

AGING HAPPENS: Ashland synagogue hosts screening of Chopra film

By Ellen Waldman

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“Do not fear death so much, but rather the inadequate life”

— Bertolt Brecht

In Ashland, most of us have the opportunity to live a more-than-adequate life. Perhaps openness to the subject of our own mortality has something to do with that. On Thursday, March 12, there is yet one more thought-provoking offering on the topic of death.

You may have seen the posters around town for “Death Makes Life Possible: A New Film by Deepak Chopra and Marilyn Schlitz.” This award-winning documentary will be shown at the Havurah Synagogue, 185 N. Mountain Ave., Ashland, as part of their Death and Dying series. This film explores the mysteries of life and death from a variety of perspectives and world traditions. Featured are leading scientists, anthropologists, philosophers, spiritual teachers and thinkers, sharing their thoughts and views.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. The film begins at 7 p.m., followed by a facilitated discussion. Tickets are \$15 in advance (\$20 at the door). A portion of the proceeds goes to support Southern Oregon Friends of Hospice. Advance tickets can be purchased at the Music Coop at 268 East Main St., Ashland, or online at AshlandDMLP.brownpapertickets.com.

To find out more information about this intriguing film, I spoke to Jennifer Mathews, who is facilitating the film showing.

Q: How did you get involved in this project?

A: After my life-partner died three years ago, my passion has been helping people look at death differently and embrace it as part of the cycle of life rather than something to fear or dread. I heard about the film through the Institute of Noetic Sciences and connected with Marilyn Schlitz, the co-producer, to offer my support because I feel open conversations about death and dying are quite valuable. During the past year, I’ve written a “Death Makes Life Possible” facilitator and discussion guides and recently began organizing community film screenings.

Q: What was the inspiration for this movie?

A: As an anthropologist and researcher, Marilyn Schlitz, Ph.D., has focused her life on studying consciousness, cultural worldviews and personal transformation. Often taboo, the topic of death brings together all of these areas of study, and Schlitz knew that the time had come to look more closely at death and dying. Her own experiences and questions prompted her to explore the mysteries of life and death from various world traditions and scientific perspectives.

Q: Why would people want to see this movie?

A: The intention of this award-winning film is to transform the fear of death into an inspiration for living, to help people live better lives by coming to terms with mortality. Death Makes Life Possible offers hope and possibilities rather than definitive conclusions about what happens when we die. After the film, there will be an open conversation about what surfaced by watching the film, so that we can share and listen to the experiences of others in our community.

Q: Who might benefit from attending this showing?

A: Deepak Chopra jokes that this movie is for “anyone who is going to die.” Caregivers, medical and health care professionals, patients, family members, Hospice volunteers and staff, chaplains, baby boomers, seniors and those interested in consciousness studies may particularly benefit from both the film and the discussion afterward.

Q: Why is it being shown in Ashland?

A: I live nearby in Mt. Shasta and imagined Ashland would be receptive to "Death Makes Life Possible." Since there has not yet been a theatrical release, the film is being shown as a special community screening and co-sponsored by the Havurah Synagogue.

As Jennifer says, this film is a great conversation starter. It's not so much about answering the mystery of life and death, it's the ability to talk about these issues in the community.

We have several local organizations who also support this process and might be able to serve as a follow-up resource. Any of the hospice groups (Asante Ashland Community Hospital Home Health & Hospice, 541-552-9900; Asante Hospice, 541-789-5005; Providence Home Health & Hospice, 541-732-6500) would be a great place to ask for help.

Also, WinterSpring in Medford (541-552-0620) offers the following, (from their website): “We help children, teens and adults, who are experiencing the pain of loss, to embrace life again. We provide peer-to-peer support with trained volunteers.”

Death is on many people's minds. Providing a way to have these conversations, as well as support those grieving from loss, is what we can do as a community. This film is an important step in that inevitable direction.