

Praise for *The Soul Midwives' Handbook*:

'In this moving book, Felicity has encapsulated the wisdom of the ages into practical examples of how to BE with the dying; how to honour and hold that sacred space for everyone as they prepare to make the journey that we all must take.'

Anita Moorjani, author of *Dying to Be Me*

'It is wonderful that Felicity Warner's Soul Midwives now have a handbook for practical use. As vigiling reclaims its rightful place at the bedside, The Soul Midwives' Handbook emerges as a useful and timely tool for those who are called to this sacred work.'

Megory Anderson PhD, author of *Sacred Dying*

*'Well, don't they do fantastic work?
Not just for the dying, but for those left behind.'*

Brian Blessed, actor

'The work of Felicity Warner and the Soul Midwives is absolutely crucial for those of us who believe that death is one of the most important moments of our life. By providing loving and gentle support, Felicity and the Soul Midwives support people to have the death that they want. What could be more important?'

Jon Underwood, pioneer of the Death Cafe movement

Praise for *A Safe Journey Home*, also by Felicity Warner:

*'Soul midwives make it their mission to help the dying
pass away with dignity and in peace.'*

Sunday Express

'The woman who wants to make dying more dignified.'

Woman's Weekly

*'A guide to help people prepare for death just as they might for a birth –
and achieve a peaceful end to their lives.'*

You magazine

'A gift for bringing comfort and peace to those who are about to pass away.'

Daily Express

*'Offers guidance and practical advice on how to offer support
and care to those on the final journey.'*

Yoga and Health magazine

THE
SOUL
MIDWIVES'
HANDBOOK

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THE
SOUL
MIDWIVES'
HANDBOOK

The Holistic & Spiritual Care of the Dying



FELICITY WARNER

Founder of the Soul Midwives' Movement



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∞ PREFACE ∞

Just as I began to write this book I heard the sad news that Gill Edwards, my dear and treasured friend, had died.

Gill was well known for her books on spirituality and energy medicine and was one of the most inspiring teachers of our time. For me, she was also something of a spiritual godmother and probably the first person to encourage me to use my gifts as a healer and seer.

We met many years ago, just as her first book, *Living Magically*, was published. We sat in her sunny cottage, eating lunch and exploring ideas for an article I'd been commissioned to write about her transition from NHS psychologist to spiritual writer. We instantly realized we had a deep connection and lost no time in talking about everything from angels to shamanism, healing, vibrational medicine, psychology and soul retrieval, the invisible realms and a vast world of things I'd never even heard of.

As dusk fell, and with gallons of tea consumed, I remember feeling completely intoxicated with joy and inspiration.

Just before I left, I asked Gill for one final nugget of advice for anyone questing for a spiritual life.

'Tell them they should all "follow their bliss"; she laughed. 'That's the real key to living magically.'



I gathered my notebooks and pens and Gill helped me carry my things to the car before asking, very seriously, 'What's *your* bliss, Felicity? When are you going to begin *your* real work and start to use the magic that you've been blessed with? You have a long trail of ancestors stretching behind you waiting for you to begin your soul work. It's time to honour them and use the gifts they have given you. Don't take too long to follow your bliss. None of us is here for long.'

I left feeling puzzled but curious. I knew she'd spoken the truth, but it still took me a few years to get there. Eventually, however, my work in honouring the ancestors became my service in creating Soul Midwifery. Thanks, Gill, for the nudge!

Gill understood the deeper mysteries of life and death and knew how to explain them with simplicity and honesty. She saw the truth, beauty and spirit in everything around her. Her teaching was always engaging, direct and bold. Her graceful death in November 2011 inspired so many people. Her family has agreed to let me share her final letter to her friends, explaining how she felt as she stepped across the sacred threshold:

I'm so sorry that some of you may be feeling grief and loss. I think the loss of someone we love is perhaps the hardest challenge that anyone ever has to face, so my heart goes out to you. What I can say is that we can make the experience far worse, or far better, by the way we see it. As I understand it, pain always means that we are not seeing things as our higher self sees them (which is why we feel negative emotion – as a warning sign of this splitting of energy).

If you have been touched by my death then my understanding is that you and I had a contract to part around this time, for all the gifts that it would eventually bring to you – which you will only understand when you look back in years to come. You may have done some workshops with me, and I'm sure you know (in theory) that



death is not a tragedy; it is simply the choice to make a transition from one state of consciousness to another. Yes, it would be easier if I had chosen just to retire and no longer respond to emails, but somehow you have to come to terms with the choice I made. For whatever reasons, this lifetime was finished for me.

I am still very much here, just not embodied any more. Love is an eternal bond, and you only need to think of me with love and I will be there, connecting with you. But you will only be able to sense me when you release the grief and simply connect with the love. (A friend of mine even co-authored a book with a close friend after her friend's death, having established close and easy communication with her.) You might be amazed at how rapidly you can find peace again, once you get your energy flowing and reconnect with your higher self (who sees nothing as bad or wrong).

You can focus on what is wrong or missing – my death – or you can choose to focus on what is positive. I have gone physically but I am absolutely fine, and you are still here – and so many good times lie in store for you still, with many other people to love and be loved by. If you look for what is positive in life, and things to be grateful for in each day, and choose to think only of happy memories of me, you will begin to release the grief – and then you will begin to attract more positive events and opportunities into your life. Focus on what you enjoy, whom you enjoy being with and what dreams you have for the future. It might take time, but you can do it. In the meantime, there are hundreds of comforting books about the afterlife which show beyond any doubt that life is eternal, and that the only reality is Love.

I wish you all the very best with your journey. It will get easier – and so many gifts lie ahead.

With love and blessings,

Gill



Gill was a guiding light and teacher and respected friend, and I thank her for encouraging me to begin my own journey and to follow the unexpected pathway that has led to creating the craft of Soul Midwifery



∞ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ∞

This book has taken many years to grow, and so there are many people I would like to thank.

I am very grateful to the family of Gill Edwards for agreeing to let me share Gill's final letter to her friends.

Thank you also to:

Michelle Pilley and her wonderful team at Hay House for their constant encouragement and support.

Chelsey Fox of Fox & Howard Literary Agency.

Mandy Preece, tutor at the Soul Midwives' School, for her goodness, fun, bright eyes and magic wand.

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Antonia Rolls, Ann Freeman, Gail Dyson, Helen Fields, Theo Hall and Susan Palumbo for allowing me to share their stories.

Mike Dooley for agreeing to me using his 10 things the dying wish to tell us.

Anita Moorjani for permission to use an extract from her book *Dying to Be Me*.

Christine Longaker for use of her exercise in how dying feels.



The artist Dan Chen for agreeing to let me describe his end-of-life hospital project.

Charlotte Gush for her blessing.

All the families and 'friends' with whom I have worked over many years. You have 'woven a cloak around my heart'.

The team of teachers who have 'midwived' my soul and continue to teach me, with boundless patience, the inner and outer mysteries of transition and consciousness.

And last but not least, my own wonderful family:

Richard, who keeps the hearth glowing with sturdy logs and bright sparks to welcome all the hundreds of people into our sanctuary and home.

My two beautiful daughters, Daisy and Lusea, who thrived and blossomed despite having a quirky mother who believed in moss-poultices rather than plasters.

My parents, Noëlle and David, for both daring to be different, and my darling granddaughters, Matilda and Amelie, who are the joy of life itself.



∞ INTRODUCTION ∞

A middle-aged woman is curled up in a foetal position on a mattress on the floor. She doesn't look up and is clearly very close to death. One of her skeletal arms is wired up to an electronic device which is plugged in beside her.

A doctor in a pristine white coat crouches down to check her vital signs before signing a form confirming that death is imminent.

Checking that there's no more to be done, he quietly fiddles with some knobs and dials and sets the machines. A panel of lights comes on with a hiss of whirring dials. Without looking at the woman again, the doctor sets the volume control and leaves the room, shutting the door quietly behind him.

The LED lights up and displays the words 'Detecting end of life'.

A second later, the machine switches on and a robotic arm begins to stroke the dying woman's arm. Back and forth it caresses her and then an automated voice message starts:

I am the Last Moment Robot. I am here to help you and guide you through your last moment on Earth. I am sorry that your family and friends can't be with you right now, but don't be afraid. I am here to comfort you. You are not alone, you are with me. Your family and friends love you very much; they will remember you after you are gone.



Is this a chilling glimpse of palliative care in the near future?

Luckily not! It is an art installation called 'Last Moment Hospital' created by Dan Chen, an American artist, designer and engineer. It's designed to shock; it hits you in the heart and makes you think deeply about intimacy and how we care for the dying.

The robot strokes the dying woman, trying to comfort her while its staccato electronic voice personalizes the recorded message with her name.

Dan Chen explains that his installation reveals the cruelty of life and the lack of human support and social connections that some people experience:

...it also makes viewers think about the placebo effects of comfort... Is it better to have a robot talking to you as you die, or nothing at all? Ultimately, what is intimacy without humanity?

Approximately 100,000 people die every day, but how many of us have thought about how we would like to die? In the West, death happens mostly in hospitals, care homes or hospices. And, sadly, most of us are terrified by the thought of it.

The majority of people simply choose not to think about death until it literally stares them in the face. According to the UK organization Dying Matters, 81 per cent of people in Britain have not written down any preferences around their own death, and only a quarter of men and just over one in three women have told anyone about the funeral arrangements they would like to have. Nearly two-thirds of people have not written a will, including a quarter of the over-65s.

Moreover, every year a fifth of NHS beds are taken up with end-of-life care, yet two out of five people who die in hospital have conditions that medicine cannot help. And 60 per cent of NHS complaints concern end-of-life care.



What of those who have considered their own death? According to a YouGov poll, two out of three people would prefer to die at home, and 90 per cent of those dying in hospital would rather die at home. Yet half of us will die in a care home or hospital.

Happily, the tide is slowly turning. Many more people are talking openly about death, thinking about their own mortality and exploring the options facing them – determining to make it a better experience not just for themselves but also for the loved ones left behind. More people are requesting to die at home, with their families around them, just as people did in times past. Soul Midwives are there to ease this journey.

A Soul Midwife is the very opposite of a dying-room robot. Our bedside care is tender, personal and very human. Instead of robots for the dying, we will find Soul Midwives in every hospice, hospital and care home within the next few years. Already you'll find them in many care settings, as well as working with people dying at home. Although Soul Midwives have esoteric knowledge of certain aspects of dying, they are also practical and down-to-earth and work alongside medical teams. There are Soul Midwives who specialize in working with children, with people with learning disabilities, those with Alzheimer's or other mental health problems, or in just about every situation you can imagine.

There have, of course, always been people who have sat with the dying. Traditionally, Soul Midwifery (although it didn't have the name then) was a sacred service passed to adepts by their masters through outer and inner teachings based on an oral tradition. The techniques were practised by only the very highest initiates once they had proved their dedication to others and their self-mastery. This handbook draws on these ancient traditions and shares the outer teachings, with small references to the deeper levels of the work.

My own quest for knowledge has led me to wise elders, holy men and women, nuns, priests, musicians, healers, artists and celebrants. I have



scoured every religion, from Buddhism to Islam, Paganism and various forms of Christianity, absorbing the wisdom of their traditions. I believe that many of the rituals and holistic practices observed for thousands of years by indigenous groups to nurture and soothe the dying hold clues to helping us all to die well.

Above all, however, being a Soul Midwife is based on deep soul friendship. This is why I have given the name 'friend' to the people we serve.

I have sought the permission of the friends whose stories I tell here, except where so much detail has been changed that the subject cannot be identified. The intimacy of these stories contains a profound quality of truth which has proved time and again to me that death isn't the end, just the closing of one chapter of the soul and the beginning of a new one.

This book is also the story of my own journey in unscrambling the lost knowledge of Soul Midwifery and fine-tuning it to provide a practical resource for today's modern healthcare.

My work began over 20 years ago. At the time I was a health journalist covering hard-nosed clinical and surgical procedures in hi-tech hospital medicine. I was writing a series of in-depth articles about what it was like to die young. Several young women in the final stages of breast cancer offered to tell me how it was for them. Over time, as their health deteriorated, I got to know them all on a very deep level. Their experiences, which I describe in detail in my previous book, *A Safe Journey Home*, amazed and also saddened me. Their understanding of death and dying shone a light on their hopes and fears, but also on other people's reactions and projections. From them I learned the practical difficulties of being ill and also the extreme spiritual challenges.

Although none of these women would have termed themselves spiritual in any way, each experienced a complex existential unfolding which brought with it profound spiritual insights. I watched them



all adapt and grow into a deeper aspect of themselves. They became truly wise women, speaking their truth in a very liberated way as they journeyed out of life.

Working with these sharp, sassy, fearless women was an exciting time. I had no experience of offering spiritual companionship as such, but it seemed to develop as we swam together, exploring new territory which was characterized by deeply soulful exchanges. They told me how it really felt to be dying, and what they were experiencing underneath the surface. They wanted their deaths to be significant and inspiring. And they were – these women were the trendsetters for a new way of thinking.

After sharing their experiences and all the miraculous – and harrowing – events that came with them, I felt as if I had come home to myself and was involved in work that I had somehow done before. I began volunteering at a local hospice and sitting with others close to death.

It is now many years since I began working with the dying, but I'll never forget the first time that I held a young woman's hand as she slipped away. She'd been restless and terrified, and had no family or friends to comfort her. I had been asked to sit with her, as she was agitated and constantly crying out. All I could think was, *What would her mother do if she was here?* So I found her hand and told her that I would stay with her. She stopped crying and turned and looked at me, and I began to sing.

A warm cloak pulled in around us and I could feel her fear begin to ebb away. She knew she was dying and that there was no turning back, but her body – and soul – knew what to do. Feeling safe with someone holding her hand, she surrendered and grew calmer. Despite the pain and anxiety, there was also a feeling that all was well. And it was. She died very peacefully a few hours later.



Her death, an initiation for both of us, showed me how miraculous and rich a good death could be.

Gradually I began to see a pattern in the deaths around me. There were definite stages covering physical, emotional and spiritual shifts. I could see that on a very primal level there was a common experience of dying that was somehow being missed or overlooked in the busy medical context. I became curious to learn more.

One day, sitting and feeling rather spare and useless, I had a lightbulb moment and intuited (perhaps romantically) that there must once have been a body of knowledge, or an archaic system, that was the key to supporting, at a soul level, someone who was dying.

Suddenly, things began to fall into place. The clues were everywhere: in traditional and indigenous societies, in the great Eastern religions, in medical traditions... There were many different practices – both simple and complicated – to respect the act of dying as a sacred time.

I began writing about my experiences and talking to anyone who would listen, and then people started finding me – doctors, priests, nurses, social workers, therapists and, most importantly, ordinary people with no special skills other than experience of life.

I learned some important lessons that totally altered my understanding of death. I realized that:

- Death is an illusion. The body dies, but the soul does not.
- There is survival of consciousness.
- Death is a process involving mind, body and soul.
- A good death is a wonder. It is a healing experience for everyone involved – something to be celebrated.
- Dying is a process of shedding and releasing: each shift enables a different set of experiences to be resolved.



- We expect pain, fear and sadness amongst the dying, but there can also be a strong sense of the soul blossoming, a quickening and transformation and a divine sense of grace.
- There is a divine grace and rhythm to the whole dying process.
- When we make friends with death we are shown how to truly live.

Somehow, strangely, modern Western medicine had no view of this.

Gradually, I became more confident at the bedside – sometimes offering gentle hand massage or simple healing, sometimes playing soothing music, but mainly just listening and being fully present.

After a few visits, the dying person often appeared to cheer up and feel a bit better. Was it that the atmosphere around them had changed? At that time I didn't know much about energy medicine, but companionship, listening, holding hands and a little bit of singing seemed to work wonders. Something seemed to shift and the gloom would lift.

These interludes were brief, like bursts of sunshine in winter, but they raised the spirits and often gave my dying friends enough energy to see visitors or make important phone calls. I received many texts asking for 'top-ups', as my friends felt stronger and lighter after a visit.

But always, as death approached, their focus would shift from wanting to keep going as normal to needing a cocoon so that they could focus on their inner worlds. As time passed, they would enter a different, more serene space.

I made these visits in my spare time, often feeling quite overwhelmed afterwards by the intensity of the experience and the privilege of being able to help. And I wasn't only helping the dying person – families, as I gradually got to know them, would ask me to be there to support them as well.



One day someone called me at home and asked to speak to the ‘Soul Midwife’. It was the first time my work had been given a name, and somehow it stuck.

I have now trained many Soul Midwives, both women and men, who have taken the work far and wide in Europe, America, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, working in hospices and care homes and people’s homes and at the heart of the community. These very special practitioners are devoted to easing the pain of others. They have extended my original vision, transforming it into something larger and braver than I would ever have dared to envisage by myself.

If you would like to be part of this new way of working with the dying, this handbook will guide you. In opening up your heart to the care of the dying you will be making a powerful change, not only to your own life but also to the lives of those for whom you care. Your journey will be incredible – hard at times, but always imbued with a sense of the miraculous.



∞ PART I ∞
THE TRADITION OF
SOUL MIDWIFERY



~~~~~  
*'Death is but a doorway to a new life.  
We live today. We shall live again.  
In many forms we shall return to this Earth.'*

**Ancient Egyptian proverb**

~~~~~


CHAPTER 1

ANCIENT SECRETS AND SACRED RITES

*'Gently, gently... breathing, softly, in,
gently, gently... "You are doing so well," she whispers, "so, so well."
She sings to me... a tune my mother sang...
I am wrapped, held safe with her love.
She leads me to the sea of my heart.
The boat is waiting.
We sail together... to the far horizon.
"What can you see?" she asks.
"What can you see?"
Then she takes my hand
and I fall asleep.'*

FELICITY WARNER

Although the title 'Soul Midwife' is modern, the role we offer is as ancient as humankind. As a tribe, we have always known how to sit with the dying and soften the final hours. It has always been the work of Soul

Midwives to ease the pain, to soothe the wound, to calm the breath, to feel the pulse, to keep the soul warm, to feed the hearth with sticks and logs. To sing the songs that ask the ancestors to guide the spirit of the dying one home. To pray and bless and wash the body, close the eyes, blend the oils, mix the herbs, stew the tea, calm the dog, protect the loved ones. To honour and release the bones, and wrap them in binding cloths to sleep in the soft dark earth. It is only in the last 60 years or so that we have lost touch with these skills, as dying people have been taken away to die in hospitals, hospices and care homes rather than in their own beds or in the heart of the home by the warming fire.

The art of dying well used to be taught widely. It was regarded as an important life skill in many civilizations – Egypt, Tibet, India and throughout Europe into the Middle Ages. The instructions, or *ars moriendi* (the art of dying), consisted of prayers and reflections, spiritual practices and in some traditions bodywork such as yoga and specific breathing techniques, and were designed to guide initiates through their dying in the hope of peaceful refuge in the afterlife. Many of my ideas and inspirations have been collected and adapted from a variety of sources that draw on these ancient traditions, including indigenous communities, folk medicine, shamanic practice and the inner mystery traditions of several of the world's great religions.

There are countless stories of early Soul Midwifery. In ancient Hebrew, Sumerian and Egyptian times, priestesses were trained in music, healing arts and high magic, using chant, sacred dance and healing herbs. These wise women carried great wisdom and knowledge, which was often viewed as a threat. During the fourth century AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea eventually decreed that women would be banned from speaking or singing in church, and gradually the healing traditions of women across the Mediterranean and Europe were forced underground.



Only scattered remnants of these traditions are left today, as very little was written down. The inner secrets of transition were carefully guarded, as knowledge without wisdom can be dangerous. Yet clues to the mysteries are all around us.

According to the ancient Sanskrit text the *Bhagavad Gita*, the great secret of the universe is contained within three mysteries of death and the soul:

- The first mystery is to be found in human consciousness. It is something we already know in our bones and in our collective memory. The path to remembering has to be intuited, however, and can arise only when an individual has begun deep inner questioning. This knowingness ripens on the inner planes and is not dependent on any outside teaching or being revealed by a master.
- The second mystery is that practising in accordance with the secret and its wisdom has to be righteous, morally lawful and in accordance with the rules of the cosmos and universal principles.
- Thirdly, it must be 'pleasant beyond measure'. The secret and its wisdom must be life-enhancing, and above the pleasures and limits of earthly existence.

These teachings still apply today and are still carefully guarded. It takes years to work at such a deep level. The inner teachings are still passed between master and pupil in stages, and only after the pupil has successfully passed through a strict series of tests, rituals and initiation ceremonies. The esoteric aspects of Soul Midwifery continue to be 'hidden in plain sight', only appearing to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Many of them are preserved in code amongst other archaic information.



The esoteric aspects of Soul Midwifery don't appeal to everyone, of course, and it isn't essential to practise them in order to help the dying. If you feel that you would like to work on a very simple level, such as holding hands and keeping someone company, that is good Soul Midwifery too.

Today more and more Soul Midwives are encompassing the work of the old priestesses and wise women and reintroducing the sacred to the care of the dying within mainstream healthcare. See what captures your imagination after reading the descriptions below. Once you start uncovering the treasures that line the path before you, your work will be forever enriched by them.

TRADITIONS

Throughout the oldest myths and folk stories we find rich pockets of wisdom on helping the dying to pass gently from this life to the next. The ancient world also gives us many valuable traditions. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, Tibetans and indigenous peoples of South America all believed that the soul survived death and gave instructions on reaching the afterlife.

The Egyptians

The Egyptians also had a sophisticated concept of the cosmology of the soul. They believed that humans consisted of the physical body (the Ka) and the personality or spirit (the Ba) and that the heart was the chief centre of consciousness. This thinking is very in tune with the view of Soul Midwives today and with our own understanding regarding the physical body and the lightbody (the subtle energetic bodies, or energetic signature, of a person).

A collection of the Egyptians' teachings – the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, also known as the chapter of *Coming Forth by Day* – formed a



guide to death and the afterlife, and consisted of incantations, spells and precise formulae to guide the dead to the underworld.

What the Egyptians taught Soul Midwives:

- the power of myth
- the use of symbols (for anointing, and as energy symbols such as those we see in modern Reiki)
- the use of anointing oils
- energy techniques
- initiations for mastery of the physical body.

The Hathors

Hathor was an Egyptian goddess. One of her titles was Mistress of the West and her responsibilities included welcoming the dead into the next life. She was a goddess of music and sound, as well as being a spiritual midwife protecting women giving birth. Many temples were dedicated to her, but the most important was at Dendera. It is believed that her temple priestesses, the Hathors, entered trance states (perhaps induced by snake bites) to channel her teachings.

Hathor is interesting to Soul Midwives because her teachings explain how to work with the soul by using sound. Perhaps this is the origin of toning – creating single-syllable sounds with the voice – as one of the Hathors' teachings says that our voices are healing tools. By toning, we can create powerful healing fields around the dying.

The Hathors are also thought to have shown how we can move energy through the body in a spiralling motion, releasing emotions, memories and soul wounds (*see pages 75–76*) and rebalancing the energy field.

What the Hathors taught Soul Midwives:



- how to work with sound, vibration and resonance
- how to spin the energy field
- the power of the human voice.

Myrrhophores

The myrrhophores, or myrrh bearers, were priestesses of transition and advanced soul technicians. They may have originated from the Egyptian temples of the goddess Isis, but their work is more widely known through the Bible, especially the crucifixion. The most famous myrrhophore is Mary Magdalene.

As well as preparing people for death, the myrrhophores healed physical conditions by placing oils on their fingertips and then spinning them through the chakras, or energy centres, of the body, in a process mentioned in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* as ‘Cleansing of the Flesh and Blood’.

Their outer, visible work was to prepare the body prior to burial, but in their inner work they used many high-frequency oils such as spikenard, frankincense, myrrh and cedar for transition and after-death support. They understood that high-frequency oils magnified the lightbody, and they were able to raise or lower a person’s vibration. They could also manifest energy as pure colour.

Their knowledge disappeared underground for many centuries, but it’s now reappearing. A very small number of people are the wisdom-keepers for their craft.

What the myrrhophores taught Soul Midwives:

- the esoteric science of working with oils and energy to prepare people for transition
- how to work with the lightbody and the soul
- how to work with colour and crystalline energy.



The Essenes

The Essenes were a Jewish sect known for their prophetic, devotional, spiritual and healing work. Jesus is thought to have lived in an Essene community during his early life and to have studied their healing methods.

The word 'Essene' means 'healer' or 'therapeutic', and the Essenes were masters of energy medicine. Their teachings and philosophy on how to live were influenced by Brahmanism, the ancient Hindu texts of the Vedas and the Upanishads, and the yoga systems of India.

Schooled in philosophy and metaphysics, the Essenes had a very 'green' outlook on life. They did not eat meat and lived gently and peacefully in small communities away from towns and villages. They studied the weather and knew how the elements and seasons affected the nutrients in the soil. Food was grown not only to nourish but also to heal. The Essenes also fasted regularly and knew how to rejuvenate and restore their bodies by working with their energy fields.

Washing the feet, hands and body was very important, and the Essenes physically and spiritually cleansed themselves each morning and evening, and before eating, praying or working. One of their customs was to wash the feet of their friends and neighbours as a sign of devotion and humility, and to show that they cared deeply for everyone around them.

They also blessed each other by laying their hands on the top of the head. This gesture was thought to bring healing light down and ensure that everyone was a clear channel for the light. Perhaps it was also a technique of chakra balancing.

The Essenes also knew how to use their voices to cure illness and to prepare people for death.

What the Essenes taught Soul Midwives:

- how to work with love, respect and humility
- how to create compassionate communities



- how to heal with hands and voices
- advanced healing methods
- the importance of diet, cleanliness and spiritual practice for physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Tibetan Buddhists

The most useful diagnostic practices guiding Soul Midwives stem from Eastern medicine, particularly Chinese and Tibetan. These energy-based approaches might seem whacky to Western minds, but they are grounded in scientific fact.

The Chinese and Tibetan systems are based on the view that human bodies are instruments of energy. How we breathe, the colour and coating of our tongue and the quality and character of our internal pulse all give important clues to the *chi*, or life force, we contain. These pointers, the basics of modern energy medicine, begin to make perfect sense when we see them in the context of the human energy field.

Like the Egyptians, the Tibetans had their 'books of the dead': a collection of texts which were not only guidebooks for the deceased but also important spiritual writings.

The Tibetans developed an exact science out of the process of dying and the survival of consciousness, and Buddhist teachers throughout the centuries have guided their students in meditation on death and impermanence. The Tibetan understanding of the dying process has become the foundation of the Soul Midwives' diagnostic model.

Central to the Tibetan concept of afterlife existence is the Bardo, which literally means 'intermediate state'. There is in fact a sequence of states or stages (Bardos) through which the individual passes between death and rebirth.



Like many other traditions, the Tibetan recognizes that subtle consciousness may remain in the body for about three days after death. Tibetans believe that the body should be left undisturbed during that time, as any disruption may affect the transfer of consciousness. For 49 days after death, prayers will be said for the soul to take it through the Bardo state.

What the Tibetan Buddhists taught Soul Midwives:

- the meaning of life/impermanence/suffering
- the cosmology of the soul
- the states of consciousness after death.

The Shamanic Traditions

Shamans (traditional healers and medicine men or women) enter other states of consciousness to communicate with animals, elements of nature and beings from other realms. When they journey with the dying, they may meet spirit guides, power animals and ancestors relating to the person concerned and retrieve information and guidance.

All shamanic traditions celebrate rituals around dying, but these vary between communities. One of the rituals, called the *Despacho*, centres around burning a prayer bundle made from paper, fabric or even pieces of old clothing, which represents the dying person's life. As the bundle burns, the soul is transformed and cleansed for the next part of its journey.

Another very important part of the shaman's work which relates to Soul Midwifery is soul retrieval. Here the shaman journeys on behalf of the friend to retrieve soul parts which have been lost due to trauma during life. Restoring these parts to make the soul whole again before transition can help a person to die well.



What the shamanic traditions taught Soul Midwives:

- how to support and make whole the soul of a friend
- how to work with people who are unconscious in the form of merging and journeying
- how to call in the ancestors to assist with transition.

Celtic Traditions

The Celtic way of Soul Midwifery is to assist transition by creating an atmosphere of beauty and tenderness through poetry, music and ritual. The wise women in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall not only sat and watched over the dying, but also healed the community by singing laments and 'keening' for the dead one.

Lamenting was a tradition to honour the dead and also to help the mourners openly express and release their sorrow. As well as singing, the women would utter loud piercing wails, sometimes accompanied by music.

Traditional Irish wakes involve all-night vigils around the corpse before the funeral, with poetry and storytelling. The Irish consider keening to be part of a spiritual language which is heard by the dead as they journey.

Green medicine, using herbs and tree essences, etc., is also part of the Celtic traditions.

What the Celtic traditions taught Soul Midwives:

- vigiling
- the importance of working with beauty and the soul
- music
- poetry
- laments



- keening
- herbal medicine
- myths

Curanderismo

Curanderismo is a form of folk medicine practised mainly in South America. It is a mixture of many traditions, including gypsy, Spanish/Moorish, shamanic and Mayan. It uses many techniques for healing, including herbalism, massage and rituals for dealing with curses and spirit possession.

Curanderos try to show how the person manifested their illness in the first place. They act as mirrors, revealing what needs to be healed on a personal and spiritual level. Working with heart energy and a link to source, they also honour our connection to Mother Earth.

Many natural tools are used in their healing practices, such as stones, wood, crystals and feathers. Herbs are also used to make healing teas.

What *curanderos* taught Soul Midwives:

- that the divine is the healing force, not us
- the importance of treating the whole person – mind, body and soul
- the recognition that physical illness has its root in soul ‘dis-ease’
- that most diseases occur as a result of other people’s connection to us
- the value of combining healing with massage and ritual
- the importance of storytelling
- how to work with the help of our ancestors.



The ancestors from the various traditions mentioned above are still present, weaving their teachings into our modern practices. They have walked this far and now we must walk the rest of the way.

THE SOUL MIDWIVES' LINEAGE

We lost a tender part of our group soul when we forgot how to sit with the dying; when we forgot the value of holding hands and placing our loved ones beside the glowing embers of their own hearths; when we decided that machinery was more important, and that a germ-free environment with easy-to-clean surfaces was a better place in which to die.

Imagine the exquisite connection that the Inuit feel when gazing into the night sky and seeing the dancing northern lights, the *aurora borealis*, as torches that guide souls towards heaven. Imagine seeing, in the shadows, the myrrhophores, the myrrh-bearing women who tend the dying with aromatic oils, or the ancestors who come to lead the way home. Remember the traditional wise women and men who lived in the homesteads, the villages, out in the forests, beside the rivers, up steep wooded mountains, in towns and communities everywhere humanity has ever lived, sitting with the dying, soothing and healing with herbs and music, vigiling, singing the soul home, preparing the body for the wake...

This is where you'll find the lineage of Soul Midwives, weaving their way through time; men and women who silently but diligently held the space for the dying and created the sacred passings for generations of souls throughout history.

Archetypes within the planet's myths and legends also reveal a history of supporting mind, body and soul.

An affinity to a specific historical or archetypal Soul Midwife may reveal a particular skill or way that you may choose to work. Here are some examples:



Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is said by some to have been the first ever Soul Midwife, holding the energy when Christ died on the cross. She was a teacher and lineage-holder of the great Egyptian mystery teachings of Isis. She used profound energy techniques to assist transition at a deep soul level.

Healer Soul Midwives are attracted to her strong teachings, which are still being revealed.

Angels

Angels are seen as carers of the soul in many of the world's major traditions. They are considered to be protectors of the sick and vulnerable, personal guides and always in loving service of humanity and at hand to sit with the dying and their families. Many salt-of-the-earth Soul Midwives are guided and taught by angels.

Brigit

Brigit is the renowned Celtic Soul Midwife. As well as being a silversmith, poet and blacksmith, she teaches the esoteric secrets of her craft from her cauldron of wisdom. She has an alliance with other beings, such as fairies and elementals, and soothes the dying with a mixture of poetry, music and singing.

Music therapists and creative Soul Midwives resonate strongly with her teachings.

Healer/Teacher Figures

Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, Dame Cicely Saunders and Mother Teresa of Calcutta all used their charisma and skills to improve the journey of the dying. They all lived in a way that inspired others and taught by example.



If you are drawn to these figures, this might indicate a path of using Soul Midwifery skills in a practical, therapeutic or medical context.

Hecate

Hecate is possibly the most challenging of the archetypes. As goddess of the crossroads, with the power to see past, present and future, she has the gift of clairvoyant sight and the ability to see the soul. Her wisdom interprets knowledge and prevents us from working with our intellect. She demands we see the bigger picture and think from the heart. She is tough, challenging and always brings attention to the shadow side in order to balance it with the light. She has the power to take us into difficult places, such as prisons, to do our work with those who have had difficult lives, for example people suffering from addiction.

Holy Men and Women

Jesus, the Buddha and St Francis of Assisi are all iconic figures of selfless service to the dying, impoverished and unloved. They inspire us to work amongst the poor, the lonely and the disadvantaged, especially abroad or amongst impoverished communities.

If you are drawn to these figures, it could mean you will also be drawn to work in a priestly or pastoral role.

Morganna le Fay

She is the legendary British Soul Midwife – half human and half fairy – who worked with the Grail energy, King Arthur and his lineage in the Isle of Avalon. She is still seen in her boat at the solstices, gathering the souls of the deceased. Her guidance is strong, pure and enchanting, and she has an affinity with mystical traditions, ritual and celebrancy.



The Northern Lights

The Labrador Inuit have an ancient myth that the northern lights are spirit torches lit at the end of each day to guide the dying home.

Modern Soul Midwives who feel drawn to work with the northern lights often have a gift for colour healing.

Peter Pan

Peter Pan is an iconic figure from children's fiction who represents an archetype working with the souls of children. The Lost Boys of this story bear witness to the work required to assist children, and those who are very young at heart, towards the light.

EXERCISE

Learning from Sacred Traditions

You can develop your own insights into sacred traditions by studying the sacred texts, sacred music, prayers, customs and myths of other cultures as well as your own.

You could also:

- visit museums and study ancient sacred paintings
- explore other faiths to see how they support the dying
- talk to the elders in your community and ask them for their memories.

SUMMARY

- Since the dawn of humanity, people have been caring for the dying and easing their transition.
- Only remnants of these ancient traditions have come down to us today, but we can benefit from their wisdom.
- Soul Midwifery is a modern, soul-based way of raising awareness of gentle dying methods and bringing compassionate loving care where it is needed.
- Soul Midwifery has now found its place: sitting side by side with modern medicine.
- People from all walks of life and of all ages are welcome to join the growing number of people practising Soul Midwifery (although if you wish to offer your services as a professional, fee-earning Soul Midwife, you will need to be properly trained, insured and mentored).
- An affinity with a certain tradition or archetype can be a clue to gifts, skills and potential ways of working.
- The love and care that we can give at the end of life are among the most precious gifts we can share with one another.

