

Sententious wisdom is not pills to pop but allday suckers to move slowly, deliciously, around the mouth of your mind. While great quotations can help us upward at every stage of life, they seem most powerful at the last stage--so the skill of using them with the dying is an appropriate component of Hospice training of both professionals and volunteers....The seeds of wisdom are blown by the winds of God into every garden: wisdom is transcultural, ennobling our living and dying whatever our heritage and faith-commitment. It does not violate, but illumines, every particular way of seeing-and-living-in-the-world (which is my definition of a religion). INSTANCE: For a dying survivor of Auschwitz, I wrote out quotation #1, and he had his final operation with that little piece of paper clutched in his hand--a Jewish hand clutching a bit of wisdom written by a Christian and given him by a Christian....I have adapted the quotations' language to increase their pertinence to Hospice work and to honor current sensibilities....God, or whatever holophrase you may use instead (Life, Cosmic Energy, Evolution, or whatnot), is the source of the quotations--so they belong to God and may be freely reproduced but not for sale (which would violate publishers' rights and my rights). Two dollars sent to me--309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville MA 02636--would bring you all the reference data (i.e., authors and publishers). The omission, here, of the data is deliberate: attention is not to be draw away from a quotation's substance by reflections on its origin.

1. The road that stretches before our feet is a challenge to our heart long before it tests the strength of our legs. Our destiny is to run to the edge of the world and beyond, off into the darkness: sure in spite of all our blindness, secure in spite of all our helplessness, strong in spite of all our weakness, joyfully in love in spite of all the pressures on our hearts. In that darkness beyond the world, we can begin to know the world and ourselves. We can begin to understand that we were not made to pace out ^{our} lives behind prison walls, but to walk into the arms of God.
2. In living and dying, every mind must face the unyielding rock of reality, of truths that do not bend to our lust or greed or fantasy or whim, of rules we cannot measure but that measure us. Besides, we are called to the courage of daily meeting the rebuff of mystery, which forever defeats our control over the meaning of our lives. To some, these limitations are an unbearable humiliation, perpetual insults to their proud, overreaching egos. Others experience these barriers exultantly, humbly accepting their challenge: so much can be known and truth yet not exhausted, truth that is an ocean not to be contained in the pool of the human mind.
3. The search of reason ends at the shore of the known; on the immense expanse beyond it only the sense of the ineffable can glide. Neither is amphibian: reason cannot go beyond the shore, and the sense of the ineffable is out of place where we exercise our shore-powers in measuring and weighing. Why do we leave the shore of the known? We set sail in our adventures beyond reason because our mind is like a fantastic seashell that, put to the ear of our inner attending, perpetually murmurs wordless messages from the waves beyond the shore. Of both realms we are citizens, and our religious language is a signal and reference system between them. To each other, they are as far and as close as time and calendar, as violin and melody, as life and what lies beyond the last breath.
4. Among my patients in the second half of life--that is to say, over 35--there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.
5. Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.
6. God is of no importance--unless of supreme importance.
7. Why should we spend our time listening to the babble of those who play it safe? Most of the words that illumine our hearts, lighten our loads, and heals our wounds come to us from self-forgetful souls, ^{searc/etw} rewards with rejection and even death. They are the dangerous ones, and only they can deliver us from danger.