



# THE FIVE INVITATIONS

*Discovering What Death  
Can Teach Us About Living Fully*

FRANK OSTASESKI

Foreword by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

## The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully

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# **The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully**

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**The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully** Frank Ostaseski  
**Death is not waiting for us at the end of a long road. Death is always with us, in the marrow of every passing moment. She is the secret teacher hiding in plain sight, helping us to discover what matters most in life.**

Life and death are a package deal. They cannot be pulled apart and we cannot truly live unless we are aware of death. *The Five Invitations* is an exhilarating meditation on the meaning of life and how maintaining and ever-present consciousness of death can bring us closer to our truest selves. As a renowned teacher of compassionate care-giving and the cofounder of the Zen Hospice Project, Frank Ostaseski has sat on the precipice of death with more than a thousand people. In *The Five Invitations*, he distills the lessons gleaned over the course of his career, offering an evocative and stirring guide that points a radical path to transformation.

## **The Five Invitations:**

- Don't Wait
- Welcome Everything, Push Away Nothing
- Bring Your Whole Self to the Experience
- Find a Place of Rest in the Middle of Things
- Cultivate Don't Know Mind

These invitations show us how to wake up fully to our lives. They can be understood as best practices for anyone coping with death or navigating any sort of transition or crisis; they guide us toward appreciating life's preciousness. Death can be a valuable companion on the road to living well, forging a rich and meaningful life, and letting go of regret. *The Five Invitations* is a powerful and inspiring exploration of the essential wisdom dying has to impart to all of us.

## **The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully for online ebook**

### **Mimi Morton says**

This book is a terrific way to open up a conversation around death and dying with one's family. Last week my wonderful Aunt Anne (94 years old) was out visiting her sister, my mother (95 years old). Anne had mentioned that it was extremely difficult to speak about the subject of death with her children and that she really wanted to talk about it but didn't know how to begin. I had coincidentally just received a copy of this book and was familiar with the 5 invitations. We opened the book together, and began to walk through each invitation, discussing what it meant to us, our experiences with death, and our regrets and joys surrounding those memories. The conversation was so satisfying and real, complete with laughter, tears and a deep feeling of connection. As Frank would say in his first invitation~ "Don't Wait!" I highly recommend this book as a great way to start what might be one of the most important conversations you may ever have. Thank you Frank!

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### **Alison Shapiro says**

There are very few books that have come into my life that are as insightful and as powerful as this one. The vehicle of Frank Ostaseski's learning may have been his work with people who are dying but what he has to teach us is how to live and embrace life in any circumstance. Sooner or later all of us will face challenges. Challenges are a part of being alive. It's not our challenges that define us. It's the way we meet what life brings us that changes everything. With wit, wisdom and profound kindness Ostaseski has translated for us what he has learned to give us powerful tools with which to claim and shape our own lives in all their richness. Nothing could be a greater gift than this.

If you want to grow your own wellbeing, if you want to spread kindness and understanding, and if you want to ease pain in this world, read this book. Learn from it. Share it. This book is a treasure. Give it yourself. Give it to the people you love. You will be deeply grateful you did.

Alison Bonds Shapiro, MBA  
Founder, Healing into Possibility

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### **Megan says**

I have a small but growing collection of books that make me cry in public, and this is now on the list. I think I cried outside the house at least three times while listening to this book, including being brought to gut wrenching sobs while I walked in the park one night. Luckily it was dark out and no one saw me. As painful as it was at times, this book is an epiphany. It's the basic tenets of Buddhist-inflected mindfulness told through the lens of a memoir about the Zen Hospice Project. If I had any critique it would be that the book was slightly repetitive at times. However, it was so beautifully written and I wanted to memorize all the advice anyway, so the repetitions didn't bother me. I'll be buying a hard copy of this and already look forward to reading it again.

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## **Muthuvel says**

I came know about this work from Sam Harris' Waking Up Podcast (checkout the podcast here - <https://samharris.org/podcasts/the-le...> )

Being mesmerized by the way the conversation between the duo underwent regarding this final masquerade in the cycle of life, I badly wanted to try the work.

The book provides vicarious experiences concerning the death of people under various circumstances from the author's perception. Though the book structure resembles the typical self help book, the contents are very secular and written in a very erudite way trying to describing one of the most complex topics as we humans ever came up but had been trying and failing to find sense with it. I have had read some literature previously on Zen Philosophy but I got enough confidence now to tell that i don't know anything about anything in here and I guess that's a progress.

Highly appreciated and recommended.

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## **Tracy says**

This book is essentially Frank Ostaseski's body of spiritual teachings refined over the course of his lifetime, and tried in the fires of nearly two decades leading Zen Hospice Project. Having been a student of Frank's for over a decade and listening to his teachings in person year after year, I assumed most of the stories in his book would be ones I had already heard. It's true; some of them were familiar. But I was unprepared for the many the stories I hadn't heard, and especially for the beauty that jumped off the pages and into my heart with each section. I haven't taken notes at Frank's retreats in years in favor of simply soaking up the stillness permeating his voice, but while reading this book, I found myself highlighting teachings I hadn't completely absorbed, and delighting in gorgeously-phrased ideas presented in precise and newly creative ways. The section on forgiveness I found especially moving, with the description of loving kindness practice in a real-world scenario. I love the way the stories are wise, yet searingly real, not glossed over or sugar-coated.

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## **Athena says**

From the first sentence the author got my attention and kept it. "Life and death are a package deal." Like many people I don't often think about the death part of the deal. The Five Invitations is a frank yet gentle reminder that death is always with us. But instead of that being a frightening prospect, the author shows us how it is an inspiration to live the life we have with a full heart and total presence.

He addresses the deepest, most important topics with reverence, humility, and a touch of humor. Through stories of the people he has sat with while they approached death's door, the author shows us how to address the corrosive voice of the inner critic, soften our hearts to forgive, and cultivate our own courageous presence. His voice becomes a companion as we explore the conscious and unconscious ways we navigate fear, love, identity, and soul.

Once you begin this book you won't want to put it down. And if you let it, it will transform the way you feel about dying.

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### **Rocco Capobianco says**

Ostaseski has assisted in creating a mindful death experience of over 1000 people over his life. This wonderful read culls the learnings and wisdom collected from those facing death, perhaps when life felt most valuable to them. This book is not morbid; it is insightful, interesting, funny at times and most importantly - this book will open your eyes to a new way to view your life today.

The Five Invitations is an unforgettable read. This book will stay with me for the rest of my life. You know those books that resonate with you long after you've finished? Well, this is one of those books.

Life and Death are a package deal - yes, we all know that, however, if you're like me, you tend to look at your life as something that will just go on forever. Let's not think about death now maybe it won't happen to me!

Well, I've always felt that way, until now. Embrace death as a way to inform the way you live today. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in creating a rich life for themselves and others in their sphere as well as those facing death of themselves or a loved one.

I have received a gift from Mr. Ostaseski that will always be with me.

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### **Sarah says**

This is a beautiful book about something important and inevitable, but that we've been socialized to dread, avoid, and flat out reject. To surrender to it is often seen as weak or selfish; to be around it in any of its forms makes many uncomfortable and distressed; even to talk about it is largely taboo from a societal standpoint. This book is about death. And, more than that, what death can teach us about life itself.

I first heard about this book on Sam Harris's 'Waking Up' podcast (for those not already listening, I suggest you do— he has some absolutely brilliant conversations with some absolutely brilliant people), and I knew immediately that I needed to read this book.

Frank Ostaseski is a Buddhist teacher and co-founder of the first Buddhist hospice in the country, The Zen Hospice Project. Based on decades of mindful, compassionate interactions with folks from all walks of life facing their last chapter, Ostaseski walks us through a few of the powerful, poetic, and painfully beautiful things we can learn from death and dying if we're willing to open ourselves to reality and the inevitable impermanence of all things.

I highly recommend this book to literally everyone. We will all— every one of us— arrive at death's doorstep one day, as will our family, neighbors, friends, and enemies. Breaking the taboo of speaking death's name allows us to make space for questions, emotions, resolutions, grace, connection, and the ultimate surrender.

These are lessons that can help us cultivate healthy, full lives and approach impermanence with presence, an open heart, and unwavering compassion.

Just incredible.

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### **Karen says**

Karen Young – Review: The Five Invitations

Frank Ostaseski is how I learned about death. I didn't want to. I didn't want my 42 year old sister Susan, who was also my best friend, to be dying. Frank quietly guided our family and helped us to be present while at her bedside at Zen Hospice. It was 1990 and my month old baby Liza was in my arms. My father, a doctor, was having a hard time since his eldest was dying and was gruff. It seemed like he had always been able to fix us, but this time there was nothing that he could do to make her well.

I remember Frank saying to me after Susan passed, "It isn't so bad, is it?" She died in peace after so much pain. She looked beautiful.

By chance, Zen Buddhist monks were meeting at the Zen Center across the street. Susan had been a student at Green Gulch and as the monks came into her room, we placed rose petals on her, one at time, until she was completely covered. She was beautiful. The pain was gone. She was at rest. Frank helped all of us who loved her see how death can teach us about living life with compassion. "The Five Invitations" is a treasure.

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### **Beka Tuitasi says**

I met Frank at Zen Hospice Project in 1995 after I'd lost both my parents in 5 weeks and was writing a newspaper series on caregiving, death and spirituality for the San Francisco Examiner. He made it not only safe to talk about death, but he also illuminated the intimate sacredness of being at bedside. His work has midwifed countless spiritual journeys both for those who eventually passed, and for those who yet remain. The Five Invitations is such a gift to the world, a testament to the power of those silent liminal spaces that are vibrant portals to a vast experience of what it truly means to surrender, to trust, and to live. This book of stories is filled with the wisdom of compassion, deep exploration, and the courage to go where all too few dare to tread. If more of us could bear witness to the pain and suffering that feel unbearable, in the manner of The Five Invitations, I know we human beings would all earn our wings. Frank Ostaseski certainly has. In the end, it really always has been, only love. Thank you.

Beth Tuitasi Witrogen, author, *The Spiritual Journey of Love, Loss, and Renewal* (Wiley, 2000)

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### **Bob Mueller, says**

In this book, Frank Ostaseski presents us with "The Five Invitations", the bedrock principles of the powerful and life-changing Metta Institute "End of Life Care Practitioner Program". These principles come from Frank's years of love and compassionate service at the bedside of those who are dying. He has lived these teachings. However, this book is not just about serving those who are dying; it offers us so much more – a

wise and accessible guide on how we may live our life in each moment.

Being with those who are dying, whether in our work or in our personal life, can be difficult, messy, heart and soul-wrenching work. Frank shows us a way to move with it, generously offered with heartfelt depth from his own lived experiences.

While some of the teachings are offered from a Zen Buddhist perspective, the reader does not have to be Buddhist nor know any Buddhist terminology in order to receive benefit from reading this book.

It is a book to savor and reflect upon, beautifully written and deeply offered. You will be rewarded for opening this book.

- Robert Mueller, MD  
Specialist in Hospice & Palliative Medicine

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### **Carin Castillo says**

I was captivated by The Five Invitations, reading it cover-to-cover in a 24-hour period. As I got closer to the end, I found myself reading much slower because I just didn't want it to end. I was inspired by the stories of people young and old at the end of their lives. The part that impressed me was that it was not just stories of inspiration on how I can embrace my days, but also I found wisdom as a new mom, and how to savor these moments with my little one more. There was a chapter about grief that hit me in a way that was very profound and moving, it opened up a place in my heart about the loss of a dear friend many years ago, that just hasn't healed. Reading Frank's book gave me a new understanding on how to "be" with the loss and feel complete with its incompleteness. Thank you for your beautiful book.

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### **Bryant Welch says**

When we read The Five Invitations, we simply cannot fear death anymore. The tender and heartfelt experiences Frank Ostaseski brings to us from his lifetime of living with death so imbue us with the tender possibilities of our final moments that slowly, slowly we realize that death can be our most focused, our most present moment. In realizing the true nature of death as he presents it to us, we have a deep sense of brotherhood, that we are all traveling on the same bus and that to not reach out with compassion to all of our fellow travelers is foolhardy and ignorant. This is really a seminal work that brings the reality of death not only out of the closet, but into the bright sunshine of human experience in a way that no other book I have read on death has done. We are all in Mr. Ostaseski's debt. Helping people break out of their fear of the shadow of death, is the greatest gift we could be given and he has done that for us.

Bryant Welch, J.D., Ph.D.  
Clinical Psychologist

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### **Hajime Issan says**

All of us who have studied with Frank Ostaseski have wanted him to write a book for many years. With the

publication of this long awaited book, "The Five Invitation," our hopes have come to fruition. It is even way beyond our expectations!

I met Frank in person for the first time in 2000. From our first private conversation, I was immediately drawn to and fascinated by his teachings. Prior to meeting Frank, I had had 15 years of involvement with caregiving for those who were dying of AIDS throughout New York City's epidemic years. After meeting Frank, I realized how little I had known. In the environment of a heavily corporate-like health care system in the city, I realized I had been like a kid growing up being fed artificially flavored orange pop believing that was orange juice. Meeting Frank felt as if I had encountered freshly squeezed orange juice for the first time. My practice completely and fundamentally shifted by meeting Frank. This man is the real deal.

"The Five Invitations" has exactly the same effect on me. The first line of the book, "Life and death are a package deal. You cannot pull them apart. In Japanese Zen, the term 'shoji' translates as 'birth-death.' There is no separation between life and death other than a small hyphen, a thin line that connects the two." The book immediately drew me in. I forgot time and didn't want to put it down. Despite the subject matter, it is a curiously easy read. And yet, it is a type of book which demands contemplative reading; it draws one back over and over repeatedly for years. In other words, "The Five Invitations" will be my next "Little Prince" and my next "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" and will stay on the top of my bedside table.

Frank Ostaseski is physically an imposingly tall man. But I didn't notice his height when I first met him because when he has an open-heart, knee to knee conversation, he always meets you where you are emotionally, looking right into your eyes and your heart. Only when the meeting is over and when both of you stand up, are you astonished by his height. "The Five Invitations" has exactly the same effect. Reading this book is your own deep journey into your own mind and heart through Frank's voice that is permeated with love, sincerity and humility. It is only when you finally put down the book that you realize what an impact this man has made on the hospice movement in this nation. You come to the realization you have just met the true pioneer, the original Mr. Hospice of America.

Many of us professional health care givers are disheartened and discouraged by the current trend of corporatization of the health care system in America. Along with this trend in recent years, there is a strange sense of "boom", and a new generation of health care workers seem to have been entering the "death and dying industry" with utterly different mind sets. In their unexplored, uncontemplated minds, hospice work appears to have become yet another tool to satisfy their needs and desires to gain a sense of power and worldly recognition. Even the words such as "contemplative care," "compassionate care," and "meditation" have been used so often and casually by those who are not qualified, which ironically, in turn, has hurt the quality of our health care system even further.

Frank's "The Five Invitations" is a sharp and clear waning and heart-felt advice to those who are entering into or have already been in the health care professions. It skillfully points out the true meaning of contemplative and compassionate care.

"The Five Invitations" is also the best American contemporary Buddhist book I have read. "The Five Invitations" is subtly but with such incredible clarity explains the most important Buddhist teachings in the simplest contemporary English without using any of those eccentric ancient languages. "The Five Invitations" is a new "Heart of Buddha's Teachings" rephrased in understandable language and put into the context of the most moving and transformative real life stories of our own time. I highly recommend this book as a textbook not only for health care workers workshops, but also for the students of Buddhism.

If you are a healthcare worker or a Buddhist student, meeting Frank and his "The Five Invitations" will

fundamentally transform your practice. If you are someone who is struggling with your own life issues, this book will embrace you with love and help you to heal. As for being simply a human being, "The Five Invitations" will drastically and joyously shift your way of living.

Hajime Issan Koyama - Hospice Chaplain.

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### **Katherine James says**

"The Five Invitations" is a beautifully written book in which Frank Ostaseski offers his wisdom on the process of dying in order to inspire all of us to live more completely in the present moment throughout our lifetime by facing the uncertainty of death.

Frank provides a powerful description of the shift in consciousness during the dying process. Through the sharing of his inspiring and touching hospice experiences, Frank teaches us how to be a more compassionate, caring, listening presence at the bedside of a dying person.

As a hospice chaplain providing non-denominational spiritual support to the dying, my role is to meet my patients where they are on their spiritual path. Thus, I was able to relate deeply to the content of Chapter 17 "Surrender to the Sacred," in which Frank writes that spiritual care can "be as simple as offering our kind and reassuring presence or chicken soup made with affection." And people who are dying need love, compassion, and presence. "Ultimately spiritual support is the fearless commitment to honor the individual's unique way of meeting death." (p. 268) I so whole heartedly agree! Thank you, Frank!

I very highly recommend "The Five Invitations" to everyone! It is a book that will profoundly change one's perception of life and death.

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