



## The Dignity Project

*Guiding the Way*

Promoting awareness and understanding of dignity through education, communication and spirit.

### Navigating Chaos 15

#### A Million Tears

Research shows that tears are a way for the body to recalibrate the nervous system. To me this gives a new level of permission for us to cry, for letting the body do what it needs to do to sustain itself, like grief adjusts the lungs and heart when the bond formed with a loved one has to be broken. Remarkably, in this society we need to be given permission and space and the safety to cry. In some cultures crying is encouraged and a part of life in the open. In our society, the natural process of grieving is most often truncated by keeping up appearances and not wanting others to be uncomfortable. Men are most challenged to allow their bodies this necessary rebalancing, but so are many women. Children are pressed to understand what they are too young to embrace, often carrying undue weight of experience and information that is not appropriate at their age.

But, here we are.... so afflicted as a society with loss, confusion, indifference, and feelings of helplessness, that *feeling* is now the domain we need most to enter, respect, and cultivate equilibrium from. We are needing to be honest that feelings are pushing on us from inside, and hard. We are needing to express feelings in the safety of a loving person. We are needing to recognize that solutions to crises don't have to come from expressing our feelings, but that doing so will make more space for clearer thinking - taking a deep breath and opening to what Life will bring - if we are able to be present. We can't be present to much of anything when feelings are so backed up that we're afraid to let them out or we've kept too busy to be in touch with them. All it takes sometimes is to bump my head on a cabinet door or the cat to get underfoot and all the emotion I've stuffed since the last release comes flying out! And then.... I can cry. Then I sigh. Then I am quite still.

Over the years, through various kinds of loss, I've learned to trust grief. It has its own intelligence. It is part of the bodily systems that protect us. Without grieving, the body would eventually have to deal with blocked energies, pockets where change wasn't acknowledged, or even allowed to be... My wise and sweet auntie, who died recently at the age of 102, told me multiple times how sorry she was that she didn't allow the grieving process to have its way with her when her beloved husband died unexpectedly during complications with surgery. She felt

she needed to protect her handicapped son from her anguish. So she held most of it in, sometimes crying softly as she waited for sleep to overtake the mind. She sensed that some of her health challenges since her husband's death were from blocking grief and its ultimate job of restoring us to a new state of equilibrium.

Grief has had its way with me again and again, mostly in private, in the quiet of my bedroom or meditation hogan, or under an open sky as I hiked and felt and cried, and talked to my departed beloved or to the larger field where so many sentient beings would receive my anguish with understanding. Grief never once threatened to drown me. My mind sometimes feared that it would, especially upon the death of my most beloved. But I came to see that grief is quite respectful, like Death is when it announces itself and spends time with the one it is to escort from the flesh to the ethers. Grief knows the body has limits. But the mind, without some education, doesn't know that grief has limits. When a big wave of grief hits it might seem to be endless, like when we're swirled upside down in a wave when body-surfing and we don't know which way is up.

I remember as a grief wave hit, I would hold to the kitchen counter or whatever was near. It forced me to pause as it moved at high speed through my lungs and penetrated my heart like an arrow. Then it would cease. And I would find myself still there. My breathing would return to normal. My beloved was still dead. My world was still forever changed, but a few more cells in my body had rearranged. My heart had one less strand of energy tied to the existence of a human or animal I adored. I was one step closer to coherently existing in a personal field that did not include a Being I would never have chosen to go on living without.

I don't know how I would have survived till now if I hadn't released a million or more tears -- curled in fetal position on the bed, arms clutching a photo of my beloved, or driving the car knowing no one could hear me or see me crying so hard I thought I would shatter. Sometimes I found a mother-tree and put my back to her and asked her to receive me, claiming I couldn't imagine life without my beloved. Grief can happen anywhere we are willing to be with it. Grief is the minister of admonishment - telling us to let go of all second-thoughts or regrets, letting us know, in no uncertain terms, that death is final. Whatever the story was between us and our beloved, we would be wise to choose the gems and find gratitude even for the lesser moments as grist for the mill.

Since the fires destroyed my town and the neighboring town, turning appliances and automobiles into scrap metal, and sending people away to seek clothing and food, I have tears behind my eyes always. We've all had days or periods of our life when tears are right there and just about anything kind or sweet can make them spill out. Each day I go into the town that didn't burn, I cross paths with friends who lost their home, their car, their business. Our eyes meet and the tears well up. We take one another's hand, we talk. On the drive back up through the vineyards that did not burn, and to the forest that did not burn, to the sweet cottage that has

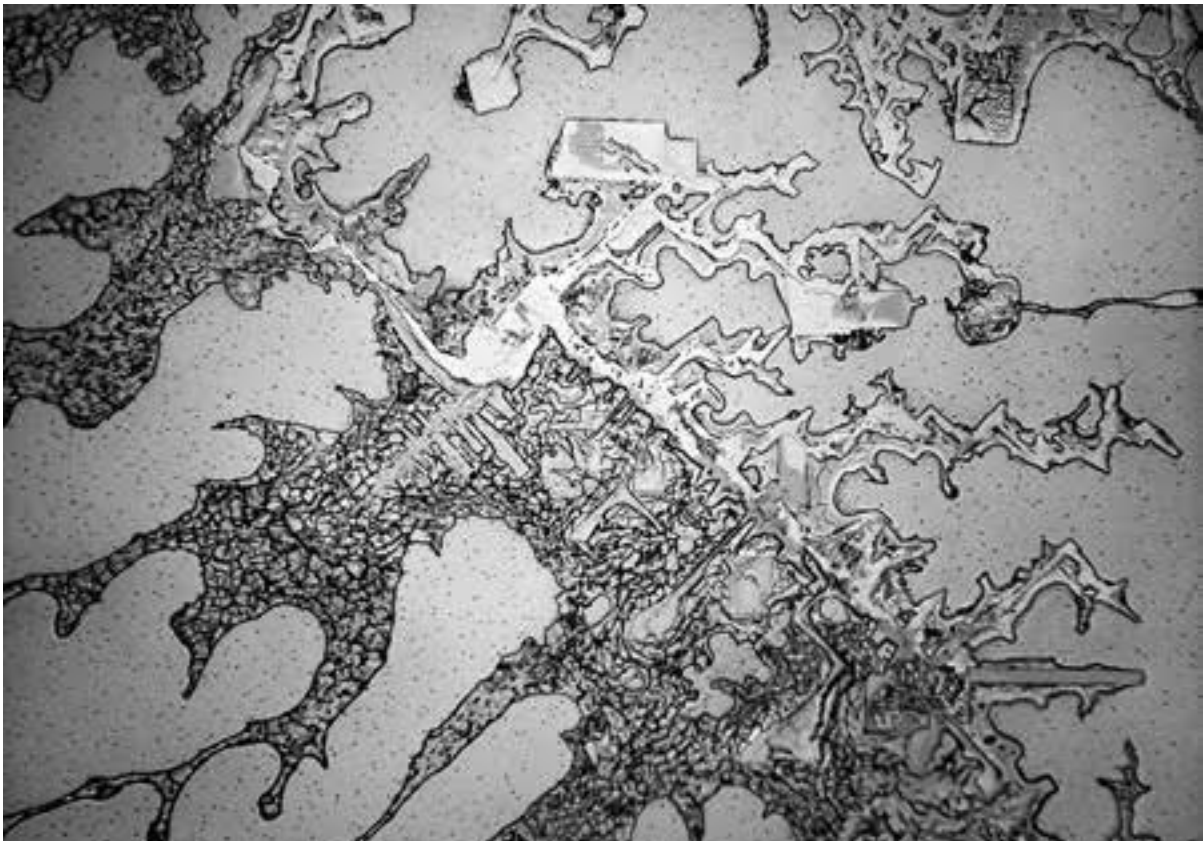
been my home during a privileged time of study and writing, I cry. I say, "I'm so sorry, I love you." to the blackened ruins of row after row of apartments and houses, and street after street where churches, offices, and cafes have stood throughout my years here, as though they would always be there for me, for all of us, to gather, to be a community, to meet our various human needs. They are gone so quickly, the way a nightmare has the power to stun us by creating its own reality. Fire has its way, it takes what it will, and humans are at its mercy. We are actually at the mercy of so much more than we think we are. Everything earthly lives according to the laws of nature that are not created by or governed by humans.

I feel helpless today. I can't clean up miles of debris and metal and concrete block or give all the people who are homeless a chunk of money to buy a new home or to the city to begin restoration. I can't promise anyone who is grieving that things will be better from now on and that this was the worst he will experience. I can't control the winds that are whipping up from California again. I can't erase the memories of fire from the children's minds, that they might grow up without trauma or fear of wind and nighttime.... I can cry though. And reset my nervous system. And support others to cry and find some equilibrium inside. When I saw that a friend is experiencing PTSD from the chaos and her own losses, I connected her with a comrade who is masterful with EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) to calm her nervous system so she can 'start again'. I can be a presence of love. I can listen. I can respect the forces of Life and the vulnerabilities of being human. That's enough, isn't it? Because, in truth, none of us can completely protect others from the experiences of that are part of their journey - what they will lose and gain, and how they will carry on with a major experience now imprinted in the soul.

Tears are life-saving. Whether for a woman who has survived a rape camp in a war-torn country, or a woman raped in an alley in New York on her way home from the office, I have witnessed tears cleanse what was calcifying in the dark, diminishing the body's life force. Losing a child to cancer, surviving a spouse's death, losing life-savings to Wall Street criminals, crossing an ocean to find freedom, leaving everything behind.... human stories bear the necessity of tears. Tears are not a sign of weakness! Once and for all could we establish this truth: that anyone, everyone, may release trauma and share their brush with death or the scars of violence.

Research shows that there are two fears that are innate to the human being, the rest are learned: the fear of falling, and the fear of loud noises. So fear of death is learned, and fear of loss is learned. Each friend who lost a home in this fire is struggling. Losing furniture and clothes and photos was huge at first. Yet after a couple weeks, they are expressing gratitude for being alive, for the generosity of the community, for the freedom they feel, in moments, to start over... This is easier for some than others. I wouldn't want to be challenged in this way. The night the fires were raging through the valley, I spoke starkly and adamantly to the stars that I would not now lose my personal belongings and be homeless! I have experienced various kinds of loss and was frightened to think I was facing more. There was no certainty that the forces of Life would heed my demands, but I knew I wasn't ready to surrender to them.

Maybe we only think we are bargaining. Or maybe we really can. I don't know how far 'down' I can be taken without feeling defeated, without giving up. Once when there were thoughts of giving up, my father asked, "What would that look like?" Neither he nor I could I could come up with what giving up would look like. It was a positive exercise in itself, to give myself permission to quit at the game of Life. I then gave myself permission to weep, until there were no more tears. I got up and lived whatever was there to live next. "I" didn't make a choice to quit or to live, as much as tears moved things around inside me, so I was in my world just slightly changed. Sometimes all we need to do for someone is give him the safe space, the permission, for that slight change inside to happen, and the Larger Being can carry on....



This is a tear under a microscope. Each tear, like a snowflake, is unique.

I know the Love that lives within the spectrum of Light that has not been condensed by gravity and matter.  
I know the Love that ignites Life itself.  
I know the Love that accompanies Death to claim a person from the flesh domain.  
I know the Love that is born of fire and torn apart by forces never named,  
and is reconfigured by heavenly hands that create, create, create,  
without mind or idea or ownership.

