

## **A Reflection on Ageing Gracefully**

Eva and I are new residents at Renaissance. One unmistakable impression we have gained, seen more clearly at a retirement village than outside of it, is the reality of ageing. Quietly behind the scenes, some residents are facing challenging realities of life — all a part of growing older. These may include difficulty walking and acquiring a mobility walker or scooter; dealing with various health issues and multiple medications; having a partner pass away; dealing with grief and depression; accessing home assistance; and eventually the possible need for moving to a high care facility. These conditions are real and can befall anyone.

In reflecting on older age, we would like to offer four insights to help us all navigate the difficult terrain of ageing.

### **Awareness**

We begin to realise, that whether we like it or not, we are becoming an older person. Looking back, we may not be able to clearly pinpoint the start of this realisation, but here we are. We may have been accustomed to seeing ourselves with a certain identity — but suddenly that identity may no longer fit. The fact is soberingly brought home to us that life is temporary and impermanent, and that, no matter how long we live, we do not have a lot of life and time left on this earth. Lewis Richmond, an American author who has addressed ageing, writes that maintaining awareness in life is important: “Remain aware and awake, regardless of what is going on. Many of our strengths and faculties decline as we age, but our ability to pay attention can be practiced ... and can persevere and even grow.”)

### **Acceptance**

This is coming to terms with the fact that we are older and being at peace with the natural process of ageing. At this stage, we find ourselves no longer resisting or fighting what is inevitably occurring. While some may remain physically and mentally healthy and fit into advanced age, others may have to accept and live with some serious health issues. Understandably, this is not easy, and it can take time to absorb the reality of what is happening to us.

## **Adaptation**

Having accepted ageing as a part of our life's journey, we are now ready to adapt our lives accordingly. We no longer compare ourselves to the past, but can rest in the age we are at present. However, we may have to make changes in our lives — and let go of certain activities and expectations. Adaptability and flexibility are vital. Lewis Richmond writes that "one of the clear results of current aging research is that—physically, mentally, and emotionally—those who remain flexible and roll with the punches age the best, stay the healthiest, and live the longest. Adaptation and flexibility are our best strategies for keeping abreast of our aging, and the keys to creating freshness and new opportunities as we age." (*Aging as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemplative Guide to Growing Older and Wiser* by Lewis Richmond [2012].)

## **Appreciation**

Finally, and hopefully, we are able to reach appreciation – and even find gratitude for the new reality of our life. We are at peace and no longer continually yearning for things to be different. We are thankful for our life's journey and able to live life, albeit in a different manner — namely, growing older gracefully.

We each experience ageing as a unique and individual journey. However, may *awareness, acceptance, adaptation, and appreciation* be helpful markers along the way.

Alexander and Eva Peck (November, 2023)