

Dealing with Death in a Pandemic

By Gilbert Lopez

Death, in itself, is an unfortunate certainty. Facing your own mortality is a very hard thing to do especially during a generational event like this one. We find comfort in remembering those we've lost and saying goodbye before they are gone. We come together to grieve and lay our loved ones down to rest, providing a time for people to heal together. But during a pandemic, the virus has no reason to spare those in grief. It's relentlessness won't subside for a brief moment for us to mourn our losses. This is unfortunately the case during the many months of quarantine. Families were forced to bury their loved ones without a proper funeral.



Rabbi performing a service with no one in attendance

Limiting the number of people, postponing, or the use of online tools has been the new norm during the pandemic. Funeral homes prepare their families with strict guidelines for those that do choose the traditional funeral. They advise those in attendance to avoid kissing or hugging the deceased because it is still possible for the virus to spread from beyond the grave. It's forced us to grieve in a way that we aren't comfortable with, a way that we aren't satisfied with. I myself have been the host for multiple Zoom funerals. I was able to see first hand the sadness, anger and grief this adds onto an already difficult situation. I felt for these families because I took for granted the closure a proper funeral provides. Being able to grieve with family and friends offers much more to the healing process than a Zoom call can.

Mortuary workers handle bodies infected with COVID-19 with extreme precaution; double body bags, masks for the deceased and disinfecting the outside of the body bags. The amount of hospitalizations due to COVID-19 was used as an estimate for funeral homes and mortuaries. A grim but accurate way to prepare during a pandemic as infectious as this one. From my time hosting these funerals I was able to see how this pandemic affects us all. I watched families say their last goodbyes through a computer screen. I saw grandchildren cry for their grandparents, sons and daughters grieve for their parents, and spouses mourn for their beloved. Through this experience I was able to comprehend the full reach of this virus and how it still affects those furthest from it.