



Finding the Sacred in Daily Life

All the Scriptures, all the true teachers, tell us that Presence, love, is always available if only we can surrender. If we have faith in God, in the teachings, then Grace and blessing will be revealed. Some part of us knows that it's all sacred, that the Beloved can only be everything. Yet seldom is this our experience. We often struggle just to be mindful of what's going on.

How can we directly manifest the truth of the teachings? Recent studies by psychologists at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, show mindfulness leads to an increased sense of well-being, not a big surprise. They also found out that if we cultivate compassion as well as mindfulness, this movement toward well-being noticeably increases. So there are two things to do: pay attention and open your heart to any suffering that arises.

I've been doing this practice for decades. Let go the narrative, let go of "Why?" And be with "What?", particularly as experienced in the body. Then get more interested in my relationship with what I'm experiencing. Is it loving and compassionate? As we become more courageous in the face of pain, the heart becomes balanced. We experience the boundless and connected nature of the heart. Our ego structure remains, of course, but it is just one small cloud in the vast sky. We approach life from a sense of fullness and romance rather than a sense



of need and inadequacy. The ego is no longer the enemy of freedom. We can gently move toward our pain. Suffering becomes grace.

Finally we can begin to rest in Presence that can only be experienced now, not lost in time. We are with the first moment of perception, having the courage to let go of conceptualization. The next

moment can no longer be more significant than now. No room for feelings of the need for self improvement before the Sacred can be experienced. Rather than being preoccupied with the content of our experience or even our relationship with it, we rest in nature of Reality itself – love, Presence, God. Compassion creates the spaciousness to let God in. Be pulled by intimacy, allowing your self pure desire. Even suffering is then a direct pointing home. Since we no longer believe God is only external, we don't identify as something lower.

We are directly and intimately touching and being touched by each moment—not using "spirituality" as a means to avoid the messiness of this life. Compassion has birthed a freedom from fear of suffering. Whenever we're not resting in the flow of grace, we know that only our faulty assumptions are veiling the immediacy of Presence. The more we rest in this fullness, the more we hunger to be here. We see no distinction between the sacred and the mundane, digesting experience and emo-

tion as just another form of the sacred and essentially being in relationship with the Sacred Feminine. We become conscious that this world is intelligent and alive, densely permeated with Presence.

— Dale Borglum

If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable, you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all that is left is compromise.

Anaïs Nin

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

Albert Einstein

There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

Rumi



Living Close to Consequence

The diagnosis of Stage 4 metastasized lung cancer came as I was beginning divorce proceedings after a 30-year marriage, and contemplating moving from home. It arrived a short while after I'd recovered from two heart surgeries. On one hand, it felt like piling on; on the other, like a challenging opportunity to meet adversity where the rubber really hits the road. I studied models of wellness on the way to a doctorate in Transpersonal Psychology and have accompanied life-threatened clients on their journey. Now the client is me, and it is my life in the balance.

There's an aliveness living close to consequence. Everything matters. That said, I felt overwhelmed and discombobulated. My daughter Siri became an indispensable support in negotiating legal, medical matters, and finding a new living situation. With so much to do I didn't have time to obsess on the looming menace that had entered the room. Not being attached to my story of woe seems critical, though I am fighting concurring skirmishes on multiple fronts.

The word "fight" may be inaccurate, because I don't want to over-invest cancer as either adversary, or a

cause for fear, though I am acknowledging that cancer is a tenacious crab willing to give up a claw rather than let go. Responding constructively to confused cells seems the best strategy to pursue. I'm also aware that I need to back off from doing everything myself, pause, ask for support. Relationship and being connected feel like essential components of healing, whatever the outcome of the disease.

I feel the need to put my health first to increase my chances of survival. I'm aware that I'm advantaged with enough time, resources and support to pursue alternative therapies. The few who experience radical remission from my diagnosis are willing to embrace the present and deal with uncertainty by not projecting fear into the future. I invite relaxation when possible, breathing in what trees so graciously offer to us. Thanks in large part to my brother, I'm in a living situation that allows me a view of Mount Tamalpais that offers both stillness and remembrance of the eternal. Everyday the mountain is my first and last focus. Even when blanketed in fog, I trust it's there.

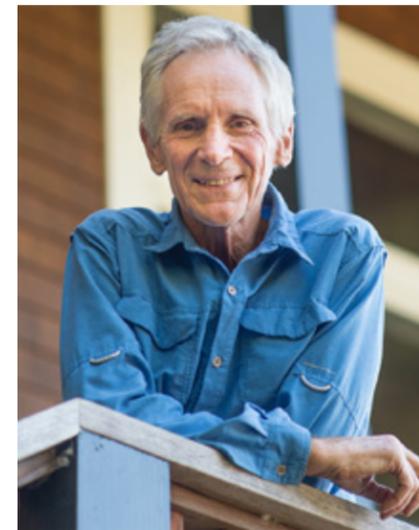
I'm having to draw more boundaries around my so-

cial time and public activity while strategizing alternatives when my heavy-lifting chemo pill loses its effectiveness. Previously I viewed denial and living "as if" to be less than authentic, but if I am to beat the 3% odds of surviving beyond two years, then I want my mind to believe it. Survivors all harbor hope without going into denial—I want to join that club. When I see how my inner struggle mirrors the current toxic socio-political environment we're having to endure as a culture, the task feels less personal in a limiting way and less isolating.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has linked my adenocarcinoma to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam. Though there are consequences to decisions made more than half a century ago, I feel grateful to be able to align myself in this moment with what affirms life. I'm not interested in identifying with a story of victimhood. I haven't time or energy to dwell in habit and history. I'd rather attune to the origin of healing as being fueled by love and strike a Tibetan bowl balanced on my bare chest to feel resonance throughout my body.

While it's prudent to seek the counsel of Western medicine, it's always time to listen inside. On some mysterious level I believe the body knows how to heal itself, so intuition must play a role. I want to participate in that conversation, for my life depends on it.

— Sandy Scull
Living/Dying Project Volunteer



For You, My Friend

We take turns living close to consequence. This is my turn, soon may be yours. When that day comes, I want you to hold fast to what you long for. Let it guide you to that temple called belonging, only then will the gong of "om" resound against blood and bone calling you home. Attuning you to the secret heart behind the heart.

Outcome is not your domain but how you approach it is. Know the dogs bark louder as you near the gate. Tomorrow is not now unless you let it be. Life's not a performance but it can be a practice.

Not a rehearsal, for fate is dealing its hand now, front and center, while oncologists hedge with words: Acceptable, collateral, cellular damage. So many adjectives, you may doubt their efficacy and sniff the cloaked one waiting in the wings to play it's version of taps. Let that be a Miles Davis love ballad. The spare ache that haunts the sublime.

Sandy Scull





Living/Dying with Stage Four Cancer

We've been spending time with a number of folks coming to terms with stage 4 cancer and thought it would be good to give each of them an opportunity to share some of their experience with the challenging journey they are on. Some choose treatment, some not. Our friend Eileen Rossman chose with the assistance of her health care provider to avail herself of end of life options now available under California law. Medicine prescribed late last year allowed her to end her life in January with her two adult children present. Holding both living and dying is clearly part of this journey. We do our best to support folks in the choices they make, inviting them to be as open to each moment as possible.

— Curtis Grindahl
Client Services Supervisor

*The butterfly counts not months
but moments, and has time
enough.*

Rabindranath Tagore

Old age is a time to be joyful and emotionally creative; so when I was diagnosed at 80 with terminal breast cancer, I chose to have no medical treatment to prolong my life. I saw this instead as a gift of knowing I was going on a trip and have been given gracious time to pack my bags for this last journey we all take.

My challenge is now new, but the values upon which I have lived my life - honesty, courage, love and respect for my fellow man, are old. Staying true to these values is the price and promise required to embark with a peaceful, meditative state of mind.

By being open in communicating my needs and condition, I have generous hospice and medical support, lists of helpful books to read and friends to share my preparation for travel, and a heart full of joy and gratitude.

All love, Betty

My diagnosis came out of the blue. No symptoms, no pain, no blood work revealing leading indicators. Just my first routine colonoscopy and a big tumor. Surgery, port catheter implant and chemotherapy every other week for six months. That was seven years ago when I turned 51.

I never received a formal prognosis (I didn't want one), but my wife did. So I've never known how much time I'm supposed to have. Practical denial is, I guess, a favored coping mechanism.

Over the years I've had a variety of IV and oral treatments. I've learned along the way that even treatments that are supposed to work lose effectiveness over time. Cancer is clever. It "morphs" to make itself harder to kill. My wife and I have a running joke. Whenever someone says to me "you look great" we look at each other and grin. I've never been so frequently told how good I look as since I was diagnosed with cancer! Of course, what are people supposed to say? We're all doing the best we can.

Eight months ago I wasn't accepted for a promising clinical trial. I'd been told I was the poster child for this treatment. I exercised, I ate well, I was active and except for the cancer, was actually pretty healthy. Apparently not as healthy as I thought. Turns out, one

*When it is dark enough, you can
see the stars.*

Persian proverb

of my cardiac rhythms was outside permissible limits by a value of 5 out of 450...I sailed through every other screening, but my QT score left me on the sidelines. My oncologist, the sponsor of the trial, tried and failed to get me a variance. I was devastated and I was changed. Not so happy go lucky. Denial wasn't working so well. Anxiety flooded in and I fixated on my college-aged sons and how they would deal with my death. In March I developed a sinus infection that made me feel sick for 5 solid months, and my last scan showed a Pulmonary Edema. Now I'm on blood thinners that give me chronic nosebleeds. The new normal seems to be a continually shrinking world. Have to find the joy in a smaller box.

What did I do to deserve all of this? Of course, nothing. Things happen in life that have no explanation. My job is to hang on to my overwhelming sense of gratitude for the life I have. My loving and supportive family of origin, my loving and meaning-giving family; beautiful brilliant wife, smart, strong, compassionate sons. Part of me believes I'll be one of the few who hangs on until a better treatment comes along. That's the imagery that keeps me from slipping into despair.

My hope is that I can face the end, whenever it comes, with dignity and ultimately self-acceptance.

Dan

*Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest
being, something that needs our love.*

Ranier Maria Rilke

Three months before my 70th birthday I was diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer. The cancer had metastasized to my lungs, liver and spine. I felt terrified upon receiving the news. This was my fifth cancer diagnosis so I was familiar with the process of treatments etc. but not with a prognosis of buying time rather than being cured.

I felt a strong desire to get "it" right before the end of my life. The decades of lessons in my spiritual communities seemed to elude me in the early days of the diagnosis. My mind was in the future of death, even though I have no idea how I will feel when the end is near. I was planning my funeral in my head. I felt frantic, exhausted and very sad.

The spell of the Stage 4 diagnosis was about to be interrupted. Someone in my spiritual community suggested I contact The Living/Dying Project. I took the suggestion. The trajectory of my focus was about to take a turn toward peace and serenity.

Curtis became my weekly visitor. He helped me to have more compassion for myself and to stay in the present as much as possible. As I began to relax into my new situation, it became easier to accept life on life's terms. A commitment to prayer and meditation proved the best way to quiet my head. Compassion, forgiveness and self-care started to grow. It also became clear that many people love me and I can accept that love. I have been restored to enjoying life and those in my life.

I called the Living/Dying project to learn how to die. What I really learned was how to live more fully each day that I am in this body. That's the "IT".

I give thanks to The Living/Dying project for the work they do.

Janice



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.
- 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 **Online Interactive Workshop** link on our website for more information <https://www.livingdying.org/intro/#online>. 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 2020. 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 per year, but a few times a year 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 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. George Ward has done a beautiful job of redesigning our homepage. 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 weekly Tuesday afternoon in Santa Rosa and Monday night in San Francisco. There is also a group in Mill Valley that meets twice a month on Wednesday nights. 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 <https://www.livingdying.org/ongoing-groups/>. 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/>. There are interviews with many of his friends including Ram Dass, Donnie Nelson, Melanie Bien, Sandra Fish, John Fox, Annie Lamott and others. There are also talks by Dale on this channel.
- **Insight Timer** smart phone app and <https://insighttimer.com> have lots of wonderful guided meditations and talks by meditation teachers including Dale. Now you can meditate anywhere!

You have to be able to imagine lives that are not yours.

Wendell Berry

HEALING AT THE EDGE CONSCIOUS LIVING / CONSCIOUS DYING

**A WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS,
NURSES, ACUPUNCTURISTS 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 Therapist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker are directed to cipmarin.org. Please select *Professional Development*, choose *Continuing Education for Professionals* and click on the course title. The **Living/Dying Project** offers C.E.U.s for nurses and licensed acupuncturists. A flyer for the workshop may be found at the **Living/Dying Project** website at 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.

Santa Rosa workshop will be held **Januray 25 and 26, 2020**.

San Anselmo workshop will be held **February 8, 2020**.

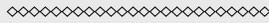
San Francisco workshop will be held **February 22 and 23, 2020**.

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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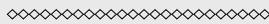
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The Living/Dying Project

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.

A Time of Need - 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. 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.

Two organizations who have supported our efforts informed me recently that for the near future they will be unable to contribute to the Project which makes even more important the gifts made by our friends. Our operation is simple and our overhead is minimal. A great majority of our budget comes from individual donations. We ask for your support with your blessings and your prayers but especially this year through your financial contributions. This support allows us to continue the vital work of the Project. You can make a donation online using PayPal or credit card by clicking this [Donate](#) link that takes you to our website.

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. May your actions contribute to peace and healing.

Touching palms together,

*The function of freedom
is to free someone else.*

Toni Morrison



Credits

Layout and design of this newsletter was done by Curtis Grindahl, Client Services Coordinator for the Project. On page one is a photo by George Ward titled *Mount Morrison Cloud Formation*. The picture of Sandy Scull on page four was taken by Curtis. The photo of Dale on page seven was taken by Heather Swain.