



Aging as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemplative Guide to Growing Older and Wiser

Lewis Richmond

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In *Aging as a Spiritual Practice*, Buddhist priest and teacher, Lewis Richmond, describes the four stages of aging, providing an uplifting look at life's enriching journey.

Drawing on the teachings of Buddhism, he urges us to rejoice in getting older, not to fight it; to adapt to a different way of living rather than trying to chase a mythical elixir of youth in a quest to stay younger for longer. He says: 'Everything is aging, all the time. We age from our first breath. The problem is not aging *per se*, but our view of it'.

Whether you're 30, 60 or 100 there are life-enhancing lessons to learn and a wealth of opportunities in which to experience true joy. With traditional Zen exercises and anecdotes from people of all ages sharing their positive experiences, Lewis teaches us to embrace change and see aging as simply an opening up of new paths. He shows us how we often fail to appreciate the wisdom we develop as we go through life and teaches us that to truly develop contentment we must spend more time with our close ones and in looking inwards at ourselves.

Aging as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemplative Guide to Growing Older and Wiser Details

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Ellen says

I am currently part of a meditation group named from the title of this book and informed by ideas and suggested practices in it. The book is rich and dense. Having just finished reading it and taking notes, I will need to take the time to digest and integrate its perspectives and offerings. I have no doubt that at some point in the near future, I will also reread it, more slowly.

Overall, I am feeling more hopeful about aging, more committed to proceed as gracefully as possible, focused on living in the present, moment by moment, accepting the burdens and the blessings of aging, with loving kindness toward myself and all creatures.

Maureen says

Engagingly written.. strong Buddhist thread, unsurprising since the author is a Buddhist priest. Love the many resources. I'm planning to do all the exercises over the next few months. A treasure!

Susan Rothenberg says

A thoughtful book about some of the issues of aging and ways that spiritual practices can help with the transitions along the way. Though Lew is a Buddhist priest, his suggestions are universal.

John Kaufmann says

I originally gave this two-stars, but have upgraded it after re-reading it (i.e., listening to the audiobook.) While not full of gems, it was full of a quiet wisdom. The book also provides numerous mindfulness/meditation exercises, which appear to be tailored to those of us who are aging.

Linda Robinson says

The interior of this book is as soft-focus as the exterior picture of the lotus. If you are aging at the same speed the rest of us are, and have not yet made some measure of peace with that, this is the book for you. Richmond handles the inevitability that aging has an end point with Zen calmness, and he shares the feeling with his prose. The book is organized by issues related to getting old, and a reader is free to roam and contemplate. That's how I'll handle the remaining years I have. Roam and contemplate. And adventure.

Dpdwyer says

Even with a twenty-plus year zen practice, I found useful practice ideas in the book. It should prove more helpful to those without a meditation practice.

Quotes:

Shunryu Suzuki (About dying): "Don't worry. Nothing is going to happen."

Stephen Levine: "Don't worry. Dying is perfectly safe."

Tom says

"The awareness that you are here right now is the ultimate fact."

Barbara says

A lot of good ideas here for appreciating every moment of your life. It's written from a Buddhist perspective, but is applicable to any philosophy. The book included lots of stories about people facing their aging and ultimate deaths and had contemplative exercises to do, as well as a schedule for a do it yourself spiritual retreat. One of the concepts I found interesting was vertical time--time as it exists in THIS breath, as opposed to horizontal time--our ordinary time line stretching from our known past into our unknown futures.

Bonnie Cowan says

Aging from a generic Buddhist perspective some practices to develop ...and how to face mortality with peace and grace ... enjoyed it!

Yelda Basar Moers says

Buddhist priest and teacher Lewis Richmond is his latest book Aging as a Spiritual Practice begins with what he believes are the four stages of aging. The first stage "Lightning Strikes," is a realization that we are growing old. The sensation comes out of nowhere, unexpectedly, like a bolt from above. I am only thirty-five years old, but this is exactly what happened to me recently, before I had even been assigned to read this book as a Library Thing Early Reviewer. Naturally, I was drawn to the book.

This was my recent "Lightning Strikes" moment. Since I'm pregnant, I can't color and highlight my hair, and about a month or two ago, while it was up in a ponytail, I found myself face to face with an anomalous site: a bunch of gray hairs, stubbornly held together by their own thickness, on the side of my head, far too many to pluck. Feeling tired and sluggish from the pregnancy with that gray spectacle before me: lightning struck, just as Richmond said. I realized, yes, I am only thirty-five, but I'm turning a corner to a place I don't want to go.

This is Richmond's gift, his ability to make his story relatable to anyone who has left youth's golden walls. His book, a mix of self-help, inspirational and meditative guide (Richmond suggests specific meditative exercises such as "Gratitude Walk," "Calm Lake," "The Loving Kindness Prayer," and "Resting in

Awareness”), comprehensively explores the connection between spirituality and aging. After giving a brief overview of the next three stages of aging, Richmond discusses elderhood, the feelings of growing older, all the while illuminating his narrative with the Zen fables of his mentor Buddhist master Shunryu Suzuki. The author also includes the present day science of healthy aging and the Buddhist approach.

In his discussion of lifestyle factors that contribute to healthy aging, including diet, exercise, relationships, stress management, and spirituality, Richmond includes lesser known factors such as time in nature, service to others and flexibility in attitude. I found the importance of time in nature the most fascinating. Citing the research of Dr. Roger Walsh, Richmond writes that in an industrialized world where we don’t have healthy time in nature, we can suffer from disruptions of mood and sleep, impairment of attention and greater cognitive decline as we reach the elder years. Equally compelling is the “biophilia hypothesis” movement among environmental scientists, calling for the need of regular exposure to nature to maintain normal mental health. Without it, our minds don’t function well.

When it comes to spirituality itself, Richmond mentions various Buddhist contemplative practices to help with aging, such as mindfulness of breath, compassion, gratitude and spacious awareness. Meditation, he writes, is at its core focus and insight, but it can also be seen as surrender, a state of spacious awareness because it feels like a clear blue sky or a boundless ocean, or a time to simply relax and rest into the light of who we are on a deeper level. A regular practice also quiets the inner dialogue of our minds; it can stop all that thinking about aging.

I found Aging as a Spiritual Practice a heartfelt, yet intelligent guide for those contemplating aging on their spiritual path. It’s a lovely read, well thought out and edited, lacking the simplistic writing, trite concepts or lazy regurgitation that can plague many self-help books. Ultimately, Richmond’s positive spin and Buddhist approach gives hope to aging. It’s worth the read if aging is on your mind too.

Donna says

I liked this, which is really saying something, because I didn't like the audio narration. It was so annoying.

The author is Buddhist. I found his outlook interesting. Some of it felt enlightening and certainly gave me food for thought. But with that being said, some of this had me rolling my eyes as well. So 3 stars.

Melanie Rigney says

I devoured this book on my 61st birthday. Richmond's examples of struggling with aging... and finding some comfort in faith, regardless of one's tradition... are well told. I met the next day with a Trappist monk about my age who noted that our generation in some ways is forging new ground, as many of the wise spiritual writers were dead by the time they were our age. He said he wondered why no one is writing about this. I said, "There is!", gave Richmond as an example, and passed on my copy.

Joann Amidon says

Two things happened this year: my friend, Janet, mentioned Atul Gawande's book, *On Being Mortal*, and I turned 75. As a result of these two events, I have been reading many books about dying and this book is one of the better ones. It is based on the spiritual and brings to the reader a calm approach to the inevitable. I highly recommend it to anyone who might be feeling unsure about the direction of their life now that they are "retired" and in the final part of their life. The encouragement within the book will be helpful to many. It is, after all, just one breath after another until the final breath.

Sara says

I was fortunate to win a copy of this book through Goodreads.

This book is a great resource for those of us that are starting to realize we aren't "young" anymore, or at least as young as we used to be. Richmond goes through the different phases of aging, the first of which is "Lightning Strikes" - that first moment you notice things aren't quite what they used to be (a grey hair, creaky knees, kids going off to college, illness, whatever). He uses examples from his personal life and illnesses to help drive his messages home, as well as uses friends and acquaintances experiences. He discusses Buddhist ideas about change, attachment, kindness (towards yourself as well as others) and provides a great overview for those early on the Buddhist path, or those even just interested in Buddhism.

The latter part of the book is called "A Day Away" and it is very specific instructions (where to go, what to bring, what to eat and drink etc) as to how to hold a one day retreat for yourself in order to explore how you feel about aging and where you are in the process. I think this section was incredibly helpful, and helps take the "mystery" out of the Retreat process, and shows that it is something that every person can participate in. For this alone, I recommend this book.

This book will retain a spot on my bookshelf, and I would imagine that as I continue to grow older (knock on wood!) that it's information will become even more valuable. As a sufferer of a chronic illness, I already had "lightening strike" for me, but the rest of the phases haven't happened yet - I think this book will help me navigate them.

Joan Winnek says

This book immediately grabbed me with its chapter on lightning strikes. My own lightening strike happened about six months ago, and had several forks.

This is a book to keep and reread for its many insights into aging and the clearest explanation of Buddhism I have found. The writing is engaging, and the contemplative reflections are activities I want to work through, slowly.
