Reality Initiating Us: Part One

* In this time of global crisis, it may be that reality is revealing itself to us—through great suffering universal patterns that are always true. ([Sunday](https://email.cac.org/t/d-l-mjkhrjt-kjlljjqy-r/))   
      
  We do not handle suffering; *suffering handles us*— in deep and mysterious ways that become the very matrix of life and especially new life. ([Monday](https://email.cac.org/t/d-l-mjkhrjt-kjlljjqy-y/))
* When we are willing to be transformed, we stop wasting time theorizing, projecting, denying, or avoiding our own ego resistance. ([Tuesday](https://email.cac.org/t/d-l-mjkhrjt-kjlljjqy-j/))
* After any true initiating experience, you know that you are a part of a much bigger whole. Life is not about you, but you are about life. ([Wednesday](https://email.cac.org/t/d-l-mjkhrjt-kjlljjqy-t/))
* *At some moment I did answer Yes to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life in self-surrender had a goal.* —Dag Hammarskjöld  ([Thursday](https://email.cac.org/t/d-l-mjkhrjt-kjlljjqy-i/))
* The transformational journey of death and resurrection is the only—and always denied—message. It really is a way we are saved. ([Friday](https://email.cac.org/t/d-l-mjkhrjt-kjlljjqy-d/))

Practice: **Death and Life**

Before we share our practice over the next few weeks, we invite you to join us in prayer for all those who are suffering as a result of COVID-19, those who have already lost their lives, and those who are healthcare workers attending to the sick. You can also dedicate your contemplative practice as a prayer for the benefit of all.

*God, we ask that all who are affected by this virus be held in your loving care. In this time of uncertainty, help us to know what is ours to do. We know you did not cause this suffering but that you are with us in it and through it. Help us to recognize your presence in acts of kindness, in moments of silence, and in the beauty of the created world. Grant peace and protection to all of humanity for their well-being and for the benefit of the earth.*

*Death and life are two sides of the same coin; you cannot have one without the other.*

*Christianity—as well as Buddhism and other religions—suggests that the pattern of transformation is not death avoided, but death transformed. . . Christians submit to trials and learn that the only trustworthy pattern of spiritual transformation is death and resurrection because Jesus told us that we must “carry the cross” with him. Buddhists do it because the Buddha very directly said that “life is suffering.” Buddhism teaches us to skillfully discern the source of suffering, detach from our expectations and resentments, and end all suffering. Today’s practice, from writer Gesshin Claire Greenwood, comes from the Buddhist tradition and asks us to practice releasing the thought that “things should not be this way.” Greenwood writes:*

Buddhist wisdom points to the reality that suffering is an enduring and continual part of being alive. . . We are often sheltered in our own kind of psychological palace where we are shielded from things like illness. Yet this kind of suffering can ultimately not be avoided. We will all, everyone one of us, face old age, sickness, and death. . . .

Personally, one of the most distressing things to me about the COVID-19 outbreak has been a feeling that “things should not be this way.” In reality, though, things are and always have been this way. . . . The suffering caused by illness and death is nothing new.

According to [a Buddhist] legend, there once was a woman who sought out the Buddha after losing her baby to illness. Crazy with grief, she asked him for medicine to bring her son back from the dead. He replied that he would give her this medicine if she brought him back a white mustard seed from the house of a family that had never experienced death. The woman went door to door, searching for a family untouched by the loss of a loved one. Of course, she could never find such a family. She realized that death touches everyone. And in realizing the universality of grief and death, her suffering lessened.

This story shows us that the feeling of “things should not be this way” is an additional and unnecessary pain on top of our inevitable suffering. We cannot avoid old age, sickness, and death, but we can remove the unnecessary assumption that things should be otherwise, and the psychic pain this assumption causes us. [1]