

## Preparing for uncertainty (COVID-19)

*“Secondly, the universe and everything that lives therein is impermanent, particularly the lives of beings, who are like water-bubbles. The time of death is uncertain, and when you die you will become a corpse”.*

Ngondro, Preliminary text.

The intention of this letter is not to cause fear, but rather to draw your attention to the urgency of the situation. It is not certain we will all survive this pandemic. Many of us will get infected, and some of us may die. We will definitely all be affected by COVID-19. One of the ways to face this daunting reality is to prepare for the worst, while hoping for best. There is not much time available. Once our affairs are in order we may find it easier to remain calm whatever happens.

The best gift we can give our loved ones when we die, is some relief from the confusion and chaos which usually follows a death. It's not just the elderly who can be affected, we all need to make sure we have the following in place:

- An updated will.
- Easy access to any policies (insurance, funeral policy documents).  
Perhaps put these in a shoebox or folder, together with your identity document.
- A list of essential computer passwords.
- Contact details for friends and acquaintances you'd like informed of your death.
- If you are a breadwinner, make sure dependants can access funds as all your bank accounts will be frozen for many months after your death.
- Have these difficult, but important conversations with ALL your loved ones.

COVID-19 can cause severe respiratory distress which may require high oxygen or even ventilation in an ICU. While the mortality rate for COVID-19 is relatively low, given the high number of people who will contract this disease, the risk of dying during the pandemic is high. Experience in Italy has shown there may not be enough ICU beds nor ventilators for everyone. These resources will need to be managed in ways which exclude some of us, regardless of medical aid, status, contacts, etc. It is important to think about, and discuss the choices which will be available should this situation arise. This where our control lies. Think about and discuss these questions with your family and friends so you can avoid fear-based, panicked decisions and ensure a peaceful death. (Include young children in these conversations as they will sense the anxiety and be fearful themselves).

1. How much information do you want to receive? If you are sent home to die, would you want to know, or would you like your doctors and family to keep this from you?
2. If you are unable to make decisions, who must make these on your behalf? Check if the nominated person is willing, and understands your wishes. Remember that severe pneumonia and low blood oxygen will cause confusion and make it VERY difficult for you to think clearly if you leave this too late.
3. Where would you like to be treated if you become severely ill? Hospital or at home.
4. How aggressively would you like to be managed, if able to make this choice?
5. If admitted to ICU and ventilated, and do not immediately respond to treatment. How long would you like the medical team to keep trying? Days, weeks?
6. How awake or sedated do you want to be if you are dying?
7. If you'd prefer to be cared for at home are you prepared for this?
  - a. Do you have a room where you can be cared for while at the same time quarantined?
  - b. Who will take care of you at home? It is unlikely you would be able to this alone. Ensure the nominated person is able and willing.
  - c. Who would do your shopping, deliver meals, etc. Remember people in your home have to self-isolate for 14 days after last contact with you. (Make a list of local delivery services).

- d. What basic medication do you need to manage at home? Do you have these at home? Check with your GP what is best, if you are on chronic medications. E.g. Paracetamol, MedLemon, Rehydrat, tissues.
8. If you are at home who would you like with you if / when you die? Would you prefer to die alone? Is there someone you could phone if you needed support? How would this impact them?
9. If you are admitted to hospital it is likely you will not be allowed visitors. Is there any way you can help your family cope in this situation? You may like to write goodbye letters in advance?
10. Do you have plans, list of instructions / feeding instructions about your animals?
11. If you live alone, does someone have a set of keys so they could access your home?

The Bardo Group booklet "*When I go*" can help guide some of these decisions – available at Centre. The Conversation Project ( <https://theconversationproject.org/> ) also have useful information and suggestions for starting these difficult conversations.

Talking about death doesn't increase our chances of dying! We must talk to our parents, our children and all those who will be impacted if we die.

If you die following COVID-19 infection (a notifiable disease) please note the following:

- Your body will be considered contaminated and infectious after death. This means it will be immediately sealed and not able to be embalmed, viewed, have mandalas placed, nor be present at vigils,
- Your body will not be able to be used for organ donation,
- Your body will not be able to be donated for medical research,
- Your body cannot be buried and must be cremated.
- Aquamation (alkaline hydrolysis) is not option.

If you die from other causes during lockdown, small burial services are allowed. No-one will be able to host memorial services until after the lock down. How best can your family prepare for this lack of closure?

The Bardo Group hosts will host 40min discussion on Zoom every Saturday afternoon at 2pm during the national lock down. The forum will be hosted along the lines of Death Café. I.e. there is no agenda and there are no experts. It is **not** a space for individual bereavement support, nor grief counselling. It is a space to connect to share personal insights, reflections and concerns about this pandemic. There is no charge and everyone welcome. Links are posted on the day.

This document was prepared by The Cape Town Kagyu Bardo Group in an attempt to ease fear and provide comfort during this time of great suffering.

We dedicate any merit for the benefit of all beings. May we all be free of suffering.

OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA