

Death Cafe as an Educational Tool for Jewish Communities

A Project Designed by Rena Boroditsky
as part of the Gamliel Institute's
Course 3: Educating, Organizing, and Training
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1. THE BIG IDEA

Our Chevra Kadisha offers educational sessions on Jewish the end of life rituals throughout the year in several Jewish venues such as local Synagogues, JCC, service groups, our Jewish day school, and Limmud.

While these sessions are important and successful, they are targeted to individuals who are already active or engaged in the community.

The Death Cafe model attracts people who may not be affiliated or who simply don't attend "Jewish" events. Death Cafe does not have speakers or set topics; the conversation is determined by the participants. This open format allows for a wide range of end of life topics to be explored from a general "human" starting point. In the course of the discussion, Jewish values and practises at the end of life may be offered or presented as options for individuals.

WHAT IS DEATH CAFE?

The Death Cafe model was developed by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid, based on the ideas of Bernard Crettaz.

Death Cafe is a global "social franchise", meaning anyone can access the "how to" guide online, agree to abide by the founding principles, and host their own Death Cafe.

Death Cafes have spread quickly across Europe, North America and Australasia. As of today, we have offered 2020 Death Cafes since September 2011. If 10 people came to each one that would be 20200 participants. We've established both that there are people who are keen to talk about death and that many are passionate enough to organise their own Death Cafe. (<http://deathcafe.com/what/>)

The Death Cafe concept is simple and straightforward. A relaxed gathering of people, some refreshments, and an opportunity or permission to talk about all things end of life. With no set agenda or speaker, the conversation is participant driven, and so each event is different. The traditional Death Cafe model is non denominational and

non directive. The open format allows for a wide range of options including a faith based event, an age based event, or an LGBT event.

2. ELEVATOR SPEECH

Are you familiar with Death Cafe? At a Death Cafe people enjoy coffee, tea & treats, and talk about dying and death in a relaxed group setting. There is no formal presentation or agenda; participants set the direction of the conversation. Death Cafe is respectful and confidential, and open to anyone interested in exploring end of life issues in an open, meaningful way.

Death Cafe is not grief counseling, bereavement support or funeral planning.

3. ABSTRACT

This project is an overview of how Chesed Shel Emes in Winnipeg, Canada used the Death Cafe model to engage individuals in discussion of end of life issues from a Jewish perspective. Death Cafe is a relaxed setting where individuals may be open to informal Jewish education.

4. MARKETING BLURB

Looking to start a conversation about dying and death from a Jewish perspective? Death Cafe is a simple and inexpensive way to open a relaxed conversation about all things end of life.

5. SEXY TITLE

Tea. Cake. Death. Join the Conversation.

6. FORMAL SUBTITLE

Death Cafe as an Educational Tool for Jewish Communities

7. BIO- SHORT

Rena Boroditsky is the Executive Director of the [Chesed Shel Emes](#), the non-profit Jewish funeral chapel and *Chevrah Kadisha* in Winnipeg, Canada. For nineteen years, she has been a student and teacher of end-of-life Jewish rituals. Rena has led sessions at [Kavod v'Nichum](#) conferences and at Limmud events in the US & Canada. She has served in past as a board member of [Kavod v'Nichum](#), and was appointed to another term as an officer at the February 2015 Kavod v'Nichum conference. She has been a lecturer and student in the [Gamliel Institute](#). In conjunction with Chesed Shel Emes, she recently launched Death Cafe Winnipeg. Rena is a member of the first graduating class of the Gamliel Institute, having completed the required studies and projects, and she has returned recently from the inaugural Israel Study Mission which is the heart of the sixth course in the Gamliel Institute curriculum, International Perspectives.

8. PHOTO

9. CONTACT INFO

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10. LAST UPDATED

July 2015, events continue through the fall of 2015

11. TYPE OF PROJECT

This is primarily an organizing project

- a. established a Death Cafe presence in Winnipeg
- b. hosted Death Cafe events in both Jewish and general community

12. AUDIENCE

- Primary audience is Jewish adults who wish to discuss and explore all end of life issues in a relaxed comfortable gathering
- Death Cafe is not a support group , not geared to newly bereaved individuals
- Secondary audience is the general community

13. THE PROJECT

A. BEHAVIOUR

Using the “How To Run a Death Cafe Guide” available online for the public, this project looks for the following behaviors to result:

- To provide a comfortable and safe space for individuals to share thoughts and feelings in a way which is inclusive and respectful.
- To promote open discussion about all things “ end of life”with a goal of enhancing our lives in the present.
- To provide a traditional Jewish perspective on a range of topics which may surface .
- To ensure that appropriate resource material and followup is available for individuals.

B. CONDITIONS

In order to run a successful Cafe, the following conditions are required:

- A comfortable and accessible venue
- Skilled facilitators to get the conversation going and keep it on track
- Delicious refreshments
- Person/s knowledgeable in Jewish traditions and their underlying values

C. DEGREE

- Any number of Cafes could be held in varied locations.
- Death Cafes could be offered in conjunction with other organizations

D. PREPARATION

The organizers would become familiar with the Death Cafe guide and underlying principles before planning the event:

- Deciding on the size of the group. A group of 10 to 12 people is manageable by one or two facilitators . A larger group may be divided up and would require additional facilitators .
- Locating a venue which is accessible (is there parking, is it near public transit).
- Arranging for refreshments (Kashrut, dietary restrictions, allergies).
- Advertising and marketing the event :
 - Place notices in City and community newspapers Billboard sections, PSAs at no charge
 - Issue a press release to all local TV and radio stations
 - Write an article and/ or place an ad in Jewish community paper
 - Jewish community organizations websites and bulletins
 - Develop a catchy logo to spark curiosity.
 - Social media: Start a Facebook page for your Death Cafe , invite friends and and post information there
 - Open an email account under the Death Cafe name and develop e-mail list of interested people
 - Start a Meetup Group
- Compile a resource sheet with community support names and contact information
- Provide Jewish material and resources for further reading and discussion on a range of topics
- Create a sign in sheet with space for email addresses, and an evaluation form for participants

E. QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

- How to screen participants - Death Cafe is not a support group or bereavement counselling. Is pre-registration required for events? Should an organizer be in touch with each registered guest to ensure the event is an appropriate fit?
- How to select facilitators - Our facilitators were members of our volunteer Chevra Kadisha, members of our Board of Directors, newly-retired social

workers, school guidance counsellors and other individuals who are comfortable with the topics and the accompanying emotions. The individuals were asked personally by one of our planning committee members. An orientation session was held prior to the first event.

F. EXAMPLE

In November 2013 a few interested Jewish community members met with the idea of bringing Death Cafe to Winnipeg. As the Jewish community non-profit funeral chapel and Chevra Kadisha, we took on this project even though it is not an exclusively Jewish concept.

We advertised widely in the Jewish community and asked people to pre-register so that we could be prepared. The response was far greater than we had anticipated. Our first Cafe, held in January 2014, had more than 60 participants.

Four events were hosted in Jewish venues over the winter of 2014. There were between 40 and 60 people at each event. While the age range was 19 to 90, the average age of the participants was 55 plus.

One event was held in conjunction with the Manitoba Multifaith Council at a local church. More than 70 attendees from all faiths attended.

For these Death Cafes, the venues were set up with round tables which could accommodate up to 10 people. We had several skilled facilitators, one at each table, to keep the conversation on track. We had two hostesses for the events who welcomed people, distributed name tags and encouraged people to sign in with their email addresses. One of the hostesses then started the evening with introductions and a quick overview of Death Cafe principles. Everyone was encouraged to help themselves to refreshments. The table based conversations went on for about 75 minutes, at which time the hostess asked a representative from each table to share a few of the themes that came out of the discussion. We then did a short wrap up and distributed the evaluation forms. People lingered and continued to share with one another.

The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, with many participants indicating they would attend future events. People felt affirmed, supported, and comforted that others also question and wonder. The level of personal sharing was truly astonishing as people opened up to strangers in ways they are unable to do with their loved ones.

Four events were held in partnership with Hospice and Palliative Care Manitoba in the winter of 2015, as part of their Grief Seminar program. These events featured a speaker and a topic and had about a dozen attendees at each. We realized that the target audience for these Grief Seminars is people who are actively mourning, and the event became more of a bereavement support group than an open conversation.

Our most recent event was held in July 2015. We held the event in our Chapel Board room and limited to 12 participants. This was the first afternoon event and had only one facilitator. A diverse group of 12 ladies took part in a wide ranging and thoughtful discussion.

To date, 168 individuals have attended a Death Cafe event. Twenty eight have attended more than one event. Many of those are Chesed staff, Chevra kadisha volunteers or group facilitators.

Four events are scheduled through the end of the year, two at local synagogues and two at the Public Library.

13. LINKS:

Global Death Cafe website www.deathcafe.com

Death Cafe: How To Guide http://deathcafe.com/site_media/files/guide.pdf

ATTACHMENTS:

1. DC Intro - For hosts
2. DC Press Release
3. DC Quotes -Conversation starters
4. Let's Talk about Dying -Winnipeg Free Press
5. DC Winter 2014 Event Poster
6. DC Winnipeg General Info Card
7. DC Winnipeg Fall 2015 Card
8. DC Resource Sheet
9. DC Evaluation

What is Death Cafe?

A movement started in Europe, with an aim to increase awareness of life by bringing discussion about death into the open.

At Death Cafes people drink coffee & tea, eat cake and discuss death in a relaxed group discussion. With the participants setting the agenda or direction of the conversation, Death Cafes are always accessible, respectful and confidential.

How does Death Cafe work?

Each Cafe has a host who will be your liason for organizing the event.

You provide the space, tables and chairs, and simple refreshments.. Coffee, tea and cake!

We provide moderators to guide the discussion, ideas to get the conversation going, and follow up information for those who are interested. We provide a sign in sheet and name tags for all participants, and we encourage everyone to add their name to our e-mail list.

We will work with you to advertise the event.

We operate on a non profit basis, but we do have a Silver Collection at the door to help cover expenses.

Please email us for more information at deathcafewinnipeg@gmail.com
or call Rena at 204.582.5088

Welcome to Death Cafe Winnipeg - For Hosts

What to expect:

- Tonight we'll start out in a big group to have some brief intros and then divide into smaller groups of 6-8 people.
- There are no formal breaks. If you gotta go, get up and go!
- If you feel overwhelmed and need to step out, that's okay too.
- We will call everyone back together at 8:50 to debrief and close the session.
- Please complete our short evaluation at the end of the evening

Death Cafe Principles:

- The event is *free from ideology* - do not lead participants towards any conclusions about life, death or life after death, apart from your own thoughts.
- The event should *feel safe and nurturing*, which includes nice refreshments.
- The event should be accessible and *respectful of all*, regardless of gender orientation, religion/faith, ethnicity, and disability.
- The event should be *confidential*. No individual stories should be retold.

Conversation starters:

What brought you here this evening?

How would you complete these statements:

A Good Death is _____

Before I die I want to _____

Welcome to Death Cafe Winnipeg

What to expect:

- Tonight we'll start out in a big group to have some brief intros and then divide into smaller groups of 4-6 people.
- There are no formal breaks. If you gotta go, get up and go!
- If you feel overwhelmed and need to step out, that's okay too.
- We will call everyone back together at 8:50 to debrief and close the session.
- Please complete our short evaluation at the end of the evening

Death Cafe Principles

- The event is *free from ideology* – we do not lead participants towards any conclusions about life, death or life after death, apart from your own thoughts.
- The event should *feel safe and nurturing*, which includes nice refreshments.
- The event should be accessible and *respectful of all*, regardless of gender orientation, religion/faith, ethnicity, and disability.
- The event should be *confidential*. No individual stories should be retold.

Conversation starters:

- *What brought you here this evening?*
- *How would you complete the statements:*
Death is _____
Before I die I want to _____

Sign in with your name and email address to be added to the Death Café Winnipeg mailing list

Join our Facebook Group at Death Cafe Wpg

For information about Death Café events worldwide, please visit:
www.deathcafe.com

Death Cafe Debuts in Winnipeg

At a Death Cafe people drink coffee & tea, eat cake and discuss death in a relaxed group discussion. With the participants setting the agenda or direction of the conversation, Death Cafes are always accessible, respectful and confidential. It is a discussion group rather than a grief support or counseling session. Cafes are open to any and all who are interested in discussing end-of-life issues in an open, meaningful way.

Death Cafe is an international movement started in Europe, developed by [Jon Underwood](#) and [Sue Barsky Reid](#), based on the ideas of [Bernard Crettaz](#), with the objective of “ increasing awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of our (finite) lives. “

Since September 2011 Death Cafes have spread quickly. As of today, 2000 cafes have taken place worldwide. Clearly there are people who want to talk about death, and many are passionate enough to organize their own Death Cafe.

To learn more about the global Death Cafe movement, visit www.deathcafe.com

Contact us at deathcafewinnipeg@gmail.com

Like our Facebook page -Death Café Wpg

Let's talk about dying

Death cafés, where folks discuss the taboo subject, arrive in

Winnipeg

By: **Sharon Chisvin**

Posted: **06/14/2014 1:00 AM** | **Comments: 0**

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Although death is the only guarantee in life, it is a topic that most people shy away from discussing. That is, unless they are among the thousands of people worldwide who have begun attending death cafés.

Death Café is an international movement that began in Europe in 2011. It was founded by British web developer Jon Underwood and his psychotherapist mother Sue Barsky Reid, and evolved from the teachings of Swiss sociologist Bernard Crettaz.

The movement's objective, according to its website, is to increase the awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their finite lives.

Death cafés are informal, non-denominational get-togethers in which participants sip coffee, speak their minds, share their stories, express their fears and ask questions in a respectful and confidential setting. They are not lectures or grief-support groups, but are meant to evoke the philosophical and scientific cafés of Europe.

The death café movement arrived in Winnipeg this past winter under the auspices of the Chesed Shel Emes, the city's venerable and only Jewish funeral home. Rena Boroditsky, the executive director of the Chesed Shel Emes, organized two cafés with the help of a small volunteer committee.

"People need a place to talk about death, to feel heard, to hear others stories and feel they are not alone," Boroditsky says.

Death cafés fill that need.

Winnipeg's inaugural cafés were both held at local synagogues and attracted about 50 participants each. The age range at the cafés was between 18 and 89, with the majority of participants being in their 60s and 70s. Those in attendance were primarily from the Jewish community, although other faith communities were represented as well.

Every religion, of course, has its own rituals related to death and mourning, but the big-picture questions and concerns about the topic are clearly universal.

Boroditsky served as host of the cafés and arranged to have facilitators on hand to guide the conversation if need be. Those conversations covered a broad range of death-related topics, including elderly parents not wanting to plan for their deaths and adult children not wanting to hear their parents' plans for their deaths. Widowhood, the afterlife and the concept of a "good death" were also discussed.

Death Cafe Winnipeg Evaluation

Thank you for joining us at Death Cafe

We very much appreciate your feedback. Please take a moment to complete this short survey. Your comments and suggestions will help us in planning future events.

Please indicate the date of the Cafe _____

What is your overall assessment of the event ? 1 2 3 4 5

Did the event meet your expectations? 1 2 3 4 5

How was the organization of the event?
(set up, refreshments) 1 2 3 4 5

Was the facilitator effective? 1 2 3 4 5

Would you attend another Death Cafe? 1 2 3 4 5

What are you “taking home” with you? What topics or aspects did you find most interesting ?

Comments and suggestions / What worked, what didn't?

Quotations to ponder

1. *Death ends a life, not a relationship.* –Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie
2. *I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens.* –Woody Allen
3. *Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.* –Joe Louis
4. *What a more beautiful world this would be if we didn't wait till people were dead before we honored their spirit.* –Kellie Elmore
5. *Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome.* –Isaac Asimov
6. *I want to die in my sleep like my grandfather... Not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car.* –Will Shriner
7. *If life is a school, loss is a major part of the curriculum.* –Elisabeth Kübler–Ross
8. *I'd rather rot on my own floor than be found by a bunch of bingo players in a nursing home.* –Florence King
9. *When someone is born we rejoice, When someone is married we celebrate. But when someone dies, we pretend that nothing happened.* –Margaret Mead
10. *Die before you die, so that when you die, you will not die.* –Egyptian Book of the Dead
11. *When we finally know we are dying, and all other beings are dying with us, we start to have a burning, almost heartbreaking sense of the fragility and preciousness of each moment and each being, and from this can grow a deep, clear, limitless compassion for all beings.* – Sogyal Rinpoche, The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying
12. *The only cure for your suffering is to lean into the source of its pain.* –Celtic Book of the Dead
13. *I learned early to keep death in my line of sight, keep it under surveillance, keep it on cleared ground and away from any brush where it might coil unnoticed.* –Joan Didion
14. *A man dies as many times as he loses a loved one.* –Syrus
15. *All architects want to live beyond their deaths.* –Philip Johnson
16. *Death is a very dull, dreary affair, and my advice to you is to have nothing whatsoever to do with it.* –W. Somerset Maugham
17. *Death is the last enemy: once we've got past that I think everything will be alright.* –Alice Thomas Ellis
18. *Do not fear death so much but rather the inadequate life.* –Bertolt Brecht
19. *No one can confidently say that he will still be living tomorrow.* –Euripides
20. *The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.* –Mark Twain

Death Café Winnipeg

Resource Information Sheet

Compassionate Friends Winnipeg is an international, non-profit and non-denominational self help group offering friendship, understanding, grief education and hope to all families who have experienced the death of a child at any age, from any cause.

www.tcfwinnipeg.org

Phone: 204.787.4896

Palliative Manitoba

Provides Province -wide telephone bereavement support by trained volunteers to any area of the province.

www.palliativemanitoba.ca

Phone: 1.800.539.0295

Klinic Crisis Line

Phone: 204.786.8686
(toll free) 1.888.322.3019

Winnipeg Mobile Crisis Service

Phone: 204.940.1781

Manitoba Suicide Line (toll free)

1.877.435.7170

The Crisis Response Centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is located at the **817 Bannatyne Avenue, at the corner of Tecumseh.**

Jewish Child and Family Service

204.477.7430

Chesed Shel Emes

204.582.5088