

## Guest Editorial

### When My Time Comes, Please Let Me Go

Today, medicine is at a crossroads. I have an opinion I would like to express. I am a retired physician who practiced medicine for about half a century. Medicine has made great strides in the recent decades. However, I disapprove of some of the new procedures for the terminally ill. They do not add anything of value to the human being we are supposed to be helping. They just prolong the suffering of the patient, add to the agony of the family, and raise exorbitantly the cost of medical care, especially Medicare. Therefore, I wrote this article, which expresses my personal views, hoping it will initiate intellectual discussion on this important subject.

No one lives forever. Each of us has a mission in life to fulfill. At the end, each mission is accomplished, either partially or completely or not accomplished at all. I hope mine will eventually be achieved. After that, I would feel nothing more to do, no more battles to fight. The logical thing then is to go, to move on. When my presence is no longer beneficial, no longer needed, and I am only in the way, then I should go. Being too weak or too sick will only slow down the caravan. As the trip continues and time goes by, I do not want to be a drag. I want to spare those with me the decision of whether to leave me behind or carry me along. Such indecision can break families. Some have softer hearts than others.

At a certain stage in life, eating and drinking may become tasteless. Why eat if food has no taste? Why drink if it does not quench the thirst? What is thirst? It is a feeling of deprivation of fluid. If I no longer taste the fluid as I drink it, if I feel indifferent whether the mouth is dry or moist, then I will no longer feel thirsty, I will no longer have a desire to drink. The taste buds and the sense of smell have a function that makes it enticing to eat and drink, to boost that desire, and to improve the appetite in the same way the color of flowers attracts hummingbirds. If one of these birds is color-blind, it will get lost and not know where to get the nectars. It will starve and die. If I reach a stage when I no longer have the desire to eat and drink, do not force food on me: no stomach tubes, no food in a vein. To me, food

has to take its normal channel to be food. Eating and drinking are instincts in all creatures. Animals survive for and by food. Birds search for food. Even plants fight for food. If I lose the basic instinct of fighting for food, if I do not look for it or ask for it, and if I am not able to taste it and enjoy it, then I am ready to go.

When I lose the appreciation of the awesomeness of the beautiful creations of God and man, then life is no longer beautiful and has no mental allure or taste. It then consists of shades of gray, shapeless creatures, and hollow buildings. When what was once considered a beautiful warm home becomes a falling tent with large holes in it that do not impress me to repair it or stimulate me to ask for help to repair it, then it is time for me to go.

When rats roam around in the tent, eating everything, including the food brought to me a week ago, and I do not care, then it is time for me to go.

Asking for help may become a burden when I depend on someone, however close to me, to think for me, to move me to a chair, to carry me back to bed, to give me a bath, and to cover my skin. These are simple tasks I do subconsciously. Gradually, they require a big effort to perform and eventually become impossible to do. If that person to help is absent, I may not even care and would let myself rot in place. When I reach that stage, I have to go, because dignity is what I live for. Giving, not taking, is my rule.

Life is like a car, and I am in the driver's seat. When I lose the sense of direction and control, the car has to stop, or I may hurt someone unintentionally. Hurting others is not something I do.

When the train reaches the end of the line, I have to disembark to give room for new passengers. What I have done during the trip is done. It cannot be undone. It is neither for me to judge myself nor for others to do so. It is God who will.

Life is one-way ticket. Holding on the rail of the train is useless; I would not have the power even if I tried. Hiding under a seat is senseless. I will be stamped by the new passengers, die in pain, and be

thrown away from the window of the fast-moving train.

If God's oxygen in the air is not adequate for my survival, oxygen from a tank will not help for long. It will eventually defeat its purpose and burn my lungs; it will not sustain my life. When I need the tank of oxygen as a way of life, it is not the way for life. When I reach that stage, I should go.

But to where? Going ultimately has a destination. All my life I thought of that destination. In fact, it puzzled man throughout history. But we are mortals; we do not know our destination. We know we are going to die. We as Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment. We believe in Paradise and Hell. We do not know which will be our final abode; only God knows, and in God we trust.

In conclusion, when I feel there are no more

mountains to conquer, have no purpose to live for, am unable to taste life physically or mentally, have no joy for life or living, am unable to take care of myself, and am nothing but a burden, then it is time for me to go. I do not know when this time is. Only Allah knows.

My loved ones, when these signs appear on the horizon, then my time has come, and I have to go. I am not asking for euthanasia, but do not be in my way because I do not want to be in yours. Just let me go. Please let me go!

**Ezzat Abouleish, MD**  
**Professor Emeritus of Anesthesiology**  
**University of Texas**  
**Houston, Texas**  
**<http://ezzatz2007.spaces.live.com>**