

Sooner or later, by age or disease or accident, one's physical body has no survival value. And when one is almost "gone," one is tempted to believe that "I" no longer has any real, significant, "meaningful" value. A book that addresses this mood in simple, profound, and playful manner is C.S. Lewis' THE FOUR LOVES--in which, under "friendship," he has this: Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that gives value to survival....This thinksheet picks up on those last four words and muses on the notion vis-a-vis the vital work of Hospice professionals and volunteers.

1. Hospice is friendship--new friendship(s), and in a new mode (viz., friendship occasioned by the fact that the occasioning friend will soon be dead). To use a commercial term, it's a "value added" mode of friendship.
2. Logotherapy teaches that when most of our powers to create and appreciate are taken away, it becomes clearer that what cannot be taken away is the power and responsibility to decide our attitude toward what is happening to us. Hospice personnel participate in the patient's decision-making--a fact heightening the attitudinal factors in Hospice training.
3. Dying reduces a human being to essentials and humanly essential tasks--one of which is being a friend. Emerson: "God evidently does not intend us all to be rich or powerful or great" (and the dying cannot become any of these), "but He does intend us all to be friends."
4. Being a friend to the dying, and (so) helping the dying be a friend, is a blessed axiological shift from the burden of ego: not "the worth of the individual" (who, when dying, feels worthless more intensely than if not believing in "the worth of the individual"), but the worth or value (1) of the Hospice worker and (2) between self and Hospice worker. (See Buber: God BETWEEN "I" and "You.") Am. philosopher Josiah Royce (adapted): We're social beings, "naturally and in this sense helplessly depending on our communities. Sundered from them, we have neither worth nor wit; we wander in waste places, and when we return we find the lonely house of our individual life empty."
5. When a patient believes s/he is worthless, should the Hospice worker disagree? The Royce quote suggests the patient may BE worthless--a notion offensive to "Americanism" with its dogma of "the sacredness of the person." If the worker agrees, the project becomes this: helping the patient create some self-worth by discovering and exploiting a focus-beyond-self. This may be prayer (which locates worth not in self but in God), benevolence (a Latin word meaning "willing" value in/for others as the "good"), the arts (which celebrate creative/appreciative values through-beyond the self), or--the emphasis of this thinksheet--friendship (which pays attention to the value of the other person more than to the reciprocal values for oneself), or self-sacrifice (which pays attention only to exonomous values, beyond self--unless one believes in afterlife pay-offs for the self).
6. And speaking of the afterlife (on which science must be agnostic, cannot be unbelieving), some believe that friendship survives death. Hear St. Francis deSales: "Friendships begun in this world will be taken up again, never to be broken off." At least this I believe (pursuant of my doctrine of the conservation of values): All our honest reachings out are met by the reaching-down Hand of God, and all the values we give to survival are taken up into and enrich the Heart of God; for friendship with God is the source and goal of all our friendships, as all our loves participate in God's love and are quasi-fulfilling forms of our love for God.