



Hardcore Love

Challenging times – pandemic, politics, fires and smoke and floods, racial inequality, social unrest, financial uncertainty. The list could be much longer. It feels like there is more to be anxious about and to grieve than ever before. Many are sinking under the weight of the imbalances that have been revealed in our world recently. Many of us feel profoundly disconnected from others, from ourselves, from God.

For years I've been exploring and teaching practices to heal our grief and anxiety, our fear and anger. This gradual approach works directly with what blocks the individual from moment-to-moment aliveness. The coming together at this moment of so many personal challenges can be the inspiration for lifting our practice to another level. If ever there were a time to cultivate an unshakable hardcore love, this is it.

Here are two practices that directly take us beyond self concern. The first is cultivating universal compassion, taking attention off our own problems, realizing the boundless nature of our hearts. One of the defining qualities of compassion is connectedness. It's compassion with, not compassion for. Trusting the loving, spacious heart even when connected with suffering. Can we feel compassion for all those facing financial insecurity because of the pandemic, for all those grieving, for those whose politics we disagree with, opening our hearts to something much bigger than our own concerns? Aren't we much vaster than



we think? We desperately need these feelings of connection not just with our own tribe, but with those we have been seeing as the other.

Whenever I do a “*big compassion*” practice I feel full, joyful, beyond concern. Here we are not denying our own grief and anxiety, but at least temporarily acting from the truth of our fundamental interdependence, our essential oneness. Grief dares us to connect and love again. Compassion is the connectedness beyond our grief. As Rumi so beautifully wrote, “*Grief is the garden of compassion.*”

Compassion doesn't necessarily alleviate suffering in the moment, but an open heart makes the pain bearable, workable and creates the doorway to healing. In the boundless heart is a joy that transcends happiness and sadness, wellness and illness, life and death.

Secondly, we can learn to love the fierce, the wild, the difficult faces of God. The difficult is much easier to embrace if we don't relate to it as an imposition, as an obstacle to being present. Can divisiveness and chaos and uncertainty also be seen as manifestations of the Divine? We stay awake by going beyond the struggle, devouring rather than being devoured by our experience, by loving what was previously unlovable.

The Hindu dark goddess Kali appears ugly and terrifying at first glance, but She reveals her inner beauty when loved. To find this beauty within the messy and the distressing, we are called upon to love the wildness within ourselves. We invoke

Presence vaster than our fear. We open to deep bodily sensation that underlies our background agitation and anxiety and thus manifest the inherent gifts in our lives.

Rather than just surviving the pervasive chaos, can we use our challenges as an opportunity for deep awakening? Can this new life so different from the “time before” be not merely fearful reacting, but inspiration to do the big practice of hardcore love? Can we create a life based on this love? We need connection now more than ever. What is the most important thing? The most important thing is remembering the Beloved can only be everyone and everything.

— Dale Borglum

The Dakini* Speaks

My friends, let's grow up.

*Let's stop pretending we don't know the deal here.
Or if we truly haven't noticed, let's wake up and notice.*

*Look: Everything that can be lost, will be lost.
It's simple - how could we have missed it for so long?
Let's grieve our losses fully, like human ripe beings.
But please, let's not be so shocked by them.
Let's not act so betrayed,
As though life had broken her secret promise to us.*

*Impermanence is life's only promise to us,
And she keeps it with ruthless impeccability.*

*To a child, she seems cruel, but she is only wild,
And her compassion exquisitely precise.
Brilliantly penetrating, luminous with truth,
She strips away the unreal to show us the real.
This is the true ride - let's give ourselves to it!
Let's stop making deals for a safe passage -
There isn't one anyway, and the cost is too high.
We are not children anymore.*

*The true human adult gives everything
for what cannot be lost.
Let's dance the wild dance of no hope.*

© Jennifer Welwood

* A dakini (Sanskrit: "sky dancer") is a Tantric priestess of ancient India who "carried the souls of the dead to the sky" and acts as a muse for spiritual practice.

*Something has been calling
to you*

*For longer than you can
remember.*

*Calling you to step out
into the light, into your life.*

*It doesn't matter whether
you think you're ready or not
The time has come.*

*Roll away the stone!
Roll away the stone!*

Larry Robinson

Where Do We Go From Here?



What has happened in California with regard to end of life decisions will likely be explored elsewhere in this country. Oregon was the first state to allow men and women contending with illnesses that have no effective treatment to make the decision to end their lives with assistance of their doctors. California passed its End of Life Option Act in 2016. It was challenged in court and the law put on hold until 2017. It was in January of 2019 that one of our dear friends and clients, Eileen Rossman, availed herself of that option and took the prescribed medicine in the presence of her two adult children. Her daughter Joey has written the piece that follows telling of her experience sharing the journey with her mother.

For the Living/Dying Project, passage of this law represents a change in how some of our clients approach the end of their lives. When we met with clients in the past it was with the understanding we were on a journey whose length was a mystery and that was completely beyond our control. Our volunteer's task was to support the client as they came to terms with the effects of the disease ravaging their body, and as they reflected on the life challenges they were leaving behind. In most cases there were farewells to be made with loved ones, friends and family alike. That, of course, doesn't change, but now the entire process carries with it the decision whether to utilize the end of life protocol and if that route is taken, when the person will choose to end their life by their own initiative.

As I'm writing this piece a dear friend who shared a bit of his journey in the newsletter last year is working through these questions. Dan is married with two college-age sons. His oldest son graduated earlier this year and is at home while he prepares to enter the workforce. With the arrival of the coronavirus all such life decisions have become more complicated. His younger son is also home and completing an internship before he returns to college.

As Dan contends with his diminishing capacity to engage with life he is surrounded with loved ones, supporting them as best as he can, while assessing whether it is time to stop treating his stage four colon cancer and seek comfort care. When he chooses that path, it will include making arrangements to satisfy the requirements imposed on those wishing to avail themselves of the End of Life Law.

Dan met virtually with a doctor from the University of California San Francisco medical center who specializes in palliative care. She will likely be in contact shortly with Dan's oncologist to get a more precise reading of his prognosis. In Dan's initial conversation with his oncologist regarding end of life questions he felt the doctor was not prepared to sign onto any plan that would terminate treatment... despite the fact treatment has been going on for eight years. No one expects his stage four cancer will be cured through these efforts.

Dan's wife asked him following his conversation with the palliative care doctor whether he is ready to take the pills that would end his life. He said, "I don't know." On good days life is bearable, if not fulfilling, and the thought of no life seems impossible to entertain. He knows *this* life, even with its limitations. What comes next is entirely unknown. At the moment there are more questions than answers, but this is the conversation we're having when we talk each week. I want to support him in making the best decision he can, a decision that may mean he won't wait for death to take him. He will make the choice.

— Curtis Grindahl
Client Services Coordinator

*It always comes back
to the same necessity:
go deep enough and
there is a bedrock of
truth, however hard.*

May Sarton

*Perhaps home is not a place but simply
an irrevocable condition.*

James Baldwin

Saying Goodbye to Mom



My mama died last year on January 10th. She was just shy of 75 when she died peacefully at home. Her death was beautiful. Her death was a gift. It was also a heartbreak.

It was a gift because it showed me and my brother what death can look like when someone puts thought, energy and intention into how they want to transition out of their body when their time has come. It is a very special space to hold for someone, sitting with them on their death bed. My mom, in many ways made this easy for my brother and me as she showed us the way. For this I am so grateful.

My mom was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer just before her 70th birthday. She was already a cancer survivor, having beaten a melanoma diagnosis in her early 30s when my brother and I were 8 and 6 years old. She beat it with a combination of western medicine and alternative treatments in Mexico which, at that time, was quite radical. She was a pioneer.

In many ways that initial diagnosis would shape the way she lived her adult life. She said she had been preparing for her death ever since. Not in a morbid way. It certainly informed how she actively prepared for her death and how she died.

My mom grew up in a Jewish home in Brooklyn and described herself as being spiritually inclined from a young age. So when she was diagnosed with cancer in her thirties it was natural for her to tap into that spiritual nature. She was part of the first death and dying retreats in the 70s lead by Ram Dass, Stephen Levine and Dale Borglum. They had a profound impact on her life.

My mom lived a simple life. She loved her family



deeply, was silly like no other, had a wicked sense of humor, was brutally honest to a fault. She was one of the most generous people I knew. Our relationship, like many mother-daughter relationships was complicated and not always easy. In many ways we were like oil and water. That being said, she was my best friend and it's been a very lonely year without her.

When my mom was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2013, she wasn't sure she wanted to fight it. The idea of chemo was daunting, holistic options were confusing and beyond her reach financially. She consulted with a well known acupuncturist who specializes in breast and ovarian cancer who, to her surprise, urged her to seek treatment with western medicine. This gave her pause.

Ultimately, it was the love of her grandson and not wanting to leave him that served as her inspiration to undergo chemo and a radical hysterectomy. Thankfully she did. To witness her approach to her treatment was a lesson in grace. Many people refer to chemo as poison. She welcomed it into her body as healing juice. This is where she excelled. Her spiritual anchor was her strength. It gave her peace and she really was fearless (she also acknowledged that facing cancer later in life was very different than when she was a mom of young children)

She responded amazingly to treatment, went into remission and we got another 4+ wonderful years with her. She made her life about her grandchildren (now 3 of them) and her children. And then she went out of remission. This time, she was clear. No more treatment. She chose quality of life and started preparing for her death. She was still so full of life. I know I lived most of those last months in denial of how soon she

would be gone.

In the state of California, we have what is called The End of Life Option Act, often referred to as Death with Dignity. She was able to get the required two doctors to sign off on her behalf. She was doing this as much for the political statement - to let her opinion be known (she was big on having her opinion known!) as this law was and still is making its way through the courts. She felt strongly in this right. She was also doing it for peace of mind. In those last months of her life, knowing she had the prescribed drugs on hand provided her with much comfort which was priceless.

It became clear last January 1st that she wasn't doing well. By the 5th it was clear she was dying. My brother and I knew neither one of us was leaving her side.

She had Ram Dass's book **Walking Each Other Home** at her bedside along with Jai Uttal's *Loveland: Music For Dreaming And Awakening* on her iPad. I picked up reading where she had left off in **Walking Each Other Home**. It seemed fitting that it hadn't been read to completion. It became our guide and teacher on how to sit with presence for our dying mother. There were lots of silent tears as our hearts broke open. As she lost her ability to talk,

*Leave behind your cleverness,
O lover of God:
go crazy instead
Become a moth: enter the flame!*
Rumi

*Ink stone cold
Joy and grief
One brush*
Mitsu Suzuki

we played Jai's music which had a visible calming impact and also put her in a blissful state. These two things along with our love for each other seemed to help her transition from this world.

During these precious five days, my brother and I did much healing in our strained relationship. That gave her peace and it was our last gift to her. She gave us the gift of showing us what a conscious and peaceful death could look like and what pure love feels like. In the end, about four days after stopping food and water, she decided to take the end of life medication and passed about 24 hours later.

This past year has been one of growth and grief. It has been a lonely year not being able to speak to her. There are things only a mother can hear and hold the space for. We spoke more times a day than I care to admit... for better or worse!

Thank you for reading a little about my mom's end of life and in a small way being witness to her courage. She would love that I am sharing with you the story of her death.

Namaste

— Joey Anderson



Project News

- We have free-of-charge, volunteer-based spiritual support services. Due to these pandemic times our services are offered virtually, not in person, and are available to all regardless of location. If you or anyone you know could benefit from this support, please call the our office at **415-456-3915**. Dale also works with individual clients.
- Services that have been available only in-person in the San Francisco 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, Asia, Australia, and throughout Canada and the U.S.
- Dale will be facilitating weekend workshops/volunteer training programs via Zoom in January and February of 2020. Please see the next-to-last 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. 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. 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 under the **Education** link.
- **Healing at the Edge** ongoing small groups are being facilitated by Dale. Temporarily these meetings are virtual via Zoom. The San Francisco group meets weekly on Monday night. There are also 2 groups that meet twice a month, the Tuesday afternoon Santa Rosa group and the Wednesday night Mill Valley group. 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 are 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.

*Each encounter is unprecedented;
each encounter is unrepeatable.
Treasure each encounter.*
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi

HEALING AT THE EDGE CONSCIOUS LIVING / CONSCIOUS DYING ZOOM WORKSHOPS FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS, NURSES, ACUPUNCTURISTS AND ANYONE WANTING TO DEEPLY EXPLORE HEALING



Sponsored by the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy**, a **ZOOM** 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

Why do some people experience wholeness as they approach death, while others lose themselves in denial, depression, distraction? Why is it that some of the most alive and awake Westerners I've known have been, almost without exception, people near death? Is there some powerful truth about life and about healing that you and I can receive from these few who, as they went through the process of dying, deeply realized their own wholeness?

Bringing emotional/spiritual support to someone with a life-threatening illness is a twofold task. First, help the client realize they are more than that which will die – the finite self – the body and personality. At the same time, honor this finite self, healing its woundedness, its identification with separateness. Rumi said “Grief is the garden of compassion.” This transmuting the separateness of grief into the connectedness of compassion is at the heart of the work. Confusion, anxiety, depression, anger are typical responses arising as the end of a life approaches, both for patients and their families.

This presentation will explore possibilities for realizing wholeness at the edge of life where illness, grief, and loss arise. Both psychological and spiritual tools will be used in the investigation of these profound and challenging issues. We will offer participants the opportunity to explore the deeper questions surrounding death, healing, and the sacred, so that each of us can better embody an enlivened sense of being in the world in each moment rather than a sense of isolation and denial.

January 30 & 31, 2021 | 9:00 am– 5:30 pm (both days)

or

February 27 & 28, 2021 | 9:00 am– 5:30 pm (both days)

or

February 13, 2021 | 9:00 am– 6:00 pm

*(One-day summarized version with the same material
but less discussion and fewer experiential exercises.)*

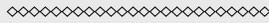
**15 HOURS C.E.
\$ 290**

**8 HOURS C.E.
\$ 175**



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 Mediator'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.



Board of Advisors

- Jerry Brown
- Fritjof Capra
- Joan Halifax
- Jack Kornfield
- Anne Lamott
- Joanna Macy
- Wayne Muller
- John Robbins
- Robert Thurman

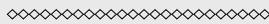
In Memorium

- Angeles Arrien
- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
- Stephen Levine



Board of Directors

- Dale Borglum
- Mira Goetsch
- Mike Murphy
- Kristin Singer
- Doug Wallace



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

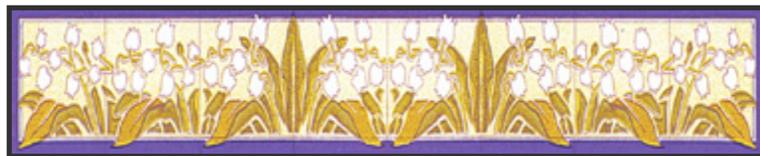
We offer spiritual support free of charge to those with a life-threatening illness as well as to their caregivers. During the pandemic most of this support is being offered virtually to clients around the world. As the first organization in the Western world whose mission is to cultivate conscious dying, we've offered these services for over thirty-five years. In addition to spiritual support, we offer training and educational services. 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. Particularly now 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 great majority of our budget comes from individual donations. Several of our major donors have discontinued their support due to financial constraints caused by the pandemic. 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 or credit card by visiting our website and clicking the [Donate](#) link at the top of the page.

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 blessings for you and for those you love. May your actions contribute to peace and healing.

Touching palms together,

We were made for these times.
Clarissa Pinkola Estes



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 *Sunrise on the North Shore of Mono Lake, Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area, California*. The picture of Eileen Rossman and her two children on page four was taken by Joey Anderson, Eileen's daughter. The photo of Dale on page seven was taken by Heather Swain.