



## **Courageous Conversation: Transforming midweek moments: Saurabh Mishra's journey from death to life.**

### **Marianne Bowdler:**

Welcome to Griefline Saurabh Mishra.

### **Saurabh Mishra:**

Thank you, Marianne. Pleasure to be here.

### **Marianne Bowdler:**

Great. I've just finished reading your book *My Wednesdays from Death to Life*. And I have to say it's a very enjoyable read, and quite funny, which is, which is a bit strange, given the context. But I understand from this that you've been spending 17 years supporting people through the dying process as a volunteer in a hospice in palliative care. And before we get onto that, I just want to say that here at Griefline all of us who work here, and all our volunteers. We spend a lot of time thinking about self care. What can we do to support ourselves so that we can be present for people. But and you speak about that. But you use the expression a Circle day, and I've not heard that before. Can you sort of explain a little bit. What? What is a Circle Day? And how does that help us refill our cup.

### **Saurabh Mishra:**

Sure. Thanks, Marianne.

So my Wednesdays, as you pointed out, are my circle days. It's a nice point. Halfway between the week, the working week to take a day off, which is what I do and have been doing for 17 years now through, you know, a fairly busy corporate, entrepreneurial career being involved with small and large businesses. And yet every Wednesday saying, You're not going to see me. I'm off doing something else and that's something else really is about the reason for the circle. The title circle is, you

know, what goes around comes around. And I think the idea is really to be sowing seeds of a particular kind all through that day that really bloom and flourish in the immediate future. And the seeds that I'm referring to are, for example, spending a lot of time in meditation, spending long hours of meditation which also includes music. I have an Indian classical music background. I'm a vocalist, and I've been learning for many decades. Actually so a good intensive practice of that is also meditative so all of that combines into that one day but also, as you said, really, a lot of volunteering activity, a lot of giving back, 1, 1 of which is through the palliative care agency.

But there are also others. So I'm the music that I mentioned. I'm I sit on the board of an organization that that promotes that Indian classical music in in Australia. So a lot of lot of activities for that, and also an organization that actually helps entrepreneurs with mentoring and sometimes funding and connections. So I'm also essentially mentoring entrepreneurs. So that that's kind of rounds off my Wednesday. So it's a day spent in contemplation, in meditation and really giving back and I find tha it kind of gives back to me in in abundance. You know it gives me, I think I find some of my best business ideas come in the immediate aftermath of that Wednesday. You know. Watch out for me on a Thursday in the office, and but also, I think there's a lot of happiness, a lot of joy that comes from giving back.

**Marianne Bowdler:**

Absolutely. And that's wonderful. So could you tell us a little bit more about the volunteering in palliative care? What do you actually do.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

Sure. I've trained for 2 different kinds of roles with this particular agency. So the 1st role that that I train for that I still do is really a companionship role. And I think the real common thread in all of that is to be able to be present and have conversations with the with the client. So the agency refers to the patient, as it were, as a client and in that role. Through the years. I've done everything from taking the client out for a coffee to, you know, just if they're in in that at that place in their journey where they really aren't, you know, not even conscious, for that matter.

Then I just go and sit there by the bedside. And typically, I might meditate myself during that time, and I find that that's a very special thing to be able to do as well.

So, and anything from, you know, in between going for a walk, taking them out for a shopping chore. So whatever it is that that in fact, I've also I had a I had a young boy who was in a wheelchair, so I used to take him out to play wheelchair basketball. So really, whatever works for the client. That's what I do. The second role is a biography role. It's a very interesting project that this particular organization has done. I think the volunteers for this organization have probably put together 2,000 biographies by now.

I think I've done about 7 or 8 myself.

And yeah, that's a very special experience as well of sitting and listening to someone recount their life and then going back and kind of putting it into a coherent, you know, piece with photographs and with background research, and so on. It ends up being a fairly good production. But I think it's the it's the exercise of reminiscing and contemplating on their life. That is actually the key part of that offering. So those are the 2 roles that I do with this? With this agency.

**Marianne Bowdler:**

I have heard. There's a that making meaning of your life. What was it all for? What was the purpose of my life can, if you can, make meaning of your life, and you do have a sense of purpose that can really help you. Let go of your regrets, of the things that you left undone, or things that you have done, that you wished you hadn't. And that can help you go towards a good death, and I've I've heard that. But I just wondered, from your experience of sitting with people when they make their biography their autobiography, and they look back over their life. Do you think that is an important part of having a good death.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

Yeah, yeah, I think it's a I mean, I think if you think about the Tibetan tradition, they talk about the point of death as being the most important point of point in life.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

You know, in their thinking it's the point at which you can free yourself forever from the cycle of births and deaths. So they spend their entire life preparing for that point of death. So I think there's much to be said about a good death. You know. Marianne. I I can't speak for anyone else but in my own thinking. For me a good death would be a death with awareness. That would be a blessing.

Because I think there's a lot to be said about that, and there's a you know it. I think it. You know it. There's a degree of being quite fortunate in being able to do that, being able to have a death. That's with awareness mind you. There's another kind of death which is very conscious death with consciousness, I suppose, and active consciousness.

It's probably a paradigm removed from what we are all mostly familiar with. But you know you, you always hear about the stories about Yogis. I've met Yogis, who have gone on to kind of preempt, and you know, announce that on certain such day I would be leaving my body, and on that day that that appointed hour in a very public way.

They sit there in lotus posture, close their eyes and they've gone. I mean, imagine you know what that means for the human potential when it comes to death. So there's much to be

I think, contemplated on yeah, what is a good death?

**Marianne Bowdler:**

I think, without being a Yogi. I think a lot of families have the experience that the person who's dying has some element of choice in it. They will sometimes hold on. Even though the doctors are saying this person is going to die in the next 24 h. In fact, they will hold on because they're waiting for maybe a family member to get back from overseas and they wait until they can say goodbye and then they choose. So there does seem an element of choice even in more pedestrian. You know the rest of us, not the Yogis.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

Well, I mean, you know, I mean there, there's also the idea of deathbed phenomena. Which is, you know, probably what you're describing also speaks to that where?

You know, you have someone who is dying, whose body is kind of you know, deteriorating in on on any aspect.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

And yet at that, just before the point of death, there is suddenly an up spurt in energy, an up spurt in, in, almost, like, you know, in acuity and awareness.

And yeah, it's like that candle that that burns bright before it. It flickers off. And you know, it's almost like, yeah, this is a. It's a blessing. It's a moment. It's your gift to basically be able to say goodbye.

So I think you know, there is a yeah, that's also an aspect of a good death, I think, to be able to say to loved ones. Look, thank you very much, and express, you know your gratitude, I think.

To die with a light heart is also a very important thing.

**Marianne Bowdler:**

So deathbed phenomena. Is that a well known thing? Is that just something that you've seen? Or is that a well documented aspect in Palcare.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

Ha! You know. That's a it's a brilliant question.

The fact is, you know, Marion. Look, I know your you know. Brief line is a very scientific organization. I'm also from a I come from a background of engineering and physics and maths.

And I like to see the world, and trying to explain the world in, you know, with physics and maths, and as I think and I think honestly, you've got to be able to like. There's no such thing as out of the ordinary or or miraculous phenomena, and as far as I'm concerned, you know, every phenomena should be able to be explained with physics.

**Marianne Bowdler:**

Hmm.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

What we do have. Probably a situation is that we don't know enough physics to be able to explain some phenomena. You know. That's I think that's any open-minded scientist should accept that premise. And with the acceptance of that premise, you know, let's talk about deathbed phenomena. So I mentioned one of them. There are others, others said that I have experienced myself. And the most comprehensive research that I've seen on this topic was a master's thesis presentation at a conference where a nurse in the UK had actually gone and interviewed 200 workers in palliative care. So doctors and nurses and ask them the simple question, what sort of deathbed phenomena have you experienced? And you know shockingly, every single one of them had experienced not just one but multiple phenomena. And there's just no framework to talk about it. You know. So now, what are those phenomena? This actually, this researcher had then, I think, quite usefully gone and cataloged those phenomena, and one of them, the 1st one, was exactly what we just talked about. Which is that inexplicable sudden upsurge in energy and acuity. There's another one where, you'll see the dying person often talking to an invisible entity or many entities and it's a very, you know. I mean, it's a very surreal kind of experience. But when you, when that happens and you ask the dying person, they'll say, Yeah, it's my mom. You know, it's someone it's a loved one, a friend, a relative, a parent, someone who has passed away before. and who seemingly is there to kind of help them? Transition, I mean. What a wonderful idea! You know one of our biggest fears in our society is the fear of dying alone.

This suggests to you that there is no dying alone, that you know your loved ones from this life will be there to see you through and that's such and such an amazing idea!

**Marianne Bowdler:**

I can't tell you how comforting that is. I think what we see with our grieving population especially, I think, quite often when a person is a carer, and they do want to spend as much time as possible with the person who's dying, and they specifically want to keep vigil and be there and sacrifice their own time to sit with whoever's dying, and they want to be there at the moment of death, and quite often like significantly. Very often. It's the one time that they leave the room because they just have to pop to the shops, or they have an appointment order, and when they're absent that seems to be when the person dies and it's very distressing. And one of the things

you're left with is, oh, my goodness, they died alone and that can sit very heavily on your heart. So the idea that they didn't. I learn that probably that there were people that came to come to get them. I think it's very comforting and I'm not sure. Can you speak to? Why, that might? Why, why, if a person has a choice of when to die, why do they die when their carer is absent? Do you think.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

As hard as it might be for a carer to hear it. But sometimes the carer is the attachment that the carer has is keeping that person there, you know well past the point that they should be there So that's, I think, you know. Embracing the idea of impermanence embracing the idea of, you know, the inevitability of a death.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

I think, includes the idea of letting go. So oftentimes, you know, I think we'll yeah, we'll just be. So. I mean, it's our. It's our willpower. Right? It's the. It's our willpower. That's kind of keeping them there. And yeah, when we're not there like. Okay. Finally, I can. I can leave

**Marianne Bowdler:**

It's really I remember in your book reading as well. There's something about letting go and something about surrendering. And there's a that feels as though there's a moment of surrender when you die. Is that right?

**Saurabh Mishra:**

Yeah, look, Marianne, I mean it. It really depends on you know how much you want to subscribe to some of the frameworks that that do exist about that, you know I mean the Tibetan book of living and dying, you know, talks in in incredible detail about the Bardo of life, the Bardo of dying. The Bardo of, you know, post-death and the Bardo of pre-life, you know. Obviously, reincarnation is a big idea in in that tradition and it's almost as if people you know their wise sort of practitioners have gone into each state, experienced it, and come back and described it. So you know, death is a process. There's no question about that, and I think we physiologically also agree. Everybody agrees. Death is a process, and there's no 1 point at which you say. Okay, that's, you know, this is the point. So In the same way, I think if you, if you look at the

the considerable literature that comes from. You know, Yogic traditions, Tibetan traditions, Buddhist traditions particularly. And I think I would say I would say every tradition, because it's a human experience. It's a common human experience.

Then, yeah, you know that that point of death is is certainly a point of surrender, point of release and to be able to do so with, I think optimism with, you know the idea that whatever comes next is at least an adventure. You know, either. Either we're all wrong, and there's nothing in which case nothing to worry about or it must. It'll be a grand adventure. So you know, for so to to approach it from that perspective, I think, is is also, I think again goes to that definition of a good death.

**Marianne Bowdler:**

So sitting with death weekly has given you, has taken away any fear that you might have of dying. It's not something to be afraid of.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

No, no, I think I mean again my own experience of these last 17 years of seeing you know very many people that I've known got to know, and then they've died as well as again. Going back to the testimony of some of you know, some of the greatest minds of in our history in human history who have talked about this idea, talked about this this particular matter has told you there's nothing to fear, absolutely nothing to fear. And, in fact, you know, if anything it almost the narrative is almost that this you know what we, what we have going on. Here is the penance. This is the this is the there's a there's a there's a lovely couple it in Urdu, which translates as there's no bigger sentence, there's no bigger, you know, punishment than life only that we don't know what we did to deserve it. We don't know what the crime was so this this idea that this is the penance, and that wherever we go to after this is the is that is actually our home? So you know. What's the what's the what's there to fear about going home?

**Marianne Bowdler:**

Saurabh Mishra. Thank you very much.

**Saurabh Mishra:**

Pleasure, pleasure. Thank you, Marianne.



