

October, 2007 Newsletter

The New Frontier of Ageless Living

Today, people are growing older in a new way. As we approach what is called retirement age we are choosing to “retool” rather than “retire”. Finding something we love to do, some way of service, or a way to express a long-denied gift or talent, we are assuming new adventures at a time when previous generations began to wind down.

We are pioneers on the frontier of a new way of aging. But what does a person on this frontier call himself? For me, “senior citizen” is just for discounts and “elder” is the generation before me. Nonetheless, I do want to blaze the trail to being a wise elder. How does a person find their way to wisdom?

Baseball legend, Yogi Berra said, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” As we come to places where our pathway in life divides, it doesn’t matter which route we take for the most part – there are always lessons to be learned and things to be gained. But eventually we come to a decision that makes a vast difference to us and to those around us. It is a parting of the ways that leads to being either a cranky old person or a wise elder.

For pioneers on the new frontier of aging there are no role models from the past for making this choice. We are creating the future with our attitudes and actions today. Because of our lengthening lifespan we have opportunities to contribute to the world around us far longer than did our ancestors. But, if we cling to wanting life to be the way it used to be – in our body – in our activities – or even in our ability to remember details, we may miss the richness and value of the present moment.

A wise elder can be defined as any person more than fifty-five years of age who has made a conscious commitment to a vital, life-affirming second half of life. We all know the definition of a cranky old person.

A while ago an e-mail message was circulating around the web. No one seems to know who originally wrote it. It said, “Life should not be a journey to the grave with the

intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well-preserved body. But rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in hand, body thoroughly used up, totally worn-out and screaming woo-hoo, what a ride!" While there are those who object to being worn-out and used up, I don't hear this as a negative idea. What I hear is someone who doesn't hold back, someone not fixated on staying young, someone who is enjoying the whole ride, looking forward rather than into the rearview mirror – someone who is letting go, loving life and gaining wisdom on the way. What a great image – sliding into the gates of heaven filled with an enthusiasm for life!

Our Inherent Wisdom

There is an inherent wisdom within us just below the surface of our logic and reasoning mind. It is the wisdom of the Universe. To access this wisdom and intuition all we need to do is to relax our bodies and minds and allow our hearts to feed our consciousness from within.

As we quiet down and sense our impressions, feelings and physical responses, we find our intuition and creativity. Fed by the experiences of the past – the learning from the hard knocks and soft landings of life itself – we find ourselves filled with the courage, compassion and creativity that are the components of wisdom.

Wise elders see value in their current conditions. Wise elders harvest from the past all that is good and release the rest. They share their knowledge without giving advice and are interested in the newness of the upcoming generations.

Cranky old people see life through the lens of loss. They focus on their bodies as deteriorating, their memory as going and the past, which appears to be so much happier and peaceful than today. Lucky for us, this choice can be remade at any time and a new direction begun.

The opposite of wisdom is not foolishness. It is shortsightedness – not having a large enough perspective on our experiences. As you and I come to see that we are created in the image and likeness of the Creator of all, we will become more like King Solomon in the Old Testament. When he was asked what he would like to have more

than anything, he replied, "wisdom." As we seek the wisdom of our years we too are able to ask any question, look inside, and find a truly wise answer there.

Three Principles for Ageless Living

Be Uniquely You

Resist any impulses to take on characteristics of aging just because statistics say that they occur. You are unique. Look to who you are, not what someone else says you should be.

Grow Your Inner Life

By opening your mind to the deepest parts of who you are through meditation you will find aspects of your being as yet undeveloped. Find a gathering or group that nurtures your new insights.

Direct Your Energy

Instead of focusing on what can or cannot be done, focus instead on what you can be. Consciousness of being is the window to wisdom. There is always enough energy to be the qualities of Spirit, wherever we are.

Staying Open

Becoming older is not necessarily synonymous with becoming wiser. Wise elders avoid the temptation to project their issues, values and the way of doing things onto others. They do not give in to the tempting notions that "misery loves company" and provide a miserable experience for those around them. We might better cultivate a healthy sense of humor about becoming older, thus increasing our chances of becoming wiser in the process. Accepting the things we cannot change and being strong enough to change the things we can, will help to establish us in an open, visionary and creative life. The path of the wise elder is one who is emotionally satisfied and filled with meaningful activity. As wise elders we work to seek to understand what gives people hope, comfort and security. As we stretch to include "the other," we create safe spaces for our interaction and we become an example of a living spirituality. As such, we must actively challenge and test our beliefs regularly, not necessarily to change them but to be able to include new views and new ways of perceiving life.

At the Crossroads

If you find yourself at a crossroads and find the unknown frontier of a new way of aging on one hand and the old familiar ways on the other, set your intention to do things in a new way. Change your routines. Try new foods, color your hair, take a class in Spanish. Look for the connections between thought and actions. Listen to other generations with the intention of understanding. You might ask: What does this have to do with inner wisdom? The answer is that Spirit's wisdom is all around us, as well as within. As we become more and more awake within the present moment, we also become more receptive to all that life has to offer.

Will you become a wise elder? The choice is yours. Ask yourself these questions: Do you want to offer your talents and energy to the world? Are you curious about the thoughts and values of the next generation? What difference does it make, or can it make, that you're alive, and to whom does it make this difference?

This is a time of marvelous opportunity. Will you walk a new way of the ageless, a path of social wisdom and empowerment, a path of fulfilling dreams? Will you walk in celebration of your creativity and connectedness, mobilize your wisdom into a vision of contribution and have a life dedicated to aging with a new attitude? Will you accept the things you cannot change and change the things you can? These are the key to ageless living.