

## **End-of-Life Reflection: Eight Needs**

The life of beings is fragile. My wife and I were vividly reminded of this when we learnt that an auditor received a phone call last week while working with a client (who was a friend of ours) – a phone call that informed him his 40-year-old son had just been killed in a traffic accident. How totally unexpected; so sudden!

Another striking reminder of the fragility of life is that of an older couple whose husband has Parkinson's Disease – as the disease has worsened over the past decade, how tragic it has been to see the losses involved, both for the sufferer and the marriage partner.

These two touching examples became the backdrop for our conversation from which these personal reminders emerged:

### **1. Cherishing a Human Life**

We need to understand how precious a human life is – when used wisely, it continually offers the potential to be of service and lasting benefit to many others. Yet, used unwisely, it is so easy to neglect or squander the gift of life.

Furthermore, we need to respect the life of others. In this context, for example, think of those who will be left behind when the time of death arrives – and to leave them something of long-term benefit. Seek not to leave a mess of unfinished business, requiring valuable time to sort through and clean up. A loving responsibility, born out of respect for others, is that we leave our things in order before we depart.

### **2. Accepting Impermanence and Death**

We can see the changing and ephemeral nature of all things all around us – such as days and nights that fly swiftly by, the changing seasons. At times, life's circumstances can change swiftly and unexpectedly.

In this context, take time to ensure having an up-to-date will – and, again, dispose of as much as possible while one has the time and energy to lovingly do so. No-one keeps on living indefinitely – we all have to go, sooner or later!

### **3. Understanding Cause and Effect**

Whenever causes and conditions come together, a result is certain to follow. We all need to do our best to help others, and to engage in positive deeds.

In this context, the disorganized accumulated possessions over a lifetime may well be the effect of years of neglect and lack of discipline. To streamline and restore neatness and order will take motivation and discipline. (A strategy that can help is to imagine getting ready for a relocation – imagine preparing for a move. If and when the time for a move does arrive, one will be much more ready!)

#### 4. Recognizing Basic Realities of Life

We may wish to finally come to terms with the realities of life. The Buddha taught four basic truths: (1) the reality of suffering which should be understood; (2) the reality of the origin of suffering which should be abandoned; (3) the reality of cessation of suffering which ought to be actualized, and (4) the reality of a path to bring about cessation of suffering which ought to be relied upon.

In this context, understand that sentimental reasons are not sufficient for hoarding accumulated possessions (including books). In time, obsessive attachment and clinging only results in dissatisfaction and a degree of suffering. (Some family treasures should be kept – and with foresight passed on to family members.)

#### 5. Streamlining and Downscaling

Realize that in one's seventies, one simply does not need "a lot of stuff"! It can take far too much increasingly precious time and energy to organize and maintain lots of items around the home – that are simply no longer really needed.

#### 6. Preparing to Die

Get our affairs in order now – and so be better prepared for whatever happens. And, remember, one cannot plan for one's death – it is a certain reality, but remains uncertain as to its timing.

#### 7. Having a Loving View Toward Life

Serve others by donating to charities and giving items that are no longer needed. One can have the joy of being generous and kind to others now, rather than having a lot of items mindlessly trashed when one has died. If that occurs, gone would be the opportunity for loving generosity today.

#### 8. Adopting a Spiritual Path

Earnestly consider having a spiritual path in life which embraces lasting values rooted in reality. Such a path will enable a more peaceful death.

Alexander and Eva Peck. (Based on a conversation over a special 70<sup>th</sup> birthday meal in one of our favourite restaurants. November 4, 2019.)