

the healing power of meditation

Saturday 4 August 2001 was a special day for PAUL LEONARD. It was his "use-by date" as he calls it. But, instead of "being in a morgue or whatever," he was in Alice Springs, celebrating his daughter's wedding with his family. Paul, a successful Melbourne graphic designer and artist, had been diagnosed four months earlier with pancreatic cancer. He tells his story to Mary Lou Considine.

Paul Leonard and his wife Heather – four months to the day after the doctor had told him that he had four months to live.

"I was shocked when the doctor said, 'You've probably got four months to go.' The door of his office was left open – I could see people in the waiting room reading magazines as he told me I was going to die. I just got up and walked out.

"I went to various surgeons after that, in the grim hope that they could operate, but they couldn't – it had gone to the liver. I thought 'My God, what am I going to do?'"

"I walked over to Tara House [in East Brighton, Victoria] and said to the person sitting in the front office, 'I've been diagnosed with cancer. I wonder if there's anybody I could talk to?' The person there asked, 'Do you know Bob Sharples? Take this card. Carolyn will call you later.'"

Ven. Carolyn Lawler, spiritual program coordinator at Tara Institute, did ring Paul. She invited him to the monthly Healing Support Group meeting, which Ven. Carolyn and Bob Sharples run as part of Tara's Healing Program. Bob also leads courses at the Gawler Foundation, a Melbourne healing center, which has become another important resource in Paul's life.

"From that day on, I had a new life," says Paul. "The shock and the fear left. I'm a perfectly healthy, happy person. I just happen to have cancer in one or two of the organs of my body.

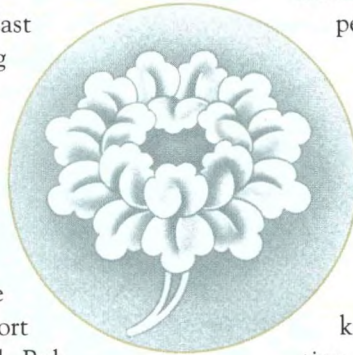
"Buddhist philosophy is different to Western philosophy in at least one way that is very important for cancer patients. Bob did a death awareness meditation at Tara one night and he said that these were the three things to meditate on – we all die, we don't know when, and to be prepared.

"That's an enormous comfort to somebody who's got cancer. I don't know when I'm going to die, and I don't know how – I could die at the football this afternoon of a heart attack. But I do know one thing: that it's worth being prepared.

"I meditate three times a day. I just go into that little room and sit. That's something I never used to do, and it is a

wonderful thing to do in life. I sit on the veranda looking at that beautiful bush – it's a weeping grevillea. I sit there and watch the wattlebirds. That's a meditation, too, just to slow down and see what a great place the world is."

Paul is finding that the most beneficial meditation for him is the practice of mindfulness. "That is where you get the most benefit, I think, when you can sit quietly and just be at peace with the moment.



"The visualisation meditation I use most is visualising the cancer leaving my body – I don't know whether they're cancer cells or abstract bits of whatever. I tend to do it quite peacefully, having the cells floating off into my favourite blue, which always comes to me before I start. The bits just break off and fade away to infinity. When that's happening, I know that the motivation for doing my meditation is right.

"I might say to myself that today my motivation for meditating is ultimate healing – to free my body from cancer so that I can be of help to others, to show wisdom, compassion and loving kindness to all beings. And I'll meditate on that. I feel good, I feel OK, and can go on with the rest of the day. I finish with a dedication to others like me.

"I had a problem at one stage with being a Christian and getting involved in Buddhism. That thought was dispelled when I read that the Dalai Lama had said, 'Buddhism is a spiritual path, rather than a religion, and is a bridge between the two.'

"Now I feel good about it all. I can go to the Church of England one day, I can go to Tara the next and I can compare the two in my mind and talk to them both. So, I've got a lot of faith. I've got all the faiths! If you have faith that there is something there – then for you, there is.

"My journey continues." ❁