

The Light

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Created *05/07/2006 - 8:19pm*

Submitted by *ian* on Wednesday 5th of July 2006 08:19:30 PM Filed under [News](#) [1]

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"It is very obvious to us that the experiences of the mind are far more acute and stronger than those of the body. Therefore, if the continuity of the mind remains even after death, then it becomes most essential for us to ponder upon our after-death fate. It is important to probe whether or not it is possible, on the basis of this consciousness, for an individual to achieve a permanent state of peace and happiness. If it is, then it becomes a matter of great personal concern for us to take the initiative to make the necessary efforts to arrive at such a state."

H.H. the Dalai Lama

The early morning mist comes out of the horizon and slowly settles over the woods, cottages, and dark waters of the lake. It's so beautiful here. The rain-soaked leaves and grass permeate the grounds. The wind is calm, the air still, and you feel the quiet strength and easiness of just being here, walking the shoreline, listening.

We use to come here two or three times each summer. My wife's mother would fly in from New York and we'd share in a multitude of stories, always filled with love and laughter. Stories about family and friends in Long Island, New York City, and Hamilton. In the evenings we took our walks along this same part of the shoreline, always to the foot of the cliffs and back.

The intimacy of these memories, the comfort of the images, run deep within me.

In my mind's eye, the past opens up before me. I see my mother-in-law under the vine-covered trellis in the garden. Small birds flutter nervously as she edges between the posts to cut back unwanted vine. She doesn't hear us come in through the gate. She's crouched over, pulling away at something, deep in thought.

In a matter of months her cancer has travelled from her breast to her spine, and then from her liver to her brain. She still has the kind of immediate beauty that people notice, in the expressions, in the grace of her movements.

She knows that death has its desire on her.

She and I are sitting together on one of the stone benches in the garden. She tells me she has refused all future treatments of chemotherapy and radiation. I don't know what to say. Then she tells me about the light.

She says her cancer has brought with it an energy, a light, whose transformation is unique and spiritually immediate.

"You can feel it assimilating through your body," she says, "It's alive, curious, forever changing. Some of the women

in my group have experienced it. It means different things to different people. But overall, I really believe it's the same thing."

Then we talk about people who have had near-death experiences and how most of them were drawn to the same beautiful, white glow, filled with love. The Buddhists believe that if you embrace the white glow after you die, you'll return to earth to suffer again as a human being. They believe you should resist the white glow, remain in limbo for seven days, and by doing so reach nirvana.

I ask her to tell me more about the light.

"When I first experienced it," she says, "I no longer felt the need to be understood or comforted by family or friends. I began to understand the interplay between everything that's essential and everything that's not essential in my life. It's a matter of clarity, perspective, and profound calm.

"Remember to look within, and listen," she says, "not only to yourself but to the changing relationships and emotions of family, friends and colleagues."

I suppose that's what I'm doing today. Looking within, remembering, listening to the words that still resonate within me.

Everything about her life tells us that she made it to the beautiful, white glow, filled with love.

If this is true, then we'll all be together again.

That would be nice.

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