

Shining Light on Death, 14th July 2018 – Notes for participants by Ann Yeomans

'We can do no great things – only small things with great love' Mother Teresa of Calcutta

'When we have truly recognised that we are mortal, then we have a choice. We can snuggle it away into the darkly opaque pouch of the 'shadow', or we can meditate upon it as part of the wonders and mysteries of life itself.'

'Taking responsibility for our own death means companionship our own inner wisdom and developing the awareness of what kind of death we want. Creating a calm and focused space in our lives will involve tying up loose ends, nurturing our relationships, fulfilling the commitments which are important to us and focusing on the positives as we age.'

Michael Kearney (2009) tells the story of the Greek god of healing, Asklepios for while his natural father was the great Apollo, he was brought up by his stepfather Chiron. Now Chiron had a wound in his body that would never heal. Chiron taught Asklepios about suffering and the ability to 'be with' those who would never get well. Dr Kearney likens the heroic Apollo to the radical medical model which is concerned with relieving pain and extending life, as against the Chiron/ Asklepios focus on alleviating the inner suffering which we work through and accept on our journey towards dying and the transition at death.

'Chiron's presence in the life of Asklepios, reminds us that with healing, who we are as human beings and how we are with the other in the incurable wound of his or her suffering is far more important than anything we might do or say.' Kearney (2009)

Finding Stillness at the end of life requires a pathway that leads away from fear and panic towards love and surrender: a pathway that brings peace of heart. Some of the fears which may keep loved ones from that peace are beliefs in religious traditions about death and punishment, fear of total oblivion, of the unknown, or even not wanting to meet an old adversary on the other side. It may be the fear of leaving their family without enough money, or of dying without the forgiveness from someone they can never meet again. Some fears may be resolved by practical intervention, making a will or asking a relative for help.

Harder to come to terms with are the soul wounds that leave a mark and cannot necessarily be resolved: where deep anger or resentment, remorse, grief, bitterness or loss of faith seep away one's strength. They may be around asking forgiveness or sending love to someone far away, the grief of never knowing their grandchild, or the wound around a baby born long ago, but who in those days had to be given away. In this situation, those who have dealt with their own soul wounds are the best help and comfort, whoever they may be, nurse, therapist, soul midwife or friend.

'I believe that the real value of stillness for anyone at the end of life is to give enough time for each one of us to identify that place of healing inside where a measure of acceptance and peace may be felt. As death approaches most people want to be able to go into that inner space and find their own way. We do turn our face to the wall as the end approaches, both physically and metaphorically and if it is hard for loved ones to accept this, then it can become a dilemma for the dying person. Giving someone permission to go may be heart wrenching but is a true act of love. Often it is when the family have gone off to find a coffee or talk to the doctor that the dying person takes the opportunity to leave without fuss or any pressure to stay.'

Meditation Template for the End of Life

'So now (*friend's-name*), as you settle gently into your body, just become aware again of your breathing. There is no hurry, you have all the time in the world as we sit here together, the air drifting in and the air drifting out, gently and peacefully. And as you do so you are drawn to a beautiful space inside your body, it may be in your heart or in your tummy. And in that space you know that there is only peace and calm and stillness and that there you are safe. You are very safe, you are always safe. This is your own special place where you are always safe and connected to the deepest part of your Being. Just feel how it feels, so calm and peaceful, restful and still.

For this is a magical place where sound and shapes have a special meaning for you. This is your own inner sanctuary and you can visit it whenever you like. Here you can be your own true self and connect with that most mystical and spiritual part of your inner being: the part of you which is always light and free and at peace. For that space is timeless and infinite and full of love, unbounded, infinite love. And that love is for you, that love is you and that love surrounds you. So, you can let go into it and feel it, experience it and know that you are safe.'

The above are extracts from The Inner Power of Stillness chapter 29, Ann Yeomans Whittle

Useful Reading:

Gawande Atul (2014) *Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End* London Profile Books Ltd

Kearney Michael (2009) *A Place of Healing: Working with nature and Soul at the End of Life* New Orleans Spring Journal Books

Johns Christopher (2004) *Being Mindful, Easing Suffering: Reflections on Palliative Care* London and Philadelphia Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Sogyal Rinpoche (1992) *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* London Rider Publisher

Warner Felicity (2013) *The Soul Midwives Handbook* London Hay House

Filmer Lorch, Barrow, Gill (2016) *The Inner Power of Stillness* UK Handspring Publishing

Ware B (2012) *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* Hay House UK Ltd.

Chopra D (2001) *The Deeper Wound - recovering the soul from fear and suffering* Rider

Assante J (2012) *The Last Frontier - exploring the afterlife and transforming our fear of death* California New World Library

James J W & Friedman R (2009) *The Grief Recovery Handbook* William Morrow

Websites:

www.williambloom.com

www.soulmidwives.co.uk

www.fountaincentre.org

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The Role of the Soul Midwife is above all else to be a friend to the one in transition and to those who love them, to *'be with'* that person as they do their own inevitable work in finding that place of peace within from which it feels safe to leave. We do not really 'help', we serve, we practice 'being with' in whichever way Friend requires, while remaining grounded, blended and unconditionally loving: sitting with the person in transition, keeping them comfortable or being a sounding board for their thoughts and feelings, as they perhaps embrace deep grief and loss or confront the soul wounds of their life.

The Four Stages of Dying: Elemental Withdrawal

Earth Elemental withdrawal: Physical Vulnerability

Weakness, fatigue, vulnerability, loss of appetite for life, can't be bothered. Unsteady, frail wants comfort food:

Therapeutic techniques include oils like patchouli and cedar, touch, energy work and sound such as drumming. Colour green!

Water Elemental withdrawal: Emotional vulnerability

Vulnerable, tearful, loss of control over body fluids. Expresses emotions and need for female relationships and love. May be dry mouth and hearing loss. Soul wounds surface to be healed. May dream of water, rivers, oceans, sea creatures. Coming to terms with end of life.

Therapeutic techniques include oils like rose, geranium and orange, flower essences like Star of Bethlehem, instruments with gentle resonance. Gentle touch therapy, music, active listening. Colour blue.

Fire Elemental withdrawal: Agitation, irritation, anger

Anger, belligerence, plucking the air, agitation, may have high temperature, dehydrating and may refuse sustenance. May speak of seeing those who have passed over. 'Transitioning'

Therapeutic techniques include greeting from the foot of the bed (tunnel vision). Gentle companionship with compassionate voice. Do not take anything personally, accepting patient's reality. Moisten lips (pineapple juice). Hold hand and elbow together with eye contact. Oils such as myrrh, frankincense and jasmine. Colour deep pink

Air Elemental withdrawal: gradual loss of consciousness

Often unconscious or sleeping. Less interested in reality. Turns their face to the wall physically and metaphorically.

Therapeutically withdraw all stimulus. Music birdsong or flute. Send love, be present, be calm, just be with! Colour yellow. Soft toys comfort.

Therapeutic Presence and Keeping Vigil

KEY POINTS:

- 1 Therapeutic presence means providing a peaceful, loving, calming environment for the other person so that their body-heart-mind can find their own place of peace.
- 2 For this we need to ground ourselves and connect to our own sources of strength and peace. This may be the stillness of the earth's energy field or our own spiritual resources and innate sense of connection.
- 3 Be consciously grounded in our own body
- 4 Hold the space with unconditional Love
- 5 Be kind and open-hearted with a 'soft vibe'
- 6 Connect ourselves to Universal Love and 'The Clear Light'
- 7 Then take our connection in 'the Clear light' to Friend.
- 8 Bring Friend also into 'the Clear Light' and see the two of us connected in the 'cone' of the One Clear Light.
- 9 If given permission, gently and lovingly touch or hold Friend wherever is comfortable for them and agreed between us.
- 10 As we part from them, withdraw *consciously* from the cone of Clear Light yet leaving them within it. Return quietly to our own living life.

