

Thoughts on Dying with Grace and Forethought

By Dharmatma Kaur Khalsa, 1956-2019

Written May 2019

Yogi Bhajan's teachings on Death & Dying have been compiled by Hargopal Kaur Khalsa into a wonderful book, [Merging with the Infinite](#). This book is practically a bible for any yogi or Sikh who is serious about preparing for their time of death. It's certainly been mine.

That said, there are tons of good books out there on death & dying. [Ram Dass](#) has several. [Stephen Levine](#), [Elisabeth Kübler-Ross](#) are two other authors. Our own Jivan Joti Kaur Khalsa [has a book on this topic](#) she is revising (as of this writing) for its second edition.

Pran Sutra

In the book [Merging with the Infinite](#), there is a whole chapter on Pran Sutra. Yogi Ji talks about the Pran Sutra one should relate to in preparation for our earthly transition. There are several that he talks about, but he also indicates that it can be any mantra one has practiced deeply. The important thing is that we each choose one, and then practice it. I chose the Gurmantra, *Waheguru, Waheguru, Waheguru, Wahejio*. Translates as: "Great beyond description is God's Infinite Wisdom. You are the beloved of my soul, oh God." Mainly

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because it is easy to make a part of one and it is very easy to remember, which will be key during my crossing.

Be Real.

It was so lovely to have a chanting event as a way to say both thank you and goodbye to Sangat. I never believed in beating around the bush about dying. Although for many years my cowgirl fantasy was that I would get to ride off the mesa into the sunset! Just me and my horse. Never figured it would be cancer.

I was given the gift of time and lucidity to prepare for my transition. This involves my **worldly affairs, my forgivenesses, my goodbyes, and my own spiritual preparation**. It is a huge gift! And while you may think me courageous, the fact is, I have no fear of death. Since cancer sucks, I am quite looking forward to moving on. None of this preparation is easy, but fear does not factor in.

Sangat

One of my life lessons has been to learn about Sangat. If I hadn't learned it before this year, I have certainly learned it

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now. I never thought I'd "need" Sangat at this level. (So typical of someone who has mastered being alone.)

I have learned that I am with Sangat and that Sangat is with me. I have learned that I am loved and will be missed. Yogi Bhajan told me clearly that I needed to know these things.

So thank you for the gifts of you, of service, of support, of love, and the cups of prayer. It has touched me at a deep level that will go with me. We are all One and prayer works from any level. You'll always be in my prayers for your own success and victory in your lives here.

Be Fearful or Be Fearless, and Ready

How is it that I am not afraid of death? Frankly, I don't know. I'm just not. The human form is a painful form. I have no doubt about continuing on when I drop my physical body. I have experience with helping people transition. Some say everyone has *some* fear of death. I can't say I do. Not that I am aware of.

One fellow asked me if I am excited to die. I told him yes! This debilitation I have sucks. I want to be free of this form. Can't

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come soon enough, although if I'm writing this now, I guess there is something that I still need to "do" before I go...

What I am afraid of is the progression of debilitation, figuring out end-of-life care, and the discomfort. Dealing with loss of control. Meaning all the stuff that happens in the days before that last breath. This has been a challenge for me to prepare for. It is harder for people who live alone and don't have a family member who can tell when it's time to call in a specific service or help.

I believe that fear of death is ingrained in our culture that refuses to discuss death as part of life, and is youth-oriented besides. Aging is a hassle. Death comes for us all and it's one of the most important things to prepare for! So why do we shrug it off or brush it under the carpet?

In our community, the way to get over your fear of death is to study Yogi Bhajan's teachings and yogic practices on the matter. Read books about death and dying. Have "the conversation" with your loved ones about end of life. Most of us don't get to die suddenly, which some say is easiest. But Yogi Ji indicates it's basically trickiest in terms of the actual transition.

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Here are my thoughts on worldly affairs, forgivenesses, goodbyes, and spiritual practice for dying.

1-How to Prepare for the End? Start with your STUFF.

I have a lot to say about preparing for one's departure from this earthly plane. It starts with the most practical level: what I call **worldly affairs**.

Now, as a single, unmarried, heirless / childless woman, who the hell did I think is going to pay for my funeral or sort out my affairs after I die? As it happens, I have family resources, but there was no way I was going to assume that siblings who I see once a year are going to come in from out of state and take care of everything.

No one who has similar circumstances should be without some will, instructions, and methods of having your stuff, your home, and your finances easily sorted. Think about it. And there's no shortage of resources for getting a will prepared online, or by document template, etc.

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And if you are single **and a homeowner** or own other real estate, then what? Just going to let the bank take everything back?

Are all your accounts online? How will anyone handle your finances if they cannot access them?

What about your pets? Have you provided for them?

See what I mean about planning now for your end? Get it done.

Pay Now for Your Cremation

And don't get me started on cremation. Oops--too late. Thank God we cremate, since burial/caskets and the trimmings run into the high four digits, at least.

All the area (Española, Santa Fe) funeral homes now offer cremation, and they offer options to plan your funeral in advance, including payment plans. So, prepay your cremation at the very least! The chapel space or other services may not be necessary, but are you seriously thinking your friends or family will easily cover the cost your cremation? *Is it the Sikh or Khalsa*

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way to expect someone to GoFundMe your cremation? Pre-paying is basically buying an insurance policy that says your cremation is covered. Get it done.

2-Complete Your Forgivenesses

So I know forgivenesses is not a word, I am known for making them up once in a while. Think of forgiveness as cleaning the slate and completing karma. When bad blood or a hurt is forgiven completely, you free yourself not only from that particular karmic connection with [the person(s) involved] but you also clear the karma of that lesson. This means *you done* for that lesson. I personally found that I'd feel a shift in my being when the forgiveness (me forgiving or asking for forgiveness) was 100% complete.

A good example is a woman who can so completely forgive her rapist that she (1) has completed that karma with the rapist, and (2) has shifted her life energy and empowered herself to never be abused in that way again in any lifetime.

This is the power of forgiveness. Simple, yes. Easy, NO.

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Have an ex you never forgave for what s/he did to you? Forgive it. Someone rob you at knifepoint? Forgive that perp.

Did you bang into someone's car and drive away? In your heart, ask that car owner for forgiveness. Were you rude to a colleague for no damn reason and never apologize? Ask them now to forgive you or at least request it internally, psychically, from the heart.

There are a ton of resources on dealing with forgiveness. Here are some tools: [Superhealth](#) #9 Forgiveness Meditation is good. I have a hard copy that came my way, not sure how.

[Hawaiians have an interesting system for forgiveness](#). I learned from that a very simple mantra that can work for any situation needing forgiveness:

I love you.

I'm sorry.

Please forgive me. [or, I forgive you.]

Thank you.

Sometimes I'd change the 3rd line to "I forgive you." You can visualize the person(s) in the Light in your heart while you vibrate this mantra verbally or silently. This is easy, helps keep

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one from overthinking any past situation and puts you in a space to get the job done.

The Five Forgivenesses Taught by Yogi Bhajan

On December 31, 1991, Yogi Bhajan's New Year's Eve Gurdwara lecture talks about five things we need to forgive. I got some Khalsa Family newsletter with a partial transcript of the lecture at Summer Solstice 1992. Here they are in their abbreviated form, but you'll want to look up all he has to say about each.

1. "Forgive God that He has separated you from Himself and created you as a creature."
2. "Forgive your destiny that it is as it is. You never wrote it, you earned it and forgot about it."
3. Forgive the distance and the environment which are always challenging and the cause and effect which are happening."
4. "Forgive your capacity, your ability, your duality and your divinity."
5. "Forgive yourself that you have to go through it."

If you can practice these now, you'll find that you have far less judgement and self-criticism as you near death. Why is this important? Because Yogi Ji is very clear that when we die, we see the panorama of our life. And at that moment, we either

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accept *all of our actions*, and move on, or we judge them and get stuck.

Just so you know, I have not practiced these Five Forgivenesses throughout my own life. I got stuck on a couple of them... I did, however, dig them out and study them in my last months. As a result, I was able to identify some key situations and people I needed to work on forgiving as part of my own transition preparation.

3-Goodbye, and Detach

So, saying goodbye to anything or anyone can be easy or hard. The same is true of letting go of attachments. Sometimes when we are talking about a person, it involves both: detaching and goodbye. Here I must add that the Sikh *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* is replete with references to worldly attachments to people, wealth, and property and that *none of these go with you in the end*.

Many of us have unhealthy attachments to other people. We may be attached to telling them what to do, or the reverse where they always told us what to do. Or we may be attached to protecting them from the slings and arrows of life. Or the reverse. If it's time for you to go, it's time to detach, not just

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say goodbye. To let them face Life, for example. Or to say: "I am doing this on my own terms, and you need to step back now." These are two examples of detaching from someone.

Of course, saying goodbye involves more. Sometimes it just involves one last visit or hug. For some it may be a phone call or email or text. What is important is to recognize *who* you need to be sure to say goodbye to, and (*by*) *when* you need to do so, and (depending on circumstance) *how*. And here I am speaking only for the one transitioning, not the other.

I found it important to determine who I saw personally or not, and this included my blood family. And a chaplain I met with affirmed the importance of **setting boundaries** at this stage in my life.

Each visit requires a lift, a projection. In my case, getting emotional means tears and the real pain from the tears (remember we are talking sino-nasal cancer and a very bad molar) is huge. So my approach has been see my best friends and core support. Others it is enough to see in a Sangat event, or once and that's it. Others...well I simply may not have made an effort. In the end, it was about the depth of my relationship and what I intuited was needed by me and the otherS.

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Although let me be clear no hurt was intended and if anyone was hurt by that approach--*I love you, I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you.*

I have been surprised by my worldly attachments. Now since I was forced early on to let go of people and places (moving 10 times before college will do that to you), I have found it easier than most. I moved around enough as an adult to learn when to let go of an item. My practical side would say, "Do I use this? Do I really care? It's too heavy to pay to move again." Between lots of practice and being single, letting go of stuff has generally not been hard for me.

Here are some attachments that surprised me. What I wasn't prepared for is missing real food (my mouth and teeth don't let me chew so I'm on puree foods only). Missing my hair as it fell out in huge clumps from the 4 radiation blasts I had. I never had a lot to start with and it really bummed me out! Though I know it doesn't matter, I want something to put up every day!

Missing tea (can't taste it anymore) and eating cashews.
Wishing I could have one more deep-dish Chicago pizza (I gave up pizza over 20 years ago!). Missing a good theatre movie.
Missing my walks. Missing spring in NM. Little things that one

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recognizes and mourns. I don't let them depress me, because ultimately, I am eager to move on. But what I found I had to do was recognize when something like this was surfacing, so I could consciously grasp it and say, "let it go."

4-Spiritual Preparation – Sadhana for Dying

In my opinion, spiritual preparation is just as important as resolving your worldly affairs. Yogi Ji and Ram Dass both say that a regular sadhana is key part of your overall preparation for dying. If you have good sadhana (at least until a serious illness hoses it), then you are more prepared, generally, than most people. Spiritual preparation for death can be its own sadhana.

When I lived in Washington, DC, I taught Kundalini Yoga to people with HIV/AIDS. At that time the drugs weren't as good as they are now, and people were dying in huge numbers. I learned then through those students who died and those who lived, that if one had a deep faith in God (any path) and kept some kind of spiritual routine, their death went a whole lot easier than those with neither. And I am talking about people who had kept their hope alive and not begun to admit they could literally die at any moment (from a sudden rare disease that took over their bodies or minds). Those folks who were

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least ready were the ones that needed the most help from me when crossing over.

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Loving Self

While I do not choose to describe my own particular meditative practice for dying, I can say that it starts with the Pran Sutra I chose. And it includes treating my own self with love and compassion. I must have an open heart for this process. Honor myself and the life I have lived, even as I also acknowledge what I didn't do.

Bottom line in this: don't beat yourself up. Loving presence for you, the one dying, and those in your life is needed now, and if you haven't allowed that before, allow it now.

Is that easy? Not necessarily. But if you believe that Guru is Love and that our path is about divine love, then start now. You still have a heart, and you still feel, and you are at base a good person. What's not to love? Let all the rest go. Practice the Hawaiian forgiveness mantra on yourself to help you get to that space. I have had to do all of this. And frankly it can be an ongoing process, especially for those of us raised with a lot of traditional Christian guilt.

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The Panorama of your Life

YogiJi--among many others--talks about seeing the panorama of your life when you die. This is a key part of death prep: what are you gonna do then? Are you going to judge yourself? Criticize yourself? Get caught up reliving a good or bad moment that traps you? Forgive yourself for mis-takes and for harm done others? Or, accept all your actions and say *"I'm done!"*?

As I worked with this part of my prep, I realized that I'd be darned if I was going to judge myself. That no matter any of my actions and choices of 63 years, "I am a good person. I accept all that I have done and affirm that I did my best overall. I am free. Waheguru!" As I practiced for the panorama, it also helped me identify what else or who else needed forgiving. So don't forget this in your preparation. Decide while you can how you are going to address it.

The Tratakam Photo of Yogi Bhajan

Every one of us has our own relationship with our Teacher, whether or not we recognize it. Some of the Sangat saw him daily, worked with and for him for years. Others of us saw him in class and perhaps other occasions. Many of us envied those close to him (he kept talking about it as Maya, and it took me

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years to recognize that it was, and to be grateful it hadn't included me).

Before he died, I could not describe my relationship with him, I guess I would say it was "average." Was I a good student? Not really, since I didn't or couldn't always complete the things he told me to do. I know now there were factors beyond my ken that didn't help me succeed, but it doesn't matter now.

A good friend gave me the [Tratakam photo](#) of Yogiji years ago-- it was after he had left his body. After I hung it and looked at it (not meditated on it) I got a clear message: given my inability to handle Tantric energy anymore, I should not spend time looking at the photo because it would dial in to the Mahan Tantric aspect of the Master.

However, it was fine to look at it/his 3rd Eye and "phone" him, so to speak. This has served me now for the many years I have had the photo. I "phone" him by glancing at his 3rd Eye in the photo and then I hear his gravelly voice (how I remember it anyway) and connection made.

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Well in my dying process, I am phoning him all the time. Our relationship is deeper and the amount of advice and direction I have received from him much more than when he was alive. I say that with no disrespect at all, he often told us he would always be available to us spiritually after he left his body. I am writing this to affirm it is so.

And while maybe any photo of him will do for you, don't forget that he had that photo taken for this purpose. To connect you, the student, to him, the Master. With or without the full meditative practice given with the photo. That photo's presence in your home is like having him dialed in to your home. Take advantage of the technology he left us and make sure you have this photo when you are preparing for your own transition.

The Emotional Ride

Well all this stuff I've described is difficult emotionally. Some of the worldly affairs part isn't so much for me, but some is. For instance, trying to figure out what kind of 24x7 care I'll need towards the end, if at all. Tears, again.

It has all made for a roller coaster emotional ride. Doesn't matter that I'm not afraid. Doesn't matter that I am embracing

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my transition. The business of preparation and forgiveness and detachment and goodbye is emotional. Not unexpectedly!

Someone told me that the one dying is grieving for all of us (you), the ones left behind. I am not grieving dying in my 60s as opposed to my 80s, although that could certainly be a source of emotionality for some. (I was dreading growing old in a culture that despises the aged.) But knowing the effect one's parting has on people, along with resolving one's actions and relationships, has its ups and downs.

Tears come at the darnedest times! --And often without any obvious trigger. When we are dying we are more vulnerable generally. Someone suggested my heart is more open now. So be it. And here I am only talking about me, the one dying, not what it is for family, friends, colleagues and Sangat. That said, I can tell how hard it is for those I am close to.

My point: be ready to be vulnerable, open, and emotional. Allow the tears and emotion, don't quash it. It is part of the process of completion.

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What's Important in Life?

Someone asked me, “at this point in your life, what do you see as the most important things in life?” My answer: **love, compassion** and **forgiveness**, in no particular order. These are the only qualities that really count in life anyway. And I can affirm that they take on new meaning for the dying.

Love yourself. Love others. Forgive yourself. Forgive others. Be in the yogic heart state of compassion for everything and everyone. When these qualities reign supreme in one, the final crossing is sure to go smoothly and easily. Not just me saying this. It's reflected in Yogi Bhajan's teachings on death and dying, as well as those of Ram Dass.

Die well when you do! Sat Naam.