playing God? Biomedical gerontologist Dr. Aubrey de Grey makes the case that aging is a disease that we can and should try to cure.

- [Jewish Mourning Rituals](#)

Jewish mourning rituals are a powerful guide through the darkest days. Learn the basics of the traditional Jewish mourning process in this short animated video from BimBam.

- [When Should Dying Patients Stop Treatment?](#)

In the mi sh’berakh – the prayer for healing – are we creating false hope? At what point should we stop asking for healing and focus instead on the end? In this video, Dr. Atul Gawande has a candid and intimate conversation with the widower of a deceased patient and apologizes for avoiding the reality of the imminent end.

- [An overview of The Conversation Project](#)

Dr. Kate Lally discusses Care New England role as a pioneer sponsor of The Conversation Project as well issues around end-of-life care, palliative care and hospice. The Conversation Project is dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care. This nationwide campaign is focused on starting that conversation early so that they can take place at the dinner table, not in the intensive care unit. In order to become conversation-ready, Care New England has developed a conversation nurse model. That model consists of nurses that are employed and trained by Care New England to have these conversations with patients. After meeting with the patient, these nurses become advocates, and use their knowledge to consult on the patient’s case. Since its collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, The Conversation Project has been devoted to the improvement of care for all patients at the end of life.

- [What Really Matters at the End of Life](#)

At the end of our lives, what do we most wish for? For many, it's simply comfort, respect, love. BJ Miller is a palliative care physician who thinks deeply about how to create a dignified, graceful end of life for his patients. Take the time to savor this moving talk, which asks big questions about how we think on death and honor life (TED Talk).

- [Death Questions from Kids](#)

Caitlin Doughty, from Ask a Mortician, fields questions from kids about death and dying.

## Library: Listen

- [Death Shall Have No Dominion](#)

Judaism asserts that death is not the end, since the memory of the deceased lives on as a blessing in the world. In this eerily beautiful poem, Dylan Thomas explores the mystery of eternity, adamant that death does not have the final say.

- [The Town Where Everyone Talks About Death](#)

In this community, talking about death is a comfortable conversation — neighbors kibbitz about who on the block hasn't filled out their advance directive.

- [Contemplating Mortality](#)

Dr. Ira Byock is a leading figure in palliative care and hospice in the United States. He says we lose sight of “the remarkable value” of the time of life we call dying if we forget that it's always a personal and human event, and not just a medical one. From his place on this medical frontier, he shares how we can understand dying as a time of learning, repair, and completion of our lives.

- [Death is Harder Than it Has to Be](#)

In his book *The Best Care Possible*, Dr. Ira Byock argues that the way most Americans die is a national disgrace — an ethical, moral and economic crisis that will get a great deal worse as the baby boomers age. How can we transform end of life care?

- [The Amen Effect](#)

Why can't you say Mourner's Kaddish alone in your living room? Rabbi Sharon Brous argues that the word “Amen” is one of the most powerful healing agents in the grieving process, and saying Amen to someone else's Kaddish could very possibly change both of your lives.

- [Cliffhangers](#)

The great lesson of Yom Kippur is that we are standing at the edge of the abyss — something we could use to be reminded of even without a diagnosis. This could be paralyzing or liberating — let's let it free us to become who we can be.

- [The Inevitability of Death](#)

When the death of a loved one reminds us of our own vulnerability and mortality, how do we choose life?

- [Funeral Exercise](#)

Dr. Stephen Covey asks us to visualize our own funeral, as a reminder of what's most important in life.

- [Fire and Rain Song](#)

Music, we know, has tremendous healing power. James Taylor uses song to help him process his grief after losing a close childhood friend.

- [Heaven and Earth](#)  
On Yom Kippur, the line between this world and the next is as fuzzy as it will be all year, especially during Yizkor, the memorial prayer. How can we touch the closeness?
- [The Show Must Go On](#)  
Singing of his furious desire to live in spite of diminishing strength, this Queen song is an ode to Freddy Mercury's terminal battle with HIV/AIDS, and resonates with the Jewish charge to "choose life!"
- [Bedside Manner](#)  
It is still beyond human capability to predict when a person will die. So for doctors who must deliver that fatal news to patients, it can be a difficult and complicated conversation. Dr. Pauline Chen discusses.
- [What Doesn't Kill You](#)  
Tig was diagnosed with cancer. A week later she went on stage in Los Angeles and did a now-legendary set about her string of misfortunes.
- [Finding the Lesson in Loss](#)  
Shiva and the Jewish mourning process is meant to help us grieve healthily. Actor Alicia Coppola describes the challenges and importance of grieving for herself after the death of her father.
- [On Suffering, Beliefs, and Dying](#)  
Author Christopher Hitchens, diagnosed with cancer and chronicling his illness, reflects on prayer, solidarity and the cosmos.
- [Don't Freak Out About Dying](#)  
To everything there is a season. For 89 year old rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, entering "the December of his years" means thinking deeply about this final stage, and sharing his wisdom with the rest of us. Start at 8:50.
- [Culture of Dying](#)  
With speech, the world was created. But if language is so important, why are we as Americans afraid to call death by its name? Stephen Jenkinson explains what this fear is doing to our culture and how we can change it. Listen from 8:30 – 25:00.
- [Breaking the Taboo Against Talking About Death](#)  
Michael Hebb, founder of Let's Have Dinner and Talk About Death, says how we want to die represents the most important and costly conversation Americans aren't having. He explains how this project gives people the tools to move through these conversations.
- [Congratulations You Gonna Die](#)  
British philosopher and Zen Scholar Alan Watts delivers a series of humorous yet thoughtful musings on death with a particular dry and lucid wit. Nothing particularly Jewish here, except for the idea that a death dinner ought to make you laugh.