

Self-Empowerment

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The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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FAITH AND MEANING

Through the years, many individuals have shown great courage and faith, working in various fields of endeavor that bless us all. Often the personal stories of those individuals connect us with deeper faith and meaning in our own lives. They serve as beacons of light, for the qualities they embody continue to inspire and teach us. Two such individuals passed away this year, but their contribution and indomitable spirit will impact our lives for many years to come.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Christopher Reeve were two powerful individuals whose contributions will continue to lead to a greater quality of life for many. Elisabeth is known mainly for her honest and compassionate communication with terminal patients and for establishing an understanding of psychological stages in dying persons. Christopher became an advocate for people with paralysis after his own tragic accident left him paralyzed.

We want to honor the lives of these two individuals and we want to assure each and every reader (that means YOU) that *every* life is a gift and holds within it the essence of the Divine. Each of us has a gift to share, and whether we are famous or not, whether we directly touch many lives or only a few, our gifts are precious. Keep extending the gift. Nobody can do it quite the same as you!

FROM SUFFERING TO SERVICE

Often the motivation to champion a cause comes from an individual's own experience of suffering or witnessing suffering in others. In the Bible, suffering may be described as a drought upon the land. In sacred writings, a drought, or a lack of water, symbolizes a lack of life energy, sustenance, joy, abundance, or enthusiasm for life.

All of us already have, or will have, an experience of drought in our lives. Our droughts can show up in various forms – health problems, financial difficulties, the loss of a loved one, disappointment, anxiety or depression.

What reaction do you have to your drought experience? Do you think you are being punished? Do you feel paralyzed by it? Do you whine and complain? Do you feel victimized in an unfair world? Do you feel alone or do you feel supported? Do you reach out for inspiration and wisdom? Do you look into possible

resources to get through it? Do you turn to God, your Higher Power, or some aspect of the Divine?

The drought experience is one of pain, but it may not necessarily be one of great suffering. There is no human life that does not experience some form of drought. As humans in a world of duality, change, difficulties, sickness and death, there will eventually be some experience that is apparently one that you wish you could avoid. Suffering, however, is only experienced to the degree that you resist what is. Star Trek fans hear The Borg say, "Resistance is futile!" which is a rather Buddhist idea. The pleasures and pains of life come and go in waves as described in the following story:

A man hears a knock at the door – "Who is it?" – "Joy." – "Great, come on in!" – Joy stays a while and leaves. A little while later the man hears a knock at the door – "Who is it?" – "Sorrow." – "Oh, no, go away, don't come in here." (He tries to lock & barricade the door, cover the windows, etc.) – But eventually sorrow comes in, stays a while and leaves. The man says "Why is it that Joy only hung around for such a short time, while Sorrow seemed to be here so long?"

Our suffering is the effort to keep sorrow out, instead of allowing the forms of life that come and go in waves to be the ever-changing environment in which we practice the presence of Love. This is not to say we should be a doormat, but instead hold the consciousness of God's Loving Presence during the challenges and changes of life, and take sensible action that reflects the life-affirming presence of the Divine.

To live a life of no suffering is to live as the Serenity Prayer describes: "God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference."

Notice that God is in the prayer, not just I hope I can change things and figure out which things I should try to change. The life of no suffering includes our Creator. We cannot do it alone. Without God, we are small, weak, vulnerable, and mortal. Without God, we do not know the bigger picture. With God, we tap into the infinite Life we are heir to as a child of the Most High. With God, we rely on a power that knows how to use each experience as a stepping stone toward the fuller expression of a greater Love.

Despite our remembering and forgetting, any effort to remember God, during good times or bad, yields the Prodigal Son experience. Metaphorically, the Divine rushes

out to meet us on the road home, without any accusations or complaints. It is never too late. We are always welcome to return to our heavenly home. Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*, describes the Prodigal Son story as a journey from unconscious perfection, through apparent imperfection and evil, to conscious perfection.

Take a chance and allow an awareness of Divinity to be with you in your drought experiences. Choosing between handling life's challenges alone and being companioned by our Creator makes a Heaven of a difference.

That reminds me of another metaphorical story of the difference between heaven and hell. In hell, everyone sits around a big pot of soup with long handled spoons, trying to eat the soup, but unable to get any into their mouths because of the long handled spoons. In Heaven, everyone sits around a big pot of soup with long handled spoons, and they feed each other.

Blessings, Love and Hugs!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004)

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, psychiatrist and author of the ground-breaking book, *On Death and Dying*, died Tuesday evening, August 24, 2004, in Scottsdale, Arizona of natural causes. She was surrounded by her family and close friends. She was 78.

"Every moment of her life was devoted to dying patients and what they were going through," noted long-time friend Mwalimu Imara, who has been close to her since the beginning of her research. "Her prolonged illness following several strokes only made her even more determined to speak up for the rights of the terminally ill."

Tributes began pouring in almost immediately from people around the world who have been stirred by Dr. Kübler-Ross' teachings. According to her longtime publishing agent Barbara Hogensen, Kübler-Ross authored more than 20 books, many of which have been translated into more than twenty-eight languages. Titles include: *To Live Until We Say Good-Bye*, *On Children and Death*, *AIDS: The Ultimate Challenge*, and her autobiography, *The Wheel of Life*. Her most recent book, *Real Taste of Life*, was a photographic journal produced in collaboration with her son, Kenneth, a travel photographer, who helped care for her both personally and professionally since she officially retired to Arizona in 1995. She had recently finished drafting her final book, *On Grief and Grieving*, with longtime collaborator and friend, David Kessler.

Dr. Kübler-Ross was born as one of triplet sisters in Zurich, Switzerland, on July 8, 1926. Always spirited, she decided upon a medical career early in her childhood against the wishes of her father. The focus of her work in

death and dying crystallized in 1945. She was a member of the International Voluntary Service for Peace who helped in ravaged communities after World War II. In the concentration camp, Maidanek, carved into the walls where prisoners spent their final hours, she discovered the symbolic butterflies which would become her symbol of the beautiful transformation that she believed occurred at the time of death.

After graduating from medical school at the University of Zurich, where she met future husband and fellow medical student Emanuel "Manny" Robert Ross, she came to the United States in 1958. She worked in major hospitals in New York, Colorado, and Chicago, and she was appalled by the standard treatment of dying patients. "They were shunned and abused; nobody was honest with them," she said. Unlike her colleagues, she made it a point to sit with terminal patients, listening as they poured out their hearts to her. While simultaneously raising two small children, she began giving lectures featuring dying patients who talked about their most intimate dying experiences. "My goal was to break through the layer of professional denial that prohibited patients from airing their inner-most concerns," she wrote.

Her bestselling first book, *On Death and Dying*, 1969, made her an internationally-renowned author. Even today, her trail-blazing book is required reading in most major medical, nursing, and psychology programs. A 1969 *Life Magazine* article outlining her work gave further mainstream credibility and awareness to this new way of dealing with dying patients, although her conclusions were quite revolutionary at the time. "People today find it hard to believe that her now commonly-accepted conclusions were quite revolutionary at the time," said her sister, Eva Bacher. "She was always very proud that her work helped to bring the hospice movement into the mainstream in the United States."

Throughout the 1970's, Dr. Kübler-Ross led hundreds of workshops and spoke to standing-room-only crowds throughout the world. The "five psychological stages of dying" (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance) outlined in her book became accepted as common knowledge throughout the world. She continued to both learn and teach in many important medical facilities and hospitals as her influence grew.

She assumed the Presidency of the Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Center and the Shanti Nilaya Growth and Healing Center in the late 1970's, a base from which she gave "Life, Death and Transition" workshops worldwide. She also continued her personal interest in mysticism, the afterlife, and other less commonly accepted forms of therapy. In the 1980's, she purchased a 300-acre farm in Head Waters, Virginia, to serve as a healing and workshop center, and called it Healing Waters. "Always controversial, she turned her focus at the time into helping babies born with AIDS when nobody else wanted anything to do with them," said Frances Leuthy, who was her assistant and ran the

Virginia center. She officially retired to Arizona in 1995, after a series of serious strokes debilitated her body, and a fire, which destroyed her house and all of her belongings. She left her farm behind for a fresh start near to son, Kenneth.

Even in retirement, she continued to receive hundreds of visitors from around the world, including celebrities such as Mohammed Ali, Susan Sarandon, and Lady Sarah Ferguson. The March 29, 1999 issue of Time Magazine named her one of "The Century's Greatest Minds" in a summary of the 100 greatest scientists and thinkers of the century. Throughout the span of her life, she continued to encourage students with similar interests, and regularly contributed forwards, chapters, and sections to numerous other authors' books regarding death, dying, and grief. She was the recipient of more than 20 honorary degrees from colleges and universities across the country. She participated in a number of advisory boards, committees and societies, and was one of the founders of the American Holistic Medical Association.

Always outspoken, her work in challenging the medical profession to change its view of dying patients brought about great change and advanced many important concepts such as living wills, home health care, and helping patients to die with dignity and respect. "She always was, and will continue to be, a strong voice for the rights of terminally ill patients," noted Dr. Gregg Furth, New York Jungian psychologist, a close family friend and supporter.

In the final years of her life, she looked forward to her own quick "transition" and tried to deal with the frustration of helping thousands of people to accept their own death, and yet being unable to direct her own. Never fearing death, she wanted only to follow what she believed, "Life doesn't end when you die. It starts." She is survived by son Kenneth Lawrence, a photographer in Scottsdale, Arizona; daughter Barbara Lee Rothweiler, a clinical psychologist in Wausau, Wisconsin, (husband, Jeffrey); granddaughters Sylvia and Emma; and sister Eva. She is preceded in death by former husband Manny; brother, Ernst; and sister, Erika.

Of her impending death she said, "I am like a plane that has left the gate and not taken off. I would rather go back to the gate or fly away."

www.elisabethkublerross.com



CHRISTOPHER REEVE (1951-2004)

MOUNT KISCO, New York (AP) -- Actor Christopher Reeve, the star of the "Superman" movies whose near-fatal riding accident nine years ago turned him into a worldwide advocate for spinal cord research, died of heart failure, his publicist said. He was 52.

Reeve went into cardiac arrest Saturday while at his home in Pound Ridge, New York, then fell into a coma and died Sunday at a hospital surrounded by his family.

His advocacy for stem cell research helped it emerge as a major campaign issue between U.S. President George W. Bush and his Democratic opponent, John Kerry. His name was mentioned by Kerry during the second presidential debate Friday evening.

In the last week, Reeve had developed a serious systemic infection from a pressure wound, a common complication for people living with paralysis. He was hospitalized Saturday.

Dana Reeve, his wife, thanked her husband's personal staff of nurses and aides, "as well as the millions of fans from around the world who have supported and loved my husband over the years."

Reeve's life changed completely after he broke his neck in May 1995 when he was thrown from his horse during an equestrian competition.

Enduring months of therapy to allow him to breathe for longer and longer periods without a respirator, Reeve emerged to lobby Congress for better insurance protection against catastrophic injury and to move an Academy Award audience to tears with a call for more films about social issues.

"Hollywood needs to do more," he said in the March 1996 Oscar awards appearance. "Let's continue to take risks. Let's tackle the issues. In many ways our film community can do it better than anyone else. There is no challenge, artistic or otherwise, that we can't meet."

He returned to directing, and even returned to acting in a 1998 production of "Rear Window," a modern update of the Hitchcock thriller about a man in a wheelchair who becomes convinced a neighbor has been murdered. Reeve won a Screen Actors Guild award for best actor.

"I was worried that only acting with my voice and my face, I might not be able to communicate effectively enough to tell the story," Reeve said. "But I was surprised to find that if I really concentrated, and just let the thoughts happen, that they would read on my face. With so many close-ups, I knew that my every thought would count."

In 2000, Reeve was able to move his index finger, and a specialized workout regimen made his legs and arms stronger. He also regained sensation in other parts of his body. He vowed to walk again.

"I refuse to allow a disability to determine how I live my life. I don't mean to be reckless, but setting a goal that seems a bit daunting actually is very helpful toward recovery," Reeve said.

Before the accident, his athletic, 6-foot-4-inch frame and love of adventure made him a natural, if largely unknown, choice for the title role in the first "Superman" movie in 1978. He insisted on performing his own stunts.

Although he reprised the role three times, Reeve often worried about being typecast as an action hero.

Though he owed his fame to it, Reeve made a concerted effort to, as he often put it, "escape the cape." He played an embittered, crippled Vietnam veteran in the 1980 Broadway play "Fifth of July," a lovestruck time-traveler in the 1980 movie "Somewhere in Time," and an aspiring playwright in the 1982 suspense thriller "Deathtrap."

More recent films included John Carpenter's "Village of the Damned," and the HBO movies "Above Suspicion" and "In the Gloaming," which he directed. Among his other film credits are "The Remains of the Day," "The Aviator," and "Morning Glory."

Reeve was born September 25, 1952, in New York City, son of a novelist and a newspaper reporter. About the age of 10, he made his first stage appearance -- in Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Yeoman of the Guard."

After graduating from Cornell University in 1974, he landed a part as coldhearted bigamist Ben Harper on the television soap opera "Love of Life." He also performed frequently on stage, winning his first Broadway role as the grandson of a character played by Katharine Hepburn in "A Matter of Gravity."

Reeve's first movie role was a minor one in the submarine disaster movie "Gray Lady Down," released in 1978. "Superman" soon followed. Reeve was selected for the title role from among about 200 aspirants.

Active in many sports, Reeve owned several horses and competed in equestrian events regularly. Witnesses to the 1995 accident said Reeve's horse had cleared two of 15 fences during the jumping event and stopped abruptly at the third, flinging the actor headlong to the ground. Doctors said he fractured the top two vertebrae in his neck and damaged his spinal cord.

While filming "Superman" in London, Reeve met modeling agency co-founder Gae Exton, and the two began a relationship that lasted several years. The couple had two sons, but were never married.

Reeve later married Dana Morosini, and they had one son, Will, 11. Reeve also is survived by his mother, Barbara Johnson; his father, Franklin Reeve; his brother, Benjamin Reeve; and his two children from his relationship with Exton, Matthew, 25, and Alexandra, 21.

A few months after the accident, he told interviewer Barbara Walters that he considered suicide in the first dark days after he was injured. But he quickly overcame such thoughts when he saw his children.

"I could see how much they needed me and wanted me ... and how lucky we all are and that my brain is on straight."

Christopher was a hero to many people, yet he was most moved by others, stating, "I think a hero is an

ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles." He adamantly believed that nothing was impossible and worked tirelessly to find a cure for paralysis.

For those who care to do so, the family has requested that donations be made in his honor to the Foundation.

Our memory of Christopher's inner strength will serve as inspiration for the ongoing work of the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation and we will continue in his honor to be steadfast in our goal of finding treatments and a cure for paralysis.

"So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable." – Christopher Reeve

www.paralysis.org

Eternity is not something that begins after you are dead. It is going on all the time. We are in it now.

— Charlotte P. Gilman

Books Through Bars

Books Through Bars (BTB), founded in 1989, began as a project of New Society Publishers when indigent prisoners began asking for damaged books. Soon a few dedicated volunteers began filling 40+ requests per month. Today BTB receives over 1,000 requests per month for books from federal and state prisons all over the United States.

How you can help

· Join BTB on Tuesday evenings, 7:30-10:30pm and/or the first and third Saturday of each month, 11am-3pm to pack books for distribution to prisoners.

· Financial donations and/or postage stamps are helpful.

· Donations of books: especially dictionaries, thesauruses, GED and ESL workbooks, high school textbooks, African-American studies, Mexican-American studies, vocational training, addiction recovery, yoga, meditation, how-to art books.

Books Through Bars

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Kindness By Rev. Sue Borg

There is an inherent generosity in the human spirit to be of help, to be of service to others. What is it that makes us decide to be of service. What is it that inspires us and encourages us to be of support to others? What is it that makes you want to serve others.

The dictionary describes service as “work done for, and benefit given to another; an act of kindness.” As an Interfaith Minister, I have studied the world religions and found the common thread in all religions is The Golden Rule. Treat each other in the exact manner in which you would like to be treated.

His Holiness, The Dalai Lama says, “My religion is very simple, my religion is kindness.” After the events of the past year, I believe it is kindness that will help the world return to a more loving place. Kindness is what will bring us back to feeling safe and loved and loving.

Thoughtful communication, loving words and feelings of unity are kindness in action. Being kind inspires us to be more loving, which in turn inspires us and leads us to be of service to others. When we are being of service because it is our heart’s desire, things come to us in a very loving way. Spirit shows up for the task at hand. When spirit is at hand, all tasks become easier.

When our focus is on helping, our minds move away from fear and problems to a place of peace and clarity. There is no place where love and fear can exist simultaneously, so if peace is your goal, you must find a place to share your kindness and service as then watch how things change.

One way to do this is to bring to mind one who has made an important contribution to your life – anyone who actually made you feel loved and supported. When you feel loved and supported, then you can easily go forward to be of service in the world – no matter what form it takes. Being of service happens naturally as you live and express gratitude for all that has been given you.

I’m sure you have experienced loving thoughts and deeds from others many times. Remember how it felt. The greatest gift you can offer anyone is kindness and full appreciation. When we are kind and take the time to be grateful, then God rushes in with more. This is the way in which we move forward to help others in a very kind and rich manner.

With gratitude in my heart, I bless you all today with

a heart full of kindness, a mind full of gratitude, and a joyful spirit to nurture yourself by nurturing others. Teach and nourish our children with loving-kindness. This is the way in which we celebrate all that is good and true and beautiful in the world. God Bless You.

Reverend Sue Borg shares her “simple truth” as a teacher, speaker, counselor, and retreat leader. For information regarding the 2005 International *A Course In Miracles* Conference at www.iammiracle.com.

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A human being is part of a whole, called by us the "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

– Albert Einstein

Daily Word

I am safe and secure in the love of God.

Financial security, personal safety, home and auto alarm systems, insurance policies – advertisers are eager to remind me of all the ways I can attempt to purchase peace of mind.

But my sense of security doesn't ultimately come from creating or controlling the events or people around me. I simply shift my focus from fear about what is going on around me to faith in God. I realize that God and I are one. I have always been and will always be secure in God's love. I dwell in God's heart, and God dwells in mine.

The truth that God loves me is the source of my security. I protect myself and my belongings in outer ways, but to experience the peace of mind of true security, I need only know that I am safe and secure in the love of God.

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The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.