

8 GRIEF

When I was seven my best friend died. I was born with a systolic heart murmur, a leaky valve, which caused me to tire easily and did not allow me to participate in sports or the heavy play that joined most of my peers. Eric had leukemia. When we met we instantly tuned into each other. Our play together had a joy I had never known, a camaraderie and equality I had not experienced. He was my first real friend. I can remember sitting on the floor of his bedroom surrounded by toy soldiers and Lincoln Log fortresses, happier than I had ever been. The room was filled with light. My heart was wide open; we loved each other. We could hardly wait to get together after school. Then one day he wasn't in class. After school I ran the two blocks to his home only to be met at the door by his weary mother, who told me Eric was too ill to play. He died two weeks later. I was torn apart, bewildered, disbelieving, angry. It couldn't be so! I had at last a close friend but where had he gone? Who could I turn to? No one understood.

My grief and confusion were an embarrassment to my teachers and parents. I couldn't believe he was gone. In disbelief, going once again to Eric's house, slouched on the lawn waiting for Eric to come out and play, his mother peeked from behind closed cur-

tains and then disappeared. I went up on the porch and she met me at the door. Dismayed by my great sadness she told me that I shouldn't be so sad—"Eric didn't die, he just moved away"—and I should go home. For weeks I was lonelier than I had ever been. I felt I couldn't trust anyone or anything, not even life.

As the years passed the valve in my heart healed and I found other friends and loves. I even apparently forgot Eric. Until almost thirty years later, assisting for the first time in a "Death and Dying Workshop," listening to the closing comments of parents who had gone through considerable grief work, thinking to myself how lucky I was to have never lost a loved one, when Eric's room, aglow with our friendship, flashed into my mind. I was seven years old again. I had lost the source of my greatest joy.

As a child I could often feel the pain of others in my heart. It made me angry to be alive in such an anguished world. I couldn't stay open to the suffering I saw around me, or to the pain within. It took years to allow my heart its vulnerability. The grief had torn me open but I hadn't known what to do with the pain.

Now, as I think back to that time, tears still come and I feel Eric still in my seven-year-old heart. And though I somehow still miss him, I sense that his death was a kind of initiation for me. What I felt seems never to have quite left. Each dying friend I am with reminds me to let my heart be torn open, that love never dies. We are here to discover the truth and to use it in the service of love. No one I have ever met has given more meaning to my life than Eric.



I've been with many people whose grief has been beyond bearing. And in some ways it has been the best thing that ever happened to them. For they come to plumb the depths of their being. When we experience grief, we are not just experiencing the loss of our son or daughter, our husband or wife, our parent or loved one. We are dropped into the very pit of despair and longing. We are touching the reservoir of loss itself. We experience the long-held fear and doubt and grief that has always been there. It is not an experience that most would choose, though the confrontation with this area of deep holding seems to be an initiation often en-

countered along the fierce journey toward freedom, spoken of in the biographies of many saints and sages.

We push away the unpleasant, and there are probably few experiences that are more unpleasant than grief. But there you are in grief and your whole awareness is dropped into the reservoir of loss, where all the holdings, longings, and fears are painfully present. Some people speak of grief as though they were walking beneath a great ocean. Some experience it as an incredible opportunity to get in touch with places they would probably never have access to otherwise. I see people start to bring some acceptance and light and softness into a mind that is on fire, some openness to the grief and loss that they have held for so long.

Some years ago a woman told me of her daughter's death while the family was vacationing on the Oregon coast. Her six-year-old daughter and ten-year-old son had been floating on a log just offshore, bobbing in the water, yelling and playing as the waves rolled over them and they tried to hold on. A wave would come and they would ride the log, squealing and laughing. A lot of joyful chaos. A wave came along and rolled the log over, but as the children scrambled to hold on, an unusually large second wave hit, and the six-year-old girl was dragged out to sea before anyone could get to her. They couldn't find her body anywhere.

A few days later, the coroner called her down to the morgue to identify the body of a child that had that morning been retrieved from the ocean. As the woman came into the coroner's office, he said he wanted her to know that what she was about to see was the partially eaten remains of a child. A shark had gotten to the body after it had drowned. As they pulled back the sheet, she went through the most profound pain she had ever experienced. She also went through the most profound experience of love. Looking at the partially eaten remains of her daughter, there was simply no way she could hold the experience. She was blown out of her mind. She went beyond herself. And she touched something that was essential in her being. That moment confronted her with all the places she was separate from other beings. And, most painfully, from herself. There was no place to hide. There was nothing she could do that would make it go away. She just had to be there, in the presence of the moment. Indeed, I don't think she

could have met an enlightened being that would have transmitted more to her than that moment did.

The potency of that grief was so intense she had to let go, to surrender. All the places she hid were illuminated in a blinding flash. A year later, she told me it was the most profound experience of her life and that, "It opened me. It turned my life around. My priority became to touch and understand and open to the hearts of others."

If we can say that grace is a sense of connectedness, that it is the experience of our underlying nature, then we may see how what is often called tragedy holds the seeds of grace. We see that what brings us to grace is not always pleasant, though it seems always to take us to something essential in ourselves.

There is a story of the great Tibetan teacher Marpa, who lived on a farm with his family a thousand years ago in Tibet. On the farm, there also lived many monks who came to study with this great teacher. One day Marpa's oldest son was killed. Marpa was grieving deeply when one of the monks came to him and said, "I don't understand. You teach us that all is an illusion. Yet you are crying. If all is an illusion, then why do you grieve so deeply?" Marpa replied, "Indeed, everything is an illusion. And the death of a child is the greatest of these illusions."

He honored the moment, allowing himself the heart's capacity to hold the paradox that though things may not be as they appear; nonetheless, the pain of separation from a dearly loved one is among the greatest of a lifetime. He acknowledged the natural transcendence beyond the body, awareness continuing its journey, but also honored the deep feelings of loss on the level at which they occur, excluding nothing, opening to the dynamism of the universe offered at this time of intense loss and potential oneness.

This is perhaps the most difficult of the balancing acts we come to learn: to trust the pain as well as the light, to allow the grief to penetrate as it will while keeping open to the perfection of the universe.

When we speak of loving someone, what we mean is that that person acts as a mirror for the place within us which is love. That being becomes our contact with ourself. When that mirror is shattered, the grief that we feel is the loss of contact with that place

within us which is love. Thinking of that person as other than ourself, we mourn our loss, we reexperience our sense of separateness and isolation that originally motivated us to look outside of ourselves for that essential unity we call love.

Examining the loss of our reflected love we come back in contact with ourselves, with love itself, in the formless connection that was always present between us. In touching love, we touch the other. In touching what was shared, the grief burns its way to the center of the heart.

As we have said, "love" usually means the emotion, the state of mind that looks outside of itself to find itself. The emotional love of that businesslike way of relating that keeps totaling the accounts, that continues to make sure that another is not getting the best of us. It is a very tentative way of relating. It is the self-interest out of which a friend of twenty years can be "written off" because he no longer reinforces our image of ourselves. We notice we love no one who does not pay tribute to our idea of who we are. But it is our essential love that we experience when the grieving mind sinks into the ever-present heart. Grief of the loss of the mirror. Grief for the lost reflection of the place within where all love originates.

Recently we spent some time with a couple whose eleven-year-old daughter had been abducted and murdered. It was every parent's worse nightmare. There was no way they could control the universe. There was no way they could make it go away. Their pain was so extraordinary that they simply could not hold onto it any more, and their hearts were torn open.

Soon after the death, they wrote a letter to Ram Dass:

"We go on, though we have no stomach for it. We try our best to be there for our two remaining children and that is also sometimes hard. We constantly search our own hearts and those of many friends and relatives who have opened to us, for deeper understanding and new meaning.

"I see Rachel as a soul who was actively engaged in her work while on earth. Her last three years in particular showed me the flowering of a shining being—caring, loving, and reaching out to the members of her family and many friends and relatives, young and old. She was always giving little 'love' somethings to every-

one. To make you smile, to help you feel good, to show she cared. She had learned somehow to bear her defeats and frustrations and not be intimidated or slowed by them. The petals were opening and reaching for the sun. She was not a clone of her parents. She was who she was. She was the best of us and the strongest of us. The wake of Rachel's death leaves the many beings who knew her and a surprising number who didn't torn open to this 'teaching.'"

When Ram Dass received this letter, he responded:

"Rachel finished her work on earth and left the stage in a manner that leaves those of us left behind with a cry of agony in our hearts as the fragile thread of our faith is dealt with so violently. Is anyone strong enough to stay conscious through such teaching as you are receiving? Probably very few, and even they would have only a whisper of equanimity and spacious peace amidst the screaming trumpets of their rage, grief, horror, and desolation.

"I can't assuage your pain with any words, nor should I. For your pain is Rachel's legacy to you. Not that she or I would inflict such pain by choice, but there it is. And it must burn its purifying way to completion . . . For something in you dies when you bear the unbearable. And it is only in that dark night of the soul that you are prepared to see as God sees and to love as God loves.

"Now is the time to let your grief find expression—no false strength. Now is the time to sit quietly and speak to Rachel and thank her for being with you these few years and encourage her to go on with her work, knowing that you will grow in compassion and wisdom from this experience.

"In my heart I know that you and she will meet again and again and recognize the many ways in which you have known each other. And when you meet, you will, in a flash, know what now it is not given you to know. Why this had to be the way it was.

"Our rational minds can never 'understand' what has happened. But your hearts, if you can keep them open to God, will find their own intuitive way.

"Rachel came through you to do her work on earth [which includes her manner of death]. Now her soul is free and the love

that you can share with her is invulnerable to the winds of changing time and space."

As our friends opened to their grief, they opened to their love. They experienced Rachel at a level which they seldom touched before. Less and less, as they opened, were they so caught in the forms which always separate parent from child, loved one from loved one. Instead, the grief which spins and burns the mind begins quietly and gently to sink into the heart.

In grief it is often seen that at first the pain of separation is in the mind—thoughts of the departed, fantasies, conversations, and memories. The relationship, still in form, conflagrates the mind. The relationship is experienced as mother for child, as husband for wife, as body for body. But eventually the grief opens into the heart, and the individual is not so much experienced as a separate body but is the essential connection that joined them in the first place. Then just the love remains. The abyss of "I" and "other" that once separated them melts away and they become one, beyond the form, beyond the ideas and models of who each might have been. The forms are seen through and just the love is felt. Then grief, the tearing open of the heart, leaves the heart vulnerable and exposed. And the deep lesson of compassion, for which we were born, becomes evident.

During a workshop a few years ago, a professor of parapsychology at a southwestern university mentioned that he had done fifteen hundred hypnotic life-regressions. One of the other participants said he would be willing to be regressed to feel what that process might be like. The fellow to be regressed was a big, burly white-water rafter from Oregon, about six-foot-five, two hundred and forty pounds, with a huge red beard. A very gentle sort. As he timidly lay down on the large couch, many of the people from the workshop gathered round.

The regressionist seemed quite skillful and quickly hypnotized his subject, taking him back through earlier childhood memories. His sixth birthday party. His first day at school. Infancy. And then past this lifetime into what appeared to be a previous life. Taking the fellow to twelve years old in this earlier life, he asked how things were going, at which the white-water rafter became

very scared and said, "I'm lost. We're all lost. What should we do? I'm frightened!"

The regressionist reassured the fellow that everything was going to be O.K.; to relax, to let go. Going backward, taking him out of this painful moment, and into yet an earlier life in which it appeared that at twelve he was very happily living with his father in what was the northern forests of Germany. His father was a woodcutter and he was his helper and great admirer. Telling about how his life is at thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen in the great forests, stacking wood and occasionally going to town with his father to trade for essentials. The regressionist, after a bit, asked him to continue in his native tongue. A linguist from a Texas university attending the workshop told us he was speaking an antiquated German-Dutch dialect. She was able to translate much of what he was saying. He was very happy, living and working with his father, learning the skills of a woodcutter. At eighteen, with great alarm, he told of an accident, of a tree falling on his father and his father being killed. He began to sob. His grief shook the couch on which he was lying. His face was red, his eyes swollen, tears flowed down his cheeks and soaked his beard. His body was shaken by convulsions of grief. "Oh, Pappa is dead; my pappa, my pappa!" This eighteen-year-old boy was clearly experiencing a great loss. The regressionist continued to move forward through that lifetime. At twenty he had taken over his father's business. Still, at any reference to his father, considerable grief was displayed. Twenty-two, twenty-three. He had settled into the life he had shared with his father. A woodcutter who occasionally went to town to sell his wares and trade for those goods he needed. At twenty-seven, the fellow met a woman in a nearby village where he was delivering wood. He was talking about his new friend with much interest, and began courting her over the next years. He was obviously very shy. After the fellow told about rather formal meetings with her over the next three years, the regressionist asked, "Have you kissed her yet?" And he blushed and said, "Oh no! No!"

At thirty-two years old, they got married. A few years of happy married life ensued and then his wife died. The grief that came

forth was immense. Again, shaking the couch, his beard dripping with tears. The regressionist gently brought him back. The fellow sat up, his eyes puffy, and looked about with absolutely no recollection of what he had just shared, at the commiseration of his fellow workshoppers surrounding him in a hushed circle of condolence. All of us were struck by the immense unnamed grief that this fellow was carrying with him.

Everyone in the room was moved by the potency of the unrecognized grief he carried from lifetime to lifetime, each of us acknowledging the grief that we all seem to carry. The grief we are born with, that unnamed heaviness in the heart that sometimes makes us wonder, even as children, "What are we here for? Why does it hurt sometimes just to be alive?" How many people, imagining the pain in their hearts to be the result of traumas originating in this lifetime, seek out psychiatric help to try to uncover what are essentially unrecoverable events? How many are left with an unnamed sadness for existence itself?

How much of what we call grief is the experience of previous loss? And how do we allow such grief not to be a motivator for our life? How do we get in touch with that deep pain, that place of loss that creates a fear of life itself, our doubt in ourselves about our ability to deeply experience the world because we so fear loss and change?

Guided Meditation on Grief

[To be read slowly to a friend or silently to oneself.]

Standing comfortably or in a relaxed sitting position, explore with your thumbs that very sensitive spot between the breasts on the sternum where the pressure seems most noticeable.

Let your attention come to the heart center, the center of the chest. Just feel it there, right at the sternum, just under that bone. You might feel some heaviness there. Something dense that seems to be blocking the spaciousness beneath.

For some there's a very noticeable ache there. A pain born of the losses and fears of a lifetime.

Don't think it, feel it. Is there a sadness at life?

Don't create it, just open to what's felt. A nameless ache that may have been there for as long as you can remember.

If you're a parent, it's the place that knows that someday either you will witness your child's death or they will witness yours. Inevitable loss.

It's the ache for the thousands of beings starving to death at this very moment. Of the mothers who hold their starving babies to a withered breast.

Reflect on the holdings of the heart. The encrustations and armoring that seem to guard the feelings lodged there.

Begin to press into that sensitive spot, feeling the discomfort, the pain there. Regulate the intensity of the sensation by the pressure of the thumbs pushed gently but firmly into that touch point.

Feel how the heart's pain pushes back against the thumbs that gently probe the inward suffering.

Feel the pain in the heart. Breathe into it.

Let the thumbs push into that sensitive area. But beware of any tendency to use that pain as punishment.

Let the thumbs push into the armoring that guards the feelings of loss and grief there. Focus the attention like a single point of light in the center of the pain.

Go deeper.

Don't try to protect the heart.

Maintaining a steady pressure at the center of the chest, feel the suffering held there. All the loss held, all the fears, the insecurity, the self-doubt.

Surrender into the feelings. Let it all come through.

Allow the pain to enter into your heart. Allow it to meet whatever pushes back. Allow the heart to be completely vulnerable.

Let the achingness open. Don't be afraid of it. Don't push it away. Open into the deepest grief locked there.

The isolation. The complete lack of control over death, or life. The fear of the unknown. The ache of the loss of love.

There is so much grief in all of us. Open to it. Don't judge it. Just experience it as it is.

The inevitable loss of everyone you love. The impotent anger of being tossed into a universe of such incredible suffering.

The death of your mate, your parents, your children.

Just let yourself experience that. Nothing to add to it, nothing to push away. Just see what's there, what we carry with us all the time.

Keep the pressure of the thumbs steady.

Bring it into a soft awareness that melts the holding. Let yourself be fully born even in the midst of the pain of it all.

Let go into the pain. Breathe into it. Allow the long held grief to melt.

Let your heart open into this moment.

Allow awareness to penetrate into the very center of your being. Use the pain as though it were a tunnel and move down that tunnel into the center of your heart, into a universe of warmth and caring.

Feel the heart expanding into space. The pain just floating there. Fear and loss suspended in compassionate space. Breathe into the center of the heart pain. Let go of it. Let the heart open past its longing and grief.

Now take your hands away and fold them in your lap. Feel the sensitivity remaining at the center of your chest as though it were a vent into your heart, draw each breath into that warmth and love.

Breathe in and out of the heart.

Breathe gently into your heart.



In this meditation the touch point is revealed which can be used to open the heart. Breathing in and out of the heart center as though it had a vent directly into it is a very useful practice for coming in touch with the compassion within. Breathing in with each breath, the extraordinary perfection of things; breathing out with each breath, those things that block the heart from experiencing its perfection. Staying with the sensations in the heart center, feeling the heart melt.

Some people work with deep meditation practices to penetrate into the mind and experience aspects of themselves quite beyond who they thought they were, beyond their limited personality. their name, beyond even this incarnation. And they uncover unrecognized holdings, primal fears and terrors. But this is the path for relatively few, though I see many people arrive at this same understanding in a moment of grief, when they are so deep in their feelings that they see it isn't even the loss of their child, no matter how immense, or the loss of any loved one. It is the place of loss itself. They are touching themselves more deeply than they had ever imagined possible.

Entering into this deep darkness is like going into a cave that has been dark for a million years. Yet the light from a single match illuminates the cave and dispels the ancient darkness. Some while in such grief begin painfully to lift their head and look about, seeing the pain they've always carried. It is in this experience, which so magnifies our old ways of separateness, that a new healing begins to occur. We begin to sense all beings as within ourselves. We break our identification with the seeming solidity of separate bodies and separate minds. And we merge into the one heart that beats in us all. After some time, the experience of grief seems to create in many a greater sensitivity to life because the potential for deep healing is so deeply touched. It is difficult in the midst of such anguish to begin to explore a reality so painful. And yet it is the very opening to this level of being, to these hidden fears of loss and desires for security, that brings us to see the possibility of freedom.

Grief can have a quality of profound healing because we are forced to a depth of feeling that is usually below the threshold of awareness. Though many of our motivations come from this level of fear, of loss, yet we don't know where these volitions originate. We simply find ourselves lost in action, in anger or fear, pushing away others, grasping at what we imagined to be our safety, constantly guarding our heart.

This tearing open of the heart leaves us exposed to that which has caused us and our loved ones the pain of imagined separateness so often before. This experience of discovery that grief leads us to is, for some, like going below ground level to look at the roots of a tree whose branches and twigs, leaves and flowers were all you thought was meaningful. It is the tree of life, of your life. The foliage is like the personality, the outward manifestation of being, a by-product of being born you have always imagined to be you. You notice how the leaves appear, the flowers unfolding, and are proud or frightened, depending on how much their shape fits your model of how it should look to the world around. But you have always been "above ground level" in the conscious mind. You have never seen the roots from which all this growth originates. You have carefully pruned and trimmed the tree to eliminate the painful, the magnify the pleasant. Life has become

like an ornamental shrub. The living truth buried beneath layer upon layer of longing for things to be otherwise. But in grief there is no hiding. There is no choice or control and you are forced beneath ground level to the very roots out of which your life experience has arisen. You enter the dark holdings and the clamorings of the heart and find yourself torn open to the truth. Then this tree of personality seems not such a wondrous display of who you imagined yourself to be. The grief forces you into the pain you would never examine voluntarily. You find yourself immersed in the darkness of millennium, and you behold the very roots and tendrils, even the root hairs, from which this tree of personality has been nurtured. You start to see the roots of various desires and judgments and feelings and doubts. You begin to see the possibility of freedom, of relating to the whole of being. Not just the flowers and leaves, but to the source from which they arise. You enter below what is usually accessible to awareness and see the immensity of this process of growth and being. You see what has conditioned the arising of so many traits and preferences, so many ways of acting in the world. Ways now recognized as inappropriate for the communication of love and the opening to wisdom.

There is in grief a pitfall for many who think of themselves as spiritual. A tendency to push away deep feelings, thinking that they are "unspiritual." "If I were really spiritual, I wouldn't be so frightened or angry or upset." And on the other hand there are those who regard only their emotions as real. They say, "All this transcendental stuff is a way of trying to suppress my feelings." But in grief one cannot push away hell in order to attain heaven any more than one can grasp heaven in one's teeth by embracing hell. It is not either/or—it is both/and. Which brings to mind a photograph of the silent Indian teacher Hari Dass standing with his chalk board on which is written, "We must do all."

There is a story of a Zen monk mourning beside the grave of his recently dead teacher. One of the other monks comes up to him and says, "You are supposed to be a monk, why are you crying?" The grieving monk turns and says sternly, "I am crying because I am sad."

When understanding comes, when we see the root out of which

experience arises, there is room for everything. There's room for the joy of our original nature, without grasping or holding to it, without hiding behind it as an idea that allows us to suppress feelings. There's room, too, for sadness. But it is unusual for us to give room to such sadness, for feelings that are so unpleasant. We imagine we must suppress them, hide them, keep a stiff upper lip. Some in grief have told me that they are confused about how to allow for such immense emotions. They feel they must manifest their sadness in some socially acceptable way. We have long-conditioned ways of being in grief. We are confused by the immensity of our feelings.

But we are all in grief. All have experienced loss. Even if your loved ones are still alive, there is a place within of disappointment and loss because we live in a world where everything changes. Most display the old scars and rope burns of having one object of desire after another pulled beyond their grasp.

Whatever you want, the more you want it, the more there is a kind of grief, a sickness, a hollowness in the pit of the stomach. Whether it is the desire to see a loved one again, or to stay alive, or to die, or to be successful, or for some new shiny bauble, the very nature of such longing has a quality of grief about it.

There is no security in this world of change. There is no unchanging ground on which to place our seemingly solid feet. Nothing remains the same. There is only the constant flow of changing events, of shadows flickering on the wall. And it is in the holding to such temporal things that suffering originates.

Grief comes from trying to protect anything from being what it is. From trying to stop change. Even for those whose priority is the truth, there may be experienced the great pain of loss as the tendrils of their connection with a loved one are cut, leaving them bereft of their heart's contact with themselves. Each experiences his humanness to the degree he can open to his joy and sorrow.

It is perhaps in grief that we discover the force that carried us once again into incarnation, the reason we incarnated in the first place. It is in the tearing open of the heart that we discover how guarded our lives have become, how small a cage we have traded off for safe ground. We see how our work is to be more loving, to live more fully in an often confusing world.

A world of constant change and infinite insecurity. Where no thought stays but for a moment, where states of mind are constantly in flux and often in opposition. Where nothing that begins does not end. We see that all we love will be pulled beyond even our most tenacious grasping by the ongoing flow of time. We mourn the absence of peace, of some contact with the unchanging, with the essential. We mourn the loss of our original nature. But as we begin to focus on the spaciousness out of which each changing form originates, we begin to see beyond thought. That just behind the ever-changing momentum of the illusory mind, there is a stillness which witnesses all that passes with a sense of equilibrium and compassionate nonattachment.

It is from this stillness that we come to watch the constant change and changefulness of the mind. We see the whole world reflected there. And we notice that everything ends. Every thought ends. Every feeling ends. Each taste, each moment of hearing, each seeing ends. It has never been otherwise. Every experience, every relationship ends. Moment to moment, change unfolds. A moment of hearing followed by a moment of seeing, by a moment of tasting, by thought, by a memory, which dissolves into yet another imagining, which melts into yet another sensation arising in the body. Our experience of life is the experience of change. We see that every state of mind changes. The breath you're breathing right now will end. Birth and decay are the ongoing manifestations of creation. Everything that has a beginning has an end. Nothing stays the same. In this flow of change, there is no real or solid place on which a lasting foothold can be taken. There is nothing which can absolutely be said to be who we are in this incessant unfolding.

Once someone asked a well-known Thai meditation master, "In this world where everything changes, where nothing remains the same, where loss and grief are inherent in our very coming into existence, how can there be any happiness? How can we find security when we see that we can't count on anything being the way we want it to be?" The teacher, looking compassionately at this fellow, held up a drinking glass which had been given to him earlier in the morning and said, "You see this goblet? For me, this glass is already broken. I enjoy it, I drink out of it. It holds

my water admirably, sometimes even reflecting the sun in beautiful patterns. If I should tap it, it has a lovely ring to it. But when I put this glass on a shelf and the wind knocks it over or my elbow brushes it off the table and it falls to the ground and shatters, I say, 'Of course.' But when I understand that this glass is already broken, every moment with it is precious. Every moment is just as it is and nothing need be otherwise."

When we recognize that, just as that glass, our body is already broken, that indeed we are already dead, then life becomes precious and we open to it just as it is, in the moment it is occurring. When we understand that all our loved ones are already dead—our children, our mates, our friends—how precious they become. How little fear can interpose, how little doubt can estrange us. When you live your life as though you're already dead, life takes on new meaning. Each moment becomes a whole lifetime, a universe unto itself.

When we realize we are already dead, our priorities change, our heart opens, our mind begins to clear of the fog of old holdings and pretendings. We watch all life in transit and what matters becomes instantly apparent: The transmission of love, the letting go of obstacles to understanding, the relinquishment of our grasping, of our hiding from ourselves. Seeing the mercilessness of our self-strangulation, we begin to come gently into the light we share with all beings. Taking each teaching, each loss, each gain, each fear, each joy as it arises and experiencing it fully, life becomes workable. We are no longer "a victim of life." And then every experience, even the loss of our dearest one, becomes another opportunity for awakening.

If our only spiritual practice were to live as though we were already dead, relating to all we meet, to all we do, as though it were our final moments in the world, what time would there be for old games or falsehoods or posturing? If we lived our life as though we were already dead, as though our children were already dead, how much time would there be for self-protection and the re-creation of ancient mirages? Only love would be appropriate, only the truth.