



## Intimacy with Fear

**M**y dear friend and colleague Stephen Levine died earlier this year. Stephen was a wonderful writer and meditation teacher, but he is primarily remembered as the pioneer who brought conscious dying to America. This happened in the late 1970's and the 1980's, a time when people spoke very little about death and certainly not about conscious dying.



Stephen saw clearly that our encounter with death was fundamentally a spiritual process and that our denial and fear of death was at the root of much of our individual and collective fear of being fully alive. All fear is fear of death – fear that makes it impossible for us to experience our wholeness, leaving us only capable of identifying with that which is separate and will eventually die.

Most of us don't become intimate in our relationship with death until we are forced to. Someone close to us dies. We receive the diagnosis of a critical illness. A relationship ends. One of my first meditation teachers said that until we become intimate with death, our spiritual practice will have the quality of us being a dilettante. Yet there is so much momentum, so much conditioning from very early in our lives, behind our retreat into the illusion of separateness, into the belief that who we fundamentally are will die.

Stephen took the basic principles from contemplative and devotional practice and encouraged countless people to honestly examine and have compassion for this fear of death that so immediately causes us to shrink from life itself.

We've all had the experience that sometimes touching another human being with love is almost more than we can bear. How seldom we are able

to feel safe with this level of vulnerability and connectedness. Until we become intimate with our deepest fear, the feeling that we are not safe and need to protect ourselves, we will remain caught in separateness. We assume this painful distance from one another is just the human condition.

Stephen was incredibly skillful in presenting a way to heal our deepest fear and thus to realize our true nature does not die. Can we mercifully move into that fear? Can the very presence of the fear inspire us to open our hearts more, to trust even our vulnerability, rather than automatically resist and contract?

The most alive and awake people I've ever met are those who have become deeply intimate with death. If I truly know I'm going to die and I don't know when, that it might even be before I finish writing this article, how can I not be intimate with you in this very moment?

All that I've said also applies to our collective fear. The Clinton-Trump Presidential election will happen before this newsletter is distributed. The divisions being revealed in our country will not be healed anytime soon. They will only be healed by more and more people finding the clarity and the courage to go beyond fear-based reactions to the "other side." More than we can imagine depends on each of us.

— Dale Borglum  
Executive Director

*We step from the river  
patted dry  
and become.*

*And in the wink of an eye  
and a wink back  
we return.*

Stephen Levine

*Of all forms of caution, caution  
in love is perhaps the most fatal  
to true happiness.*

Bertrand Russell



Stephen Levine 1937 - 2016

*Growing older  
I love the quiet that used to  
disturb me.  
I have distance on my life.  
The boast and pity of self-regard  
have mostly fallen behind.  
Heading home,  
the home I carry with me,  
I settle into the clouds.  
On the mountain  
I sit quietly in a sage meadow  
visited by the same bees that make lovers  
of flowering bushes  
all that will be left of me  
part of the golden comb hidden  
in the hive  
humming with delight.*

Stephen Levine

## Spreading Wings at Maitri



For the past year I've been spending time at Maitri Hospice as a Living/Dying Project volunteer. Maitri provides both hospice and respite care. I have met some truly extraordinary people during my time there. Most days I wander from room to room visiting with residents at their bedside. Sometimes I am a friend who listens to whatever is on their minds. At other times I provide spiritual counsel, guided meditations and breathing practices to support pain relief. But mostly, I offer a presence of love and healing simply by choosing to practice being the angel version of myself while I am there.

I see my angel self as my highest form. Before I walk into Maitri, I release my own concerns. I use the tools Dale taught me, to ground and center in

myself. I relax into a state of being that is willing and capable of responding openly to whatever might be asked or required of me. And then I actually imagine wings on my back and feel my face reflect the love that I allow to well up within me not only for the residents, but for myself. I then shine my light on each and every being I come into contact with in a very vulnerable way. What we practice, we become.

I have cultivated an angel within me. I now know what it feels like to be completely heart-centered. It is at Maitri that I have learned how to be and give the best of myself. This is a gift that has ripple effects in my life and I am deeply grateful for the experience.

— Kristin Singer  
Living/Dying Project Volunteer



## How Do You Say Goodbye To Your Twelve Year-Old Son?

My conversations with Mary Beth of late have focused on whether it is time to invite hospice into her journey. I've written about Mary Beth over the last three years I've been visiting her each week. She has ALS and is approaching the end of her travail. Her lung capacity has dropped below 25% which contributes to her diminishing ability to not only breathe but to talk.

When we met Wednesday at our regular time, in the shelter of large trees that offer a bit of shade on a warm morning, she suggested it is time to contact hospice. But before doing so she wants to discuss this decision with her twelve year-old son Nico. Mary Beth knows he has feelings about her illness as well as her pending death, but it is difficult for him to speak about them with her. She hopes a conversation about hospice will give him a chance to express his concerns, his fears. I offered to join them for that conversation.

Two days later, Mary Beth called and asked if I were available to talk with Nico. I told her I'd be there in twenty minutes. I found her in her wheelchair in her bedroom with her much loved neighbor Luisa who happens to be a nurse. Mary Beth had had a difficult day with much labored breathing. She called hospice earlier and was told someone would be in touch to schedule a visit. After Luisa left I got Nico from his room, telling him his mother wanted to talk with him. He settled on her hospital bed adjacent to a wall of photos of him and his mother. I sat on a chair next to him.

I shared with him my experience working with hospice, explaining the services they provide and how his mother would benefit from increased support at this time. The conversation unfolded with Mary Beth commenting and asking questions as I added relevant information. I listened carefully to Mary Beth who was at once remarkably loving and generous toward her son as she spoke openly about how hospice marks the beginning of the final chapter of this journey for her. She said it could be a matter of months or it could be a matter of weeks before she dies. She encouraged Nico to ask for what he needs along the way. Does he want to meet with hospice folks when they come? Does he have questions about his past that his mother would be able to answer? She reminded him of the many friends who know her well and could answer questions he may have in the future.

Although he expressed little during our conversation, the hug Nico gave me when I first came to his room and the wave he gave me as I was departing, suggest he knows we are soon to experience a painful loss. How do you say goodbye to your twelve year-old son? You really can't.

— Curtis Grindahl  
Client Services Coordinator



Nico strolls with his mother.

*Someone I loved  
once gave me a box  
full of darkness.  
It took me years to  
understand that this too,  
was a gift.*

Mary Oliver

## Kamala Bids Farewell

Kamala's mother left a telephone message that her daughter died on August 18th at 2 a.m. She sounded overwhelmed, having to make so many calls and at the same time grieving the death of her 45 year-old daughter. Either mother or father visited Kamala every day for 5 years, bringing healthy, delicious food, physical and spiritual support, exhausting all potential remedies for her condition. I sensed they were experiencing a mixture of relief that her suffering had ended, grief for their loss, and a void that was once filled with caregiving.

Kamala, whom I introduced in the last Living/Dying Project newsletter, had a chronic, debilitating illness, Paraneoplastic Cerebellar Degeneration, a rare condition that occurs in less than 1% of cancer patients. The impact on her life was sudden and devastating. Within a few months she could not move her body from the waist down, had double vision, tremors, difficulty swallowing. She was confined to a nursing home bed. Her vibrant, joyful, loving self was trapped in the prison of her physical body. There was no cure.

Yet she invited me and Ken, her other Living Dying Project volunteer, into her space, into her life. She looked forward to our visits. In the midst of what at times seemed like a dark desert landscape, our connection and friendship was an oasis.

We said goodbye 2 days before she died – she had a premonition that her death was imminent. There were other signs – she said parts of her body felt cold, she was having flashbacks. She seemed to be in a deep state of grief and longing. I grieved with her, both of us on the edge of joy and sorrow. We acknowledged our gratitude for the time we had together. I told her we would always be connected, and that she had been a teacher for me.

Kamala showed me how much I take for granted – my mobility, my capacity to make adjustments and alignments, that being alive in a physical body is a gift. She taught me that physical illness is impersonal, that I can only make it personal by finding meaning. She taught me how to sit with helplessness, hopelessness, and look into the void of no meaning. She taught me that there is value and love in being present to human connection without conditions or expectations.

I have a reliable source who told me they saw Kamala dancing among the stars, joyful and free. I'd like to believe that is true.

— John Emmons  
Living/Dying Project Volunteer

### THE SILK WORM

*I stood before a silk worm one day.  
And that night my heart said to me,*

*"I can do things like that, I can spin skies,  
I can be woven into love that  
can bring warmth to people;  
I can be soft against a crying face,  
I can be wings that lift, and I can travel  
on my thousand feet  
throughout the earth,  
my sacks filled  
with the  
sacred."*

*And I replied to my heart,*

*"Dear, can you really do all those things?"*

*And she just nodded "Yes"  
in silence.*

*So we began and will never  
cease.*

Rumi



## Project News

- We offer 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 the our office at **415-456-3915**. Our volunteers are now offering support services at Maitri AIDS Hospice in San Francisco and Stanford Hospital.
- Services that have been available only in-person here in the Bay Area are now available online through our website. Training workshops to consciously support the dying are being offered online. This training will include live, interactive discussion, Q&A, and guided meditations. After taking 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. We have trained volunteers in Europe, Australia, and throughout Canada and the U.S.
- Dale will be facilitating weekend workshops/volunteer training programs in Santa Rosa, San Anselmo, and San Francisco in January and February of 2017. Please see the following page of this newsletter 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 each year, but every few months have been sending out email updates about the Project. (We also email a digital copy of the annual newsletter.) These shorter emailings contain updates on events and activities, articles on the services that the Project offers, and thoughtful and inspiring pieces on the spiritual path. Also if you are willing to unsubscribe from our physical mailing list and thus forego a physical copy of the newsletter and receive only the email version, we would save money and trees.
- More useful material continues to be added to our website. There are some great new audio files of lectures and meditations. We are endeavoring to be the go-to website for anyone wanting information about the spiritual opportunities that life-threatening illness and caregiving can offer. Meditations, practices, audio and video files, and descriptions of the services that the Project provides all are available.
- **Healing at the Edge** ongoing small groups are being facilitated by Dale. These groups meet Tuesday afternoon in Santa Rosa, Tuesday night in Sebastopol 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 on the homepage of our website. There are a few spaces available in the Sebastopol group and there is a possibility of another San Francisco group on Wednesday evenings. The other groups have waiting lists. If you are interested in talking to Dale about these groups, call him at **415 456-3915**.
- Dale now has his own video blog channel on the **Be Here Now Network**, <https://beherenownetwork.com/category/ram-dev/>. His first two interviews are with his friends Donnie Nelson and Annie Lamott. There will also be individual talks.

*The best form to worship God is every form.*

Maharaji

## HEALING AT THE EDGE CONSCIOUS LIVING / CONSCIOUS DYING A WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS AND ANYONE WANTING TO DEEPLY EXPLORE HEALING



Sponsored by the Community Institute for Psychotherapy, a workshop offered by the Living/Dying Project. Participants seeking continuing education as Psychologist, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and Licensed Clinical Social Workers are directed to [cipmarin.org](http://cipmarin.org). Please select **Professional Development**, choose **Continuing Education for Professionals** and click on the course title. A flyer for the workshop may be found at the Living/Dying Project website at [livingdying.org](http://livingdying.org)

Physical healing, emotional healing, spiritual healing, collective healing – the journey to wholeness takes many forms and has many starting points. 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 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 an open heart. Having explored these wisdom traditions during 35 years of being a guide to the dying, a 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 to create a healing experience that will lead to a life consciously and compassionately lived and eventually to a conscious death. We're all caregivers and all seekers of healing. These deeply uncertain times are an incredible opportunity.

San Francisco workshop will be held January 28 and 29, 2017.

Santa Rosa workshop will be held February 11 and 12, 2017.

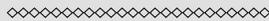
San Anselmo workshop will be held February 25, 2017.

For information about locations and registration please contact the Community Institute for Psychotherapy or visit the Living/Dying Project website. Registration is handled through the Community Institute for Psychotherapy regardless of whether the registrant is pursuing continuing education or not.



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 founder and Executive Director of the Living/Dying Project and co-author of **Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook** (Bantam Books).

*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-five years. In addition to our local services, we offer support, training and educational services through our website, by telephone, and Skype to people around the world. 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. During these divisive and troubling times, finding that which connects us rather than separates us is crucial.

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 by visiting our website [www.livingdying.org](http://www.livingdying.org), and clicking the **Donate Now** link on our home 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, Client Services Coordinator for the Project. He also took the cameiia photo on page 3. A good friend, George Ward whose work appears in respected journals and calendars, took the photo *Silver Jack Aspens* on page 1. The photo of Stephen Levine was made available by Stephen's wife Ondrea. The photo on page 4 of Nico and Mary Beth was taken in Spain by her good friend Travis Smith who is also a friend of the Project.