

Listening at the Bedside of the Dying

From The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying by Sogyal Rinpoche

"I have been amazed again and again how, if you just let people talk, giving them your complete and compassionate attention, they will say things of a surprising spiritual depth, even when they think they don't have any spiritual beliefs. Everyone has their own life wisdom, and when you let a person talk you allow this life wisdom to emerge. I have often been very moved by how you can help people *to help themselves* by helping them to discover their own truth, a truth whose richness, sweetness, and profundity they may never have suspected. The sources of healing and awareness are deep within each of us, and your task is never under any circumstances to impose your beliefs but to enable them to find these within themselves.

"Believe as you sit by the dying person that you are sitting by someone who has true potential to be a Buddha [enlightened being]. Imagine their . . . nature as a shining and stainless mirror, and all their pain and anxiety a thin,

gray mist on it that can quickly clear. This will help you to see them as lovable and forgivable, and draw out of you your unconditional love; you will find this attitude will allow the dying person to open remarkably to you. . . . Through the strength and peace and deep compassionate attention of your presence, you will help them awaken their own strength. The quality of your presence at this most vulnerable and extreme moment is all-important.

"I never go to the bedside of a dying person without practicing beforehand, without steeping myself in the sacred atmosphere of the nature of mind. Then I do not have to struggle to find compassion and authenticity, for they will be there and radiate naturally.

"Remember, you can do nothing to inspire the person in front of you if you do not inspire yourself first.