

## **Helping Ourselves and Others at the Time of Death**

Our attitudes shape our experiences. Some people avoid thinking about difficulties such as illness, aging, and death. But these are bound to happen, and accepting and preparing for them in advance enables our mind to be calmer when they occur.

As creatures of habit, we tend to die in the way we live. If we are not in the habit of acting kindly during our life, it will be unlikely that we will think to hold virtuous thoughts in mind or engage in virtuous actions as we are approaching death. For that reason, leading a good life by not harming others and helping them as much as possible is the best preparation for our death and future lives and enables us to die without regrets.

In our daily life, and especially as we approach death, we should forgive people who have harmed us, engage in purification practice [or forgiveness], recollect the Buddha [or Jesus], and meditate on love, compassion, and wisdom.

The best way to help friends and family prepare for death is to encourage them while they are alive to abandon non-virtue ... Encourage them to be generous and kind to others and to forgive others and not hold grudges. Avoid involving them in divisive speech, harsh speech, or idle talk. In this way, they will create merit and will have no regrets when they die.

The best procedure to follow at the time of death depends on the person.

In general, as someone approaches death, avoid disturbing their mind with unnecessary emotional outpourings, spiritual ideas that will confuse them, or idle talk. Help them to recall something virtuous—the Three Jewels [or, the Godhead, the Holy Scriptures, and the Church], compassion, generosity, and so on—with which they are already familiar. Encourage them to rejoice in their own and others' virtues.

If they have no religion, gently speak to them about forgiveness, love, compassion, and hope—qualities that everyone appreciates and that will make their mind virtuous.

No matter what religion a dying person follows, encourage them to do the practices with which they are familiar. Encourage a Christian to forgive others, develop a kind heart, pray to God, and think of Jesus's benevolent qualities. Speak to a Jew, Hindu, or Muslim according to the beliefs and concepts of their religion. These are more familiar and comforting to the dying person, and will facilitate their leaving this life peacefully. Never try to convert another person on their deathbed.

Buddhists, for example, can do a variety of practices, depending on their level of practice. Remind a dying Dharma friend of a practice they have trained in and guide them through it if they wish.

When it is our turn to die, we should likewise focus on a familiar practice. Since our mental power and alertness decrease at the time of death, forcing ourselves or others to do a new practice at that time will be confusing. ...

In short, we must do what is suitable to our level of mind and to the circumstances we are in. Whatever we do, we should be content and focus on that practice as best as we can without having doubts that perhaps we should be doing another, more effective practice.

Source: Adapted from *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice: The Library of Wisdom and Compassion* (Volume 2) by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron (Wisdom Publications)