



Inside the Rock

I first met Peter in Maui when teaching at the first Ram Dass Legacy Retreat in 2021. Almost immediately we became brothers, great friends. I invited him to be a member of the Living/Dying Project Board of Directors. He asked me to visit him twice at his home in Colorado during the last 6 weeks of his life.

Long ago Stephen Levine told me how different my experience would be when I *fell in love* with a "client."



I fell in love with Peter and yes it was different.

In the last week of his life Peter was sad that he was about to leave a life, a family that he loved so much, but he was also joyful, often calm, fearless and deeply loving. He opened so much during his last month.

About ten days before Peter died I interviewed him. Below are some of the things he said.

— RamDev Dale Borglum

The last couple of months I've invited a lot of friends and family here to my house. Through that process I see that my perception of who I am was off quite a bit. People love me more than I expected. It's astounding how much love there is for me. I've always tried to love people whether it's been visible or not. So now it's much easier to love myself. I didn't realize it at the time, but I set out to do that many years ago and apparently I finally got there after 30 years or so. The Living/Dying Project has been the final jumping off point for understanding that I did a good job.

The phrase dying into love for me means complete surrender. Complete surrender into my heart and accepting all the love that there is, which is a hundred percent. And it's such a relief to be able to do that.

You want to live life to the fullest. The key is to just show up, to be there as difficult as it may seem. You've just got to show up, get it done, whatever it is, and to live one hundred percent. I really think that meditating like Christ, losing yourself in love, is a key principle. It's becoming more and more evident to me that's really important.

Sculptors always say that they have to find what's inside the rock. They take off a little bit, a little bit. Recently more and more I have a flash that it's time for me to chip off a little piece. I just relax with my eyes and allow the hammer and the chisel. A little bit more comes off and I get a little closer. Like Michelangelo saying that he was revealing the statue that was in the rock in the first place.



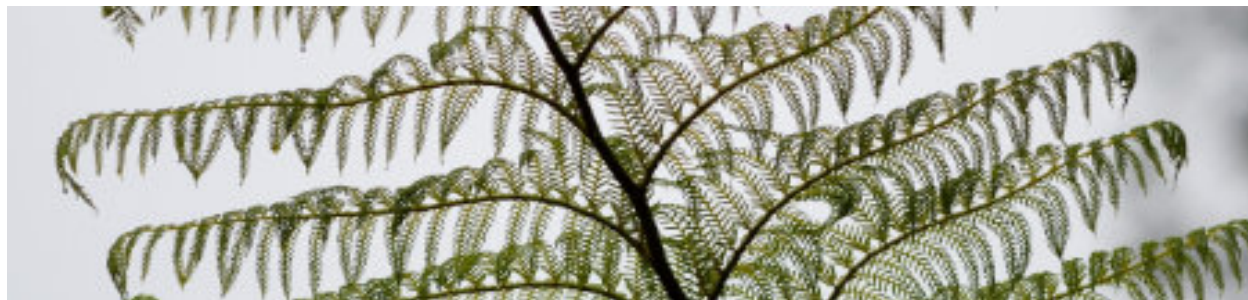
Peter Kelsey 1956 - 2023

Grief and gratitude are kindred souls, each pointing to the beauty of what is transient and given to us by grace.

Patricia Campbell Carlson

*Just to be is a blessing.
Just to live is holy.*

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



*Know the nature of
your Beloved.
In His loving eyes
your every thought,
word
and movement
is always, always
beautiful.*

Hafiz

*When your real,
effortless,
joyful
grateful
nature is realized,
it will not be inconsistent with
the ordinary activities of life.*

Ramana Maharshi

Being Connected

Peter died last month and my friend Mark died last week. My compadre Rico's Parkinson's disease has progressed to the point that he has taken a couple of serious falls. There are 2 wars going on now. In both of them civilians are being targeted. So many young people dying. Election season is beginning. A friend called, overwhelmed, asking for help.

What can I do? What can you do?

Tenderness that is not usual for me often fills my heart these days. True compassion is a mixture of sadness and joy—sadness that there is so much suffering in the world and a joy that transcends both sadness and happiness because our heart is open, open to it all, boundless. There are so many seemingly good reasons for the mind to be caught in anger, in fear, in the conviction that I am right and the other is not. True compassion is not of the mind, It is not even an emotion. It is a state of being that is the natural expression of our true nature.

Compassion can be fierce. Compassion includes

opening our hearts to our own suffering as well as that of others. It is omnidirectional and includes all. It may sound strange but the nature of a compassionate heart is empty, empty of concept and grasping, so empty it is full.

You might want to be an activist or to protest. Please do it with an heart that is so empty that it is full. You will be more effective. You will be able to stay sane. We need more sane people now.

The compassionate heart is also connected, healing the separation of grief. Anger and fear separate us from ourselves, from each other, from God, from the earth. The poet Rumi says grief can be the garden of compassion, the grief of separation transmuted into the connectedness of compassion. Can we feel the pain of separation that is inherent in anger and fear, then have compassion for that tender place within and be able to genuinely connect. Can you find and cherish the most important thing for you, now?

— RamDev Dale Borglum

*All spirituality is about
what we do with our pain.*

Father Richard Rohr



*You take it all in. You let the
pain of the world touch your heart
and you turn it into compassion.*

16th Gyalawa Karmapa

*You live in illusion and the
appearance of things.
There is a reality.
You are that reality.
When you recognize this,
you realize that you are
nothing,
and being nothing,
you are everything.
That is all.*

Kalu Rinpoche

*Love and prayer
are learned in the
hour when prayer
becomes
impossible and
the heart turns to
stone.*

Thomas Merton

Being Present With Everything



“Ultimately my goal is to be present with everything that is thrown at us. And there are times when I’m with my family, when I’m so elated, so joyful, and so happy and then I get struck with sadness that I will not be here. And it’s not a fear of dying or death, it’s a fear of absence, it’s a fear of not being here for my family. The Living/Dying Project has allowed me to talk through that. It’s truly spiritual hospice... I have been able to talk through some of the hardest spiritual truths there are.”



was paired with our wonderful volunteer, Michael Podlin.

“Having the chance to speak with Michael pretty regularly has given me the opportunity to talk about the mystery of it all as well as the hard parts, and he always has the right questions and meditations to help me keep spiritual awareness at the heart of things.”

Together they’ve been exploring subjects that matter to Alex. Topics like non-duality, how to be with discomfort, and how does one experience both incredible sorrow and joy at the

Alex coached college basketball before becoming a counselor and later the Mindfulness Coach for the Virginia Commonwealth University Men’s basketball team. In 2017 he was told he had cancer and the doctors didn’t think he would survive. He spent months receiving chemotherapy.

As a husband and father to two kids, Alex has talked about feeling in limbo. He looks healthy on the outside, but the inside tells another story.

He’s been given days, weeks and months to live over his five year encounter with two stage-four cancers and essentially lives his life 3 months at a time, from scan to scan.

“I have lived beyond the science. Amazing doctors have treated me but they don’t always know what to do anymore,” Alex says. “It is not their fault. Very few people have ever been in my situation — getting prostate cancer at such an early age with a secondary cancer on top of it. I am so fortunate to be alive—almost no one has made it this far.”

Meditation has always been a part of his life, and after digesting Ram Dass talks and books and listening to a podcast between Raghu Markus and Dale, he contacted the Living/Dying Project and

time same. He is a Christian and sees faith as individual as languages are, believing there are many doors to the same room. He practices Tonglen and considers Thich Nhat Hanh to be a special teacher. We wish him well on his journey.

— Aurora Leonard
Associate Director

*You don’t get to choose
how you’re going to die.
Or when. You can decide
how you’re going to live.
Now.*

Joan Baez

Into the Mystery



I met Susan through the Living/Dying Project, when I was assigned as her volunteer. I had no idea when I met her that she would become a dear friend on the spiritual path. During the last 17 months of her life, we explored the mystery and magic of life, finding answers and peace in the wild unknown.

As travel mates and soul sisters we moved beyond fear and found ease with how things are. We learned to keep our hearts open to the unimaginable. We studied the **Tibetan Book of the Dead** with Pema Chodron, the **Bhagavad Gita** with Ram Dass as well as the timeless wisdom of Alan Watts. We devoured content and expanded our understanding of life and death. We became unafraid, perhaps even welcoming of the great becoming of our souls.

Susan found forgiveness for everything and everybody, including herself. She learned how to bring deep compassion to her own experience. She poured her growth into her art, creating magnificent works that are filled with love and deep insight. Her final piece she titled *“Completion.”*

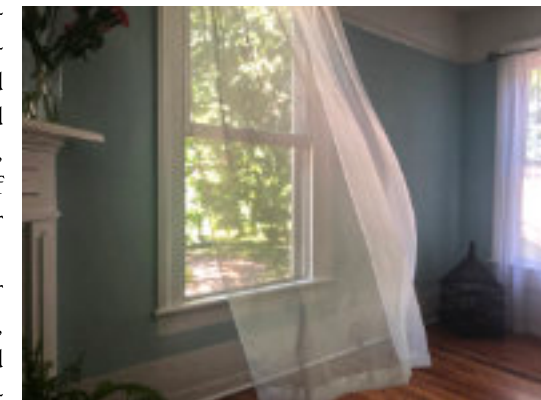
She was ready. She did the work. She healed. And while this does not cure us of physical illness, it does purify our soul for what’s to come. She dropped the sad story of cancer and opened to the deeper knowing that everything is here serving our soul’s endless expansion into love. That ‘even this’ was to be embraced as the guru. She knew she was guided and loved at the end; ready and willing and a little bit excited to experience her next becoming. She left her body with grace and wholeness.

Susan told me she would find a way to share with me from the mystery. We often talked of signs and synchronicities and how we would receive a visit or a knowing from beyond. I told her I would watch

and wait. True to form she delivered. I received the most amazing gift.

During our last visit, at the end of March, we sat together for a long time. I had brought a citrine crystal with me that I placed in her hand. The citrine is a symbol of positivity and personal power. Susan held it, admiring its beauty and energy. It was a lovely shared experience. Our last one.

A month after her passing, a series of seemingly unrelated events led my daughter and I on an afternoon walk. It was there that I found a



huge, beautiful citrine crystal sitting on a chair next to a sign that said *“free.”* I knew Susan had found her way. I knew she had found her power. I knew she was free and that she was still with me, just as she is still with all of us.

Susan was a true spiritual warrior. Facing her fears, opening her heart and letting go with trust and faith into the mystery of the unknown. I feel so deeply honored to have experienced her love, wisdom and friendship. I am changed for the better for having loved her and will hold her in my heart forever.

— Kristin Singer
Living/Dying Project Volunteer

*Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.*

Mary Oliver

Project News

- We offer free-of-charge, volunteer-based spiritual support services for persons with life-threatening illnesses, for their caregivers and for those grieving the loss of a loved one. Our services are offered virtually as well as in person and are available to all, regardless of location. If you or anyone you know could benefit from this support, please call our office at **415-456-3915**.
- There is now a [Calendar](#) of all Living/Dying Project events on our homepage which includes not only workshops, courses and talks we produce, but, also, workshops Dale will be teaching at places like **Hollyhock Centre, One Commune, and Neem Karoli Baba Ashram** in Taos, New Mexico.
- Our Board of Directors has grown to 12 members plus 6 consultants. The new Board members bring great experience and enthusiasm which is generating much more energy than the old "Dale and friends" model. You can meet our Board and staff using the [About - Our Team](#) link on our website.
- Aurora Leonard our Associate Director is doing wonderful work with our social media presence. She is also helping to create Guest Speaker events, new online courses, improving the volunteer onboarding experience, driving fundraising campaigns, writing our monthly newsletters, putting together Featured Client stories as well as facilitating our Grief Support Group. Aurora and the Board have taken the Project to the next level in a remarkably short amount of time. You will find links to our social media accounts at the bottom of each page of the website. We can be found on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).
- We are generating new clients and new volunteers more than ever before. We now have 173 volunteers around the world supporting clients via Zoom and in-person.
- In addition to our one-to-one support for clients we now offer support groups led by committed Board members that meet regularly on Zoom. Check our [Calendar](#) for upcoming dates.
 - Grief/Bereavement group
 - Critical illness group
 - Caregiver Support group
- We have a large, very sweet spiritual support group that meets via Zoom every-other Saturday between 9 and 11 AM Pacific Time. Email the Project if you would like to be added to the roster.
- Dale's podcast channel on the [Be Here Now Network](#) under his spiritual name *RamDev*, has lots of dharma talks and some great guests.
- Dale's book **Life in a Body; How to Live Your Life So You Can Die Without Fear** has finally gone to the publisher and will hopefully be available in 2024.
- Affordable dharma teachings by guest teachers are regularly offered. Check out our monthly Speaker Series under the [Events](#) tab in the menu bar on our website.
- Dale will facilitate weekend workshops/volunteer training programs via Zoom and in person January, February and March of 2024. California CEUs are available for LCSW, LMFT, LPCC, RN, LAc & Psychologist. Please see the following page for details or go to the [Calendar](#) on our website.



*Be joyful, though you
have considered all the
facts.*

Wendell Berry



HEALING AT THE EDGE CONSCIOUS LIVING / CONSCIOUS DYING

A TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS, NURSES, ACUPUNCTURISTS AND ANYONE WANTING TO DEEPLY EXPLORE HEALING

Sponsored by the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy**, this workshop is offered by the **Living/Dying Project**. Participants from California seeking continuing education as Psychologist, LCSW, LMFT, or LPCC will receive C.E.U.s from the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy**. 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/2024workshop.

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 40 years of being a guide to the dying, a clear and practical paradigm for the healing path has become apparent to me. Healing occurs through direct contact with the Sacred, through realization of our true nature. There are no shortcuts, but certainly neither taking unnecessary detours nor spending time spinning our wheels can inspire us along what is often a difficult journey to a life consciously lived.

During this workshop we will explore together a clear, concise and usable model of the healing process that can specifically diagnose and identify the next step that is transformational for each of us, even during crisis. Short, intensive guided meditations and other practices will be presented to create a healing experience that will lead to a life consciously and compassionately lived and eventually to a conscious death. We're all caregivers and all seekers of healing. These deeply uncertain times are an incredible opportunity.

San Francisco one-day workshop will be held **January 27, 2024**
San Anselmo two-day workshop will be held **February 10 and 11, 2024**
Santa Rosa one-day workshop will be held **February 24, 2024**
Online workshops: March 23 and 24, 2024

For information about locations and registration please visit the Living/Dying Project website.



Workshops will be conducted by Dale Borglum, Ph.D., who, with Stephen Levine and Ram Dass, established the Hanuman Foundation Dying Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the first center supporting conscious dying in the U.S. Dale directed the center until moving to the San Francisco Bay Area. He is founder and Executive Director of the Living/Dying Project and co-author of **Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook** (Bantam Books).

Imagine facing death without fear. Imagine using a life-threatening illness as an opportunity for spiritual awakening. Imagine approaching the unknown with an open heart. We often resist change as a natural part of life. Strength and healing can be found in life's most difficult situations.



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Mission Statement

The Living/Dying Project offers conscious and compassionate support in the spirit of mutual exploration to those facing life-threatening illness and their caregivers. We also offer education and training in the practices of spiritual healing to those confronting life's most difficult situations and to anyone committed to spiritual transformation.

Supporting Us

Because of you, the Living/Dying Project has been expanding. In this past year, we've had 197 new donors, over 90 new volunteers, over 30 new clients, and 3 new contracted staff members. We believe it's because our mission deeply resonates with those who discover us.

This year has been one of inspiration and new directions in our training and educational services and we look forward to showing you where this work is heading. Our mission is twofold: to heal what obstructs us from embracing full aliveness and to heal our collective and individual relationships with death.

Because we do not charge our clients for our services, your support is crucial in enabling us to continue the vital work of the Project. We humbly request your assistance, both in financial contributions and through your blessings and prayers. Your support keeps the heart of the Project beating and thriving.

- Visit www.LivingDying.org and click "[Donate Now](#)" at the top of the page.
- Sign up for one of our online courses. Learn a framework for how we heal.
- Make a bequest to the Living/Dying Project. Bequests are a form of planned giving and can be any amount gifted through a will, trust, life insurance policy, or IRA. Please call our office if you would like to make a bequest and need more information. Not only can a bequest provide tax benefits for donors, it is a great way to support the Project's mission to serve others.
- If you received our printed newsletter, you can contribute by using the enclosed donation envelope.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to all who have supported us in any way. May this holiday season and the coming year bring wisdom and blessings to you and your loved ones. Your actions have the power to contribute to peace and healing.

With Deep Love and Gratitude,
Aurora Leonard
Associate Director

*What I really like to do is to get into action...
When I am meditating on compassion, I don't
want to keep it inside my own mind. I want to
be able to show this power to others.*

17th Karmapa



Credits

Layout and design of this newsletter was done by Curtis Grindahl, a long-time volunteer with the Project. The photo of Dale and Peter on page one was taken by Peter's wife Elena. The picture of Peter on page two was taken by Dale. **Delicate Fronds** on page two was taken by Curtis. Dale took the photo on page three titled **Summer Afternoon in Georgia**.

Living/Dying Project 2023