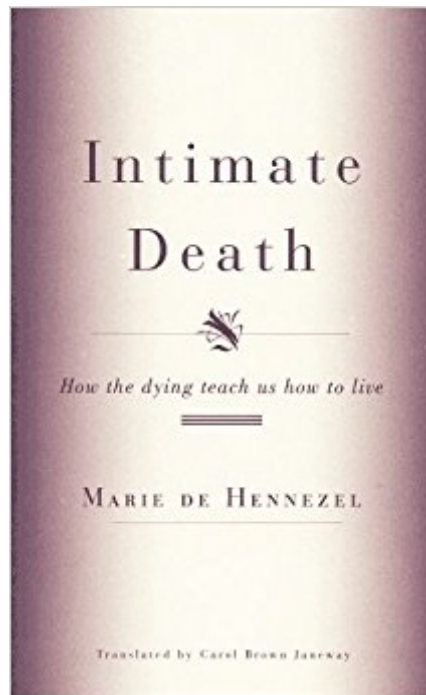




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Intimate Death: How The Dying Teach Us How To Live



Synopsis

An extraordinary book and an immediate bestseller abroad, *Intimate Death* tells readers how to help those who are dying face the end squarely and with acceptance, bringing back both peace and dignity to death. 224 pp. Author tour. 40,000 print.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

French psychologist de Hennezel shows the dying how to live every last minute to the fullest. A best seller abroad. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Hennezel is a psychologist in a Paris hospital's palliative care unit for the terminally ill who also works with the dying at an AIDS hospice and in their homes. This book, a best-seller in France, is basically a journal of about a year of her professional life, which is no longer traditionally professional, for she has disposed of so-called professional distance. She perches on the edge of the bed when she first meets a new patient, and she freely holds and kisses her patients to assure them that they are not dying in solitude. She strives to learn what unfinished personal business they may have with family members, friends, or themselves and helps them conclude it. But if she gives much, she insists that she obtains even more: "true intimacy." Telling many stirring deathbed stories, Hennezel adds powerfully to the rising chorus (e.g., in part, M. Scott Peck's *Denial of the Soul*) in favor of palliative care of the dying. Ray Olson

It is a classic in the field of palliative care. It gently instructs the living how to "accompany" the dying.

It explains how to speak of death, what physical relief a patient can get by touch, how to reassure a patient "you have enough time" to complete the act of living e.g., reconciliation with others, telling one's life story, celebrating and continuing to engage in beloved activities--music, art...until transition.

The subtitle "how the dying teach us how to live", had a unusually specific meaning for me. As I watched my emotional response and empathy to the conversations between Hennezel and terminally ill patients, I began to notice how many patients wanted to die earlier, not later, until, that is, their conversation with Hennezel. And, in each case, the patient was glad to live another few weeks or months because, during the conversations, they began to resolve some outstanding issues about their lives. Just as Hennezel helped them awaken to the value of attending to unfinished business, I too came to realize how much unfinished business I have myself. Or, put another way, I see the backlog of things-I've-hoped-to-do (since retirement) through the lens of "unfinished business." And I've since realized that other authors such as Stephen Levine's *A Year to Live: How to Live This Year as If It Were Your Last* have emphasized the same point. The conversations between Hennezel and her terminally ill patients are invariably moving because of the compassion that Hennezel and the nurses on the staff extend to their patients. On pages 47-50 Hennezel refers to the field of Haptonomie (found in the French (but not the English) Wikipedia) associated with Frans Veldman which is about the importance of affection and human touch for "affectivity." This is as widely appreciated around child birth as it is under appreciated at the time of death (in the US at least). Hennezel and her co-workers implement this affectivity in their palliative unit for the dying and I think the articulation of that practice is much of what makes this book so emotionally moving, at least for me. I can open the volume to any pages and within minutes I'm teary eyed. It's the depth of my emotional responses to the moving conversations that keeps me on my new track of attending to unfinished business. I dare not read the whole book in one setting -- perhaps 10 pages/week will keep me moving on what is genuinely a new path for me. I keep wanting to buy a crate of these books and hand them out on the street corner but, since the 1973 publication of Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*, I realize that issues surrounding death are not for everyone. I wrote everything above almost a year ago but since returning to the book time and again, I now realize something I had not fully appreciated, viz., just how many people in palliative units are begging for something very specific, an injection to enable them to die. If most adults fully realized how they will likely feel about dying once they approach those final days (in a first rate palliative unit as well as nursing homes with fewer resources), I suspect the laws against

euthanasia would be off the books. I think that Becker's phrase, "denial of death," helps explain why euthanasia remains illegal in countries like the US. The inevitability of death gives meaning to life and Hennezel's excellent book facilitates greater presence to the death of others, to one's own mortality and, hence, the value of living.

I ordered this book, as my mother had a terminal illness and wasn't given long to live. Sadly it arrived a day after she passed. I only wish I had ordered it sooner. It explained many things, and gave a bit of comfort. I wish my brother and sister in law (who were caring for my mother at the time of her death) had had a chance to read it, They might have seen things differently. My mother's behavior was like many of the terminal in the book..defiant, angry etc...and I believe she had every right to feel those feelings. I saw her ten days prior to her passing and I wish I had known then what I know now. I would have encouraged her to talk, and when she tried to say she was sorry, I would have fully let her. I would have asked her if she was afraid, I would have massaged her, I would have engaged her in conversation..., I would have...done so many things different. Instead I cut her off, not wanting her to be burdened. If you have a loved one who is terminal do yourself a favor and get this, and help them grieve what they are losing. I wasn't in time.

Marie de Hennezel is obviously an extraordinary person. As a psychologist, she was assigned to the first palliative care unit in a Parisian hospital. This was when French medicine was in the dark ages as far as informing patients of what's happening and what is likely to happen. Some patients were even told that they were going to a convalescent unit! As a psychologist, de Hennezel was only supposed to sit and talk with patients, but she sat on the edges of their beds, whenever possible, and touched, gave massages, helped clean up messes, fed them, everything. Her extraordinary compassion and sensitivity is something to experience and for those of us who work with the dying (I am a hospice volunteer) to emulate. You won't find much you can abstract of how to operate in these situations, or even much of "How the Dying Teach Us How to Live," the subtitle. Yet I would recommend this book to anyone, including family caregivers, because her example will help you find that sort of compassion within you.

An encouraging look at a portal through which we all must pass.

This is one of the best books I've ever read on Death & Dying! This book is inspiring and touching beyond comprehension! This author comes across as sincere and compassionate! She and

Stephen Levine should get together to collaborate on project, as he too is a wonderful writer on the subject. Anyway, I wish every person in the world would read this book! I initially read this book when I was getting grief counseling through Hospice, but since, I've bought several copies for family and friends!

Excellent. Every baby boomer needs to read this. So far I have given away 2 copies.

I had already read the book(borrowed) and just had to own it so I can use as a text and a reference.

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