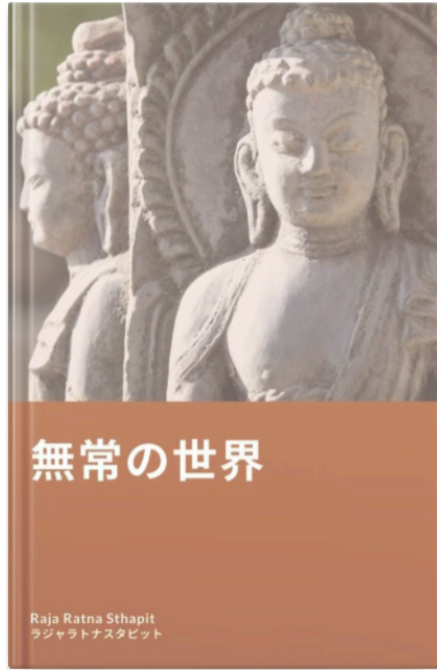




# THE IMPERMANENT WORLD

RAJA RATNA STHAPIT

TRANSLATED FROM THE JAPANESE BY  
TAKESHI KOMINO



# **The Impermanent World**

To everyone who lost their loved ones

**Raja Ratna Sthapit**

Translated from the Japanese by Takeshi Komino

*dedicated to*  
*Tara Ratna Sthapit (1940-2012)*



I get this life only once  
So any good deed that I can perform  
Or any help that I can render  
I should do it right away  
Such a good deed,  
neither will I waste time thinking nor I neglect  
Because I would not get this life again and again

**Tara Ratna Sthapit**

## **"To everyone who lost their loved ones"**

When the Great East Japan Earthquake struck in March 2011, my father made an international call to me from Kathmandu. 'How painful it must be for those who lost their loved ones. I wish I could do something.' My father was very worried about those who were in crisis.

But less than a year later, I myself had an eternal farewell to my esteemed father. We live in an impermanent world where no one knows what will happen when, and I think the best we can do is to accept what comes and move forward.

This book inherits the thoughts of my father, and the message are for all those who have lost their loved ones, either by disasters or any other reasons.

Raja Ratna Sthapit

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# Introduction

We live in an impermanent world and everyone experiences death. But the sadness of losing a loved one is truly painful. My father died in the winter of 2012. For me, living in Japan far from my hometown, the sudden farewell was a great pain I had never experienced. However, now I am quietly determined to overcome my suffering little by little and live by inheriting the good of my father. This book was written with the desire to share what I felt through my eternal farewell to my father and what I continue to learn from it.

There is a word in Nepalese called ‘dāna’. It is also translated as "donation" in Japanese, but it is also widely used when "giving" something of your own to help others. Also, when a family member or someone close is lost, Buddhist teachings and monks' writings may be made into books and distributed as dāna. It is said that if a book has a positive effect on someone, it will be a merit. In this way, the giving of books that support someone's life is called ‘dhamma dāna (giving of law / truth)’ and is the highest level of dāna practice. I wrote this book as dāna in the wake of my eternal farewell to my father.

I think I was able to accept the eternal farewell to my father largely due to influence of Buddhism, which I have been familiar since childhood as my grandmother often took me to a monastery near my house. Every morning at

the monastery, a nun tells a Buddhist story in an easy-to-understand manner, and I have been studying Buddhism ever since. Now, while practicing meditation, I am visiting monks and nuns to learn further. Every time I face a big challenge in my life, I feel that the teachings of Buddhism is in my heart, and I pray from the bottom of my heart that there is something good for you through this book.

Raja Ratna Sthapit

## **An unforgettable day**

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February 17, 2012 was an unforgettable day for me. It was the day of eternal farewell with my esteemed father. Before 3:00 am on the 17th, a phone call from Kathmandu's brother announced my father's death. After I hung up, I felt like time had stopped until dawn.

On that day, I was supposed to give a lecture on cross-cultural understanding in the evening. The morning came without a sleep, but I decided to fulfill my expected role and responsibility. My heart was deeply depressed, and I tried to focus my thought on preparing for the lecture. I went to the lecture hall in the afternoon, and even though I tried to be cheerful as usual, I unconsciously thought about my father, which I tried to shift my mind every time it occurred. After fulfilling my duty, I excused myself from the dinner appointment and went home.

After returning home, I looked at my father's photo. I recalled what happened in the day, starting from my brother's call. After a long staring at the photo, I couldn't

accept the fact that I couldn't meet my father anymore, and it felt unreal and it felt as if I have become someone else.

One of the reasons why it was difficult to accept my father's death was that I knew he was more health conscious than anyone else. For the past few decades, he has completely stopped drinking and smoking, which he liked to do when he was young. He practiced healthy habits and gave insightful advices to the others. Even after the age of 70, his life was still youthful and fulfilling.

My father's morning starts at 5, with light warm-up and 2 hour Yoga, followed by an hour of running. While on a run, he used to stop at a tea shop, rest while reading newspaper, and give an international call to me for about 10 minutes. He continued this no matter how cold it was, or whether it was a rainy day, and I sometimes joked with him that 'it is like a life of a monk'. I was proud of my father, who always thought about the health of those around him first.

However, in mid-December 2011, my father, who didn't like hospitals, went for a rare checkup saying he couldn't get rid of his fatigue. My father never wanted to make people worry about him, and at that time also he was saying 'it's okay, it's okay, and things will be as they should, it is an impermanent world." After that, he had both good and bad days, but I undoubtedly believed that he will recover soon.

In late January of the new year, I was originally planning to attend a coming-of-age ceremony for my brother's children, but my motive to visit Nepal changed to 'meeting my father'. I was busy around that time preparing for cross-cultural event, and was restless everyday as there was a lot of things to do in Japan.

Finally I met my father in late January, and we talked about many things while I cared for my father in my 10 days stay. I was telling myself numerous times every day that things will be just fine. The short stay ended soon, and as I prepared for my departure and greeted good-bye, I prayed that we can celebrate the festival together with good spirits when I come to Kathmandu again in the fall. It was unbelievable that only two weeks after returning to Japan, I had an eternal farewell to my father. The time we just spent together was like an illusion, and just couldn't accept the fact that I can never meet him again. What is happening - I kept thinking without any answer, over and over again.

## Suffering of a farewell

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My mother died when I was eight years old, but I didn't really understand what eternal farewell means, and I didn't have clear awareness of 'death'. My mother died in the hospital and I wasn't there at that moment. What I remember about that day was that I went to the hospital with my grandmother, but came home without seeing my mother. On the way back, my grandmother stopped by a temple and prayed for a while. For some reason, a lot of people came to my house that night. No one told me that my mother had died, and I thought it was like a regular 'joyful festival'. However, I don't recall how I perceived that my mother, who was supposed to be there, was not around, and I never knew the sadness of eternal farewell at that time.

Obviously, my mother wasn't around ever since, and my father raised us tirelessly. As I grew up, there were few incidences of my relative's deaths, and I started to understand what that eternal farewell to my mother meant, but that didn't automatically link with sadness. However, what I learned clearly from my eternal farewell to my father was that he was the most important and irreplaceable person for me. I was full of deep sadness, helplessness, and unbearable pain that I had never experienced in my life.

Buddhism teaches that there are eight sufferings in life. Along with the four sufferings of being born, aging, getting sick, and dying, the suffering of breaking up with a loved one, having to meet a person you dislike, the not being able to achieve one's wish, and not being able to fully control the body and mind. These eight sufferings are inevitable for every life.

After experiencing an eternal farewell to my father, I learnt for the first time what it means to break up with a loved one. How painful it is not being able to be with a loved one, and to say good-bye. It was as if my whole body was experiencing suffering.

## Words and way of life

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My father liked writing poetry and lyrics, and some of them were sung by a famous Nepalese singer. Probably, that had an influence that I play music now. He played various instruments during my childhood, There were a harmonica, a flute, and a banjo at home, and both my brother and I learnt to play what my father was playing. One day, I think I was a college student at that time, I found what my father wrote about life, like a poem.

***I get this life only once  
So any good deed that I can perform  
Or any help that I can render  
I should do it right away  
Such a good deed,  
Neither will I waste time thinking nor I neglect  
Because I would not get this life again and again***

I was too young to think deeply about the meaning despite that I liked how the poem sounded. My father offered support to our relatives, neighbours, and whoever needed help. I have often wondered why he focuses on others so much, but as I grew older, my father's words began to resonate with me. After I left my hometown and started to live in Japan, I feel them more deeply.

I once asked about these words in my conversation with my father and he said with usual shyness, 'as a human being, living in the present is very valuable, so it is important not to think only about yourself, but to help others as much as possible.' I was truly impressed with how he practiced these words in his life, and it reaffirmed my respect for him; I may have learned from him without knowing it. It was probably his influence that I pursued what I can, and should, do for our society. He was always there for me regardless of which challenge I was going through, and I feel all his respect and support very close to me.

In the summer of 2012, six months after my father died, I went to see my father's friend who lives in Kathmandu. He was always with my father, even in the last days. 'I don't have friends like your father anymore, and no one like that will be born again', he said.

He had a problem with his leg, but my father would solve any concerns in every visit. He shared various episodes indicating that my father did the same with others too, and

everyone misses him. While listening to him, I felt that my father lived not only with his family but also with everyone around him. I also felt that the words that my father practiced in his life will guide me in the future.

## Death in Buddhism

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The days of thinking about ‘death’ continued from the eternal farewell to my father. Everyone knows that they will die someday, but why is it so hard to realize that? I'm even scared when I think I'll have to accept death one day.

Overwhelmed by anguish, I wanted to know how Buddhism preaches death. I remembered a short story about death (Marananussati) in a book I received from a respected Nepalese high priest who spoke on the theme of ‘Social Issues and Buddhist Perspectives’ few years ago. I immediately searched for the book and started reading it in front of my father's photo. After reading it with great interest, I felt as if I had touched undeniable truth, and felt the tranquility in my heart. And I started to think about death, remembering the eternal farewells I had with many people.

One of the things that touched my heart was, ‘even Buddha had to accept death, and who are we compared to that?’ I wondered how an ordinary person like us could deny the truth, even though the Buddha, who was enlightened at the end of his suffering, accepted the truth of ‘death.’ Although death is a part of the nature and a natural law that occurs in everything that is born, I have realized that we forget the truth in our daily lives.

At the end of the sutra, the words ‘don't forget the truth of death in your daily life’ was striking. From that day, I continue to read sutras every morning. I may not have fully accepted that my father's death is part of the nature, but I feel that I will also die someday. It reminds me to live a life without regrets when we reach the end of our lives by cherishing ‘here, and now.’

### ***Marananussati***

*As if the light was blown out by the wind  
The life will end and this body will perish  
So, in the face of someone else's death  
As I will die someday  
Think about death*

*No matter how much wealth you have, everyone will die  
Similarly, I will die  
If it's not today, tomorrow or someday*

*What is born, is with death  
Like a hunter aiming for prey  
Death is chasing me all the time*

*The sun that continuously keeps moving forward  
From sunrise to sunset  
This life also moving toward death*

*Like a thunder, or like bubbles in water  
Like a drop on leaves, or like a line drawn on water  
This body will disappear soon  
Like an enemy attacking no matter how you control  
No one can stop death*

*Even the great Buddha and others  
Accepted death  
Compared to that, who are we ordinary people*

*Even life-saving food rots  
Weapons from the outside, illness from the inside  
Senses of the body die at the moment of blinking  
Keep thinking about death in your daily life  
(Unofficial translation)*

## The song I want to dedicate

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From the eternal farewell to my father, only time passed with my feelings remained unorganized. At one point, I felt like I understood everything, but after a while, I started to wonder if there was any better way, or regret for not noticing my father's symptoms earlier. I was completely confused as sometimes it felt like nothing had happened and only time had passed.

Even though I knew thinking or regretting doesn't do any good, I was surprised that I unconsciously kept regretting. I started to think I'm not facing myself deeply enough in my heart. As I've loved music since childhood, I've used music to express what I've felt in my heart in my life. One day, I decided to write a song to face the deep part of my heart. I wrote down my thoughts on my father, my father's words

and his way of life, as they came to my mind. I read back and added, and finally, I've put together the lyrics, added a melody, and asked my brothers in Kathmandu to hear it. The title was 'impermanent world.'

### ***Impermanent world***

*In this everlasting world that keeps changing  
The person from yesterday is no longer with us today  
No one knows who will leave tomorrow  
In this impermanent world*

*He gave love and raised me to an adulthood  
He always gave me happiness even when he was suffering  
He took my hand to show me the way when in need  
But in the end, he left me crying alone  
He will never return  
I have no choice but to walk alone, the path he guided  
Hoping in my heart that there is good for everyone  
I will also die at the end*

*Let's do a lot of good things while we are alive  
Because being born as a human is itself very valuable  
Let us not forget to take care of others  
Because we may never get again  
This life, as a human  
In the end, I was left behind, as he never returns  
He taught me the objective and way of life*

*I have no choice but to walk alone, the path he guided  
Hoping in my heart that there is good for everyone  
I will also die at the end  
(translation from Nepalese lyrics)*

I asked my brother, a singer, to record the completed song in a studio in Kathmandu. Tears overflowed watching him sing with his eyes closed. It wasn't only sadness, but also a joy to share the great essence of my father. I feel that making this song meant a lot to me. If I hadn't written this song, I might not have been able to be positive because only time would pass in a confusion, and the regrets and sorrows would have dominated my mind.

## Living without regrets

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It was around 2009 that I, in Japan, started talking to my father on international calls on a daily basis. Even if I had the opportunity to visit Kathmandu, I was always busy during my stay and often missed being with my father. When I was talking to my father on the phone in Kathmandu on such a day, I decided to call him from Japan as well. There is a time difference of 3 hours and 15 minutes between Nepal and Japan, and my father's break during his morning run would be around noon time in Japan, which became the time for our everyday call. Until then, I was only calling when there was something special, so wondered what I should talk about in early days. However, as I got used to it, it became our routine.

My father happily talked about ordinary things like what he will do today, who he met yesterday. And I also talked

about my activities and 'Katmandu Journal (formerly Kathmandu News).' My father also taught me old culture and many things that my generation didn't know about. I serialized Kathmandu's "rite of passage" in the Journal, and it was born from a conversation with my father.

Calling my father became one of my daily pleasures, and it was a precious time to get to know my father's way of thinking and about himself. Those calls will never return. Whenever the line was connected, my father's warm 'hello' is still echoing. The existence of a family is sometimes taken for granted, and one may think it's too ordinary and we don't need to put words on. However, what I felt over and over again with my father was that it was important for me to have more communication, because we are a family. If we hold such heartfelt conversation with important people, even if the day of departure comes tomorrow, our regret will lessen thinking that we should have communicated or listened more.

If I hadn't talked to my father on a daily basis, I would have probably been overwhelmed with regrets. However, as I deepened my ties with my father and gained a deeper understanding of himself, I came to think that living his way of life was what I should do, and I gradually became stronger in order to live a life without regrets. I can't meet my father anymore, but I always feel his existence. Sometimes I can't help to recall those conversation with him, but they are irreplaceable treasure for me.

## Closing

I've known the word 'impermanence' for a long time, but I felt that the eternal farewell to my father made me realize its true meaning. I'm still facing myself on how I should live and do in this impermanent world.

Unexpected events occur in our life. We are worried and suffer thinking how to face and overcome the challenges. The greater the challenge, the longer it will take just to face it. In addition, sometimes we may feel lost in figuring out how we should move forward.

How to live in this impermanent world - I am one of those who are still exploring for an answer. When we encounter a terrible event, time passes so fast while we are overwhelmed in sadness and regret. Instead of mourning what happened, why not look closely at the sadness and anguish we have experienced, and the good essence of the person important for us. In that way, we should be able to hold for a moment, and to take a positive step forward. This is what I personally experienced from my eternal farewell to my father. Once we overcome a challenge, we will have the power to move forward by telling the good things we've learned and practiced.

This book was written in February 2013 in Kathmandu, at the first anniversary of my father's death, and was rewritten in April 2020. The world is now in chaotic

situation with the spread of COVID-19; state of emergency was declared in Japan, and the lockdown continued in Nepal, whilst observing five years from the great earthquake in 2015. It would be my great pleasure if this book helps in any way to overcome challenges and crisis, and to succeed the good of your loved ones.

Raja Ratna Sthapit

# About the Author

**Raja Ratna Sthapit**



Born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, moved to Japan in 1990. For many years, he has been engaged in various activities to promote cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural communication. The information magazine "Kathmandu Journal" (formerly "Kathmandu Tsushin") was first published in Japanese in 1994. In 2010, he founded Cross Culture Media and leads philanthropy activities with the concept of "Discover Yourself". He is the author of "The Kathmandu – a hometown far away". 『素顔のカトマンドゥー日本が教えてくれた故郷一』



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