

## Chapter 2

### THE GRACE IN DYING:

*A Message of Hope, Comfort and Spiritual Transformation*

by **Kathleen D. Singh, PhD**

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

*"When you're prepared to die, you're also prepared to live."*

**-Dr. Billy Graham**

*"Death is not an outrage."* **-Ram Dass**

*"Be calm. God awaits you at the door."*

**-Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

*"Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom."* **-Montaigne**

*"End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take."*

**-J.R.R. Tolkien**

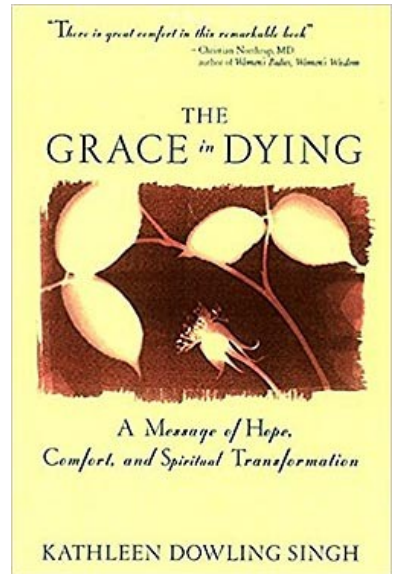
*"Dying is safe,"* writes Kathleen Singh. Let that thought sink deep into your spirit for a few moments. Then, boldly confront your deep-seated fear of death with the pure love graciously available to you now by your Creator as you read the inspired pages of *The Grace in Dying*.

For those who have sought a spiritual path in life, this book will confirm your journey to abandon your old (false) self in pursuit of a new, truer self in God.

Author Kathleen Singh reveals that re-merging with God is both a birthright and a deathright of all who are created in His image and likeness. Whatever spiritual enlightenment unaccomplished in life, will be accomplished in death.

Death is to be seen not as tragic, but rather as the final stage of transformational growth, according to Singh. "Disciplined reflection adds meaning and urgency to life," writes Eric Greiten in *Resilience*.

Singh explains: *"Death is a mirror in which all of life is reflected. We need to recognize death as a part of life as beautifully conceived as every other part. A greater*



*understanding of the process of dying in physical and psycho-spiritual dimensions also will enable us to better guide our loved ones and ourselves through this difficult and profound time.”*

*“To see how everything belongs we must trust the flow, trust life, the life so large and deep and spacious that it even includes death,”* writes Richard Rohr in *Everything Belongs*.

## Overview

*“No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils.” -Socrates*

*“I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.”-Mark Twain*

*“When we have passed the tests we are sent to Earth to learn, we are allowed to graduate. We are allowed to shed our body, which imprisons our souls...I’ve told my children that when I die, to release balloons in the sky to celebrate that I graduated. For me, death is a graduation.”-Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross*

Ms. Singh invites readers to take a guided tour of the incremental stages of the “Nearing Death Experience.” She explains that death is “*a universal process marked primarily by a dissolution of the body and the separate sense of self and ascendancy of Spirit.*” She observes this process usually includes these qualities ...

- 1. Relaxation** - the end of struggle, letting go, emptying of self, like an ice cube melting in a glass of water.
- 2. Withdrawal** - detachment from our worldly self, a positive, purposeful and transforming turning inward.
- 3. Radiance** - brightening aura, relaxing of facial muscles, inner illumination, light from the eyes.
- 4. Interiority** - a liminal experience of clearing our old self from out of the way to allow God to fill us.
- 5. Silence** - the language of love, dear and whispered, beyond words, a sense of great mystery of the sacred.
- 6. Sacred** - the last bond the dying person has to bodily life is an expression of pure love.
- 7. Transcendence** - a transpersonal consciousness, our personal river flowing into the ocean of God.
- 8. Knowing** - A sense of becoming part of something vast, transformation

beyond our waking state.

**9. Intensity** - energy can be felt rising through the chakras in preparation for the moment of exit.

**10. Merging** - the end of separation and duality, coming face to face with the Source of All Being, God.

**11. Experienced Perfection** - a sense of absolute safety, that all is really OK.

**12. Grace** - a transformation from perceived tragedy to experienced grace.

Readers are immediately swept up in Kathleen's providential worldview of the dying process from "perceived tragedy to experienced grace" which leads us to an experience of transcendence - whether or not we have pursued a spiritual walk or practice in life. In the Nearing Death Experience we face an accelerated discovery of both self and God - a sort of "enlightenment at gunpoint".

She outlines the three major goals of the book as; 1) Embracing the dying experience as a time of monumental transformation, 2) a moment of profound significance in the human journey leading us from the ego-bound self which she views as an experience of separation into Unity Consciousness, and 3) viewing this end moment in a human life as being a re-merging with The Ground of Being from which we once emerged.

Her basic transformational view is that we all are born of God before we enter the world of form "undifferentiated" then during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood we experience a differentiation, or individuation. Most remain in this state of feeling as though their self is separated from God until they approach death, which requires returning or re-merging with God. Through spiritual practices some are able to find a path in life to shed the ego, or false self, and return to spiritual unity with God via prayer, meditation and contemplation.

"A human being is an organism designed to realize Spirit," writes Ms. Singh. "If transformation into the final stage of consciousness, the merging of the individual, personal identity with the Source, has occurred prior to the time of dying, the Nearing Death Experience suggests that dying, in and of itself, activates this potentiality."

I wish I'd had the opportunity to meet Kathleen in person to give her a giant hug and thank her for a life well-lived and for all of the great work she has done, but on October 1, 2017, Ms. Singh died peacefully with her loved ones.

According to her daughter's posting on Facebook, "As she would say, she was an ordinary person dying an ordinary death. Our mother personified Grace and offered it up as a gift for the world."

Kathleen Dowling Singh has authored three other books, which I have also enjoyed; *The Grace in Aging*, *The Grace in Living and Unbinding*; *The Grace Beyond Self*.

What follows are approximately 100 of the major truisms I was able to extract from this amazingly practical yet very spiritual book, which I hope you will find helpful in understanding the journey toward selflessness both in life and in death.

### **The Journey Into Ego**

Most of humanity remain fearful of death because they embrace a worldview of "mental ego, or separate-self consciousness". We usually lack the wisdom which is gained from a higher perspective of life, which Christ, as well as other great spiritual masters from other wisdom traditions, exhibited and taught.

I appreciate Katherine's deep desire to help readers connect the dots by including all major religious perspectives in defining the spiritual processes of life, death and resurrection in universal spiritual terms.

Ms. Singh quotes extensively from the works of Michael Washburn, an author and transpersonal theorist and Ken Wilber, considered the most influential philosopher of our time. Both of which are helping others understand the pathway to higher levels of understanding, the unitive field postulated by modern physics and confirmed by all the great spiritual mystics throughout history (including Christ).

The two great arcs of human development are; 1) the first phase of the journey which leads us to and through the development of our present state of mental ego (personal and separate self) and 2) the laying down of our self, taking up our cross - either in a conscious life process decision or ultimately in the Nearing Death Experience. These stages of transformation in the Christian tradition are encompassed in Christ's words, "I am the Alpha and the Omega".

Ms. Singh illustrates how we are born into this life from God, or "The Ground of Being" as she often refers, Undifferentiated, that is, one with God.

As Washburn suggests, when you hold a newborn and observe his or her self-contained absorption and entrancement, remember that what you are witnessing is partial embedment of the Ground of Being and the magnetic, gravitational 16

pull of the Ground. The luminosity that can be perceived and experienced in the presence of an infant is an expression of the Ground of Being. Our parents witnessed us at this stage of self. This stage evokes love.

As we grow, the self moves toward increasing differentiation, a dawning sense of me, as Kathleen puts it. This developing consciousness of the child establishes the “**First Dualism**” - the “Grand Canyon of dualisms” **between self and not-self** - which has great relevance as it also represents the last letting go in the dying process.

Ken Wilber puts it this way, “The distinction between self and non-self is the most cherished boundary we are most reluctant to give up...in death this is the last boundary we relinquish...it is the first one we draw and the last one we erase.”

This First Dualism launches us into the journey to ego and spawns our concept of space and time, as we begin to make distinctions between past, present and future, which then births the “**Second Dualism**” - **the distinction between life and death.**

These first two dualisms, which develop in early childhood, seek to divide and separate everything, our thoughts our feelings, removing us from the experience of wholeness and the unquestioning place of Love from which we came.

“A posture of defensive, protective self-containment is enacted slowly but relentlessly over the first seven years or so of life,” writes Ms. Singh, cutting us off from openness and replacing it with caution and reserve.

The “**Third Dualism**” is **between mind and body**, which is usually developed in the early to middle childhood years. According to Singh, “The loss is immense. We lose our deep integrity, the unity of body and mind, which is the unity of feeling and attention - the ability to be present.” This reinforces our sense of “primal repression” and our feelings of separation.

“With our dualistic thinking, with our penchant for boundary drawing, we have already created an illusory sense of self - a mind divorced from body, a self-image...The acquisition of language is our entry into membership in the adult worldview of our culture,” which clears the pathway for the “**Fourth Dualism**” - **our persona, which is our acceptable self-image, and the shadow self**, which consists of all the parts of our self that we cannot see or disown.

Late childhood is a period of growth and consolidation for the young and

developing mental ego. As the hormones of adolescence begin to rage comes a greater desire for intimacy, a sense of solid identity and worth. “Our personal consciousness believes in its apparent independence and self-control.”

In early adulthood years “we become lost in our own dramas; we forget our Original Nature. As we move closer to mid-life, our personal consciousness experiences a growing sense of emptiness, anxiety and alienation and a corresponding impetus toward transcendence,” writes Kathleen.

“Although the mental ego’s identity is a vehicle of authentic growth and expression during the first half of adult life, it is not a vehicle for the growth and expression of the whole person. It is an incomplete self posing as a whole self.”

With this solid foundation of understanding these four great dualisms which are a normal part of human development Ms. Singh then begins to explain how, one by one, these false dualisms begin to entirely unwind when faced with “special conditions” such as; a terminal illness or by systematic spiritual practices including prayer and mediation.

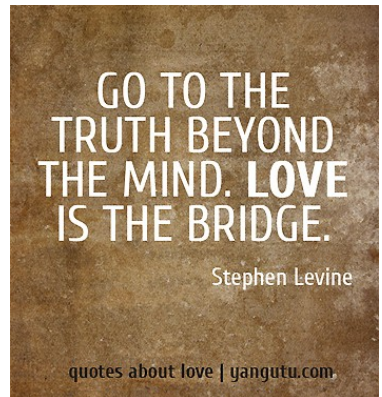
In both cases she presents readers with an amazing opportunity to participate in the process of transformation from perceived tragedy to experienced grace.

**“Death is the ultimate threat to ego.** The mental ego cannot even conceive of its own nullity...the fortunate ones are those who begin to experience and to live in expanded states of consciousness (which require overcoming the four dualisms) long before they are called to the dying process.”

“Among all my patients in the second half of life, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life,” writes Carl Jung.

Sigmund Freud said, “Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it, we can perceive that we really survive as spectators... in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality.”

“The mental ego is terrified of the universe’s indifference to our cherished nonessential nature...death is feared because it is seen as the end of our



existence, which is the only viewpoint available to the mental ego...the horror of being alone in a universe no longer caring if they live or die is unbearable.”

The key when approaching death, according to Singh, is offering compassion and attention toward yourself and others. “If you have a terminal illness, find at least one person who will listen to all you have to share. **If you love someone with a terminal illness, give them the gift of your attention.**”

In an egoic-driven culture, such as we live in America, the emphasis is always on upward mobility, self-definition, comfort and success. Aging and dying are not seen as integral parts of the life process, but rather as a painful loss and decline. To solve this Singh offers a Path of Return - a journey for the ego back to the Source of its own Being - which she views as a gradual movement into transcendent dimension which are every human's birthright and deathright.

### **The Path of Return**

Singh acknowledges that the path of moving beyond the mental ego is a road less traveled, “largely confined to our spiritual geniuses, mystics, saints and sages, both heralded and unheralded.” This powerful transformation or awakening involves the death of the ego and rebirth of the self by the Spirit. “All of the splits, rifts we created in our experience of self, or life are healed on this journey...the turning point is often signaled by a restlessness or by the imposition of an illness or terminal diagnosis.”

Once the futility of our “identity project” is embraced, sometimes referred to as disillusionment, the ego gradually comes face-to-face with its greatest fears about its own illusory identity. “**The first step toward freedom is the emptying of self...** primal repression is loosened in this letting go.”

**The first dualism to be healed and reintegrated is the Fourth Dualism; the split between our persona and shadow self.** “The process of rediscovering, reowning aspects of our being, expanding our identity from an impoverished persona to a full more complete sense of self... more inclusive...owning our common humanity...There is freedom in this integration...no longer tension and energy spent holding in, pushing down, denying all those parts of our self which we are ashamed of or feel unworthy...The truth sets us free!”

**The second dualism in need of integration is the Third Dualism; the division of mind and body,** which leads to a new transformed and expanded level of

consciousness. “The death of the personal self and the beginning of transformation and emergence of the “transpersonal self,” according to Michael Washburn. It is usually a painful deconstruction period which could be likened to nailing your self onto a cross, with a growing sense of resurrection on the other side of the pain. What John of the Cross calls “The dark night of the soul.”

**With this reunification of mind and body comes also unity of feeling and attention and the ability to be present, which is the “first really expanded level of consciousness.”** In the integration of persona and shadow all of our dark corners have been illuminated which provides us a greater psychological freedom.

At this stage of consciousness the heart is open and the mind is clear. “We begin to radiate love as an experienced openness to and acceptance of what is. The cup, the self, truly runs over...In the Sufi tradition, “The task of a human being is to transform suffering into joy.” At this stage **mindfulness** - the focused and deliberate use of the gathered attention - emerges.

**At these deep levels of integration a transformation of our fear of the problem of death begins to dissolve.** “There is a growing movement toward the healing of the **Second Dualism; that border we drew creating the human sense of time, spawning the fear of mortality.**”

“The healing of the dualism of life versus death seems to occur with two concurrent realizations; 1) the soul begins to function through integrated mindbody, mindfulness, as presence. 2) the emergence power of presence, or naked awareness... leading to a healing of the human sense of time and terrifying sense of difference between life and death...first conceived during infancy, which arose with **the First Dualism of self and other, creating the concept of space and the concept of time.**”

“Attention becomes a tool of transformation in its capacity to transcend time by so deeply entering the present...this dawning recognition into the eternal and the infinite comes in the lived experience of eternity and infinity, through the vehicle of present-entered awareness, or naked attention.” As Meister Eckhart put it, “The eye in me which is seeing God is the eye in God which is seeing me.”

“Divine Contemplation is the highest level before Unity Consciousness. We finally know ourselves to be planted in Love...consciousness in search of communion. Gradually, it dawns on us that the glass door through which we are contemplating the Divine is a mirror and the Divine we are contemplating is our Self. 20



This is the emergence of Unity Consciousness. **As that sense of self utterly dissolves, so does the First Dualism...This is the experience I believe each and every one of us has as we enter death.**"

### From Tragedy to Grace

"We must recognize with honesty that we live our lives in a dispossessed state, far from our home in the Ground of Being. This is a tragic state. The prognosis of death allows us to realize that we have been living in this tragic state all along...Stephen Levine speaks of the fear of death as '**the imagined loss of imagined individuality.**' With the elimination of the untrue, the truth emerges."

**"The experience of living with terminal illness is an experience of subtracting daily...**a shedding of the illusory identifications or definitions of self...there is suffering in the loss of one's hopes, and dreams, unfulfilled accomplishments, saying goodbye to all that one cherishes; family, friends, memories, the perceived loss of a future."

"In the head-on collision between terminal illness and personal ego, hope is almost always the first powerful psychodynamic to come to the forefront. Hope typically signifies one thing: the continuation of self. There is a profound change in the quality of hope during the transformation process. **When hope evaporates, we are left with here and now. Hope, a posturing of the mental ego, is transformed into presence, a stance of Spirit.**"

"Dying is especially difficult in America...medical and hospice personnel are the secular stewards of dying in America, instead of prayer and chanting, we are just as likely to hear the sounds of a blaring TV or hospital intercom...**We as members of a spiritually impoverished culture, have failed to provide an adequate context for both living and dying.**"

**"The transformation from tragedy to grace is the transformation from the loss of the lesser self to the realization of (Absolute) Self.** Living with terminal illness is, paradoxically, a journey of healing...the process of becoming whole...the restoration of our integrity, the mending of all previously created dualisms...Healing is not a cure."

**"The breaking of the heart precedes the dissolution of the physical body.** The breaking of the heart, paradoxically, allows it to become open and full, softened by pain and disappointment, vulnerable to each precious moment...There is distinct

magnetic feeling, a feeling of melting into the intense beingness of the one who is dying. Some visitors find it uncomfortable and run. The ones that stay begin to melt too.”

“Both Eastern and Western wisdom traditions recognize that **the deepest reason we are afraid of death is that we do not know who we are.** The suffering of the mental ego prior to entering the dying process is enormous as it becomes aware that it can no longer indulge in frivolity, in unreality, in hiding.”

“The crucible, like the cross, the West’s primary symbol of transformation, represents a situation in which one is held in place, to endure and experience what is. As Walt Whitman puts it, ‘I and this mystery, here we stand.’ It is interesting that our words sacred and sacrifice share a common root, reflecting their congruence.”

“There is an overwhelming chaos here that demands nothing less than total surrender. With the surrender comes the fall, the terrifying free fall... into the abyss and onto the Ground of Being. Grace comes at the end of such suffering like the balm in Gilead. **Tragedy holds the seeds of grace. Grace is the end of illusion,** the peace that quite literally passes understanding. Grace finds it’s root in the same origin as gratitude.”

### **The “Special Conditions” of Transformation**

“Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.” John 12:24

“The level of mental ego seems to be a difficult level to transcend. Self-obsession is so clever and so blind. It seems special conditions must be present in order for transformation to occur. Spiritual practices of any tradition can provide the needed spark, or shock, to start the fire of transformation aflame.”

A skillful means could be a meditative sit, prayer, the path of imitation of Christ. Often evoking pain and anxiety is a way out of the pain and anxiety of the separate self. The brain will respond to a believed, dreamed or imagined reality as easily as to a physical reality, if we want to transform ourselves, we act as if.

In the world of salesmanship, this same truism can be seen... “If you want to *be* enthusiastic, you've got to *act* enthusiastic!”

“Our spiritual practice is imitation of the expression of a deeper and expanded level of consciousness, by design and by desire, until the imitation becomes 22

real. We enter the next level of consciousness we confine our being to the expressions, the natural behavior of that next level.”

“The adoption of a contemplative discipline requires considerable motivation. Nothing less will do. In the case of the transformation that occurs during the dying process, the disease itself ensures that one stays the course. Once we enter the transformative fields, there is no return and no escape.” As St. Augustine put it, “he arrives at That Which Is.”

“This is really all there is to contemplative mysticism - to be aware without judgment or comment of what is actually happening at this moment, both outside ourselves and within, listening even to our involuntary thoughts as if they were no more than the sound of rain. This is possible only when it is clear that there is nothing else to do, and no way on or back.” - Alan Watts

“Meditation slowly and progressively purifies the ordinary mind, unmasking its habits and illusions... Ken Wilber/Abraham Maslow say anytime an individual heals or makes whole the dualism of a major level (persona/shadow, mind/body, life/death, self/other) they enter next level of consciousness.”

“The power of meditation is the power of attention, which has incredible power by choosing the content of our consciousness. All wisdom traditions indicate that where awareness is, greater inclusiveness and clarity of consciousness arise. (Think ordinary light vs. laser light)”

“No one knows so much of God as the man who is thoroughly dead.” - St. Gregory - **Many spiritual masters speak of meditation as learning to die while still alive.** In the recognition of our impermanence comes the freedom to live in the present, fully, authentically.

“The dying process, as does meditation, uncovers the contradictions of desires, attachments, and fears that block us from the experience of our Original Nature...With this healing unfolds the transpersonal self.”

“The act of dying is the most powerful spiritual opportunity of a lifetime...With the acknowledgment that they have absolutely no control over the situation, they let go of knowing. And letting go of knowing they enter being - taking the one seat.”

“The time of sickness or terminal illness is a time of withdrawal and isolation...it

sometimes reminds me of a car broken down on the side of a great superhighway. Everyone else is speeding by, but you feel abandoned by the world...the tiny space on the side of the road becomes home for that present experience...attention is more present and intense.”

“Withdrawal allows us to step out of the norm and is recognized as a special condition that facilitates **psychospiritual transformation**. **The derivative word for ‘mystery’ is from the Greek meaning ‘to close the eyes.’** Shutting out the world leads to revelation of mystery.”

“For those entering the dying process, as well as those practicing a spiritual discipline, the reintegration of mind/body allows the experience of the body as the ‘temple of God.’...the true meaning of contemplation; ‘completely, to make a temple, completely to make a holy space.’ It is one of the first healings on the Path of Return.”

“The stance of humility...We are all of us ordinary people...the humility fostered by the Quakers as they follow the path of simplicity... **in the practice of ordinariness we allow ourselves to circumvent the traps and pitfalls of the mental ego** that thrives on think of itself as special.”

“Humility is forced upon us by the helpless and uncontrollable aspects of the dying process...**Death is completely humbling**...in terminal illness we begin to be able to do only very ordinary things...we begin to be revealed without the carefully cultivated mask of specialness.”

“There is nothing so much like God in all the universe as silence.” - Meister Eckhart - Both prayer and meditation are facilitated by **stillness and complete silence**, which is a powerful transformative vehicle... ‘the fasting of the mind’ ...purification of the mindstream...like a container of water in which suspended impurities sink to the bottom leaving crystal clear water.”

“With the dissolution of the physical body occurring in the Nearing Death Experience, the breath becomes life itself...labored breathing goes on until the final breath...Sitting by the side of someone dying it is helpful to adapt the rhythm of your breathing to theirs...a silent communication, connection occurs that speaks eloquently of your compassion and commitment to be there for the one who is dying.”

“While alive in this physical form we are ‘being breathed,’ inspired, has long been a part of humanity’s accumulated spiritual wisdom. The Greeks call the life force 24

pneuma, the breath of the Holy Spirit. Every human death is ultimately due to oxygen deprivation. Breath is life itself...the intersection with the source of all Being.”

“The more mindful of our breathing, we become increasingly present...breath awareness of the simultaneity of emptiness and fullness, of the interpenetration of living and dying...the Nearing Death Experience reduces us to just breathing and to mindfulness... we enter into and begin to befriend the impermanence of all this is.”

**“Resistance is the refusal to accept what is. Surrender is open receptivity to what is.** As Wilber states, ‘Since every boundary line is also a battle line, here is the human predicament: the firmer one’s boundaries the more entrenched are one’s battles. The more I hold onto pleasure the more I necessarily fear pain...The harder I cling to life, the more terrifying death becomes.’ Surrender is the end of boundaries and resistance.”

“There is a qualitative difference between acceptance and surrender...acceptance is the cessation of outward struggle, but the inner cringing remains...Surrender is not so much agreeing to, but agreeing with...in surrender we cease being a victim of life...this movement from ‘you are going to die’ to ‘I am dying’ is the act of surrendering into the experience of death.”

“With surrender and the participatory stance we face and enter reality rather trying to deny it or appease it...Surrender ends the alienation from the Ground of Being when one is already turned toward it and preparing to enter it ever more deeply...Surrender is not something that is done once and for all, it actively requires doing over and over again...Surrender increases the quality of life... and quality of one’s dying.”

“Our sense of self, identity endures profound and relentless changes during the course of terminal illness and the dying process...aspects of gender, achievement and affiliation begin to fade...Who am I if I am no longer this?...Not knowing is ‘beginners mind’ is good...it is the only space in which wisdom can arise without preconceptions, openness to possibilities inherent in each moment.”

“As terminal illness carries us closer to death, many people begin a life review...seemingly universal on the meaning, the value, one has created in one’s

brief stay on the Planet Earth...people come to appreciate, to honor their own lives...developmentally what unfolds, what we move on to is life resolution...the release of history...an integrative entering of the present moment.”

“The identity project can finally be acknowledged and then released, like waving good-bye in the driveway to a beloved child who, you know, is ready to leave home...the movement is always and inevitably from the inessential to the essential, from periphery to Center, from surface to depth. We move ‘out of our own hands’ anxious, grasping hands of our own separate identity transported by grace into safety, into peace.”

### **The Psychospiritual Stages of Dying**

“Dying is 180 degrees from birthing...Any mother can tell you with what travail life comes into form...for life to leave form requires equal travail. It is hard work to die...in dying is the task of finding the courage to be in the face of a lonely death. The challenge of the dying process is living while dying, rather than dying while living.”

“Kubler-Ross’s five stages of dying are; *denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance*...a reaction of the mental ego forced to confront the death of the body in which it presumes itself to reside. The highest spiritual values of life can originate from the thought and study of death.”

“Dying at home is qualitatively different from dying in the hospital...more peaceful, filled with genuine care and love...a more authentic expression of the self who is dying. Death is increasingly seen as an event of great spiritual import...death is an event that begs for spiritual guidance.”

“The passage from tragedy to grace begins with the terminal prognosis and ends with the final dissolution of personal consciousness...we will be describing the stages of movement from tragedy to grace...each of the experiences of suffering is ultimately healing, integrative and regenerative. All that we have imagined ourselves to be is lost in dying...I will call these phases Chaos, Surrender and Transcendence.”

“The stage of Chaos is characterized by turbulence (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance)...as well as alienation, anxiety, the despair that leads to ‘letting go’ and the dread of engulfment.”

“Surrender is a deep phase which begins the moment the ego’s presumed sovereignty is surrendered. In Surrender one opens to Reality, to one’s deeper Being, recognizing the Ground as its own Essential Nature.”

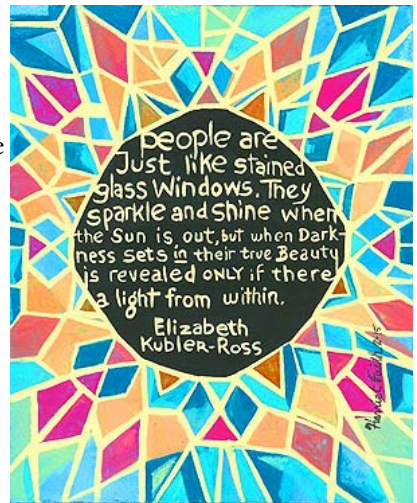
“Transcendence is that phase that goes deeply into expanded, enveloping states of spiritual integration. It corresponds to the period Washburn calls ‘regeneration of Spirit’ as well as to the expansion of consciousness Wilber refers to as ‘transpersonal awareness.’”

## Chaos

“Chaos can be characterized by the dismantling of all previous, primarily mental-ego-level identity structures. The will to live crashes, over and over, into the disease process itself, engendering turmoil, suffering and confusion. We are driven by fear...our whole life, reality is disappearing...the reality that ‘we’ are about to be over, we are terrified...the possibility that we can never be forgiven...perpetual hell.”

“Fear that no one will love them anymore...their lives have been meaningless...It is terrifying to think of abandoning the ego when we know nothing else...darkness ensues when our most fundamental desire - for continued existence - are frustrated.”

“Denial has been called the ultimate pushing away of the present, serving the same purpose as anesthesia. Denial is a powerful tendency of the mind. Denial is our first technicolor view of the ‘Grim Reaper’...the look of somewhat vacant madness when the topic being denied is approached. Denial is what we all experience in our minds when confronted with a conflict between knowledge and belief.”



“Denial can actually be a creative defense mechanism. It allows the mental ego time to create a category for its own death. When denial no longer has any blocking power, the scream of ‘NO!’ turns quickly to the shout, ‘Why Me?’ Anger arise when the will to live crashes into a terminal prognosis.”

“Anger is the highly emotional phase in the dying process...a reaction to our

perceived loss of control, which is humbling and overwhelming, far beyond what you can imagine if you have never witnessed it...anger is healing psychologically in that it is real and closer to the truth than repression.”

“Bargaining also is well-laced with fear...we want a miracle, a reprieve from death...We begin to answer the question ‘Who or what is God to me?’ Bargaining is a prayer of supplication, revealing our conviction that God is totally other...revealing our belief that if God loved us, would let us live.”

“Bargaining can be conceived as a battle between hope and despair, which comes in waves. It represents the struggle in the mind that is the beginning of acceptance. Bargaining phase of the stage of Chaos reveals to us the ‘if only’ nature of original mind. It leads at some point to depression.”

“The darkness of this depression is the disturbing experience of recognizing, perhaps for the first time, how far we are from the truth. Although painful, dark, and deadening, this period of depression also has some positive aspects to it - the beginning of the loss of all of our cherished illusions.”

“With depression we begin to face honestly the powerlessness and the aloneness of the mental ego. With acceptance, although still a far remove from surrender, the protective wall of the identity structure can begin to crumble.”

## **Acceptance**

“Acceptance is the mental ego’s balancing act, acknowledging inevitability of its own mortality...Outer struggle ceases and we call this stage acceptance. which is centered in a very deep experience of disillusionment marked by remorse, regret, recognition of helplessness and some outer stillness.”

“Acceptance is often marked by withdrawal and silence...the movement toward the threshold of silence, is the path that will lead us beyond acceptance... out of the mental ego and into the realms of the transpersonal. With acceptance the dying person begin to be occupied with things ahead.”

“Acceptance is dying while living...the terminally ill person typically will be tired and often quite weak...the hours of sleep for a dying person begin to approximate the hours of sleep of a newborn. This sleep is part of the psychoalchemy, a transformative sleep in preparation for Surrender.”



## **From Chaos to Surrender**

“Acceptance opens the way to the naked experience of our alienation from the Ground of Being...the real state of being for almost every one of us for most of our lives.”

“The mental ego ceases believing in itself...for it has become only a mask, a persona, a disguise. The self can no longer live an identity already revealed to be illusory...during this turbulence the shadow is depressed...repentance helps empty our mind and heart of guilt. Self-forgiveness leads us to peace.”

“When despair is reached it is the absolute end of the line of the mental ego. The pain of despair is unendurable, finally more than the mental ego can bear, it let's go. The surrender that arises out of despair is part of the natural progression...the ego jumps with ‘fear and trembling’ into the abyss.”

“The transpersonal realm of being is a dimension where the separate sense of self is melted, purged, cleansed away, dissolved, dissipated, forgotten. Dreams, visions, images are the sign posts of the transpersonal realms.”

“In one moment you have lost it all, and then, in the very next moment, you find you have what has always been your most fierce and secret longing. This is the phenomenology, the inner experience of Surrender...Light begins to fill the self, ‘the resurrection body’, the body of bliss.”

## **Surrender Into Transcendence**

“Dying we now behold Thee revealed.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Transcendence is what occurs as consciousness coincides with the Ground of Being. This is integration as it is organismically experienced. Dread and engulfment shade into awe and ecstasy...leading us to full and complete integration of the self with Spirit...the presence of God.”

“All traces of fear are lost and the feeling state become one of reverential joy...the peace that passes understanding...spontaneous qualities of grace. Love appears to be the last connection the dying have with the world of form...Love pours into and pours out of us and through us.”

“Transcendence brings us to the level of identity of pure Presence, far more inclusive than the Second Dualism time divisions of past, present and future...and with it the fear of death has dissolved.”

“The First Dualism, self versus not-self, is all that hold us back from Unity Consciousness. Once this dualism is understood and experience to be illusory, our sense of identity shifts to the entire universe. This is Transcendence. Self-realization follows upon surrender of the ego. Soul is interior to the mind, just as Spirit is interior to the soul. The inner experience of Transcendence is filled with grace.”

### **The Nearing Death Experience**

“With sensitive, compassionate palliative care we can focus on the soul in the body and not on the horror of someone gasping for breath. If you have or if someone you love has a terminal illness, call hospice early.”

“The dying process could be described as an awakening from the dream of form through the chaos of dissolution. The entire experience of both living and dying is more peaceful the earlier we experience Surrender.”

“The Karnofsky scale (0-100) measures the functionality of a person. At 90-100 a person is still fully functioning able to carry on activities of life normally, evidencing little or no physical signs or symptoms of illness.”

“With a Karnofsky scale of 80 the person can carry on normal activity, but more signs and symptoms of the disease are manifesting such as; decreased appetite and strength, weight loss, increased pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, itching, rashes, frequent vomiting.”

“Those with a depth of their lived faith often move with greater ease through the stages leading to Surrender and Transcendence...others with espoused belief system that was un-lived or unexamined or both often find their structure flimsy and quickly crumbles.”

“Contemplative stability also figures as a factor during the end stage of a disease process...we know it dramatically reduces 'death anxiety'...contemplative stability suggests the person has entered transpersonal realms prior to the disease process.”

“At a Karnofsky scale of 70% his/her life changes dramatically; weight loss, difficult emotions of fear, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, anxiety, alienation and dread of being engulfed.”

“Increased systemic deterioration due to terminal illness eventually brings performance level down to 60% on Karnofsky scale, a person need occasional assistance. Life is quieter, simpler. mental ego begins transformation.”

“At Karnofsky scale of 50% we require considerable assistance with even the simplest activities of daily life. Medical care is frequent and medications routinely administered to restrain symptoms. This is the end of independence.”

“From a Karnofsky scale of 50% on down, decline is usually much more rapid. Change becomes constant. Karnofsky level of 40% the person is ‘disabled’ and require constant care and assistance with every aspect of life. At this level most people pass the invisible border from knowledge they are sick to awareness they are dying.”

“This is the cross, the crucible, what many dying people describe as the cocoon state, where metamorphosis occurs. Psychological Chaos begins to shift into psychospiritual Surrender and Transcendence.”

“Often at this point it is the one who is dying who begins to comfort the ones who will miss him/her. It appears that for many people some inner source of strength is being tapped.”

“At a Karnofsky scale of 30% we begin to approach the process of active dying, as it is described medically. Often dying people feel like an ice cube melting into a glass of water, or an autumn leaf shaking in the wind.”

“Love is the last connection we have to the world of form and the natural condition of our being revealed when all else is relinquished...All that matters is in the palm of my hand, my family, my love for them and theirs for me.”

### **Signs and Symptoms of Active Dying**

“At a Karnofsky scale of 20% or less one has entered a phase called ‘active dying’- which proceed over a period of time from typically a few days to a few hours. Level of 10% is characterized as ‘moribound.’ Fatal processes are progressing rapidly. Karnofsky level of 0% the person is dead, with no measurable indices of life.”

“This stage requires commonsense acts of human mercy and compassion; wiping the brow, wetting the lips, turning the body and keeping it clean, speaking softly and truthfully and comfortingly... current medical thinking suggests that artificial nutrition and hydration actually make the process of dying more uncomfortable.”

“Music that employs alpha and theta brainwave entrainment or antiphonal music of the Christian monastic tradition of death preparation may be calming and appears to foster the entrance of consciousness into deeper dimensions.”

“Often seeming agitation can be calmed by the soft, reassuring voice of a beloved or by place a hand under the hand of the dying person to allow the solace of comfort without constraint.”

**Entering the Mystery** - “My work with the dying has been a privilege. I have been transformed, becoming more alert to God, to mystery. This book, with its view of the dying process is a passage filled with grace, is an artifact of our times. It arises as we a maturing culture begin to embrace death as a part of life and more frequently allow our loved ones to die in our midst.”

“The imagery we as a culture conceive of death and dying has shifted subtly in the last few decades, moving from enclosing darkness to images of expansive radiance. Thank God we have come this far.”

“We will discover for ourselves that the tragedy is not in dying, but in living disconnected from Life. We will experience grace the moment we experience our connection with Spirit. Grace is the common thread linking dying, contemplative practice and spiritual growth.”

“May we undertake the contemplative practices that will nurture our deep and more inclusive consciousness in the midst of our lives rather than at its edge, and allow ourselves to be offerings of love and hope for those who live contracted in suffering.”

“The Cloud of Unknowing reminds us that the only way back to union with God is ‘forgetting, forgetting, forgetting.’ This is the emptying of self. The qualities of grace, of Being, arise in moments of self-forgetfulness.”

**At the Edge of Life** - “Water is water, no matter what its shape or form. The solidarity of ice imagines itself to be its edges and density. Melting, it remembers; Evaporating, it ascends.” -Stephen Levine

“Enlightenment for a wave is the moment the wave realizes that it is water. At that moment, all fear of death disappears.” -Thich Hhat Hanh

“Let us be the ear that listens without judgment and with deep compassion to all that the voice of our loved one has to say in the phase of Chaos. Let us be the still and quiet point of acceptance where the personal life is reviewed and resolved, honored and released. Let us be the silent and understanding companion to the voiceless time of Surrender. Sit and breath with your loved one, matching your rhythm. Sit and meditate with your loved one matching your visions.

Let us share, far beyond the last breath and even through a breaking heart, in our loved one's Transcendence; the entrance, at the edge of life, into the peaceful resplendent Center” -AMEN!

## **Making Space For Grace**

(A ballad/song based on *The Grace in Dying*)

May we all find the inner joy of surrender,  
Making space for Grace in both life and death.  
Death is a mirror, reflecting all of life,  
From perceived tragedy, to experienced grace.  
We're all ordinary people, facing ordinary death,  
Selflessly born into this world, we shall selflessly die.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe,  
Giving is healing, crying myself awake.  
Our journey into ego, notions of time and space,  
Our journey out of ego, helps make space for Grace.  
The key to happiness in life; compassion and attention,  
The key to embracing death; acceptance and surrender.

Life's task; transforming our suffering into joy,  
Death's task; transcending body, mind and spirit.  
Knowing ourselves to be planted in Divine Love,  
We seamlessly merge from earthly to heavenly love.  
Like an ice cube, melting back into water,  
Warmed by God's love, we ascend as heavenly steam.

May we all find the inner joy of surrender,  
making space for Grace in both life and death.  
Within every tragedy is the seeds of Grace,  
A seed must fall to the ground to produce fruit.  
Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted,  
Grace and peace follow suffering and pain.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe,  
Giving is healing, crying myself awake.  
We give thanks for every breath we take,  
Inspired lives, until a last breath we take.  
Like stained-glass windows, we sparkle in the sun,  
But true beauty is revealed from the light within.

All traces of fear of death are now lost,  
As space for Grace and joy is now found.  
Love's last connection with this world,  
33 Love's our natural condition leaving this world.