

HOW THE SOUL MATURES

In a deeply insightful book, *The Grace of Dying*, Kathleen Dowling Singh shares insights she has gleaned as a health professional from being present to hundreds of people while they are dying.

She suggests that the dying process itself “is exquisitely calibrated to automatically produce union with Spirit.” What she is saying is that what is experienced by someone in the final stages of dying, particularly if the death is not a sudden one, is a purgation that naturally lessens the person’s grip on the things of this world as well as on his or her own ego so as to be ready to enter into a new realm of life and meaning beyond our present realm of consciousness.

Writing about aging, James Hillman poses this question: Why have God and nature so constructed things that as we age and mature and are finally more in control of our lives, our bodies begin to fall apart, and we need a bevy of doctors and medicines to keep functioning. Is there some wisdom in the very DNA of the life-process that mandates the breakdown of physical health in late life? Hillman says, yes. There’s an innate wisdom in the process of aging and dying: The best wines have to be aged in cracked old barrels. The breakdown of our bodies deepens, softens, and matures the soul.

The famed psychologist/philosopher, William James, submits that there are realms of reality and consciousness that lie beyond what we presently experience. All religion, not least Christianity, tells us the same thing. But our normal consciousness and self-awareness literally set up boundaries that prevent us from going there. Normally, for us, there’s this world, this reality, and that’s all! The dying process helps break open that contraction in our perception, awareness, and consciousness.

But there are other paths to this too, outside the process of dying. Prayer and meditation are meant to do for us exactly what the dying process does. They too are exquisitely calibrated to loosen our grip on this world and open our awareness to another.

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