



ON DEATH AND DYING

Analysis by Salim Al-Yacoub

In Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's book, "On Death and Dying", Dr. Ross addresses an issue most cultures and people find taboo. Dr. Ross, a native of Switzerland, graduated from the University of Chicago in Psychiatry. She quickly became a pioneer in near-death studies through her many years of interest and research on the subject. The book she composed (written in 1969 but still holding its relevance to this day) revolves around the 5 stages of death that she derived based on her numerous studies of people facing imminent death. The 5 stages, in order of progression, are labeled as *Denial*, *Anger*, *Bargaining*, *Depression* & *Acceptance*. These stages are presently recognized in the fields of Psychology and Psychiatry as the Kubler-Ross Model. This model has been witnessed in terminally ill patients who have been learning, coping, and coming to terms with their immortality. The importance of her research with the terminally ill has proven to be profound as this model works; it has been witnessed in terminally ill patients of most ages and environments, and who were raised in a culture who view the topic of death as taboo.

The Stages of Death

The first stage of death Dr. Ross labeled as *Denial*, revolves around the emotions most people have when learning of their incurable diagnoses. This first stage can often be one of the hardest to get past and proves to be detrimental to the overall well-being of the patient if he or she does not move beyond the stage. Denial is usually followed by *Anger*, in which the humanistic reaction of acknowledging the fact that an incurable diagnosis has grabbed a hold of the patient and induced feelings of bitterness towards others who are healthy. The *Bargaining* stage develops after the anger stage and leads to the patient making attempts of begging medical professionals and God to save their life. This stage also proves to be detrimental to the patients' overall well-being if it is not passed. Yet, *Depression* (minor or relatively long lasting) sets in after the patient realizes that begging for prolonged life has been shown fruitless. The final stage in the Kubler-Ross Model is *Acceptance*. In this stage, the terminally ill patient has successfully passed through the previous four and has exhausted all efforts at prolonging life; this allows the patient to come face to face with the reality of the illness. This stage can often be the most peaceful; surprisingly, as all bitter feelings, fear, and depression have vanished, which allows the patient to feel at peace as they face their exit from this world.



Beyond the Stages

These stages, although a major part of the book, are not the only focus and aim of Dr. Ross's years of research. The book is littered with varied and numerous stories of her personal experiences with the terminally ill. Out of the hundreds of patients Dr. Ross has studied, the most poignant are discussed in her book with the aim of showing readers that facing and dealing with death is a very dynamic and challenging process. Dr. Ross unveils the weaknesses of the hospital and health care system, and the fears that hospital and medical staff face when dealing with the dying. The book discusses various real world scenarios in which doctors, nurses, chaplains, priests, rabbis, and others either avoid or deal with their own fears and emotions around the dying, and how this comes into play when dealing with their patients. The book emphasizes the need to successfully help the patient pass these 5 stages, as they often overlap each other. A dying patient who has gone through the 5 stages, has had enough time to face mortality and immortality, and will be more likely to die at peace.

"On Death and Dying" is a ground-breaking book and has made a significant impact in the fields of Psychology and Psychiatry, as well as opening the minds of those who read it. It has been dubbed "The Classic Bestseller" and has been rated very highly by numerous medical professionals and book critics. A highly recommended work for medical students and those entering all other health related fields, as well as a supportive book for those having to cope and deal with the terminally ill. Reading this book, the reader begins to understand that he or she is no different than the patients described within its stories. The fact that you will surely have to deal with similar issues throughout your lifetime, especially near the end of it, makes this book hit home and a worthwhile read.