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time. This dance includes every meadow, every rainstorm, every unhewn gem, every particle of dust, every six-pointed snowflake, every intricate crawling thing, every stellar explosion, every collapse of star, every planetary ring, every Big Bang, every first breath, every unfolding bud. Maybe God isn't executioner, but escort. Maybe it hadn't been an axe at my neck all along, but a rose.

I had always thought that if I did enough *mitzvo*t, perhaps God would spare me. At that moment I realized that this way of thinking was in essence a renunciation of God's world, because it assumed that when I died, I would be cast out of the world of the living like some worthless, empty thing. My inevitable death would be God's ultimate rejection of me. Now I understood that in life we are in covenant, and in death we are at One. I am a leaf on the tree of life that will some day rejoin the soil and quench the roots and reintegrate with everything. To die is not to be cast out, but to be invited to enter the very Source of Life, the great and complete embrace. Love.



My fear of death has not totally abated. But whereas I used to spiral into complete panic, now, when the tremble begins, I think of a hike, a bicycle ride, the taste of fresh fruit picked from a tree, or other moments when I freed myself to be a part of life, not apart from it. I think, *invitation*, and begin to relax. I remember the message of the Sabbath, how it sets the majesty of simply *being* over the mastery of things. I feel like I am learning a new dance, and my teachers are every creature, my text every tree. I feel less alone.

I can even appreciate my phobia now. After all, it brought me on a journey of discovery—midrashim, mysticism, rabbinic wisdom, art, science, philosophy, beauty, and human connection.

My son saw a dead bird the other day and became terribly anxious. I said to him, "Death is part of God's world. And God's world is beautiful." He nodded, because neither of us doubted that both of these thoughts are true.

The answer is not in chasing transcendence. It is in surrendering to wholeness. □

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