

THE GRACE IN DYING: A MESSAGE OF HOPE, COMFORT AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION.

Kathleen Dowling Singh

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*Enlightenment for a wave is the moment
the wave realizes that it is water.
At that moment, all fear of death disappears.*
Thich Nhat Hanh

When preparing for a talk on the spirituality of dying recently, I found this graceful book by Kathleen Dowling Singh to be of great use. She argues that death to ego (our separate self) is death to our sense of control over our lives. This sense of control is peeled away over our lifetime, expedited by crises, by spiritual practice, and by accompanying persons who are dying. Thus, a relationship with death is developed inevitably with experiences of loss and uncertainty. That relationship can be further fostered by reaching higher levels of consciousness through contemplation and by sitting with individuals with terminal diagnoses.

I felt an aha! moment when I read the quotation above by Thich Nhat Hanh on the enlightenment of a wave – this image can help me over and over again to realize my true nature. Throughout the book I experienced other moments where Singh gave words to the truth I had somehow known. What I like best was her assurance in the introduction that ‘dying is safe’. The book is an elaboration of how we can learn to accept death and to facilitate the grace of dying for the person we accompany as well as for ourselves.

Through talking with and being with dying patients over the years, Singh has learned that people nearing death go through almost universal processes, even without an initial faith in something greater than themselves. Dying is a process of transformation through which the body and the separate sense of self dissolve while the person is filled more and more with spirit.

She identifies the **Nearing Death Experience** (a process beginning days or hours or even minutes prior to death), which is characterized by a number of emerging qualities. These include: relaxation, withdrawal, radiance, silence, sacred/transcendence, knowing, intensity, merging, and experienced perfection. The nearing death experience can transform the meaning of the dying process: “from perceived tragedy to experienced grace.”

She urges us to accept withdrawal of a dying person and to learn to be present, to accompany him/her during this journey.

Let us create the environment and conditions that nurture movement through the transformations of dying. Let us be the ear that listens without judgment and with deep compassion to all the voice of our loved one has to say in the phase of Chaos. Let us be the still and quiet point of acceptance where the personal life is reviewed and resolved, honoured and released. The love will endure, never fear. In fact, beyond the personal self, love just gets stronger, purer, freer, deeper. Go there with your loved one. Let us be the silent and understanding companion to the voiceless time of Surrender. Sit and breathe with your loved ones, matching your rhythms. Sit and meditate with your loved one, matching your deepest longings. Let us share, far beyond the last breath and even through a breaking heart, in our loved one's Transcendence: the entrance, at the edge of life, into the peaceful, resplendent Center.

Singh provides theory (based largely in transpersonal psychology as well as an integration of Christian and Buddhist perspectives). Yet, the uniqueness of this volume is the development of a practical approach to facilitating and sharing the grace in dying. We are invited to form our relationship with death through being present with the dying.

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