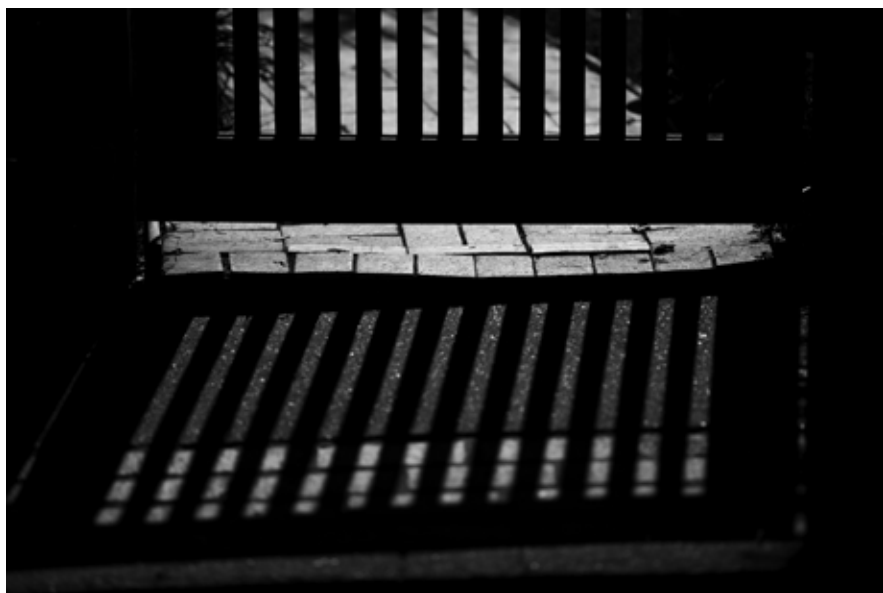


# *Living/Dying Project*

winter 2008



## Conscious Dying in the West

Thirty years ago the conscious dying movement was born in the modern West. Basically, conscious dying is the process of utilizing the dying process as an opportunity to become more present and loving, an opportunity for profound healing, for spiritual awakening. Eastern traditions such as Hinduism and particularly Buddhism, as well as shamanic traditions, have explicit teachings that guide the dying to a conscious and graceful death.

In the West, however, this wisdom was lost in the rush to industrialization and modernity. For example, there is a body of Medieval Christian literature called *Ars Moriendi* or “Art of Dying” that provided guidance for the dying and for those attending them. This

tradition fell into disuse in the late eighteenth century.

For much of the twentieth century, death was almost completely denied in the West. The dying patient was told “You’re really looking better today.” Family members were encouraged not to upset their dying loved one.

Things began to change in the late sixties. In 1967, Dame Cicely Saunders founded the first modern hospice in London. In 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’ “On Death and Dying” was published. Then the first American hospice was founded in New Haven in 1974. Death was coming out of the closet. A few people began to talk about death openly and honestly.

Originally there were spiritual

underpinnings to the hospice movement, but as it grew in America, the need to subsist on third-party payments from insurance companies and from the government forced most hospices to deeply reduce their chaplaincy services. There are a few shining exceptions; our local Hospice by the Bay in Marin is one. Certainly each hospice is as spiritual as the individual human beings who are part of that hospice, but the hospice movement in general is no longer a spiritual movement.

Before the modern hospice movement, death was denied. Dying was about the body only, so the mind and the spirit were avoided. The main benefit of the hospice movement and of the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was that death could be discussed, psychological issues were addressed directly, families could find closure, patients could “finish business.” People could make the best of a bad situation.

As long as we think we are only our body and our mind, dying most certainly is a bad situation. We are, however, two-fold beings, human/divine, relative/absolute, imperfect/perfect, at one and the same time. In fact, since we are losing our body and our mind in the dying process, the spiritual or soul dimension that each of us fundamentally is, becomes crucial.

When the physical and psychological needs of the dying patient are met, to the extent that they are no longer overwhelming, dying becomes a great spiritual opportunity. (Whenever I mention dying or the dying patient,



*hiding in this cage  
of visible matter*

*is the invisible  
lifebird*

*pay attention  
to her*

*she is singing  
your song  
—Kabir*

*Barn's burnt down—  
Now I can see the moon.  
—Masahide*



I am using shorthand to refer to someone confronting death who may be healed in body as well as mind and soul.) Bringing consciousness to the confrontation with a life-threatening illness adds to the possibility of physical healing.

In the early 1970s, my friend and associate Ram Dass began to talk publicly about the possibility of dying consciously. Ram Dass had been intensively studying and practicing Eastern mystical traditions and saw that the wisdom contained in “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” and

other sacred writings was nowhere being utilized here in the West, though Aldous Huxley, whom he knew, had earlier written about this possibility in his novel, “Island.” In fact, though death was finally beginning to be talked about, it still remained the topic which carried the most unconscious fear in our culture, and hence held the potential for the most profound collective transformation.

Thirty years ago Ram Dass invited Stephen Levine, a poet and meditation teacher, to begin a project that would explore, put into practice and teach the possibility of making the dying experience a conscious act, a spiritual opportunity. Stephen founded the Dying Project in Santa Cruz, California, under the umbrella of Ram Dass’ service-oriented non-profit Hanuman Foundation, of which I was the Executive Director. This was the first organization in the West whose mission was to promote conscious dying. It soon became clear to Ram Dass and me that Stephen’s project was the most compelling work being done in the Foundation and we joined him in teaching workshops and in-service trainings around the country.

After a couple of years of this teaching, which was very well received, we decided that the time was ripe to create an actual physical place where people with life-threatening illnesses could come to heal and/or to die consciously. This home, called the Dying Center, was founded in 1981 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Stephen, Ram Dass and I had moved, and was the first such residential facility in the West.

I was Director of the Dying Center and for three and a half years the staff and I offered care and guidance to seventy patients.

During this time Stephen decided he no longer wanted to be part of our non-profit structure, though he continued with his skillful and inspiring teaching and counseling. I became the Director of the entire Dying Project. Feeling that the name “Dying Project” was confusing (was it a project about dying or was the project itself dying), the name was changed to The Living/Dying Project.

The Dying Center closed when the building that housed it was no longer available. I moved back to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1986 and started the next incarnation of the Project, which no longer had a physical home for the life-threatened. A group of trained volunteers in five Bay Area counties visited the homes and hospital rooms of our clients and offered free-of-charge spiritual support, which meets the clients wherever they may be and has no dogma to promote.

Twenty years ago we fully expected this important work to become widespread, since clearly there was such an obvious need. Many of the tens of thousands of people who have attended trainings with the Dying Project and then the Living/

Dying Project are now working in hospitals and hospices around the country, but there are only a handful of organizations whose primary mission is to offer spiritual support and guidance for the dying.

Besides our project there is Joan Halifax's Upaya Institute in Santa Fe, and in the Bay Area are the Center for Attitudinal Healing, the Zen Hospice Project and the Metta Institute of Frank Ostaseski. Fear of death is still the unacknowledged elephant in the room of our culture, the largely denied and unexamined force that continues to compel us individually and collectively to the out-of-balance situation which we find ourselves in politically, economically, environmentally and socially.

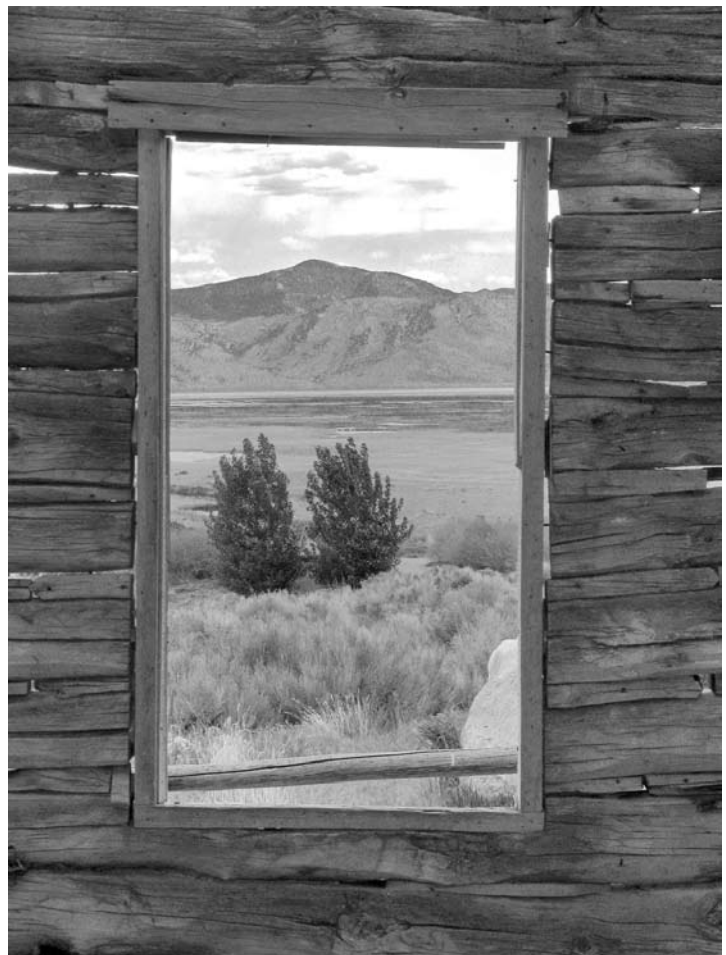
This collective denial of our mortality has led us to a near future in America and in the West that appears problematic and deeply uncertain. The Living/Dying Project is not so much about dying as about the slash between the living and dying in our name, the interface where our certain mortality can inform the way we live. This work is about healing in the fullest sense.

Our society is at a vital choice point where each of us is invited to again and again choose healing rather than the denial and avoidance that clearly are no longer viable.

—Dale Borglum



*If you want to build a ship,  
don't herd people together to collect wood  
and don't assign them tasks and work  
but rather, teach them to long for the  
endless immensity of the sea.*  
—Antoine de Saint-Exupery



# The Journey Continues

A year has passed since I wrote about Denlow Enlow in last year's newsletter. Melissa Enlow contacted the Living/Dying Project in 2007 to ask for spiritual support for her husband, who had been diagnosed with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. We've been meeting once a week for over a year and a half.

*Pathwalker,  
There is no path,  
You must make the path  
As you walk.*  
—Antonio Machado

Denlow's journey continues. As we've all expected, his capacities have diminished as his body succumbs to the reality of this unrelenting disease. Though Denlow's mind remains sharp and his insights evocative, words are harder to form, whether he speaks them or composes them on the computer.

His breathing is much diminished and his fingers more difficult to control, but his writing is as moving as ever. We've included a recent poem of his entitled "My Four Corners." As he and I have discussed his imminent death, Denlow expressed a wish that his ashes be scattered at the "four corners of his life."

Sitting at the computer with Denlow and reading this and other poems as they slowly emerge from his still vital and creative mind, I'm struck by the depth of these words. After hours together, I know his story well enough that I appreciate how each word resonates with the fullness of a life that, though coming to an end, has been richly lived.

Our meetings are precious to me, perhaps because I've spent so many months with Denlow, though I'm inclined to believe that this appreciation has more to do with the sweet presence of this man than the span of time spent together. I feel as though Denlow has been teaching me how to open my heart in the face of loss, in ways I hadn't imagined possible. His living in the face of dying is inspiring. I love him dearly and thank him for the gifts he continues to give me.

Melissa recently asked if I'd be willing to officiate at the memorial service for Denlow after he dies. I was deeply honored and accepted.

Since then Denlow and I have been preparing for the service in a conversation that is at times filled with humor and at other times great sadness, as he contemplates saying farewell to everyone and everything he loves. Living with dying is not an easy thing to do, yet it can be remarkably precious.

—Curtis Grindahl



*My continuing passion is to part a  
curtain, that invisible veil of indifference  
that falls between us and that blinds us  
to each other's presence, each other's  
wonder, each other's human plight.*  
—Eudora Welty

# My Four Corners

My East

Scatter my ashes there  
Where my life began  
Where my seed began to germinate  
That land where the three rivers meet  
High up the river so that I will float down  
Past all those places I played as a boy  
Those precious pools of innocence  
Back to my beginning, scatter me there

My South

Scatter my ashes there  
Where my character developed  
Where I finally took root  
That valley beneath those golden bluffs  
Under the cedar, where my mother spirit rests  
In memory of times so happy and creative  
I learned much about the world, myself as well  
Back to my enlightenment, scatter me there

My West

Scatter my ashes there  
Where I found my love  
Where my universe blossomed  
That hill with its hallowed halls of higher learning  
Under the oak in the meadow, where I reveled free  
A bacchanal with memories that will last lifetimes  
Friendships forged, bonds unbreakable, love everlasting  
Back to less troubled times, scatter me there

My North

Inter my ashes there  
Where my life draws to an end  
Where my life grew into fruition and went to seed  
That land north of the bay where the sleeping maiden lay  
In those valleys below my heart found its home  
My perfect home, my beautiful wife and daughter, my love  
Hopefully, I leave enough behind, my legacy of words  
Take me to my ending, inter me there

—Denlow Enlow, 8/25/08



## A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HEALING

A WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS AND  
ANYONE WANTING TO DEEPLY EXPLORE HEALING



Physical healing, emotional healing, spiritual healing, collective healing — the journey to wholeness takes many forms and has as many starting points as there are people who embark upon the journey. Each of us is at a particular point on our healing path, confronting our next challenge, often without clearly knowing whether attitudes or practices we have been using to facilitate growth in ourselves or in our clients are becoming stale, without knowing which direction we should now turn to create meaningful transformation.

In this workshop, we will draw upon the wisdom of Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, the diagnostic message coming from the connection between stages of early childhood development and energetic patterns in the adult body, as well as the softening and passion of heartfelt devotion. Having applied these wisdom traditions during thirty years of being a guide to the dying, a very clear and practical paradigm for the healing path has become apparent to me. Healing occurs through direct contact with the Sacred, through realization of our true nature. There are no shortcuts, but certainly neither taking unnecessary detours nor spending time spinning our wheels can inspire us along what is often a difficult journey.

During this workshop we will explore together a clear, concise and usable model of the healing process that can specifically diagnose and identify the next step that is transformational for each of us, even during crisis. Short, intensive, guided meditations will be presented in order to create a healing experience rather than experience that is about healing. We are all caregivers and are all seekers of healing. These deeply uncertain times offer an incredible opportunity.

There are two training groups available:

EAST BAY		MARIN	
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2009	9:00 A.M.–6:00 P.M.	SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2009 SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2009	10:00 A.M.–5:00 P.M. 10:00 A.M.–5:00 P.M.
ST. JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 2727 COLLEGE AVENUE BERKELEY, CA 94705-1247	<b>8 HOURS</b> <b>C.E.U.</b> <b>\$120</b>	SAN FRANCISCO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY GENEVA HALL, ROOM 100 105 SEMINARY ROAD SAN ANSELMO, CA 94960	<b>12 HOURS</b> <b>C.E.U.</b> <b>\$180</b>
FOR DRIVING DIRECTIONS VISIT: <a href="http://livingdying.org/events.html">http://livingdying.org/events.html</a>			
<p><b>PRE-REGISTRATION IS ENCOURAGED. SPACE IS LIMITED. \$20 EXTRA FOR REGISTRATION AT THE DOOR.</b> CHECKS SHOULD BE MADE PAYABLE TO: LIVING/DYING PROJECT AND SENT TO P.O. BOX 357, FAIRFAX, CA 94978</p> <p>Refunds will be made only with notice given at least two days in advance of the workshop by calling 415-456-3915 or by e-mail addressed to <a href="mailto:info@livingdying.org">info@livingdying.org</a>.</p>			



Workshops will be conducted by Dale Borglum, Ph.D., who, with Stephen Levine and Ram Dass, established the Hanuman Foundation Dying Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the first center supporting conscious dying in the U.S. Dale directed the center until moving to the San Francisco Bay Area. He is the founder and Executive Director of the Living/Dying Project and co-author of *Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook* (Bantam Books). He will be assisted by Curtis Grindahl, M.F.T., who serves as Intake Coordinator for the Project.

Board of Behavioral Sciences Provider Approval Number 4367. Board of Registered Nursing Provider Number 9621. Courses meet the qualifications for 8 and 12 hours of continuing credit for MFCCs and/or LCSWs as required by the CA Board of Behavioral Sciences. Refunds will be made only with notice given two days in advance of the workshop by calling or e-mailing the Living/Dying Project. A \$15 processing fee will be deducted from refunds issued.

## Beannacht (Blessing)

On the day when  
the weight deadens  
on your shoulders  
and you stumble,  
may the clay dance  
to balance you.

And when your eyes  
freeze behind  
the grey window  
and the ghost of loss  
gets in to you,  
may a flock of colours,  
indigo, red, green,  
and azure blue  
come to awaken in you  
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays  
in the currach of thought  
and a stain of ocean  
blackens beneath you,  
may there come across the waters  
a path of yellow moonlight  
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,  
may the clarity of light be yours,  
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,  
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.  
And so may a slow  
wind work these words  
of love around you,  
an invisible cloak  
to mind your life.

—John O'Donohue (1956–2008),  
“Echoes of Memory”



I'm listening  
but I don't know  
if what I hear is silence  
or God.  
I'm listening  
but I can't tell  
if I hear the plane of emptiness echoing  
or a keen consciousness  
that at the ends of the universe  
deciphers and watches me.  
I only know that I walk like someone  
who is beheld, beloved and known.  
And because of this  
I put into my every movement  
Solemnity and Risk.

—Sophia de Mello Breyner

## Mission Statement

Imagine facing death without fear.

Imagine using a life-threatening illness as an opportunity for spiritual awakening.

Imagine approaching the unknown with an open heart.

We often resist change as a natural part of life.

Strength and healing can be found in life's most difficult situations.

The Living/Dying Project offers compassionate support in the spirit of mutual exploration to those facing life-threatening illness.



## Board of Advisors

Angeles Arrien

Jerry Brown

Fritjof Capra

Joan Halifax

Jack Kornfield

Anne Lamott

Joanna Macy

Wayne Muller

John Robbins

Sogyal Rinpoche

## The Living/Dying Project

Post Office Box 357  
Fairfax, CA 94978-0357  
415 456-3915  
www.livingdying.org  
info@livingdying.org

## Supporting Us

The Living/Dying Project continues to offer free-of-charge spiritual support to those with life-threatening illnesses in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as educational services here and beyond Northern California. The mission of our work is the healing of our collective and individual relationships with death and hence with our lives.

As I write this in October, the global financial system is collapsing more each day. Many are afraid as what we imagined to be our security dissolves. The core of all fear is our attachment to our separateness, fundamentally our fear of death. Now as always, it is vital to keep that which is most meaningful and inspiring to us at the motivating center of our actions. This is the educational mission of the Living/Dying Project.

Most of the work of the Project is done by volunteers so overhead is very low. A great majority of our budget is from individual donations. We ask for your support, both financially and via your blessings. In addition to making a donation in the enclosed envelope, there are two additional ways to support us financially.

- ☞ First, we are a member of the escrip program. Go to [www.escrip.com](http://www.escrip.com) and register. Then 2%–6% of purchases you make at Whole Foods, Macy's, Andronico's, Good Earth and dozens of other stores will automatically be donated to the Project. To register with escrip, please use our group ID# 500002940 or the name Living-Dying Project (rather than Living/Dying Project with a slash).
- ☞ Secondly, many Web sites offer a 1%–6% donation to the Living/Dying Project if you first go to [goodshop.com](http://goodshop.com) and then enter Living/Dying Project in the "Choose Your Cause" box. Participating sites include Amazon, the Apple Store, BestBuy, Buy.com, eBay, Circuit City, Office Depot, Macy's, Nordstrom's, Toys R Us, Target, LL Bean, Lands' End, HP, Dell, iTunes, Williams Sonoma, Zappos and many more.

We received many gifts and donations last year. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you who have supported us financially and/or with your kind thoughts and prayers. May this holiday season and the year to come be filled with happiness and blessing for you and for those you love.

—Dale Borglum, *Executive Director*



## Credits

Heartfelt thanks to Steven Englander, who once again beautifully designed this newsletter. Steven has been a dear friend and a part of The Living/Dying Project for many years.

Photos: Gate (page 1) and Denlow (pages 3–4) by Curtis Grindahl; Ross Valley Hills in the Mist (page 2) by Dale Borglum; View from Pioneer Cabin, Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge (page 3) ©George Ward; Play Misty for Me, Banff, Canada (page 7) by Steven Englander.