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## Conversations with self-25

### Being compassionate to the elderly

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*Love, kindness and encouragement go a long way towards helping elders cope with advancing years*

An old man repeatedly asked his son the same question. The son, with irritation in his voice, told his father to keep quiet. Shortly thereafter, the father hobbled on unsteady feet into the next room and brought out an old, tattered diary. He turned the page to a date which was written when the son was four. On that page were written the lines: "Today, my son asked the same question 24 times, and each time I gave him the same answer. I realise it was the child's curiosity and marvel at his inquisitiveness." He showed the page to his son who only then realised that his father, now an old man, had become a child again.

My mother is old and often repeats herself. Sometimes I am empathetic but, more often than not, I show irritation. Sadly what she wants is to be understood, to be listened to, and to be shown kindness. These are the least I can offer her in her old age.

Old age causes one's mortality to stare us in the face. We suddenly become unsure of ourselves, unpredictable and frightened. Death seems to beckon and we are scared to die.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross has said it so well in her treatise on death and dying which, though applicable more to cancer, is relevant to old people. Old people are first angry that they are incapacitated; then they feel betrayed by disappointments they have faced in life; then they plead with life for more time and finally, accept the reality of their impending death. Yet most people pass away in the pleading stage and never really attain the accepting stage.

The only way people who are younger and more robust can offer an easy passage for the old is to show love, compassion, kindness and accept the fact that ageing brings with it unimaginable fears. When we show love and kindness we tell our elders that we are thankful, that they mean a lot to us and that their life has been well-spent.

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