

Old Age 老年



Old age, believe me, is a good and pleasant thing. It is true you are gently shouldered off the stage, but then you are given such a comfortable front stall as spectator.

(Confucius)

OLD AGE in Buddhism

Old age is the period towards the end of an organism's natural life span. The Buddha described old age as characterized by 'brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of vigor and the failing of the facilities'. At the time of the Buddha, the life expectancy was much shorter than today and few people lived to be 'eighty, ninety or a hundred'. However, the problems most often associated with old age senility and illness, loneliness and fear of death were as common then as they are today. The difference is that with people living longer than ever before, at least in developed countries, such problems affect a much larger section of the population.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma for the overcoming of suffering and because old age is one of the manifestations of suffering, he had much to say on this subject. The most obvious symptoms of old age are physical frailty, incapacitation and sickness. Because these states are inherent in old age they cannot be avoided completely but only postponed or minimized. Avoiding drinking and smoking, having a healthy diet and regular exercise before the onset of old age, and

prompt medical intervention after its onset, all help to do this. However, the psychological problems often associated with old age can, with the right attitude, be minimized to a much greater degree or even avoided completely. Once a man came to the Buddha and said: 'Sir, I am now elderly, worn out, far gone in years, approaching the end, always physically sick and ailing. Tell me something cheerful and comforting that will benefit me for a long time.' The Buddha replied: 'Train yourself like this, Though my body be sick, my mind shall not be sick. These words of wisdom are a positive and cogent reminder that we can be emotionally stable, happy and content despite physical decline.

The Buddha recommended a range of strategies to help keep the mind healthy in the face of old age and impending decline, and we will briefly look at three of these. The first is learning to accept old age. Modern society sees old age as a state to be feared and denied. Science, medicine and surgery are marshalled in a frantic effort to stave it off for as long as possible. The results can be both comical and sad the aged matron going for her sixth face lift and the 70 year old man putting on his toupee and teenager's attire. Old men who marry women decades younger than themselves were known at the time of the Buddha too. The Buddha asked us to be realistic about old age and see it as a natural and inevitable process. Doing this will help us to 'gracefully surrender the things of youth' so we can use the energy we would otherwise expend on denial in filling our time with meaningful endeavors and in preparation for the end.

The Buddha said: 'Old age comes to the learned, noble disciple but when he is old he thinks Not just I but all who are born grow old. And if when I am old I were to weep and cry, food would not interest me, my body would become ugly, I would neglect my affairs, my enemies would rejoice and my friends would grieve. And so when old age does come

he does not weep and cry. He is rightly called a learned, noble disciple, he has pulled out the poisoned arrow of sorrow with which the ordinary person is tormented'.

The Buddha also asked us to consider that longevity is perhaps not as important as what we do with ourselves in the time we have. He said: 'It would be better to live for one day wise and meditative, than for a hundred years stupid and lacking awareness. It would be better to live for one day full of vigor, than for a hundred years lazy and idle'. These statements are, of course, rhetorical, but their point is clear. The quality of our life is more important than its length. If we fully utilize and appreciate our life now, we will become less concerned with staying young for as long as possible.

Two common psychological problems many elderly people face are regret about having done or failed to do certain things and a sense of having wasted one's life. Such feelings can fill an elderly person's days with sorrow and bitterness. Living with integrity now and developing the mind now will preempt these problems. Another aspect of old age that the Buddha addresses is the issue of **caring for the aged**. In the past, growing old was compensated for to some degree by the deference and respect given to the elderly. Grandparents often had the job of caring for their grandchildren and this kept them occupied and made them feel needed. But in modern consumer societies, old people are often ignored or even shunned as an unwelcome reminder to the young of what is in store for them, and as an economic burden. The Buddha said that loving and grateful people think like this concerning their parents: 'Having supported me I will support them in return'.

Old Age in Bible

Want to know how to age gracefully? Do it with the Lord by your side. Every day we live is an opportunity to know Him more. The most exciting part is that God never ages. He remains the same beautiful, layered, complex, simple, exciting, peaceful, wild presence that he has always been. Worried about growing older? Shift your focus to learning more of Jesus every day, and watch all of the ways you'll begin to feel young again. Read on for some truth on the aging process and God's love for us at every stage of our lives.

Proverbs 16:31 Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.

If you have spent your years walking with God, and learning from Him, then you have earned every gray hair on your head. They should be celebrated and worn like a crown, as a testament that you are the living, breathing child of a King.

Isaiah 46:4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

In the younger years, when lots of life's biggest decisions are being made, it is easy to seek God's guidance and assistance. But it is important to remember that He cares about every day of your life. He will carry you when you are too young to know you need it, and when you are too old to walk on your own. His sustaining love is forever.

Job 12:12 Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?

Some life lessons come in an instant, and others must be learned from years of experience and growth. The older we grow, the more we learn

about kindness, patience, heartbreak, love , and mercy. All of these experiences lead us to a deeper understanding of life's seasons, and a greater wisdom of God's presence through them all.

Deuteronomy 32:7 Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you

All generations have been entrusted with different lessons based upon the time they lived. There is much to be learned from those that have gone before us. God places people in our lives who can teach us these lessons- parents, grandparents, church elders-and they can explain so much about God. We just have to take the time and consideration to ask for help.

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

Those who have devoted many years to serving the church, and proclaiming Christ's message, are worthy of respect and honor. They have spent time pouring themselves out, preaching and teaching others what they, through time and experience, have learned. We honor their commitment to their church community, as well as their commitment to serving God.

Psalms 71:18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.

I believe this may be the prayer of many. Asking God to stay beside them, to remember them, throughout their lives. We live long enough to see God's mightiness in many ways, and ache at the thought of someone not getting that chance. We hope that we can help others to

know Him, as we have known Him. Once you know love like that, you just want to spread it out.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

No one ever said that following Jesus would be easy. Daily, believers lose, struggle with, and abandon their faith. The ones who thought they were signing up for a breezy sprint are shocked when they discover that this race is long distance. Upon making this discovery, there are two options: Give up when you get past the easy part, or dig deep and continue on. The finish line may seem so very far away, but for those who have stayed in the race? They will be rewarded with a crown, and allowed to rest forevermore.

Conclusion

There is a common belief that we gradually become less useful as we grow older. That this world is made for the young. Perhaps that is so. But we are not of this world. When we live our lives for God, our journey here does not end until we take our final breath. Noah, Moses, Abraham—some of our greatest biblical examples—all went on some of their greatest adventures at a time when most would be settling into retirement. Should you be finding yourself feeling a little bit forgotten, overlooked, unappreciated...take care to remember that God will use you at any age, and any stage. There is no age limit to the way He works, and His is a love that never grows old.

Old Age in Confucianism

The focus of the Confucian response is found largely in the importance placed upon the Confucian virtue, hsiao, filial piety — a virtue that articulates the importance of the relation of parents and children. The character itself is the combination of the character for age and child, thus suggesting the relation of parent and child. Though suggesting to some a subservience of children to their parents, in its largest role its foundation rests with an honor and respect shown of age that is the cornerstone of virtually all of East Asia historically as well as today. Thus we find Confucius commenting to his disciple Tzu-lu upon the meaning of filial piety and emphasizing that filial piety is a matter of honor and respect, not simply care and support.

The Master said, “The filial piety of nowadays means the support of one’s parents. But dogs and horses are able to do something in the way of support; without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?” (Even in his own time Confucius is suggesting that filial piety for most people means nothing more than providing basic care and support — providing room and board if you will! What is it then that would distinguish the filial piety of parent and child? Beyond care and support there is reverence, ching, the honor and respect due the relation of parent and child because it is the product of the love between parent and child.

Chinese children care for their parents in old age.

Chinese families traditionally view filial piety and respect for one’s elders as the highest virtue, deriving from the Confucian tradition. Although westernization has lessened the power of these values in some cities and communities, adult children are still generally expected to care for their parents in their old age. “Placing your parents in

retirement homes will see you labeled as uncaring or a bad son,” Beijing resident Zhou Rui told China.org. “To abandon one’s family is considered deeply dishonorable.” However, this tradition is beginning to break down in China, due to the country’s one-child policy, rising life expectancy and an aging population. Nursing homes are beginning to become a more socially acceptable option for elderly care.

In Korea, elders are highly respected.

Much of the Korean regard for aging is rooted in the Confucian principle of filial piety, a fundamental value dictating that one must respect one’s parents (although Confucius was Chinese, Confucianism has a long history in Korea). Younger members of the family have a duty to care for the aging members of the family. And even outside the family unit, Koreans are socialized to respect and show deference to older individuals as well as authority figures. “Few of those who are filial sons and respectful brothers will show disrespect to superiors, and there has never been a man who is respectful to superiors and yet creates disorder,” Confucius wrote in Analects. “A superior man is devoted to the fundamental. When the root is firmly established, the moral law will grow. Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of humanity. It’s also customary in Korean to have a big celebration to mark an individual’s 60th and 70th birthdays. The hwan-gap, or 60th birthday, is a joyous time when children celebrate their parents’ passage into old age. The age is thought to be reason for celebration in part because many of their ancestors would not have survived past the age of 60 without the advances of modern medicine. A similar large family celebration is held for the 70th birthday, known as kohCui (“old and rare”).