

Please Die Soon: Finding Compassion for Unimaginable Thoughts

When someone you love is dying, there could be a secret moment, when things are really bad, when you hear yourself silently whisper the unimaginable thought: Please die soon. Say what??? It is with a brave heart, writes Elaine Smookler, that we look at this whole journey of death and make peace with the wild currents that threaten to pull us under.

BY [ELAINE SMOOKLER](#) | MAY 15, 2024 | [GRIEF & LOSS](#)



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My beloved lay dying in the living room. After three years of ducking and dodging the cancer that had been chasing him, there was nowhere left to run—he was officially a goner and his rapidly deteriorating state left nothing to hold on to.

I had been by my honey's side for almost 25 years, accompanying him through every which kind of joyful and terrifying life situation. He was the love of my life, my dear friend and collaborator, and the person who made me laugh more than anyone else.

Suddenly, he was adventuring where I could not go, having visions that only he could see.

And as I watched him in this final dissolve, I felt the wind going out of my sails. I couldn't stop him from dying. Like an animal caught in a leg-hold trap, I wanted to escape, or better yet, prevent what was happening in front of me. I felt utterly helpless.

the medical mayhem was ramping up, I heard the smallest voice inside of me beg him, *Please die soon.*

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The thought had surfaced before I could push it down. I heard myself think it. And now, there was no going back—I was damned for all time. I had just heard a thought in my head that was the exact opposite of everything I wanted. I didn't want him to die—ever. And yet some part of me was encouraging him to go. What was happening? Who was I?

Just as I was about to burn myself to the ground for being a traitor and betrayer, it dawned on me that this might be a good moment to use some of the mindfulness tools I had been cultivating as a therapist and longtime practitioner.

I took a big breath, stepped back from the scene and found empathy for myself as I acknowledged that watching people I love suffer is grotesque and hurts like hell. It makes sense that there might be some part that wants to run for the hills, or make it all stop.

The Part That Protects

Richard Schwartz is a psychologist who created the therapeutic model known as Internal Family Systems. His view is that parts of ourselves automatically take over to help us keep face, and keep safe. One of these parts he calls “The Protector.”

When we feel great vulnerability, without asking our permission, our Protector springs into action with the goal of making the pain stop. Sometimes, making it stop can sound like hearing yourself impulsively wish that your loved one would die. Instead of carrying a lifetime of guilt that you are clearly a heartless ghoul, consider that this could be your Protector trying to help you manage the un-manageable.

It's also possible that this seemingly treacherous thought of wishing for a loved one to die might be the raw awareness that like it or not, everything is really and truly

If we are seeking a more peaceful experience of life and death, there has to be room to let go of what cannot be saved.

Taking a mindful stance can help us notice if our system is under excessive stress. We can remember that when we feel overwhelmed, we are more likely to engage in automatic responses as a misguided safety mechanism. It's OK. It's good. These are moments to pay attention, rather than personal failings.

Death is a shocker. It will propel forward parts of you that you might not recognize or want. To the best of your ability, hold these foreign experiences with exquisite gentleness. Keep it cool, if you can, by watching what comes and goes. Can you greet everything you meet with great curiosity? Remember that each part of this experience is part of life. You are here, whether you want to be or not, and you will never pass this way again. Dare to take it all in.

In the Face of Suffering, Reconnect With Loving Presence

It's tough to be where you have never been before. Sizzling hot moments of grief will shake you up and toss you here, there, and everywhere. The guidance here is to love all the parts, choosing love and kindness toward the precious one known as you. Try these tips when you need to reconnect to yourself and the world in a more loving way.

- Supporting those you love the most, whether they are people, pets or plants, can be exhausting. You may want to give everything you have to your loved one, but take a moment to check in with yourself with H.A.L.T. Just noticing if you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired can be a great way to manage a glimmer of well-being.
- Watching someone you love suffer is incredibly difficult and it is natural to want them to suffer less. The practice of giving and taking, sometimes called Tonglen, can offer some space to this icy-flamey-sadness. Here are the basic steps for this practice:

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1. **If you can, bring yourself some stability by shifting your attention** from focusing on your thoughts to focusing on your body: feel your feet touching the floor, feel your body making contact with the bed, or feel held by the chair you are sitting on.
2. **Then shift your attention to your breath** and breathe in for a count of three and out for a count of five. Repeat this cycle three times or more, as needed.
3. **Once you feel present, bring to mind an image of yourself** (if you are the one who is struggling) or picture the person you are concerned about.
4. **Imagine breathing in all the suffering and distress** that the dear one is feeling—even if this dear one happens to be you.
5. **Then, on the outbreath, send a sense of well-being**, ease, and peace.
6. **As you continue**, imagine that you are breathing in fear, distress, worry, difficulty, with the confidence that you aren't bringing it into you, you are just calling it out of its hiding spot. In fact, these dark qualities never reach you, or stick to you—as soon as you call them out, you are releasing them with your outbreath. Breathing in any turbulence, breathing out calm. Continue until you feel any kind of shift. What do you notice?

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