



## The Greatest Gift: To be Comfortable and at Peace

A Conversation with Rabbi Carol Mitchell,  
Hospice Chaplain, Compassionate Care Hospice

### 1. What matters most for a person and their family at the end of life?

As a rabbi and hospice chaplain, I believe the most valuable gift we can offer a person at the end of life is to help that person be comfortable and at peace. Being comfortable is something hospice care does well. Being at peace means different things to different people; whether it's being at peace with your family relations, your life experiences, being emotionally and spiritually at peace or being at peace with your faith and with God. As a hospice chaplain, I meet people where they are to provide support for peaceful last months as they transition to end of life.

### 2. How do we respect the faith, spiritual and cultural traditions of a person and their family?

It's important at the end of life's journey to honor and respect a person's cultures, traditions, values and religious beliefs, whatever they may be, and to make sure the family is comfortable. That may sometimes be tricky today with increasing intermarriage. In Judaism, for instance, there are specific traditions and beliefs around end of life, including certain prayers and customs that are said around the funeral, burial and shiva or mourning for the family. Other religions have their own practices. Some people may be spiritual but not religious. Understanding and honoring both the individual's need and the families' need is important at this stage in the journey.

### 3. How does a hospice chaplain help multi-cultural and multi-religious families on this journey?

I find I am increasingly working with interfaith, intercultural and blended families. Part of the chaplain's role is to be open and accepting and help the family make plans that work for everyone. For example, a Jewish man in hospice care had married a Catholic woman and raised their children in the Catholic faith. He had asked for a burial in accordance with all Jewish customs and traditions, while also respecting his children's Catholic traditions. In talking with



the family we created a service that could honor both traditions: the first hour in the Jewish tradition, followed a Catholic wake with family and friends at both to celebrate their father's life and pay their respects. As a rabbi, I was able to educate about the Jewish traditions and where they came from helping everyone find peace knowing we were honoring the individual's choices and traditions.

*4. What can a person and family expect to find coming into hospice care?*

Hospice is a benefit for terminally ill patients you can use when your doctor determines you have a life expectancy of about 6 months. Hospice provides care for a person's physical, emotional and spiritual needs, as well as support the family. Hospice chaplains are often the bridge to help make each day as good as it can be. As a chaplain, I talk with patients about what gives them meaning and joy. I often hear about love for family, music, and food. For Jewish patients, I will read religious texts, sing melodies, offer a Jewish Shabbat lesson, and a healing blessing. I have spoken in Yiddish as a person's grandparent once did, to bring back warm feelings of childhood. I can also call the local pastor, minister, priest, spiritual leader to offer similar support.

Much of what we do is offer hope. We never lose hope. What we hope for may change, but we never lose hope.

*5. What's the one thing you wish for all adults and families at the end of life?*

It's simple really: that every individual who passes does so in comfort and peace, and their families feel they have done whatever they can do to give them that peace and comfort. That's the power of the hospice experience. Finding that comfort and peace in honoring a person's life, their values, beliefs and traditions.

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