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## AGEING

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### Just Part of the Journey

by

Yig Labworth

Many societies honour the wisdom of their elders. They have accumulated their knowledge during a longer time-span than anyone else. Unfortunately, our society is not one of them, and the ageing and elderly are not respected with the reverence I believe they deserve. They are shut away and ignored by the younger generation, like repressed and undesirable feelings, without the awareness of how everything needs to be included in the totality of life.

I'm 42 years old now: a mother of two beautiful daughters (19 and 16 years old) and I look very young myself. Some people who I meet, ask me for the secret ingredient I use in staying young. "Is it the face cream that you use?" "Do you do yoga?" "You must have a good lover?" etc.

Ageing is an enemy and a problem if a person identifies their existence with time. Time passes, everything changes, nothing stays the same; birth/life/death. The cause of suffering is trying to control this process, holding on to what has already gone, looking towards an unknown future, when there is only here and now. My own secret of how I am, is being and living my life in

the present, staying open to awareness and how things are from moment to moment, as mindfully as possible. I have a body, and emotions and states of mind flow through me, but I do not identify with them or hold on to them. I allow them to pass, as everything does, not knowing or needing to know. I feel a freedom in this 'just-being' state. I move with ease and equanimity from one state to the next: sometimes crazy, sometimes sane, sometimes there is sadness or hurting or pain and often there is joy and peacefulness - cleaning, cooking, eating, working, meditating, sleeping, walking - constantly changing roles, but always just being, without identifying with the role, being awake to the needs of the moment.

Ageing creates war in ourselves when our identities are stuck in roles. If a woman is busy being beautiful, enjoying the compliments about how beautiful she is; enjoying her beautiful appearance each time she gazes at herself in the mirror, catching glimpses of herself in shop-windows - then it's going to be really painful if something happens that threatens this image. Ageing could be that happening. The first wrinkles, the thinning and greying

hairs, dry skin beginning to shrivel slightly, sagging breasts that were so perfect once upon a time. She could then make a choice. A deficiency choice would be to fight the process, which is going to happen in any case (- all beings in time grow old and eventually die). Fighting the process might include face-lifts, cosmetic surgery, spending lots of money on expensive lotions and potions, buying clothes suitable for teenagers, searching for lovers who will tell her how beautiful and young she looks. Anything to avoid facing the reality of the situation.

Another deficiency choice would be to find a new identity to live by - a new myth. She might choose to have yet another baby or become a business woman. "I'm a successful business woman now - I'm so busy being one that I don't have time to think about my appearance now - I make so much money, but I don't have time to spend it - but I'm getting so tired, stressed, drained of energy and tense everywhere, that I secretly want to end this living process, painlessly and soon". How sad to be locked in this sort of prison, unable to find an escape route, unless an illness occurs, which hopefully would force this woman to her senses and allow her time to live before she dies.

The wise choice would be to allow oneself to age with beauty. This is an art, accepting ourselves as we are without fighting or suffering more than we need to. It's allowing ourselves the space to love our ageing, and everyone else's ageing process as it is, with answers; for it is not us, it's only a process in time.

Inner listening is the method I use, not knowing each next moment; but I really trust the cosmos, and with faith, the path of the heart I allow my inner process to guide me.

The majority of people though, in our society turn outward to the world of appearances as their only reality, whilst inside there is disorder and possibly chaos. These people are wrapped up in values and self-image and what other people think of them, trying to be classified as a somebody in the world. Ageing can destroy them, because ageing is not easily tolerated in a society averse to the elderly, and where people are frightened of death.

Ours is a distraction-seeking society, where money, beauty, fame and youth reign supreme; anything to distract people from how they feel this instant. One good reason for not paying attention to their feelings is that they don't like what they find when they do stop to notice. People judge them to be bad, nasty or wrong. It's dangerous though, for the body and mind to ignore the awareness of difficult or unpleasant emotions. Physical or emotional illness is usually the result of unrecognized or ignored feelings, and illness is associated with ageing and dying.

Ageing doesn't have to include the prospect of becoming ill. Illness can affect people of all ages. The main constriction to a good state of health at any age (since we're ageing from the day we are born), is living out conflict - producing patterns, outgrown from childhood, rather than moving towards the potential to be our true selves.

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My own journey has been one of great suffering. I was born into a very rigid unloving family, and I spent my childhood frightened of being beaten and punished cruelly. I believed that I was just waiting to die, and lived in daily terror. I could never understand that living had to be as painful as I experienced it then; but somewhere inside I had the willpower to escape and discover for myself, if there were happy families in this world. At the age of 18, I left home and travelled abroad against my family's wishes. Through kidnap, rape, drugs and disease, I survived and returned home much wiser.

I had been given a copy of (Alan Watts) "The Way of Zen" when I was 18 by a loving admirer, who suggested that this would be my initiation for my spiritual journey. I then learnt to meditate, and have been practising ever since, using various teaching methods. I now practice regularly - Vipassana Buddhist meditation.

My psychological initiation was at 23 years old. I trained in an 'Encounter and Sensitivity' class in the Free University of Montreux, Canada, together with my then

husband. Our white haired guru was fresh from Esalen, and in spite of chasing pretty girls, was an inspirational group facilitator. I learned not to worry about people laughing at me, or finding fault with me when I expressed myself as a bouncing ball, a pizza-maker, or a parcel, unwrapping itself in front of the group. Soon my husband and I were running Growth Groups in London.

Psychological growth and spiritual awareness are the two important paths to follow in order to cope with ageing, I believe. As I've let go of my childhood fears and patterns through psychotherapy, I'm able to be fully myself to use intuition to divert my choices in life. A spiritual practice allows me to see the truth of things in a loving, compassionate and wise way. I am now able to help other people to move toward finding their true selves. Instead of being anxious about growing old and dying, I try and teach others how to live life as fully as possible. I have found that most people's fears toward ageing and death have been formulated by cultural images. Scenes of violence, vicious killings, horrendous accidents, old people dying in hospitals, and homes for old folks - these are variations of the theme that ageing and dying are definitely not nice.

It seems that those who see inner growth as the most important growth area of their life; who are willing to constantly let go of the past, in order to be in the present and allow their inner visions to

direct them toward their potential, are more able to age and die consciously, without too many problems. With an inward spiritual practice, a meditational approach to ageing and dying will be one without

resistance to what is happening, skilful and calm. This is surely a realistic and healthy way to live all of our life on this everlasting journey to eternity in which we are all participating together.

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## DO YOU KNOW?

We are very frequently asked for information about people or organisations within the human potential movement and usually can give an answer. However, from time to time, we are stumped and instead of just saying - "sorry we don't know" - I thought we would throw the problem to our readers and ask you if you could help. At the moment there are three queries outstanding. If you can help, please write in or telephone (01) 928 8254.

### **Current Queries . . .**

- AC* Wants to know the name of a therapist in or near Athens.  
*MK* Wants to hear from anyone working with deaf children, particularly if they have experience of using puppets as a training aid.  
*JV* who works in the city would like to know of any potential lunch-time co-counselling contacts.
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