
Accompanying a person at the end of life

By Nelly Shin Gen Tereszkiwick

Before opening this door for the first time onto the unknown,

Leaving dualities behind in order to be in unity with the person to meet.

Any human being has something to teach us, any event carries a teaching.

Before opening that door, dropping off social status and preconceived views at the door of exchanges, letting go of worries and concerns. Silencing the inner dialogue.

Offer life from the outside, the smell of the seasons, the rays of sunshine, a story... a perfume, a presence, the silence.

Listen to the breath, the glance and the words of the person you are accompanying.

A creative listening, attentive, sensitive, accurate, full of empathy, non-judgemental, listen without fears, the fear of the person at the end of life.

Being able to be real.

Touch this body, this hand that tells a story. Just being there, attentive to all its requests, whether fully or little expressed.

By abandoning himself, the dying draws us also into that trust and respect.

Greeting the other within ourselves as he greets us. Life is there, flowing from our heart all the way down to his fingertips.

Leaving behind our conditionings and seeing with the eyes of the heart, not with a narrow look that judges, values and assesses.

Respecting what the other one says. Hearing the wealth he communicates to us.

Understanding what he understands, being humble, not mastering but serving, not knowing but listening,

Listening closely to what he says.

Perceiving the spiritual universe of the dying is often his spiritual suffering (rebellion, guilt...)

Using imagination to find the relevant means to provide spiritual support by involving family and friends.

The person at the end of life needs to be loved in order to feel alive.

The accompanying person gives time and gentleness.

This present moment is a precious moment, and accepting that death is part of it seems to bring some serenity.

As long as we are alive, we are not dead. To us, who do accompaniment, it is obvious that the person at the end of life, is well alive and we try to help her living the best of that present moment thanks to a heartwarming environment.

USEFUL PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Several associations exist for benevolents who are trained to the accompaniment of end of life: JALMAV, TONGLÉN, ASP... They all aim at considering the ill person as a living subject all the way to the end, at giving support to the sick as well as their family and friends circle, in the constant respect of their will.

The associations, which organise the work of the benevolents, have written a charter defining the principles that ought to be respected within their scope of action: respect of the philosophical and religious opinions of the accompanied person; respect of his or her dignity and intimacy, discretion and confidentiality; no interference in the medical cares.

ACTIONS OF THE ASP (Association for the development of Palliative Cares)

- 1. Accompaniment of patients in hospitals and at home*
- 2. Accompaniment in old people's homes*
- 3. Basic and ongoing training of the voluntary accompanying carers (11 months, one Saturday per month)*
- 4. Support to the accompanying carers in talk groups with a clinical psychologist*
- 5. Organization of public conferences and information days*
- 6. Regular publishing of an information newsletter for the members of the association*