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Death

When I was working on my talk for today, my husband, Gregory asked me what my topic was. “Death”, I answered. “Oh”, he said; took a few steps, turned around and said, “But you have to change it to “Transition” because there is no death. I said, “But I have to talk about Death.”

The reason for that is I am heading toward speaking about the experience of death as an extremely important part of spiritual development. But first, I have to lay some ground work.

Our culture does not appreciate death. Our news media REPORTS about death ALL the time. Deaths caused by disasters like earthquakes, tropical storms, accidents, murders. The only time death from natural causes or illness is reported in the media is when someone famous or well-known dies. The grief of the survivors is usually only briefly noted and then forgotten.

We often see in movies or TV, stories that show a person who is terminal wanting to talk with their loved ones about their death, and most of the time, everyone tries to stop them from speaking about it. They don't want the person to die, they don't want to endure the pain of their loss and most of all, the grieving process they'll have to go through. Grief is one of the most painful feelings humans have, but there can be no moving on, no spiritual development, if we short circuit our grief.

Decades ago, people wore black arm bands, so everyone knew they were grieving. Not too long ago, I wished that custom was still in use. Last year, there were three deaths in my husband's side of the family. While we were still sorting out things from his mother's house after HER passing, one of his brothers-in-law killed his sister and himself. Shortly afterwards, we were shopping at Trader Joe's, and the cashier greeted us with one of the most inappropriately cheerful things one could say to someone who was feeling the way we were, and I paused for a moment wondering how to handle the situation. I came up with, "Actually, we're grieving." The cashier said, "I'm sorry", and the rest of the transaction was rich with a feeling of silent support.

Yes, death is a transition. Here at the Center of Enlightenment, that is stated at every Sunday service when we say Spiritual Principle #4: "We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the CHANGE called death." But what I've talked about so far is someone ELSE'S physical death, and how we handle that.

What I want to get into is what is stated in a song the choir is going to sing on Easter Sunday. One of the lines is "choosing clear the many deaths of going beyond self." This is the kind of death we deal with all the time, but we're unaware of it AS a death.

Whenever we make a choice between this or that, taking this path or that, we are giving up on the life that might have been had we not taken the path we did. This death of going beyond self is the death that used to be endured as a rite of passage, one of transitioning from one way of BEING to another, often shown as a boy passing a trial, letting all know he is ready to be a man.

There is a scene from GAME OF THRONES when Jon Snow, as Lord Commander of the Nightswatch must make a decision. He seeks counsel from Maester Aimen. Jon knows in his heart that one decision will sit well with a good number of the men under his command, but if he makes a different choice, these men will hate him. After some discussion, Maester Aimen tells him, "Kill the boy, Jon Snow, and let the man be born."

That takes a lot of courage. What ENABLES Jon Snow to MAKE that unpopular choice is the comfort level he has with his heart letting him know what is right, and what will result in the most good for the most people.

When I choose to watch something on television or pay to see a movie, I am drawn to it with the feeling that it has something of value for me, something I can learn from it, or something that will help heal something for me.

There is a show I have been watching from the very first episode, called THE WALKING DEAD. Whenever I watch it, Gregory gets up and leaves the room, but don't worry, I'm not going to describe anything gory. There IS a conversation from an episode I want you to hear, so I DO have to give you some background so it will make sense.

The premise of the series is everyone has been infected with a virus, and within a certain number of hours after dying, one becomes reanimated.

These creatures move and make noise and eat, but there is no higher brain function. They are referred to as Walkers. In this episode, there is a HOARD of walkers heading toward the community where the main character, Rick, and his family and friends live, so he takes it on himself to lead the hoard past his community and then double back to safety.

He rides a white horse far enough ahead of the hoard so they can't reach him. After some time, he approaches an intersection. There are lots of trees on his left so he can't see that there's another hoard of walkers approaching, and when he gets to the intersection, the horse gets spooked, rears up, Rick falls off, is severely injured, and loses consciousness. He wakes up just in time to get going ahead of the hoard, but he's in bad shape and continues to lose consciousness along the way.

Every time this happens, he finds himself in a conversation with one of his friends who has died.

One of these times, he finds himself walking down a hallway of a hospital. At the end of the hallway are double doors with a plank of wood shoved through the handles with the words, "Do not open, dead outside" painted on the doors. Rick pulls the plank out, opens the doors, and sees a white light so bright he covers his eyes with his arms.

As his eyes become accustomed to the light, he looks around and sees dead bodies as far as the eye can see. Then he feels a presence behind him. He turns around to find his friend, Sasha.

He says, They're....they're all dead.

Sasha: Yeah, I know. And it's okay.

Rick: How can it be okay? How can THIS be okay?

Sasha: 'Cause you did your part - like I did mine - like the others did before us.

Rick: How?

Sasha: They gave us the strength that we needed to do what we had to do for the others, and the others draw strength from us. We change each other. We help each other. We make each other better. And it never ends.

Rick: It feels like it's ending.

Sasha: Little things do end, but it's never the end of everything, because we don't die. It's not about me or you or any one of us, it's about ALL of us. And I don't think it just evens out. I think it always crosses over, toward the Good, toward the Brave, toward Love.

Rick nods.

Sasha: Your family, you're not gonna find them because they're not lost. And you are not lost. What you need to do, is wake up.

Waking up to the “many deaths of going beyond self” is a transition of viewing existence from the viewpoint of the ego, to that of Spirit.

Some people believe the ego has to be obliterated, but what we really need is to lovingly transition out of the ego being in charge with its limited view, to seeing through the unlimited view of Spirit.

Matt Kahn writes about this change in his book, ***Whatever Arises, Love That***. “As you assist in the evolution of our planet through a journey of spiritual growth, you will likely experience periods of profound expansion and contraction, shifting between extraordinary highs and infinite lows, until all polarities balance out. You may experience ringing in your ears, lightning bolts of electricity surging throughout your body, swirling energy emanating from the base of your spine, waves of anxiety, moments of existential bliss, feelings of impending doom, a desire to die, or even a sense of being reborn.

As your awakening dawns, it is quite common for your experiences to seem less than the fairytale romance you may have hoped they would be.

Instead of being immersed in never-ending bliss or having the ability to respond consciously in every interaction, there is a palpable emptiness that can make you feel quite helpless.” You may feel that “nothing that used to define you provides any surge of significance or fulfillment while your long-awaited new way of being has yet to be revealed.”

Matt calls it a spiritual-limbo land, describing it as very much like an existential stage of purgatory. “This is the stage of spiritual development when, as you wake up, your attachment to ego dissolves out of your energy field. As attachments to ego evaporate, you are suddenly UNABLE to be fed by the people, places and things that previously defined your existence.”

This is not the death knell of the ego; this is the death of our ATTACHMENT to the ego, to the ego's view of life and of ourselves. I like to think of the ego as the zoom lens on a camera. It has a very narrow focus, and only when it moves back into the camera does it get the bigger picture.

When you find yourself knee-deep in awakening, yearning to break through to the other side but without a clue as to how to care about life when nothing seems to matter, Matt offers a healing mantra.

If you'd like to try it out right now, get comfortable, pay attention to how you feel right now, and if you wish, close your eyes, start with a big exhale, and repeat after me,

THERE IS NO WAY OUT OF PAIN.

THERE IS NO WAY OUT OF JUDGMENT.

Matt writes that the energy within these phrases inspires a heartfelt SURRENDER that gives every remaining option over to the hands of fate.

The acceptance that there is no way out of pain or judgment unravels EVERY strategy of manipulation and avoidance our ego tries to use.

[THESE are the many deaths of going beyond self].

WITHOUT these strategies in our energy fields, our choices can now be arranged and orchestrated by the will of the Universe.

This doesn't mean we will always feel pain or be in judgment. Instead, pain or judgment will no longer be enemies, especially when any perceivable enemy is often a spiritual ally in disguise.

Speaker Notes

There is no way out of pain, there is no way to of judgment. And whatever arises, love that. May all be blessed, uplifted, liberated and reborn now and forever, by the love that we are. And so it is.