



Grace & Grit: Spirituality & Healing in the Life & Death of Treya Killam Wilber

Ken Wilber

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Here is a deeply moving account of a couple's struggle with cancer and their journey to spiritual healing.

Grace and Grit is the compelling story of the five-year journey of Ken Wilber and his wife Treya Killam Wilber through Treya's illness, treatment, and, finally, death.

Grace & Grit: Spirituality & Healing in the Life & Death of Treya Killam Wilber **Details**

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From Reader Review Grace & Grit: Spirituality & Healing in the Life & Death of Treya Killam Wilber for online ebook

Anna says

It is a beautiful lovestory about Ken and his wife Treya. It is also a fascinating story of how they grow and what they learn through Treya's five years of cancer until her death. I learned about spirituality and psychotherapy, about compassion and Buddhism, and about how to be a support-person to people who are ill.

Kristen says

The story of Ken's true love, from that moment of first glimpse to the last seconds of her life. This book is the story of Wilber's wife's battle with terminal cancer, her strength, his too. His weaknesses are exposed and he examines them as she continues to fight the cancer. Wilber, I think, learns what life is really all about (even though he has written about life/philosophy for years) and what it means to live and love now.

A must read.

Rob says

My dear cousin lent me her copy of this book a few months back and at the time told me it was one of her all-time favorite books -- now after completing it myself -- I completely understand why.

This has to be one of the most emotionally touching and spiritually rewarding books I have ever read. As well as one of the most sincere and amazing love stories I could ever imagine.

It offers such personal insight into the dying process - but even more so into how that process can change one's perspective on how to truly live.

Absolutely beautiful.

It definitely has left me with a new appreciation for the love I have in my life and for our capacity to change.

Our capacity to grow. To improve. To help. And to love.

The understanding that we are here for a higher purpose.

Like my cousin - it has found its way onto my all-time favorite list.

Beautiful.

Deirdre says

When Ken and Treya met it was love at first touch. They just hugged and hugged. A few months later they were married. 10 days after marrying they found out that Treya had breast cancer. This is the story of how they dealt with the cancer, the treatment and Treya's final days. It deals honestly with the pain and the overwhelming work that dealing with cancer can be both for the patient and the caregiver. Ken is a writer and philosopher and this is quite clearly reflected in the book while the two of them try to come to terms with cancer and try to understand why them and why now.

It is a story with deep sadness but the two of them have such a feeling of heartfelt joy in the world and in their lives that it seeps through. Yes sometimes the philosophising can be a bit much, and you would need to know something about Buddhism to get some of what's going on, but still it's an interesting variation on the theme. A book I could only read in small amounts at a time to fully understand what was going on.

Simmin says

Honest and intimate journey encompassing living with and treating breast cancer told from both the patient's perspective, and her caregiver's perspective (said husband/caregiver being preeminent philosopher Ken Wilber), including the ride of their relationship through sickness and relative health, and their journey into healing approaches and spiritual practices. Excellent information on the world's spiritual traditions and practices. A love song to the Self, and an intimate glimpse into the heart of an exceptional woman and the heart of a devoted relationship.

Most importantly, this book cultivated a newfound sense of compassion in me - towards myself, and towards those dealing with disease - what more could we ask for?

Jaime says

written 7/7/04 after the death of my son isaak:

i just returned from warm sun rays in the back yard and a finished book that left me in tears. an old love sent this book to me, and the more i read it, the more reasoning for its arrival comes clear.

i can't fully explain the emotion that sits upon my chest at the moment. but i can share a few passages that may make its way through.

from the book titled 'grace and grit,' written by both ken wilber and his lost love treya.

these were her last moments here. on this planet...

`Her entire countenance lit up. She glowed. And right in front of my eyes her body began to change. Within one hour, it looked to me as if she lost ten pounds. It was as if her body, acquiescing to her will, began to shrink and draw in on itself.`

`The noble Goethe had a beautiful line: "all things ripe want to die."`

and it was this that boiled over in the form of tears. i held my son isaak as he passed. and this was the case, truly, of my experience with him. his lasts breaths were smile full. he was lit up knowing he was ok. knowing his time was granted and safely said good bye because he was surrounded by love. and his goodbye was not a forever departure, but that of time simply in between.

i was scared, i was angry, and sad like you could never imagine. but it's these moments that its reality becomes more and more clear. more ok to bare. more ok to live fully, and yes, without him.

this life has been a curious one. for sure.

i send love to him. through this, through me. forever...

and ever.

Linda says

Recommended by a good friend I love and respect, a psychologist by profession and warm and sensitive spirit by nature, when she heard my brother was battling pancreatic cancer.

It took me a long time -- 3 years, actually -- to get to this book. I have to admit, the reason was that I was *afraid* to read it. My friend lent me her copy during the months when my brother was being treated for cancer, and I didn't know if I would be able to handle reading about someone who lost her own battle. I finally picked it up this year, and as fate would have it, my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer while I was reading it. So much for avoiding reading it during a trying time in my life...

As it turns out, though, my fears were pretty well unfounded. As my friend had said herself, *Grace and Grit* was a very uplifting story of someone who was transformed over the course of her 5-year battle with recurring cancer, who reached a new level of understanding and peace in her life and served as an inspiration to all who knew her as well as to many who have read her story since.

The story is that of Treya Killam Wilber and her husband Ken Wilber, who meet and fall instantly in love, are married within months, and just weeks later are hit with the devastating news that Treya has been afflicted with breast cancer. Their 5 years together are dominated by Treya's health -- episodes of remission and recurrence, a wild array of treatments and approaches, the cancer's increasing aggressivity -- and their struggle as a couple as their love grows but their relationship is tested by the slings and arrows of their outrageous fortune. The book is also an examination of their spiritual progression, and much space is given over to explanations of spiritual seeking and practices from Ken Wilber, a well-known expert in the field of what most people would characterize as new-age-type spirituality,

As a result, I would say that reading this is not for the faint of heart. Not, as you might expect, because of Treya's illness and treatment, but rather because of the spirituality/philosophy discussions, which are weighty, academic, and arcane, and far beyond most people's level of engagement with such things. I often found myself wishing I could excise away most of that discussion, and give much more time over to Treya's story. One of the nice parts of the book is that Ken includes excerpts from Treya's journals, and I would have enjoyed hearing even more of her voice. To be honest, Ken himself sometimes comes off in the book as someone who rather likes to hear himself speak -- although he does deserve much recognition for being stoically honest in owning up to some of his own failings as Treya's partner and caregiver, and he does not dress up his own mistakes.

The best and most interesting parts of the book were those that had to do with Treya. I have my own struggles with (against?) traditional religion, and I don't think that simply switching allegiances to other, more exotic or alternative spiritual paths is a solution to the problem. Having said that, since I didn't actually skip any part of the book, the spirituality parts did spark a few intriguing questions even for me, but it was

not what I came to the book to get. Treya's journey, on the other hand, not only kept my interest engaged, but also, as a person with two close relatives affected by cancer, and conscious of the distinct possibility that I may one day face it myself, reading about Treya's experience opened new perspectives in my understanding of what my family members were/are experiencing, and encouraged me to contemplate many new questions regarding how I might want to go through such a situation myself. For example, when Treya gets her first diagnosis of cancer, she captures in her journal her feelings of untethered isolation and bewilderment at the future, writing simply:

"Should I prepare to live? Or should I prepare to die? I do not know. No one can tell me. They can give me figures, but no one can tell me." (p. 39)

Also, she often returns to the theme of the myriad meanings that we give to illness, and how we often subconsciously blame the patient for his or her own disease, even when that patient is ourselves. One lesson I hope to remember from Treya's story is this:

"Pain is not punishment, death is not a failure, life is not a reward." (p. 279)

Not having read any of Ken Wilber's 800,000 other books, I only have this one to judge his skill as a writer, but on the basis of this one, I'd have to say his ideas are a bit ahead of his writing skills, to put it mildly. The first and most important complaint I have about the writing itself is that I finished the book really feeling that Ken failed to *show*, rather than *tell*, his readers about the kind of person Treya was. Again and again, Ken remarks on how wonderful she was, how everybody not only loved her but was inspired, moved, transformed by her. However, he rarely if ever gives examples of this, and as such, it's really hard just to accept what he says at face value. I mean, I'm sure she was a nice person and all, but isn't everyone who is close to someone going to say, oh, she was such a wonderful person? Just telling me over and over again doesn't convince me that she was any more extraordinary than any other nice human being on the earth. If you really want to convince me, help me *feel* what was special about her. As my high school composition teacher taught us, use examples to make your point, illustrate with details.

Secondly, for all his new-age/advanced/evolved thinking, Ken comes off as a fair bit of a sexist. Of course, I'm sure he would say all the right things about women's rights and gender roles, etc., etc. But at the same time, throughout the book women -- but not men -- are always introduced with some comment about their good looks. It really felt like no woman who entered the narrative was described without reference to her physical beauty. And despite the obvious deep-soul connection Ken has with Treya, most descriptions of why he loves her or why he was attracted to her begin first with a comment about how beautiful she was. I found it really condescending and trivializing toward women. If he did the same thing with men, it would sound ridiculous -- it would sound as ridiculous as it is. Take this description of one woman, for example: "She was tall, statuesque, good-looking, with black hair, red lipstick, a red dress, and black high heels." Multiply that by a factor of about, oh, thirty, to cover virtually every new woman who comes into the story. Now imagine he said of a man they had just met: "He was tall, magnificent, handsome, with sandy hair, shiny white teeth, a blue suit, and black wingtips." Now multiply *that* by a factor of 30 and you'll get an idea of how silly and annoying it is to have to deal with that type of description of practically every woman in the book. Pretty basic stuff, Ken. Time to read up on a little feminism. To be fair, I do think this is largely unconscious on his part, but that still doesn't make it right.

Leaving aside the writing style, if you are a follower of Ken Wilber and/or the type of spirituality he focuses on, I'm sure you'll find much to love here. If you're not, there is still a lot to learn from in the book in terms of living with cancer. For example, the best explanation of chemotherapy I have ever come across can be

found on page 132:

"Aside from surgery, the main forms of Western medicine's attack on cancer -- chemotherapy and radiation -- are based on a single principle: cancer cells are extremely fast-growing. They divide much more rapidly than any of the body's normal cells. Therefore, if you administer an agent to the body that kills cells *when they divide*, then you will kill some normal cells but many more cancer cells. That is what both radiation and chemotherapy do. Of course the normal cells in the body that grow more rapidly than others -- such as hair, stomach lining, and mouth tissue -- will also be killed more rapidly, hence accounting for frequent hair loss, stomach nausea, and so on. But the overall idea is simple: Since cancer cells grow twice as fast as normal cells, then at the end of a successful course of chemotherapy, the tumor is totally dead and the patient is only half-dead." [*emphasis in original*:]

Also, even though at 20 years out, the book is quite dated, you can still get a good feel for some alternative cancer treatments, as well as the difference between approaches to cancer treatment between cultures, especially with respect to the treatment Treya undergoes in Germany. For example, this description of conversations with Treya's doctor in Germany when asked about particular treatments used in the US:

" 'We don't do it because the quality of life is so much lower. You must never forget,' he said, 'around the tumor is a human being.' [. . .] We asked him about another treatment that was popular in the States. 'No, we don't do that.' 'Why?' 'Because,' he said directly, 'it poisons the soul.' Here was the man famous for the most aggressive chemotherapy in the world, but there were things he simply would not do because they damaged the soul." (p. 288)

Finally, two more quotes that spoke to me:

(1) "Ken likes to say that the work we do on ourselves, whether it's psychological or spiritual, is not meant to get rid of the waves in the ocean of life but for us to learn how to surf." (p. 378) This was a nice way of putting an idea that is partially captured by sayings like "Don't sweat the small stuff" and "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." To me, the goal of life is contentment, and equanimity, and it would seem that a sure path to a discontented, dissatisfied life is to spend your days trying to stop the waves.

(2) "To forgive others for insults, real or imagined, is to weaken the boundary between self and other, to dissolve the sense of separation between subject and object." (p. 158). When I read this, I thought not so much of forgiveness, but of my field, grassroots rights work and community organizing. Real help for oppressed people comes from a compassion that is rooted in solidarity -- I am not helping *you* with *your* struggles; rather, your struggle *is* my struggle. It reminds me of the quote, well-known among activists, from Lila Watson, member of an Aboriginal women's rights group: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." Real help comes from dissolving the separation between us and them, between subject and object. Without this solidarity, what you have is not compassion; it is patronizing, it is paternalism.

Joan Lieberman says

Enough pain and suffering to make one desperate to become a Buddhist. Wilber writes with exquisite care and understanding.

randy says

It is right there in the title, you know it is coming, Treya's death. You are pretty sure you will be ready for it, but it hits you like a typhoon, and you can not even stand for a long while after you read it. You know if it was a real typhoon, you would have drowned. SO yeah, this is an intense book, a very meaningful, intense book.

And before I sing it's praises, I must say I recommend this to anyone with a chronic illness or those caring for someone who has one. If this describes you: **MAKE THE TIME TO READ THIS.**

And if you are at all curious about confronting the fears you might have towards death: **READ THIS BOOK.**

In one of the late chapters of this, they (even though this is credited to just Ken Wilber, it is written by both he and his late wife Treya, and at times it is hard to tell whose voice is speaking) relate to meditation as practicing for death. I can not argue that in the slightest. And this whole book is both a love story between two people who obviously love each other more than the characters do in all the romantic comedies you have ever read/seen combined, but it is also practicing for dying. And this is really something to read. Something you clearly do not see much, if any, of in other books.

Imagine 10 days after marrying the man of your dreams, starting chemo for the breast cancer they discovered. This is Treya's story. Rather than sunning herself in Hawaii she has her breast removed and begins a rigorous round of chemo. That seems a pretty remarkable story in and of itself, but she uses "cancer as a prompt to 'change those things in your life that need changing.'" And this is where the real story of healing and growth comes from.

As you can tell from the title, here healing is not the same as being cured. She never fully expels the cancer from her body, and it finally consumes her, but... she makes it extremely clear that cancer did incredible things for her, helped her grow and become a more fully realized person. A complete person.

And for anyone that may say her healing was incomplete, she confronts that very well: "I sometimes feel that those around me will judge my success or failure depending on how long I live, rather than on how I live. Of course I want to live a long time, but if it's short, I don't want to be judged a failure." And she certainly was not a failure, in her five year battle she begins to practice something she calls passionate equanimity: "to be fully passionate about all aspects of life, about one's relationship with spirit, to care to the depths of one's being but with no trace of clinging or holding, that's what the phrase has come to mean to me. It feels full, rounded, complete, and challenging."

And while you read about her embracing the joy all around her, even as tumors are causing her to go blind and when she can no longer walk up the stairs or even stand, you know there is something remarkable about this healing. It may not have been perfect for her body, but it sure was for her mental and emotional health.

As I said before, this was an incredibly hard book to get through. The passages about the chemo forced me to walk away quite a few times. But by the end of the book, while I was sobbing at the pitch of a flash flood, I was far more able to read and be present with her death, as I took away some lessons about passionate equanimity from her. It is a horribly sad story, but she and Ken embrace it with such joy, even the darkest hours.

I would love to be doing this better, and I think I may be just a bit too close to this illness to, so just read it instead.

Lorenzo Bovitutti says

One of the most touching and deep books I've ever read.

After reading this, most of the other books out there will faint in comparison: you will become a more demanding reader.

This heartfelt, sincere and true account is an immensely valuable source of inspiration and wisdom.

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Since nobody knows what caused your cancer, I don't know what you should change in order to help cure it. So why don't you try this. Why don't you use cancer as a metaphor and a spur to change all those things in your life that you wanted to change anyway. In other words, repressing certain emotions may or may not have helped cause the cancer, but since you want to stop repressing those emotions anyway, then use the cancer as a reason, as an excuse, to do so. I know advice is cheap here, but why not take the cancer as an opportunity to change all those things on your list that can be changed?" The whole idea was a great relief, and I started smiling. Ken added, "And don't change them because you think they caused cancer—that will just make you feel guilty—change them simply because they should be changed in any event. You don't need cancer to tell you what you need to work on. You already know. So let's start. Let's make it a new beginning.

The mental surface structures vary considerably, but the mental deep structures are quite similar. Now, just as the human body universally grows hair and the human mind universally grows ideas, so the human spirit universally grows intuitions of the Divine. And those intuitions and insights form the core of the world's great spiritual or wisdom traditions. And again, although the surface structures of the great traditions are most certainly quite different, their deep structures are quite similar, often identical. Thus, it's mostly the deep structures of the human encounter with the Divine that the perennial philosophy is interested in. Because when you can find a truth that the Hindus and Christians and Buddhists and Taoists and Sufis all agree on, then you have probably found something that is profoundly important, something that tells you about universal truths and ultimate meanings, something that touches the very core of the human condition. TKW: At first glance, it's hard to see what Buddhism and Christianity would agree on. So what exactly are some of the essentials of the perennial philosophy? Could you go over its major points? How many profound truths or points of agreement are there? KW: Dozens. I'll give you seven of what I think are the most important. One, Spirit exists, and Two, Spirit is found within. Three, most of us don't realize this Spirit within, however, because we are living in a world of sin, separation, and duality—that is, we are living in a fallen or illusory state. Four, there is a way out of this fallen state of sin and illusion, there is a Path to our liberation. Five, if we follow this Path to its conclusion, the result is a Rebirth or Enlightenment, a direct experience of Spirit within, a Supreme Liberation, which—Six—marks the end of sin and suffering, and which—Seven—issues in social action of mercy and compassion on behalf of all sentient beings.

If I am really one with God, why don't I realize that? Something must separate me from Spirit. Why this Fall? What's the sin? TKW: It's not eating an apple. KW: [Laughing] It's not eating an apple. The various traditions give many answers to this question, but they all essentially come down to this: I cannot perceive my own true identity, or my union with Spirit, because my awareness is clouded and obstructed by a certain activity that I am now engaged in. And that activity, although known by many different names, is simply the

activity of contracting and focusing awareness on my individual self or personal ego. My awareness is not open, relaxed, and God-centered, it is closed, contracted, and self-centered. And precisely because I am identified with the self-contraction to the exclusion of everything else, I can't find or discover my prior identity, my true identity, with the All.

This situation is often called "dualism," isn't it? KW: Yes, that's right. I split myself as "subject" apart from the world of "objects" out there, and then based upon this original dualism, I continue to split the world into all sorts of conflicting opposites: pleasure versus pain, good versus evil, true versus false, and so on. And according to the perennial philosophy, awareness dominated by the self-contraction, by the subject/ object dualism, cannot perceive reality as it is, reality in its wholeness, reality as the Supreme Identity. Sin, in other words, is the self-contraction, the separate-self sense, the ego. Sin is not something the self does, it is something the self is.

mystics actually define sin and Hell as being due to the separate self? KW: The separate self and its loveless grasping, desiring, avoiding—yes, definitely. It's true that the equation of Hell or samsara with the separate self is strongly emphasized in the East, particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism. But you find an essentially similar theme in the writings of the Catholic, Gnostic, Quaker, Kabbalistic and Islamic mystics. My favorite is from the remarkable William Law, an eighteenth-century Christian mystic from England; I'll read it to you: "See here the whole truth in short. All sin, death, damnation, and hell is nothing else but this kingdom of self, or the various operations of self-love, self-esteem, and self-seeking which separate the soul from God and end in eternal death and hell."

"Yoga" simply means "union," a way to unite the soul with Godhead. In English the word is "yoke." When Christ says, "My yoke is easy," he means "My yoga is easy." We see the same root in the Hittite yugan, the Latin jugum, the Greek zugon, and so on.

this is from Swami Ramdas: "There are two ways: one is to expand your ego to infinity, and the other is to reduce it to nothing, the former by knowledge, and the latter by devotion. The Jnani [knowledge holder] says: 'I am God—the Universal Truth.' The devotee says: 'I am nothing, O God, You are everything.' In both cases, the ego-sense disappears."

In Christianity, of course, it finds its prototype in the figures of Adam and Jesus—Adam, whom the mystics call the "Old Man" or "Outer Man," is said to have opened the gates of Hell, while Jesus Christ, the "New Man" or "Inner Man," opens the gates of Paradise.

If I fundamentally distrust my experience, then I must distrust even my capacity to distrust, since that is also an experience. So sooner or later I have no choice but to trust, trust my experience, trust that the universe is not fundamentally and persistently going to lie to me.

The discovery of this witnessing center is very much like diving from the calamitous waves on the surface of a stormy ocean to the quiet and secure depths of the bottom.

Daemon, daemon, daemon. Without it I felt like I had no compass, no direction, no way to find my path, my fate. It is often said that what women provide for men is grounding, what men provide for women is direction. I don't want to get involved in sexist arguments over whether that is true or not, but it does often seem to be the case. In the past Treya had offered me grounding; now I just felt grounded. As in, incapable of flight. And whereas in the past I had offered Treya direction, now I just offered her an aimless wandering in depressive circles.

I think I find it hard to acknowledge help from someone because it makes me vulnerable, it puts me at their mercy in a way, that they could see me more clearly than I see myself. And even deeper than this, the important point, is the assumption that they would judge me for whatever they saw, they would have power over me, not that they would have compassion, for if I assumed that, then their insight into me could be the beginning of a deeper love connection. No, I assume that people will judge me, are judging me, always have judged me, will continue to judge me. Because I judge myself. The old scorpion of self-criticism.

But the point is that that is classically the obsessive's way to keep things under control. In other words, obsessives do everything themselves. They don't trust others to do it—mistrust is at the root of the obsessional neurosis—so they try to control even the smallest details themselves.

Although I had not yet started meditating again, both Treya and I had begun the search for a teacher we could both embrace. Treya's essential path was vipassana, the basic and core path of all forms of Buddhism, although she was also very fond of Christian mysticism and practiced the Course in Miracles daily for about two years. Although I was sympathetic to virtually any school of mysticism, East or West, I found the most powerful and profound form of mysticism to be Buddhist, and so my own practice had been, for fifteen years, Zen, the quintessential Buddhist path. But I was always attracted to Vajrayana Buddhism, the Tibetan form of tantric Buddhism, which is by far the most complete and well-rounded spiritual system to be found anywhere in the world.

But with the emergence of the rule/ role mind, the child's moral sense can begin to shift from pre-conventional to conventional modes—it goes from self-centric to socio-centric. And this is very important: because the conventional or rule/ role mind cannot yet introspect with any degree of strength, the rules and roles the young child learns are for all purposes set in concrete. The child accepts these rules and roles in an unquestioning fashion—what researchers call the conformist stage. Lacking introspection, the child cannot independently judge them, and so follows them unreflexively.

As level two emerges, and images develop, along with early symbols, the self differentiates from the world but is still tied to the world very closely, in a quasi-fused state, and so it thinks it can magically influence the world by merely thinking or wishing. A good example of this is voodoo. If I make an image of you and then stick a pin in the image, I believe it will actually hurt you. This is because the image and its object are not clearly differentiated. This worldview is called magic or magical.

Now I see why, in your books, you have always maintained that the modern rise of rationality, which has usually spent so much time trashing religion, is actually in itself a very spiritual movement. KW: Yes, I seem to be alone among the sociologists of religion in this regard. In my opinion, these scholars do not have a sufficiently detailed cartography of the whole spectrum of consciousness. They then naturally lament the rise of modern rationality and science, because modern rationality and science—level five—definitely transcends and dismantles the archaic, magic, and mythic worldviews. Most scholars therefore seem to think that science is killing spirituality in general, killing all religion, because they don't seem to understand mystical religion very well, and so they fervently wish for the good old mythic days, before science, the good old prerational days, which they think was “real” religion. But mysticism is transrational and thus lies in our collective future, not our collective past. Mysticism is evolutionary and progressive, not devolutionary and regressive, as Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin realized. And science, in my opinion, is stripping us of our infantile and adolescent views of spirit, is stripping us of our prerational views, in order to make room for the genuinely transrational insights of the higher stages of development, the transpersonal stages of genuine mystical or contemplative development. It is stripping magic and mythic in order to make room for psychic and subtle.

Since the pancreas is not producing enough insulin, the body cannot utilize blood glucose. This sugar accumulates in the blood, causing it, in effect, to become dense and honeylike. Some of this sugar spills into the urine—the Romans used to test for diabetes by putting urine next to honey bees, who would swarm around the urine if the person was diabetic.

when young boys are playing baseball, and a boy strikes out and starts crying, a girl will say, “Give him another chance”; the boys say, “No, rules are rules, he’s out.” Gilligan’s point: boys will override feelings to save the rules, girls will override rules to save the feelings. Both are important in the real world, but very different, and we need to honor those differences and learn from them.

Goddess more of a descent, God more of an ascent. Both necessary, both important.

Why is she so very likable? Why do I like her so much? I trust her openness about what she does and her desire to teach it. She’s not greedy, that’s for sure. I like being around her, look forward to coming back. Definitely a strong, nurturing, mothering energy she has. I hope she has learned to take care of herself; I can still hear her saying how all those years she was giving and taking care of others she was empty inside, she didn’t know how to give to herself.

She was now working hard on that psychogenic slice of the cancer pie, a slice we both figured was about 20% of the picture. Not the whole picture, but a crucially important segment. “His theory is that people are more prone to cancer if, as adults, they have a hard time bonding with other people. Rather, they tend to be hyperindividualistic, overly self-contained, never asking for help, always trying to do it themselves. Because of this, all the stress that they accumulate can’t be discharged easily by bonding with others, or by asking others for help, or allowing themselves to depend on anybody. This built-up stress thus has nowhere to go, and if they are genetically primed for cancer, this stress can trigger it.” “And you feel that applies to you?” I asked. “Definitely. My favorite lines, throughout my life, have been things like, ‘Oh, no thanks, I can handle it,’ ‘I can do it on my own,’ ‘Oh, don’t bother, I can do it.’ It’s extremely hard for me to ask for help.” “Maybe that was part of being the eldest son, being the tough guy.” “I think so. It embarrasses me to think of how often I’ve said these things. Over and over again, throughout my life. I can do it on my own. I can handle it. No, thanks. “And I know what’s beneath it. Fear. Fear of being dependent. Fear of being rebuffed if I were to ask. Fear of being turned down if I showed my need. Fear of being needy. I remember how quiet I was as a child, how easy, how undemanding, how uncomplaining. I didn’t ask for much. I didn’t tell anybody about my problems in school. I went to my room, where I read books, alone. Very quiet, very self-contained, holding myself still. Shy, reserved, afraid of criticism, imagining negative judgments everywhere. Even when I played with my brother and sisters, I often felt alone. “Here’s Levenson’s point,” she continued. “I’ll read this: ‘The precancerous individual, lacking emotional entropy, will be unable to fuse with anyone else as a means of dissipating irritation. He will most likely be able to experience intimacy only when he is caring for someone else. This is safe. To be loved and cared for, however, results in emotional discomfort, an uneasiness that is easily detected.’ “That’s me. You’re the first person I’ve really been able to fuse with. Remember that list I made on what I thought caused my cancer, and one of the items was ‘not meeting Ken sooner’? Looks like Levenson would agree with that. He says that ‘Do it yourself’ is a carcinogenic concept. Well, I’ve had it all my life, and I don’t think anybody gave it to me, I think I came born with it. It feels like some deep karmic trend of mine. It wasn’t just wanting to be the eldest son. I’ve had it forever, it seems like.”

In the past few years she had returned to her roots in the Earth, to her love of nature, to the body, to making, to her femininity, to her grounded openness and trust and caring. While I had remained where I wanted to be, where I myself am at home—in Heaven, which, in mythology, does not mean the world of Spirit but the Apollonian world of ideas, of logic, of concepts and symbols. Heaven is of the mind, Earth is of the body. I

took feelings and related them to ideas; Treya took ideas and related them to feelings. I moved from the particular to the universal, constantly; Treya moved from the universal to the concrete, always. I loved thinking, she loved making. I loved culture, she loved nature. I shut the window so I could hear Bach; she turned off Bach so she could hear the birds.

If and when death came, she would deal with it then, not now. There's a great Zen koan on this. A student comes to a Zen Master and asks, "What happens to us after death?" And the Zen Master says, "I don't know." The student is aghast. "You don't know!? You're a Zen Master!" "Yes, but not a dead one."

Maharshi goes on to say "As the beings reap the fruit of their actions in accordance with His laws, the responsibility is theirs, not God's."

As Gibran said, "Hate is love starved."

Again, what she said may be true, I don't know, but the way she chose to communicate indicated clearly that she cared more about being powerful and right than about helping someone gain insight.

But in the maze of all these possibilities, so many of them unproven, I keep coming back to one thing, whether it's choice of physical treatment or choice of psychological work—the individuals must trust themselves in making a choice and never let themselves be coerced or unduly influenced by the preferences of others. I want to help people feel empowered to say "No, that's not for me" or "No, you're not the therapist for me" without always being afraid that some sort of unexamined resistance might underlie their choice. My message is simple, but hard-won: Trust yourself, trust your psychic immune system. Take time to find your center, the solid ground inside your being, do what works for you to stay in touch, whether it's meditation or visualization or active imagining or therapy or walks in the woods or journal writing or dream analysis or simply practicing mindfulness in your daily life. Listen to yourself, and take your own best advice!

The noble Goethe had a beautiful line: "All things ripe want to die." Treya was ripe, and she wanted to die. As I watched her write that entry, what I was thinking, what I didn't have to say, was: That summarizes her entire life. Grace and grit. Being and doing. Equanimity and passion. Surrender and will. Total acceptance and fierce determination. Those two sides of her soul, the two sides she had wrestled with all her life, the two sides that she had finally brought together into one harmonious whole—that was the last message she wanted to leave.

Erica says

I gave up on this one. Although parts of this book really appealed to me (I especially enjoyed the reflections on eastern and western philosophy and religion) I couldn't stand Ken Wilber's self-importance. For a book about spirituality and healing he seemed rather full of himself. Also, I was floored that he didn't dedicate at least more than one paragraph to when he hit/beat Treya. Not saying he needed to dwell on it or dedicate a chapter to it, but for being such an unsettling moment, he could have allowed some reflection on how that moment may have impacted Treya, himself or their relationship.

Lisa Shultz says

Reading this book took a long time and some effort. Was it worth it in the end? Yes. However, I wish the book was more focused on Treya's life and death than being interrupted in a few chapters by Ken Wilbur's "technical information", as he puts it. That information seemed better suited for another book by itself. So I skipped those sections for the most part as the author himself suggested people could do without missing a thing.

I became exhausted by reading the extensive measures that Treya took to beat her cancer. I don't know how one can endure so many treatments. My own biases for simplicity arose but who am I to judge another's path? I did want to quote Treya from page 343: "My main advice is always to beware being knocked off center by what doctors say (they can be terribly convincing about what they do and terribly closed-minded about non-traditional approaches), to take the quiet time to be clear about what you want and what you are intuitively drawn to, and to make a choice you feel is yours, a choice you can stand by no matter what the outcome. If I die, I have to know it is by my own choices."

I looked up a video of her speaking shortly before she passed away. She said, "Because I can no longer ignore death, I pay more attention to life." I think if readers and myself grasp that line and live it, the arduous dedication to finishing this book is worth it.

By the way, my reviews are usually much shorter. This book and this review took more time than I typically spend in reading and reviewing. Perhaps that says something in and of itself.

Joyce says

Life/Death

Real people, Ken and Treya,
fall deeply in love and they decide to marry.
At this point her terminal illness reveals itself.
The marriage plans are not cancelled.

Lives naturally come to their ends, but in the meantime, this couple lives...together, separately and as honestly as people can. It's their honesty which bumped me up to living more passionately. Treya trusted in the truth and allowing Ken room.

Karyn says

Was given this book to read by a friend for a curriculum we are devising. I finished it yesterday- or rather, I finished two-thirds of it yesterday. This is really two books: the compelling story of Ken and Treya Wilber, who discovered that she had stage 4 breast cancer 10 days after their wedding, and an academic-even arcane-discourse on the world's different contemplative/spiritual disciplines. In his introduction, Wilber confesses that "the MAIN PURPOSE of this book is to provide and introduction to just those topics."

Here's an example of this so-called introduction, chosen totally at random: "It's not a union, it's an indissociation. A union is two separate things brought together in a higher integration. In infantile fusion, there are not two things to begin with, just a global in differentiation. You cannot integrate that which is not first undifferentiated. Besides, even IF we say that this infantile state is a union of subject and object, let me repeat that the SUBJECT here is merely a SENSORIMOTOR subject undifferentiated from a sensorimotor world, it is NOT a total integrated subject of ALL levels united with ALL higher worlds. In other words, it isn't even a prototype of mystical union, it is rather the precise OPPOSITE of the mystical state. The infantile fusion state is the greatest point of alienation or separation from all of the higher levels and higher worlds whose total integration or union constitutes mysticism."

Not quite my thing. So why the three stars? Because the story he narrates-in between more than a hundred pages of the above- is truthful and inspiring. It's for sure not a feel-good book; he is brutally honest about the toll that Treya's cancer took on both of them and their relationship, and how two years into their five year journey they almost divorced. But the journey of growth and spirituality they took together is compelling. He alternates between his narration and long excerpts from Freya's journals, which are, to me, the heart of the book. Read Grace and Grit just to hear the voice of this extraordinary human being.

Joe Green says

I'm reading this book for class. It's not my favorite book. I want to like it, for I think it should have something somewhat profound to say about death, dying and the "mystical" experience. But Wilber comes off as being highly impressed by his own ideas... and, from my perspective at least, he seems to misunderstand some of the teachings he's trying to interpret. Or, at least, he picks and chooses the interpretations he likes and manipulates other info so that it fits into his own ideas.

Basically, I personally find the beauty of the descriptions of mystical experiences to be most intense when they're least pretentious. Hence my fascination with Chinese Taoism, Cha'an and Japanese Zen. Highly unpretentious practices/philosophies. Ken and Treya on the hand are highly pretentious. And for a couple of people who are determined to see past the ego, they sure seem to enjoy basking in their own. Everything is "I", "I", "I" and "me", "me", "me". I also find it somewhat humorous that Ken never seems to pass up an opportunity to include a statement from someone calling things like a "genius" or a "man of astounding intellectual breadth", yada, yada, yada, etc.

What I do like about the book is that the love story between Ken and Treya at times is highly touching. Also, the story of Treya's bout with cancer is also touching and heart breaking.

In short, the actual narrative is fairly engaging. It's all the half-baked new-age philosophizing that rubs me the wrong way.
