

Are you ready for old age?

By Yen-F. Ruffalo



Time is passing.
Things are changing.
From the smallest
cells of your body

To the biggest stars
in the universe,
Nothing is permanent.

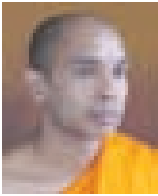
A flower blooms
and fades away.
A tiny plant grows to a
huge tree and dies.
Living beings arise
and pass away.
Life is a flux of energy of
constant change.

The moment you are
born is the moment you
start getting old.

Birth and Death are
nothing but changing.

Are you ready for
old age? Do you think
it's too early to get
ready?





Born in the south eastern Sri Lankan village of Bibile, Venerable Kanugolle Rathanasara became a novice monk in the early age of twelve and received his higher ordination (upasampada) in 1998 at the Malwatu Maha Viharaya in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

His insatiable quest for learning saw him entering the portals of the University of Kelaniya, and graduating in 1998 with a Bachelor of Arts (Special) degree in Mass Communication. The noble expression of his endeavour to share his knowledge of the Dhamma internationally became fulfilled when he was selected to become a resident monk at the Sri Lankaramaya Buddhist Temple in Singapore in 2001, at the invitation of the Singapore Sinhala Buddhist Association which administers the temple.

Being in the prime of his youth himself, he has exemplarily garnered the support of the youthful devotees and banded them into a group that calls themselves the Dhamma Gavesi Youth Group (Seekers of the Truth), not only to enhance spiritually but also to contribute in various ways to the activities of the temple.

His articulate communication skills holds him in good stead to conduct regular Friday evening Dhamma talks and Sunday evening blessing services, which are witnessing an increasing interest among the attendees.

Education & Dhamma Propagation Subcommittee
Sri Lankaramaya Buddhist Temple

Are you ready for old age?

Ven.K.Rathanasara

Sponsored by

Ehipassiko Chanting Group

~ Warming the Heart, Freeing the Mind ~

In Memory of the Late

Mdm Tay Cheng Chuah

The gift of the Dhamma excels all other gifts.

May all the living beings be well and happy!



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Acknowledgement

Cover & Layout Designed by
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June 11th, 2009

Contents

Getting old.....	02
Falling sick	05
Dissolving of Energies	06
Re-Becoming.....	08
Are Buddhists pessimistic?.....	09
Understanding Nature.....	11
Being good and doing good	14
Depending on yourself.....	16
Health is wealth	18
Getting ready to leave	20

Are you ready for old age?

The sky was clear.

Morning came with a cooling breeze.

Soothing and cheerful was the singing of the birds.

Flowers and leaves covered the trees.

It was another lovely day of springtime.

Prince Siddhārtha got into his beautiful chariot. He was on his way to the Pleasure Park. His vigilant eyes caught the sight of an old man by the side of the road.

He was shocked by this experience since it was the first time he saw an old man. Eventually he came across a sick man, a dead body and an ascetic.

These four sights made him think deeply about life. He realized that sooner or later all beings will reach these states in their lives. He wanted to seek a way out of these unpleasant states. With the aim of finding a way to stop suffering from old age,

sickness, and death, he renounced his life as a prince, with all its comforts, wealth, and power, to become an ascetic.

He was determined to find the true path to happiness and freedom and end the cycle of birth and death.

How many of us, when we are young, realize that in the future we too will become old? We see sickness and death around us, but many of us live, as if we are going to live forever.

Getting Old

Getting old starts from the moment that you are born. A flower which blooms in the morning will fade away in the evening. A tiny plant which sprouts from a seed will grow and becomes a huge tree and one day it will fall upon the earth. The baby who is born today will grow, eventually becoming a child, a young man, and finally an old person. Death will follow.

Time is passing. Everything is changing. Nothing is permanent. Life is a changing process. It is a

constant flux of mental and physical energies. This changing process is called getting old. Therefore every single second that you live, you are getting old.

Every second that you spend reading this booklet, you are getting older. The one who started reading this booklet and the one who finished reading it are two different persons. Getting old does not start in a particular period in your life. The changes that take place in your mind and body occur all the time, from birth until death.

In the discourse on ‘The exposition of the truths’ Venerable Sāriputta explains to his fellow monks:

“What, Friends, is ageing? The ageing of beings in the various orders of beings, their old age, brokenness of teeth, grayness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of life, weakness of faculties – this is called ageing”¹

Nobody likes to get old. You would like to stay young, strong and healthy. Can you avoid getting

old? Scientists are doing, experiments to find ways to control ageing. Thanks to modern medicine you can hide your age to some extent. But to what extent can you do it? Are you ready to accept these changes which will occur in your body and mind?

“To beings subject to ageing there comes the wish: ‘Oh that we were not subject to ageing! That ageing would not come to us!’ But this is not to be obtained by wishing; and not to obtain what one wants is suffering”²

Before going to bed, you take out your dentures to make sure that you will not swallow them or get them stuck in your throat. When you see that your hair has turned grey, you tend to colour it. In the morning, before you come out from your home, you apply colour on the lips and nails, do some facial make up and then look into the mirror to see whether you have done a good job of covering your actual self.

You like to be young and attractive, though you are really old. You are happy to hide your actual age from the others.

Falling Sick

At one time or another during your life you will have physical and mental health problems. Only a very few, if any at all, will have perfect physical health and mental health through out their life.

Ill will, anger, hatred, jealousy, arrogance, craving and miserliness are some of the mental defilements that may arise and cause suffering in your day to day life. If you cannot understand the nature of these defilements, and if you do not control them, they can make you do evil acts.

Anger makes a man quarrel or get into arguments with another. Jealousy makes one plan secretly to destroy others. People take revenge because of ill will or hatred. Being a slave to desires, being unable to control them, you may commit sexual crimes. Strong craving may lead you to steal.

When the mind is filled with evil thoughts, you are mentally sick; you may not have a peaceful sleep. The desire, jealousy or ill-will in the mind cause you to become physically ill.

You can fall sick at any moment. But in old age you become sick very easily. You face diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart diseases, arthritis and many more. Your organs like the heart, liver, lungs and kidneys become weak. Your eye sight will become poor. .You may lose the hearing ability and perhaps your memory.

Dissolving of Energies

Death is not something new. It is always happening in your body and mind. Every single moment, you are changing; becoming someone else; you are in the process of dying and becoming. Your bodily cells are always dying and being replaced by new ones. Thoughts arise in your mind and they too die. When one thought dies, it gives way to another thought arising in its place.

While someone is living, the process of living itself is dying and becoming. It is like the flowing of a river. It is like the burning of a candle. Venerable Sāriputta says:

“What, Friends, is death? The passing of beings out of the various orders of being, their passing

away, disappearance, dying, completion of time, dissolution of aggregates, laying down of the body – this is called death”³

Though life is precious to everyone, you cannot live forever. One day you will die. Because of modern medicine, you can prolong your life span. You may see those people who live with the help of machines in hospitals; though, the life that is prolonged is full of unbearable suffering and pain.

In reaching old age and getting closer to death, some still are not willing to let go of their wealth and possessions. They tend to worry about having to leave their children and loved ones. This great attachment to their wealth and loved ones becomes a cause for great anxiety and unhappiness.

There are also those who feel angry and jealous of the children and grand children who will inherit the wealth. Yet others will be repenting about the wicked and evil acts done by themselves during their life times. Another group of persons worries about things they could not do and about unfulfilled desires.

Together with impending death comes the fear of the unknown about the next life. ‘Will I be re-born in a fortunate state or not?’

Re-Becoming

Death is not the end. As the sun sets here and arises somewhere else, one’s life ends, another life begins at this point along the continuous journey of life and death of all beings.

It is because of unfulfilled desires that beings are born again and again. Craving is the most powerful mental energy that makes life go beyond death for life after life. In fact this is the energy which makes the whole world move.

All living beings are subject to death. It is only the end of a life span of a particular living being. But the journey does not stop there. It will continue, depending on the positive and negative energies one creates while living here.

“What, Friends, is birth? The birth of beings into the various orders of beings, their coming to

birth, precipitation [in a womb], generation, the manifestation of the aggregates, obtaining the bases for contact – this is called birth”⁴

From the beginning of the human history people have believed in life after death. Lots of scientific experiments have been done related to the life after death; and the concept of rebirth is going to be a scientifically proven fact some day. Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner says:

“Just as an age was once ready to receive the Copernican theory of the universe, so is our age ready for the idea of reincarnation to be brought into the general consciousness of humanity”⁵

Are Buddhists Pessimistic?

Talking about the reality of life is not pessimistic. No matter who you are, you get old, you fall sick, sooner or later you will die and will be born again. But this does not mean that you have to live in a miserable, gloomy world feeling worried and helpless.

Buddha encourages you to understand this reality of life. Having understood it, you have to seek the freedom from it. The path of the Buddha leads to freedom from old age, sickness, death and birth. You have the ability and potential to cross beyond and get rid of the causes of suffering and repeated rebirths.

Buddhism recognizes suffering as a universal ailment. And it points out that craving and delusion are the causes of the problem. Buddha introduced a unique path to get rid of all the suffering and miseries in life. Following this scientific and practical method, you can experience the taste of freedom, here and now.

So the question again: Are you ready for old age?

Since it is something that you cannot stop till you attain Final Nibbāna, is there any way that you can prepare yourself to face it successfully? If you take the advice of Buddha as shown below and act accordingly, you will achieve peace and happiness here and now. Your old age will be pleasant and you will not fear death knowing that you will be reborn in a good realm.

Understanding Nature

Be mindful about the nature of existence within and around you. Birth, decay, sickness and death are always happening. They are all about you and also in your body and mind. Be watchful and understand this.

When you see a sick person, an old man or a lifeless body, apply it to yourself and understand that you are not one who has overcome these conditions and at any moment you can fall into that level.

In the morning, you open the door and see a beautiful flower blooming in your garden. In the evening, when you return home from your work, you see the same flower has withered away. Understand that things are changing within you and around you.

You are sitting on a bench under a tree, a leaf falls to the ground; think ‘nothing is permanent. Just like this leaf separated from the tree, I too have to separate from those near and dear ones.’

You happen to go through your photo album. There are pictures of you taken long ago as a baby, as a child, as a young girl or boy. You can see and understand the changing process which has occurred within your body and around you.

You go to hospital to see a friend who is sick. Passing through the wards, seeing patients who are suffering from various diseases, understand that you too can fall ill at any moment.

When you see a baby who is lying in a cradle, think, 'I too was a baby once.' When you see a young girl or a boy, understand, 'I too was once that age.' When you see someone who is elder than you, understand that 'I too will reach that age, it is only a matter of time.'

From the smallest cells of your body to the universe itself, everything is constantly changing. Understand the changes which are happening in your body. Understand how your mind changes from moment to moment.

You are sitting on a beach and looking at the sea. Waves arise one after another, come to the shore

and disappear. In the same manner, in your mind thoughts arise and disappear one after another. Watch the thoughts without clinging to them.

When you look at the sky, you see clouds passing by. In the same manner, in your mind, thoughts are passing by. Don't cling to them, just watch them.

When you train yourself in this way of watching without clinging, your penetrative vision becomes sharp and you can see things in their real nature. You are not sleeping. You are awake. Your vision is not obstructed with the dust of ignorance. You have the light of wisdom. You know what is going on and happening within you and around you.

In this way, having cultivated the sense of nature, you become more positive. What happens to you is seen as it really is. You get old, fall sick or a dear one separates from you; you accept these with less worries and much understanding. You are not puzzled. You become someone who knows and sees the true nature.

Being Good and Doing Good

Every intentional action has a reaction. Evil, unwholesome actions produce negative energies which bring miseries, worries and suffering in this life and lives to come. Good, wholesome actions produce positive energies which bring happiness here in this life and hereafter.

One day, you have to die and to leave every one and everything behind. Nothing material can go beyond death. If there is anything which goes beyond death, it is only the Karmic energy that you produced while you are living. Karmic energies are the powerful impulses generated in your mind at the moments you do something evil or good.

‘World is led by the thoughts’ says Buddha. Thoughts are the roots of words and deeds. When the mind is filled with evil, unwholesome thoughts, your words and deeds become evil. Those evil actions produce negative Karmic energies which bring suffering in this life and lives to come.

Just like the cart which follows the hooves of the ox, those evil energies follow the evil doer, life

after life, making him suffer. Only after many lives will they be reduced or finished.

On the other hand, when the mind is based on good, wholesome thoughts, your words and deeds become pure. Those deeds produce positive luminous power in the mind which can go on life after life.

Just like your own shadow which follows you wherever you go; that positive Karmic energy follows you and gives you good results in due course.

Having understood the good and bad results of actions, you should refrain from evil and cultivate good. Then you have nothing to worry and you are happy about the life you have spent and you have no fear for the next birth. Buddha says when you refrain from evil and cultivate good, you can win four assurances in this very life.

“If there is another world, and if good and bad deeds bear fruit, yield results, it is possible that with the breakup of the body, after death, I shall arise in a good destination, in a heavenly world.” This is the first assurance.

If there is no other world, and if good and bad deeds do not bear fruit and yield results, still right here, in this very life, I live happily, free of enmity and ill will. This is the second assurance

Suppose evil befalls the evil-doer. Then, as I do not intend evil for anyone, how can suffering afflict me, one who does no evil deed? This is the third assurance

Suppose evil does not befall the evil-doer, then right here I see myself purified in both respects. This is the fourth assurance.”⁶

Depending on Yourself

You may have good children who always take care of you with great love and respect; but you should be prepared to face the situation if you have to manage by yourself. Every month save a bit of money to be used when you are very old and helpless. It is for your medicine, food, clothes, shelter and for some other simple needs.

Some parents hand over all their wealth and

property to their children, with the hope that their children would take care of them when they are old. But some ungrateful children, once they get legal ownership of the property and wealth, send their parents to an old folks' home while some even chase their parents away from the house. Some wicked children keep their old parents to do housework, like cleaning and cooking. Some may beat their parents and bully them. No one can predict the future.

When it is the right time to hand over wealth or property to children, you may do so. But you should do so keeping some wealth and property for yourself or you may will the ownership to children so as to activate it after your death.

In modern societies, there are various types of life insurances, CPF, or pension. There are social welfare organizations that take care of elderly people. Keep these in mind as savings sometimes are too small. You must secure your well being in old age.

Health is Wealth

When you get old, take extra care about your health. Eat moderately. Do simple physical exercises. Walking in a park or doing some other simple physical exercise will keep you in good health. Most important is mental health, since it can affect this life as well as your next life; and mind has the ability to over power the body.

You can see many well taken care of elderly people in nursing homes. Their physical needs for food, drink, medicine, clothes and shelter are satisfied, but there is a big gap in their mental states. Many of them appear to be sad and unhappy.

This is the nature of the human mind. To overcome these mental worries, distress and miseries, you can practise a simple meditation. There is no need to wait till you become very old to start. You can start it today.

Loving kindness meditation is one of the best subjects for meditation. It is very simple to practise this meditation. You can sit on a chair in

a comfortable way or you may lie down on your bed or you even slowly walk up and down. Here is how you meditate on loving kindness.

In your mind you repeatedly think:

“May I be free from anger, jealousy, ill will and hatred. May I be free from mental and physical sufferings. May I be well and happy.”

Keep on thinking in this way as long as you like. Then think of your parents, husband or wife, children, dear and near ones, friends and relatives. Wish them sincerely:

“May they too be free from anger, jealousy, ill will and hatred. May they be free from mental and physical sufferings. May they be well and happy.”

Keep on thinking as long as you like. Again radiate your loving kindness further:

“May all the human beings who live in this world, may all the living beings who live on the earth, may those who live in the water, those living beings

who live in the sky, all sorts of living beings, big or small, near or far, seen or unseen, may they all be free from anger, jealousy, ill will and hatred. May they all be free from mental and physical sufferings. May they all be well and happy.

When you practise this kind of meditation, your mind always engages in positive, wholesome thoughts; and your mind becomes free from evil, unwholesome thoughts, which bring miseries. You become a friendly, loving, compassionate and gentle person.

In your old age, when you have nothing much to do, you can cultivate these noble thoughts in your mind. It will bring happiness in this life and lives to come.

Getting Ready to Leave

When you understand and see for yourself that things are changing within you and around you, then you are less attached to the world. But when you do not have this understanding, you are stuck to the world within you and around you. You are worried, unhappy and suffer greatly.

When you are old, try to live a simple life, a life with less worries but much understanding. Free yourself from the strong mental bondage towards your family, wealth or property.

Do not worry if children or grand children are not following the same customs or religions that you followed. Let it be as it is. From time to time, new cultures, new ways of thinking and new life styles get popular in the world. Each generation must find its own way. If you have mental and physical health, that is sufficient.

You have done your duty to your family. It is up to the next generation to run the business, take care of the property, guard the wealth, educate their children, keep the family lineage, and so on. You cannot change these. If you are attached and worried you cannot die peacefully.

Just like you cannot go where you want when your leg is tied by an iron chain to a pillar, in the same manner when you are tied up with mental bondages, you may not be able to let go of miseries and have pleasant thoughts.

When death occurs, when your physical body collapses to the ground, if your mind is filled with miserable thoughts due to attachment, you will be born in a miserable place according to the last thought of this life.

Some people die with so much anger and hatred towards others. Because of that attachment they are easily born in suffering realms.

When the mind is filled with anger, hatred, ill-will or jealousy, your mind becomes so heavy. It does not have peace to relax. It is always burning. It is the strong attachments that tie you up to suffering. So practise to forgive and forget. No body is perfect. As you grow older, become less attached.

When the right time comes, death will occur wherever you are. Get ready to leave. Make your mind light and relaxed by cultivating good wholesome thoughts. Destroy the evil thoughts on the spot when they arise in the mind. Evil thoughts make your mind miserable and lead to suffering.

May you be well and happy!

References

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5. Scientific Acceptability of Rebirth – P: 22; Dr.Granville
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The Simile of the Mountain

“Just as mountains of solid rock,
Massive, reaching to the sky,
Might draw together from all sides,
Crushing all in the four quarters,
So aging and death come,
Rolling over living beings”

“I inform you, great king, I announce to you, great king:
aging and death are rolling in on you.
When aging and death are rolling in on you, great king,
what should be done?”

“As aging and death are rolling in on me, venerable sir,
what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma,
to live righteously, and to do wholesome
and meritorious deeds?”

*Buddha and King Pasenadi – Samyutta Nikaya; In the Buddha's Words
– P 26; An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon; Edited and
introduced by Bhikkhu Bodhi*

