

The green of the winter pines  
endures a thousand years.  
An aged rustic picks a flower  
and in myriad lands it's spring.

Kanshō isshiki sennen no betsu nari  
Yarō hana o nenzu bankoku no haru

寒松一色千年別  
野老拈花萬國春



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This couplet is from *The Records of Rinzai*.

In the past, people marked the boundaries between their properties by planting trees. These trees would form a path through the mountains, and what a sturdy and fine sight they afforded. Even from far below, they provided a stable line for vision, standing ready through any era. These boundary trees were never used for lumber or building material and so they were never cut down. In the same way people who reach an advanced age and know the struggles of life say, "Entrust! Do not be worried and confused." Yet even though they are beyond worry and confusion, they are not without a goal.

From ancient times Buddhism has always trod the Way, while making offerings and bowing down deeply to those who are revered and respected.

Old people of the path are to be revered and respected even by the high emperor and are considered to have four special merits: brightness, power, beauty, and joy.

As long as there are abilities and possessions to get hung up on, the ninety-eight year olds will say to the fifty and sixty year olds, "You're all still runny nosed little brats--life starts from here!"

The first virtue is to be still and dignified and yet know, "I will lose to no one." The second virtue is power; the third beauty.

We let go of desires and are thankful for all the grace in the world and offer our Buddha Nature to all beings. We gassho in grateful appreciation, allowing no gaps. Our mind clear, our life aligned, no seams in our existence.

The fourth virtue is to be joyful. Those who have faced the greatest perils and suffered the deepest pains are the ones with the face of a living Buddha. When we see their faces our worries and concerns fly away. We don't have to ask them anything; we become peaceful just from being around them.

"An old peasant plucks a flower, spring in a myriad lands."

The old person has walked a life deeply. When we are still in the springtime of our youth we can't know this mountain-tree state of mind. Each human being is full of a hardened lump of ego; letting go and allowing it to fall away teaches us how to become a human.

If we don't spend our time running after what we want and instead quietly purify our being, then in every day our practice becomes complete. We live long lives without thinking about it. The longer we live, the deeper our samadhi in zazen is. We see whatever arises externally, but we aren't moved around by it; deep confidence arises from this.

When we know our original mind and are not moved around, we become clear and pure and realize spontaneously that this body, as it is from the origin, is the body of the Buddha. With this mind we know the spring that arrives in all countries.



The pine tree, even in the coldest season, retains its deep green color. Its color is so consistent that we even call it an evergreen. Since in all seasons it remains green, the pine is used as a symbol for that which doesn't change. Yet even though its color seems not to change, the tree itself does. It is always evolving and growing; it just doesn't go through the process of dropping old leaves and putting forth new ones as do the deciduous trees with their seasonal greenery.

The sturdy branches of those ancient trees, which have been through so much, give them a sense of gravity and a feeling of long endurance and great stability, even when seen from afar.

These ancient pines are like old people, growing within the harsh circumstances of all that occurs around them, like the troublesome situations of a challenging life.

People who have lived to an old age say, "One should not get too concerned and bothered about things, but should learn to trust." Not bothering about things does not mean to be without a goal, nor to live casually and half-heartedly. Such people have lived lives with definite demarcations, observing the natural changes clearly and carefully. For the people around them as well, they have shown with their own bodies and actions how to live well.

The Buddha said in the Dhammapada:

Always observe this:  
For elderly people, what is most important  
is long life, beauty, joy, and energy.

It is important to emphasize correct manners and good behavior and to live from our natural mind. To those who have ample experience we should give deep respect. But just as important as a long life are beauty, joy, and energy. Many people will respect one who lives in this way.

A long life, which almost everyone wants to have, is something that it is difficult to plan for and that we cannot just decide to bring about. Nevertheless, those who live a long life let others know that to live a long life is possible.



We also aim to realize these four values given by the Buddha. The most important of these is life energy. Even if we have capability and social skills and wisdom and are famous and abundantly rich, in order to be able to make use of all of these we need to live a long life. One who has lived a long time can say from the perspective of ninety years of age: "Those who are fifty, sixty, seventy are snotty-nosed youngsters. Only when you reach eighty does life really begin." A ninety-year-old elder has said these words to encourage his juniors. For him, someone of fifty or sixty is still very raw and green. Only after the age of eighty does one begin to ripen at all.

All of you, if you want to say something about life, work to that point of becoming eighty at least with human's deepest faith. Knowing that from the age of eighty it begins, you can't lose to something smaller. From age eighty it begins! This is how a ninety year old sees it. This brings us the power to say, "I won't lose to anything!" This is the power and energy that the Buddha is talking about.

The Buddha also talks about beauty. As humans get older they may lose physical beauty, but for those who are older, there is a greater inner spiritual beauty. That of course comes not just from living but from going through challenges, letting go of desires, and giving thanks for all things in nature. We change to embrace the greater Buddha Mind and feel gratitude toward all things as the grace of the Buddha. We see clearly that that is where everything comes from. From that unceasing gratitude and humility comes the deep, all-embracing human love and compassion of one who has lived a long time. A person like this does not know selfishness. We know this feeling of gratitude as well just from being in the presence of those who are like this. Living without extra thinking, they function from that clarity and virtue.

Along with this kind of beauty is their joy. We cannot become melancholy as we get older. Having had so much abundant experience should bring us great joy. When in the presence of those who are struggling, we should be able to bring them abundance of spirit and help them realize a quiet, steady security. When we look at an older person's face we don't even need for him to listen to our problems; just by being with him we are soothed. "An old peasant plucks a flower and it's spring throughout the world."

An old person's quiet mind is like spring, and this is the state of mind everyone wants to realize. Buddhism is to trust and believe in people. In old age and eternal life we show respect, not killing without needing to, and not hurrying without needing to. If we are pure and clear in our thoughts and actions, then our life will be one of a person of true virtue and deep character. This person will live for a long time. We will become more and more bright and revealed and our power of the path will be clearer and clearer as we are no longer moved around by anything. Here there is beauty, energy, and joy.

If we hold on to nothing at all, and are not moved around by anything, then we will see that this very body is the body of the Buddha, and there is found spring throughout the world.