

**Understanding Death**  
**10 Ways to Inner Peace for the Grieving**  
**By**  
**Uma Girish**

# **Understanding Death**

## **10 Ways to Inner Peace for the Grieving**

Copyright 2012 by Uma Girish

Book Design: Sudeshna Das

Author Website: [www.umagirish.com](http://www.umagirish.com)

Get Your FREE download of [\*\*\*10 Gentle Ways to Beat Brain Fog While You're Grieving\*\*\*](#)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any mechanical, photographic or electronic process or in the form of a phonographic recording; nor may it be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or otherwise be copied for public or private use—other than for “fair use” as brief quotations embodied in articles and reviews—without written permission of the author.

The author of the book does not dispense medical advice or prescribe the use of any technique as a form of treatment for physical, emotional or medical problems without the advice of a physician, either directly or indirectly. The intent of the author is only to offer information of a general nature to help you in your quest for emotional and spiritual well-being. In the event you use any of the information in this book for yourself, which is your constitutional right, the author and the publisher assume no responsibility for your actions.

*For Amma and Appa, my angels and guides*

## Table of Contents

Author's Note

The extras

Affirmations

Meditation

How to use this book

What is the definition of death?

What is the point of life if we're just going to die?

What is the purpose of life?

Is God punishing me by taking a loved one away?

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Do some people die alone?

Why is grief so hard?

How do I deal with my own feelings of grief?

Are my deceased loved ones lost to me forever?

## Author's Note

When my husband, fifteen-year-old daughter and I moved from Chennai (India) to Chicago in the spring of 2008, we arrived with our suitcases, and hearts full of dreams. Ten days later, my mother was diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer. After a harrowing eight-month struggle, she passed away in January 2009.

Needless to say, my beginnings in this country were nothing short of nightmarish. My world was turned upside down almost overnight. I had few friends. I had barely learned how to drive. Most of my family was a whole continent away. Navigating a new country and culture during my grief journey took every ounce of strength and courage I had in me.

But I survived...as all of us who lose loved ones do. In fact, I did more than survive. In the most devastating experience of my life I found my greatest gift. A gift to serve others find their way through the darkness of old age, loss and grief.

I'm no psychic medium. I'm a regular person, just like you, who lost a loved one, desperately needed to heal the pain and didn't know how.

I delved deeper into the grief process because I had a burning need to understand it. I dove into questions surrounding death and dying. I trained to become a hospice volunteer. My curiosity was all-consuming. Where did my mother vanish to? What is the meaning of life? Why are we born if death is the inevitable inescapable end? Is there more to all this than I understand?

The search drove me to books and teachers, courses and seminars and discussions. I emerged with a clearer understanding of death...and life. Having found a measure of peace, I wanted to share what I've learned so others can find peace too. This book is my attempt to offer you just that.

Some of these concepts may resonate with you, and some not. Take what you will, and leave the rest. If there's one truth I've embraced on my spiritual quest, it is this: Deep within us, we have all the answers. Trust the feeling in your gut. That is where your wisdom lives. Listen to the whispers of your heart. For, there is no greater truth than personal truth. If you tune in to the nudge of intuition, you know what's right for you.

I wish you peace. And I wish for you the knowing that your loved ones who have passed on continue to be with you.

## **The Extras**

I've included an affirmation, and an activity or a meditation at the end of each answer to help you explore the truth of what you have learned. This will help strengthen your understanding and guide you toward further resources to deepen your wisdom.

## Affirmations: Your thoughts create your reality

There is a saying: Where intention goes, energy flows. What you focus on expands. Affirmations are an excellent way to focus on what you want more of in your life—whether it is better health, a well-paying job, or a vacation you’ve dreamed of. Repeating an affirmation several times a day is a gentle way of reprogramming your subconscious.

Affirmations must be accompanied by inner work for best results. As you repeat affirmations, you slowly become aware that a new reality is possible. Awareness is the first step in changing behavior. But awareness must be backed by specific action in order for new behaviors to take root. For instance, let’s say you have a problem with anger. You choose to repeat an affirmation—I am calm—several times a day. But the acid test is a situation that triggers your anger. If someone promises to call you and doesn’t, and you’re tempted to lash out when that person eventually does, catch yourself in the moment. Choose to respond differently. It is in the moment where you make a different choice that real change happens. Adding an affirmation strengthens your new behavior and makes you calm, less reactive.

Affirmations are wonderful tools to retrain the mind. Stop for a minute in the middle of your day and notice how much mind chatter fills your head. As you go about the day washing your car, doing the dishes or making a meal, notice what’s going on in your mind. Pause. Repeat an affirmation: *I am grateful for every breath I take* or *My day goes smoothly and effortlessly* or *My body is a miracle*. You can also do this when sitting in a doctor’s office, stalled at a traffic light, or waiting in line at Starbucks.

When my mind starts with “*Why* did she say that about me?” or “*Why* am I so terrible with figuring out technical stuff?” or “*It’s not my fault that...*” I’ve learned to push the Pause button. Then I simply switch tracks. I chant an affirmation or send out a prayer for someone, maybe even a stranger who’s standing in line ahead of me: God bless this person get through whatever difficulty he/she is facing. That is all it takes. Far more effective than useless mind chatter, it also sets in motion a positive energy in the Universe which eventually returns to the sender. Thoughts are powerful, so be wary of what you’re putting out there.



## Meditation: Not one more thing to worry about

Here's a common misconception: Meditation is for monks and mystics alone. That was my impression too. It was a while before I became comfortable with the practice and really understood its magical benefits on mind, body and spirit.

Meditation doesn't have to be one more thing you have to work hard at in your life. And you won't, when you become clear about the process. Think of meditation as you do going to the gym. Some days you run forty-five minutes on the treadmill and feel great at the end of it. On others, you run out of steam sooner than expected. The gym session was probably coming at the end of a tough day on the job. Or your spouse was less than kind and ticked you off. Or you were feeling plain bored and sort of dragged yourself to the gym. And it showed in the workout.

Similarly, some days I find it impossible to slow down mind chatter—days when I'm preoccupied with a specific problem, or have a crowded To-Do list. I also have those days when I close my eyes, start to focus on my breath and feel blissfully relaxed and calm. I feel so good I don't want my meditation session to end.

Accept the fact that you will have a mixed bag of days...and meditative experiences. And that's okay.

The essence of meditation is the art of getting quiet on the inside. Easier said than done. Pretty words when arranged on a page. But how do we get to that place? Closing your eyes is a good first step. Most brain activity is stimulated by the visual world we inhabit. Closing your eyes helps you focus inward. Next, concentrate on your breath. It helps you connect with your body. Be conscious of breathing in and breathing out. A rhythm of slow inhales and exhales helps you feel centered. It's often useful to work with a count: 1-2-3-4 on the inhale and 1-2-3-4-5-6 on the exhale. A long exhale helps you release tension. After repeating this 4 or 5 times, reverse the process with long 6-count inhales and 4-count exhales. Do this a few times and you'll notice how calm you feel.

If thoughts intrude—and believe me they will—simply watch them without judgment. *I need to pick up the dry cleaning...Liz needs a new pair of shoes...Wonder if there's any milk in the fridge...* You're simply watching a thought parade. Each time you watch a thought, return to your breath and body.

When you're ready to try meditating without the counts, listen to the sounds around you, smell the air, feel what's going on in your body. Be alive and present to the moment. Meditation is about being here, in the “now.”

The Buddhists say meditation is also washing dishes or peeling potatoes. When you're smelling the fragrance of the soap suds and watching them slide down the sink, feeling the hot water on your skin, awake, and mindful of how the sunlight sneaks in through the kitchen window and sparkles on your washed pan, it is an act of meditation.

Start with 5 minutes. If you're getting comfortable a week later, increase it to 8 minutes. Keep progressing till you get to 20 minutes or so. There is no rush. No time frame. Listen to your heart and do what works for you.

## How to use this book

My intention in writing this book is to help you find some serenity. You may use this book any way it works for you. There is no right or wrong way, but I do have a few suggestions:

- Pick a question you're struggling with, and try to understand the truth in the answer.
- Work on the activity/meditation and see what comes up.
- Journal your thoughts, impressions, feelings, fears and doubts. It is a good idea to log all your entries by date. This will help you track your progress.
- Read more, if the topic piques your curiosity. There is a wide array of authors and books to choose from.
- Sign up for a workshop on the subject.
- Find like-minded people and start a Spiritual Book Club or discussion group.
- Talk to a hospice chaplain.

## 1. What is the definition of death?

The dictionary defines death as “the total and permanent cessation of all vital functions.” In physical terms, death is declared when the heart stops beating and brain activity shuts down.

In spiritual terms, we’re all energy. Energy is not born and doesn’t die. It simply changes form. Every one of us is a soul that has a body; not a body that has a soul. The soul exits the physical body at the time of death. The body has served its purpose as the “temple” of the soul. It is then cast off, like a jacket that isn’t a good fit anymore.

Death does not exist; nor does birth. I’ve heard the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh describe it beautifully. He says that when a beautiful cloud disappears from the sky, it doesn’t vanish into nothingness. It falls as rain, then eventually merges with the ocean and through evaporation becomes another cloud. What he wants us to get is that *the cloud simply changes form*. Human beings are the same. We incarnate as physical bodies. When our time on the physical dimension is over, we simply transform into spirit or soul energy.

Where do these souls go? Some choose to work in an elevated realm and move to higher spiritual dimensions. Others choose to reincarnate in physical form. They return to Earth School to “complete” what was left “unfinished” from a previous incarnation. Let’s consider the example of a woman we’ll call Kathy who struggles with anger issues. Losing her temper over trivial matters, flying into a rage and screaming curses is normal in Kathy’s daily life. Kathy’s soul presents her with enough people and situations that “trigger” her anger. Why? Because that is how she has the opportunity to choose a better response. She is meant to “learn” what lies underneath her anger and how to heal it. If she fails to heal it before she dies, makes enemies and has forgiveness issues to deal with, Kathy’s soul will choose to reincarnate for her to “get” the lesson.

The ultimate purpose of all life is to be love. That is the grand lesson we’re all here to learn. No matter what the situation, trigger or personality that pushes our buttons, we’re here to conquer our lesser self and evolve to a higher way of being. We take as many lifetimes as we need to achieve this soul goal, depending on the choices we make and the actions we take. As we evolve, we become more mindful and spiritual and less vulnerable to the trials and temptations of an earthly life. Consider a philanthropist and a bank robber and you begin to understand where they are on the karmic scale. Both come from the same spiritual realm and will eventually return there. But one has learned his lessons on what is important in this life while the other will have to keep coming back until he changes his ways.

So “dying” and “rebirth” are simply cycles in the spiritual life. The incentive: Learn your lessons and ace your tests, for then you won’t have to keep returning to Earth School to master it all over again.

The soul, which is the Essence of who you are, is never born and never dies. It merely changes form.

**Affirmation:** I am a soul. I am immortal, infinite, eternal.

**Meditation:** Find a quiet comfortable spot. Sit down and close your eyes. Follow your breath “in” and “out.” Now scan your body, one part at a time. Feel the tingling, vibrating and pulsing in your palms, feet, shoulders. When you notice your hand as an energy field, can you figure out where your hand ends and something else begins? Not really. This tells you that everything in the universe is made up of the same energy. Everything is connected. Now watch the thoughts that come into your mind. Allow each thought to be there, and slowly pass, like a parade. Notice that there is the thought and there is the thinker of the thought. Become aware that you’re the thinker or observer. Imagine a spark in the center of your heart. That is your God-spark, your soul. Learn with each meditation to connect with your soul and live from the space of the soul. Honor your body by feeding it right, getting enough exercise and rest. But also bring your consciousness to the “spark” that lights you up. Remember, your soul is your guide on the earthly journey.

## 2. What is the point of life if we're just going to die?

You're not alone in asking the question. I know I have, several times. The question became even more urgent when I lost my sixty-eight-year-old mother to breast cancer in January 2009. My mother's life was one of enormous struggle. But she coped without complaining and did her best until breast cancer beat everything out of her.

After she died, the question—what is the point of a life of struggle and survival if we're going to die at the end of it?—began to give me sleepless nights. In the weeks and months that followed, it burned inside my brain. I simply couldn't shake it off, no matter how hard I tried.

As I began to find answers, I realized something. *We've got it all wrong.* We believe this life is about success, being better than others, making money, getting stuff and getting ahead.

On the other hand, our soul has only one agenda: evolution. That is why we're here in Earth School, getting the lessons we need through the people and circumstances that will best serve our growth in this lifetime. And when we're finished with this lifetime, the soul reincarnates. It comes back in another body to learn the lessons it didn't finish with in the previous lifetime.

Today, I get it. I understand the mind-body-spirit connection more clearly. I know this with a certainty that's hard to explain to non-believers: We don't die; we simply cycle through birth and death. What is death in the physical realm is birth in the spiritual realm. In physical form, you're a spiritual being having a human experience. When the physical journey is over, the spirit returns to where it came from. Until the next reincarnation, the next chapter in the Book of Life.

I know now. My mother did not die. She simply shed her earthly form. She continues to live. She was a soul living in a body. Most of us scoff at this as some ridiculous mumbo-jumbo. We're souls!? We dismiss the idea and walk around in a daze, feeding our egos and fueling our materialistic desires. We struggle and live in the space of fear. Life becomes all about survival, about avoiding death at all costs and in all forms. No conversations about death or dying, no contemplation of it. We run away as if we can outrun death if we get far enough. We do nothing to embrace what is our unavoidable end on the physical plane. In short, we walk around with a swagger and the illusion that death is what happens to others (and mostly in books, movies, television soaps), not to us. We don't ever feel the need to open the door a crack and look at the meaning of death. We do nothing to develop a comfortable acceptance of it and face it. Instead, we escape, run, hide, and bury our head in the sand.

Here's what I've come to understand and believe. Your soul and mine has undertaken this earthly journey with a very specific purpose. Our job is to figure out what that mission or purpose is. Once our time is up, our soul sheds its physical cloak and departs.

There is no soul that leaves before its time. In other words, when someone dies, they have “finished” what they came here to do.

But then how do we answer this question: what about a baby that dies a week after it is born? From everything I understand and know to be my personal truth, I believe it was that soul’s express desire to incarnate only for that short period of time. Every soul has an agenda that it clearly knows when it arrives here. So, when you were born, you came here with your purpose coded into you. The soul of that baby undertook the mission of experiencing life for only that tiny span of time. It is up to the souls of all those who were deeply touched by that baby’s passing to arrive at that understanding. Free will lets us choose how we respond. It is perfectly normal to mourn and grieve for as long as needed. But some are so devastated by the loss that their lives spin completely out of control. Others use the tragedy for a bigger purpose.

I think of the 13-year-old who was killed by a drunk driver and how her mom went on to pioneer Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The girl’s soul, I believe, took on the earthly mission of dying a tragic death so as to facilitate healing on a bigger scale. Over thirty-plus years, MADD has become one of America’s most widely respected non-profit organizations. It is a safe haven for many parents who have lost children under similar circumstances.

There are other examples. A mother who carried her baby to term and lost her on the day she was supposed to be born is today running workshops for bereaved parents and helping them heal through art therapy.

Another woman who lost her mother to cancer wrote a soul-stirring memoir about pain and loss, a book that is touching and connecting fellow mourners.

Not everyone who loses a child, or a parent, spouse or sibling goes out and does something inspirational, and that’s okay. Each of us has our own spiritual growth path. But many have turned the anguish and pain of such a terrible loss into a way to reach out and touch other lives.

**Affirmation:** I am a soul that has a body.

**Meditation:** Sit in a quiet spot, either on the floor or in a chair. Close your eyes. Take a slow and full deep breath. Release. Repeat twice more. Imagine your soul slipping out of your body. You can imagine the soul as a candle flame or a wave of white light. Your soul is now looking at your body from the outside. Imagine your soul expanding and floating, merging with the clouds and the blue skies. Imagine your soul becoming one with the breeze, the trees and sunshine. Feel as if you are a part of the universe. Expand, float, and merge. After a few minutes, imagine the soul returning to your physical body, lighting it from within. Take a deep breath. Bring your senses back to where you are. Feel the temperature of the room on your skin. Feel where you’re sitting. Ground yourself. Slowly, open your eyes.

### 3. What is the purpose of life?

As spiritual teacher and author, Caroline Myss, declares, “If you have life, you have purpose.” The sooner we start focusing on what we’re meant to do with this life, the more meaningful and joy-filled our days here will be. From the time we’re born, we’re taught to “be better than” others. Our parents rewarded us for good grades and successes on the dance floor, football team or debate society.

As we grow and learn and mature, the veil gradually slips from our eyes. We see the truth. The point of life is not the six-figure income, the brand-new BMW in the driveway, the sprawling house, or the exotic vacations in sun-kissed islands.

The point of your life, and mine, is about making someone else’s life a little better. The point of life is to Be love, compassion, kindness, peace and joy. “Being” love is different from “showing” love. It means adopting a state of being rather than “doing” or “performing” an act of love or kindness.

But I need to go work at my job because I have bills to pay, you say. In the midst of terrible struggle and survival in a gasping economy, our purpose only becomes larger. Today, more people than ever before are in need of understanding, kindness, and connection as they shoulder unimaginable burdens. There’s more opportunity than ever to live our lives in service so we can die without having to ask the question—what was my life all about?

Not all of us can be Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. It’s not the size of the personality or even the size of the service that matters. It’s about doing the small things with big heart. It’s simply being sensitive to the other person’s need and making the choice to serve.

Most of us walk around with this grand notion that our “purpose” has to be something spectacular. Not true. Smiling at a stranger in the supermarket aisle can be the most valuable act of service you perform today. That smile may be the only spot of sunshine in another’s life. Never underestimate the power you have to lift another’s spirits. A kind word or gesture, a cup of coffee, a hug—these seemingly small acts create huge ripples of love and connection. To be love is the single most important purpose of all.

We also express our purpose through our special gifts and talents. Every one of us, no matter how much we protest, is born with innate gifts and abilities. How do we know what our gifts are? They’re usually activities we are drawn to, things that we do easily. When we’re engaged in these pursuits, time seems to fly. For some, it is the ability to whip up mouth-watering meals. Cooking meals and feeding people brings them joy. For some others, it is the gift of public speaking. They feel most inspired when they’re standing in front of a group of people and sharing their wisdom or expertise. Some of us are gifted with the ability to listen to people. Some have tremendous affection for



animals, plants, orphans or the elderly. Some make magic with paper—origami—while others find their passion in working with children that have special needs.

No matter how much you deny it, you *do* possess gifts that are uniquely yours, and it is your job to figure out what they are. When your dreams and passions flow from that place, your purpose blossoms in beautiful ways. Jennifer Hudson is gifted with a rich voice because her purpose is to entertain and empower through her musical ability.

Deepak Chopra's purpose is to be a master teacher and help others "find" their own light.

Paula Deen's purpose is to make magic with food. It is important to be mindful of our purpose, to treat it as a divine destiny. Sometimes, celebrities lose themselves in the fame and fortune the gift brings them. When they lose the connection to their purpose as a result of ego-driven pursuits, they receive wake-up calls that bring them back on track.

Your purpose, no matter how ordinary your circumstances, is always meaningful. There is a reason why you and I are here. It is no random occurrence. We were put on this earth to serve a specific agenda, and it is up to us to get about the business of living it.

Our purpose is not divorced from our jobs and roles. Even as we perform our everyday roles as managers and mothers and engineers and uncles, we have the opportunity to live our purpose. For a corporate executive, it could be the dream of putting his kids through college. A cab driver's purpose could be to treat every passenger with courtesy and dignity. For a cop, it could be approaching his duties with a humanitarian attitude.

This leads us to, perhaps, the most important point in understanding our life purpose:

Doing versus Being. In the journey called life, most of us are preoccupied with the "doing" of our jobs or roles. In other words, we live in a system that rewards people who do more, and do it better. We don't often pause to consider the aspect of "being." Who are we "being" as we perform our many roles: mother, sister, wife, secretary, colleague, neighbor, or friend? Are we being Compassion? Love? Kindness? Peace? Forgiveness? Joy? Understanding? Or, are we being Judgmental? Resentful? Angry? Envious? Fearful? Insecure?

This key choice—who we choose to be—is what determines how we "do" our jobs. This shift can be huge in the way we serve people and enhance our sense of purpose as we move through our daily lives.

All "doing" flows from "being." A janitor can experience immense satisfaction in his work if he asks himself a profound question: Who am I being as I wash bathrooms and clean floors? Resentful at my lot in life, stuck in this crummy job? Or someone who preserves and protects the environment so others can do their jobs more effectively?

When a stay-home mom is being peace and joy and love as she raises her kids, the end-result of her "doingness" which flows from "beingness" is sure to be reflected in her kids.

Ask yourself who you are being as you do your jobs. Love is the one and only purpose of this life—whether you're an artist painting landscapes, a garbage collector driving a truck or a checkout clerk counting cash and bagging groceries. Whatever you're doing, do it with love and kindness.

**Affirmation:** My soul is here on a specific mission.

**Activity:** Make a list of all the activities that come naturally to you. They are activities that give you great joy. Time just flies when you're engaged in them. It could be anything from gardening to cooking, working with animals/kids, scrapbooking, teaching, fabric painting, listening, storytelling, quilting, or playing a sport. Brainstorm how you can bring more of what you love into your daily life...if you aren't already. For example, even if you need to keep your full-time job to pay the bills, can you volunteer a couple of weekend hours at the pet shelter? Or can you teach kids how to draw cartoon figures at a weekend workshop at the library? In other words, think about how can you stay connected to what brings you joy.

#### 4. Is God punishing me by taking a loved one away?

We come to this conclusion when we don't have a clear understanding of death. This is exactly what I believed too, especially when all prayers and pleas for my mother's medical miracle did not work. Cancer had the last laugh. My mother was not part of the survivor statistic. I felt betrayed by God. I was angry. "After all the trust I placed in You, You do *this* to me!" was all I could say for a long time. And, of course, I turned away from God for a while because I was confused and didn't understand how a loving God could cause so much pain in my life.

God, the strong silent one, stayed silent. At the time, I didn't have the clarity to realize how loud the voices inside my head were. So loud that that there was no way God's soft whispers could come through. I was neither still, nor receptive. I had, in fact, shut the door firmly on Him.

God, in His own inimitable way, got my attention. He cracked that door open a few inches at a time—just as a parent of a sulking teen would. He sent me people and books and messages and dreams and prayers to woo me back. It was his way of helping me come to terms with what had happened.

As my understanding of death evolved and I learned to embrace this new understanding, something started to shift. Little pieces of light began to filter through the darkness that surrounded me. I finally got it. God wasn't punishing me. He wasn't punishing my mother, either. I got it in a way I never had before.

Death is not a punishment. Death is the reward. My mother was freed from her pain and suffering when her soul left her physical body. Viewed unselfishly, that can only be a gift. It took me a long time to accept the idea, but when I did, it brought me peace.

Most of us think of death as The End. The last chapter in the Book of Life. It isn't. Death is a doorway. You just exit life through this doorway, and begin anew on the other side. We're all energy. And energy never dies; it merely transforms.

I'm not discounting the terrible grief that possesses us when we lose a beloved. I've lived and breathed it and choked through that sorrow. We mourn and grieve, and we should. It is natural. Grief is a normal response to loss of life. The thought that I will never see my mother in physical form still feels surreal. Her laughing eyes, the fresh scents of incense and sandalwood that clung to her skin, her arms looping around my neck in a warm hug, her infectious giggle...these are lost to me. And yet, I know she's around me, just in a different form. I've grown to accept that and learn to tune my radio to her new station. When I miss her too much I say, "Please come visit me" and she always obliges. When I go to bed that night, I will see her and smell her and hug her in a dream. When I wake up, I know I've been given a gift. Her love, blessings, wisdom and advice are always available to me. I only have to learn to trust and ask.

My mother was sixty-eight. Too young to die, my mind argued for a long time. If so, what about those who die what we call “an untimely death?” Husbands who leave behind young wives and kids to struggle on their own? A teenager who dies in a car crash? A child who steps out to splash around in a pool and drowns moments later?

I asked those questions. I know now. This wasn’t about entitlement anymore. Souls leave when they’re meant to and there’s nothing we can do to change that. All we can do is make peace with the knowing that each soul has a different path, a unique journey. It is not our business to interfere with it. Nor do we have the power to do so.

I believe now that our “soul blueprint” is written much before we arrive here. This blueprint includes the exact time and manner in which the soul will depart the physical body.

What’s more, every soul that arrives here does so with a clear agenda. So the sixteen-year-old who crashed his car did so because it was his time to leave and that was the manner his soul had chosen to leave.

We’ve all lamented, “He died too young,” or “It was not her time...she had so much to live for.” We’ve all heard people say: “If only she’d left an hour later, the weather might have cleared and the car wouldn’t have spun,” or “I told him to take the next flight, but he was keen on making it to that meeting,” or “If only I’d called Mom that day, I could’ve rushed her to ER and saved her life.”

Here’s the truth: No soul leaves a moment too soon or late. In other words, that is the exact life span the soul came here to experience. When it is time for a soul to leave, nothing and nobody can stop it or change it or delay it, not even by a nanosecond. You couldn’t have and you were never meant to, no matter how much you beat yourself up about it. If only we embraced this truth we would invite a whole new level of peace into our lives. Instead, we cling to the notion that “saving” this person was somehow within our control and we didn’t measure up to the moment. Control is an illusion. Let it go.

In order to understand this at a deeper level, we need to consider another truth. The moment we enter the physical plane—the moment of our birth—is also the “moment of forgetting.” We forget where we came from and the soul contracts we made. This is deliberate, to help us use free will and make choices that will determine the outcomes of our life. Equally, when we exit the physical plane—the moment of our death—is also the “moment of remembering.”

Imagine how insufferable life would be if you arrived here with a perfect memory of your “soul blueprint.” What if you remembered that your father was going to abandon the family when you were seven? Or that you were going to suffer tremendous health challenges in your early adulthood because of a rare virus that attacked your immune system? You’d live your entire life in a state of anticipatory dread.

Forgetting is a gift, not just for this reason. It also helps destiny and free will to work together. By no means does your soul blueprint limit your life. A skeletal framework of key events is destined but you do have room to maneuver and make choices that will

determine the course of your life. For example, let's say you're destined to live in Canada as part of your soul blueprint. Whether you choose to live in Toronto or Ontario is entirely up to you. Whether you choose to follow your passion and become a musician, or opt for the so-called security of an accountant's job is also up to you. If you're destined for a life of wealth and riches, it is up to you whether you choose to squander that money or be a philanthropist. The lessons you learn and those you don't will determine your next incarnation. If your life was about helping people and looking out for those who had less than you, you will carry over the positive karma of your actions into your next incarnation. If you live selfishly and mismanage what you've been given, you accrue negative karma. The lessons you didn't get this time will be part of your next lifetime assignment.

With this perspective, we can better understand issues surrounding death. Nobody abandons us by dying. Nobody punishes us by dying. God does not punish us by taking people we love away from us. It was simply their time to leave. As some day it will be yours. And mine. When that happens, our near and dear will grieve us, but we have every chance to reunite in a future life for the purpose of evolving to the next level of our soul growth.

**Affirmation:** I trust my soul with the bigger picture of this lifetime.

**Activity:** Participate in your "live" funeral. Gather a group of dear friends and tell them this is their opportunity to say farewell to you as if they will never see you again. Each person is free to choose how they wish to say goodbye. Some may choose to read heartfelt poetry, some may write personal letters, and others may choose to honor you in other creative ways. The idea is to immerse yourself in this experience: What about your life was truly significant to people whose lives you touched? At the end of this experience you will become really clear about how precious your time on earth really is and what you need to focus on. You will know in a compelling way how important it is to express your true feelings to people who are still alive, to reach out and connect before it's too late.

## 5. Why do bad things happen to good people?

“Good” and “bad” are value judgments we place upon people, events, circumstances and outcomes. We do so because we live on the earth plane which is the “realm of the relative.” It is a realm that is about contrasts and paradoxes. For instance, “light” wouldn’t exist without “dark”; “happiness” couldn’t exist without “sadness”; and, “black” wouldn’t exist if we didn’t know what “white” was.

In fact, all relationships fulfill exactly this purpose. You wouldn’t know who you are without being in relationship with another. That is why all relationships are sacred. Without a reference point called the “other” who are you? Imagine a world peopled by millions of identical you’s. But let’s suppose you know a man named John who thinks hobos are lazy bums that just want to live off others’ money. John doesn’t believe in charity and would never part with a dime. You, on the other hand, may decide to buy a coffee for the homeless man down the street. It is only in relation to John’s behavior that you’re able to experience yourself as “kindness.”

Or let’s say you have a colleague named Sue who’s impatient with her subordinates and is intolerant of anything less than perfection. You have a chance to experience yourself as “patience” and “tolerance” with your peers by accommodating the odd delayed deadline and being mindful of their needs. Once again, it is in relation to Sue’s “intolerance” that you are experienced by others as “tolerant.”

In other words, how can you evaluate yourself as “compassionate” unless you know what lack of compassion looks and feels like?

In the “realm of spirit”—our home from where we came and where we’re headed—there are no paradoxes. Love is all there is. That is why we incarnate in human form into a world of relativity. We challenge each other through our different attitudes, behaviors, cultural and racial preferences. It is only in such an environment that we have the opportunity to rise above a “separatist” mentality and embrace our oneness. We have the opportunity to become love.

When we arrive on our earthly journey, we start the process of labeling and classifying everything in our world. People are “selfish”, “kind” “lazy” “liars” and “generous.” Watch a child at play and you see the magic of innocence. Children attach no labels; they have no judgments. They are open to people, experiences and all of life.

As we grow into adulthood, we start to sort experiences into those that bring us “pain” and those that bring us “pleasure.” These experiences encompass even the simple circle of our daily lives. We crib and mope when we wake up to gray skies and a chilly drizzle. We smile on a sunny day. We become grouches when the weather turns hot and humid. In other words, we give the weather so much power over our feelings. We judge and label external events as good or bad

and decide to pick a mood based on those events. Think about it for a second. A sunny day is neither good nor bad just as a stormy day isn't. It just *is* the weather on a given day. For someone like me who's lived most of her life in Southern India where the sun blazes down most of the year, cool cloudy skies are a treat. Everything is relative.

I wondered why my mother who had lived by the rules had to suffer such a painful end. She had raised four kids as a stay-home mom through my father's descent into alcoholism, and later, his brain injury caused by a road accident.

In my spiritual transformation following my mother's passing, I found the answer to my dilemma. It was the single most significant event that changed the course of my life. I am a hospice volunteer, coach, writer and teacher, thanks to the life lessons that came my way through such a painful event.

On a bigger canvas, we judge a car crash, cancer and death as bad. When they happen to hard-working, God-fearing, kind people we wonder "why bad things happen to good people." I'm not being facetious enough to suggest we welcome painful events into our lives with open arms. Such events cause real suffering and hardship. All I'm trying to do is help you find a sliver of peace when things beyond your control happen and life spins out of control.

An effective way of doing this is to understand that the mind's agenda is very different from the soul's agenda. Let's look at an example. Mark shows up for work as usual one morning at the restaurant where he's a manager. Only, he has no idea it's his last day. Unexpectedly, Mark is laid off. Mark struggles with the decision. How will he go home and tell his wife? How will he feed his four –and two-year-old kids? In his mind, Mark labels himself a loser. He calls his ex-boss some really nasty names. His mind judges the situation with the data it has.

Fast forward three years into the future. Mark is following his passion as a bass guitarist in a local band. He's got a couple of decent gigs and an album is on the cards. He's happy, fulfilled, living the life he dreamed of. If Mark hadn't been fired, he'd probably have stayed in a cozy comfort zone. He may never have traded the job that helped him pay the bills to follow his muse. It was Mark's soul that created the situation which shoved him out of that comfortable rut. In the long-term, Mark got what he really desired, truly wanted.

But the mind can only work with the data it has at any given time so it judges, condemns, criticizes, and blames.

When seemingly bad things happen, we struggle and suffer. Doing so is part of our human journey. But when we know better, we're able to remind ourselves that there is a soul agenda at work here. Some possible good will come out of the situation, as long as we're willing to keep our eyes on the big picture and our hearts open.

Let's consider the soul agenda in a car crash that kills a teenager we will call Joe. What most people struggle with is this fact: It was Joe's soul that decided to exit the earthly plane at that exact moment. And this was decided much before Joe slid out of his mother's birth canal. There is no such thing as an "untimely" death. It only looks that way to us. Every soul here has its own individual journey. Why did Joe have to die at eighteen? There is the immediate reality of our experience (anger, grief, hopelessness), and there's the bigger picture Joe's soul knows. Joe's passing impacts all whom he knew in ways that will further their own journeys—if they choose to use the experience of their personal pain for greater good.

Some of us stay stuck in the space of mourning and grieving and blaming. We're unable to move beyond. And some take a powerful experience of loss and turn it around. They create messages of hope and healing in the form of books and art and music that touch the lives of kindred souls. They work toward creating new and more effective legislation. They raise funds to support a cause that was probably dear to the departed and what he lived for. The minute we're able to step away from "why?" to "how can I use this for the greater good?" no death needs to be in vain. It becomes one of the most powerful platforms one can serve from.

**Affirmation:** Everything that happens in the universe is in perfect divine timing.

**Activity:** Look back over your life. Find three events that you judged to be harsh, unfair and unpleasant occurrences. Reflect on what those events taught you. What blessings did they bring into your life? How were you changed by those events? Open your journal and write down your answers as also thoughts and feelings that come up. The next time you're tempted to judge a life situation as unpleasant, pause. Ask why it is happening and what it is trying to teach you.



## 6. What happens when we die?

One of the reasons why people who have near-death experiences (NDE's) come back to life, I believe, is to answer this question. They also return with a crystal-clear understanding of what is truly important in this life. Having experienced death, and life on the other side, they grab their second chance for change. They tune into a completely different way of “being” and “doing” in the world.

Not one of the near-death experiencers said, “Gee! Having to leave my body was the hardest thing ever.” On the contrary, the person experienced a sense of total freedom after leaving the physical form.

In the realm of spirit, the first stage of death is about this realization: *I am not my body*. The sense of disassociation with the physical form is almost immediate. Near-death experiencers also report a wonderful feeling of release and a complete absence of pain as the soul floats out of the body and hovers above it (The closest I can come to imagining the soul leaving the body is the ease with which I slip off a shirt I've worn all day). As the dead person watches paramedics try to revive the body and the anguish of family members, he wants to say, “Please don't cry. I feel fine. I'm not suffering at all. I wish you could hear me say that.”

The second stage of death is exactly how you've imagined it to be. In other words, what you believe will happen is what will happen. Each person's experience differs based on what they think will happen after they die. Some see a brilliant white light that draws them forward. As the light embraces them, they feel enfolded by a warm, pure feeling of unconditional love. Most have no words to describe the euphoric feeling. Some people float over flower-filled meadows. Some have an encounter with a God of their understanding. Some others meet angels, or loved ones who have passed on, even a great-grandma or an uncle who passed decades ago.

And then there are those who report seeing a thick gray fog as a sense of doom and gloom enveloped them. But this dark, depressing experience is quickly followed by one of peace and love. It is a time when they come to realize that the afterlife is not so much about retribution as it is about taking stock of how one lived their life: a life review.

The third stage is when the soul merges with the One Mind or God or The Eternal. People have different names for it while on earth. This is where you experience the divine. No longer is one separate, but a part of the Divine Mind.

What I find extremely comforting is the knowledge that death is not something to be feared. No matter how sudden or horrific our passing—terminal illness, car crash, a heart attack, or going to sleep one night and not waking up—the moment the soul leaves the body, there is the promise and experience of pure bliss. So, if you asked me today, “Are you afraid of dying?” my response

would be, “I guess I’m still afraid of “how” death will come—although I don’t dwell on it. But afraid of crossing over? Hell, no.”

After stage three is when we get to choose if we wish to reincarnate. Yes, it is our choice. And if we have unfinished lessons in the lifetime just lived—someone we didn’t forgive, addictions we did not overcome, fear, money management—our soul will choose to return to Earth School to finish those assignments. On the other hand, if we have reached a higher spiritual dimension during our earthly journey, we get to choose if we wish to move on to other realms or serve as spirit guides to those on earth.

If we choose to reincarnate, we get to make decisions about the circumstances we will be born into: Our geographic location, parents, family members, our vocation, experiences, people and challenges we will draw to ourselves in order to learn soul lessons. We reincarnate as many times as we believe it is necessary for our soul’s evolution. When our soul has fully evolved, the wheel of life stops.

This is a great incentive for us to accelerate our learning in this current lifetime. We can make the decision to forgive people who have wronged us, overcome fears and addictions, and become more loving, kind, generous and connected.

**Affirmation:** I choose to let go of thoughts and behaviors that no longer serve my soul.

**Activity:** In your journal, write down your list of incompletions. Think about resentments you hold against friends, family, neighbors. Think about people you chose not to help, people you turned away from. Is there a letter you need to write to someone? Do you need to ask a friend out to lunch and apologize for something you said or did, months, maybe even years, ago? Do you need to forgive someone? Do you need to return money or a book you borrowed? Do you need to visit a grandma or an aunt or possibly a parent you haven’t had much time for? Write down what you need to do to achieve completion. Get busy completing the incompletions and checking things off your list. Every act of completion will bring you more than peace of mind. It will open up a space for fresh energy to flow into your life. Things that have remained stuck will all of a sudden begin to come together in ways you never imagined possible. When you respond in loving ways to the people in your life, the Universe will respond in loving ways to all your dreams and desires.

## 7. Do some people die alone?

That is how we see it. That is how it appears to us because we live in a three-dimensional world. We believe what we see, hear and feel with our human senses as the complete truth.

Some people do end up lonely and isolated in their old age. There are no friends or family members on their horizon. Sometimes, it appears as if they brought these circumstances upon themselves because of the choices they made. Being mean and critical of those they loved, they alienated people and ended up growing old all alone.

It is worth mentioning here that some hospice programs offer “volunteer vigils.” As the dying person is running out of time and has no family, a volunteer is called in to “sit” with them. The volunteer reads scripture or poetry, sometimes talks or provides compassionate touch. The idea is to offer companionship so no one dies alone.

The spiritual truth is that “crossing over” is not a solitary experience. Loved ones who have passed on help the dying person transition into the afterlife. Sort of like the tour guides who show you around when you’re a new traveler in an unknown country. It is said to be a very joyous experience, this reunion with people who have gone before. Some claim to see “angels”, the heavenly kind, as their final moments draw closer.

Sometimes this is how we recognize that death is close. In my own experience, we had such a patient in hospice. Mary had been virtually comatose, but all of a sudden she became alert one afternoon. Her eyes took on a glazed look and she started to mumble. “I see Aunt Joanie,” she said. Her voice was so feeble that her family had to ask, “Who?” “Aunt Joanie,” she repeated. And then, more excitedly, “And there’s Grandpa Joe...and dad.” By this time, her family members were exchanging baffled glances. All the people Mary claimed to be seeing had been dead at least twenty-five years. But Mary’s face took on a peaceful glow. Within moments, her eyes began to close. She took one long, deep breath...and was gone. This is what helped her family understand and make sense of Mary’s last moments on the earth plane. She was being assisted in her transition to the afterlife by a host of loving family members who had passed on. Such incidents confirm the truth in what those in their last moments are communicating to us.

“Hardly a handful attended his funeral,” we say of those who don’t have too many friends because of their sour disposition or cold attitude. What we lay to rest is the mortal remains of a human being. His soul, his very essence, is not contained in that body anymore. The soul is always assisted in crossing over.

In truth, no one ever dies alone. Our passage into the next life is always guided.

**Affirmation:** I am always surrounded by loved ones. I am never alone.

**Meditation:** Sit in a quiet spot. Light a candle. Keep a photograph of your deceased loved one close to you, but make sure it is a picture of their young, healthy self. See them as their radiant self. Close your eyes. Think of a situation that brings on anxiety or worry. Visualize it. It could be a pile of bills to pay, the face of your difficult boss or even a project that you find challenging. Or it could be the fear of being laid off, or an unsuccessful job search. Feel the fear, tension, anxiety in your body. Maybe it manifests as tightness in your chest, or stiffness in the neck and shoulders. Maybe your stomach is in knots or your heart pounds at night not letting you sleep.

Now take a couple of slow, deep inhales and exhales. Feel the tension in that body part begin to lessen. Imagine the knots in your stomach untying, dissolving. Imagine stiff neck muscles melting like ice to water. Now bring to mind your loved one who has passed on...a parent, spouse, aunt, grandparent, sibling or friend.. Talk to them in your mind and tell them your problems.

You can also visualize them as pure light energy. See pure white light radiate from them and wrap itself around you. Feel the warmth and peace of the connection. If you could hear them speak, what would they be saying about the difficult situation you're in? What words come to mind instantly? Remember, Spirit is all about love and your loved ones reside in that realm now. Allow yourself to experience the calm that comes from knowing that you are always surrounded by love—even when you can't see it or feel it. Ideas and gut feelings will tell you how to proceed next.

## 8. Why is grief so hard?

Most of us have a small circle of “intimates.” By that I mean, a limited number of people we’re emotionally close to. We are only able to make this emotional investment in a small group. Usually these people are immediate family, dear friends and a few we share a special bond with. It could be a mentor, or a caring, generous neighbor who shepherded you through a lonely, difficult time in your life. Given the value of this investment, losing a member of this circle is a heartbreaking experience.

On a soul level, I believe we choose our parents, siblings, close friends and the people we encounter in a lifetime. So we came here with a particular set of people to achieve a specific purpose. We all share a soul connection. That is why even a dad who walked out of your life and abandoned you when you were little brings up complex emotions when he passes away. The daughter who barely knew him still suffers enormous loss. Often it is the buried issues, unspoken truths and unresolved relationships that bubble to the surface and demand resolution.

Our lives are so thickly interwoven that when the person dies, we feel as if a part of us died too. A piece of history just ended. Life, as we knew it, is interrupted, over. It is not possible for things to be “that way” ever again, no matter how badly we want it.

This is the part I struggled with the most. Being a continent away didn’t help matters either. I could not get over the fact that I’d never hear my mother’s voice, or go home and not find her there. I went crazy just thinking about it. Somehow I’d always foolishly, naively, imagined my mother would always exist in my world. Throughout her battle with cancer, I’d convinced myself that God had a happy ending in store for us. When she died, that conviction shattered into a million pieces and I was left to face the truth: Life would never be the same.

In some ways, grief forces us out of our cozy comfort zone. The grieving have no choice but to move to a new normal. Part of dealing with the emotions in a healthy manner is making the choice to let go of “life as it used to be” and embrace a different reality. Those who fail to do so find themselves emotionally “stuck.” These are some of the reasons why grief is so challenging. It is also why we dread a loved one’s passing, already experiencing an “anticipatory” fear of death. We do all we can to stall it, to push it away, to pretend it isn’t coming. Until it does.

The best way to deal with grief is: a) acknowledge it b) accept your feelings and emotions c) work through them d) make peace with a “new normal.”

I find solace in a Buddhist parable, of a mother who loses her child. Distraught, she accosts a guru and begs him to do something, anything that will bring her child back to life. He agrees, but on one condition: “Bring me a grain of rice from a house that has escaped the curse of death.” The woman travels through the village, going from door to door, only to be told story after story

of suffering and loss. Finally she returns to the guru wiser, compassionate and more accepting of her lot in life.

Death is the great leveler. Grief is universal. It is one of the things that touches us all, connects us. If we can use our personal experience of grief to ease another aching heart, our loved one's passing will never be in vain.

**Affirmation:** Pain and suffering are my greatest teachers.

**Activity:** Make a list of all the things you miss about your loved one. Maybe your list goes like this. "I miss our Saturday night movies; I miss her smile; I miss her famous chocolate chip cookies..." Now write another list of all that you enjoyed with the person and all that you're grateful for. "I'm grateful for the years we had together; I'm grateful for the love we shared; Thank you for the vacations we enjoyed..." Read your gratitude list once every day. It will help you focus on how this person enriched your life. It will also help take your focus away from what you feel you now lack.

## 9. How do I deal with my own feelings of grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss. So you could be grieving the loss of a job, a home or a beloved. If you've felt anger or sadness or jealousy and knew it was simply human to have those feelings, please know that it is the same with grief.

Grief over the physical loss of a loved one is, perhaps, the hardest loss to bear. People will tell you that time heals everything. I believe it's *what you choose to do with time* that heals. In other words, taking active steps to work through your feelings and healing your broken heart are more effective than burying yourself in work and hoping to feel fine after the first anniversary.

If you talk to someone who's undergone open-heart surgery, they will tell you this. Patients are advised to take it slow, start a program of cardiac rehab and gently ease into routines. I believe grief is the metaphorical equivalent. When you lose a loved one, you feel as if your heart has been ripped from your chest. And yet, a lot of people think it is okay to slap a Band-Aid on it and carry on.

We're all differently affected by grief. As a hospice volunteer I have regular conversations with bereaved family members. Some tell me they're relieved the struggle is finally over for their 85-year-old mom who was suffering from Alzheimer's. They tell me they've lived with the little deaths, the memory lapses along the way until she became someone they barely knew. I've also spoken to sixty-somethings who get all choked up and tearful six months after their dad died of lung cancer.

Your grief is your own. It doesn't have to look like anyone else's. Unfortunately, our culture rushes through it and expects the grieving to spring back. Almost as if grief is a common cold that can be banished with a few quick doses of Nyquil.

Grief takes time. For some it takes longer than others. Give yourself permission to grieve. What does "permission to grieve" look like?

- **Cry when you get congested with emotion.** Tears are a great release. Bottling up your emotions could cause more stress in the long term.
- **Find a trusted friend or mentor to talk through your feelings.** For me, just having someone to share the memories I'd made with my mother became a real need—and necessary for healing, as I later realized. Sometimes it's hard for your immediate family to provide a listening ear without jumping in to try and "fix" it to help you feel better. At other times, they do just the opposite. They stop talking about the loved one who's passed away as a way of protecting your feelings. This is why you need to find a neutral listener, someone you can trust with your fragile confidences.

- **Journal if it helps you.** Some people find it very therapeutic to confide their deepest feelings in a sheet of paper. It is a wonderful outlet and just as effective as sharing with a friend. Pour your anger (I'm so mad you've left me this financial mess to sort through), sadness (I'm so sad we'll never have the life we imagined), betrayal (How could you die when I believed you'd be fully cured and we'd be together?) and abandonment (I feel so alone, you have no idea) issues into your journal. This is a great way to "upchuck" all the emotions that will otherwise keep you stuck.
- **If you don't feel ready to "socialize", honor the feeling.** I needed to withdraw and marinate in my sorrow. Far from unhealthy, it gave me time to process my grief, to think things through. Friends who tried to help me "get out in the real world" had the best of intentions, but were not welcome in my life at the time. Some who are grieving prefer the distraction of a movie and dinner with close friends. But please don't feel pressured to grieve the way your family/friends believe you should. *You need to get out more, I'm coming over to pick you up, shopping will help get your mind off this* are some of the well-intentioned phrases you will hear. Listen to your heart. Honor what works for you. Your heart knows what you need and what's right for you. Most people who try to get you out of the "grief rut" mean well, but do they know what's going on inside you? And then there are those who want you to "hurry up and feel better" so they can feel better. Your grief is awkward for them. They don't know what to say or do, so if you just got over it, life could go back to being normal for everyone. Be polite, but firm in asking for what you need, whether it is space, time, company, or help with chores.
- **Find a Grief Support group.** The decision to do so literally saved my life. For those two hours that the group met weekly, I cried all the tears I'd dammed up. Also, I didn't feel alone in my grief. I was one among other survivors—all who had lost a parent and were swimming through the waters of grief. Just sharing my story in a safe space felt like a gift. We comforted the other, held their grief and asked the questions that needed to be asked.
- **Don't run from the grieving process.** You may have a job to go to and bills to pay and not a whole lot of time to fixate on your grief. I'd been working at a part-time position for only three weeks when my mother passed away. I took two weeks off to travel to India for her last rites, got back and dove into my job. My daughter was in high school at the time so I had chauffeuring duties in addition to stuff to take care of at home. My husband was overseas on business. In my daily routine, it would be 9:30 in the night before the dishes were washed and the kitchen cleaned. Then I'd allow my grief to bubble to the surface, sit down and have a long, hard cry. Getting busy and burying yourself in activities in order to escape your grief is a short-term fix. There's only one way out and that is through. If you run or hide from the grieving process, it will catch up in other ways. The body never forgets. Grief remains trapped in the cells and organs of your body. Feel it, deal with it, and heal it.



- **Tackle foundational issues.** Sometimes, foundational issues are unleashed when a parent passes away. Emotional baggage that you've been carrying since childhood and have not dealt with may come up for attention now. The feelings may surprise you with the power of their intensity. *Why is this stuff taking over my life now*, you may wonder. Unresolved issues have a way of surfacing when a life-changing event occurs. If you're overwhelmed by anxiety, fears or abandonment issues, seek professional help. A qualified grief therapist can hold your hand through the process. Don't beat yourself up that it's too late. It never is. Coming to peace with those issues is a gift you give yourself and your loved one who "feels" the energy of resolution. Finding closure can be one of the most important challenges in dealing with grief. For some, there is no closure. But there is tremendous calm that surrounds you from simply choosing to let go.
- **Help another heal from a broken heart.** When you've had some time to deal with your own loss and feel more "together," one of the best things you can do is reach out to a grieving person. Be a friend. Listen. Do their laundry, walk their dog or cook a meal for them. Encourage story-telling. Hug, hug, hug. In other words, don't try to "fix" their grief. Just be a caring, supportive presence in their life. You will experience something remarkable through this process. Your heart will open wide and you will feel a sense of joy and peace because what you do for another, you ultimately do for yourself.

**Affirmation:** My feelings are the language of my soul. I honor every one of them

**Activity:** If you're an introverted sort who finds it hard to "talk" feelings, try a Feelings Scrapbook as a starting point. This scrapbook can include anything that represents feelings to you: pictures that evoke emotion, phrases, quotable quotes, feeling words like *tender*, *scared*, *excited*, and *disconnected*. It may include inspiring poetry that reminds you of emotional events, nostalgia, happy or sad feelings. Look for sentence starters: I feel..., I need..., I desire... and fill them up. Once you get more comfortable with the vocabulary of feelings, try using it in your conversations with a good friend or family member. Expand your comfort level by writing a couple of sentences about how you *feel* on a given day, or when someone says or does something that produces a strong emotion in you.

## 10. Are my deceased loved ones lost to me forever?

It certainly seems that way, doesn't it? But it's far from the truth. Hard as this is to believe, your loved ones are closer to you than ever before. Most psychic mediums say that our loved ones who have passed on are just a thought away. If you think of them, they know they're in your thoughts. And they're right here, if you need them.

It is important to remember that you don't need to "talk" in order to communicate in the spiritual realm. Communication happens instantly through thought. If you've read the experiences of those who've had NDE's, you know this. When they meet their family members and friends on the other side, they simply "think" a thought and the other person gets it immediately. It is called "telepathy."

What's interesting is that telepathic communication happens in our realm as well. We have the power to engage in it. But we shrug it off as "coincidence." Surely, you've had this experience. You're thinking of a friend and she calls you. Or you dream of someone you haven't seen in a while and the very next day you run into him in a coffee shop. "What a coincidence! I dreamed of you just last night," you say, and dismiss it. Far from coincidences, these are illustrations of the power of thought, of telepathic connection.

Your loved ones on the other side want nothing more than to support you any way they can. All their actions are supportive. The one thing they cannot, and will not, do is interfere with your free will. They cannot tamper with your karmic path and the lessons you're meant to learn through your life experiences.

I have conversations with my deceased parents pretty regularly. Not in full view of people who might possibly judge me and label me crazy. I do it in the privacy of my home. If I'm struggling with a specific problem, I ask for their guidance. If I'm missing them, I request a dream visitation. I almost always get a response. The answers to my problems have showed up in a variety of ways. I'm guided to a book on the library shelf, or receive a timely email from a sibling. The lyrics of the next song on the CD contain a message, or sometimes, I feel a strong gut reaction. It's a knowing that I need to call a particular person or go to a place to find a specific resource.

On my birthday this year I missed both my parents. My mother was always one among the first to call me on my birthday and fill the phone line with her flowery wishes. So on birthday morning I sent out a request to them. *Please show up today so I know you're with me.* As the day wore on, nothing happened. I saw no signs, nothing to suggest a birthday presence from either parent. As evening drew closer, my spirits sagged a little. My husband and daughter had invited a few close friends for a surprise dinner. As everyone gathered, my husband set out the birthday cake. When he flipped open the lid of the cake box, I gasped. Sitting on the cake were two plastic

butterflies. Butterflies are a sign of the afterlife—symbolic of the transformation from one form to another. This was confirmation, real proof that my parents were still with me and more than happy to grant my birthday wish.

Another incident happened on New Year's Day of 2011. It was my first New Year after both my parents had passed away. Sitting in my living room I was thinking about how life had changed, how everything was so different this year. I missed my mother's cheerful voice wishing me a happy new year. Just then the phone rang. It was my sister who lives in the Middle East. As we were chatting, a card from the mantel fluttered to the floor. Surprising, because I live in Chicago where all the windows are sealed tight in the winter months. There was absolutely no chance of a breeze. The cards had been standing on the mantel for over ten days. After I got off the phone I picked up the card. The first words that registered were: "Happy New Year—Love, Amma and Appa." In Southern India where I come from, *Amma* is the word for mother and *Appa* for father. This is how I address my husband's parents as well. The card that fell to the floor was the one my parents-in-law had sent us, but I knew in my heart that my parents had used it to communicate their New Year wishes. It was a matter of minutes between my having the thought—missing them—and the card dropping to the floor. We're only a thought away from our loved ones who have crossed over.

**Affirmation:** I am always connected to my loved ones who have passed on and continue to hear from them.

**Meditation:** Sit in a quiet spot and close your eyes. Take a couple of deep and full breaths. Bring to mind a loved one who has passed on—preferably someone you enjoyed a close relationship with. Visualize them as healthy and radiant as they are in the afterlife. Tell them a problem you're currently dealing with. It could be a relationship challenge, a job search, or a geographical move. You can speak the words out loud as you would in a real conversation, or simply imagine the conversation in your mind. Make a specific request: *Please show me a sign I will recognize in the real world that this is the right decision or Lead me to the right person who can help me with this or Send me a message about next steps I should take.* Thank them for continuing to remain in your life.

In the days following the exercise, be alert to signs and messages you receive from people or in your dreams. Be open to opportunities that show up for you. A question that is often asked is: How do I know it's the right decision? If the decision produces a peaceful feeling in your heart you will know that it is the right one. Don't worry about the butterflies that seem to be taking over your stomach. It is normal if your decision is one that requires stepping out of your comfort zone. Trust the feeling in the deepest part of your being that you're on the right track.

\*\*\*\*\*

