



Spiritual Keys ^{to} *Aging Well*

A rustic stone wall with a wooden door and vines. The door is made of vertical wooden planks and has two large, ornate black metal hinges. The wall is made of rough-hewn stones, and there are green vines growing on it. The door is slightly ajar, revealing a glimpse of a garden with green plants and a stone path.

As Young as the Morning

This booklet about aging with grace comes to you by popular demand. The Unity audience tends to skew older, and you have expressed particular interest in the spiritual aspects of aging.

The United States has one of the older populations in the world, along with Europe, Japan, and Canada. The boomers—those hippies with flowers in their hair—now range from 59 to 77. Generation Xers are well into middle age. Even the oldest millennials are in their mid-40s.

Older Americans have always been more likely to live alone, and the number is increasing dramatically. Thirty-six percent of households headed by someone over 50 are just one person. That's 26 million Americans living alone, up from 15 million in 2000.

Interest in a spiritual path often blooms in middle age—maybe because people have more time to pursue spiritual study or maybe because they have realized there's more to life than houses, jobs, and kids. Even if you do not consider yourself to be among the older population, your day will come simply by continuing to live.

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Generous donations from friends like you allow us to make Unity literature available to those most in need of spiritual encouragement. Please give at unity.org/donatenow.



From Aging to Eldering

Rev. Robert Brumet

Eldering may seem like a new word, but the practice of eldering goes back several millennia. In tribal cultures and in early societies, the elders were seen as those who carried the traditional wisdom of the community. These elders were turned to for advice and counsel when important decisions needed to be made. The elders presided over traditional ceremonies and rituals. They were the spiritual leaders of the community.

By contrast, our youth-obsessed culture tends to see the aged as irrelevant—perhaps even a burden. Our final years are seen as a time of loss, diminishment, and pain. Many see aging as a curse.

Eldering is a perspective that sees aging and the final years of life as another stage of development in our life experience. As with every developmental stage, there are challenges and opportunities. Each stage of life has its own “curriculum.” The final stage of development is no different.

The paradigm of eldering does not ignore the fact that aging may lead to some physical and mental ailments, as well as to loss and diminishment of certain physical capabilities. Eldering encourages wise and compassionate care for the body. We do not deny or discount this aspect of aging. We encourage acceptance of this element of aging without identifying with it. The experience of aging does not need to define us. We are much more than this physical body, whether it is young or old. When someone recently asked me how old I was, I responded, “I have no idea how old I am, but I know my body is 80 years old.”

Eldering involves looking at our life in four directions: looking back, looking forward, looking outward, and looking inward.

LOOKING BACK

Looking back includes the process of harvesting our life experiences. *Harvesting* means collecting both the wheat and the tares (see Matthew 13:24-30). Harvesting the wheat represents acknowledging and valuing our achievements and our positive accomplishments in this life. It involves seeing the ways in which the world is a better place because we have lived. Each of us has wheat to harvest, no matter how humble our life may appear. Yet no matter how great or small our accomplishments, the past is the past; we must release our attachment to it. We can live only in the present moment.

Harvesting the tares (weeds) signifies facing our regrets and disappointments; it means forgiving, releasing, and letting go of the past. This is not easy, but it is very important for the well-being of our soul—and for the body as well.

LOOKING FORWARD

Looking forward means accepting the inevitability of our death. This process involves looking at any fear or foreboding that we may have about death or dying. It involves looking at beliefs (or nonbeliefs) that we have about life after death. This is not a morbid preoccupation with death but simply an acknowledgment of the reality that all physical beings will die.

Another aspect of looking ahead is to address the arrangements needed for those we leave behind. This includes burial or cremation arrangements, drafting a will and durable power of attorney, making all necessary legal and financial arrangements, and providing loved ones with critical information they will need after our passing.

LOOKING OUTWARD

Looking outward involves finding community and developing a sense of connection to others. Loneliness tends to plague many older people; friends have died and former associations and activities are no longer part of their life. Those who have meaningful social connections tend to live longer than those who do not.

LOOKING INWARD

Perhaps the most essential aspect of eldering is looking inward. Releasing former identifications allows you to look more deeply into the soul. No longer identified with social and professional roles and no longer identified with the body you had as a younger adult, you can now know yourself more deeply and authentically.

This experience can be challenging, yet it is an opportunity to find your own true nature. As you transition from role to soul, you no longer say, “I am this or I am that.” You can now truly say, “I am that I am.” Welcome home!

Rev. Robert Brumet served on the faculty of Unity Institute® and Seminary. He founded Mindfulness Ministries and is the author of four books.

A photograph of a garden scene. In the foreground, a blue metal bench with an ornate backrest sits on a concrete path. Behind the bench is a dense garden of purple flowers, likely lavender. In the background, a brick wall is covered with climbing plants, including pink roses and purple flowers. The scene is bathed in soft, natural light.

Change Is Our Friend

Rev. Jim Blake

As children, most of us anticipate birthdays with excitement about growing older. We know we get to do more and be more with each passing year. But somewhere in early adulthood, many of us begin to dread birthdays. Birthdays mean change—to our bodies and also to our circumstances. Loved ones move away. Neighborhoods change; favorite restaurants and stores may close. Society and technology change and challenge us. Throughout time, we lose cherished friends and family as they pass from this plane of existence. As I look at these endless changes, I can see why we resist getting older.

I viewed aging through this lens of dread for many years until I had a spiritual awakening. First, I began to understand we are not our bodies; we are the everlasting, impermanent consciousness beyond our thoughts and the vessel that houses them. In truth, we are a unique expression of the Divine, incarnated here to live and experience the spectrum of life so the divine presence may experience more of itself.

I began to understand that death is not a bad thing, just as birth is not a bad thing. It is a transformation. We transform from this expression into the next expression of living.



Express Your Feelings

Rev. Carolyn Warnemuende

When observing the seasons in nature, we recognize a cycle: birth and newness in spring, ripening and maturing during summer, and the burst of color, then fading of fall before winter, when dormancy and death come. This cycle of life is endless—birth, maturity, decline, and death. We experience this same cycle in our lives.

As we age, our bodies begin to change. These changes feel unfamiliar and sometimes cause angst. We may fight them, wishing we were once again young. By willingly accepting the inevitable changes with grace and a positive attitude, we remain young in spirit. We become a shining light for others.

Just as our bodies change as we move into our later years, so do our emotions. The research on older people indicates that seniors exhibit a comparable or higher level of emotional empathy than young adults—the ability to feel what others feel or to feel compassion for them.

Emotional empathy reminds us that feelings are universal. Through our feelings, we relate to others. When we consciously recognize feelings and practice experiencing their subtle nuances, they bring us closer to all humankind. We see that we are not alone.

Author Cynthia Hand in her novel *Hallowed* says, “There’s nothing more inspiring than the complexity and beauty of the human heart.” Have you ever considered that the multiplicity of feelings we experience in our heart is what brings richness and color to our life? When we live in the vivid color of joy, the soft color of peace, and even shades of gray, we bring depth to life.