



Great Compassion

We are two-fold beings, at once human and divine, finite and infinite, dualistic and non-dualistic. On one hand we have a body and a personality that change, that age, that experience happiness and pain, that eventually die. We also are pure consciousness, living spirit, deathless, the subject that experiences our body and mind as objects. We live in a society preoccupied with the body and the personality, with that which dies. Death becomes the enemy. All contemplative spiritual traditions clearly tell us our essential nature does not die, that living spirit is eternal.

In life and especially while approaching death, it is vital to fully embrace both the human and the divine aspects of our being. We have a body and a personality as do all those around us. What is asked of us is to have deep compassion for the suffering that we see within ourselves and in the world, suffering that is caused when we

lose sight of our divine nature and identify only with that which dies.



We are invited to be with suffering even as we remember the vast, boundless spaciousness that is our true nature, aware that each moment of happiness or sadness, of suffering or non-suffering is arising in the context of being whole and pure and undefiled, of being pure consciousness. As we do so, how we relate to the suffering of the world is transformed and compassion begins to arise naturally. To the extent that you

or I can feel compassion for the suffering of the world in the way a mother feels compassion for her newborn child and wants the child not to suffer, to that extent compassion begins to deepen and eventually change into not a compassion that I am feeling for myself or for you, but is revealed as Great Compassion, the spontaneous arising of our true nature, unobscured.

Death is a very real blessing for each one of us. Knowing we will die one day has the potential of inspiring us to turn toward that which does not die.

Beyond that, the deeper blessing is that as we are dying, that which we hold onto as separate, our identification with body and personality, is inexorably being ripped away from us. What remains is living spirit, the deathless. To the extent you or I have been able to bear the brilliant light of love, of joy, the totally open heart while still alive, then dying will simply be another moment of resting in this light. To the extent we turn

away from love and pull back with fear in our separateness, then dying will come too soon and be too terrible to face.

Now is the moment to awaken. Now is the moment to die into love of this moment and this moment, learning to bear the unbearable nature of human existence and to bear it with joy. The invitation is to feel the perfection of it all and the pain of it all at the same time, to have such deep love and compassion for this human condition in all its many forms that we realize we *are* compassion.

My brother David, who died as we were putting this newsletter together, was a true example of this Great Compassion.

— Dale Borglum
Executive Director

*We live in illusion and the appearance of things.
There is a Reality.
We are that Reality.
When we understand this,
we will see that we are nothing.
And being nothing,
we are everything.
That is all.*

Kalu Rinpoche

I wish I could show you

*When you are lonely
or in darkness*

The Astonishing Light

Of your own Being.

Hafiz



*You will lose everything.
Your money, your power, your fame, your success, perhaps even your memories. Your looks will go. Loved ones will die. Your body will fall apart. Everything that seems permanent is impermanent and will be smashed. Experience will gradually, or not so gradually, strip away everything that it can strip away. Waking up means facing this reality with open eyes and no longer turning away.*

But right now, we stand on sacred and holy ground, for that which will be lost has not yet been lost, and realizing this is the key to unspeakable joy. Whoever or whatever is in your life right now has not yet been taken away from you. This may sound trivial, obvious, like nothing, but really it is the key to everything, the why and how and wherefore of existence.

Impermanence has already rendered everything and everyone around you so deeply holy and significant and worthy of your heartbreaking gratitude.

Loss has already transfigured your life into an altar.

Jeff Foster

Still Worth It

When I asked Mary Beth whether she felt there is anything she wishes to say in the forthcoming Living/Dying Project newsletter we found ourselves immersed in a conversation about the reality of her physical challenges, measuring them against her desire to remain with her son for so long as she can. The title of this brief article came to mind. It really says everything that is essential for Mary Beth.

Yes, it is true, her body continues to succumb to this unrelenting disease, ALS. It is increasingly difficult for her to lift her arms and to use her hands. She now requires assistance to get out of the hospital bed that has been moved to an alcove off the livingroom of her friend's home.

When not in bed she is in a powered wheelchair. Granted that chair enables her not only to maneuver through the

house but also to wander down the street to the nearby park. With the converted van it is also possible for friends to drive her to



doctors' appointments and even to a housewarming she attended shortly before our conversation.

But her limitations also mean she is unable to volunteer at Nico's school. Beyond the fact she is no longer able to offer meaningful assistance to either students or the teacher, is the feeling that her appearance in the wheelchair is

an unsettling presence. As Mary Beth puts it, she has no wish to become the poster child for ALS. She is willing to share her experience with the folks who are concerned with end of life matters who receive the Living/Dying Project newsletter, but prefers not to answer endless questions from folks so clearly frightened by her reality.

Nico is slowly coming to terms with his mother's illness, but, understandably, he still wishes she could be the mother she once was.

Clearly, it is still worth holding on to this life that allows Mary Beth to remain a presence in her son's life, even if it is a diminished presence. Yet embracing what is left of her life leaves her open to the profound challenges that come with the disease that holds her in its grip.

— Curtis Grindahl
Client Services Coordinator

Hope is not optimism, which expects things to turn out well, but something rooted in the conviction that there is good worth working for.

Seamus Heaney





Born October 20, 1945 - Died All Hallows Eve, 2014



*hiding in this cage
of visible matter*

*is the invisible
lifebird*

*pay attention
to her*

*she is singing
your song*

Kabir

Death Could Be Nearby

I don't know. Death could be nearby—but my life energy has not abated much. Perhaps a combination of internal changes... healing my life and alternative treatments will work a “miracle” of Radical Remission, or of strengthening my system enough to be able to live with cancer. It's too easy to head trip about the future, and I choose not to focus on the “what if's” my mind can make up.

While my health remains very precarious and it's been a tough couple of weeks pain-wise, my spirit has never been more free; I'm learning to laugh and sing in a whole new way. In some strange way, having cancer and so many experiences around it, has opened my heart. It's not only that I'm reading “Funny Times” more and trying to laugh intentionally; not infrequently I find myself giggling like an embarrassed 10-year-old girl at — life itself. Or just twinkling with my eyes with the people around me.

My loving and well-meaning parents, especially my mother, taught me about moral obligation and duty and hard work which over the years I subtly transformed into social justice work and ecological simplicity while overemphasizing work. Now I'm interested in combining joy with work for social and environment change.

Miracles abound —

feeling the brisk fall evenings and the warmth of sunny afternoons;
snuggling with my beloved watching “Desperate Housewives;”
hanging out with friends as long as my energy holds up. *(Why did I spend
so much time working and so little time enjoying friends before?)*

I'm amazed at all the love the universe / God is pouring into me daily, especially through the prayers and loving wishes of numerous others... rides, friendships, gifts, calls, and, unbelievably now, meals for the family coming two or three times a week, organized by the Congregational Care Team of First Congregational Alameda. So many incredible friends, church members and healers. How fitting that “David” means “beloved.”

I'm not nearly as afraid of dying these days. I know it's not a big deal, and physical death is hardly the

end. But I do have my preferences — I'd like to live for several years, not so much out of fear of death, but more out of love for the precious life I have been given and the joy I feel. Daily, as I awake to greet the new morn, how can I keep from singing? Blessed be.

*I thank you God for most this
amazing day;
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky,
and for everything which is natural
which is infinite
which is yes.
(I who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the
birth day of life and love and wings and
of the gay great happening illimitably
earth.)*

e.e. cummings



Beloved Jesus, my healer and my guide, to whatever extent possible, may I be freed of pain and suffering. Teach me to recognize, accept, and release my fears. Heal me in heart, mind, and spirit, and if it's in the larger flow of things, heal my body and restore my energy.

When pain does come my way, may I meet it with tenderness, ease and compassion toward all who are suffering.

— David Borglum

I met David Borglum, Dale's younger brother, early last summer in my capacity as a Living/Dying Project volunteer. David, now 69, was first diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer about six months ago. He has long been committed to a vegan diet and a healthy lifestyle, with great sensitivity to the impact humans have on the planet; realities that contribute to his struggle to understand how he could have developed cancer. Did the disease have its origin in his way of dealing with emotions, perhaps a by-product of his upbringing? Was it due to a lack of joy in his life, and his tendency to care more for others than himself? If the cause of his illness had such an origin, is there a way for him to heal it? And finally, how should he hold these many questions that might not have an answer?

Last week David received word chemotherapy treatments were not reducing his tumors, that there is no benefit in continuing. He found it painful to realize that all he went through — the nausea, weight loss and fatigue — did not have



an upside, and that a door was now closed. Today, he is facing the limited options that remain open to him, including alternative treatments and the “palliative care” services offered through hospice.

I've been honored to witness the journey of a deeply spiritual man, a Christian pastor and meditation practitioner, as he faces the limits of his time left. We've shared many moments of tears and tenderness as we talked together, sat in meditation, and did gentle yoga. Will we have months more for our conversations, or perhaps only weeks? How will David share all that is in his heart with his wife, his children, his many friends?

For me, it has been an extraordinary blessing to enter into David's life and share this friendship.

— Doug Wallace, Volunteer and
President of the Living/Dying Project Board of Directors

Project News

- *Open Circle*, the free-of-charge, volunteer-based spiritual support services for clients with life-threatening illnesses we now offer in Alameda, Marin, Sonoma and Contra Costa counties has been expanded into San Francisco. If you or anyone you know could use these services please call our office at **415-456-3915**.
- Dale will facilitate weekend workshops/training programs in San Anselmo, Santa Rosa and San Francisco in January and February, 2015. Please see the next page of this newsletter for details.
- We've expanded services available online through our website. Training for those who wish to consciously support the dying is now being offered online. Training includes interactive discussions, Q&A, and guided meditations. Those who complete the training may become Living/Dying Project Adjunct Volunteers with access to interactive online support sessions. Dale will also offer **Healing at the Edge** ongoing, small groups online. See the **Services** link on our website for more information about online training and groups.
- If you are on our physical mailing list but not on our digital mailing list, please go to our website and sign up on our digital mailing list. We print and mail only one newsletter per year, but every few months have been sending out email updates about the Project as well as emailing a digital copy of the annual newsletter. These shorter emailings contain updates on events and activities, articles on the services the Project offers, and thoughtful and inspiring pieces on the spiritual path. If you are willing to unsubscribe from the physical mailing list and thus forego a physical copy of the newsletter and receive only the email version, we would save money.
- Useful material continues to be added to our website. There is a new section called *Client Stories* in the **Education** link as well as some great new audio files of lectures and meditations. We are endeavoring to become the go-to website for anyone wanting information about the spiritual opportunities that life-threatening illness and caregiving can offer for those prepared to embrace them. Meditations, practices, audio and video files, and descriptions of services the Project provides are all available.
- **Healing at the Edge** ongoing small groups are facilitated by Dale. These groups meet Tuesday afternoon and Tuesday night in Santa Rosa, Wednesday night in Mill Valley and Thursday afternoon and Thursday night in San Francisco. Also an online group will be starting soon for those not in the Bay Area. Rather than focusing on end-of-life issues, these groups address spiritual transformation with an emphasis on meditation and on healing the psychological/physical imbalances that limit this transformation. More information is available at the *Ongoing Groups* link in the **Services** menu on our website. If you are interested in talking to Dale about these groups, call him at **415-456-3915**.
- Doug Wallace and Kristin Singer have been added to our Board of Directors. Curtis Grindahl has stepped down after many years as Board President. Deep thanks to all present and past board members.
- Dale will be interviewed on **Buddha at the Gas Pump** on December 13, 2014. This interview will be posted on their website www.BATGAP.com a few days later. There are over 200 interviews with some wonderful people archived on their website.

The light is everywhere.

Maharaji



HEALING AT OUR EDGE: A PATH TO WHOLENESS

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 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 the 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 to a life consciously lived.

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 and other practices will be presented in order to create a healing experience that will lead to a life consciously and compassionately lived and eventually to a conscious death. We are all caregivers and are all seekers of healing. These deeply uncertain times offer an incredible opportunity.

This training workshop will be offered in early 2015 at three locations; San Anselmo (1/17), Santa Rosa (1/31 & 2/1), and San Francisco (2/7 & 8). The one day workshop offers 8 hours of Continuing Education Units available to nurses, as well as M.F.T. and L.C.S.W. license holders. Workshops in Santa Rosa and San Francisco offer two days of training though registrants may attend either day only if they wish. Two day trainings offer 16 C.E.U. hours and cost \$240. Single day trainings cost \$140 for 8 C.E.U. hours.

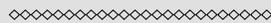
For precise locations please visit our website at livingdying.org/events/



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).

Board of Behavioral Sciences Provider Approval Number #367. Board of Registered Nursing Provider Number 9621. Course meets qualifications for 8/16 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.

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.



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Mission Statement

The Living/Dying Project offers conscious and compassionate support in the spirit of mutual exploration to those facing life-threatening illness and their caregivers. We also offer education and training in the practices of spiritual healing to those confronting life's most difficult situations and to anyone committed to spiritual transformation.

Supporting Us

We offer spiritual support free of charge to those with a life-threatening illness in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as to their caregivers. As the first organization in the Western world whose mission is to cultivate conscious dying, we've offered these services for over thirty years. In addition to spiritual support, we offer training and educational services through our website and by telephone, Skype or in person. The mission of our work is healing, both the healing of that which blocks us from full aliveness and the healing of our collective and individual relationships with death. Fear of death separates us from each other and from our own essential selves. Now as always it is vital to keep what is most meaningful and inspiring to us at the motivating center of our actions.

Our operation is simple and our overhead is minimal. A significant proportion of our revenue comes from individual donations. We ask for your support, both financially and with your blessings and your prayers. This support allows us to continue the vital work of the Project. Please make a donation in the enclosed envelope (if you received the printed newsletter). You also can make a donation online using PayPal by visiting our website www.livingdying.org, and clicking the **Supporting Us** link at the top of the page.

We encourage those of you receiving our printed physical newsletter who could be just as happy with an emailed version to go to the **Mailing List** link on our website, sign up for the mailing list and then send us an email asking to be taken off our physical mailing list.

Our heartfelt thanks to all of you who have supported us in any way. May this holiday season and the year to come be filled with wisdom and blessing for you and for those you love.

—Dale Borglum



Credits

Layout and design of this newsletter was done by Curtis Grindahl, who also contributed three photos, *West Marin Fenceline* on page 1, *Mary Beth Taking Sun* on page 3, and *Hillside Tree* on page 5. Curtis is Client Services Coordinator for the Project. Dale took the photo of his brother David that appears on page 4 a few weeks before his death. A good friend, Cory Goldberg, took the photo of Dale on page 7. Cory is a professional photographer who splits his time between here and India.