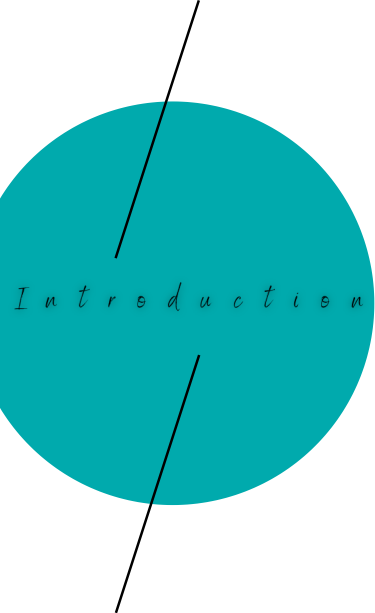


# A Death Anniversary Ceremony

Acknowledging the date of a  
loved ones death.



*This ceremony is a collaboration between Be Ceremonial and Hope Edelman, with input from members of the AfterGrief Community who generously volunteered their time.*



While each person grieves in their own way, there are universal moments and markers that many people want to acknowledge. A death anniversary is one of those markers.

The date of a loved one's death often engraves itself in our memories. Larger cultural messages about death convey this is a sad occasion to mark and, as the years pass, that we should be "over it" by now. While some cultures and religions have rituals to mark the anniversary of a death, dominant Western culture offers little acknowledgment or guidance. As a result, this Silent Anniversary often leaves mourners to honor the lives of their loved ones alone and make meaning of their losses on their own.

We believe that the day of a loved one's death is a very brief moment in the context of the full life they lived. That's why the ceremony we have created acknowledges both the time they were with us, and the time after their departure.

No matter what your relationship with the person you lost was, when you step into the ceremony space, give yourself permission to wonder, imagine, and dream about their life, their impact, and their legacy, including how you want to fold them into your life moving forward.



Be Ceremonial believes that every ceremony should tell a story, helping us acknowledge what was, what is, and what will be. Rituals are intentional actions that help us create meaning, and a ceremony is the container that holds those rituals.

We hope this ceremony can help you acknowledge a significant date connected to the death of a loved one. This ceremony was designed to help you honor the past relationship with your loved one, ground yourself in the present, and set intentions for what you'd like to carry forward.

The rituals included here have been sourced from a larger community of individuals who have lost a parent or loved one. Our ritual suggestions are descriptive, not prescriptive, meaning you are invited to add your own elements, beliefs, and experiences to make this your own. We recommend including all of the components in your ceremony for the full experience, yet you can also choose individual ones that speak to you.

## Marking the End of the First Year

The first anniversary after someone dies holds special significance. You've completed a year of so many firsts, such as a first birthday and a first holiday season without them. To honor this transition, consider doing something or going somewhere for the very first time. Perhaps this is something they always talked about doing, or something you've wanted to do but held off on. It could be something as simple as sampling a new food or watching a movie they liked for the first time. However you choose to honor this first anniversary, allow space for all of the emotions that surround your year of firsts. You might also consider creating a symbolic threshold, such as laying a piece of string or a long stick across the ground that you can step over to mark this transition from one period of time to the next.



**Serves:** One person

*\*This ceremony was curated for an individual. If you'd like to invite others to join you, you can adapt the rituals accordingly. Either way, please ensure that you have emotional support leading up to and following the ceremony.*

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Ceremony Time:** 1 hour

### **Ingredients**

Here is a list of ritual ingredients to prepare and bring to your ceremony:

- *A small tray or table, and a tablecloth*
- *Flowers, candles, a special song to play, or other elements to add to your ceremony space*
- *Significant objects or mementos connected to your loved one*
- *A photo or visual representation of your loved one*
- *Small pieces of paper and a pen*
- *Lighter or matches*
- *Bowl full of water*
- *Access to nature, or soil in a potted plant*
- *Piece of paper cut in a circle*
- *Marker*
- *A glass jar with a lid*

# Opening Ritual: Setting the tone

## Story Altar

- Choose a spot for your ceremony that holds meaning or feels comfortable for you. Set up a small table in your ceremony space to display the items you've collected. Consider placing a scarf or tablecloth down on a small table or on a tray, and adding elements that bring beauty or intention to the space such as flowers, candles, or incense. You can play a special song, ring a bell, or spray an essential oil to help you drop into a ritual mindset.
- Consider introducing items from nature or from a special place you associate with your loved one's life or death. Ideas include soil, sand, or water from a significant spot, or a rock, feather, or flower you notice as you're preparing for the ceremony.
- One by one, hold each object or memento that you brought in connection to your loved one. As you place it on the table, write or speak a story you associate with that object, or acknowledge what it represents to you. After each item has been placed on the story altar, you can move onto the next ritual.

# H o n o r i n g t h e P a s t : A c k n o w l e d g i n g W h a t W a s

## Release and Return

- What do you remember most readily about the time spent with your loved one? Sit with your thoughts for a moment and with any details that come up. What would you like to let go of in connection to their death? Sit with these emotions that come up.
- Then on small pieces of recycled paper or an alternative, write down what you want to release. Trust that you're not erasing these feelings; you're simply acknowledging and releasing the hold they have over you. Once these thoughts are written down, you can choose to release them with fire or with water.
- Using fire, read each note out loud and then safely burn the pieces of paper one by one. Hold the paper for as long as you safely can, watching the words disappear. Drop the burning paper into a bowl of water and watch it continue to transform.
- Using water, read your thoughts aloud and drop them directly into the bowl of water, taking a few minutes to watch how the water transforms the ink and paper.
- When you feel ready, take the bowl of water, filled with the remnants of your thoughts and words, and pour it into the soil. This could be outside in nature or inside in a potted plant. Take a moment to acknowledge both what you have released and what you have returned to the earth.

# Being Present: Acknowledging What Is

## Holding Two Truths

- Cut a piece of paper or cardstock into a circle. Write the word GRIEF on one side of the coin, and the word GRATITUDE on the other side. You're welcome to choose two different, seemingly opposing words as well.
- Hold the coin in your left hand with the GRIEF side facing up. Picture your grief as you feel it today in as much detail as you feel comfortable doing. What color is it, is it heavy or light, does it have a taste or smell? Sit with your grief for as long as you choose.
- Hold the coin in your right hand with the word GRATITUDE facing up. Think about what you're grateful for that may be associated with or have resulted from the loss in as much detail as possible: what does it look like, where in your body can you feel it most, does it have a taste or sound? Sit with your gratitude for as long as you choose.
- Finally, bring both your hands together, by your heart or in your lap, and acknowledge the tension and the connection these two polarities hold. Recognize that you can hold both at the same time, that they can both be true at once. Take a few deep breaths as you find room for them to coexist in a state of grace.

# Intentions for the Future: Acknowledging What Will Be

## Legacy Jar

- Think about who your loved one was, not only to you, but to others in their life. (You can invite friends and family to send in their thoughts or memories as well.) If you don't have many memories of your own, or if your memories are complicated, you're welcome to imagine what they might have been like or who you hope they would have been to you and in the world. You can choose single words, sentences, sayings, or quotes.
- Write down each word, thought, or message on a small piece of paper and place it into a glass jar that closes. You can use any container you have around the house, so long as it closes tightly and feels special to you. You can also decorate the jar if you're so inspired.
- Whenever you want to connect with your loved one's life, simply shake the glass jar, open the lid, and pull out a piece of paper. Sit with that word or message and consider what it stirs up in you. Maybe it reminds you of a story or a memory, or perhaps it invites you to consider something that's happened in your life recently.
- When you're ready, place that word back in the jar. Repeat this process whenever you want to fold your loved one's legacy into your daily life.

## Closing: Completing the Circle

### Post Ceremony Reflection

After the ceremony is complete, we encourage you to share what you experienced, either by writing it down in a journal or bringing it up in conversation with close relatives or friends. Think about what the ceremony helped you realize or what it offered you. Remember, you can draw on the energy this ceremony created whenever you need to, and you can repeat any of these rituals, or adapt them, when you want to reconnect with the emotions you released or the intentions you set.



## Story Altar

- Carefully take each piece you added to the altar and hold it for a moment. Acknowledge what that object represents or means to you, and tuck it away or place it somewhere special.
- If you played a song or released a scent during your opening rituals, you can repeat these actions as a way of bringing the ceremony journey full circle.
- Blow out the candle and watch the smoke dissipate and the wax harden. Thank yourself for the care and thought you put into this ceremony.

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*A b o u t*

## **About Be Ceremonial**

This ceremony was created with the support of Megan Sheldon and Kate Love of Be Ceremonial, a mental wellness project that's reimagining how we can easily bring ritual and ceremony into the seemingly invisible moments that surround life and death. They offer workshops, retreats, and training programs, as well as an app that empowers care providers to help their clients create their own ceremonies. Learn more at [www.beceremonial.com](http://www.beceremonial.com).

## **About Hope Edelman**

Hope has been writing, speaking, and leading workshops and retreats in the field of early bereavement for more than 25 years. Her first book, *Motherless Daughters*, was a #1 New York Time bestseller that has been published in 14 countries and created a worldwide movement. Her eighth book, *The AfterGrief*, offers information and support to all mourners traveling along the long arc of grief. Learn more at [www.hopeedelman.com](http://www.hopeedelman.com).

## **The Collaboration**

Megan, Kate and Hope met through a task force created in early 2020 by [End of Life Collective](#) that brought together bereavement professionals, academics, and authors to address the growing Covid-19 crisis. They acknowledged the need for rituals surrounding certain events in the aftergrief, and co-created these ceremonies together with help from two groups of women in the *Motherless Daughters* Community. Special thanks to Heather Paris, Becky Burns, Nicole Schnitzler, and Leigh Conard for dedicating their time.