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For all beings awakening to their Deathless Nature

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Author's Note

The number of books published in 2025 exceeded 3.5 million, tripled from 2017. All self-published authors must use intuition and discrimination as they navigate the new landscape. With the growing wave of artificial intelligence applications (AI), increase in censorship in publishing and online hacking, the technological expanse is becoming more dysfunctional.

Conscious Transition encompasses a vast array of topics related to death and dying. Several chapters have edgy topics: aid-in-dying (Chapter-24-25), ayahuasca and psilocybin therapy (Chapter-15-16) and a few others that might stretch people out of their comfort zone. Yet, Conscious Transition is really about fearlessness and embracing life in all its wonder and beauty.

In Chapter-7, I expose the cancer business. For many people, long indoctrinated through various sources of propaganda and cultural ignorance, the information I share about mainstream cancer treatment, may be shocking. These revelations are all true, backed by my direct experience, insights, and corroborated by studies and research in regards to the cancer establishment as practiced in the United States.

Introduction

In 2003, during the third year of my end-of-life caregiver journey, spiritual awakening dawned. With this transcendent glimpse, my focus shifted towards *being* rather than doing, towards *Consciousness* rather than thought. As you read or listen to the book may illumination naturally unfold and uproot the most deeply embedded fear, that of death.

About a decade ago, in 2016, I had a vision of leading silent meditation retreats for people recently diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses as well as their caregivers and family. In this way the fear of death could be examined deeply and the Essential Self unveiled. If we realize, from our own direct experience, that fear is only a manmade concept, it diminishes and recedes.

For a full year I attempted to launch the retreat vision. All efforts seemed fruitless until one day in 2017. I had just returned home after an initial encounter with a new caregiving client. That evening, a spontaneous flow of words unleashed. Soon after, I read the fresh pages (now Chapter-3) to my wife, Aleece. With her eyes moist with tears, she said,

"This is a book."

A week later, following her heartfelt endorsement to write, I sat cross-legged on a yoga mat with a cup of *Yogi Tea* at my side. Taking a slurp of the brew, the tea string adhered itself to my tongue. Upon pulling the string out of my mouth, the following affirmation appeared to me: *Communicate sacredness—build it, share it, and spread it*. It was an apt pointer, summarizing my intentions for this book.

When this human journey moves from form to formlessness, which is called the end of life, we often become stressed out, anxious, sad, or uncomfortable. Finding the chuckle button during this time is essential. Nothing stops thinking and facilitates a natural fall into the

Timeless Dimension like embodied laughter. So, let us begin with a few words from a clever Dr. Seuss impersonator:

The Cat in the Hat on Aging

I cannot see

I cannot pee

I cannot chew

I cannot screw

Oh my god, what can I do?

My memory shrinks

My hearing stinks

No sense of smell

I look like hell

My mood is bad—can't you tell?

My body's drooping

Have trouble pooping

The golden years

Have come at last

The golden years

Can kiss my ass

I have been involved in the field of death and dying, in various capacities, for 25 years (2001-2026), beginning as a hospice volunteer practicing acupuncture and massage therapy in the Park City, Heber Valley, and Sundance areas of Utah in 2001. During my initial two years of end-of-life caregiving, I traveled to the homes of people with late-stage cancers and other disease conditions. A few of my clients lived only a week, and none more than three months.

One of those clients was Rick, 45-years-old, married for 20 years, with two teenage daughters. His wife was preparing food in the kitchen as I entered their home. Rick escorted me to a private area covered by an awning adjacent to the backyard. We sat at his outdoor picnic table as a soft breeze fluttered the leaves of the nearby aspen trees. Rick's daughters were visible through the window facing the house; one pacing aimlessly, the other sitting lost in thought.

Rick was silent for a minute. Then with jaw clenched, bloodshot eyes and furrowed brow, his face contorted into a scowl. Closeted rage bubbled to the surface, covering up deep sadness, as he spoke,

“I don’t have anyone to talk to about this stuff! Everyone is too afraid, lost in their own feelings.” He realized the earthly phase of his existence was coming to an end and confided in me as one would a best friend.

Rick was not interested in the hands-on healing and acupuncture that I was offering most of my clients to ease their pain and suffering. As I sat with him, I realized what he really wanted, someone with a listening heart not invested in his form.

Those nearing this passage want a companion with no ulterior motives, someone who can just be. The greatest gift I could offer was not related to my technical skills, healing touch, or years of training—Rick wanted me to see his immortality.

In the years that followed, each encounter with those preparing for transition became a profound meditation on the Eternal Nature of life itself. Through their courage to face death, the elders and the dying shared their deep wisdom with me. In our culture, the dying and elders are often quarantined in nursing homes and their life wisdom untapped. If American society is to mature, we must begin to embrace the wisdom of the elders and the dying process. Death and dying are part of the sacred life journey that we all make. My work (and play) as an end-of-life caregiver facilitated a deep and continuing contemplation and inquiry into what it means to be truly alive.

For 25 years I’ve worked with the dying, severely debilitated or chronically ill. In this book, I share my client’s stories, challenges, insights, fears, and wisdom as they approached transition. Many branches of the end-of-life tree are touched upon, including: attachment, pain management, living from a compassionate heart, love in action, psilocybin therapy for the dying, celebrating a life well lived, true surrender, the power of laughter, the benefit of hospice,

cutting-edge applications of morphine and cannabis, and aid-in-dying. Truth must encompass all areas of one's life, so in Chapter-7, I touch on proven holistic cancer therapies and the failure of Western Medicine's "war on cancer."

In the book you will encounter many people who are navigating their final phase of earthly life, such as Lloyd, a late 80s physicist-astronomer undergoing the throes of Parkinson's disease; Noel, an 85-year-old Episcopalian-Catholic professor of religious studies, undeterred by stomach cancer; Hamsa, an 89-year-old Hindu-inspired former nurse; Tara, a woman in her 50s with ALS who participates in plant spirit medicine ceremonies with the sacrament ayahuasca and resonates with the Tibetan Buddhist teachings; and Terry, a late 80s mathematician with congestive heart failure; as well as Jack an age-defying, Navy Cross-winning follower of the Indian spiritual tradition of Vedanta, a man that read thousands of near-death experience accounts during the last decades of his long life.

A few poems are interspersed throughout the narrative as well as caregiving breaks emphasizing the importance of nature. At the end of each chapter, you will find what I call "Primordial Words." Reading these words of the spiritually illumined, which point to our Deathless Nature, diminish the existential fear of death.

And the words Christ, Purified Mind, Self or (True Self), Consciousness, Absolute, Pure Awareness, Essential Being, True Nature, Divine Current, Buddha, God and several other terms are capitalized and used synonymously throughout the book to point to the one underlying Eternal Reality.

We are at the stage in American societal evolution where we need to focus our searchlights inward toward the Source, instead of always outward. America is full of outer capital, yet bankrupt inside, for we have not focused on the true purpose of life, attuning to one's soul force, realizing the True Self, and abiding in the direct experience of the Absolute, which some call God.

What's going to happen when 74 million baby boomers begin to die? The first wave of boomers, those born in 1946, hit age 80 in 2026; and the last edge, those born in 1964, turned 62. How many from this age wave group will contemplate a graceful form of exit, use the opportunity to get in touch with their essential being and abide in the natural state of awakened presence, learn about the dying process, or put more energy into authentic spirituality?

Many people, despite heavy media propaganda which puts increasing focus on illness and death, during and in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, still feel as if they will live forever. The denial of death is deep.

At this moment, a beloved family member or dear friend of yours might be actively dying. It may be that they have just been given a disease diagnosis or a prognosis of six months to live. Hospice may soon arrive.

The dying process wakes us up; death calls us Home. And in death, our old identity

disintegrates, opening us up to the vastness of what we really are. If conscious living and the practice of surrender are part of your life, the transition we call death can be as easy as falling asleep at night. To die well is to uncover innate happiness and true peace.

In an authentic spiritual search, one must put in sincere effort to "die before you die," which means seeing the falseness that has corrupted your life. That light of the True Self which sees the falseness, is the key to letting go and surrender, which is death to egoism. Then fear subsides, which includes the fear of death. As a celebrated spiritual master once said,

"You must not leave the symphony of your life unfinished."

I never fully believed in the charade we call death, so I can sit next to the petrified man, look into his eyes, and see the formless in his form. I am able to hold the hand of and cry with the disconsolate woman believing in the delusion of separate existence.

I can listen to their fears, the ones they've never investigated or expressed, and bear witness to their pain, sadness, worry, and grief, while holding all of it in the silent embrace that knows that I am and you are beyond space and time, Eternal Spirit everlasting. There is nothing to fear in that.

Primordial Words

People are afraid to die, because they do not know what death is. The moment you know your real being, you are afraid of nothing. You need not push life about. Just flow with it and give yourself completely over to the task of the present moment, which is dying now to the now. Give your real being a chance to shape your life. You will have no regrets.

1

The Death Dude

The focal point of my life has never drifted too far from the realm of death and dying. One day an astrologer looked at my chart and said,

“With five planets in Scorpio, four in the eighth house (the traditional house of death, regeneration, rebirth, healing, and transformation), you are someone who must first go through the medicine before you can help others with it. It is like you get buried underground and are given only a straw to breathe through as part of your initiation. Only then are you able to work with others.”

As a child and preteen, between the ages of 5 and 12, whenever I heard that someone familiar to me had recently died, I would formulate a fantasy eulogy for them. Feeling both awestruck and horrified as a result of the end-of-life stories that sprung from within me, I would shake my head in wonder, saying, “Where did that come from?” Then I would laugh. Sometimes I would see that a well-known sports figure had died, the eulogizer downloading yet another tribute. In my adolescent dreams for years, and throughout day-to-day life, the eulogizer would suddenly appear as if deposited by a wisecracking spirit grandfather.

In a certain way, you could also say I had a “death wish.” This was not a desire to be dead or wish death on another but an unconscious heart desire to be free from suffering. My real wish was to find what is deathless. At first this yearning drove me towards risk taking and thrill seeking. And beginning in my late 20s, this “deathless wish” became part of my spiritual quest.

This pursuit of the deathless has played out in various ways. About a decade into my end-of-life work, in 2012, I took a caregiving break in Kauai shortly after one of my clients transitioned. The phenomena

of death was pulsating within me. “What dies? Who dies? Can I really die?!”

On a November morning in Kauai, at the famous northshore gem, Hanalei Bay, an irrational impulse arose. That day, the gentle waves of early fall disappeared; a powerful winter storm from the North Pacific transformed the bay, forming waves with 12 to 15 foot faces. A red flag warning was in full effect; nobody was in the water, not even surfers. The ocean called me with such force that I did not have time to think.

I quickly jogged to the bay’s edge and then sprinted and dove into the vibrant and turbulent white water. Exhilarated, I swam towards the offshore break. I did not even consider that the depth of the bay dropped radically, from 5 feet closer to shore, to as much as 50 feet near the wave breakline a couple of hundred yards out.

As I approached the impact zone, the sheer size and amplitude of the waves lit up every fiber of my being. I ducked under the first giant and attempted to punch through the wave, instead got caught up in its girth and a powerful suction effect, which drove me downward. The after-effect rotational energy thrusts swirled me about underwater for 15 seconds. By the time I surfaced, it became obvious that these waves would not take me towards shore but only down into the depths of the bay. I was in the “washing machine” that big wave surfers talk about after a wipe out.

Never a surfer and having not boogie-boarded in big surf in over three decades, I was in the hands of the Oceanic gods. Any skilled watersport enthusiast knows the simple facts of the ocean. I did, too, but conveniently forgot during a moment of unbridled enthusiasm. After resurfacing from that first wave hold down, about to dive under another monster wave, a voice inside me said, “You just killed yourself!” A brief instant of fear and terror for the ego-mind before all disappeared and full awareness shifted to the living moment.

During those 10 to 15 minutes, the ocean unleashed fierce wave sets. The on-duty lifeguard did not feel like risking his life to save me

and I understood. Nature demanded a strict protocol: deep breath, duck under wave, tumble, roll, and then fight my way to the surface to face another wall of water. After about the 10th spin cycle, a short lull in the set frequency spared my life. As I came up to face the next giant wave, ready to surrender the fight and give myself to the sea, the body responded with a burst of adrenaline. It was my fastest 100 yard backstroke ever. I made it to shallow water and barrel rolled through foaming white water, before staggering onto the beach.

The on-duty lifeguard approached right after I had collapsed onto my towel with my heart still thumping at 140 beats per minute. Looking both astounded and petrified, he gave me a short verbal thrashing. I waved my hand, saying, “I know. I know.” I was just thankful to be alive.

Those with adventurous spirits are able to set aside fear and confront death directly. It could be an Amazon explorer jumping on top of a 25-foot Anaconda. Perhaps it is a free-diver attempting to go deeper than ever before on one breath of air or an unroped Yosemite rock-climber pressing the limit on a 5.12 rated climb.

The adventure-enthusiasts are always seeking peak experiences. Each human being, in his or her own way, is on a conscious or unconscious journey to find lasting peace and contentment.

Underneath my unique quest was an impulse to merge with nature in all its wildness, transcend the limited personality self and realize my True Nature. For me, this energy that has coalesced around death has catalyzed a movement toward immortality. I needed to see if it's true what the spiritual masters say: The True Self is indestructible and beyond the physical body. It is the only thing that really matters in my life.

All the experiences I go through, from boredom, anger, and witnessing crazy world events, to work, exercise, and interactions with family and friends, are held against the backdrop of the “Am I immortal?” question. I have to realize immortality in every fiber of my

being. I have to see for myself that I am everything and everything is me.

Death stares me in the face every day with ongoing chronic health issues and my work as an end-of-life care provider. Like a tiger ready to leap, the idea of death attempts to frighten me with an illusory salivating tongue and sharp fangs. Therefore, I must predecease death, die to the wrong identification, and fully awaken out of this trance of personality. I must disappear yet fully inhabit the human frame.

I can't get away from death. The death dude, that's me. I never have to search for clients in the realm of death and dying. Even on the few occasions I do look, I never find them, as they always find me.

Primordial Words

When a dear one dies, instead of grieving unreasonably, realize that he has gone on to a higher plane at the will of God, and that God knows what is best for him. Rejoice that he is free.

2

Unnecessary Baggage

Gloria was an 84-year-old psychotherapist, still working part-time, with more than 50 years spent listening to people express various anxieties, fears, and foibles. Though no major health issue had been identified, Gloria knew that her human lifespan was winding down.

Our hour-long energy healing massage and acupressure sessions turned into awareness work. During our first session, I realized that a lot of fear and anger was trapped in her system. It was as if all the clients she had ever worked with were lodged inside and trying to escape. She spoke their voices in short angry bursts, shouting out phrases much like someone with a mental imbalance would, saying, “No, that’s not right! Stop it! What are you talking about? Knock it off!”

She was petrified of death. Her coming demise did not seem imminent, but her intuition knew better. I would often gently tell her the truth about our Immortal Nature, the Eternal Reality. She loved hearing me say that “death was like taking off a tight-fitting shirt before going to sleep,” though strong doubts often came up.

I sensed through energy and intuition that a dark mass was in her abdominal region. By highlighting awareness and through the application of gentle touch, trapped rage released or a catharsis of tears manifested, as well as shaking, trembling, and other kinds of body, mind, and emotional reactions. In this way, she was able to let go of old unnecessary baggage.

During our weekly sessions, I had to stop every five minutes or so, several times over the hour, while I lovingly reminded her, with soothing words and compassionate touch, that everything was okay.

After three months of weekly sessions, one day during a visit, Gloria began to cry as she informed me that late-stage metastatic ovarian cancer had been found. Her oncologist told her that she had less than a

year to live. We continued our healing sessions for another month, and she came into more and more peace around her situation. Then one day a few weeks later she dropped the body.

Gloria was fortunate in that she spent her last few months looking deeper into the Truth and getting a small inkling of her Eternal Nature.

Primordial Words

You must pine to see the most Beloved One to meet the True Self...as if one is going to die if not able to do so. With the innermost sincerity of your being, you must earnestly pursue the Lord, even if the situation becomes unbearable. With love, determination, eagerness, and courage, you must journey onward.

3

One Month to Live

I received a text from my friend, Sandra. She was wondering if I had time to help a man wishing to die at home. As often happens when a new end-of-life job arrives, an attunement begins before I meet the person face to face.

I slept barely an hour or two, in broken bursts, the night before I was to visit him. After a 30 minute drive to the Westside of Santa Cruz the next morning, I spotted the tall spindly palm tree that marked the destination.

As I pushed through the front porch gate, the bark of 18-month-old Mac, a beautiful red standard poodle, announced my arrival. Walking through the front door, glancing to my left, I saw Terry, age 87. He was sound asleep on a hospital bed, his mouth wide open, face tilted upward. It was the pre-morgue snapshot, which causes many people to recoil when they visit their dying grandparent. The faintest sound, a raspy breath, was heard from a man slowly dying from congestive heart failure. Once a robust 190 pounds, Terry had withered down to 112 at last weigh-in. A retired mathematician who worked for 40 years at IBM, Terry was part of a community-centered non-denominational Christian church.

Hospice was called, arriving a week before me, and signaling that one had six months or less to live. The hospice evaluation nurse thought Terry might live only a week. But I have learned that each death journey is a unique and amazing final dance that is not decided by man—nor really is any other aspect of life.

I am here by some magic to help a man die. Terry is dying well, and a certain kindness exudes from him as he lets go into the Great Unknown.

During one of Terry's rare moments of lucid Consciousness, Peggy, his wife, introduces us. I hold out a protein shake minutes later, as the solid food days are over. Lightly pressing the plastic container against his upper chest to allow easy access, I place the straw in his mouth. Terry looks at me with wide bright eyes full of love. Even as the life force dwindles, he sees this new arrival as a welcome guest.

He is unable to get up from bed, so a permanent catheter has been installed. There's no better analogy than seeing the body as a car with a large radiator leak gushing yellowish water all over. This had been a labor-intensive huge mess for his already overworked wife.

Terry's not a fan of a metallic needle up his urethra, and no man in his right mind would be. Peggy, though, is ecstatic with the medical device, repeating more than once, "A life saver!"

Though emotionally and physically drained with her own health issues, Peggy, 80-years-old and the self-proclaimed alpha of the family, was used to handling everything herself. Hospice, along with two new caregivers, Sandra and me, came to allow Peggy to do errands, simple projects, nap, go to church, or see a friend for lunch. She can now rest at ease knowing her husband of 53 years is truly being cared for.

The end-of-life care provider is there not only for the dying client but also for the entire extended family, which comes together at this time, pets included. When the body transition grows near, a cocoon is created which draws those who are intimate with the dying person inward, over the client's last months, weeks, and days. End-of-life care providers hold space, with a listening ear and a kind understanding heart, and do simple household tasks, whatever is needed, to help one have a conscious transition. They act as a blank scrabble piece, fitting into any situation, while knowing when to disappear and let the family have intimate moments together. Like aloe gel that soothes burned skin or nerves, end-of-life-caregivers allow families a chance to psychologically unwind, as they are going through a profound sense of

loss. Sensitive and open, these caregivers maintain a clear boundary that holds all in a loving embrace.

When death approaches, our Western culture has been conditioned to run, deflect, escape, fight, or defend. The best response is acceptance, for the passing of the form is natural and ordinary. As death nears, we need not take an attitude of impending doom or become worried about physical appearances, symptom manifestations, or other issues related to our loved one's obvious decline. Death cannot touch our Essential Self. Dying is only part of a play, a happening within the Absolute Consciousness (God).

Terry now takes a few sips of fresh-squeezed orange juice and looks at me with the

innocent and receptive eyes of a child.

"Thank...you...sooo...much," he says. Each word is enunciated with a slight pause, allowing the bliss of gratitude to fully enter my heart. His words carry a genuine transmission. Each syllable, every single vowel, resonates like a Tibetan singing bowl.

"Is that enough?" I softly ask.

"A little more," he replies, thinking nothing had ever tasted so good.

"Do you want some?" he asks in the manner of a young child wanting to share his favorite toy.

Mac, the red poodle, jumps up onto Terry's bed and then nestles against his leg. Terry smiles and coughs. Within seconds, Terry's eyes close. He's out cold and so is Mac.

A Beethoven piano sonata continues in the background. It's been a beautiful backdrop for the simple yet profound events of the last few minutes. Pandora switches to Mozart, and soon Bach will play.

All of these distinctly different elements are held together and sustained by that formless web of Pure Consciousness, which resides in that place before clocks, the Timeless Dimension. And in this brilliant presence, dancing with all creation, I've lost the sense of separation, the idea of an individualized existence having disappeared.

Soledad, a 25-year hospice veteran and certified nurse's assistant, has come for the first time. She's a real professional, and true to her Hispanic roots, brings an incredible work ethic, warmth, and grace. Like the hotel maids and agricultural workers, the Hispanic people of California are the unheralded backbone of the workforce. In this case, it is a diaper change and sponge bath for Terry.

I ask Soledad if she needs any help. She declines. Proud and prompt, she goes straight to work, effortlessly maneuvering Terry about like the true nurse she is. Soledad calls me at the end of her cleaning routine.

"Can you take one side of the towel?" she asks. It is draped under Terry, so we can pull and slide him up a couple of feet toward the head of the bed.

As she leaves, Soledad gushes to Peggy, "The lilies—how beautiful!" An abundance of white lilies in the garden are visible through the front window.

"Why don't you take some, whatever you want—you know lilies, they always come back," Peggy replies.

The next day, a hospice nurse arrives. With several visits to the house already, Reanda is like family. She displays a palpable love for Terry, tenderly leaning over and touching his arm, then bending down for a hug. I am holding Mac close on his leash. After a few minutes, I release him and he greets Reanda with a slathering smooch.

After Reanda leaves, a growing stillness descends. Terry's eyes open when I touch his arm lightly to check on him.

"Are you a doctor?" he asks, as if speaking from an ethereal realm, eyes glazed over, having little understanding of the concepts of past, present, and future.

"Not really," I reply. "I am an acupuncturist, kind of like a doctor of the East."

I lean close to him, so he can hear. Terry smiles and then asks me if I am a writer. I would like to say that I am and nod in the affirmative.

The next day, Terry begins singing to his other caregiver, Sandra. The song is one she has not heard in more than 40 years. It turns out that it was her favorite song in youth. They sing together and Sandra has tears in her eyes.

Before Terry drifts off into a nap, Peggy asks him if he would like to listen to some jazz. His answer is a smile. A few seconds later, Pandora begins playing the Preservation Jazz Band tune, "Come With Me." At that moment, I noticed a framed print of a magnificent sycamore tree above Terry's head. Under the tree, at the bottom of the print, it says, "The Holy Tree of Existence." And like Mary, Mother of Jesus, this tree now shelters Terry, offering comfort for the coming transition.

A month later, Terry passed. His transition took place on the Thursday morning before Easter, at 2:00 a.m., during a strong spring downpour. Peggy could no longer hear his labored breathing on the baby monitor she kept near his hospital bed in the living room, as the rain was pelting the roof. When the squall was over, the breathing had stopped. They say the soul often leaves the body during a storm. It is as if the cosmic electrical energy serenades one into the Light.

Primordial Words

In the Almighty Empire of this world, there is creation, preservation, and dissolution,

continuously coming and going. When we are subjected to the grief of the departure of a loved one, there is no other way except to take refuge in the Lord. In this material world, keep up the remembrance of the One, even if there is some resistance. Those who have been taken away are now residing in the Source.

4

A Poem for Terry

Upon hearing of Terry's passing, a poem came through and I shared it with Peggy. A few days later, she asked me to read it at Terry's celebration-of-life service, and I was happy to do so.

My hand sits gently on Terry's chest,
as he surrenders to Divine rest
Death is dawning for my new friend,
a great transition, not an end
The release from an earthly hold,
receding into the formless fold
Settled in silence next to him,
His soul shines brightly, never dim
I lean close and hear Terry say:
"So grateful you're with me today"
Heart-drenched words an unleashed veil
The Ordainer's Power does not fail
This heavenly abode need not wait
God, a timeless open gate
And then a smile paints Terry's face
His eyes meet mine, our final embrace
An Easter storm took Terry at night
Now his form is ethereal light
Humbled before the Eternal One,
Celebration, a new rising Son

Primordial Words

When the body grows sick and dies, the principle that always remains is you. If you identify yourself as the body, you will feel that you are dying, but in reality, there is no death because you are not the body. Let the body be there, or not be there, your existence is always there. It is eternal.

5

After-Death Support

I visited with Terry's wife, Peggy, once a week for several years after his passing. Peggy was in mourning and seeing a grief counselor. Yet she found that additional emotional and spiritual support, as well as help with a few practical things were also needed. Though not actively dying, Peggy still has numerous health challenges, including a hernia, respiratory and digestive issues, and vertigo. I come as the presence that listens to her troubles and challenges and assuages her loneliness.

When I showed up one day at her door, a few months after Terry's passing, Peggy

answered with a cell phone pressed to her ear. She whispered,

"I'll be done in a minute." She then walked into the back bedroom.

Mac, the red poodle, belied his training and hopped with his paws onto the front screen. He then backed away so I could open the door. As I came in the door, I dropped to his level and took him into my arms. I was not sure which of us was more excited to see the other. I felt seen at the core as a valuable part of the scheme. Mac has this way of being majestic and ordinary at the same time. As I lowered my head, he sniffed, licked, and nuzzled. Then he reflected Pure Divine Being as he looked into my eyes. After a few seconds, he dropped the top of his head against my chest. In surrender, Mac held his head against my heart for a full minute. Tears fell from my eyes as I put my arms around him. Unconditional love permeated the room.

Should I die, at this very moment, I would be fortunate to have directly experienced such holiness through Mac. I could see clearly that we are here only to experience this grace as giver and receiver. Just for love. Tears slid down my face, core touched core.

My healing session was complete, as just five minutes with Mac was all I needed. More present, I was able to listen from the stillness and hear what Peggy was expressing underneath her words and soothe her sadness with the same love Mac showed me. I can empathize and show compassion for the regret and anger Peggy was experiencing and reflect the truth of love. For an hour, I undertook the simple practical tasks Peggy needed help with.

I gave Mac an acupressure treatment for 20 minutes. He's recovering from a lack of

appetite and chronic diarrhea and vomiting, which stopped once he began receiving weekly acupressure treatments from me and discontinued taking a toxic monthly tablet called Trifexis, which contained a combination of heartworm remedy and flea pesticide.

After Mac's treatment, he ate for the first time in two days. Peggy and I then talked for 45 minutes. Well, mostly, she talked and I listened. Dissolution continued for Peggy. She was saying goodbye to old attachments, feeling deeply, and letting go in subtle and profound ways. Peggy was on an important mystical journey. How could she still experience the full depth of her husband's soul without seeing him?

And there's nothing like the guide called death, that sudden thrust into formlessness,

which forces us to look deeper. Often seen as a dark tunnel, death is, in truth, an endless light-infused corridor, where we find that dying is just a transitory shift within Eternal Life.

Primordial Words

Do not feel distressed because you have been deprived of his physical presence. It is the duty of the nearest and dearest of the departed to pray that he may progress on his upward path.

6

A Seismic Shift

Encounters with clients in their last weeks, months, and years of life only serve you up to a point. They cannot prepare you for the intensity felt around your biological father's passing. It is something existential that cannot be described, only felt.

My father was a vital man for 75 years. Then, while on vacation, the waterline to the refrigerator icemaker ruptured and the entire house was flooded when my parents returned two weeks later. The stress from this housing calamity weakened his system.

A year later, after the house was repaired, I was about to start a morning hike when my cell phone chimed. It was my mother. My parents were in Florida.

"Hi Michael," she said. "Dad's okay, but we are in the hospital with him because he has been having a lot of stomach pain and began throwing up." My mother went on to tell me that he contracted pneumonia and was being admitted to the hospital. Tests were done and nothing definite had come through yet, but something was apparently off with his pancreas. She ended her message saying,

"They should know more tomorrow."

Later that morning, I called my dad's cell phone in the hospital room. He picked up the phone around 1 p.m. Florida time. "Hey Dad, you didn't have to go all the way to Florida just to go to the hospital. They have those in California, too," I joked. The line stayed silent for a few seconds before my father spoke. His speech was slurred, responses delayed, and comprehension abilities questionable. I thought: oh boy, he's having some neurological issues.

"What's going on?" I probed. A mishmash of garbled noises came through the phonenumber, and I was able to decipher a one-word clue:

“Stoned.” It wasn’t much, but with scrutiny and a little luck, it would turn out to be enough. I felt as if I was some kind of medical terminology code breaker.

“Dad, I get it, you’re stoned,” I said. “Damn, you’re turning into a junkie. What have they got you on, morphine?”

“Strong stuff...” he mustered up. Dad was starting to come back with some renewed strength, two-word answers. I kept going with my smelling salt routine.

“Okay, you have a stone, where?” I probed.

“I don’t know, somewhere, I fogot—gwallbwadda.”

“Oh, you have a gallstone?”

“Ya, and den day wand to remood da gwallbwadda.” Dad was unintentionally imitating Elmer Fudd.

The next day, my father’s condition was diagnosed as an acute gallbladder attack (bile duct obstruction, where the duct between the pancreas and gallbladder had been fully blocked). After having the bile duct blasted clear through, a procedure known as ERCP (endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography), Dad was told that his gallbladder should be removed.

Modern gallbladder surgery is considered easy and safe. With new laparoscopic procedures, several small incisions are made near the naval along with the use of a robotic camera. The gall bladder itself is considered non-essential, with the liver taking on the role of bile distribution. (800,000 of these surgeries are done each year in the United States. Poor diet, bad fats, lack of exercise, preexisting chronic illness and planetary toxicity are the primary causes).

I told my father not to get his gall bladder removed, speaking, over the phone,

“Dad, don’t do it! Get out of the hospital and come home. At least find out the facts. Ask the doctors what the real numbers are about this. You know, how fast gallstones accumulate after having ERCP. There’s no way they come back that quick.”

My father did not listen to me. He had his gallbladder removed by a seemingly safe and less invasive “routine procedure” called laparoscopic cholecystectomy, yet uncontrolled bleeding ensued when they attempted to pull the gallbladder free and they had to abort the procedure and initiate a major surgery. A few days later, the routine biopsy was positive for cancer.

My father looked like a small child when I saw him for the first time since the surgery. It was the day before Thanksgiving after nearly two weeks in a Florida hospital. He was leaning to the left on the couch, against a pillow, looking somber and vulnerable. He couldn’t stand to greet me. Pushing up with his arms, his buttocks raised an inch off the couch, before he collapsed back against the cushion. I leaned down to hug him. He hugged me hard for a full minute. Then he gave me a kiss on the cheek, something my father had never done. My dad had been a pillar of strength, vital and healthy his whole life. But now his fragility reminded me of a downed tree preparing for reentry into the forest soil.

A few days later, I was sitting in a parking lot recalling a time when my dad and I were playing catch with our baseball gloves. The little boy inside of me asked, “How will I be able to breathe without my dad?”

By this point, my father had lost 20 pounds. They call it cancer cachexia (“wasting syndrome”), which affects about 50 percent of the people who have cancer. Wasting syndrome occurs when one loses weight and has muscle atrophy, fatigue, weakness, and significant loss of appetite.

When the final pathology report regarding my father’s cancer diagnosis arrived, he called simply to hear my voice and know that he was loved. His oncologist advised him to have surgery followed by an experimental regime of double chemotherapy. The doctor in his sly way repackaged single drug chemotherapy and made it feel cutting edge, as if my father was one of the fortunate ones being offered a revolutionary and pioneering protocol.

After a 7-hour surgery at Stanford, to remove cancer from various places in the surrounding biliary tissue near the liver, chemotherapy was to begin two weeks later. Yet, chemo was postponed, for when my father went to see the surgeon to have his post-surgical drain tube removed, large amounts of fluid were still discharging. The doctors twice delayed the removal of the tube, since pus was still draining from the surgical wound. As it turned out, my father was battling an infection and it took the doctors six days to realize this fact. The surgeon was hoping the infection would heal on its own. My father asked the surgeon when he could play tennis again. Stunned, he eyed my father quizzically and said,

“Well, most people who’ve had this surgery and develop an infection are in the hospital.”

Finally, the surgeon acquiesced and answered Dad’s query, saying, “Six weeks.”

One week after chemotherapy began, my mother called me and asked if I could spend the weekend looking after my father's needs at their house. She wanted to visit family a few hours to the north. I was to get a closer look at the American Medical Association’s cancer wing.

On the morning of my arrival at my parent’s home, I watched my father almost finish a small bowl of gluten-free cornflakes, while I dreaded our entry into the oncology suite, what I deemed “the chemo cauldron” or “the den of doom.” Inside these facilities, infusion stations are arranged in a semicircle configuration. Patients can interact with others receiving treatment while seated on comfortable lounge chairs as they imbibe either pre-treatment anti-nausea medication or the chemo liquid itself. Most of the recipients have Power-port blood catheters inserted into their chest for ease of infusion, and to make regular IV changes unnecessary.

I was to sit with my father during his “therapeutic infusion protocol,” what a deceitful way to refer to outright poisoning, I thought. It was to be an exercise like no other. He was doing a double

experimental form of chemotherapy because they did not know much about gallbladder cancer and he was told by his Stanford lead oncologist that “we have to hit it hard.”

My father claimed that his previous chemo drug, infused the day before, was “not bad,” but, in my eyes, he looked wiped off the map. As we prepared to leave for chemo round number two that day he said,

“This is nasty stuff.”

The “nasty” chemo drug, Oxyliptatin, is used mostly for colon cancer, though Dad had a rare type of cancer (gallbladder), which mainly affected women.

Dad informed me that an experience of tunnel vision followed his first dose of Oxyliptatin. After his second dose, he went blind for 10 seconds. At his next medical appointment, a few days later, I told my father to mention the tunnel vision and blind flash episodes to his novice oncologist, a 30-year-old Santa Cruz-based practitioner who was working indirectly with the Stanford team. He asked her,

“Do you think it has anything to do with the chemo?” She said,

“Oh no,” while looking puzzled by this well-known side effect and possibly deluded by her medical indoctrination, “You should see your general practitioner. Maybe you had a mini stroke or maybe you have pneumonia or a blood infection?”

“Dad, it’s the chemo,” I stated emphatically. He mumbled something and shook his head side to side. “Dad it’s the chemo,” I repeated and silence followed, until he finally said,

“They ran the blood tests, and they were negative,” trying to assure himself.

Right before we were about to leave for the chemotherapy appointment, I said,

“Dad, I went online and checked on the Oxyliptatin and found a study showing that blindness was a known side effect of your chemo drug. This was a new study, Dad; it came out a month ago. It showed that of 6,670 people in the trial, 33 went blind. Permanently blind,

Dad! That does not count any who went partially blind or had blind flashes like you.” (Unfortunately, the type of research I did at the time is no longer possible because the information has been removed. You can, however, still find individual practitioners operating outside of the mainstream Western narrative but must know their website names or have secured a direct referral).

Later at home, we had the propane fireplace roaring, and Dad, wrapped in four blankets, was still shivering. All of my attempts to alter destiny and get Dad to stop the poisoning were to no avail and a series of tension headaches arrived, like a freight train screeching in my head.

They momentarily subsided and then hit with renewed vengeance. Over and over, like a computer loop trick, these headaches kept coming. For three days, they hammered in, until a catharsis of tears arrived like my own private whale song.

Released from an attachment pattern, I felt a seismic shift within me, and I was ready to meet whatever came into the space.

Primordial Words

Mourning is not the index of true love. It reveals love of the object, of its shape (the physical body) only. That is not love. True love is shown by the certainty that the object of love is in the Self and that it can never become nonexistent. There will be no pain if the physical outlook is given up and the person exists as one with the Self.”

7

A Closer Look at America's Cancer Establishment

Three decades before my father's cancer diagnosis, I discovered the insidious and ruthless ways that the Western Medical System suppresses all holistic cancer treatments. Only chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery are recognized as primary treatments for cancer. To understand what paved the way for this triad's monarchy, which exploded in the years just after the 2nd World War, one must look back to the turn of the 20th century. At that time, naturopathic herbal medicine, homeopathy and many other healing tools and systems, were integral parts of mainstream health care.

John D. Rockefeller, the richest man in the world at the time, had a monopoly on the oil industry, but wanted to seize control over the food supply as well as the banking and medicine sectors. In 1910, under the guise of science and the reform of medicine, Rockefeller commissioned the Flexner Report in order to achieve his goal. In the years after that pseudo-scientific report came out, naturopathy, herbal medicine and homeopathy were criminalized. Medical schools removed all natural healing therapies, listing them as quackery. Today, Rockefeller controlled businesses own 50 percent of the drug companies and petro-chemicals are in nearly every chemotherapy agent and pharmaceutical drug.

Of course, Western allopathic medicine can be invaluable and life-saving in acute medical emergencies, like after a car accident or via pharmaceutical drug administration in cases of severe bacterial infection. Yet for chronic conditions like cancer, the conventional mainstream approach is an abysmal failure. Toxic substances and treatments (chemotherapy and radiation) cannot possibly help one

undergoing a serious illness, as they attack and destroy the human immune system and cellular structure of the body.

Holistic therapies, however, offer one a real chance at true recovery from the ravages of cancer and other chronic, degenerative conditions. Doctor Nicholas Gonzalez, one of the pioneers in alternative cancer treatment utilized an Enzyme Therapy protocol. His results outperformed the mainstay juggernaut of surgery, radiation and chemotherapy offered by conventional Western Medicine.

Many of his patients came to him as a last resort after their mainstream doctors had given up hope on them. He once said in reference to chemotherapy,

"...they were trying to find a medical use for Mustard gas just after World War Two...and that started the whole chemo regiment and chemo came into fruition and drug companies loved it because you could patent those poisons..."

Shortly before he passed on, Doctor Gonzalez said, "I've been told that the drug companies know about my work but hope I get hit by a bus." He died under mysterious circumstances three years after detailing the sabotaged study of his Enzyme Therapy in a book, published in 2012, called: *"What Went Wrong: The Truth Behind the Clinical Trial of the Enzyme Treatment of Cancer."* Before his death he was ridiculed and condemned by the reigning medical establishment network.

In truth, Gonzalez's Enzyme Therapy followed in the footsteps of many holistic and non-toxic cancer treatment pioneers of the 20th century. Practitioners such as Dr. Royal Rife (Rife Frequency Machine), and Dr. Max Gerson (Juice-centered Detox) along with dentist William Kelley (Metabolic Typing), and nurse Rene Caisse's (Essiac Tea), a 4-herb blend she received from an Ojibwa medicine man. All of these practitioners courageously offered their therapeutic approaches against extreme backlash from the conventional Western Medical authorities.

The American Medical Association's lead zealot, Morris Fishbein, held a leadership role from 1920 into the 1960s. Fishbein vilified many alternative cancer specialists, took some of them to court, and on occasion others were poisoned, but despite adversity and challenges these holistic cancer doctors were able to reverse disease progression, and in some cases, completely cure even late-stage cancers.

Decades later many patients of these pioneering practitioners were still alive, living testimonials and empirical proof of the efficacy of the treatments they received. Yet, on today's heavily censored internet, without a website URL one can only find mainstream allopathic propaganda. Anything that doesn't fit into the fictitious mainstream narrative is considered medical misinformation on the large social media sites like YouTube and Meta (Facebook). All it takes is the mention of one word related to holistic cancer therapy and a post or video is instantly removed. So, instead of finding out about the rich history, healing stories of patients, and details of their successful treatments, one discovers only an extensive smear campaign. All of the mainstream media channels portray these pioneering practitioners as quacks and their treatment methods are listed as dangerous and unproven.

Ten years before my father's cancer diagnosis, I had seen the definitive, 14-year groundbreaking study that completely debunked the chemo myth. The paper was published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* in December 2004 and called: *The Contribution of Cytotoxic (toxic to all cells) Chemotherapy to 5-Year Survival in Adult Malignancies*. The report stated:

“...Researchers at the Department of Radiation Oncology at the Northern Sydney Cancer Center studied the five-year survival rates of chemotherapy on 22 types of cancers in the United States and Australia.

They studied 154,971 Americans and Australians with cancer at age 20 and older who were treated with conventional treatments, including chemotherapy. The results showed that only 3,306 had a survival that could be credited to chemotherapy.” The study concluded with,

“The overall contribution of curative and adjuvant cytotoxic chemotherapy to five-year survival in adults was estimated to be 2.3 percent in Australia and 2.1 percent in the United States...it is clear that cytotoxic chemotherapy only makes a minor contribution to cancer survival. To justify the continued funding and availability of drugs used in cytotoxic chemotherapy, a rigorous evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and impact on quality of life is urgently required.”

How many people would get chemotherapy if they knew the true numbers? Two percent success and mostly for the rarer forms of cancer, which actually distorts the numbers. The actual success of chemo is close to zero, if you factor in the numbers for the rare types of cancer that chemo does help, testicular cancer, for which chemotherapy is 41.8 percent effective, and Hodgkin’s disease, for which it is 35.8 percent effective. These skew the overall results, raising chemotherapy’s effectiveness from less than 1 percent to just above 2 percent.

The study was meticulous and reviewed by a team of oncologists over a 15-year period. When data was unclear, these doctors chose to overestimate the benefit of chemotherapy and still came up with it being only 2 percent effective.

According to Leigh Erin Connealy M.D., the cancer industry, through the chemotherapy sector, made 236 billion in 2025 (doubled from 118 billion in 2018); cancer surgeries garnered well over 200 billion, while radiation treatments grabbed another 8 billion per year.

In 2025, primarily through the private cancer charity (American Cancer Society) and public cancer charity (National Cancer Institute) 14 billion was raised. A good portion of the money goes into the pockets of a few billionaire executives and the rest is used to fund

pharmaceutical research on future chemotherapy drugs. Yet, cancers are becoming more aggressive than ever, with incidents rising not falling, especially since the pandemic.

Primordial Words

Many people live with a tormentor in their head that continuously attacks and punishes them and drains them of vital energy. It is the cause of untold misery and unhappiness, as well as of disease.

8

Eastern Energetic Healing

I have been practicing acupuncture since 1997. My father has always responded well to acupuncture, whether it be for back pain, rib pain, or emotional pain. Healing is not about prolonging bodily existence or producing a cure. True healing is the same as Self-realization, what some may call being immersed in the heart of Jesus Christ, or living in the pristine emptiness of the Buddha Awareness Field. Dis-ease, sickness, and other imbalances are transformational opportunities. In reality, they do not exist in the way the mind perceives them. They only appear to exist when one identifies with thought. True healing happens when we become conscious and return to the natural state of being.

We began our healing session with acupuncture balancing. I treated him for the pain over the drain tube surgical site, which cut through the intercostal muscles and upper abdominal area on the right side, near the site of the previously removed gallbladder. This also corresponded with an intestinal blockage causing constipation.

The best part of an acupuncture session is connecting through touch. I feel as if I am able to give back a small gift to my father for all he has given me. After months of chemotherapy and additional surgery, I see the strain in my father's eyes and feel it in his qi ("life force") through the pulse.

After the session, I spent the night at my folks' place. Suddenly, at about 12:45 a.m.

(which just happens to be the time of the gallbladder in Chinese medicine), I was awakened by a loud crash in the room directly above me. I dashed up the stairs to find my father collapsed on the kitchen floor. He was just coming to after passing out. He didn't remember

what happened. I put one hand on his heart, the other underneath his skull. My mother came a moment later and stood over us in shock. Dad was shaking, confused, embarrassed, and helpless. My father was lying there in nothing but his underwear. Feeling into the severity of the fall, since he had banged his head on the hardwood floor, I noticed that all of his nails, on both feet and hands, were yellow-green in color. His face was beet-red, eyes sunken and distant.

The next day, because he was still lightheaded, my mother took Dad to see his Santa Cruz oncologist. While everything checked out okay with his head, the oncologist unleashed an inappropriate remark regarding Dad's ongoing chemotherapy,

"Only seven more rounds to go..." She exclaimed with a nervous chuckle.

Each day with my father, with death near, was a chance to revel in the fullness of his heart. In those days, with death staring him down, I met my real father, the one I've always known. It was during those brief moments that I sat watching sports or movies with him on TV. There was lots of distraction and commotion, then wham: The TV went off, conversation stopped, pin-drop silence. We would look into each other's eyes, and I knew that my real father was much more than that slowly disintegrating form.

If one is intuitive and listens, we know that active dying processes have begun and our temporary body-vehicle is moving toward the Formless Unseen. And if we are conscious, a natural letting go has already been taking place, a movement of utter beauty and simplicity, dying.

Contained within the dying process is a great opportunity for walls of denial to come

crashing down. In the space of dying, a truer and deeper communion and emotional connection is possible.

Primordial Words

To be a living being is not the ultimate state. There is something beyond that, something much more wonderful, which is neither being nor non-being, neither living nor not-living. It is a state of Pure Awareness, beyond the limitations of space and time. Once the illusion of the body-mind as oneself is abandoned, death loses its terror and becomes part of living.

9

Caregiver Break: Mount Pinos

Two months before my father's passing, in the middle of July, I was led to the Los Pinos Nordic Center, at 8,300 feet, in the southernmost section of the Los Padres National Forest. It was time for nature, a break from the intensity around my father's health decline. The temperature was in the mid-70s with a light breeze when I arrived.

Navigating through the end of life with my father, my restlessness was able to dissipate in this wilderness setting. The campsite, Chula Vista, was vacant, so I had the entire forest campground to share with various animal friends, such as jays, robins, ravens, and chipmunks. The stillness was deep and I nested in for a four-day retreat by first cleaning up garbage, remnants of previous inhabitants. Though not a lot of refuse, by normal campground standards, it took me about an hour.

Each day I would bask in the silence for hours in sedentary stillness and then turn toward movement. I was without a map, compass, or any other navigational convenience but each day explored a new trail. One day I took a cross-country ramble over downed trees, through thick pine needles, on a path to nowhere in particular. The only elements in play were light wind, the occasional call of a bird, the in and out of my breath, and my own heartbeat. It must have been about three hours out and back.

Another day I headed up an old dirt fire road, which turned into a trail, climbing 500 feet to the top of Mount Pinos. At the top, a large wooden board said, "The Chumash and other Native American Indian groups saw themselves as part of the natural world, rather than its masters. Iwihinmu (Mount Pinos) was the focal point of this balance. The Chumash call this summit Lilikshup ('the Center of the World'). Iwihinmu was created more than 100 million years ago. From its

8,831-foot summit, you can see four wilderness areas, lands preserved in balance forever...”

The only facts about the Los Padres National Forest that came to my attention, related to a news report I watched many years ago about the reintroduction of the endangered (nearly extinct) California condor to this area. The Chumash call the condor “Alymiyi.” With its nine-foot wingspan, a sighting would be unmistakable. The Chumash consider the condor sacred. They say it is a bird that symbolizes the balance of power in all living things.

Ever watchful for a soaring condor overlooking the valley in search of carrion, I

proceeded down the other side of Mount Pinos. I hiked about 45 minutes down a steep canyon and up the other side, when I came to a faint, unmarked trail branching off the main trail.

I felt mystically guided down this path, and five minutes later, found myself at the Chumash Spirit Tower, a 10-foot-high rock cairn with prayer flags. The views were stunning. Yet the predominant force was spiritual. Many prayers had been delivered and answered here I felt. Sitting down at the base of the Spirit Tower, tucked into the eastern side, to block a strong westerly wind, I felt lifted out of myself. All ideas, feelings, worries, and trials and tribulations wafted away without any effort at all. It was grace to be led to this sacred site.

Primordial Words

Bereavement and suffering, as well as pleasure and pain, are generated by delusion. Man's journey through life, however, must be directed toward the Supreme Being. When that Source is found, all is found—contentment, peace, and bliss.

10

My Father Remains

The death of a beloved family member or friend is something we all share. We never know when the last visit will happen with our loved ones. Two days before Dad's passing, he was in between worlds, preparing to drop the body that was decimated from chemo and cancer. Incredibly, my father was able to raise himself from the bed and walk to the bedroom door to greet me with a pure heart hug. His eyes were unfocused luminescent pearls. We could not connect in the same way, but words seemed frivolous; a spiritual power shined through his form.

My mother, brother, sister, and I, all got on the bed with him that day, which was something our family had never done before. My brother's spasmodic cries and unrestrained tears were the only sounds breaking into the silence, as the family embraced each other and experienced love. My dad put his arm around my brother, much like a formless angel would comfort a child.

The morning my father passed I felt a primal energy surge within me around my navel. I sprang up from bed, holding my abdomen, as if I had been shot in the gut. It was 5 a.m. and it had not been a nocturnal dream or a hallucination. I was half awake, half asleep. Sitting up from bed, I bent forward, wailing guttural sounds that lasted for some five minutes. I knew what this catharsis portended; my father had passed away in the early hours of the morning. I had picked up on his form exit via the celestial tides. Afterward, the emotional wave subsided, peace came, and along with it, space. A conscious full-abdominal breath led me to the calm center.

A few hours after hearing of my father's transition, I was drawn to the Enchanted Forest, at the Land of the Medicine Buddha, in the Soquel hills near Santa Cruz. It is a Tibetan Buddhist Retreat Center

which offers programs and teachings as well as more intensive retreats. They even have their own elementary school (Redwood School). The land is open to the public with numerous nature trails. There is also Tara Home, a hospice cottage for those wishing to receive spiritual support in preparation for a conscious transition.

To gain access to Tara Home's sacred space, one must be a hospice patient and meet certain criteria (including a doctor's prognosis of 3 months or less to live). At Tara Home, often a Lama, an honored spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism, comes to help usher one towards a peaceful earthly departure.

The Land of the Medicine Buddha is filled with serenity and adorned with ancient Pali healing symbols, Tibetan prayer flags and wheels. Windchimes which produce ethereal sounds, mix with bird song and the magnificent redwood forest accentuates the silence and stillness of the land.

After a 2-mile hike down one of the Medicine trails, a potent energy again coalesced within my abdomen. The body had to run. The pace quickened, and in moments, I was sprinting at top speed. I slowed slightly and found a breathing rhythm, as an earnest urge grew: I had to connect with my father.

"Where are you, Dad?" I called out in my mind. It was like an explosion inside of me, a deep inquiry. As I ran, right at my maximum capacity, this question could be heard with increasing urgency. All of a sudden, after dashing for a full mile on the trail, a faint sound arose within me. It was the unmistakable voice of my father; he lit up the forest within and around me, and I heard: *I'm right here, Michael*. I knew it was true, and I smiled, then laughed, with tears streaming down my cheeks, for I was running with my father again.

How appropriate that this assurance of Spirit Everlasting occurred in a forest overseen by Tibetan Buddhists, for as the Dalai Lama once

proclaimed, “My religion is kindness.” My father, not a religious man, always lived that ideal. Many spiritual practitioners cultivate kindness for decades, whereas my father lived it naturally. It was an essential part of who he is.

His kindness did not dissipate throughout the dying process. I kept waiting for my father to lose his temper, mistreat others, or begin complaining. It didn’t happen. Instead, the same dutiful and loving family man kept emerging, day after day. And he had some tough days physically, especially during chemo. He would endure fits of nausea and vomiting and then look up, smile, and tell a joke.

Right after hospice was set up, I was sitting at the feet of Dad’s reclining chair, my shoulder against the side of his leg, when the phone rang. As I stood up to answer it, Dad nonchalantly said,

“It must be the death people.” It was a lighthearted moment that epitomized the attitude he had.

My father and I played our last doubles tennis match six weeks before he passed. He played well that day. If you looked closely, however, the disintegration of the body was easy to see and revealed through his pale-green skin, glazed-over eyes, and gaunt features. Looking deeper, beyond appearances, however, you could find a vibrant soul filled with inspiring light.

The light was moving my father about that day. The Holy Father and my human father were seen as one. That afternoon one last surge of vitality was allowed by the Maker, for God decides when the last breath comes for all. My father’s best qualities were on display that day: kindness, perseverance, gentleness, determination, and love.

After the match, Dad and I said our goodbyes to his friends, Don and Theo, who certainly did not realize this would be the last time they would see my father. As a gift to his friends, Dad was allowed to say farewell by being the same guy they had always known.

Walking back to the car after tennis, Dad was moments away from collapsing in a heap, like an Everest climber who had run out of oxygen

and headed for the summit anyway. I walked next to his fragile frame away from the court, knowing a gentle wind would have knocked him over. As we approached the car, I said,

“Dad, let me drive.”

He shook his head, plopped into the driver’s seat, and started the engine, the way he’d always done for the three-plus decades we’d played tennis together. Dad always drove. With death staring him down, my father wanted one afternoon to be about living, not dying.

Watching him move through the dying process, I was able to see that the heart is always bubbling forth with the simple yet subtle pointer to the natural state of peace. And a loved one dying is a springboard that can enable us to see this more clearly. We usually don’t pay attention to the heart’s promptings and instead bring awareness to thoughts that only create a distressing web of possibilities. Dad’s heart was like a lure, or receiving antennae, transmitting an even stronger signal. The Formless Dimension of life was less veiled, and I found my real father, his never-ending Essential Self, bursting forth like a current of electricity calling me Home. So, I was not afraid of his body passing, because who would be afraid of going Home? Instead of being afraid, I was in awe with the realization: *I’m going Home with my father*—this wasn’t a thought, but my direct experience. We truly die with our loved ones, but not in the way the mind thinks. It’s a beautiful death because the True Self remains untouched.

All the filler elements fall away, the stuff we don’t need. Tears still come, but they are not from grief or loss; instead, they are streams of gratitude, flowing in celebration for what we have found.

During those last months of my father’s life, his physical body was a mere vestige of his once vibrant form. Yet before my eyes, a divine personage, a luminous light resided, and it grew more alive every minute. To sit with my father in the dying process, witnessing the shedding of form, was to be with the greatest part of myself.

Our earthly biological fathers (and mothers) are actually inseparable from the Heavenly Father (or Divine Mother). We can see that what we call the Heavenly Father is in fact the same being that animates our biological father and ultimately everything in life.

Primordial Words

Why mourn the loss of your parents? The life current has passed through innumerable

incarnations and expressions, births and deaths, pleasures and pains, not unlike the current of a river flowing over rocks, sand, and elevations and depressions. Pleasures and pains, births and deaths, are like undulations of the water in the mirage of the ego. The only reality is the True Self, from which the ego appears as thoughts which manifest themselves as the universe, where the mothers and fathers, friends and relatives, appear and disappear. They are nothing but manifestations of God. One's parents are not outside the True Self, so there is no reason to mourn their loss. Learn this, realize this, and be happy.

11

Let's Die Now

The sister of a dear friend called. She wanted me to assist in the conscious transition of her husband at home. This was six weeks after my father had passed.

Andy was a 64-year-old manager of a large Calla lily breeding and production company. We knew each other. I'd seen Andy at a couple of social events, the last time four years earlier. His bodily decline had come on quickly, his wife, Laura, informed me over the phone one afternoon. His slow-moving stage-two prostate cancer had suddenly spread and turned into stage-four metastatic.

Andy and Laura did what they thought was best and tried chemotherapy, which

exacerbated the situation and nearly shut down his kidney function. With a teenage son to consider, Andy may have pressed the treatments further than he wanted.

One day earlier, Laura told me that Andy looked right at her, with piercing intensity, and said,

“Let's die now. Just die.”

The next morning, I drove to the Aptos hills. Andy had returned home from the hospital the evening before and was set up in a modern cottage, which faced an open meadow, built adjacent to the main house. I peered through the sliding glass door entryway to see the six-foot-eight-inch Scotsman attired in only a hospital gown, which made it just past the knees. It seemed as if he was awkwardly resting on a child's small mattress.

As I walked in, I realized that the contraption was a normal-sized hospital bed. His toes dangled over the edge of the back rail. Drain tubes, attached directly to each kidney, via specialized catheters, were

hanging over the side bed rail. Based on the amount of urine inside the bags, his left kidney was the only one functioning. I stood just inside the entrance before walking to the bedside opposite his wife, Laura.

“Hi Andy,” I said, reaching my hand out. He took my hand without response. “How’s it going?” I said, looking into his eyes.

Andy stared at me silently, as if taking inventory. Laura began speaking quickly to cover up a feeling of anxiety and impending doom. Something urgent was coming through Andy’s eyes, however, and my attention was primarily focused on him.

One quarter of my attention listened as Laura expressed Andy’s practical caregiving needs, while three quarters of my attention was immersed in the urgent yet silent question being put forth by Andy, which I intuited as “Are you going to help me die?” This silent inner query contained equal parts vulnerability and strength.

As our steady gaze continued, it merged; an unspoken contract was established between us: *We were going to die together*. Andy finally said,

“Are you okay with soiled sheets?” Not wishing to put any more attention on bodily maintenance, including dealing with bladder and bowels, Andy wanted to make sure I could deal with that in an easy dignified way.

“Oh sure,” I responded.

His expression changed, looking more relaxed. I felt his body release against the mattress and settle. With his urgent spiritual query answered and now the last worldly concern gone, Andy could get on with the effortless work of dying.

Because, really, how hard is it to die? We gladly go to sleep each night, our own mini-death. In truth, sleep is an essential respite that keeps humans alive and sane, well partially sane, at least.

I’ve always been good with deconstruction. Tell me you’re about to build a new wood deck and I’ll be lost in a haze; if you want me

to deconstruct an existing platform, however, I'm your man. I will tear down the decaying wood with glee and determination, clear away the junk, and leave you with nothing but simple ground. I can show you that the old stuff was not needed, nor did you really lose anything at all. This ability is well-suited for end-of-life caregiving. Those entering the dying process are not interested in building up, but rather, they want to let go. I sit with them in the still presence of being, where a harmonic attunement takes place, make-believe identities fall away, and the stories and past histories of who we thought we were can be released. It is a timeless space where the "I-am-the-body" idea fades, becoming less and less interesting.

I sat with Andy for hours at a time, each day and night. We spent from four to six hours each 24-hour period in silent meditation together. The primary sound heard was the vital breath dancing into and out of form. I would be there from 7:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. and sleep only two to three hours each night, and then work about six additional hours during the day.

On rare occasions, Andy would open his eyes for brief moments and we would meet in the stillness. What was there to say at this point? We both knew that exchanging words would move energy outward toward the mind and the world, when Andy's natural inclination was to go inward into the vast depth of Spirit.

About two hours of each day at Laura's request, I would give Andy firm acupressure on trigger points, releasing tension and energetic blockages from the body. As the final days approached, the hands-on sessions turned gentle and nurturing. Using my yoga-inspired limberness, I was able to maneuver around the hospital bed and Andy's lengthy frame, touching him with as little tension in my own body as possible.

One day, as I was releasing some tension in his lower neck with acupressure, Andy said,

"Oh, that's so good!"

I suppose I may be taking credit for some angelic interlude, but I think he was talking to me, since at that point he barely spoke.

Another day, he seemed submerged in deep sleep, and I told him, “You remind me of my first meditation teacher, both in looks and spirit.”

One evening outside the room, Laura told me that Andy had been on an active spiritual quest in his twenties, meditating with sages and yogis in the Himalayas and traveling to India, Japan, and many places in Southeast Asia. One time, Andy was wrongly incarcerated, and I never found out why. Ram Dass, the well-known yoga teacher, came to the prison as part of a Prison Ashram Project. As Ram Dass was walking among the inmates, he suddenly stopped in front of Andy and said,

“Now, there’s a bright light!”

Nearly 40 years later, Andy was drawing from those years spent on the spiritual quest. Nearing the so-called end of life, he was letting go into the Great Beyond. With enthusiasm, happy to drop into the space of Pure Awareness, Andy was blasting through the veils of conditioned beliefs, conceptual thinking, and identification with mind states.

For some dying clients, letting go is natural. Others nearing death, however, try to find completion with certain family members or with things they’ve done “wrong” or not done “right.”

One of the biggest challenges the dying person faces relates to unresolved emotional issues with family members, as both of them struggle to let go of the relationship form, past traumas, and the continual seeking for a cure, even if that means more pain and decreased quality of life.

During my limited time away each day, it was crucial for me to be in nature as much as possible. I would hike in the forest or walk on the beach, eat a simple healthy meal, and then go to the Tea House Spa and soak in a hot tub. This recharged and relaxed my energy body so

I could continue to meet the intensity that builds up as one nears the form change.

Each day a certain routine transpired with Andy and me. I would arrive and check in with Laura about caregiving considerations, such as shifts in bodily comfort and specific needs or challenges. Then I would watch Laura tend to her husband with delicate touch and soothing words. She would leave, and I would sit down on the futon couch next to the hospital bed so we could meditate together. Intuitively, I would give him a massage or apply acupressure, put a cold rag on his head, or swab his lips with a cream. At other times, after long periods of sitting, I would move into a nearby room for spontaneous ecstatic dance movements, deep breathing, light yoga or qigong.

My closest friends, along with newborns and infants, are those who predominantly rest in being, rather than mind. I am drawn to vulnerable and open people who are comfortable with the unknown. Those who are dying are kindred spirits, as they too are moving into deeper recognition of being.

I love helping people die well. It is a simple assignment that comes naturally to me. What an honor to be with someone saying farewell to the world, for our deepest peace lies in forgetting this illusory “I” and the separate body idea that springs from it. We are always bodiless and timeless whether we realize it while in form or not. As the end of form-identity begins, the bliss of being calls us home. If we are aware that this is a natural inclination, fear and other mind states hold no sway over us.

On day four, I sensed that the final exit was close. Laura was getting terrified that I might want a night off. She did not know how she could stay with Andy at night. I kept feeling that no matter the escape tactic used, Laura would not be able to miss his final departure. At this point, Andy let me know, with body movements and subtle gesturing, that he no longer wished to receive massage on the lower body. The next day, he did not want a massage or acupressure at all. Touch was keeping

him connected to the body when Consciousness wanted to jettison the form.

During the morning of day six, at 5 a.m., Andy appeared agitated, his legs thrashing, so I asked him if he was in pain. He did not answer. Then I said,

“Would you like some morphine?”

He did not respond verbally or arouse into a waking state, his eyes remaining closed. It was obvious that he was in discomfort and pain, as his facial muscles tightened into a grimace.

I gave Andy a dose of morphine through a syringe into the corner of his mouth. Five hours later, Andy silently requested another dose, for too much pain can bring one to extreme bodily identification, making it more difficult to let go.

Rarely is the open secret related to morphine use at the end of life discussed. Besides being a pain-relieving opiate, it has side effects, which include constipation, agitation, nausea, vomiting, dry mouth, and itchy skin. It is a well-known fact among hospice nurses and other savvy end-of-life practitioners that morphine also accelerates the dying process. Morphine, as used in hospice and end of life arenas, is a socially accepted, slow-motion euthanasia not unlike other aid-in-dying methods. Though opiates are the leading cause of death for those under age 50 in America, someone in the last few months of life need not worry about opiate addiction, unless they had a remarkable recovery and lived on.

When we made the caregiver change at 1 p.m. on Andy's last day, I told Laura I would be returning at 7:00 p.m. A strong 24 hour late autumn storm blew in that evening at 6:30. As I was returning at 7:00 p.m., a tremendous downpour unloaded just as I was driving through the gate. Sprinting from the car to the deck in front of the cottage, I removed my raincoat and shoes underneath the protective awning.

I peered through the sliding glass door, Laura was kneeling by Andy, her head nestled on his chest, with her left hand over his. One

could easily mistake this for a birth scene. This birth, however, was the so-called death. The room was alight with a potent force. I felt lifted out of myself. I was walking into and being graced with a tidal wave of light, while being inseparable from that light. It was a palpable light, coming through me and out of me, and it was everywhere. It was animating the room. The impulse was to dance, sing, and celebrate. Instead, I moved toward the bed with a type of reverence one might have while entering a temple, holy shrine or attending the birth of a newborn child.

Laura, looking up, was quite distraught.

"I think he just took his last breath," she said. I did not need to look at the corpse beside me to know that the life force was free. Still, I put my hand over Andy's heart—no movement, no sound. Then I searched for a radial pulse at the wrist—nothing.

"What do you think?" Laura asked, looking at me, her eyes downcast. She was holding on to a residue of hope that magically I could reverse the truth. I was kneeling next to a lifeless body, yet life was never more alive.

"Yes," I said quietly, "he's gone." I closed my eyes, and then opened them, looking at

Laura. "And still the room is alive with his spirit." Andy was not dead to me. The room was a volcanic eruption of soul-force.

"Really, you feel it?" Laura asked, holding tightly to the lifeless body, her eyes tearing

up. I scanned the room in awe. Whispering a few words of sympathy and compassion, I

touched Laura's arm tenderly. Then she said, "There was no struggle. It's just that the next breath did not come. I was so scared he would struggle or be in pain, and I would not know what to do."

After about 30 minutes, Laura left to tell her 14-year-old son that his father had passed. The last thing she wanted to do was call the mortuary and have them come out at night in a storm. I told her that

leaving the body undisturbed for as long as possible is a good thing. At the sliding door, as I was about to leave, she asked me if I could still spend the night with Andy.

“Of course,” I said. I then walked over to the futon next to his bed. I smiled into the
illuminating and Loving Spirit that is not born and cannot die.

Primordial Words

I am like the wind, as no one can own me. I am in every heart. I will never leave thee.

12

The Death Doula, a Poem

The death goddess has stepped through.
She carries the lotus flower dew.
I've been waiting for you, beloved one.
Together we share in Thy will be done.
You were envisioned in the presence I Am,
soul friend and integral part of my Fam.
You'll witness this heart somersault in space,
carry soothing water that drenches my face.
With compassionate touch and radiant song,
you are a primordial delicate gong.
Oh, how that glowing smile lights up the sky,
bringing on a belly laugh that makes one cry.
Now I see clearly that death holds no sway,
as my hands come together, in pure Namaste.

13

Caregiver Break: Mount Shasta

After Andy's transition, I felt drawn to spend time in the Shasta-Trinity wilderness of Northern California while taking a break from caregiving. I found myself at the mountain and township of Shasta, where esoteric extremes meet the most extraordinary earthiness.

Some might say it is simply a 14,179-foot-high dormant volcano, but others will tell you things are still bubbling underneath the surface. For instance, there is the legendary advanced race, the mystical brotherhood of people known as the Lemurians, who are said to thrive in an underground city on the mountain. Then there are the Ascended Masters...

While in Shasta, I spent time during the day in the city proper, interacting with people

living on the fringe: New Age hipsters, those dealing with drug and alcohol addictions, travelers cruising in minivans, the homeless.

There was Joshua, a 40-something Choctaw Indian. (The Choctaw was the first Native American tribe forced to relocate through the Indian Removal Act of 1830, where Native Americans had to relinquish their ancestral lands and move to designated reservation territories). His skin had taken on the quality of a protective sheath and looked like charred leather, as if insulating him from prejudice and injustice. Alcohol had become his insulating lubricant but finding that no protective barrier was needed with me, he opened up and I experienced his mighty heart, which emitted a translucent light. After a long jail term for some unmentioned offense, Joshua still exuded a gentleness of spirit. We talked into the wee hours one night.

Aaron was about 60 years old. We met at a laundromat. Filthy and a probable meth addict, he was traveling through the region with all his worldly possessions on some ramshackle device one might call a bicycle. He could not stop talking and sharing his supreme intelligence, with practical and mystical truths pouring out in bursts of inspired lunacy and delight. It was as if he had come from Mars and had not talked to another human before.

Mark was a late-20s college dropout, who after talking with me for 15 minutes, suddenly divulged with great shame that he had been sexually molested as a child. After saying this, he dropped his head into my hands and asked me to pray that he would overcome his drug addictions. I held him in silence, like one would a little boy.

A few days later, when I ran into him again, Mark asked me to drive him to the headwaters of Mount Shasta (the revered beginning point of the Sacramento River). He insisted,

“The water, dude, is so healing. Make sure to always fill your bottle from here.” He said these words with religious fervor while pointing to a specific spot in the river at the mountain’s base.

Each night I drove up the mountain and crashed in my tent at a campsite near the 7,000-foot mark, a short distance from the Bunny Flat trailhead, which is the primary access point for those planning on climbing to Shasta’s summit. With no agenda, I spent most days in town, letting Shasta’s power enter me through osmosis.

While in town, one late afternoon, a man entered the Yaks Koffee Shop and Cafe, where I sat looking at a trail map. With his ruffled wild hair, darting eyes, and unkempt dusty clothes, he had all the marks of the fringe types I had grown so fond of. His name was Sapphire; he came right up to me and said, “You a climber...?” I looked up at him.

“Well, I’ve climbed Shasta, but I am more of a backpacker. I’m Michael,” I replied and reached out my hand.

“I like your open energy, bro. I want to invite you to something very cool,” Sapphire said.

“Oh, yeah, what’s that?” I asked.

“It’s a music thing, well, more than a music thing. It’s up on the mountain tonight with

Saint Germain,” he replied enthusiastically. “He’s the reason I hitchhiked here from Eugene.”

It felt right, so I agreed, and 20 minutes later, we were on our way, after a brief stop for food. Sapphire had only an Oregon food stamp card with 90 dollars on it, but something was wrong with the pin number or somehow it did not work in California. I ended up buying his meal and snacks since he had not eaten all day.

When we reached the end of Shasta’s main road, the Everett Memorial Highway, I parked in a lot with about 25 other cars. Numerous tourists wandered about, some slowly spinning 360 degrees around, for this section of the mountain looked more like the pictures one had seen of the moon. A larger group of about 20 people were coming together on a section of this football field-size flat area.

Dusk was settling in. To my left, the full moon was luminous. The sun, to my right, about to set, radiated a fiery orange-red intensity. Shasta’s summit loomed large some 7,000 vertical feet above.

As we began to walk from the car, Sapphire exuded,

“There he is! That’s Saint Germain!”

Saint Germain is considered to be one of the Ascended Masters of Mount Shasta, and this incarnation of Saint Germain played 100 instruments, sang in 10 languages, and was an award-winning poet, as well as a champion skateboarder. Saint Germain walked toward us. He appeared enigmatic, yet ordinary.

“This is Michael,” Sapphire said. “He gave me a ride up the mountain and is going to join us.”

“Okay,” Saint Germain said softly. We grasped hands and I said,

"I've seen you around town several times over the last few days." He nodded his head with a wry smile.

Fifteen minutes later, we were doing spontaneous chants like "I Am That I Am," which is wonderful in song. Next, simple and profound affirmations were expressed such as "I Am Grateful," "I Am Love," and "I Am Eternal." It was refreshing to be validating the musically inspired attributes of "I Am," of Divinity itself.

The Saint Germain teachings emphasize "contemplating your Mighty I Am Presence,

the mighty presence of God in you, in your home, in your world, in your affairs."

According to these teachings, "every breath you breathe is God in action in you."

Soon our group on the mountain was taking part in Sufi-inspired dances, vocal toning, and group hugs. Saint Germain then pulled out a conga. With single-pointed concentration, he coaxed our group into a devotional mood. Never had I felt such energy coming from the instrument we call the drum. The harmonium came out next, and the group energy moved deeper.

After some time, Saint Germain, the celestial musician, pulled out a handmade agave didgeridoo. Its earthy yet other-worldly tones started from the ground up, like a lightning bolt, full of electricity. I had always known music was healing, but this was something else. As the harmonic tones of this rare instrument slowly receded into silence, Saint Germain lifted the didgeridoo from the ground and aimed it at each person in the circle, one by one.

He was a musical shaman, dispersing demons, in the form of delusional ego propensities, and blessing us with the living notes, beginning with his breath aimed into our hearts. Yet it felt as if he was not there at all, as Spirit and the wind met in sound, and no separation could be found.

The didgeridoo, or didge, is a wind instrument developed by indigenous Aborigines of Northern Australia. Believed to be more than 1,500 years old, it is one the oldest known wind instruments in the world. It was originally made by Australian craftsmen from Eucalyptus trees hollowed out by termites.

Saint Germain used a handcrafted didgeridoo from the flower stalks of the agave (century plants), which are native to Southern Arizona, and his instrument emitted a different sonic quality, known as a “wash of sound,” making it more popular for meditation and sound healing.

Primordial Words

As death is inevitable, you need to accept that death is something that cannot affect that which you are. This identification with the body is time-bound, so why not disassociate from it now?

14

Tara

I met Tara in early 2004 at a gathering with the spiritual teacher Adyashanti. Tara had ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, often called Lou Gehrig's disease, an adult-onset neurodegenerative disorder). Generally considered to have no cure, the disease usually ends a person's life within two to five years of the onset of symptoms.

The earliest signs of ALS vary and include inability to grasp, difficulty chewing, trouble walking, leg weakness, and slurred speech. In Tara's case, the disease began while she was visiting a friend in Africa. Ironically, this happened on the morning of September 11th, 2001, a day etched into American history. On that day, Tara woke up and noticed that her legs were not working right. In the coming months, while teaching English as a Second Language in Japan, she could no longer climb stairs or carry her school bag. Nearly a year later, a neurologist diagnosed it as ALS.

Tara was wheelchair-bound when a friend took me over to meet her at the end of the satsang, a gathering of seekers after Ultimate Truth. Tara's words were unformed and delivered with a mumbled croak. Although I could barely understand her words, her face radiated an inner light, and the enhanced presence I felt during the spiritual gathering communicated all that was needed.

I had worked with one other person with ALS the year before while in Utah and knew that deep tissue massage and acupressure therapy helped my client gain short-term relief from many of the symptoms of ALS. For a few hours after these sessions, energetic blockages were decreased, his musculature relaxed, and his breathing improved. When I told Tara about this, she was happy to receive sessions from me.

During therapy periods, Tara would be navigated onto my massage table. This would

require an additional helper, usually her friend and caregiver, Svargo, from Germany, whom she met in the Oregon spiritual community that formed when the charismatic and much-maligned spiritual teacher, Osho (formerly Rajneesh), arrived from India in the 1980s. Svargo and I would lift, carry, and slide Tara, who weighed about 160 pounds, from the mobile twin bed to the massage table. She had to lie on her back, for when she faced downward and attempted to use the face cradle, it was too difficult for her to breathe.

I found Tara's musculature on both sides of the spine to be crystallized with deposits of sharp icicle-like frozen tangles that lined the spinal pathways and appeared to be one of the symptomatic manifestations involved in her central nervous system dysfunction. Each session was a powerful workout for both of us, for I needed to use deep finger holds. Reaching my hands down to her low back and working them slowly up to her neck, along both sides of the spine, I used her body weight as leverage to sink into and pull against. When I found a large crystalline deposit, I would retain the hold with the energy focused and compressed into two or three fingers, which penetrated into the area of blockage. This would make small breaks in the frozen deposits or at least create a little more space. Sometimes it felt as though I was pressing into a sharp piece of granite. Tara utilized her meditative background to witness and breathe through the intense sensations from the physio-energetic contact we were engaged in. These sessions provided short-term respite from some of her symptoms.

The only sounds Tara made during our sessions were gurgling noises, like a cat purring over and over with a phlegm ball in its throat. At first, these vibrations felt disconcerting. But after a deeper attunement, I experienced them as a show of relief and gratitude. I was tired after each session and at times needed to ice my forearms and hands from the intensity of the massage work.

With ALS, the musculature becomes almost paralyzed, particularly in the throat and areas affecting breathing, eating, and speaking. Those with this condition slowly begin to drown on their own fluids. In fact, about 50 percent of those diagnosed with ALS die within the first 30 months from respiratory complications.

In the first half of her last year, Tara was still taking nourishment through power smoothies with all kinds of super green foods and protein powders and various supplements to maximize assimilation. I was able to hold the glass and support the straw while she drank these smoothies after our sessions, until the last six months of her illness, when she could no longer take beverages orally and required an IV feeding tube to get nourishment. This tube-feeding program continued for the last six months of her life.

Tara had friends come to visit and assist in her care. They came from all over the world, including Africa and Europe. Tara did not want to tube-feed and prolong the physical pain. She and her husband, Narayan, checked on the possibility of ending her life earlier, but the doctors and ALS Foundation people informed them that the only legal way was to stop eating.

They thought this involved too many complications and challenges, so they decided to let the ALS play itself out to the end.

In the final month of her life, Tara required a caregiver at her side 24 hours a day. She could no longer swallow and someone had to clear the breathing passages of phlegm with a suction device in order to stop her from choking to death. This is a common occurrence in end-stage ALS.

On the last evening of Tara's life, about a dozen chairs were set up around her bed, which was pulled out into the center of the living room of a small home in the Santa Cruz hillside community of Felton. With deep silence and unified breath, a small group of 12 of us gathered around Tara to celebrate her coming transition. We sat together in stillness, contemplating and witnessing the movement toward the Pure

Land of Peace. Some stayed for a few hours, others until her passing, which happened at about 1:30 a.m.

While Tara's body was burning at the crematorium, her spiritual friends sang her into the Celestial Realm over cloud-covered skies. Her husband, Narayan, said, "her soul was palpable until the clouds suddenly parted" and he felt her leave this sphere of existence.

When Tara passed on, many of the Tibetan Buddhist rites were observed, as she felt a special affinity with these teachings. When one is a dedicated Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, a Lama, a spiritual leader, comes in the weeks and months before transition. The Lama visualizes the dying person in a healing space with objects of refuge: the Buddha, Truth teachings and sacred community. They then recite verses related to the attainment of Buddhahood while visualizing the dying person melting into the Light. At the moment of death, the Lama deeply attuned to the moment of transition, when Consciousness leaves the body, guides the dying person through the dissolution of the material elements of form, which leads to the inner radiance of being.

In many cultures, a priest, shaman, or other spiritual or religious people play the part of lama and escort one over the threshold. Many of those offering guidance, however, have not discarded the personality sheath through awakening to their Deathless Nature, therefore, they are not ideally suited to usher souls into the Great Beyond. The dying person needs timeless presence, non-attachment, deep love, and the absence of identification with the phenomenal world. Silence is imperative, emotional outpourings are a detriment, and fear has no place at one's deathbed. In cases where an illumined escort cannot be near at the time of death, it is best to be alone, though sacred music can be of great benefit.

Yet, all is orchestrated by an ordained script of the Almighty and we must surrender to whatever circumstances transpire around our bodily exit.

After her transition, Tara had requested that protocols in the “The American Book of the Dead” (a literal translation of The Tibetan Book of the Dead) be followed. One of the rituals called for someone to stay in her room for 49-days following her transition. At the request of Narayan, my future wife Aleece and I spent three weeks living in her room. Another friend of Tara’s came for the final four weeks.

The Tibetan Buddhists feel that our Consciousness floats free and roams the death bardos after the body passes on. A bardo is a state of existence intermediate between two lives on earth, yet really it is the natural state animating each moment. Interestingly, the Tibetan viewpoint related to *bardo* is not that different from the afterlife belief of *purgatory* in Catholicism, where the soul is believed to be in a temporary transitional state but still needs purification.

According to Tibetan tradition, after death and before our next birth, when our Consciousness is not connected with a physical body, we experience a variety of phenomena. During this 49-day period, traditionally a Lama using a melodious voice, reads the following passage to the one in transition from The Tibetan Book of the Dead: *Now you are dead; you have left your body and entered the bardo of death. You cannot return; do not attempt to go back; go forward. Today such and such will happen. There will be appearances, vivid lights, sounds. Do not fear. They cannot harm you. They are projections of your mind. See them for what they are, and go toward the bright light. Merge with the bright light; it is your enlightened mind.*

In the bardo of becoming, during the transitional period between lifetimes, according to Tibetan Buddhist teachings, one undergoes powerful subtle experiences, and there is an immense potential for liberation. One is floating free in the spacious ether and the mind is in a subtle state and nine times stronger than during regular waking life. If awareness can focus on the Source, they believe, our Eternal Nature can be realized.

The Tibetan Buddhists also feel that although the dead have lost the power to communicate with us to any significant degree, we still have the power to communicate with them. The Tibetan Buddhists believe those in transition can hear us.

Knowing this, Narayan asked Aleece and me to talk to Tara about light and love. After her passing, Narayan said that living those last six months were “really important spiritually for Tara.”

Unbeknownst to me at the time, Tara’s primary caregivers were part of a local spiritual group, known as the Santo Daime, that used the plant spirit medicine, ayahuasca, as a sacramental religious expression. This community of friends had formed a sacred bond and came to offer service to Tara during various phases of the illness over the last year of her life.

Ayahuasca, as the central feature of a Santo Daime religious gathering, is known as the “vine of death” for this elixir is said to open up one’s limited view and help them see their Deathless Nature. It is derived from two Amazonian rainforest herbs, the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* plant, together with a vine, *Banisteriopsis caapi* (called “soul vine” in the Quechua language associated with indigenous people of the Andes). These two plant parts are prepared as a synergistic decoction and said to expand access to the spiritual dimension.

Modern research has shown that the ayahuasca plant constituents create what is known as the Spirit molecule, (DMT). One doctor and researcher, Rick Strassman, a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, said that DMT is linked to the pineal gland, the least understood endocrine gland. This molecule has strong ties to near-death and mystical experiences. The pineal gland is located between the eyebrows and associated with the

ajna chakra or 3rd eye of Indian mysticism which governs intuition and spiritual insight.

One week before her transition, Tara took part in a final gathering with her Santo Daime plant spirit medicine group. While immersed in the ceremony, Narayan introduced the ayahuasca decoction through her feeding tube.

Primordial Words

Whatever may be the thought at death, it determines the later birth of the person. It is necessary to experience reality now in life for it to be experienced at death. See if this moment is different from the last one and be in the natural state.

15

Experiencing the Vine of Death

Twelve years after Tara's transition, I directly experienced the plant spirit medicine ayahuasca. Coming upon an authentic Santo Daime lineage is a matter of Providence and the initial encounter often has a magical or synchronistic quality about it. Mine certainly did after I met Shiloh, an ayurvedic healing practitioner. As warm oil landed between my eyebrows, during what is known as a shirodhara ayurvedic treatment, the membranes in my skull seemed to open in acceptance of this soothing liquid. My nervous system settled while Shiloh gently massaged the oil into my neck and shoulders.

After the session, I noticed an 8-10 framed photograph of a black man, a Brazilian of African ancestry placed prominently on the treatment room shelf. The man exhibited reverential poise. "Surely he is an awakened soul." I mused to myself, before pointing to the photo and asking,

"Who is that man?" Shiloh smiled, with obvious veneration for this mysterious soul, and replied.

"That's Mestre Raimundo Ireneu Serra, the founder of my religion, the Santo Daime, the religion of the forest." Bringing in historical context, she added. "It's a Christian-centered religion that started in Brazil in the 1930s." I'd heard the words Santo Daime once before but knew only that the group used the vomit-inducing psychedelic herbal brew known as ayahuasca.

Three weeks later, Shiloh and I were headed to a Santo Daime ceremony. Though I had not used hallucinogens in 35 years and was not searching for or interested in psychedelic-inducing substances, when invited, I felt drawn to accept.

During the 90 minute drive from Santa Cruz along the Skyline Ridge, Shiloh revealed a few details related to her understanding of the Santo Daime.

“Ayahuasca is our teacher. Daime is a universal religion and open to all. The central teachings are love, the essence of Christianity. We honor truth, harmony and justice.” She then told me that during a solo vision quest in the 1930s, after consuming the leaves and vines that would become known as ayahuasca, Mestre (Master) Ireneu, heard many hymns, called *hinários*¹ in Brazilian Portuguese.

These hymns kept coming to him over the next few decades and he received about 130 of these sacred chants. He claimed they came from the *Queen of the Forest*, who he associated with the *Virgin Mary (Christ's Mother)*.

These visionary interactions with the mother of Jesus Christ led him to the heart of Christianity, which he devotionally conveyed through the *hinários*² (devotional hymns) and *icaros* (prayerful medicinal songs) as well as the use of ayahuasca and other indigenous practices. The essence of the Santo Daime teachings can be summarized as: inner transformation, sacred community, and living a Christ-like existence.

Many people who come to a Santo Daime service are drawn because Western medicine has failed them. They are looking for mental stability or physical health restoration. Some are seeking authentic mystical insight. Others are less sincere, using the plant not for its spirit medicine but in order to bypass emotional pain and trauma, for a new experience, to entertain the mind, or enhance social status.

From the 1960s to 1980s only small niche ayahuasca groups existed in the United States and most of the ceremonies happened in South America. In the 1990s things began to change and more and more ayahuasca ceremonies were taking place in America. Since its use was

1. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hin%C3%A1rios#Portuguese>

2. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hin%C3%A1rios#Portuguese>

illegal, groups were very selective when it came to accepting new members. Eventually, ayahuasca was given grudging acceptance in 2019 when the government lost landmark lawsuits, allowing the Santo Daime churches to use ayahuasca as a religious sacrament and operate free from further DEA harassment. By 2020, it was estimated that about 1.4 million people in the United States had used ayahuasca at least once. By 2025, fueled by increasing fear of sickness and death, the increase was threefold, up to 4 million.

Healing is truly holistic with indigenous spirituality. One's diet, their entire lifestyle, must be in harmony. On the day of the planned evening Santo Daime ceremony, Shiloh and I ate a simple meal of quinoa and collard greens before the service. Shiloh drove us deep into the rural hills. The retreat was situated near the Long Ridge Open Space Preserve on a 200-acre homestead.

A large red barn, adjacent to the main house, was the central feature. It was converted into a temple and used monthly for medicine gatherings. Outside the temple, a few hours before the service, I saw Narayan for the first time in years, as Shiloh was part of the same Santo Daime family.

When the ceremony started, ten foundational members were joined by two new faces, myself and one other man in his late 40s. We gathered in a large circle, with puke buckets by our side but a restroom/toilet area was about 20 yards away from the circle and most everyone did their retching business there.

The purging is meant to be more than a physiological emptying of the stomach. It is a removal of all that does not serve our higher Self, all the latent tendencies in the mind, ancestral traumas, and core-conditioning imprints from family and culture. This allows one to uncover the ruby, our precious heart.

The retreat was led by an authentic Curandero, a native healer or shaman. The true shaman, like an Indian sage, is difficult to find. They

don't advertise, nor do they employ a recruitment team. Earnestness for Truth is the decisive factor in coming upon a real Curandero.

Narayan was the musical facilitator, playing the hymns on guitar as if they came directly from his heart and leading the chants with his deep resonant voice. During the ceremony, devotional expression was at a level that I had never before experienced and everyone joined in, with singing and chanting, and unrelenting praise of God, Jesus Christ, saints, angels, and spiritual beings. The service was enhanced by the sacramental herbs, which though powerful, are not physically addictive.

Only a short while after imbibing the first dose of the plant spirit medicine, visionary and heart-opening experiences intensified. These doses of the medicinal decoctions were separated at about 2 to 3-hour intervals. (Three doses were consumed by all but the two newbies who drank only twice).

In the ceremony I experienced myself as a flowing river. I realized that the entire body structure was mainly a reservoir for conscious energy. My eyes played the part of waterfalls which cascaded down my cheeks on numerous occasions throughout the all night gathering. I was not crying for any sense of loss; these were tears of pure joy and bliss. I experienced a clear and benevolent female energy. In plant spirit medicine parlance, this energy is referred to as "Grandma Ayahuasca." And Grandmother is a good analogy, for my heart expanded beyond its perceived limit. The entire ceremony, for me, felt like an immersion into authentic indigenous life, a spirit family gathered together in a sacred circle.

Each person in the group was honored for who they are. I felt touched by the tribe's sincerity and kindness. Gratitude reverberated throughout the circle, as blissful smiles adorned all faces.

I had none of the intense, shadowy-dark experiences that many people encounter, though at times I dropped into another sphere of

existence, as if the normal worldly overlay or veil was lifted and an omnipresent, all-seeing realm revealed.

The next morning, after just a few hours of sleep, I wandered outside and met the shaman. We had a mostly silent nature walk along a rural road, connecting through the stillness in wordless understanding. I had experienced the natural state free from thought during a transcendent glimpse or spiritual awakening without the need of any substance.

The Curandero seemed to understand this intuitively. He realized that the previous evening's ceremony was to be my only plant spirit medicine journey and regular reminders facilitated through the ayahuasca were unnecessary in my case.

For some people, plant spirit medicines can be a forerunner to authentic spiritual experience. It may enable them to see behind the veil of the ego-centered mind and the realm of thought. Yet, ayahuasca can be an intense entryway. For those that can meet the powerful effects of ayahuasca and are drawn to burn through internal darkness in short fierce bursts, it can be an authentic, though challenging path. After the mind-expanding, heart-opening effects of the medicine wear off, it is easy to fall into the trap that one needs the plant to reach an exalted illumination. The inner shadows of the psycho-emotional body slowly erode for most of us. It takes time and deep diligence and inquiry to become free of conditioned and delusive patterns. There is a fine line between escape and transformation with ayahuasca. Some glorify the herbal elixir into a godlike entity because it induces psychedelic visions. Additional aids like somatic healing or body-centered psychotherapy might be necessary. Even long-time users of ayahuasca, with decades of experience with the medicine, can be caught in spiritual bypass, where trauma and emotional pain are not transformed but only covered up by the mind's visionary experiences.

Becoming psychologically reliant on the medicine is also possible. Psychological dependence happens when the ego usurps the experience

and an unconscious and subtle game begins. The potent effects of the plant medicine make one feel as if they've "found the holy grail" and afterwards the descent into every day states of awareness can be almost depressing, as if "the magic has been lost."

Plant spirit medicines can be powerful stepping stones. True spiritual depth, however, is not about bigger, better, and deeper experiences but to move beyond all experience to the natural state of being that does not come and go. The openness and expansion associated with plant spirit medicines is always within us.

One must also be careful as some ayahuasca gatherings are promoted and advertised by deranged, though charismatic individuals with unresolved trauma and emotional and psychological issues. Many of these types have deep shadows and the medicine is being misused in order to bypass fear, trauma, and pain.

These leaders make the ingestion of ayahuasca into a business; a sacred lineage then turns into a dysfunctional cult. Bizarre and disturbing behaviors are projected on to retreatants, often young women with deep unmet trauma and emotional and psychic wounds. Vulnerable and lost in altered states on the plant medicine, participants at these reclusive ceremonies give their power away through a misguided sense of loyalty. Many cases of sexual abuse have been reported.

Ayahuasca is a strong herbal psychedelic and can be profoundly transformative, both to harm and to heal. This plant spirit medicine may be too unpredictable for many people. Yet, new scientific evidence suggests that ayahuasca can open and stimulate key receptor sites and activate deadened areas in the brain. At times, people ingesting the medicine have been able to get in touch with repressed emotions, reframe trauma, and heal from PTSD and depression. Many sacramental users have testified that ayahuasca ceremonies have been

instrumental in helping them see and remove what might be inhibiting full vitality and ease.

One man riddled with late-stage cancer shared his experience after participating in several Santo Daime ceremonies.

“I was completely unprepared for death at age 41. After four sessions, I had this inner knowing that my fear of dying had gone. Well, not gone, but it made me look forward to death...” Though it is difficult to say if the ayahuasca facilitated the change or if it was the community gathered in deep devotion and surrendered to a Higher Power that was the significant factor.

Many plant spirit medicines have been researched as potential aids in palliative end-of-life care, such as: Peyote Cactus. Yet, no matter how much the researchers and scientists’ study and discover, like the endocannabinoid system of the cannabis plant which regulates homeostasis, the amazing internal synergy of each plant’s deepest powers can only be known through direct experience. We must become like the shaman and merge with the plant spirit intelligence.

Besides the cannabis plant, the most well-studied and safest psychedelic-inducing plant medicine for the dying is psilocybin, the famous “magic mushroom”.

Millions of people are looking for ways to deal with stress, anxiety, depression or other mental health issues. According to a 2025 Rand Survey, psilocybin mushrooms were the most used psychedelic substance from 2020-2025, with over 11 million people in the United States taking them annually.

In the last few years the use of psilocybin as a sacrament began with “Mushroom Churches” in both San Francisco and Santa Cruz under the name, Rising Phoenix Entheogenic Temple. These are really not churches, in the normal sense of the word, but magic mushroom dispensaries offering 40 different psilocybin varieties from around the world with wild-sounding strain names.

Another mushroom church using psilocybin as a sacrament in Santa Cruz is, Holy Trinity of Divine, which offers more community support and is closer to an authentic church and “believes in God, the one creator of heaven and earth...and that when our body’s time expires, our essence will be united with God in everlasting life.”

Primordial Words

“No matter how long your journey appears to be, there is never more than this: one step, one breath, one moment. Now.”

16

Psilocybin Therapy for the Dying

For thousands of years indigenous peoples from all over the world have used plants for healing. The native cultures, especially their shamans, discovered that all life is a harmonious expression of the One. Plants carry their own unique vibrations and those who approach them with gratitude and humility can awaken to the interconnectedness of all living things. In this modern age, many people are finding that wilderness areas and indigenous practices can help us reconnect and remember the ever-present Divine Reality.

In the last decades, research has taken place in regards to plant-based psychedelic therapy for the dying (and for many other chronic and debilitating conditions). Just as opiates and other drugs relieve physical pain and are available to those that are nearing bodily transition, less socially accepted herbs and plants can be of great value for the existential fear of death.

Pharmaceutical drugs numb or suppress symptoms and feelings, and create a short-term blockage of pain and do not address the underlying causative elements. These drugs also propel an addictive reliance, as well as further imbalances from side effects to the physiology of the body and mind. This necessitates the need for more and more chemical medications. Getting off or completely stopping many pharmaceutical medications requires great care and severe complications can occur. To continue their cultural control and dominance, pharmaceutical companies, through government coercion, have associated plant spirit medicines with insanity and violence. Many psychedelic-inducing plant spirit medicines are banned not because they have no value, but because drug companies are unable to patent them. These plants, herbs and other naturally-derived substances

interfere with the money supply chain of large multinational pharmaceutical companies.

Plant medicines do not need to be psychedelic, or produce visionary and heart-expanding experiences in order to heal, nor is long term administration necessary. These substances can be taken just once or as needed for immediate improvement in one's level of well-being, whether it be for spiritual, physical, mental or emotional support. Also, when used with wisdom, there is little chance of serious side effects.

Like the vine and leaves that beautifully synergize in ayahuasca, while this chapter was in the revisioning process, I began taking *Artemisia Absinthe*, a New Zealand grown variety of artemisia also called wormwood. This plant has links to ancient Egypt (back to 1500 BCE).

It is one of the most bitter herbs found in nature, with volatile oils that I harmonized with Licorice root. Wormwood when mixed with licorice rebalanced my body's physiological processes. I then used *Artemisia Annua*, a distant cousin species. Together, in small doses, these Wormwood plants addressed not just lyme disease symptoms but underlying parasitic infections and helped minimize symptoms of brain fog and intestinal distress, while increasing vitality and lessening the toxic load from microscopic free-loaders.

There are many plant spirit medicines that are considered dangerous and recreational by the mainstream establishments. Recreational use in order to get high or escape uncomfortable feelings should be avoided. To properly modulate dosing and have support, one needs to work with an authentic shaman, expert herbalist with years of experience with the specific plant spirit medicine, or via medically-assisted psychotherapy. One should not use the medicine alone unless very experienced and in a natural setting.

According to Stanislav Grof and Roshi Joan Halifax, in the *Human Encounter with Death* (1977),

"...the first suggestion that psychedelic substances could be useful in the therapy of individuals dying of incurable diseases came from pediatrician Valentina Pavlovna Wasson...in June 1955 (after years studying ethnomycology, for potential fungal medicine use) she and her husband Gordon Wasson became the first Westerners to be admitted to a sacred ritual conducted by the Mazatec Curandera (medicine woman or shaman) Maria Sabina.

The Wassons were deeply impressed by the powerful effect of psilocybin mushrooms that they ingested at the ceremony...seeing the potential medical uses (of it) for alcoholism, narcotic addiction, mental disorders and terminal diseases associated with severe pain."

Psilocybin mushrooms contain a psychoactive substance that has been used for thousands of years to heal and connect with higher vibrational states.

As End-of-Life Care Washington State reported,

"Numerous well-controlled, peer-reviewed clinical studies have demonstrated that psilocybin, taken under controlled conditions regarding dosage, setting, and professional guidance, produced significant and enduring positive effects.

In addition to reducing anxiety and depression, it also improves death acceptance, life meaning, and optimism, as measured by several valid and reliable tests completed by study subjects... psilocybin acts on serotonin brain receptors, resulting in changes of perception, cognition, and emotion."

Psilocybin imbibers claim that due to the mushrooms, they have healed from early life trauma and fear of death, both common experiences in psilocybin therapy.

Research indicates that our fear of death activates a region in the brain known as the anterior cingulate cortex, and psilocybin seems to shut down this area of the brain so it no longer sends out erroneous and stressful misinformation. One terminal cancer patient said, after ingesting psilocybin,

“I felt this lump of emotions welling up...almost like an entity. Everything was concentrated and came welling up and then it started to dissipate, and I started to look at it differently...I began to realize that all of this negative fear and guilt was such a hindrance to making the most of and enjoying the healthy time that I’m having.”

Using psychedelics during the dying process is not for everyone but its use should be available to those who are drawn to it. These substances can help the dying feel deeper peace while undergoing the body dissolution process. Of course, being at peace does not require medicine of any kind but for some people psilocybin offers a window into non-ordinary states of Consciousness and may help foster more relational closeness, gratitude, sharing, and love.

Primordial Words

Somewhere along the way, we lost the experience of unity. We live our lives propping up the lie that we are different from everything else...but the same awareness shines in the heart of all things.

17

True Yoga, a Poem

Basking in awareness, it's all so clear,
the bliss of being, no room for fear.
Separation brings I, me, and mine.
In the movement called ego, that's just fine.
Yet when the mind drops into the heart,
what we are emerges as real art.
In this world of creation, filled with change,
feel the river of peace always in range.
In truth, we find yoga already there,
no search, no searcher—just God everywhere.

18

The Professor

I was hired to be a personal assistant for Noel, an 85-year-old ordained minister and retired professor of history and religious studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Our meeting coincided during a brief period when I felt the possibility of sidestepping my end-of-life caregiving destiny.

After just two months, however, the personal assistant job with the professor had another role affixed, that of end-of-life caregiver, when he was diagnosed with stage-three metastatic stomach cancer. Given a prognosis of six months to live, Noel underwent surgery to remove a substantial portion of his stomach and this stalled the cancerous growth. Hospice began for a few months but was discontinued when Noel recovered to some degree.

Despite his movement away from active dying, Noel needed extra support, and I stayed on as full-time helper. This allowed his wife, Laurie, to write daily, as she was an Edgar Award-winning author of historical fiction crime novels.

Noel was an Anglo-Indian raised in North India. He was born just before Christmas in

1922; thus, he was given the name Noel. His father was a British engineer working on the last phase of the Indo-European Telegraph Line. Noel grew up in affluence, with Indian servants attending to his needs, and was sent off to private boarding schools for a high-class education.

When I started with Noel, I had been working in the field of death and dying for almost five years at that point. Working with Noel, however, was different from the other caregiving I had done. The

professor and I developed a deep bond. Part wizard and part friend, he was also a true soul grandfather to me.

Noel expressed himself very articulately, but even more importantly, he really knew how to listen. He understood the power of silence and relished stillness in nature and conversation. He had a brilliant mind and was comfortable with the unknown. We laughed often. It was a time of heartfelt sharing. This kind of profound attachment had not occurred with any of the other people for whom I had done caregiving.

During the three years I spent assisting Noel, he inspired and supported my forays into the writing world. The professor spoke from a bottomless reservoir of wisdom, choosing his words, after reflection, with the skill of an expert craftsman. He leveled new words on me all the time.

During our first week together, in a letter I was dictating, he referred to me as his “amanuensis.” When I asked him what the word meant, he smiled wryly and replied,

“Assistant.”

Something about the energy in his look motivated me to check the word’s meaning later in the evening. When I saw him the next day, simulating his formal English manner of speaking, I added,

“So, sir, I looked up the word amanuensis, and do you know what it said? ‘A slave

with secretarial duties.’ Is that what you think of me?”

The professor did not miss a beat, and while feigning indignation, he glanced back at me from underneath his spectacles and replied,

“It is a good thing you did not find an archaic dictionary.” He paused for dramatic effect and then said, “It could have said ‘a castrated scribe’!” I began to chuckle and he smiled with an irreverent grin before we both burst into laughter.

In his final two years, a constant revolving door of students, friends and colleagues came to visit him from all over the world. Then, in the fall of 2008, after nearly three years of bonding and caregiving, the final months of bodily decline were upon the professor.

I sat on the edge of his bed, while he wheezed in a futile attempt to get enough air. It was a scorching Indian summer day, in late October, with temperatures in the high 90s, but the professor sat before me shivering.

“Sir, please put something on. You’re making me cold,” he said.

I was wearing shorts and a T-shirt, perfect attire, considering the inferno outside, and yet I found myself replying,

“All right, sir.” I loved mirroring his endearing formal English manner of speaking. I reached into his drawer and pulled out a prized “Wooly” as he called them. The Wooly is a simple sweater vest that Noel slid over his button-down long-sleeve shirts. He was still freezing even with a winter jacket over it. I put the Wooly on. I have helped Noel put his Wooly’s on for three years but had not yet had the privilege of wearing one myself. It was a fine red wooly and made me look quite dashing.

The professor dreaded showers or at least feigned fright. As he was about to get into the shower, I would prepare to turn on the faucet. Many times, right before I turned on the water, he would shout,

“Sir, don’t turn on the water yet!” He would point into the bottom of the bathtub. Invariably, a spider would be there. I would be instructed to gently and carefully escort “our friend” outside.

Although evangelical Catholicism, where the priest can marry and the Pope is not recognized as a higher spiritual authority, was his primary religious expression, Noel had a little Tibetan Buddhism in him as well. In fact, after so many years teaching the religious studies program he created at the university, a unique spiritual perspective had bloomed within him.

It is hard to imagine that so much enthusiasm can be experienced while combing an old man's hair. The simple act of combing that wizardly gray mane was a delight to me. I felt like Picasso creating a masterpiece. The great thing about it was that the work of art was already finished, the professor being the masterpiece. Still, every movement of the brush was a joy and wonder, every glide and stroke savored.

Later in the day, we sat on a bench, side by side, under a large oak tree, overlooking Monterey Bay. We shared much under that tree in his last years, experiencing the majestic views, a King snake battling a rattler, a bobcat sauntering through, as well as sunshine, rain, wind, and even a hail storm. I saw Noel as an old oak tree, too. I appreciated our hearty vibrant talks under this tree. I also enjoyed sitting next to my beloved friend during the long periods of silence spent under those branches and leaves...

The professor knew how to be still, and then, as he neared the great transition, it was a deeper basking, a deeper falling into the silence. And like a whirlpool, proximity had its benefits, as I got sucked into the emptiness as well. We dread disappearing, fight it, and futilely attempt to control the inevitable, but really it is our deepest longing to surrender to freedom, to be beyond pleasure and pain. Life was taking us there now, the professor and me, and it was a wake-up call to be more present and to live life, which is so fleeting, to the fullest.

When silence worked its magic in those last months with Noel, I realized that joy abides inside like an undiscovered wellspring. Obsessive thinking, such as *if I only think this through enough it will manifest*, was seen as a ridiculous myth. It was based on the belief that a so-called favorable outcome will arise simply because I willed it so with thought.

When silence met sincere inquiry or investigation into reality, I was able to see that pleasure and pain were always dancing back and forth

in awareness, but they had nothing really to do with ‘me’, as a separate personality, for what I really am is boundless and timeless.

Noel was beginning to take pain medication as Thanksgiving approached. The doctors prescribed Oxycontin, a time-released formula from the analgesic Oxycodone, derived from the opiate family. Developed in Germany in 1916, Oxycontin is potent and popular and at one time the most prescribed, or overprescribed, pain medication on the market. It is known on the street as “hillbilly heroin” or “kicker” for its ability to create what users call “blissful apathy.” And Noel did not like it for that very reason. Oxycontin, as with most drugs used for pleasure and pain, is a check-out substance. A lot of people use it in an attempt to disconnect from the pain caused by the mind. This drug is intended and also used for physical pain and is still being prescribed but in the last decade, the synthetic-opioid Fentanyl which is 50-100 times stronger than morphine has taken its place. Originally, medical grade, unadulterated Fentanyl, was designed as an end-of-life medicine for late-stage cancers. Now synthetic Fentanyl is laced with all kinds of toxins like the malaria drug quinine, the pain killer lidocaine as well as caffeine and many other drugs and is involved in about half of all opiate-related deaths (50,000 annually), most due to overdose.

The professor made cancer and death amusing, if you can believe that. The wisdom he extracted from life, that splendid ability to see the truth, he freely shared. He did not suffer from cancer; pain he knew, but suffering was a rarity. He did not buy into the suffering game and did not complain very often. He would not give energy to stories about the pain he experienced. He did not put his attention on the pain. Pain needs a story in the mind to create suffering. In bare nakedness with no identifier, pain does not give rise to suffering.

This did not mean physical challenges did not take place. Noel would often quip, with a slight grimace, that his “half stomach” was giving him difficulties, or he would say, after four cups of strong black

tea had failed to unblock his intestines from several days of constipation and associated pain,

“Sir, I think it’s time for the coffee...”

Primordial Words

Everyone has to die, so die as your True Nature. Why die as a body? Never forget your True Nature. If you must have an ambition, have the highest, so that at least while dying, you will be aligned with the Absolute. Decide this now firmly with certainty and conviction.

19

Noel Returns Home

At 7:00 a.m., one late November morning, I ascended the driveway to Noel's abode. Hopping out of the car, I walked briskly to the front door. Gently twisting the doorknob, I glanced down a hallway to the right. The professor's bedroom door, slightly ajar, exposed his bare knee to my line of sight. Noel was sitting on the edge of his bed, dressed in nothing but an old T-shirt. With his wispy beard, he looked like a wizard.

Upon my appearance at the bedroom doorway, his hands came together, clapping with glee. I looked into his soft eyes. Though deeply tired, they exuded a luminous sparkle. I moved toward him with a smile. A single tear hovered on the inner edge of my right eye as I sat down on the bed next to him. Draping my arm around his shoulder, I quipped,

"I've never been given a sitting ovation before, sir." Noel, in his endearing and unique way, showed his immense gratitude. All I had to do was show up.

The professor could just as easily spring into song or utter timeless words from a Shakespearean play. I loved the aliveness of this old man's soul, which was not in the least bit dampened by his bodily decline.

As Noel approached the final phase of his illness, I left on a caregiving break to Thailand. It was an attempt to escape his final days. I was beginning to fall apart from being his full-time caregiver for three years with no significant breaks. The entire time I was in Thailand, however, Noel was never far from my thoughts.

While in Thailand, I came down with a shingles infection that brought with it a humbling fatigue. A year later, a holistic practitioner diagnosed Lyme disease. The professor's death and the escalation of

my own chronic illness certainly took their toll on me but beyond the physical aspects of the health disorder, I had to confront death and dying directly and look deeply into the “I am the body” idea. Old repressed and unhealthy conditioning patterns, long hidden from Consciousness, were beginning to surface from within me. They were out of my control and scared the crap out of me.

In a certain way, over the first five years working as an end-of-life caregiver, I had been able to separate myself from it. There was always a subtle movement to distance myself from and create separation: It was those poor dying people and then there was me.

It was in the beginning phase of a great death of sorts, ineffectual thoughts and behaviors started to pour out of me. Purity was being uncovered, as well, but I couldn’t see that truth for several years.

In leaving for Thailand before his passing, I told myself, ‘you are emotionally spent and this is time for his family to step in and have a chance for more intimacy’, but this was only partially true. An unhealthy attachment had grown out of a conditioned tendency from youth. I took on some of Noel’s unprocessed emotional energy while failing to care for my own deeper needs. Noel died while I was in Thailand and I realized that in missing his transition, I would lose a valuable gift and my heart longed to be by his side.

In the year that followed, I collapsed into a life-altering chronic illness. It was an

obliteration of ego tendencies and conditioned patterns. I could not avoid the ego death, for it came to eliminate many ideas and beliefs while shaking my body to its core.

I first attempted to fix the appearances, the symptoms of the illness, with herbal compounds, holistic treatments, homeopathic remedies, any natural method I could find. But eventually I surrendered to the inevitable collapse.

Speaking of the authentic spiritual journey and how it at times affects the bodily frame, the great Hindu Saint, Ramakrishna, once said while visiting a dying devotee,

“Why is it that you are ill? There is a reason for it...Do you know what actually happens when a house is on fire? At first, a few things inside burn, then the great commotion comes. Just so, the fire of Knowledge at first destroys such enemies of spiritual life as passion, anger, and so forth. Then it is time for the ego to burn. And lastly a violent commotion is seen in the physical frame. You may think that everything is going to be over. But God will not release you as long as the slightest trace of your illness is left.”

When a gravely ill spiritual aspirant approached her for healing, the well-known

contemporary Saint Amma said, “I do not think a doctor can find a cause for this sickness. It is coming from God to make you go higher in the spiritual life...”

In truth, all bodies are dying. As many as 6,300 human bodies on earth cease to function every hour, 105 every minute. It is well known that 10 billion cells in the human body are dying each day. All bodies are dying, every moment, every day.

The more we are able to rest as awareness, the Witnessing Consciousness, instead of a particular body form, the more effortlessly life unfolds and flows.

Primordial Words

He who yearns for God will find Him, and for the man who has found Him, death dies. Ever try and spend all 24 hours in the contemplation and remembrance of the Supreme Being. Be intent on the realization of your own Self.

20

With Dramatic Flair

Muriel was my adopted Jewish grandmother. At four-feet-eleven, she was short and plump and loaded with fire. As they say, she had chutzpah. Growing up on the Lower East Side of New York, she had undergone some challenging early experiences. At 18, Muriel was raped at knife point. A few months later, the events at Pearl Harbor sent her boyfriend to war. He was never the same again.

Some years later, Muriel married. She was an angry divorcee of 30-plus years by the time we met. Muriel had never forgiven her husband and regularly injected venom upon his ghost, for he had passed away a decade earlier.

I first met Muriel when she came to the acupuncture clinic where I practiced. Through touch, both with massage and acupuncture, I was able to win her trust and see underneath her defenses, right into her shining heart. I witnessed her fury, pain, sadness, brilliance, and spunk. In the final five years of her life, I saw her nearly once a week for hands-on healing and companionship.

One day, about four months before her passing, I walked to Muriel's door and entered the house, for she always left the door open for me.

"Muriel. I'm here....," I called out.

"I'm in the bedroom, Michael." I walked to the doorway. She was sitting on the bed.

"Why won't they come and take care of me?" she wailed. "I'm their mother! They're grown men in their sixties—what's wrong with them?" The tears of a small child slid down her face. I put my hand on the side of her head, caressing around her ear, and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Then my hand slid down to her neck and shoulder, finally ending up

nuzzled against the back of her heart. Muriel slowly lowered down into a horizontal position. I kept my hand underneath her heart, as she settled back on the pillow. She began,

“Michael, if you could cover me with that blanket...”

“Sure.” Then it happened, a vintage Muriel joke.

“These two old farts were sitting around at the rest home—you know, they’ve known

each other for a few years,” she said. “‘I have a perfect idea,’ he says. ‘What is it?’ she asks. ‘Let’s go up to your room and have sex,’ he says. ‘Yes, okay, my dear.’

So, they took their wheelchairs and went into the elevator and over to her room, where she starts to disrobe and says, ‘Before you start, I have to tell you I have acute angina.’ He says, ‘Well thanks for telling me, because your tits are a great, great disappointment.’”

Then Muriel looked up at me and said,

“Ha. Ha. Funny, huh?”

“Funny,” I said with a chuckle.

Before our healing session moved into silence, Muriel said,

“Michael, I have been listening to these Buddhist tapes (mostly Pema Chodron and Sylvia Boorstein) for months now, every day for an hour or more, and it seems to me that the essence of it all is letting go of everything.”

“Yes, that’s it,” I said enthusiastically. Muriel’s voice then turned solemn.

“I am getting close, Michael. I am saying yes to the big let-go. Michael, people want to come and see me and talk. I don’t want to see people right now.”

“Of course, totally natural,” I replied.

“What is there to say anyway?” she said.

“That’s right, there’s nothing to say.”

“I am losing my eyesight and hearing. It doesn’t seem to matter. And I don’t have great tits anymore. And that doesn’t seem to matter, either.”

“Yes, that’s right, it doesn’t matter,” I said, smiling and reaching over to caress her forehead.

Primordial Words

God alone is real and all else is unreal. Men, the universe, house, and children—all these are like the magic of the Magician. Water ebbs and flows, and its bubbles appear and disappear. They disappear into the very water from which they arise.

21

Caregiver Break: Bristlecone Pines

During Muriel's final three months, her son, Billy arrived. After visiting with his mother for a few days, distress from the intensity of being around her reached a zenith. Feeling overwhelmed by her incessant needs and a caregiving role he was not up for, Billy asked me if I would take him into the wilderness, and I readily agreed.

We decided to head for the White Mountains. They have a forest of Bristlecone Pines said to be the oldest trees on earth. A spontaneous long-weekend adventure was set in motion. We ascended toward the Eastern Sierra, with a stop to camp in the Palisades region. We made the eight-hour drive, heading east from the beaches of Santa Cruz through Yosemite National Park and then southward down highway 395. We set up camp at Upper Sage Flat, a rustic forest service campground, which topped out at 7,400 feet. It was late September, the early days of autumn. A light dusting (a few centimeters) of snow occurred overnight.

After dropping back down several thousand feet to highway 395 which borders the Eastern Sierra range, we headed north for an hour. Ascending a paved forest road in the Inyo National Park, we climbed over 5,000 feet to the 9,843-foot elevation. A high desert landscape unfolded before us.

When we arrived at the White Mountain Visitor Center at Schulman Grove, I was

overcome by the silence all around me. The Bristlecone Pines were like magnificent natural sculptures twisted by intense winds for thousands of years.

I told Billy that I was going to be in silence while we were there. I walked alone into a separate part of the forest. The silence kept

deepening. Something profound, beyond words, thoughts, and feelings, took over. I was in abeyance to that. It was as if the slate had been wiped clean. I was enclosed in a blissful transcendent bubble.

The sparse forest of trees looked ethereal and yet familiar. They appeared as a windswept prairie of angels, who embodied sanctity, watching over mankind and the earth for thousands of years.

Billy found me near one of the pines, as I wandered back closer to the parking lot. I stood, staring in awe at a tree that dated back to the time before Christ, before Buddha, when humanity was operating through a higher level of Planetary Awareness. The Pyramids of Giza were being built when this amazing force called a Bristlecone Pine first sprang into form.

As we drove away, silence had taken up all the receptacles in my brain. I was unable to speak. The silence began to penetrate Billy too; he talked less, and basked more.

The space grew, a communion without words, a power far exceeding the chatter and banter of normal speech, for silence is the eternal expression. That inner hush has an eloquence that transmits a timeless language.

Primordial Words

Thought appears in silence and vanishes in silence. Something that appears in something and vanishes in something is none other than this something. Likewise, what you believe yourself to be also appears and vanishes in silence. What you understand by death is really nothing other than a pointer to silence, to Life Itself.

22

Muriel Finds Peace

It was 5:08 a.m. I was in a light sleep when the phone rang two months before Muriel's passing. In those days I did not turn off my cell at night. Coming into wakefulness, before the first rays of early-morning light, I knew only one person would call me at that time: Muriel. She was famous for making early-morning calls. No call was too early. I must say I miss those calls, and I will always treasure those messages.

It is amusing to wait and...wait until the tape runs out, as Muriel always goes until the tape runs out, usually ending mid-sentence. On that morning, I lay in bed listening, with a silly grin on my face, until the telltale beep, beep, beep arrived, indicating she was done (but not really). I loved listening to the voice and energy of one of the truly unique humans I've ever known.

"Michael, it's Muriel." That's how she starts every message, like she needed an introduction. And as with all great orators, the first sentence hook-line pulls you into the present moment. "Michael, this morning about 3 o'clock my father came to me in a dream, and he took me from this place for a walk into a big park, where we met this beautiful young woman who must be a combination of all the women who have been so devoted and caring to this bitchy, unhappy, unrelenting monster of a woman [referring to herself]. And my father and I walked through this park, which was a total healing. I'm not shaking. I still have dry mouth, but that's because of what is happening physiologically. Michael, I can't believe it. This is the work of the Buddha, you, the devotion of all these women when I am bitchy and nasty. It's all gone. My memory has been wiped out, the thing that I relied upon, that God provided me with..."

At 5:28 a.m., another call, just as I was fading back into a restful slumber. This time I

laughed out loud.

“Michael, Muriel. This is message number two calling you this morning. I’m just

knocked out from the joy, and, um, it occurs to me that I probably could use your help any time that we could work out today, whatever you can do to help me. I am riding on a crest of a wave and don’t want to crash, but it’s amazing, totally amazing. I love you. God bless you.”

During those last months of her life, Muriel had been doing the nursing home circuit,

staying as long as Medicare would pay and then returning to her apartment for a few weeks before departing again for the next facility. She was not suffering from a labeled disease but undergoing a complex array of symptoms affecting various body systems. In entering the nursing home tour, Muriel was attempting to get emotional help, for she really wanted daily nurturing and to be cared for full-time by her sons, one in Florida, the other in Maine, but they didn’t think they could handle it.

Since the pandemic in 2020, hundreds of thousands of small business and individual entrepreneurs have gone out of business or been forced to join agencies in order to find work and support themselves. In the last six years, senior and end-of-life caregivers undertaking the important and challenging work of personal care (dressing, toileting, showering), and once paid a fair wage as independent contractors, must align with agencies that pay them near-minimum wage.

Large business enterprises now control the health and social assistance sector. These big agencies take in two to three times as much income as the caregivers who must, at times, deal with incapacitated,

belligerent and cognitively-challenged clients often incapable of supporting their own weight.

Over 30 million Americans were cared for (unpaid) by a family member or friend in 2019, but by 2025 it was 40 million. The national average for supplemental and temporary In-Home health care in 2018 was \$4,000 per month but in 2025, it is closer to \$5,000, way out of range for most American families. If you need 24-hour care, (critical for those wishing to die at home), it is \$10,000-\$20,000 per month depending upon which state you live in.

A large percentage of families, those unable to afford the out-of-pocket expenditures, must utilize insurance coverage which the large agencies offer and most independent caregivers cannot provide. The clients seeking caregivers must pay the agencies twice as much. Yet many feel forced to use an agency because they cannot afford out of pocket expenses and must rely on insurance. The agencies also do background checks, increasing a sense of safety and security. Media campaigns designed to perpetuate fear and destroy small businesses, along with focus on sickness and death, are the primary forces of detrimental change not just in the caregiving sector but American society in general.

Muriel did not truly need the services of the nursing homes. These assisted-living and skilled nursing facilities take in about two million people in more than 60,000 locations in the United States. More than half of all Americans will spend some time in a nursing home, and more than 75 percent will die there if they spend more than two weeks.

After one has entered a skilled nursing facility, their mortality rate is 50 percent during their first year. Fortunately for Muriel, her care was short-term, only a week or two at a time, or a month at most. The quality and level of these establishments vary considerably. When one is on Medicare, like Muriel, usually they must accept whatever facility Medicare assigns.

One day, during those final months, Muriel was in one of these “manors” above Capitola Village, just south of Santa Cruz. Muriel was on the pot when I knocked. She thought I was a worker and exclaimed, “I have poisonous diarrhea!”

I didn’t exactly need those words to realize this grand truth. It was so foul that I told her I needed to use the restroom down the hall and would be right back. I then circumnavigated the inner sanctum of this assisted-living manor, where the other “inmates,” as Muriel called them, dwelled. I listened to their incessant moans, screams, and “Please help me” cries, viewing them through their open doors, as I walked past. I witnessed the near comatose, the drooling, and the pleading elders, desperate souls left in a dastardly place. It was an intense 10-minute stroll, while Muriel’s room wafted clear.

The workforce at this place had its hands full. The housekeeper, a 30ish young Hispanic woman I spoke to for a few minutes, cleaned 48 rooms every day for nine dollars an hour, just over minimum wage at the time. It took her a full eight hours, which was six rooms per hour, for a whopping 72 dollars a day before taxes.

When I arrived back at Muriel’s room, she was still in the bathroom, perched on the

porcelain pot, which is where the entire 90 minutes of my visit transpired. I played volunteer, uncertified nurse’s assistant. Muriel managed to push the emergency button anyway and began issuing orders before orderlies even arrived.

“What is all of this? Why am I still here? Where is that noise coming from? Do this,

don’t do that, put that here, put that there...” I could barely understand her, for she was speaking without her dentures.

“Muriel,” I said, smiling, “you’re just bumping gums. I’m the only one here.” She looked at me with a shrug of the shoulders.

Just then, a Hispanic aide walked in the room. Peeking into the bathroom, she saw me crouched dangerously close to the action.

“Muriel, es su pill?” the Hispanic aide said. (It was her Desiten for diaper rash.)

Muriel started to complain about it being too early, but I said,

“Muriel, just take it, an hour early is no big deal.”

Then Muriel responded,

“Michael, do you speak Spanish? I hardly remember it, though I studied it back in the thirties.”

“I remember only a bit from high school, like muy pico,” I replied. The aide corrected me.

“It’s poquito,” she said with a smile. Then I said to the aid,

“Muriel es trabaja en la bano?” (“Muriel is working in the bathroom?”) The aide laughed. “That’s the extent of my Spanish,” I said. Just then Muriel farted.

“Is that all you have to say, Muriel?” I said in a deadpan voice. We all laughed.

As I was leaving, Muriel gave me a sendoff:

“Tell Peter [her son] that when I die, which could be tonight, I hope you will all gather and remember how much I love you.” She said this sweetly and then added, “And remember to call that number I gave you to complain about this place.”

A few months before Muriel’s transition, she had me pick up cannabis medicine from WAMM (Wo/Men’s Alliance for Medical Marijuana), a pioneering Santa Cruz cannabis collective. The cannabis medicine took the edge off Muriel’s anxiety and emotional pain and eased the depression and agitation, allowing her to relax a bit more into the dying process. For 3-decades WAMM cultivated their own cannabis and offered it to those near the end of life or for people with chronic illnesses like AIDS and cancer. To those on the edge of poverty and in need, the medicine was given freely or at a highly discounted rate. WAMM staff would often hold vigil and sit with the dying. (WAMM went defunct for about 6 years, upon the legalization of marijuana in California but reopened in the Fall of 2025).

Over the last few years, small amounts of morphine, mixed with medical-grade cannabis oil, has become the cutting edge in end-of-life care management. Cannabis medicine, when used with morphine, increases its pain-relieving properties, while minimizing the side effects of the opiate medication, for the brain does not have many cannabinoid receptors that relate to metabolism and breathing. This allows one to use smaller amounts of morphine and create a safer and more powerful pain-relieving agent.

Cannabis oil can also be used alone as a substitute for morphine. The psycho-active effects of the THC can be modulated and reduced by using it along with CBD oil or tincture. Strong anecdotal evidence suggests that medical cannabis oil using Indica strains, even in small doses, sedates (calms) and reduces inflammation and eliminates agitation, anxiety, depression, and pain.

In the last decade, hospice has been considering use of medical cannabis in some states. So far, the deeply entrenched opiate supply chain and pharmaceutical industry politics has kept cannabis medicine out of end-of-life care.

A few days before Muriel passed, we had our last conversation. We were sitting on her bed together, at her apartment, holding hands. A great panic arose within her.

"I am so afraid. Don't leave me," she said, as she trembled and shook all over.

"Muriel, I'm right here," I replied, touching her softly, sliding my fingertips delicately over the back of her shirt and down her spine. "What are you afraid of?" I asked as I leaned forward to look into her eyes.

"I'm afraid of death."

"Where is the fear?" I probed. A silence descended that lasted a couple of minutes. Muriel was searching, in order to find the fear. We just sat there holding hands. I thought Muriel had forgotten the question.

Suddenly, she looked at me, a soul force emanating from behind her eyes, and said,

“I can’t find the fear.” I smiled and said,

“That’s right, because it isn’t there—it’s only in your imagination. Now is the time to practice your *metta* (a Buddhist-oriented loving-kindness meditation she liked to do) as much as possible,” I said.

The next morning, she began acting strangely, while talking to her son, Billy, who had called from Florida. He panicked and had a neighbor call 911. They came and took Muriel to emergency. The next day, she slipped into a coma. She died in her hospital room a few days later.

The day before she passed on, I visited her for the last time. Knowing that one’s hearing is the last to go, I stood next to the hospital bed with my hand over her heart and said, “I love you, Muriel.”

Primordial Words

The journey we call death is one that everyone, without exception, has to undertake. On the level of the Self, you are one with your deceased friends and family. In this world, happiness alternates with sorrow. Bear in mind that as the Self your friends and family members are with you, within you. This is the truth, not fanciful thinking. Birth and death happen in fulfillment of the Divine Will.

23

Love Dancing, a Poem

A simple light shines inside of me.
Can we help each other to be free?
Just feel love dancing with itself.
Our eyes meet in transcendent space.
Do you feel our sacred embrace?
Just feel love dancing with itself,
for we emanate from a subtle light.
Let's share the journey toward divine sight.
Just feel love dancing with itself,
ending tomorrow and yesterday,
blissfully present for this earth stay.
Just feel love dancing with itself.
We are the shine that spreads ever new,
where precious hearts become one, not two.
Just feel love dancing with itself.

24

A Taste of Hemlock

Muriel, a few weeks before her passing, handed me a piece of paper with only a phone number on it.

“Just call Jack,” she said with an eyebrow flash.

The next day, on a warm early spring afternoon, I arrived at Garfield Park Village, a senior community, on Bay Street on the Westside of Santa Cruz. I came to the sliding glass back door, the entrance I would always use.

Peering through the glass, I noticed an elderly man in a reclining chair, eyes closed in contemplation. I knocked against the sliding glass door. Jack, who was just about to turn 89, nimbly sprang up from his chair and greeted me with a hug. With strong hands still gripping the sides of my upper arms, he smiled deeply and looked into my eyes.

The first thing I noticed inside Jack’s apartment was a five-by-seven index card tacked to the wall opposite his recliner chair, which said:

Do not meditate—be!

Do not think that you are—be!

Don’t think about being—you are!

I recognized the quote as coming from Ramana Maharshi, the famous Indian sage who emphasized inner investigation or self-inquiry as a means to freedom, and showed that all is one Consciousness. Pointing to the wall, I exclaimed,

“Ramana!”

Hearing that, Jack’s face lit up. As it turned out, in the last decades of his life Jack had discovered the great sage through Vedanta, an Indian philosophical and spiritual system that states that the individual self and the Cosmic Self are different manifestations of the one Consciousness, called Brahman or Atman in Indian mysticism.

Soon we were enthusiastically discussing the Indian sage. I had visited Ramana's ashram at the foot of a holy hill called Arunachala in Tiruvanamalai, India, in 1996. Although his body had passed on in 1950, the grounds still exuded a profound peace.

Known as "the Silent Sage" for his unique ability to transmit the highest spiritual

knowledge with a simple glance, Ramana, at 16, had realized the Self, (as constant uninterrupted awareness). Decades later, Ramana described Self-realization to a few devotees, saying,

"The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inward, and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words, 'now that death has come, what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies. But with the death of the body, am I dead? The body dies, but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit.' All this was not a dull thought, as it flashed through me viscerally as living truth, which I perceived directly."

Jack grew up in *Christian Science* which was founded by Mary Baker Eddy. Later in his mid- 30s, he stepped away from this religious form. He told me,

"There are some powerful truths but the system is incomplete. Christian Science is full of spiritual wisdom but came to a faulty conclusion. It was Baker-Eddy's destiny to recover from a near fatal fall. She attributed her healing to prayer, assuming that prayer when practiced deeply enough could cure all illness and disease. But we each have our own destiny. One of its foundational tenets is: *Reality is purely spiritual and the material world is an illusion*. Well, that's true at the Absolute level. Yes, the body is not ultimately real but it's not a mental error if one gets sick. We can certainly see a doctor or holistic healer. We must care for the body like we do a house."

A stocky five-foot-six, Jack at 19 joined the Navy when the height restriction was lowered after Pearl Harbor. After gaining my trust, six months later he began to share some of his experiences in World War

II. He was a bazooka man in the war and awarded the Navy Cross. Two men normally manned the M20 bazooka, an anti-tank rocket launcher. In one story, Jack revealed that the ammo loader became frightened and ran off when incoming tanks were spotted coming right for his division, and Jack was forced to handle the loading and firing himself. Jack received a commendation for “extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty.”

Jack and I became instant soul friends, kindred spirits, who could understand each other with ease. Intuitively, we filled in missing words and connected shared insights, all the while just as easily relaxing into the space between the words, silence. The relationship with Jack had no defined roles. In a clear sense, I was engaged in end-of-life caregiving, yet our connection was more that of two friends reveling in the Divine Mystery.

Spirituality was the main topic discussed in every one of the numerous meetings Jack and I had over a four-year span. This included talking about NDEs (Near-Death Experiences), which are a unique state of Consciousness that occurs when one has gone into cardiac arrest or had other life-threatening occurrences. Jack had read thousands of near-death experience accounts over the last decades of his life and was a member of IANDS (International Association for Near Death Studies), an organization which studied and supported those that have had an NDE. By the year 2025, the number of people said to have experienced an NDE is estimated to be between 34-68 million people in the United States.

These NDEs include seeing a tunnel, a light, a light being, or deceased relatives, and having veridical perception of physical stimuli. In essence, it is to see the True Nature of the external world, to intuit things as they really are. The NDE accounts, which Jack had read and later shared with me, were sprinkled with tidbits of quantum physics. In quantum physics, they have shown that the human body is only a mass of vibrational energy with the appearance of solidity. Jack also

realized that those who've had an NDE shared a similar insight with the spiritually-illuminated, a beyond conceptual understanding of their True Nature. After an NDE, one is able to say things from direct experience, such as: "I have had to face many trials and challenges since my NDE, including complete loss of personal identity, disability, poverty, loss of friends, due to their inability to understand how the NDE changed me, and chronic pain (from the car crash). But knowledge of the eternity of my spirit and freedom from the fear of death have created in me a foundation of peace that no temporary physical condition can shake."

Often our talks turned to what is erroneously referred to as "assisted suicide," but more astutely called "dying with dignity," "aid-in-dying," "medically assisted dying," or "self-deliverance."

The term "assisted suicide" adds an unfair stigma to people who are in great pain and suffering from a challenging medical condition. "Suicide" is a term that implies self-harm and is usually related to, or an outgrowth of, mental illness or deep depression.

I find it strange that some religious groups pray to St. Joseph for a happy death or can show compassion to their dog or cat by lethal injection but deny it to themselves or other human beings on the grounds that it goes against God's Will. In truth, all happens by God's Will, so if someone is destined to use aid-in-dying, they will, but if not, they won't. This ends all arguments.

Jack had been a member of the Hemlock Society, whose stated mission is "Choice,

dignity, and control at the end of life." I knew the general theme of the Hemlock group but did not realize that a system had been devised to allow someone to end his or her life with ease.

Jack informed me that helium tanks, bought at toy stores as a party balloon device, until air was added making them no longer viable for aid-in-dying, were the cheapest and most simple way to deliver oneself on one's own terms.

Today, one must pay about \$100.00 and special order a helium-100 tank (100% helium) in order to use this option for self-deliverance. Aid-in-dying is facilitated using nitrogen instead of helium in supportive organizations like Final Exit Network (FEN) which offers practical support. As their site states, “It holds that mentally competent adults who suffer from a terminal illness, intractable pain, or irreversible physical (though not necessarily a terminal illness with a clearly identified time window) conditions have a right to voluntarily end their lives.”

(Clearly this option is not for those with mental health issues, depression or who are suicidal).

“Helium is so effortless and easy,” Jack explained to me. “There is no reason for anyone to suffer on for months and years once their quality of life has gone, and it’s a lot less messy than using a gun, jumping off a bridge or hanging oneself. With this method, one can quietly and painlessly leave the earthly sojourn.”

Jack had witnessed aid-in-dying several times. He shared how an 80-year-old woman diagnosed with ALS did not want to go through a slow demise, hooked up to oxygen, but still unable to breathe because her lungs were filling with fluid. In contrast, he described his Hemlock associate’s death in an easy, cheerful way:

“Before she became incapacitated,” he said, “this woman decided to use a helium tank. She invited other Hemlock members to her home. She was sitting in her chair, put her transparent hood on (this isolates the gas), and then turned on the gas valve. Suddenly, after about 20 seconds, her face lit up in pure joy. Pointing to a tree outside the window, she said, ‘Oh look, the bird has returned to its nest!’”

Those were her last words. Then she passed out. Painlessly unconscious, she had a contented smile etched on her face, as the helium gas took up oxygen receptor sites in her brain, lungs, and body systems. Minutes later, she was physiologically dead. It was a painless

death for her and a profound experience of peace for Jack and the others who were present.

Primordial Words

The moment of death, watching occurs, the vital breath leaves the body, and the sense of presence recedes and then vanishes. That is the greatest moment, the moment of immortality.

25

Jack's Conscious Transition

I was riveted by his words, for Jack spoke from inner illumination, beyond the normal chatter of the ego-centered mind. With a fiercely practical, often scientific enthusiasm, once Jack set his eyes upon me, a potent presence encompassed my entire being. Jack reminded me to go deeper and have more conviction in what I really am. If my attention began to drift into thought streams while listening to Jack, his face would begin to turn red and his eyes would emit a laser-like beam that would not allow me to engage into thought. This was a unique aspect of our communion.

Hidden underneath Jack's discriminating intelligence was a beautiful sensitivity and deep compassion. He was a man who lived a simple life, with two very small pensions. Yet, for well over a decade Jack shared \$600.00 each month with those in his senior community who were struggling.

What a blessing to be with someone consciously preparing for death, especially when they have put a lot of energy into deep spirituality. Jack's preparation entailed living more and more in and as the unknown and reading numerous near-death experience accounts, while contemplating and meditating upon primordial words of liberated sages and falling into the thought-free state.

Jack saw that nothing could be taken from him, from what he really is. Jack's direct experience provided a great trust and faith in the Eternal Absolute. It was awe-inspiring to witness a growing fearlessness pervade his being. Instead of the fear and associated discontent that many go through as the body manifestation nears transition, Jack was at peace and quite ready to meet the Maker.

It was obvious that no doctor or organization was going to force Jack into a hospital bed or hook him up to IV tubes. No institution was going to extract his financial resources or attempt to extend his life through extraordinary measures. Jack was not one to be pushed around in a wheelchair or chance an advanced directive being dismissed or a POLST document ignored. Like many spiritual aspirants, Jack was not afraid of death, but he did have a fear, I sensed, of losing his independence and having to rely on others for care.

Jack was still quite lucid and his mind was as sharp as a tack during the last six months prior to his conscious transition, but he had been slowly losing interest in worldly things, even more than his regular detachment. His physical body had begun a fairly rapid decline. He was no longer able to ride his bicycle, which he had always used for appointments or grocery shopping.

His usual steadiness afoot had turned into a wobble. Falls had begun to happen in the months prior to his passing, one taking down a bookshelf near his recliner and the other a fall in the shower, which caused some severely bruised ribs, requiring a course of Tylenol-codeine. Throw in a few periods of incontinence, and Jack was losing too many faculties, at least for him.

Soon after his fall in the shower, Jack looked at me and said,

"It's time for the tank." He scheduled a day for me to arrive at his independent living facility, a retirement community that he shifted to in the last year of his life. It had small apartment rooms inside a larger building, including a community room, cafeteria, and other amenities. The place even had an assisted living wing to accommodate the various stages of the aging process.

On the morning of his conscious transition, Jack embraced me with a powerful hug, looked into my eyes with determination, compassion and good will, just as he had on the day we met. Then he sat down in his recliner chair and we closed our eyes for a few minutes of silent contemplation. Jack then glanced over at me one last time. He

put his transparent hood over his head, leaned down and turned on the helium tank gas valve and I watched my beloved friend transition peacefully into the Great Beyond.

Jack did not want to create a scene at his retirement community, with authorities finding him hooked up to a helium tank. Ten minutes later, I stood from my nearby perch and gently removed Jack's hood and turned the gas off, before loading the helium tank into a box. I waited a few minutes before calling his daughter Laila, who was stationed outside in the parking lot of the complex. Laila entered Jack's room and took the tank out to her car. Minutes later, she notified the authorities of his passing. When the police arrived, both Laila and I were lightly interviewed before the coroner was contacted.

Jack died while fixed on Source; his doubts had been removed about what we really

are. He realized that this so-called life is just a phase of Consciousness.

He had joined the Stanford 'Willed Body Program' two decades earlier, as he lived within the required 50-mile radius. The Program, now defunct, once allowed one to donate their body, which assisted in the training of student doctors and scientists.

After a short phone call to the Program Hotline and a coroner's confirmation of death, Stanford sent a funeral home service to transport Jack's body to the hospital.

Jack did not want a funeral or burial and his body donation ensured that no additional cost was thrust upon his three daughters. After one year, Stanford cremated the body and returned the ashes to his family.

Primordial Words

They say I am dying, but I am not going away. Where could I go? I am here.

26

Caregiver Break: The Ocean

A body transitioning, no longer appearing in form, helps one reveal the reality underneath, the All-Abiding Self. After Jack transitioned, I needed to be near the ocean, to harmonize with the powerful surge of energy released by his bodily passing. I spent the entire day at the beach, walking along the shoreline, swimming, and resting on the sand, immersing myself in the natural rhythms of the sea. The isolated spot I chose was more than 100 yards from any other human being. It does not take long to fall into alignment with the ebb and flow of the ocean. If we allow it to, all discontent gets washed away.

The waves continued to rhythmically thrust, flow, and release. A group of pelicans fell into a V-formation, a God-synchronization, and then dropped at a sharp downward angle, falling into a single line, a few inches apart and mere inches from the crest of the wave. These ancient aerialists glided past, wings perfectly still. Staying as the witness, the dissonance of my mind dissolved even more, thoughts becoming inconsequential whispers, the whispers fading into silence.

Primordial Words

We need not be frightened of the unknown, because we do not know what the unknown is, so there is really nothing to be afraid of. Death is a word, and it is the word, the image, that creates the fear.

27

A Heavenly Spot

Peering at the clock with a bedside flashlight, I discovered that it was 2:00 a.m. These middle of the night or early morning adventures had become more regular once chronic health issues began. On these mornings, it is easy to get overwhelmed and off-balance, for the mind roars: I have to go to work today... How will I do it? I feel like shit. The drama always begins with the initial “I-thought.”

And that “pseudo-I” felt nauseous and sick in the stomach. It was the time of the liver, according to traditional Chinese medicine, and that right epigastric region was moaning. Brain fog had rolled in, along with tinnitus. Also, crustiness had formed over my right eye. Activated charcoal taken at midnight had reduced the toxic load, but it still felt as if microscopic storm troopers had turned my blood cells into a sluggish cesspool. I collapsed under the covers for a few more hours of broken sleep.

At 6:00 a.m., I rolled to my left side and felt ready to puke. I pushed myself up to a sitting position and rose in stages. Then I walked into the kitchen and pressed the tea kettle “on” switch. Taking a few short steps, like a drunk preparing a hangover remedy, I added some ginger root, peppermint leaf, and fennel seed to the green tea leaves. Moments later, I squirted a few droppers of Gastro Calm tincture onto my tongue and tossed down half a teaspoon of the ayurvedic powder, triphala, dissolved in warm water, while eyeing my acupuncture needles.

Soon, the famous acupuncture point Stomach-36 was pierced, a point for gastric concerns: nausea, vomiting, stress, and fatigue. I recognize the wisdom of the ancient Chinese warriors who wore leather sashes with stones that pressed into these two points whenever

they kneeled down to rest. These points, one on each leg, are located three inches below the knee near the tibia bone.

The tea leaves opened and the roots and seeds seeped into the warm water. I took the cup and sat crossed-legged in a comfortable yoga pose facing my back window that looks out onto a spacious meadow, a heavenly spot. The early-morning rays danced across the meadow.

A young doe gazed my way, blades of grass protruding from both sides of her mouth. She chewed and watched, as her ears rotated like a natural satellite antenna.

I took a few sips of tea, slowly moving from sluggishness to clear wakefulness, without thought identification, the space where human frailty and form don't apply. It is the space where silence, gratitude, and love meet, forming the essence of the Holy Presence.

I don't even have to breathe. That is done for me. All the sensory apparatus and thought streams dim into insignificance. The thoughts that fill the mind become less and less urgent, less and less real, and no longer personal. Minutes later, there are no thoughts, or stories, to grasp, beliefs to hold on to, or bodily symptoms to manage.

Awake to the ploys of egoism, I step away from the playing field to bear witness. True meditation, the natural state, appears at the forefront of awareness, not as some obscure backdrop hidden by a thinker and a barrage of thoughts. A breath comes. I feel my real body as Spacious Consciousness, the human frame only the house of Spirit. Now, it's time to leave the house to see my current client, Lloyd.

Primordial Words

There is only what you are, in whose presence this magnificent universe is breathing and being perceived, including the sense of yourself as a player on this great field.

28

Progression of Parkinson's Disease

I drove 12 miles of country road, the Empire Grade shortcut, and arrived at Lloyd's house. An 88-year-old retired physicist and astronomer, Lloyd was instrumental in the first accurate distance reading between the earth and moon, about ten days after Neil Armstrong took his historic step, using a laser implanted inside a telescope at Lick Observatory on the top of Mount Hamilton.

He's had Parkinson's disease in full manifestation for nearly a decade. His symptoms started insidiously about 20 years ago, when he lost his sense of smell. Loss of sense of smell is one of the early signs of Parkinson's disease, often coming on a decade or more before the full manifestation of the disease. Another early diagnostic marker is a musky odor (put off by an oily-wax called sebum released by the sweat glands). The hallmark symptoms of Parkinson's disease are now on display with Lloyd, including dementia, tremors in the arms and legs, muscle stiffness, a freezing of gait, slow movements, poor balance, hallucinations, dizziness, and confusion, along with difficulty speaking and swallowing.

Dementia, insomnia, and mental illness are all on the rise in the United States (and worldwide). According to global statistics, 16.2% of adults are now dealing with moderate to severe insomnia. In 2007, through research gathered by the World Health Organization, it was reported that one out of every six people on earth had noticeable neurological symptoms; when WHO next released the figures in 2025, it was one in three people. And almost 1 in 4 people, 23.4%, are dealing with some form of mental illness. According to WHO, the dementia epidemic will directly impact two thirds of the populace by 2060.

All kinds of brain, memory, and cognitive issues are on the rise, not just in the elderly or dying but with children and teens, as well as those in the so-called prime of life (20s and 30s). Almost 20 % of adolescents, 12-17 years of age, have experienced moderate to severe anxiety in the last year.

In the last decades twice as many young adults are complaining about memory challenges, confusion, brain fog, and difficulty thinking. Neurological effects of Lyme disease and other viral, bacterial and spirochetal disorders are on the rise as well.

It is an alarming trend that shows no signs of slowing down. Environmental toxicity, glyphosate from Roundup and other pesticide pollution, chemicalized skies, increasing electromagnetic exposure, metal toxicity, among others, are the principal causes.

Yet, all of it, when seen through the eyes of the Higher Self, helps us to drop the body right on schedule. Though, we'll have a different body and name and possibly gender, most of us will get another human birth.

Lloyd's dementia and cognitive deterioration was considered moderately severe based on the Reisberg Scale (Global Deterioration Scale), a 7-Stage system which helps to assess levels of cognitive decline in dementias of all kinds, the most prominent being Alzheimer's disease (60% of all dementias) followed by Parkinson's disease.

I had been with one other client with a more severe dementia form. She would ask the same set up questions every few minutes: "Who are you? What are you doing here? Do I know you?" Every few minutes, I would get a new chance to answer and modulate my responses so as to appease her mind. Once I found the most soothing emotional responses, her level of agitation lessened and I would use the same answer over and over.

When I first started working with Lloyd, he was recovering from a near fatal fall. Left alone by his wife, Sue, for a 30-minute errand, he decided it was time to clean the pool, falling and rupturing an artery in

his head on the brick-lined patio of his rural home. He lost 1.5 liters of blood. Amazing grace spared his life in that a paramedic team was just a quarter mile down the road and leaving a residence when Lloyd pressed his 911 Dispatcher Necklace. Airlifted to Stanford, he survived.

After this episode, Sue, 12 years younger than Lloyd, decided she could no longer leave him unattended. Like many women in her position, Sue had done her saintly best to continue her active social life, with bridge club and church volunteer work, while still caring for Lloyd, including getting up several times at night, changing his adult diapers, washing bed sheets each morning, helping him shower, and making breakfast, just to begin the morning.

Lloyd was certainly on a hospice trajectory. He was wheelchair bound when I first arrived, and a hoist-sling device known as a Hoyer Lift was being considered, for he was near the point of being bedridden. His speech, whisper soft and incomprehensibly slurred, improved dramatically one week after the cholesterol drug Lipitor was discontinued.

This drug is given to 30 percent of Parkinson's patients even though the side effects include confusion and memory loss, making it contraindicated for those with dementia. In a span of a few more weeks, Lloyd found it possible to use his walker again, improving every week for a couple of months.

Most days with Lloyd during that first year were filled with some kind of project or an adventure into the fruit orchard he planted some 40 years ago.

We spent many days roaming about his three-acre parcel, eating and testing the fruit. Lloyd's trees include grapefruit, lemon, lime, persimmon, apricot, mandarin orange, and five varieties of apple.

At other times, a chess game would be undertaken. The games would go well at first. Lloyd would move his center pawns out, and the knights and bishops would follow. Then something would snap. The game then changed—to call it chess, well, hmmm. Lloyd had created

a new game, with more than a few theoretical novelties. In one game, after move seven, he stared at the board, appearing to be totally absorbed. Then after 30 minutes of what appeared to be either a deep think, a nap, or a hallucination, Lloyd placed one of my pawns, which had not yet moved, onto the back rank, giving himself a new queen. No one switches sides mid-game and is able to promote a new queen with your opponent's pawn! I said,

"What are you doing, Lloyd?" He smiled benignly, as if now seeing the absurdity of what he had just done.

"You are incredibly patient," he responded.

"Well, thanks, Lloyd," I said, smiling. "I'm getting a sense of what you must be going through."

As the first year came to an end, Lloyd could barely walk on some days, even with the help of his walker. It would be best to use the wheelchair on such occasions, but Lloyd would often refuse.

On those days when he is compromised, I am focused on his every move and not sure if he will make the next step or fall over. It is this type of fragility that brings out the best qualities in me: kindness, awareness, gentleness, and space.

In a way, caring for him feels as if I am attending to a great spiritual master, and it is an honor to be in this position. I walk slightly behind him, and to the side, looking for places or ways in which he may need assistance. He might be angling his walker sideways and walk right into a tree. It's possible he is feeling dizzy but insists on walking anyway. Instinctively, I reach out and touch his low back or hip. I anticipate he might fall and grab his arm to steady him or bring a chair with us, as we walk in the orchard, ready to slide it underneath him at a moment's notice. Compassion and love dance together, thoughts vanish, and the moment is full and ripe. The enjoyment comes from being present, in full awareness, but with no agenda, no expectation.

Primordial Words

Nothing belongs to you and yet everything is you. Find the imperishable in you. Then you have used your life well.

29

Living Forever

Lloyd is fading more and more. He falls asleep often. His naps can last two or three hours. Sometimes he drifts off for a few minutes, then wakes up, attempting to focus and will himself into doing some kind of activity, only to fall asleep again. At other times, he awakens and wants to go outside. Once outside, he'll forget why he wanted to go out.

Caregiving is becoming more and more challenging. Lloyd has less and less energy to support his physical body. One time while standing behind him at the commode, just after having slid his pants down to the knees in preparation to sit down, he began to urinate against the bathroom wall. I looked at him and said,

"Lloyd, what are you doing?!" He answered midstream and in matter-of-fact manner,

"That's how we did it on the farm."

The truth is setting in, as his body no longer works the way it once did. Even though he has been conditioned to be willful, his bodily decline is becoming more difficult to deny. If God's grace reveals itself, he might catch a glimpse of his Essential Nature and see that his soul is untouched by his bodily downturn. Lloyd's disorientation continued unabated. The brain and bodily organs are moving toward the big shut down. Lloyd may soon fall into an active dying-phase, a realm wherein normal human communication is no longer possible.

Deep down, I realized it doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is caring for Lloyd with tenderness, compassion and love. Therefore, I touch him often, with a gentle hand, coaxing him silently toward a deeper surrender. On rare occasions, he lets me give him a gentle massage for a few minutes.

All of my clients are kindred spirits. I love them all, no matter their personality quirks, the ease of our relating, or the depth of connection. Each one of these sweet beings is a relative who I've had the privilege to care for. We share the same divine heritage.

One afternoon, Lloyd awoke from a nap. Disoriented, he wanted to get up from his chair. I walked from my nearby meditation perch, squatting low. My hand held his upper arm, like a needle transmitting an injection of calm.

"Hi Lloyd, did you have a good rest?" I said in a soothing voice. "You seem to be a little confused or disoriented. What are you experiencing?"

Lloyd struggled to come up with words. His eyes rolled around like shifting marbles, his tongue darting about in a contorted fashion. He is a man adrift in some misbegotten and foreign world. Finally, he managed to speak, and it came out as a non-sequitur, considering his condition.

"I, I just wish I could live a hundred more years," he said, smiling, while fixing his gaze on me. I chuckled softly and said,

"Yes, wouldn't that be great?"

Lloyd then shared his secret hope with me, one many Americans have, that a new

treatment, magic pill, or innovative surgery might extend his life indefinitely. He wants to keep going long enough for the next scientific or medical breakthrough to save him.

After Lloyd fell back to sleep, I wondered how much he'd be able to let go in the coming months while moving toward the active dying phase. The process of surrender is often a real challenge for cerebral people where so much emphasis is put on the intellectual faculty. In dying, not only do we have to let go of our physical possessions, but we must also unload everything we have accumulated intellectually.

Lloyd's slow health slide continued. Friends, associates and doctors advised Sue to put Lloyd into a skilled nursing facility. I advised her to

begin hospice but she was not ready for either of those choices. Lloyd was undergoing an acute progression towards decreased quality of life, with increased dizziness, less desire to interact, eat or drink, along with confusion, hallucination and diminishing ability to stabilize and stand on his own or consistently raise and steady himself.

Sue continued to manage minute details in an attempt to keep Lloyd's body from dying. She still made robust breakfasts. Lloyd rarely took more than a few bites or fell asleep while eating. His blood pressure spiked very high and then very low, during the same hour. All signs and symptoms pointed to a pre-dying phase.

Lloyd and Sue and their healthcare team members at Kaiser were unable to talk freely about dying or hospice. For the last 6 months, denial of death has been playing out with Lloyd and Sue in various ways. On the surface level, increasing chaos and stress continued to arise due to attachment and fear. They were avoiding the most important conversation, one neither of them was ready to have.

Starting Hospice was to give up and admit that Lloyd was dying and they no longer wished to use heroic measures, like resuscitation, IV hydration or nutrition. Entering a skilled nursing facility, Sue felt, was to lose him as well. These two options were not yet viable alternatives for them.

In thousands of homes across the United States, the most important questions and discussions about death and dying are averted: In Lloyd's case, he's unable to say, "Help me die with dignity." And Sue could not ask him if he's ready to die and follow through and support his wishes.

With Lloyd and Sue, mental attachment to each other and their fear of death overrides the pain, suffering and severe discomfort and slow demise which is taking place. Like some Americans, they have a very nice home, a large savings, a house that's paid for, and an abundant retirement income stream. They've spent their entire life focused on the outer-worldly dimension, gathering possessions, experiences, exercising

intellectual prowess, and absorbed in habitual social interactions and obsessive thinking. This has made it difficult to have a direct experience of Reality (God), thus they miss out on the primary purpose of life.

We are not raised to look at death in our culture. We are brought up to always be moving, push hard and achieve much, so we deny death which is seen as an inconvenient truth that gets in the way of our grandiose visions. We use caffeine and other stimulants to keep us moving faster and faster. The closest many of us get to relaxation comes through alcohol, via sedatives to help us sleep, or drugs to bypass and numb feeling states. Through our cultural denial of death, we cannot see that death, like birth, is part of eternal life. We are too busy to enjoy the moment or investigate our True Nature.

Lloyd was on his way to the hospital again. Sue called 911 for the 4th time in 2 months, after he refused to eat or drink. Paramedics arrived, as Lloyd would not get in the car and was too belligerent to be helped. Sue and I drove him to the Kaiser emergency unit, some 35 miles away. The doctors and hospital staff at Kaiser could not find a conclusive bladder infection or suspected pneumonia. They admitted him under what is termed, *Failure to Thrive Syndrome*. The blood work and other tests showed diminished kidney function, dehydration and low thyroid function.

I sat next to Lloyd's bed in the emergency room, feeling claustrophobic from the lack of windows and fresh air and overstimulated from the beeping monitors and bright lights. Sue fidgeted in her chair, appearing to be in some kind of pseudo-relaxed state, after the frantic drive and check in.

She felt safe, I sensed, with the belief: Lloyd could not die now that he's in the hospital with nurses and doctors, IV fluids flowing, swathes of indicators going off and tubes to monitor blood pressure and other vital signs.

The medical team at Kaiser added four new medications to his existing regime and his health continued to plummet. His total medical prescriptions hit eleven. One of the drugs Lloyd was prescribed, the antipsychotic medication Zyprexa, is not only contraindicated for those with Parkinson's disease but has an FDA black box warning, indicating increased risk of death for patients with dementia. The one medication that may have been of some value was Synthroid, given to compensate for low thyroid function.

Upon returning home with Lloyd, Sue opted to start hospice, after one of the doctors suggested that Lloyd remain in the hospital and receive an intravenous morphine drip. The doctor said,

"This is the compassionate thing to do since his quality of life is gone." In these kinds of situations with advanced age, slow disease progression, one could live on for 3 weeks, 3 months or recover somewhat and last a few more years. This is often the case with neurodegenerative conditions like Parkinson's disease.

For a couple of months, Lloyd stabilized somewhat and was eating and drinking, gaining weight, and on a few rare days even used his walker to visit his beloved fruit orchard again. Then one day, he did not wake up. The Divine Perfection guides each journey to its ordained unfoldment, no matter how things appear. This human existence is a flicker in Eternity.

Primordial Words

If you looked at a human being under an electron microscope, you would find something very interesting. The space between the molecules would be the equivalent distance between the planets...There is space between the planets also. That space is Consciousness. And the space out of the body is also Consciousness. Your body is in a state of flux. Your body is not what you think it is. It only appears to us to be solid. If you see what I'm talking about, you're really space. You are not the body, because the space between the atoms is larger, more than the atoms themselves. And the space becomes expanded, taking up all of space. What is behind space? What causes space? What is the substratum of the space?

You are—your real nature, Absolute Reality. So, you see you are not what you appear to be. Trying to improve something that does not exist brings suffering, for you are identifying with the appearance rather than with Reality.

30

Caregiver Break: Silence

Silence is the great love of my life. Over the last 30 years, she and I have had an amazing dance together. It is a serenade that keeps getting sweeter. All of us have challenges that tend to pull us away from the innate vibration of peace. But to honor silence is a beautiful prompt, reminding us of our True Nature.

A small group of dedicated truth-lovers gathered for a day-long Silent Retreat. We were each graced with an opportunity to bow toward silence, in awe and gratitude, and rest in its magnificence. Three men and three women sat in a meditative circle at a private home. As we sat together, basking in the stillness, silence met us; she was waiting, always here, never changing. As we emerged from the silent meditation, the space opened up for words. We shared from our hearts. A trust had developed that allowed our most essential expressions to come rushing forth from that deeper space.

Silence is the home we all return to and yet have never been away from. Only the clouds of the mind prevents this realization. As the end of life grows near, this gentle soundless beckoning comes closer.

If you have identified during most of your life as a mind with a body, possessions, and a name, this natural return to silence can be uncomfortable at first. It may feel as if you are falling into a void. That emptiness is not to be feared, for it is really spaciousness, space devoid of persona and ego.

Most of our lives, we have lived as if peering through a veil of conditioned thoughts, beliefs, and stories. As death approaches, the veil comes down and it's possible to see through the illusion of separation. No longer do we have clouded vision. Divine sight asserts itself and we

recede. This receding, or falling away, of the persona might even feel terrifying if we have not been on the conscious spiritual path.

The movement toward silence is a pull toward the Absolute, the immutable and infinite, which always shines. As the dying process accelerates, we are afforded the opportunity to embrace the truth of silence.

Emerging from silence, we can see that grace is always here. The flow of life, the

Consciousness is spontaneously moving and taking care of everything. There is no separate person who can control events or do anything.

Life is living itself. Nothing can be lost in death, as nothing was gained with birth. Birth was only the idea of separation, which is found to be untrue. After emerging from a time of silence, it is easier to see that all of the things in life naturally unfold against the backdrop of silence.

Primordial Words

The silence of the ending is only the beginning. It is like going through a hole into a tunnel and emerging in a huge, wide, expansive ocean, in an immeasurable, timeless state.

31

A Message from the Owl Clan

For about 8 months, from January to August 2025 during the last year of my mother's life, at the urging of my sister, Aleece and I moved into her home in Santa Rosa. Destiny jettisoned us in mid-August and we headed 2 hours south to Santa Cruz. One day two months later, in mid- October, my wife's voice raised an octave,

"Hey, look, it's an owl!" Unzipping our tent door, I strode briskly to her side. We stood together at a near empty Pine Hollow camp inside Sunset State Beach. Over the previous two months, on an extended fall camping spree, mostly residing at New Brighton State Beach near Capitola. We had been breathing the fresh air that only natural settings provide. Numerous animal encounters became commonplace, including: coyote sightings, whale's breaching, plentiful visits from deer and various bird species, as well endless wild rabbits and squirrels. We even witnessed a blue heron's deceptive hunt of a mole. Yet, this owl visit felt more like an omen. It was daylight, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, a rare time to see a nocturnal raptor. Poised on a branch of an old wind-twisted Pine tree 30 feet away, the large great-horned one had a piercing stare that transmitted a discernable intelligence. The yellow bordering around those sparkling orbs made them appear larger, while highlighting a benevolent presence.

"Whoa!" I said, as nature's grace-filled silence embraced us. Less than a minute later, another owl, possibly the mate, landed on the same branch. For 15 minutes we held silent communion with these two rarely seen raptors. A message was being conveyed in the stillness. I took a long full breath and contemplated the deeper meaning of this encounter.

Nearly 30 years ago I began to practice and study indigenous spirituality with a Hopi shaman. It was a journey into the Native American healing arts and lifestyle. The shaman even made me a pipe himself from pipestone he had obtained, so I could participate in authentic pipe ceremonies. We did vision quests, sweat lodges and also a 12-month Hopi medicine wheel immersion.

The Hopi, as with most Native American tribes, honor the four directions. Each direction has various associations, including links with specific animals. According to the Hopi tradition, the animals one encounters in the wild, may indicate the presence of or a visitation from previous ancestors or teachers. The Hopi refer to the owl as *mongwa* or *moonhawk* (night raptor).

It is considered a *kachina* or *spirit* whose appearance symbolizes deep wisdom, rebirth, the afterlife, unseen mysteries, and on many occasions denotes impending danger or death. I began to embody the Native American proverb: *Regard Heaven as your father, Earth as your mother and all things as your brothers and sisters.*

The entire time I studied with the shaman, earth-centered living took centerstage and I gained an increasing respect for the land and all of nature. Putting fingers into the sand, being awestruck by a breeze or touching a tree now felt like sacred acts. Mother Earth and Great Spirit, form and formless, were seen as a unified whole. As I learned about various animal characteristics, their hidden depth became vivid and more obvious.

The next morning at dawn's first light, I stepped out of our tent. Within seconds, one of the owls made sure I was paying attention. He launched towards me at eye level, from the same tree we had spotted him the previous day. Twenty feet before contact he veered up to a branch above me.

That afternoon we moved our campsite right below the owl nesting tree. The following morning around 6:00 a.m., a strong wind arose and began whipping the tent flaps. I heard the unmistakable sound: "*a hoo*,

a hoo”. Now, I have heard owls over the years, but never like this. It felt as if the owl was on top of our tent. His *hoo-hoo* message, I now understood as: *Call your mother; her earthly life is soon ending!*

While living with my mother, during what was to be her final year of life, Aleece and I brought presence and joy into an otherwise repressive and suppressive emotional environment. My mother, long prone to denial of feelings, would not allow us to help her physically or medically but we were able to keep the house clean and the yard in good shape. During those 9 months, I sensed something was awry with Mom, both physically and mentally. My mother, very independent, did not wish to share medical information with me or my siblings or allow us to speak to her doctors. In fact, she had always been in denial of sickness or health concerns ever since I was a young child. In the last year of her life, I was able to watch Mom closely and witness her slow deterioration of health.

Cognitive changes were taking place. I witnessed an assortment of alarming signs. Mom was in a minor car accident, and her description of what happened did not seem feasible. Numerous times, Mom fell asleep in her lounge chair in the living room in the middle of the night with the TV on full blast.

Mom would return home, after running an errand by car, and seeing me, she would pause a few seconds as if confused about who I was or what she wanted to say or do.

Mom was obviously being challenged with new symptoms. I noticed disconcerting periods of agitation and frustration, along with issues in word phrasing and speech. Periods of disorientation, though short-lived, grew commonplace. One day 6 months before her passing, she said,

“Gosh, I’ve been losing my balance lately.” After revealing this, Mom, seemingly embarrassed, isolated herself in her room for hours, as if to escape further detection. I felt she might be in the early stages of dementia or had undergone a small stroke. My mother was quite

stubborn and I had to wait for a truly significant change in order to urge her to release medical information, or implore her to see a specialist.

At 84-years-of-age, however, Mom was still actively engaged in life. She was a driver and caregiver for several 90-plus ladies, helping them navigate their final months of life. Unknowingly, she was preparing for her own transition.

When I made the October phone call, after the owl commandment, Mom showed signs of strain. Our conversation moved from coherent to garbled. She finally revealed some new health information. Mom told me that more tests were to be done and an MRI was planned, because of increased nausea and dizziness. Yet, Mom finished the call the way she always did,

"I'm doing okay."

That night, however, my sister, recently home from a 3-week European vacation, noticed how bad Mom's hand tremors had grown. They rushed her to the hospital by ambulance. In the early morning the doctors identified a large fast-growing cancer, an orange-sized, stage-4 malignant glioblastoma tumor. The specialists recommended surgery but the prognosis was grim, even without medical intervention. The surgeon and two different oncologists claimed that if she undertook an invasive 9-hour surgery, followed by oral chemotherapy and radiation she would live 12 to 18 months.

Primordial Words

'What is man without the animals? For if all the creatures were gone, man would die of a great loneliness of the spirit.

32

On the Road to Recovery or Hospice

Mom did not hesitate to undergo an invasive surgery. She survived and in the eyes of the surgeon this made the procedure a success. A short 10-day acute rehab stint followed, before Mom was sent home. Despite the various medical specialists' prognosis, Mom, in deep denial, believed that full recovery or even remission was possible. In her willful state, surgery was a breeze, and with rehab ongoing, along with her improved physical dexterity and cognitive function, a return to her regular lifestyle would surely follow. This fantasy was in direct opposition to the prognosis which claimed that without fail new malignant tumor growth would again form and encroach upon critical areas of her brain, leading to death in 18 months or less.

As part of her post-surgery plan, steroids were initiated to reduce brain inflammation (edema or swelling). This hormonal therapy gave her a false sense of strength and vitality. It solidified her delusion and determination to not only survive 6 weeks of simultaneous oral chemo and radiation but overcome the brain cancer death-sentence and thrive again.

Fearing that my mother might not decide to follow up surgery with radiation and chemotherapy, the oncologist painted these cancer treatment staples in a grand light and coerced Mom with toxicity-minimizing phrases, like, "the pain will be manageable" and "the study results are clinically relevant" as well as "the medication is well-tolerated."

By telling my mother that she would die in two months without these mainstream cancer interventions, the oncologist tapped into her fear of death. In essence, he was telling her: choose chemo and

radiation, for if you try any other holistic treatments, even doing nothing at all, a collision course with death is inevitable.

The money-making aspects of the cancer business are rarely discussed but six weeks of radiation will make the cancer establishment about \$50,000, while equal time of oral chemo will garner another \$25,000. As it turned out my mother lived less than 2 months from the time the chemo and radiation began, not even 3 months post-surgery.

Mom came home from rehab in late October. Her full-time care was managed by my sister, Cheri, who lived 3 miles away.

As the sole caregiver for the first two weeks, my sister turned into a wonder woman, taking charge of Mom's round the clock personal care, including numerous trips to the toilet, showering, making meals, all while taking care of her finances, managing medical appointments and home needs. My sister accomplished this while operating on bits of broken sleep.

In my 20 plus years of end-of-life caregiving, I've offered round the clock intensive personal care to many clients but with deteriorated vitality due to chronic health issues in the last years, that kind of physical exertion and endurance is beyond my capabilities. Yet though "retired" from end-of-life caregiving, my sister was operating on embers...

I came in early November, arriving after a 3-hour drive. I received only a faint turnover, before my exhausted sister dashed off. Based on the sketchy bits of information received from my sister, I understood that Mom was on the road to recovery. Mom did not use a walker or a wheelchair in the house, and only arm support was necessary for walking. My sister, in a state of shock and denial herself, even encouraged me to take Mom on a walk outside. I did take her out in the morning for a 40-yard escorted trip using her wheelchair as a walker but had to return quickly and load Mom into the wheelchair when she became disoriented and fatigued almost immediately.

Though I was skeptical of the information being shared about Mom's seemingly remarkable recovery, an additional wake-up call hit when I learned that Mom had just stopped steroidal treatment the day before. As it turned out, the day I arrived Mom showed her first signs of significant physical and mental instability post-rehab. Early in the morning she slipped by her bed, gingerly pulling herself back to a standing position while I was in the shower. My mother was losing her ability to stabilize herself or even stand up on her own. On that day her disorientation and loss of strength seemed to grow by the hour.

A male caregiver attending to a female for personal care is not ideal for numerous reasons. I can get her to the toilet but cannot stand at the toilet the entire time. And what if she gets up before I get there?

In the afternoon we were watching a documentary of the 2014 Giants World Series victory. The program was nearly over; game 7 was underway and the greatest double play in World Series history had just concluded.

Giant's pitcher, Madison Bumgarner, was about to come in for the epic save. And then Mom said that she had to go to the bathroom. I pulled her up to a standing position. She took my arm, as we slowly ambled to the toilet.

I had to use maximum strength while guiding and supporting her the whole way like one would with a sick or injured climber. After we reached the toilet, I moved away to the bathroom entryway, alternately checking in on her while glancing at Bumgarner approaching the mound.

"Mom, you done yet? I asked.

"No." She answered. Several times every two minutes, I asked again. Each time she responded in the negative. Just as I was asking, on my 4th check, she fell by the toilet while attempting to stand. Mom hit the tile floor with a thump. I dashed to her side and knelt down, checking for potential injury. Her legs were splayed apart, her left arm (dominant one) inoperative, because the cancer and surgery damaged

the right hemisphere of her brain, making the left side of her body less responsive. The nearest grab bar next to the shower entrance was on the wrong side.

As I surveyed the situation, squatting behind and by her side, I noticed that Mom's eyes were unfocused but her cognitive abilities were mostly intact. A significant injury appeared to have been avoided. A few seconds later, she said,

"My tailbone hurts a lot." The stakes were raised. It never dawned on me to call 911. I had to get her up.

"You hurt it when you fell?" I replied. She shook her head side to side.

"No, it's pressing into the floor." I saw her wince.

Mom had no cloth-gait belt, a transfer aid, and she was in pajamas. I realized I had to deadlift her limp 160-pound body, steady her somehow, and get her back in a chair. Searching for inspiration, I envisioned the 1972 summer Olympic games. I was ten years old for an instant and had to become Vasily Alekseyev, the legendary Russian weightlifter. Mom was in pain and as far as I was concerned, this was for the gold medal.

I grabbed Mom's pajamas by the elastic waistband and screamed, "AHHH," like a 90-meter ski jumper on takeoff. Then, I lifted her to a precarious standing position. This technique I called *the Jerk*. And as far as I was concerned, getting Mom upright and stabilized qualified as a *clean* lift. Now, using my chest and legs to temporarily prop and secure her against the shower glass, I waited for her legs to regain strength and for my dizziness to recede. After a minute composing ourselves, I guided her to the lounge chair and then collapsed on an adjacent chair with my heart racing. When the intensity of the experience settled, I smiled and said,

"I gave you a good *wedgy*, huh." Mom, with a silly grin, replied in a deadpan voice,

"The best one I ever had!" I laughed; she smiled.

The next day, I told my sister and brother that hospice should be started. They opposed the idea, not on obvious merit, for both of my siblings felt Mom would not accept hospice, as it would indicate she was no longer moving towards recovery but the end of her life.

My sister did implement my other suggestion and hired an overnight caregiver, a strong, hearty Fijian woman named Nita.

Because of the rapid changes in her vitality and well-being caused by the abrupt steroid withdrawal, the doctors decided to keep her on hormone treatment indefinitely. This decision further complicated her prognosis, as studies have shown that steroids, used post-brain cancer surgery, negatively affect prognosis and lead to reduction in lifespan.

Mom's health steadily declined during the 6 weeks of dual cancer treatments. Here was a woman, just 3 weeks after surgery, attempting to recover from glioblastoma, one of the most aggressive brain cancers, but instead bombarded with chemotherapy and radiation. It is challenging enough to watch a beloved die; why poison them when there is no hope of a lasting recovery? Where does compassion and quality of life come in?!

Two days after Christmas, a week before my mother transitioned, I visited her along with my daughter Jessica. I knew Mom was declining quickly but had no idea how close to transition she was. During the visit, Mom worked hard to stay alert and not nod off. The denial of her situation and precariousness of her health were on full display. There was even talk of a trip to the ocean in Santa Cruz, two hours to the south. On that visit, however, Mom articulated well and did not show any major signs of impending death. It had been less than a week since completion of the invasive oral chemotherapy and radiation protocol ended on Christmas eve, with a ludicrous "ringing of the bell" ceremony at the oncology suite. A few days after Mom began to plummet and went into a precoma state, sleeping most of the day. Hospice was started and occasional doses of morphine given.

The human transition from form to formless is a holy and sacred time. Everyone close to Mom had been immersed in a subtle tornado-like energy vortex that develops when someone dear to us is nearing bodily exit.

One week after our last trip, my daughter and I drove through a rain storm for several hours to visit Mom. I realized this may well be my final embrace of the family matriarch, the woman who brought this body into life.

Entering Mom's house, my sister and brother-in-law greeted us and we exchanged warm, bittersweet hugs. I spotted an unused oxygen tank through Mom's open bedroom doorway.

A large computer monitor, frozen in screen-saver mode, displayed Mom's younger brother John, my beloved uncle. He was gazing into the beauty of the High Sierras, standing alongside a roaring stream adjacent to the Pacific Crest Trail. He has always been an inspiring and positive influence in my life and I felt him there in spirit.

I could hear Mom before I could see her; I turned to my left and witnessed her heaving in loud raspy breaths. Each breath Mom took was like a climber gazing into a bottomless crevasse while holding a frayed rope in an attempt to forestall the inevitable. Jessica did not hesitate; she leaned down to hug her grandma, delivering loving words and a prayer into her ear. She then stepped back from her grandmother's bedside so I could greet Mom. I leaned down, and while hugging Mom, spoke into her ear,

"Follow the love and the light..."

I could tell my daughter was shocked to see her grandmother so near death. I whispered into Jessica's ear.

"This is the death rattle; grams could last a few hours or a day or two at most."

I was in awe of Jessica's courage. The death rattle, the first time it is experienced, can be jarring and repulsive. It's a startling experience, as if fingernails are being clawed into a chalkboard or listening to a piercing and eerie scream.

My mother, however, had lived a rich life, full of activities and travels to Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Family had always been the center of her life and she doted on her grandkids. A bumper sticker I recently saw is one she might well have used: *Grams is the name; spoilings the game.*

Even though my daughter is 40 years old now, she is still the little girl Mom built a homemade doll house for to celebrate her 7th birthday. It was an exquisite artistic piece that took a month of elaborate and creative work. Once Mom set her mind to something, there was no stopping her. This is the grandmother who had used much of her life force to support my daughter's life.

Jessica sat on a chair next to my mother's hospital bed; I moved around to the other side. We both put our hands gently against Mom's heart. After a couple of minutes, my right hand went to the crown of Mom's head, while my left hand stayed nestled against her heart. Jessica and I, centered together in a loving presence, had been in the room for just 10 minutes. Suddenly, Mom's eyes opened and looked heavenward. Surprised, and feeling that one last moment of lucid Consciousness might have arrived, I said,

"Mom..." but there was no one there. Ten seconds later the soul force exited her form through her eyes, escorted by the Almighty vacuum. It was as if God, through infinite grace, allowed her to wait for our arrival. One last tiny exhale escaped from the now lifeless frame.

No more struggle, for she was now released from the confining box of the body form and into the Great Beyond.

I felt no sorrow, only joy, as I watched an almost imperceptible trail of ethereal condensation hover, like a tracer of light from Mom's eyes, connecting to the wide-open space of the Formless Dimension.

Even before the owl message, I had felt my mother's earthly life slipping away. The grief I felt around Mom's coming transition never really materialized until a month after her passing, as we didn't have much of an emotional connection. Mom was closed down on the level of feelings and unable to summon the courage to deeply investigate early emotional abuse related to her father.

After her passing, grief came out in a unique way. I had long desired to have an emotional connection with my mother. With Mom's transition my desire for emotional closeness could no longer be fulfilled. This came to light while watching the beautiful film, *Storm boy*, (based on a 1964 novel). In the movie, a young boy of 11, living in the rural Coorong Peninsula of Southern Australia, discovers pelican hatchlings after witnessing the mother bird being killed by hunters. One of the pelicans was developmentally-challenged and needed extra care. A rare emotional intimacy and physical tenderness grows as they protect and support each other. The story mirrored my lifelong yearning for the same level of emotional intimacy with my mother. While watching, a catharsis of grief unleashed. I was relieved from an attachment pattern: 60 years of striving for closeness with my mother. A newfound freedom arrived as a spiritual blessing.

Primordial Words

Death affects those who know that the person is dead and gone. There is no effect on the one who is dead and gone...You are so much obsessed by death because of your identification with the body. If you are the Self, there is no question of death for YOU.”

33

Eternal Friends

One morning, Aleece and I were having our morning tea. We began talking about the dear souls in this book who have gone through the dying process, when I said,

“What joy in writing about my friends.” She smiled and said,

“Do you know why you feel so much joy about this subject of death and dying? When you write about each person, you’re connecting with their Eternal Essence, for now they’re in space, released from the bondage of bodily form. A halo of purity surrounds them, no ego, with personality dissolved.”

As the formless Self, they are bliss itself, freedom itself. Each of us can connect to our “departed” loved ones. We need no master psychic or spirit medium. Our beloveds are closer than close, the veil thinner than we realize. Our idea of “death” is just a misconception. When a body passes from the earthly sphere, the communication avenue shifts, becoming very subtle. The mortal frame dissolved back into the earth; the Innermost Being one with Source. As we pay attention to the inner pulse of the Divine Current, we discover what we thought was lost in “death.” This vital force is our Essential Nature. From our True Nature, we can feel, intuit, and hear the deathless ones living in the light space that permeates not only the ethereal realm, but also the earthly realm, for they are not separate.

In the years that followed my clients’ passages from form, their voices have arisen from within. I hear them during instances when I feel disconnected, am caught in a moment of thought identification, or feel overwhelmed or distraught. They point to everlasting life. The great thing is, we all have friends, family, or power beings appearing when we most need to remember what we really are. These eternal friends show

up incognito as an angelic presence. Sometimes they communicate through strangers, animals, or loved ones in the most ordinary life situations.

Primordial Words

Death is considered to be a traumatic experience, but understand what happens: That which has been born, the knowledge “I Am,” will end. That knowledge that was limited by this body will become unlimited, so what is to be feared?

34

Paw Prints in the Sand

There are hidden blessings in blindness. One of those blessings is a new companion. They call them guide dogs. My brother, Jeff, is on his fourth guide dog. First, he had a Golden Retriever, named Hoyt, next was a long-haired German shepherd, named Hale, and then there was Charlie, a brilliant white lab.

When Charlie died at about age 75 (age 11 in human years), he did so with dignity. He was euthanized (a term that means “dying well” or “having an easy death”). Widespread cancer came on so quickly that, as my brother said,

“One day he seemed fine and the next he could not even stand to eat.”

All of my brother’s “guides” have been my buddies as well. Whenever I see my brother, at some point during our visit, his latest guide dog companion will come over for a massage, canine acupressure or spontaneous hands-on healing. Of course, the healing they bring is always 10 times more potent. If the dogs could speak, they would surely chuckle at my “healing” analogy and administer a slathering tongue across the side of the face.

The great thing is, it doesn’t matter if they are tired from guiding and need a massage or if I am overwhelmed with some ridiculous mental fabrication. Once they arrive, my hands reach out and touch them. A minute later, they lie motionless before me, succumbing to the rub. And to my great benefit, it doesn’t take any time for the mind (as a bundle of thoughts) to recede into the Source from which it came. This gift of “no mind” is cherished in spiritual circles. In fact, it is so highly regarded that monks and other spiritual aspirants work a lifetime to “get there,” yet dogs show us it is “always here.”

In society at large, the “no mind” insight is not only underrated, it is also absolutely feared. So, this great emptiness of mind or purity of spirit, which springs forth once the veil of thought obsession lifts, is missed because most humans cherish their mind. People love their “bundle of thoughts,” whereas dogs just say, “Come on, let’s play!”

People feel lost without their memories, ideas, personalities, and all of the things that

give them a sense of independent identity. Dogs don’t have an identity; they don’t know

separation; they don’t even know they have a name. Fortunately for us, dogs come when we call them.

As Cesar Millan, the Dog Whisperer, once said,

“I don’t work with people that have dog problems; I work with dogs that have people problems.”

Most people do not realize that their dog is an integral part of their sanity. For many

individuals, their dog might be keeping them from committing some heinous act, drug or alcohol addiction, life on the street, or some years in a mental institution. This is no joke in today’s fast-paced, poison-infested, high-tech world, where slowing down is tantamount to suicide. The great thing about dogs is that they are always in the flow of the present moment. When we are with our dogs, an opportunity to remember what we really are is always available. And that wellspring is effortlessly reflected by our dogs.

A few days after Charlie passed on, while walking on the beach, I reflected on our last massage session. A presence spread throughout my being as a powerful reminder and a serenade pointing the way to the true Home, as if I could ever leave. Moments later, interrupted from my reverie, while still walking on the beach, a man appeared, looking distraught. “I am looking for a small dog...” he said, holding out his

hands, with about 18 inches between them. I told him that I would come back if I saw him.

As I walked away, I shook my head in awe at the connectivity of life and then looked down at the ground. A mishmash of human footprints, some with shoes and others barefoot imprints, dotted the landscape in front of me. I, however, was following the lone set of paw prints etched gently and floating across the sand. All I could do was laugh. Once again, the dogs had shown the way.

Primordial Words

Millions of people who otherwise would be completely lost in their minds and in endless past and future concerns are taken by their dog or cat back into the present moment again and again and reminded of the joy of being.

35

Making Me Dead

Jane was a 97-year-old wealthy widow who was five feet tall and weighed less than 100 pounds. Aleece had been Jane's longtime personal assistant. As Jane approached age 98, and her final 6 months of life, she required more help after she fell and broke her hip. I was recruited for additional daytime assistance while she was convalescing.

Four-year-old Zach entered my sphere at this time. He was Jane's great-grandson and came over with his mother, Laura, when she visited her grandmother. Each time Laura visited, she would ask me to watch Zach during the visit. On those days, my caregiving focus shifted from end-of-life care to childcare, affording me an opportunity to let my little boy out.

One day Zach and I were in the den of the large house, wrestling, laughing, and doing stuff little boys do. Suddenly, my young friend turned Errol Flynn, as if playing the swashbuckling early cinema hero, and thrust his make-believe sword into my abdomen. I fell straight backwards, toward the carpet, grabbing at the sword as if it were truly impaling me, eyes firmly closed and in the throes of a mortal injury.

After dropping to the floor, I assumed the corpse pose and feigned death for about 15 seconds. Then I opened my eyes and exclaimed,

"I'm dead!"

This declaration had a dramatic effect on the little lad. Zach burst into unbridled laughter, rich and deep. I lay there laughing, too, but of course also playing dead.

I rose to my feet, not realizing the full import of what had transpired. A new game has been created! As I stood, Zach came toward me again, eyes darting about with a fiery and wild delight.

"I want to make you dead!" he shouted gleefully.

“Okay!” I replied, dropping to the floor again, as he pushed another phantom sword into my gut. Over and over, we played this little game. Each time Zach laughed at the same fever pitch and so did I. It was ten minutes of timeless deadness or total aliveness. Laura finally came back to check on us, for our new game had become boisterous.

Zach had made the idea of death into a pretend game. Death was fantasy, make-believe. Intuitively, Zach knew there was no death, the paradox of “I’m dead” turning into a great cosmic joke.

The phrase, “making me dead” has a second meaning. It also points to the necessity of ego-death through a burning away of an erroneous conceptual sense of self (being identified as an objective body-mind) which poses as the vastness of the True Self.

In the following months, each time Laura came to visit her grandmother, the first thing out of Zach’s mouth was,

“I want to make you dead!” And he wasn’t just saying the words, as each time his expression was fresh and alive, the way it was the first time we played this game.

Young children remind us of what we have always known, but sometimes forget, that life is everlasting and death does not really touch us.

Primordial Words

Death is really beautiful, for if it were a bad thing, God would not let it happen to us. It is really freedom, an entry into another, higher life. We must utilize this life well in order to realize the life beyond this one.

36

Dancing into the Light

Inside her apartment living room my friend Hamsa's arms and legs floated above a hospital bed, as if attached to marionette strings. These spontaneous and flowing movements were performed as she laid on top of the blankets, with only an adult diaper and t-shirt covering her 80-pound frame. Her eyes appeared vacant, yet introspective. Hamsa's limberness and agility defied the fact that her 89-year-old body would soon be departing the earthly sphere of existence, for she was in the final two weeks of her life.

Each time Hamsa spoke, a short pithy saying pointing to deep spiritual truth came through her. Parrot-like, she would immediately repeat words, as if responding to her own inner dialogue,

"I don't know; I don't know."

Hamsa realized that the Eternal Reality (God) can never be known by the mind. After her second repetition of this phrase, Hamsa chuckled, as if awakened to the great cosmic joke: you are what you are seeking.

I witnessed the spectacle, while maneuvering from one side of the bed to the other almost every minute, to ensure that her dance did not end on the floor. Occasionally I adjusted her pillows or limbs, shared an impromptu hug, or sometimes we looked into each other's eyes. For brief moments she paused long enough for me to feed her a small spoonful of raspberry sorbet, and like a tiny bird waiting for its mother her mouth opened in readiness to receive each bite.

You could say that old conditioning patterns were being processed and released as well. More importantly, a lifetime of spiritual pearls permeated the airwaves.

Hamsa's incessant talking and habitual body movements continued for hours, almost

without a break. In near-death jargon the label used to describe this behavior is "terminal restlessness" a final discharging process before the dissolution of form (dying). I called Hamsa's version, dancing into the Light.

One day Hamsa's left foot floated up and gently touched the side of my cheek.

"She kicks the death dude and he remains unmoved." I said and we both giggled.

"In fact," I continued, "now he's turning the other cheek." I smiled, turning my head to expose the other side of my face, and Hamsa grabbed her belly in heart-filled laughter. She always enjoyed tap-dancing; it symbolized her playful nature and zest for life.

A dear friend of Hamsa's was ready to leave,

"Love you." The friend said, tenderly, a joyful tear in her eye. "See you tomorrow."

"I hope not!" Hamsa responded in a mock-serious tone. More laughter filled the space. No dread or gloom could be found inside this small apartment. It was easy for Hamsa to joke about death, as she realized that form was changing to formlessness and matter to pure energy, while nothing could affect one's Essential Nature.

As I sat with Hamsa during that last month of her life, a deeper and deeper clarity came, a conviction and intuitive insight: the body truly is but a snapshot, an idea derived from thoughts, the soul eternal.

Hamsa and I were from the same faith stream, with shared spiritual lineage, so she asked me to be her death buddy. As her doula, or companion-in-transition, a cosmic alignment put us together. Once our agreement had been made, I went to get her a bowl of soup.

Upon my return, she handed me a card in which she wrote, "What can one say to the one who freely gives their gift of escort up to the Gate of my Eternity."

It mattered not whether I was physically at her bedside, though I came every morning for a couple of hours. I felt her body as a house slowly being lifted up by a tornado, and soon to be scattered in the Vast Infinite.

In the weeks before her passing, Hamsa shared profound insights, such as,

“I would say I understand what the phrase ‘Die before you die’ points to. It’s exciting in one way to know that unification can consciously be experienced even though the brain programming holds on to its divine decrees to survive. All the thoughts that come up, I see them and say ‘thank you very much for sharing. Ha, ha.’ Thus, in a celestial or miraculous way I experience myself without much body identity.”

Hamsa was born in early October 1929 and given the birth name Harriett. Her spiritual name, Hamsa, means: graceful aquatic bird representing divine spirit. In her early life she was a nurse and married to a doctor. They had three children. Wanderlust and an igniting spiritual thirst shifted her life. She divorced in her late 30s, drawn to life as a seeker of the highest Truth and Light, eventually spending some years with the Hindu guru Muktananda. We met in late 2003 at a gathering for spiritual aspirants.

She led a very active and healthy life for 87 years. In the last two years, several major health situations occurred. Three months before her passing, a Cat-Scan was done for suspected cancer and showed stage-3 adenocarcinoma of the lung.

A biopsy revealed that her DNA had a specific bio-marker suggesting a trial medication called Tigrasso would be an effective treatment. This drug was being marketed as an enzyme therapy but in fact it was an oral chemotherapy agent in disguise.

When I visited her in June 2019, Hamsa told me what was happening after only 3 days on this new chemo drug: loss of vision, some finger motor function weakness and numbness, orientation issues

and confusion and other brain changes. We evaluated her options and she expressed an adamant desire to stop the trial medication and felt ready for hospice.

“It’s easy to set up hospice, if that’s what you want.” I said. We made the phone call

together. Afterwards she felt more settled and expressed:

“I know there are no mistakes the Universe is making in this intense, what feels like, a purification process. I am learning to let go and let God. At this point Source has to do it for me as some disorientation and confusion muddles my mind but Thy will be done. I trust Source as my only anchor. Still there is love and gratitude for the life that Source deems to be living as me and that truly there is only Life living all life, which does not end with death of the body.”

Hamsa was originally planning on using physician-hastened death out of state when she reached the pre-dying phase but changed her mind. (California implemented a new law legalizing physician-hastened death -as an aid-in-dying option- in September 2019, not quite in time for Hamsa).

One of the world’s leaders in Physician-hastened death is Dignitas in Switzerland. They pioneered a protocol that is very similar to what most states use where dying with dignity is legal. (Currently 10 states offer aid-in-dying: Colorado, Oregon, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Vermont, Washington and District of Columbia).

As the Dignitas website states, “An oral dose of an antiemetic drug is given (to prevent vomiting), followed approximately half an hour later by a lethal ‘Medicament’ overdose of 15 grams of powdered pentobarbital dissolved in a glass of water...The pentobarbital overdose depresses the central nervous system, causing the person to become drowsy and fall asleep within 3–5 minutes of drinking it. Anesthesia (sedation) progresses to coma and later, as the person’s breathing becomes more shallow, respiratory arrest and death follow, which occurs within 30 to 40 minutes of ingesting the pentobarbital.”

Hamsa's physical doula was her 63-year-old daughter Bonny, a certified midwife, who had assisted in many births over the last 30 years. Bonny was a natural and intuitive caregiver, aided by her four grown daughters all in their 20s and 30s. They came at various times during Hamsa's last month of life, offering love and companionship.

As part of our plan for possible episodes of agitation and restlessness as well as pain management, small amounts of a weak Indica (medical cannabis) tincture, infused with lavender and chamomile was given to Hamsa. This herbal blend was administered in conjunction with high dose CBD tincture, further minimizing the psychoactive side effects, as Hamsa had not used THC in over 3 decades. These herbal compounds helped to keep Hamsa in a balanced place until the last ten days of her life when small doses of oral morphine were given to treat breakthrough pain.

In our last day spent exchanging words, I said to Hamsa, after a long period of silence,

"You and I dwell in the mystical forest; not many visit this space as there's nothing to do. No borders, delineations, fences or walls nor limitations of any kind are here. All are welcome, yet few arrive. It is a joyous place. Laughter flows like the song of a bird; the eternal current flows; smiles adorn the inhabitants. All flourish. Nothing is different about the forest here. It is only that all the dwellers have divine vision. What a simple life; no separation exists."

As I looked into Hamsa's eyes, I realized she was dancing in the light again. A rare

opportunity, so why fill the space with words or conversation since nothing can compare to the silent presence. We fell into a deeper stillness, a richer communion. If something important needed to be said, the silent heart could speak it without words. Hamsa was in communion with the Maker and her body-dropping process provided a great opportunity for all her visitors and caregivers to deepen in eternal presence.

At some point it behooves us to let the dying person lead. They have lost many of the obstacles or veils that obscure the subtle realm and possess a direct line to the spiritual dimension that is often not easily accessible for others. The dying person is bathing on the cusp of form and formlessness.

So, I waited...and waited some more, breathing in the silence which was more than an interlude but the very Backdrop of Existence.

Each morning in the final week of Hamsa's earthly sojourn, as I sat at her bedside, silence reigned, except for Hamsa's occasional hiccough spells.

Sitting with her during those early mornings was like entering the unfathomable, as if peering into an abyss that is not empty but absolutely full, or lying down on an immense green pasture that opens into space. In her last days, I sensed, Hamsa was immersed in a mystical cocoon and living her own words,

"If I stay in 'the I don't know present moment', all is beautiful. Now is my refuge, my meditation, just deep rest and silence unfolds its own gifts. Something lives us, as us. Words stand silent. The silent salute to the One that loves us, knows us, breathes us, charts the course of our short trajectory in non-existent space/time reality and will in great mercy and compassion bring Itself Home from whence it came. Who would have imagined our humanity is our divinity."

Hamsa passed into the formless dimension at 5:15 am on Monday July 29th, with what her daughter said was a "restful look on her face."

What joy to be part of her final earthly chapter; such a fine friend on the journey to Self-realization.

Primordial Words

By meditation on the Immortal, the fear of death recedes far away. Remember this! When the contemplation of the One becomes uninterrupted, you will advance towards full unbroken realization of God.

37

The Fear of Death

In the Katha Upanishad, an East Indian wisdom text written a few centuries before the time of Christ, a boy named Nachiketa (a name meaning “One who does not decay”) yearns for the truth about death. The scripture begins with Nachiketa saying to Yama (the Master of Death), “When a person dies, there arises this doubt. ‘He still exists,’ say some. ‘He does not,’ say others. I want you to teach me the truth.”

And this question about death is answered in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, written near the time of Buddha (2500 years ago) and paraphrased here: After death some beings move directly to the Light and remain in the heaven realms; others take the path of darkness (fall into hell realms) and are reborn after undergoing the fruits of karma in their subtle bodies. If good deeds and bad deeds are equal, they are reborn immediately on earth. If good deeds outweigh bad, they go to heaven realms for a time and are then reborn on earth; if bad deeds outweigh the good, they go to hell realms for a time and then are reborn on earth.

The Bhagavad Gita, the ancient Bible of India, written about the time of the Old Testament 1000 years before Christ, states that a conscious life and a conscious transition go together,

“...No one who does good deeds will ever come to a bad end. When such people die, they are reborn into a home that is pure and prosperous or they may be born into a family where meditation is practiced...and the wisdom they have acquired in previous lives will be reawakened...”

Chinese Taoist mystics are fearless when death approaches because they know, through their own experience, that nothing changes within the Essential Self. The physical body is like a ripple on the surface of a

lake, a brief appearance, followed by disappearance. So, they cultivate Self-Presence and refine themselves during their earthly lifetime in order to maintain Self-Presence during the transition of form, knowing that the physical transitory body is not worth clinging to.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead was written 1,000 years ago by a student of a master

named PadmaSambhava (“The Lotus Born”). The book shares the wisdom of this illumined master, elaborating on experiences that Consciousness has after death.

Many people from Eastern countries, those affiliated with Buddhism, Taoism and Hinduism, such as India, Tibet, China and Thailand, have gone deeply into the realm of death and dying. These are ancient societies that have been around much longer than American culture and tend to be more spiritual. Those immersed in these spiritual traditions understand that preparation for death while still living can help one attain enlightenment, promote liberation, or at least facilitate the best possible rebirth. No one has gone deeper than the sages and saints of all traditions, for they have realized what we are, the Deathless Spirit, the Supreme Self. For them, death has no real meaning, as the great Indian sage Ramana Maharshi said,

“In spite of ignorance, no man takes the fact of death seriously. He may see death around him, but he still does not believe that he will die. He believes, or rather, feels, in some strange way, that death is not for him. Only when the body is threatened does he fall victim to the fear of death. Every man believes himself to be Eternal, and this is actually the Truth. This Truth asserts itself in spite of man's ignorant belief that the body is the Self.”

In the West, important questions related to death are rarely if ever asked. People often change the subject when I talk about death and dying, especially in a social context.

“What do you do for a living?” they often ask.

“I’m an end-of-life caregiver,” I reply and then describe some beautiful exchanges with dying clients. Less than a minute later, the subject has been changed or a joke is told, shifting conversation to a more palatable topic.

The length of time Americans can hold awareness on the subject of death and dying reflects the superficial level of our Western culture. In the West, we generally have a lack of presence with dying. American culture has been conditioned to believe in the myth that death is to be feared. Every day on the internet and television, stories are published that speak of the tragedy and horror of death, further reinforcing this myth. In avoiding the subject of death, however, we miss some of the sweetest, most profound gifts available to us.

Our society has been immersed in the outer search through material acquisition and

putting energy into technological advancement.

In the United States, we have become increasingly absorbed in the newest device or application with rarely a free moment for reflection or rest. Silence and stillness are covered up with busyness or noise. We avoid the only aspect of ourselves that does not change: our Innermost Being.

This makes it difficult for Americans to talk about dying, let alone contemplate death with any depth. Our conditioned beliefs and fears reinforce a sense of denial. First, we must admit that fear is there, although many people may not acknowledge this fear of death.

Instead, some may say, “I fear losing my independence, my usefulness, and my ability to exercise and do the activities I love or are concerned with loss of seeming control or being incapacitated or sick.” Two of the biggest fears are fear of the unknown and fear of pain in the

dying process. Yet underneath these unpleasant feelings about death is the primal fear of losing our personal identity. And that identity includes an assortment of conditioned beliefs about death.

A large portion of the populace is not prepared for death, the dissolution of form. A few people in American culture may have purchased a titanium casket, or skimmed a book about death once, but most Americans bypass the most important inquiries: *Have I gotten to know the soul or realized the immortal nature of the Self? Have I touched the deeper spiritual dimension through direct experience, resolved emotional issues with family and friends, or forgiven and made amends to those I may have hurt with my actions?*

Ultimately, according to the liberated sages: there is no birth and death. One remains as they have always been, not flesh but Eternal Spirit. Of course, our bodies die, but what we really are does not die. Self-realization, a direct experience of oneness with God, is the greatest benefit and true purpose of life.

We have a large group in America (the baby-boomers) who are headed toward death and dying. There are not going to be enough services like hospice available for those who need it. Some people will look into assisted-dying alternatives. Many will forego a large drawn-out funeral and burial to avoid putting a financial and emotional burden on their family and friends. People are going to look into different ways of dying. The traditional cemetery business and funeral home enterprises may become obsolete or move towards soil-reduction death-care options (human-composting), where instead of a regular burial or cremation, one opts for a green burial (no embalming chemicals, metal caskets or concrete walls).

This natural organic body reduction process is the cutting edge in sustainable death-care, though the cost is about \$5,000.00.

It is also possible that in the West during the coming decades, we might see funeral pyres such as the type they have used in India for thousands of years. And there is going to be a big need for caregivers,

coaches, and doulas. The time is now to attune to the eternal vibration with all your heart and to realize “the peace that surpasses all description.”

Primordial Words

In the West, death is often regarded as a big trouble, and we don't want to be faced with it, to even talk about it, but one day we will all have to shed this body.

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A Redwood Speaks

I've been here for hours; not a single person has interrupted the silence as I sit inside the fire-carved-out base of an old-growth redwood tree standing at a height of 277 feet and near the high point of a local state park. On this day, the Old-growth one is speaking to me. The words come from within me but they're not mine and appear before my awareness as if downloaded from the primordial depths of an ancient spirit. All I can do is listen and write:

"In 1,500 years of earthly life, not one iota of fear has oozed from my bark. Wildfires, wind, rain, flooding, mudslides, hailstorms, and even a little snow—I have withstood them all. Centuries of changing seasons have not stirred my colossal spirit. I have no name or gender but humans refer to me as *Big Ben*. I tell no stories nor have thoughts, beliefs, or worries. My roots connect to every living thing in this forest, a matrix containing a vast underground spider web that supports an entire ecosystem. I am the mighty redwood, watching over the forest and providing shelter to all.

"One day I, too, will fall. The thunder from my collapse will be heard for miles. Yet, no one will cry or shed a tear. The sun's light will now pierce deeper into the forest and allow my grandchildren space to grow and thrive. My disintegrating form will remain still, as always, while delivering nutrients to the forest floor. I will never stop giving; I will disintegrate, but never completely disappear."

Similarly, each of us has our turn at playing on the earth's school field. What a great opportunity to bloom into the vastness of the Supreme Self. When the body falls, the heart stops beating, life transitioning into Life. Yet our True Self remains, unmoved, untouched, by the bodily exit. As the idea of the body falls from

awareness, one becomes disinterested in thoughts. All fear comes from thought. When we let go of thinking, thoughts are seen as crumbs of dry bread when the universe is offering a feast. Knowing that the winds of Spirit always blow our way, feeding us the Nectar of Immortality, thinking is then realized to be an unnecessary distraction, for nothing really needs to be figured out.

As we awaken into fearlessness, the mind stops for just a moment and truth and love rush in. When we change our usual way of looking at things, we are able to move away from the obsession with thoughts and thinking, awakening from the trance of ordinary existence, which is often clouded by resistance and fear.

The state before awakening amounts to believing in the conceptual “I” or the illusion of separate existence. In the state after awakening, transformative awareness, or Pure

Consciousness becomes the focal point. Awakening is always in full bloom within, and we need not seek it, for it finds us. Like a rising tide that comes suddenly, yet gradually, awakening to inherent oneness deepens as the sense of a limited separate self becomes more obsolete. When we awaken to what we really are, not as a concept or belief, but as a direct experience, the mind grows quieter.

To be awake is to realize the deathless nature of life. In spiritual awakening, we are ready to die each instant and become that which cannot die. Awakening can offer a mighty glimpse behind the veil of mind, snapping us out of the trance of “I, me, and mine.” You realize the truth, that the body and personality are only a temporary state within Eternal Life.

When you no longer live by fear, form and formlessness are seen as one. The activities of life are seen as dream-like, ephemeral, and not serious. Each moment is the only space where reality lives and it is absolutely full, for it has the divine spark as its basis.

Primordial Words

A glimpse of Self-realization can be regarded as a breach in the prison walls of the ego. Yours is the steady work of erosion, which wears the walls away until at last they become paper-thin and collapse. The only real tragedy is a lifetime wasted on meaningless living, not turned toward spiritual effort.

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Our Deathless Nature

If there is any lingering fear about death, take solace in the innocent and sincere investigation story of a 5-year-old boy in Southern India in the 1950s. He went to the spiritual Master Atmananda because of incessant and tormenting thoughts and nightmares about death. As he sat at the Master's feet, Atmananda said,

"Were you not a small baby some years ago?"

"Yes."

"Where is that baby now?"

"It is gone."

"Where...can you bring it back?"

"No, no, that is impossible."

"So, it is dead? Is it not?"

"No, as I am here."

"I mean, the baby you once were. It is gone forever and will never be able to come back. That is what I mean by death. Did you cry when the baby was gone?"

"No, but until now I did not know it."

"In a similar way, this boy will also die and you will be a youth. Then the youth also will die and you will become an old man. All these deaths one after the other you take pleasantly, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then why do you cry and make noise when the old man dies? Is it also not like the many deaths you already had?"

"Yes. If this is the meaning of death, I shall not cry or be afraid of it any longer."

"Why were you not sorry when the baby in you died? Because you knew that the baby alone dies and that you do not die. In a similar way,

it is only the old man in you that will die. You know that you will never die. You know your many deaths from your babyhood onwards, so you are the knower of these deaths.”

“Yes, yes!” The boy said, his face luminous with the joy of Truth. “Now I understand. I shall never be afraid of death.”

“Now you are deathless, the Eternal. That is God. Do you follow me?”

“Yes, Master!” The boy said, as he bowed in prostration at the Master’s feet, tears streaming down his face.

Primordial Words

I laugh at death. I am ready anytime. There is nothing to it. Eternal life is mine.

Resources

The final two phases of end-of-life care are called “pre-dying” and “active dying,” but they often overlap. Much depends on the specific nature of the disease or terminal illness, the metabolic profile of the patient, and the signs and symptoms that are present. The following information is from hospice.

Pre-Dying (Preparation for Dying) Phase

The pre-dying (preparation for dying) phase lasts approximately one to three weeks. Signs of the pre-dying phase include the following: increased restlessness, confusion, and agitation; inability to stay content in one position and insisting on changing positions frequently (exhausting family and caregivers); withdrawal from active participation in social activities; increased periods of sleep and lethargy; decreased intake of food and liquids; beginning to show periods of pausing in breathing (apnea), whether awake or sleeping; the patient reports seeing people who had already died; the patient states that he or she is dying; the patient requests the family to visit to settle unfinished business and tie up loose ends; inability to heal or recover from wounds or infections; and increased swelling (edema) of either the extremities or the entire body.

Active Dying Phase

The active dying phase lasts on average three days to one week. Signs of the active dying phase include the following: inability to arouse the patient at all (coma) or ability to only arouse the patient with great effort, the patient quickly returning to a severely unresponsive state (semi-coma); severe agitation, hallucinations, and acting “crazy” or not in the patient’s normal manner; much longer periods of pausing in breathing (known as apnea), dramatic changes in the breathing pattern, including very rapid breathing or cyclic changes in the patterns of breathing (such as slow progressing to very fast and then slow again or shallow progressing to very deep breathing, while also changing the rate of breathing to very fast and then slow); and other very abnormal breathing patterns; severely increased respiratory congestion or fluid buildup in lungs, inability to swallow any fluids at all (not taking any food by mouth voluntarily, as well), the patient states that he or she is going to die, and the patient is breathing through a wide-open mouth continuously and no longer can speak even if awake; urinary or bowel incontinence in a patient who was not incontinent before, marked decrease in urine output, and darkening color of urine or very abnormal colors (such as red or brown);

blood pressure dropping dramatically from the patient’s normal blood pressure range (more than a 20- or 30-point drop), with systolic blood pressure below 70 and diastolic blood pressure below 50; the patient’s extremities (hands, arms, feet, and legs) feel very cold to the touch, the patient complains that his or her legs/feet are numb and cannot be felt at all, and cyanosis, or a bluish or purple coloring, to the patient’s arms and legs, especially the feet, knees, and hands; and the patient’s body is held in a rigid unchanging position and the patient’s jaw drops or the jaw may drop to the side his or her head is lying toward.

Movies and Documentaries with Death and Dying Themes

Just Getting Started (movie)

My Life (movie)

Our Souls at Night (movie)

The Book Thief (movie)

Here After (movie)

All My Life (movie)

50-50 (movie)

The Last Song (movie)

Storm Boy (movie)

My Happy Ending (movie)

The Leisure Seeker (movie)

Being Mortal (documentary)

Grief Walker (documentary)

BJ Miller: Death as Part of Life (documentary)

Death by Joy (documentary)

In the Parlor: The Final Goodbye (documentary)

Life Before Death (documentary)

Lives Well Lived (documentary)

Nurse with Purple Hair (documentary)

How to Die: Simon's Choice (documentary)

Books with Death and Dying Themes

Accidental Saints: Finding God in all the Wrong People, Convergent Books, New York, 2015.

Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death,

Shambhala, Colorado, 2009.

Graceful Exits: How Great Beings Die, Shambhala, Colorado, 2005.

Intimate Death: How the Dying Teach Us to Live, Vintage, 1998.

The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully, Flatiron Books, NY, 2017.

The Good Death: An Exploration of Dying in America, Beacon Press, MA, 2017.

Important Considerations at the End of Life

It is important to have a clearly defined will listing essentials. An advanced directive, a written document that appoints an agent to make decisions in the event the patient becomes incapacitated, is valuable as well. An advanced directive is the combination

of a living will and power of attorney. It includes naming a healthcare agent, preferred places to live in certain situations, an agent having access to the patient's medical records, decision regarding organ donation, desire for intrusive medical treatment, such as artificial nutrition and hydration, and what the patient wants done with his or her body after death.

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR), Do Not Intubate (DNI) (hook up to tubes), and Do Not Hospitalize (DNH) are also important considerations at the end of life.

A POLST (Physician's Order for Life-Sustaining Treatments) is a document that takes the advanced directive to the next level, as in the past the advanced directive wishes have not always been honored. The POLST gives the patient a better shot at having his or her wishes met. It includes a doctor's signature and is reviewed with the patient's doctor and signed by him or her. The POLST includes some of the same elements of an advanced directive, such as a listing of the patient's most important wishes, and what the patient wants before, during, and after passing.

FICA (standing for Faith, Importance/Influence, Community, and Address) is a spiritual assessment tool used as a guide to check in with the patient's most important questions and issues.

The G.R.A.C.E. Model by Joan Halifax is a useful guide for end-of-life caregivers in cultivating compassion in interactions with the patient.

In this model, G stands for Gaining attention and grounding, or balance; R stands for Recalling intention and the resource of motivation; A stands for Attuning to self/other, affective resonance; C stands for Considering, what will serve; and E stands for Engaging and ethical enactment.

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About the Author

Michael, with his wife Aleece (also known as Chetana), love spending time in one-to-one communion (or small groups) with fellow heart & soul-oriented brothers and sisters. They are open to visits with sincere seekers of Truth, those interested in spirituality and various elements related to end-of-life care and holistic healing.

His first book, published in 2008 is a travel narrative called, *Medicine of the Heart* about his journey to Thailand (in 2005) to study Thai Massage. Michael's upcoming book, for a late 2026 release is co-authored with his wife Chetana. It is called: *Awakening Through Direct Experience*, a hybrid spiritual memoir about the path of spiritual awakening and the powerful assistance of the great saints and sages.

You can reach Michael via email at: mysticscribe11@gmail.com.

