

In the Eastern tradition, the state of your consciousness at the last moment of life is so crucial that you spend your whole life preparing for that moment. We've had many assassinations in our culture, and we wonder what it was like for Bobby Kennedy or Jack Kennedy—if they had any thought, and what those thoughts might have been. "Oh, I've been shot!" or "He did it," or "Goodbye," or "Get him," or "Forgive him." Mahatma Gandhi walked out into a garden to give a press conference when a gunman shot him three or four times, but as he was falling, the only thing that came out of his mouth was, "Ram. . . ." The name of God. He was ready!

At the moment of death if we let go lightly, we go out into the light, towards the One, towards God. The only thing that died, after all, was another set of thoughts of who we were this time around.

Ram Dass, *Grist for the Mill*

Death does not mean an end of all effort. The Eternal Law which we term God will be a mockery, if death were the end of such an effort. "Hereafter" is a mystery into which we may not peep. We should have enough faith to know that death, after life truly lived, is but a prelude to a better and richer life.

Now for Ram Rajya. It can be religiously translated as Kingdom of God on Earth; politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which, inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race or creed or sex vanish; in it, land and State belong to the people, justice is prompt, perfect and cheap and, therefore, there is freedom of worship, speech and the Press—all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint.

Such a State must be based on truth and non-violence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities. It is a dream that may never be realized. I find happiness in living in that dreamland, ever trying to realize it in the quickest way.

Mahatma Gandhi, from "The Hindu," June 12, 1945,  
in *Gandhi in India, 1944-1948*

### *For a Radiant Star*

Dazed, uncertain, hesitating,  
Wings still damp, bent, unfolded,  
As if still molded  
By darkness, change, confusion,  
Bound still  
In the emptied chrysalis.

①

The air stirs.  
I tremble,  
Feel still within that mold,  
Shaped by a form I now  
Vaguely sense  
Is hollow, empty, spent,  
Its work complete.

I only need to move—  
One step, another, tentative,  
And wait.

Feel the air dry this strange new form,  
Watch tissue thin patterns of gold, black, orange,  
Unfold into readiness,  
Unfurl into openness,  
As the air takes me,  
Lifts me  
Into surprise.

I know not what to do  
Yet giddy with instinct  
Throw myself out,  
Caught by a current unseen,  
Swoop low, glide high, dive  
Into surrender.

A chrysalis stands now empty,  
Drying in the sun,  
Constraints forgotten by the life once served.

One day, perhaps, a child will come,  
Will ask its mother,  
"What strange creature one day lived  
In such a tiny home?"

(Trey, 1974)

And so began the most extraordinary forty-eight hours of our life together. Treya had decided to die. There was no medical reason for her to die at this point. With medication and modest supports, her doctors felt she could live another several months at least, albeit in a hospital, and yes, then she would

die. But Treya had made up her mind. She was not going to die like that, in a hospital, with tubes coming out of her and continuous IV morphine drip and the inevitable pneumonia and slow suffocation—all the horrible images that had gone through my mind at Drachenfels. And I had the strangest feeling that, whatever else her reasons, Treya was going to spare all of us that ordeal. She would simply bypass all that, thank you very much, and die peacefully now. But whatever her reasons, I knew that once Treya had made up her mind, then it was done.

I put Treya in bed that evening, and sat down next to her. She had become almost ecstatic. "I'm going, I can't believe it, I'm going. I'm so happy, I'm so happy, I'm so happy." Like a mantra of final release, she kept repeating, "I'm so happy, I'm so happy. . . ."

Her entire countenance lit up. She glowed. And right in front of my eyes her body began to change. Within one hour, it looked to me as if she lost ten pounds. It was as if her body, acquiescing to her will, began to shrink and draw in on itself. She began to shut down her vital systems; she began to die. Within that hour, she was a different being, ready and willing to leave. She was very determined about this, and she was very happy. Her ecstatic response was infectious, and I found myself sharing in her joy, much to my confusion.

Then, rather abruptly, she said, "But I don't want to leave you. I love you so much. I can't leave you. I love you so much." She began crying, sobbing, and I began crying, sobbing, as well. I felt like I was crying all the tears of the past five years, deep tears I had held back in order to be strong for Treya. We talked at length of our love for each other, a love that had made both of us—it sounds corny—a love that had made both of us stronger, and better, and wiser. Decades of growth had gone into our care for each other, and now, faced with the conclusion of it all, we were both overwhelmed. It sounds so dry, but it was the tenderest moment I have ever known, with the only person with whom I could ever have known it.

"Honey, if it's time to go, then it's time to go. Don't worry, I'll find you. I found you before, I promise I'll find you again. So if you want to go, don't worry. Just go."

"You promise you'll find me?"

"I promise."

I should explain that, during the last two weeks, Treya had almost obsessively been going over what I had said to her on the way to our wedding ceremony, five years earlier. I had whispered in her ear: "Where have you been? I've been searching for you for lifetimes. I finally found you. I had to slay dragons to find you, you know. And if anything happens, I will find you again." She looked profoundly at peace. "You promise?" "I promise."

②

I have no conscious idea why I said that; I was simply stating, for reasons I did not understand, exactly how I felt about our relationship. And it was to this exchange that Treya returned time and again during the last weeks. It seemed to give her a tremendous sense of safety. The world was OK if I kept my promise.

And so she said, at that point, "You promise you'll find me?"

"I promise."

"Forever and forever?"

"Forever and forever."

"Then I can go. I can't believe it. I'm so happy. This has been much harder than I ever thought. It's been so hard. Honey, it's been so hard." "I know, sweetheart, I know." "But now I can go. I'm so happy. I love you so much. I'm so happy."

That night I slept on the acupuncture table in her room. It seems to me that I dreamt of a great luminous cloud of white light, hovering over the house, like the light of a thousand suns blazing on a snowcapped mountain. I say "it seems to me," because now I'm not sure whether it was a dream or not.

When I looked at her early the next morning (Sunday), she had just awoken. Her eyes were clear, she was very alert, and she was very determined: "I'm going. I'm so happy. You'll be there?"

"I'll be there, kid. Let's do it. Let's go."

I called the family. I don't remember exactly what I said, but it was something like, please come as soon as you can. I called Warren, the dear friend who had been helping Treya with acupuncture for the last few months. Again, I don't remember what I said. But I think that my tone said, It's dying time.

The family began arriving fairly early that day, and each member had a chance to have a last open talk with Treya. What I remember most was her saying how much she loved her family; how incredibly fortunate she felt to have each of them; how they were the best family anyone could want. It was as if Treya were determined to "come clean" with every single family member; she was going to burn as clean as ashes, with no unspoken lines left in her body, with no guilt and no blame. As far as I can tell, she succeeded.

We put her to bed that night—Sunday night—and again I slept on her acupuncture table so I could be there if anything happened. Something extraordinary seemed to be going on in that house, and we all knew it.

About 3:30 that morning, Treya awoke abruptly. The atmosphere was almost hallucinogenic. I awoke immediately, and asked how she was. "Is it morphine time?" she said with a smile. In her entire ordeal with cancer, except for surgery, Treya had taken a sum total of four morphine tablets.

"Sure, sweetie, whatever you want." I gave her a morphine tablet and a mild sleeping pill, and we had our last conversation.

"Sweetie, I think it's time to go," she began.

"I'm here, honey."

"I'm so happy." Long pause. "This world is so weird. It's just so weird. But I'm going." Her mood was one of joy, and humor, and determination.

I began repeating several of the "pith phrases" from the religious traditions that she considered so important, phrases that she had wanted me to remind her of right up to the end, phrases she had carried with her on her flash cards.

"Relax with the presence of what is," I began. "Allow the self to uncoil in the vast expanse of all space. Your own primordial mind is unborn and undying; it was not born with this body and it will not die with this body. Recognize your own mind as eternally one with Spirit."

Her faced relaxed, and she looked at me very clearly and directly.

"You'll find me?"

"I promise."

"Then it's time to go."

There was a very long pause, and the room seemed to me to become entirely luminous, which was strange, given how utterly dark it was. It was the most sacred moment, the most direct moment, the simplest moment I have ever known. The most obvious. The most perfectly obvious. I had never seen anything like this in my life. I did not know what to do. I was simply present for Treya.

She moved toward me, trying to gesture, trying to say something, something she wanted me to understand, the last thing she told me. "You're the greatest man I've ever known," she whispered. "You're the greatest man I've ever known. My champion..." She kept repeating it: "My champion." I leaned forward to tell her that she was the only really enlightened person I had ever known. That enlightenment made sense to me because of her. That a universe that had produced Treya was a sacred universe. That God existed because of her. All these things went through my mind. All these things I wanted to say. I knew she was aware how I felt, but my throat had closed in on itself; I couldn't speak; I wasn't crying, I just couldn't speak. I croaked out only, "I'll find you, honey, I will..."

Treya closed her eyes, and for all purposes, she never opened them again.

My heart broke. Da Free John's phrase kept running through my mind: "Practice the wound of love... practice the wound of love." Real love hurts; real love makes you totally vulnerable and open; real love will take you far beyond yourself; and therefore real love will devastate you. I kept thinking, if love does not shatter you, you do not know love. We had both been prac-

ticing the wound of love, and I was shattered. Looking back on it, it seems to me that in that simple and direct moment, we both died.

It was at that moment that I began to notice that the atmosphere had become very turbulent. It took me several minutes to realize that it wasn't my distress or my grief that seemed to be so disturbing. It was the wind blowing wildly outside the house. And not just blowing. The wind began whipping up a ferocious storm; our ordinarily rock-solid house was shaking and rattling in the gale-force winds that hammered the house at exactly that moment. In fact, the newspapers reported the next day that at exactly four o'clock that morning, record-breaking winds—reaching up to an incredible 115 miles an hour—began to whip through Boulder (though inexplicably, no place else in Colorado). The winds overturned cars—and even an airplane!—all of which was duly reported in the headlines of the papers the next day.

The winds, I suppose, were coincidence. Nonetheless, the constant rattling and shaking of the house simply added to the feeling that something unearthly was happening. I remember trying to go back to sleep, but the house was rattling so hard I got up and put some blankets around the windows in the bedroom, fearing they would shatter. I finally drifted off, thinking, "Treya is dying, nothing is permanent, everything is empty, Treya is dying..."

The next morning, Treya settled into the position in which she would die—propped up on pillows, arms at her sides, mala in her hand. The night before she had begun repeating silently to herself "Om Mani Padme Hung," the Buddhist mantra of compassion, and "Surrender to God," her favorite Christian prayer. I believe she continued to do so.

We had invited a member of the Hospice movement to come by and work with us, and in due course—around eleven that morning—Claire arrived. I personally had wanted a Hospice member to come by because I wanted to make sure that we were doing everything possible to ensure that Treya could die painlessly and in peace, in her own bed, in her own way.

Claire was perfect. Looking very like a beautiful and peaceful angel (so beatific that Kati unconsciously kept referring to her as "Grace Dawn"), she entered the room and announced to Treya that, if it was OK with her, she was going to take her vital signs. "Treya," she said, "is it all right if I take your blood pressure?" I don't think Claire thought Treya would actually answer. The point, rather, was that Hospice members are taught that the dying person can hear quite clearly everything you say right up to the end, and perhaps beyond, so Claire extended this elemental courtesy to Treya. Treya herself had not really spoken anything for several hours. But when Claire asked that simple question, Treya abruptly turned her head (eyes still closed) and very

clearly said, "Sure." From that point on, everybody knew that Treya, "unconscious" as she was, was in fact fully aware of everything that was happening.

(At one point, Kati, who like all of us had assumed Treya was "unconscious," looked at me and said, "Ken she is so beautiful." Treya said very clearly, "Thank you." Those were her last words—"Thank you.")

The wind continued to howl, rattling the house severely. The family members maintained their vigil. Sue, Rad, Kati, Tracy, David, Mary Lamar, Michael, Warren—all touched Treya and many whispered final words to her.

Treya held her mala, a mala she had gotten at a meditation retreat with Kalu Rinpoche, a retreat in which she had taken a vow to practice compassion as her path to enlightenment. The spiritual name given to her at that time, by Kalu himself, was "Dakini Wind" (which means, "the wind of enlightenment").

By two o'clock that afternoon (Monday), Treya had ceased to respond overtly to any stimuli. Her eyes were closed; her breathing was following a pattern of apnea (shallow gasps with long pauses); her limbs had become cold. Claire took us aside and said that she thought Treya would die very soon, possibly within hours. She said she would return if at all necessary, and with the kindest of wishes, left us.

The afternoon stretched on; the winds continued rattling the house and contributing to the eeriest atmosphere. For hours I held Treya's hand and kept whispering in her ear: "Treya, you can go now. Everything here is complete and finished. Just let go, just let it happen. We're all here, honey, just let it happen."

(Then, uncontrollably, I began laughing to myself, thinking: "Treya has never done anything anybody ever told her to do. Maybe I should quit saying all this; she'll never let go if I don't shut up.")

I continued with her favorite pith phrases: "Move toward the Light, Treya. Look for the five-pointed cosmic star, luminous and radiant and free. Hold to the Light, sweetheart, just hold to the Light. Let go of us, hold to the Light."

I should mention that, in the year of Treya's fortieth birthday, a teacher of both of us, Da Free John, began saying that the ultimate enlightened vision was when one saw the five-pointed cosmic star, or cosmic mandala, pure and white and radiant, utterly beyond all finite limitations. Treya didn't know this was said at that time, but nonetheless that is exactly when she changed her name from Terry to Estrella, or Treya, which is Spanish for star. And it is held that, at the precise moment of death, the great five-pointed cosmic star, or the clear light void, or simply great Spirit or luminous Godhead, appears to every soul. It is my own belief that this vision had appeared to Treya some three years earlier—it had done so in a dream she told me of,

right after an empowerment with the Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche—the vision was unmistakable, and accompanied by all the classic signs, though she told no one of it. She did not change her name to "Treya" because Free John had talked about this ultimate vision; she had simply had this vision, of the luminous cosmic star, in a very real and direct way. Thus upon actual death, I thought to myself, Treya would simply be seeing her own Original Face, and not for the first time. She would simply be experiencing, once again, her own true nature as luminosity, as radiant star.

The only piece of jewelry she really valued was the five-pointed gold star pendant that Sue and Rad had made for her (based on a drawing Treya had made of exactly that vision). I thought to myself, about that star pendant, that it was, in the words of a Christian mystic, "The outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace." She died with it on.

I think everybody realized that their letting go of Treya was crucial to the process, and in their own individual ways, each person released her. I would like to report what transpired in those moments, as family members touched Treya, and softly talked to her, because everybody acted with such dignity and grace. I think that Treya would want me at least to say that Rad, who was beside himself with grief, touched her ever so gently on the forehead, and said, "You are the best daughter I could ever want." And Sue: "I love you so much."

I stepped out to get a drink of water, and suddenly Tracy was there, saying, "Ken, get up there immediately." I ran upstairs, jumped on the bed, grabbed Treya's hand. The entire family—every single member, and good friend Warren—made it into the room. Treya opened her eyes, looked very softly at everybody there, looked directly at me, closed her eyes, and quit breathing.

Everybody in the room was completely there and present for Treya. Then the entire room began to cry. I was holding her hand, with my other hand over her heart. My body began to shake violently. It had finally happened. I could not stop shaking. I whispered in her ear the few key phrases from the Book of the Dead ("Recognize the clear light as your own primordial Mind, recognize you are now one with Enlightened Spirit"). But mostly we all cried.

The best, the strongest, the most enlightened, the most honest, the most beautiful, the most inspiring, the most virtuous, the most cherished person I had ever known, had just died. Somehow, I felt that the universe would never be the same.

Exactly five minutes after her death, Michael said, "Listen. Listen to that." The gale-force winds had completely ceased blowing, and the atmosphere was a perfect calm.

This, too, was dutifully noted in the next day's papers, right to the exact minute. The ancients have a saying: "When a great soul dies, the winds go wild." The greater the soul, the greater the wind necessary to carry it away. Perhaps it was all coincidence, but I couldn't help thinking: A great, great soul had died, and the wind responded.

In the last six months of her life, it was as if Treya and I went into spiritual overdrive for each other, serving each other in every way that we could. I finally quit the bitching and moaning that is so normal for a support person, a bitching and moaning that came from the fact that I had, for five years, set aside my career in order to serve her. I just dropped all that. I had absolutely no regrets; I had only gratitude for her presence, and for the extraordinary grace of serving her. And she quit the bitching and moaning about how her cancer had "wrecked" my life. For the simple fact was, we together had made a pact, on some profound level, to see her through this ordeal, come what may. It was a profound choice. We were both very, very, very clear about this, particularly during the last six months. We simply and directly served each other, exchanging self for other, and *therefore* glimpsing that eternal Spirit which transcends both self and, other, both "me" and "mine."

"I've always loved you," she began on an occasion about three months before she died, "but recently you have changed in very profound ways. Have you noticed?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

There was a long pause. This was the period right after I had come back from the Dzogchen retreat, but that wasn't the main cause for the change she had noted. "I don't know, kid. I love you, so I'm serving you. It seems very straightforward, don't you think?"

"There's an awareness about you that has kept me going for months. What is it?" She kept repeating, as if it were very important, "What is it?" And I had the strangest feeling that it wasn't a question, really, but more of a test, which I did not understand.

"I think it's just that I'm here for you, sweetheart. I'm here."

"You're why I'm alive," she finally said, and it wasn't a comment about me. The point was that we kept each other going, and we became each other's teacher during those last extraordinary months. My continued service to Treya generated in her almost overwhelming feelings of gratitude and kindness, and the love she had for me in return began to saturate my being. I became completely full because of Treya. It was as if we were mutually generating in each other the enlightened compassion that we had both studied for so long. I felt like years, maybe lifetimes, of karma was being burned out of

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me in my continued response to her needs. And in her love and compassion for me, Treya also became completely full. There were no empty places in her soul, no corners left untouched by love, not a shadow in her heart.

I'm no longer sure exactly what "enlightenment" means. I prefer to think in terms of "enlightened understanding" or "enlightened presence" or "enlightened awareness." I know what that means, and I think I can recognize that. And it was unmistakable in Treya. I'm not saying this simply because she is gone. That is *exactly* how I came to see it, over those last few months, when she met suffering and death with a pure and simple presence, a presence that outshone her pain, a presence that clearly announced what she was. I saw that enlightened presence, unmistakably.

And those who were with her in those last few months, they saw it, too.

I had arranged for Treya's body to remain undisturbed for twenty-four hours. About an hour after her death, we all left the room, mostly to compose ourselves. Because Treya had propped herself up for the last twenty-four hours, her mouth had hung open for almost a day. Consequently, due to insipient rigor, her jaw was locked in an open position. We tried to close her jaw before we left, but it wouldn't shut; it was locked tight. I continued whispering "pith sayings" to her, then we all left the room.

About forty-five minutes later, we went back into the room, only to be met with a stunning vision: Treya had closed her mouth, and there appeared instead on her face an extraordinary smile, a smile of utter contentment, peace, fulfillment, release. Nor was it a standard "rigor smile"—the lines were entirely and totally different. She looked exactly like a beautiful Buddha statue, smiling the smile of complete release. The lines that had been deeply etched on her face—lines of suffering and exhaustion and pain—had all completely disappeared. Her face was pure, smooth, without wrinkles or lines of any sort, radiant, glowing. It was so profound that we were all taken aback. But there she was, smiling, glowing, radiant, content. I couldn't help it, I kept saying out loud, as I gently leaned over her body, "Treya, look at you! Treya, honey, look at you!"

That smile of contentment and release remained on her face for the entire twenty-four hour period that she was left in her bed. Her body was finally moved, but I think that smile is etched on her soul for eternity.

Everybody went up and said goodbye to her that evening. I stayed up that night and read to her until three that morning. I read her favorite religious passages (Suzuki Roshi, Ramana Maharshi, Kalu, St. Teresa, St. John, Norbu, Trungpa, the *Course*); I repeated her favorite Christian prayer ("Surrender to God"); I performed her favorite sadhana or spiritual practice (Chenrezi, the Buddha of compassion); and most of all I read to her the

essential pointing-out instructions from the Book of the Dead. (These I read to her forty-nine times. The essence of these instructions is that, to put it in Christian terms, the time of death is the time that you shed your physical body and individual ego, and become one with absolute Spirit or God. Recognizing the radiance and luminosity that naturally dawns at the time of death is thus to recognize your own awareness as eternally enlightened, or one with Godhead. You simply repeat these instructions to the person, over and over again, with the very likely assumption that their soul can still hear you. And so this I did.)

I may be imagining all this, but I swear that, on the third reading of the essential instructions for recognizing that your soul is one with God, something audibly clicked in the room. I actually ducked. I had the distinct and palpable feeling, at that utterly dark 2:00 a.m., that she directly recognized her own true nature and burned clean. In other words, that she acknowledged, upon hearing, the great liberation or enlightenment that had always been hers. That she had dissolved cleanly into All Space, mixing with the entire universe, just like in her experience as a thirteen-year-old, just like in her meditations, just like she hoped she would upon final death.

I don't know, maybe I'm imagining this. But knowing Treya, maybe I'm not.

Some months later I was reading a highly revered text of Dzogchen which describes the stages of dying. And it listed two physical signs that indicated that the person had recognized their own True Nature and had become one with luminous Spirit—that they had dissolved cleanly into All Space. The two signs?

*If you remain in the Ground Luminosity,  
As a sign of that, your complexion will be nice...  
And it is taught also that your mouth will be smiling.*

I stayed in Treya's room that night. When I finally fell asleep, I had a dream. But it wasn't a dream, it was more of a simple image: a raindrop fell into the ocean, thus becoming one with the all. At first I thought that this meant Treya had become enlightened, that Treya was the drop that had become one with the ocean of enlightenment. And that made sense.

But then I realized it was more profound than that: I was the drop, and Treya the ocean. She had not been released—she was *already* so. Rather, it was I who had been released, by the simple virtue of serving her.

And there, there it was: that was exactly why she had so insistently asked me to promise that I would find her. It wasn't that she needed me to find her;

it was that, through my promise to her, she would therefore find me, and help me, yet again, and again, and again. I had it all backwards: I thought my promise was how I would help her, whereas it was actually how she would reach and help me, again, and again, and forever again, as long as it took for me to awaken, as long as it took for me to acknowledge, as long as it took for me to realize the Spirit that she had come so clearly to announce. And by no means just me: Treya came for all her friends, for her family, and especially for those stricken with terrible illness. For all of this, Treya was present.

Twenty-four hours later, I kissed her forehead, and we all said goodbye. Treya, still smiling, was taken for cremation. But "goodbye" is the wrong word. Perhaps *au revoir*—"till we meet again"—or *aloha*—"goodbye/hello"—would be better.

Rick Fields, a good friend of both Treya and myself, wrote a very simple poem upon hearing of her death. Somehow, it seemed to say it all:

*First we're not here  
Then we are  
Then we're not*

*You looked into  
Our coming and going  
Face to Face*

*Longer than most of us  
With more courage and grace  
Than I have ever seen*

*And you smiled  
All the way—*

This is no hyperbole, it is a simple statement of fact: I have never known anyone who knew Treya who did not think that she had more integrity and honesty than any person they had ever known. Treya's integrity was absolute, unimpeachable by even the meanest of circumstances, and overwhelming to virtually all who knew her.

I don't think any of us will ever actually meet Treya again. I don't think it works that way. That's much too concrete and literal. Rather, it is my own deepest feeling that every time you and I—and any who knew her—that every time we act from a position of integrity, and honesty, and strength, and compassion: every time we do that, now and forever, we unmistakably meet again the mind and soul of Treya.

So my promise to Treya—the only promise that she made me repeat over and over—my promise that I would find her again really meant that I had promised to find my own enlightened Heart.

And I know, in those last six months, that I did so. I know that I found the cave of enlightenment, where I was married, by grace, and where I died, by grace. This was the change that had come over me that Treya had noticed, and about which she kept saying, “What is it?” The fact is, she knew exactly what it was. She simply wanted to know if I did. (“And as for the Heart, it is Brahman, it is All. And the couple, now one, having died to themselves, live life eternal.”)

And I know, in those last few moments of death itself, and during the night that followed, when Treya’s luminosity overwhelmed my soul, and outshone the finite world forever, that it all became perfectly clear to me. There are no lies left in my soul, because of Treya. And Treya, honey, dear sweet Treya, I promise to find you forever and forever and forever in my Heart, as the simple awareness of what is.

Treya’s ashes came back to us, and we had a simple passing-over ceremony.

Ken McLeod read passages on the development of compassion, which Treya had studied under Kalu’s guidance. Roger Walsh read selections on forgiveness from *A Course in Miracles*, which Treya had practiced daily. These two themes—compassion and forgiveness—had become the path that Treya most valued as the way to express her own enlightenment.

Then Sam performed the final ceremony, during the course of which a picture of Treya was burned, representing a final letting-go. Sam (or as Treya called him, “dearest Sammy”) was the only person that Treya had wanted to perform this ceremony.

Some there spoke final words of remembrance about Treya, and some remained in silence. Twelve-year-old Chloe, Steve and Linda’s daughter, wrote this for the ceremony:

*Treya, my guardian angel, you were a star on earth and gave us all warmth and light, but every star must die to be born again, this time in the heavens above, dwelling with the eternal lightness of the soul. I know you are dancing upon the clouds right now, and I'm lucky enough to feel your joy, feel your smile. I look at the sky and I know you're shining, with your brilliant, radiant soul.*

*I love you Treya and I know I'll miss you here, but I'm so happy for you! You have shed your body and your pains, and are able to dance the dance of true life, and that is the life of the soul. I can dance with you in my dreams, and in my heart. So, you are not dead, your soul still lives, lives on a higher plane, and in your loved ones' hearts.*

## *Death and the Eternal Life*

*You've taught me the most important lesson, what life and love is.  
Love is complete and sincere respect for another being...  
It is the ecstasy of the true self...  
Love extends beyond all planes and is limitless....  
After a million lives, and a million deaths it still lives...  
And it only dwells in the heart and soul...  
Life is of the soul, and of nothing else...  
Love and laughter ride with it, but so do pain and anguish...*

WHEREVER I GO

AND WHATEVER I SEE

IN MY HEART AND SOUL

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE WITH ME

I looked at Sam, and I found myself saying to those assembled:

“Not many people remember that it was here in Boulder that I proposed to Treya. We were living in San Francisco at the time, but I brought Treya here to meet Sam, to see what he thought. After meeting with Treya for just a few minutes, Sam laughed and said something like, Not only do I approve, I’m worried about her getting shortchanged. I proposed to Treya that night, and she said only, ‘If you didn’t ask me, I was going to ask you.’ And so, in a very special sense, our life together began here, in Boulder, with Sammy, and it ended here, in Boulder, with Sammy.”

We would eventually have a memorial for Treya in San Francisco—with remembrances spoken by Vicky Wells, Roger Walsh, Frances Vaughan, Ange Stephens, Joan Steffy, Judith Skutch, and Huston Smith—and in Aspen—with eulogies by Steve and Linda and Chloe Conger, Tom and Cathy Crum, Amory Lovins, Father Michael Abdo, and the monks from Snowmass Monastery. But somehow Sam summarized it all in just two sentences that day:

“Treya was the strongest person I have ever known. She taught us how to live, and she taught us how to die.”

In the following days, letters began to arrive. What struck me most was how many of them reported essentially the same events that I have recorded here. It seemed to me, perhaps in my grief, that maybe hundreds of people had participated in the remarkable events of those last two days.

Here is a letter from my family—a poem, actually, that an aunt had sent to me. (“This is a favored poem and symbolic of Treya we think, and one day we will all be reunited. Of this we are absolutely sure.”)

I found, in all the letters, a repeating of the words “wind,” and “radiance,” and “sunlight,” and “star.” I kept thinking: How did they know?

The "favored poem . . . symbolic of Treya," my aunt had sent to me, was very simple:

*Do not stand at my grave and weep;  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow;  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;  
I am the gentle autumn's rain.  
When you awake in morning's hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft star that shines at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry,  
I am not there . . . .*

Here is a letter, from a woman who had met Treya only once, a woman who was nonetheless overwhelmed by her presence (I kept thinking: This is so typical, because all you had to do was meet Treya *once*)—

"The dream came on Monday night the 9th, before I knew Treya was in the last hours of her life.

"As with most everyone, I felt so much the presence of her great soul and have carried it, like the light that was all around her, with me since then. The only other time I've seen and felt that kind of light around people was in the presence of Kalu Rinpoche."

(When Kalu learned of her death, he performed a special prayer for Treya. For Dakini Wind.)

"Maybe that's why the path was open to dream of her 'out of nowhere' that night. She touched so many of us so deeply.

"In the dream, Treya was lying—floating—on air . . . As I looked on, a great sound came, and soon I realized that it was the wind coming. It blew all around her body, and as it did, her body began to stretch out, becoming finer, until it became translucent and took on a soft glow. The wind kept blowing around her and through her with a sound that was also somehow music. Her body became more and more transparent and then began slowly bending into the snows on the side of the mountain . . . then up and up with the wind into that fire, crystalline powder that 'smokes' off the mountaintop to become a trillion stars, and eventually the sky itself.

"I woke up crying that morning, filled with awe and beauty . . ."

So the letters went.

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After the passing-over ceremony, we all watched the video of Treya speaking at Windstar. And an image went through my mind, the most difficult image I will ever have, an image that will never leave me: When we first received this video from Windstar, I played it for Treya. She was sitting there, in her chair, too tired to move, hooked to oxygen, in much discomfort. I played the video, the video of her speaking so straightforwardly and so strongly, just a few months ago, the video in which she had said, so clearly, "Because I can no longer ignore death, I pay more attention to life." The speech that had made grown men weep and people clap with joy.

I looked at Treya. I looked at that video. I saw both images together in my mind. The strong Treya, and then the Treya crippled by this cruel disease. And then Treya said to me, through her great discomfort: "Did I do all right?"

I have seen, in this lifetime, in this body, the great five-pointed cosmic star, the radiant star of final release, the star whose name will always be, for me . . . "Treya."

Aloha, and Godspeed, my dearest Treya. I will always, already, find you.

"You promise?" she whispered yet again to me.

"I promise, my dearest Treya."

I promise.

Ken Wilber, *Grace and Grit*

Death is the epitome of the truth that in each moment we are thrust into the unknown. Here all clinging to security is compelled to cease, and wherever the past is dropped away and safety abandoned, life is renewed. Death is the unknown in which all of us lived before birth.

Nothing is more creative than death, since it is the whole secret of life. It means that the past must be abandoned, that the unknown cannot be avoided, that "I" cannot continue, and that nothing can be ultimately fixed. When a man knows this, he lives for the first time in his life. By holding his breath, he loses it. By letting it go he finds it.

*Und so lang du das nicht hast,  
Dieses: stirb und werde,  
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast  
Auf der dunklen Erde.\**

Alan Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*

\* Goethe, West-östlicher Divan. "As long as you do not know how to die and come to life again, you are but a sorry traveler on this dark earth."