

## **Kopan Monastery Prayers and Practices**

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### **Advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche for the time of death.**

During the death process, the main thing is to take care of the dying person's mind. Many others can take care of the body, but we can take care of the mind. The most worthwhile thing to do is to inspire the person to think of others with loving kindness and compassion, to wish others to be happy and free from suffering. If a person dies with the thought of benefiting others, the mind is naturally happy and this makes the death meaningful.

Eliminate any base motivations that might be present in your own mind such as seeking reputation, material offerings, or respect for yourself. In their place, generate strong love and compassion for this suffering sentient being who is approaching death.

Make the dying person's room as beautiful as possible: a calm, peaceful, serene, holy environment is so important. There should be beautiful views, beautiful art, flowers, spiritual images. Flowers give a very special spiritual feeling. The point is to make a positive imprint on the mind. Because of being there, the person's mind is elevated, and he/she is not afraid of dying. When visitors come, they will see the room as a nice place, a place that makes them feel there's no need to be afraid of death, and they will want to come.

When considering the spiritual care of the dying, it can be helpful to divide people into several different categories, because the category they are in will determine the most useful approach to use. These categories are:

- (1) whether the person is conscious or unconscious
- (2) whether he/she has a religious belief or not

In terms of the first category, a person who is still conscious can perform the practices, perhaps with assistance. However, if the person is unconscious someone will have to do the practices on his/her behalf.

For the second category, a person's specific religious beliefs can be utilized. If there are none, the person needs to be encouraged to have positive/virtuous thoughts at the time of death, such as memories of positive and compassionate accomplishments during the life.

It is helpful to encourage a spiritual practitioner to have thoughts such as love, compassion, and remembering his/her spiritual teacher. It is beneficial also to have an image in the room of Jesus, Mary, Buddha, or some other spiritual figure who has meaning for the dying person. It may be helpful for those who are with the dying person to say some prayers, recite mantras, etc. These can be silent or aloud, whichever seems more appropriate.

However, one needs to be very sensitive to the needs of the dying person. The most important thing is to keep his/her mind happy and calm. Nothing should be done, including certain spiritual practices, if this causes the person to become annoyed or irritated.

Because the death process is so important, it is best not to disturb the dying person with noise or displays of emotion. Expressing attachment and clinging to the dying person can disturb the mind, and therefore, the dying process. It is more helpful to mentally let the person go, to encourage him/her to move on to the next life without fear. It is important not to deny death or push it away, but rather just to be with the dying person as fully and openly as possible, trying to have an open and deep sharing of the person's fear, pain, joy, love, etc.

When a person is dying, the mind becomes much more subtle, and more open to receiving mental messages from dear ones. So silent communication and prayer can be very helpful. It is not necessary to talk much. The dying person can be encouraged to let go into the light, into God's love, etc. Again, this can be verbal or mental.

This should be our aim: not that the person must necessarily believe in karma, but that they die with a happy, positive mind, with compassion and loving kindness; this is our precious gift.