



Devotion as Loving Everyone

I've been meditating since the 1960s. My mind is calmer. My ego structure is less intrusive and cumbersome. Insight and wisdom have increased, yet the longer I am on this wonderful and challenging path to freedom from fear, the clearer it becomes the essence of this journey is devotion, in particular, its expression in loving and serving our fellow beings. Devotion to what? Devotion to whom? From one perspective we are all connected. From a deeper perspective we are one. The Beloved can only be everything — you, me, the Sacred. Our true nature is Love.

When I was in India, Maharaji told us there is no need to do complicated meditation practices — just love everyone, serve everyone, and remember God. The Living/Dying Project offers spiritual support for people facing life-threatening illnesses and those who support them. It's wonderful work. I truly feel that the best practice for this chaotic and challenging age in which we live is having an intimate relationship with death combined with an inner contemplative practice.

Can I make my support of the dying more than glorified social work? Can this work become the vehicle for expressing my devotion? Can being with the dying shatter complacency and show me



that now is the moment to love utterly. As Mother Teresa asked "*Can I see Christ in his distressing disguise?*" as she lifted a leper from the gutter in Calcutta... can I see the sacred in the form of every person I meet?

Most of us have a much better disguise than the leper or the dying person. Yet crisis tends to shatter the disguise. Often it is so much easier to see God in the eyes of the dying than when looking into the mirror or at your neighbor, but we've got to start somewhere.

Ages ago when people wanted to find God, they went into the desert or the mountains or a cave and then used this solitude to look within. Today we are lucky to have a little time each day, possibly the occasional few days, to retreat from our busy lives to do this inner exploration of the depths of our hearts and minds. We live in a world of relationships. Every day we are meeting people. Every day when we brush our teeth we look in the mirror. The Object of Devotion, the Beloved, can only be everything and everyone.

Walt Whitman said, "*Sometimes touching another human being is almost more than I can bear.*" How often do we allow ourselves to be undefended enough to directly experience the vastness that

each of us truly is? In this technologically driven age, this time in which so much seems out of balance in our fragile and beautiful world, the most direct path to freedom for many of us is the path of devotion, and the most accessible path of devotion is loving and serving everyone.

I struggle so hard to open my heart. I expect you do as well. Let's meet there. Let's admit face-to-face, heart-to-heart, what we want, what we need as much as air to breathe and food to eat.

— Dale Borglum
Executive Director

*Your task is not to seek for love,
but merely to seek and find
all the barriers within yourself
that you have built against it.*

Rumi

*Admit something:
Everyone you see,
you say to them,
"Love me."
Of course you do not do this out loud,
otherwise someone would call the cops.
Still though,
think about this,
this great pull in us to connect.
Why not become the one
who lives
with a full moon in each eye
that is always saying, with
that sweet moon language,
What every other eye
in this world
is dying to hear?*

Hafiz



Life is Always Worth Living!



Rolling with Nico... the Festival of St. John at a village in France

I was surprised when I visited Mary Beth in February and she asked with a timid smile whether she was crazy to consider taking a trip to Italy with her son Nico who had been creating a family tree and exploring his Italian heritage. She was bound to her wheelchair by that time and required help getting in and out of bed. Although she could still move her hands and arms she lacked the control and strength to do much with them. Having a sip of water necessitated leaning over so she could reach the straw.

We often talk in these pages of the reality that facing a life-ending illness in no way obliges one to give up one's zest

for life. We are the *Living/Dying* Project, after all. Yes, life with serious illness often carries with it significant limitations. The question eternally being asked is the one Mary Beth has answered over and over again in the affirmative. It really is possible to embrace one's aliveness, to choose life over and over again.

Mary Beth has attracted a circle of friends who've known her only since her diagnosis of ALS and only sitting in a wheel chair. While some of her family and friends were daunted by the challenges she faces, this group of friends finds nothing about her limitations an impediment to enjoying the moment. They often load into her van with its lift to handle the wheelchair and head out for an evening of adventure. Mary Beth and her good friend Kathleen purchased memberships to the DeYoung Museum so they could view exhibits as well as enjoy *Friday Nights at the DeYoung* with music, dancing and a cocktail or two.

One member of this group, Joaquin, invited the gang to his home for dinner he prepared. Since the stairs make it impossible to get Mary Beth's wheelchair into his home, he cleared space in the garage and decorated it for the occasion. The pleasure they take in one another's company is real, as is the love and care they all provide for Mary Beth.

With this experience in the back of my mind and Mary Beth's question about a trip to Europe before me, it was easy to believe whatever challenges might lie ahead of her would be met with the resilience exhibited many times and with support from friends who would share the journey with her. And so the planning began.

Imagine the logistics... arranging a transcontinental flight that will accommodate a wheelchair as well as a van at the end with a lift to handle the wheelchair with Mary Beth seated in it the whole time. Imagine checking the width of every doorframe that must be passed. It was here that the home offered in Florence fell to the side. The wheelchair wouldn't fit. And the home of Gloria, her friend in Spain who planned to join the entourage, is on the third floor and the elevator hadn't been working for months.

Piece by piece each problem was solved... the elevator repaired the day before Mary Beth ar-

rived! The trip that was planned for Italy instead became a trip to Spain and France... where they encountered the *Festival of St. John* in a small mountain village above the Mediterranean beach they drove to each day. A photo of Mary Beth and Nico entering the courtyard during the festival is on the opposite page, taken by her friend Travis who came on the trip to lend a helping hand. What delight!

Mary Beth said during our conversations that if she were to die along the way, it wouldn't be a terrible thing, though she knew it would be difficult for Nico. But it will always be difficult for him and this trip offered them a wonderful opportunity to share an adventure. Before her illness she envisioned exactly this kind of life for her and Nico. ALS may impose its consequences for the future, but it didn't stop this trip from happening.

I've been meeting with Mary Beth for two and a half years. She is a remarkable woman undaunted by what lies before her. She is inspiring in the simplest way. Next we prepare a ceremony for two of her friends who have offered to serve as Nico's god-mothers after Mary Beth is gone. She envisions a deck overlooking Tomales Bay with close friends present for the event. I promised to take a few photos after I officiate at the ceremony.

Apart from that we realize it is all beyond our control. But for today we embrace our aliveness.

— Curtis Grindahl
Client Services Coordinator

*Keep some room
in your heart
for the unimaginable.*

Mary Oliver

Rare Form

I had a good life in Laguna Beach. I could see the ocean every day. I was a beach girl. I really loved it. When I worked, I worked hard. During the day I was an optician. At night I worked at restaurants. I was healthy my whole life, so I never expected this. I went to bed normal, I woke up not normal... a big shock. I thought I would get better real quick, but I didn't. I saw doctor after doctor after doctor but they don't know. I don't have any answers right now. I don't know when I'll get better.

There's no place for young people like me. They just shove us in nursing homes. The system doesn't get it. They don't have anyone they love who is sick. If they did, everything would be different.

I have PCD, paraneoplastic cerebellar



degeneration. You are either born with it, or have cancer and it develops. It affects the nerves and motor skills. I used to be a runner, but now I can't move my legs. I used to talk normal, but now my speech

is really slurred. I used to see normal and now I see double. I've kept one eye closed for 3 years. I've been to three optometrists and one ophthalmologist, and they don't have answers either.

No answers, just feeling hopeless. It's hard to fight when I don't know what I'm fighting.

I moved here to be near my parents. They're getting older, and want to do everything possible, but how can they – they're in their 70's?

I used to be independent, but now I depend on everyone for everything. Now I have to depend on others for bathing, feeding myself, things I used to take for granted and would do every day.

— Kamala

Kamala is a 45 year old woman being seen by two volunteers from the Living/Dying Project. She suffers from a neuro-degenerative disorder so rare that many of the physicians she visited were unable to make an accurate diagnosis, and so rare that there is little funding for research. The disorder arrives in the wake of cancer — an anti-tumor immune response that damages nerves in the cerebellum. Treatment? As Kamala reports, *"I've tried everything. I've done stem cell, chemo, Rituxan, Klonopin, Sinement, supplements, surgery, prayer, you name it. Nothing seems to work."* Prognosis? At this time, the condition has reached a plateau — the future is without a horizon, and the landscape is featureless.

The onset was sudden and cataclysmic. Within 4 months, Kamala was unable to move her legs, had limited range of motion in her upper body, double vision, difficulty swallowing. Due to loss of muscle control, extra effort was required to form words and to communicate with others. Kamala now requires around the clock assistance with the most basic activities of daily living. She is a young, vibrant, intelligent woman trapped in a body that simply doesn't work, sharing the nursing home where she lives with 80 and 90 year olds who are in the end stage of life. She feels profoundly isolated and alone.

And yet, a light shines through the dark circumstances of her life. She feels deeply, and expresses her feelings freely — despair, grief, resignation, frustration, humor, joy. Suffering in isolation is unbearable, but with connection it can be endured.

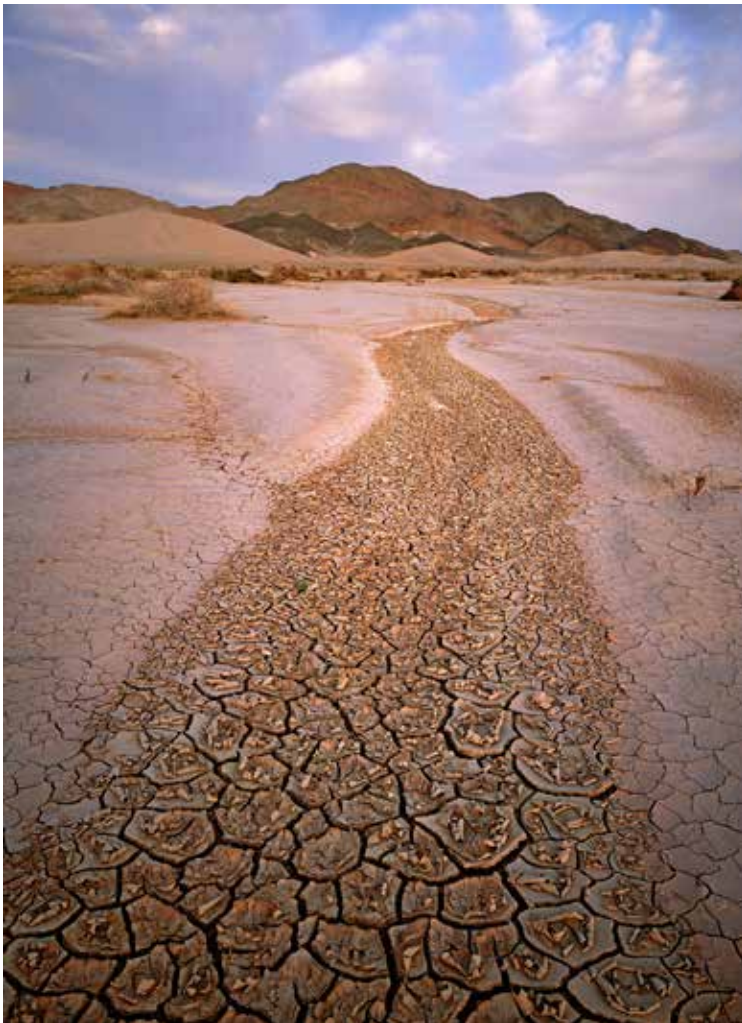
Kamala shares stories with me of the ups and downs of her daily life — of who among the staff care and who are *"just doing their job;"* of being woken by her 100 year old roommate who talks in her sleep; of having to wait an extra half hour for a trip to the bathroom. She tells me about visits with her aging parents — either her father or mother visit every day. Sometimes we read — *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, Man's Search for Meaning, Ghost Boy, and The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* — all tales of suffering and redemption. Out in the hall, we hear the repeated sound of the call bell, a mattress alarm going off, a desperate scream of terror.

More recently, Kamala has begun creating lists of "projects" for me. Being completely present to her experience is my primary intention, yet she gives me other ways to be of service. The "projects" are adjustments and enhancements of her visually limited world — the one she can see from her bed. The projects have made me aware of how much I take for granted in my own daily life — being able to adjust a wrinkled curtain, or close the bathroom door.

Last Tuesday we met on the nursing home patio where Kamala sits for an hour each day. She asked me to straighten the cushions, pick up an old newspaper clipping, re-order and water the plants. A few weeks ago, she asked me to make a sign that said **“Please Close the Bathroom Door!”** These are simple acts but they bring a sense of agency and solace.

My visits with Kamala have become the high point of my week. I leave feeling a kind of acceptance and serenity. Yes, suffering is part of life but through my engagement with her I move beyond conditions, expectations, and in doing so become more fully present to the moment. Of course, at the end of each visit there is a touch of sadness we share, the inevitable loss that comes when meaningful connection ends. Our relationship is growing and deepening with each visit. I believe Kamala feels the same way.

— John Emmons
Living/Dying Project Volunteer



A Blessing of Solitude

*May you recognize in your life
the presence,
power and
light of your soul.*

*May you realize that you are
never alone,
that your soul
in its brightness and belonging
connects you intimately with
the rhythm of the universe.*

*May you have respect for
your own individuality
and difference.*

*May you realize that the shape
of your soul is unique,
that you have
a special destiny here,
that behind the facade of your
life there is something
beautiful,
good, and
eternal
happening.*

*May you learn to see yourself
with the same delight, pride,
and expectation with which
God sees you in every moment.*

John O'Donohue

Project News

- We have free-of-charge, volunteer-based spiritual support services for clients with life-threatening illnesses in San Francisco, Alameda, Marin, Sonoma and Contra Costa counties. If you or anyone you know could use the services please call our office at 415-456-3915. Our volunteers are now offering support services at Maitri AIDS Hospice in San Francisco. We also have trained volunteers in Europe and throughout Canada and the U.S.
- Services that have been available only in-person in the Bay Area are now available online through our website. Training workshops to consciously support the dying are being offered online. This training includes interactive discussion, Q&A and guided meditations. After completing the training there is the option of becoming a Living/Dying Project Adjunct Volunteer with access to ongoing interactive online support sessions. See the Live Online Education link on our website for more information.
- Dale will be facilitating weekend workshops/training programs in Santa Rosa, San Anselmo, San Francisco and Oakland in January and February of 2016. Please see the following page for details.
- If you are on our physical mailing list and not on our digital mailing list please go to our website and signup on our digital mailing list. We print and mail only one newsletter per year, but every few months send out email updates about the Project. These shorter offerings contain updates on events and activities, articles on the services that the Project offers as well as thoughtful and inspiring pieces on the spiritual path. We also produce a digital copy of the annual newsletter each year sent to those on the digital mailing list. *(If you are willing to unsubscribe from our physical mailing list and thus forego a physical copy of the newsletter and receive only the emailed version, we would save money.)*
- More useful material continues to be added to our website. See the section called Client Stories in the Education link as well as some great new audio files of lectures and meditations. We are endeavoring to be the go-to website for anyone wanting information about the opportunities for spiritual growth that life-threatening illness and caregiving can offer. Meditations, practices, audio and video files, and descriptions of the services that the Project provides are all available.
- **Healing at the Edge** ongoing small groups are facilitated by Dale. Separate groups meet Tuesday afternoon in Santa Rosa, Wednesday night in Mill Valley and Monday night in San Francisco. These groups are not focused on end-of-life issues, but on 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.
- Dale was interviewed recently on the **Mindpod Network**. The podcast called **From Fear to Being Right Here** can be found at <http://www.mindpodnetwork.com/mindrolling-ep-127-ram-dev-explores-deathlessness-from-fear-to-being-right-here/> or just go to mindpodnetwork.com and check out the Mindrolling podcasts.

Love everyone. Serve everyone. Remember God.

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 2016 at four locations; Oakland, (1/24), Santa Rosa (1/30 & 1/31), San Francisco (2/6 & 2/7) and San Anselmo, (2/13). The one day workshops offer 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 \$250. Single day trainings cost \$150 for 8 C.E.U. hours.

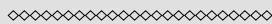
For precise locations please visit our website at livingdying.org/events/



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 4367. Board of Registered Nursing Provider Number 9621. Course meets qualifications for 8/16 hours of continuing credit for MFTs 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.

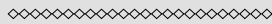


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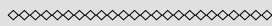
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The Living/Dying Project

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

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 may also 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 is Client Services Coordinator for the Project. The rose photo is by Sheree Campbell. The photo of Mary Beth and her son was taken by Travis Smith, a friend who offered a helping hand during the trip. The photo of Karmala was taken by a friend. George Ward, a good friend of Dale's, offers the *Dry Arroyo* photo on page five. Curtis took the photo of Dale found with the flyer for forthcoming workshops.