

AGING WITH SPIRIT - QUOTATIONS

I realized that this question of who Elders are, and what they do for us, is simpler than I thought.
Elders are there.

Elders offer their presence and life as a gift to model one's own life upon.

They sit with you, and respond to what you ask or say.

They do not correct or instruct,

they simply accompany the questions and the journey to the answers...or to more questions.

~ Kate Gordon

Days should speak, multitude of years should teach wisdom.

~ Job 32:7

Character is refined in the laboratory of aging.

~ James Hillman

For the unlearned, old age is winter;

for the learned, it is the season of the harvest.

~ Hasidic saying

And now in age I bud again.

~ George Herbert

The enterprise of conscious aging is about developing and maintaining integrity.

This journey involves enlightening the mind,

not tricking it into thinking there are shortcuts to becoming enlightened.

It involves developing spiritual resources to adapt to aging,

not to deny it.

~ Robert C. Atchley

Old age is like climbing a mountain.

You climb from ledge to ledge.

The higher you get, the more tired and breathless you become,

but your views become more extensive.

~ Ingmar Bergman

To exist is to change,

to change is to mature,

to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.

~ Henri Bergson

If you continue to work and absorb the beauty in the world about you,
you find that age does not necessarily mean getting old.

At least not in the ordinary sense.

I feel many things more intensely than ever before,

and for me life grows more fascinating ...

I do not think a single day passes by in my life
in which I fail to look with fresh amazement at the miracle of nature.
It is there on every side.

~ Pablo Casals

Age is the antidote to personal destruction,
the call to spiritual growth,
because age finally brings us to the point
where there is no where else to go
but inside for comfort,
inside for wealth,
inside for the things that really count.

~ Joan Chittister

It is time to taste the essence of life
rather than concern ourselves with its accessories.
It has taken almost a lifetime to love a sunset,
to value company,
to give up what has always been too much,
and to learn to revel in what is enough –
but it has been worth the wait.

~ Joan Chittister

No theological treatise is any kind of substitute for the sight of a life well lived. ...
Instead, persuasion rests, in the last analysis,
on the presence of living witnesses to what it means to live well,
to be productive, to make a difference,
to grow to full stature as a human being.

~ Joan Chittister

A blessing of these years is coming to see
that behind everything so stolid, so firm,
so familiar in front of us
runs a descant of mystery and meaning
to be experienced in ways we never thought possible before.
To become free of the prosaic and the scheduled and the pragmatic
is to break the world open in ways we never dreamed of.
In this new world, a mountain, a bench, a grassy path
is far more than simply itself.
It is a symbol of unprecedented possibilities,
of the holiness of time.

~ Joan Chittister

A blessing of these years
is to have the opportunity
to take on the role of thinker, of philosopher,
of disputant, of interrogator, or spiritual guide
in a world racing to nowhere,
with no true human goal and no lived wisdom in sight.

~ Joan Chittister

Now we are beyond the narcissism of youth,
 above the survival struggles of young adulthood,
 beyond the grind of middle-age,
 and prepared to look beyond ourselves into the very heartbeat of life.
 Now we can let our spirits fly.
 We can do what our souls demand that fully human beings do.
 This is the moment for which we were born.
 ~ Joan Chittister

The elderly among us have lived long lives of witnessing and experiencing,
 of truly coming to understand life.
 They are repositories of knowledge, thoughtfulness, and good judgment.
 In that sense, they are living gifts to the rest of us.
 For children, who are trying to explore the world and understand it,
 the elderly are wonderful teachers.
 They know life - perhaps better than anyone else would ever come to know it –
 through their own good luck, endurance, and resiliency.
 No doubt, that is the explanation for their longevity.
 And so, they are a gift and a treasure
 for all of us to hold close and understand.
 We should all be grateful for them.
 ~ Robert Coles

If you are mindful that old age has wisdom for its food,
 you will so exert yourself in youth that your old age will not lack sustenance.
 ~ Leonardo DaVinci

I never remember feeling tired by work,
 though idleness exhausts me completely.
 ~ Arthur Conan Doyle

There is no doubt we are all products of a society
 that teaches us that aging is descent.
 We are taught that maturity signals the end of meaningfulness
 and to grow old is to grow irrelevant...
 [But elders] accept the limitations that arise
 as their bodies slow down
 and see the transitions they are going through
 as a new, yet different kind of ascent –
 a fresh opportunity to ground themselves in a deeper sense of a greater wisdom.
 Their gratitude for others and for the world becomes more pronounced.
 ~ Ken Dychtwald

Within I do not find weariness and used heart,
 but unspent youth.
 ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

The only thing that can save us as a species
 is seeing how we're not thinking about future generations in the way we live.

What's lacking is generativity,
 a generativity that will promote
 positive values in the lives of the next generation.
 Unfortunately, we set the example of greed,
 wanting a bigger and better everything,
 with no thought of what will make it a better world for our great-grandchildren.

~ Erik Erikson

We strive to create a vision of life
 in which aging is an unprecedented period of human enrichment.
 Such a revolution vitally depends on the communities of research and professional practices
 that focus on adult populations, especially people over 50.
 It is within these communities that new ideas, insights,
 factual support, and practices of growth enhancement can effectively emerge.
 By focusing on the developmental aspects of aging –
 the availability of relevant resources, skills, and resiliencies –
 research not only brings useful insights into the realm of practice,
 but inspires hope and empowers action among older people.

~ Mary and Ken Gergen

You have to keep the young adventurer inside your heart alive
 long enough for it to someday reemerge.
 It may take some coaxing and some courage,
 but that person is in you always, never growing old.

~ Granny D

The impermanence of the body should give us great clarity,
 deepening the wonder in our senses and eyes
 of this mysterious existence we share and are surely just traveling through.

~ Hafiz

I want to wear out, not rust out

~ Anon.

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

~ William James

Just as maturation (aging) requires change,
 it offers growth.

The growth that personal maturation offers
 is an internal growth, a growth in spirit, in love, in the intangibles of living.
 Growth in our later years requires a shift in perception
 and a growth in our personal compassion
 and sensitivity that is identifiably different
 from what was required in our earlier years.

~ Robert P. Johnson

The evening of a well-spent life brings its lamps with it.

~ J. Joubert

People who feel their life is part of a larger plan
and are guided by their spiritual values
have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure,
a lower risk of heart attack and cancer,
and heal faster and live longer.

~ Harold Koenig

Age has given me what I was looking for my entire life.
It has given me me.

~ Anne Lamott

The place of respect that elders enjoy in tribal groups
represents a sharp contrast to how older adults in our society are seen.
The elders earn and accept the respect they're given.
It's not just that they're acknowledged by their people-
they claim themselves as vital resources for their communities.
Becoming an elder is, for them,
an active step that involves staking out a place of power around the fire.
A person closest to the flames has something valuable to bring forth
and takes the initiative to do so.

~ R. Leider & D. Shapiro

Pragmatically most important is the fact that spiritual growth
is possible long after other forms of growth are past.
However it changes, spirituality is a domain of humanity
in which the quest for wholeness and holiness
is a lifelong developmental task.

~ David Moberg

Growing old is one of the ways
the soul nudges itself into attention
to the spiritual aspect of life.
The body's changes teach us
about fate, time, nature, mortality, and character.

~ Thomas Moore

Growing old can be a matter of growing deep.

~ Thomas Moore

Our most authentic and powerful legacies
come from living "on purpose,"
that is, giving our unique gifts,
guided by our core essence.
These gifts of ourselves, both tangible and intangible,
the imprint of our lives that reflect our purpose,
will necessarily be legacies of the heart.
For this and other reasons, I advocate clarifying our purpose
and being intentional about our legacies early in our second journey,
as we harvest and pass on our inner wealth
while there is still time to reap the many rewards.

~ Margaret Newhouse

There is something you can tell people over and over,
and with feeling and eloquence,
and still never say it well enough for it to be more than news from abroad—
people have no readiness for it, no empathy.

It is the news of personal aging---
of climbing, and knowing it, to some unrepeatable pitch
and coming forth on the other side,
which is pleasant still but which is, unarguably, different—
which is the beginning of descent.

~ Mary Oliver

It takes a long time to become young.

~ Pablo Picasso

Beautiful young people are accidents of nature,
but beautiful old people are works of art.

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Aging changes consciousness more surely than any narcotic;
it does so gradually and organically.
It digests the experience of a lifetime
and makes us different people –
sometimes so different
that we are amazed, embarrassed,
or even ashamed at the person we once were.

~ Theodore Roszak

Every life matters immensely.
Every well-lived and completed life
helps in healing the world.

~ Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi

Aging is a time with special opportunities
for forgiveness and spiritual intimacy.
This is a time we can act as guide, mentor,
and agent of healing and reconciliation
on behalf of the planet, nation, tribe, clan, and family.

~ Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi

Aging - a time to let go of all that we have outgrown
and to re-imagine our future differently.

~ Anon.

With mirth and laughter, let old wrinkles come.

~ William Shakespeare

The afternoon knows what the morning never suspected.

~Swedish Proverb

In the way of learning, each day we gain more and more.
 In the way of the Tao, each day we have less and less.
 ~Tao teaching

Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
 Death closes all; but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done...
 'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
 ~ Alfred Lord Tennyson

One of the difficulties of growing older
 is the way that our senses do begin to atrophy slowly.
 But at the same time as these outer senses
 are actually dulling and fading slightly,
 there's an integrative mechanism of imaginative experience
 inside an older human being
 which is actually able to bring them together into sharp focus
 right at the center of their imagination.
 At each stage in our life, I think there's a possibility
 for a certain kind of vitality
 even if that's for the vitality of knowing
 when is your time to actually go.
 ~ David Whyte

Life is no passing memory of what has been...
 It is the heart after years
 of secret conversing
 speaking out loud in the clear air.
 ~ David Whyte

One of the blessings of growing older
 is the discovery that many of the things
 I once believed to be my shortcomings
 have turned out in the long run to be my strengths,
 and other things of which I was unduly proud
 have revealed themselves in the end
 to be among my shortcomings.
 Things that I have hidden from others for years
 turn out to be the anchor and enrichment of my middle age.
 What a blessing it is to outlive your self-judgments and harvest your failures.
 ~ Rachel Naomi Remen

The world lives in order to develop lines in its face.
 ~ T. E. Hulme

Aging of whiskey smoothes out rawness and greenness,
 it adds depth and complexity and smoothness,
 it adds flavours, it concentrates what's desirable.
 At the same time, there is the evaporation of what's less consequential

and I think it's fairly easy to see analogies in human life with that process.
 Aging can increase value by concentrating what is most worthy
 and by allowing what's inconsequential to dissipate.
 It can smooth out roughness, add depth of character,
 so I just find it a useful exercise to think
 what aging brings out in these other areas of our experience
 that makes us willing to pay more money for old versions.
 ~ Andrew Weil

To know how to grow old is the master work of wisdom,
 And one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living.
 ~ Henri Frederic Amiel

We shall not cease exploring
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 ~T.S. Eliot

Spirit can be said to be the driving force behind the motive to serve.
 And the ultimate test for spirit in one's old age is, I believe,
 can one look back at one's active life
 and achieve serenity from the knowledge
 that one has, according to one's lights, served?
 ~ Robert K. Greenleaf

Wisdom is the most positive and acceptable trait of people who live long lives.
 The challenge is to stimulate imaginations
 to combine that wisdom with activity
 and social engagement
 to make it meaningful in one's life and in the world.
 ~ Mary Catherine Bateson

We are seeking a vibrant spirituality for later life.
 Like seeking the pearl, this quest seems elusive.
 How are we to find a path with a heart -- especially in later life?
 Perhaps by following our heart,
 by following what is truly beautiful.
 ~ John Sullivan

To keep the heart unwrinkled,
 to be hopeful, kindly, cheerful,
 reverent--that is to triumph
 over old age.
 ~ Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The springtimes, summers, autumns, and winters,
 each with its own wisdom to be gleaned.
 Each with its own shaping hands.
 ~ Wendy Wright

Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me
 Keep my mind on what matters,
 which is my work, which is mostly standing still and learning
 to be astonished.
 ~ Mary Oliver

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
 with your one wild and precious life?
 ~ Mary Oliver

And I have become the child of the clouds, and of hope.
 I have become the friend of the enemy, whoever that is.
 I have become older and, cherishing what I have learned,
 I have become younger.
 ~ Mary Oliver ~

All the arts we practice are apprenticeship.
 The big art is our life.
 ~ M. C. Richards

Old age, to the unlearned, is winter; to the learned, is harvest time.
 ~ Unknown

May you live all the days of your life.
 ~ Jonathan Swift

Elders are the jewels of humanity that have been mined from the Earth,
 cut in the rough, then buffed and polished by the stonecutter's art into precious gems
 that we recognize for their enduring value and beauty.
 Shaped with patience and love over decades of refinement,
 each facet of the jewel reflects light
 that awakens our soul to intimations of its own splendor.
 We sense such radiance in our youth, but we cannot contain it.
 It requires a lifetime's effort to carve out
 the multifaceted structure that can display our hidden splendor in all its glory.
 ~ Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.
 ~ e.e. cummings

The great thing about getting older is that you don't lose all the other ages you've been.
 ~ Madeleine L'Engle

There are five ways to become wise: be silent, listen, remember, grow older and study.
 ~ Arabian Proverb

We turn not older with years, but newer every day.
 ~ Emily Dickinson

Aging people should know that their lives are not mounting and unfolding
but that an inexorable inner process forces the contraction of life.
For a young person it is almost a sin-- and certainly a danger—
to be too much occupied with himself;
but for the aging person it is a duty
and a necessity to give serious attention to himself.

~ Carl Jung

The spirituality of the aged is a spirituality of storytelling.
Telling the story brings the past, present, and future together.
Telling the story breathes life into a time of closure and seemingly diminishment.

~ Margaret Guenther

The aged among us are rare parchments,
waiting to be read by those of us who will take the time to listen.
We are honored to sit in their presence.
And these rare parchments may indeed show us
how we ourselves, God willing, might grow up to be rare parchments, too.

~ Margaret Guenther

Thoroughly unprepared
we take the step into the afternoon of life;
worse still, we take this step with the false assumption
that our truths and ideals will serve us as hitherto.
But we cannot live the afternoon of life
according to the programme of life's morning;
for what was great in the morning will be little at evening,
and what in the morning was true will at evening become a lie.

~ Carl Rodgers

To grow old is to pass from passion to compassion.

~ Albert Camus

I am inclined to believe that God's chief purpose for giving us memory is to enable us to go back in time so that if we didn't play those roles right the first time around, we can still have another go at it now. We cannot undo our old mistakes or their consequences any more than we can erase old wounds that we have both suffered and inflicted, but through the power that memory gives us of thinking, feeling and imagining our way back through time, we can at long last finally finish with the past in the sense of removing its power to hurt us and other people and to stunt our growth as human beings.

~ Frederick Buechner

Years wrinkle the face, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul.

~ Watterson Lowe

Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength.

~ Betty Friedan

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

One of the best things about aging
is being able to watch imagination overtake memory.
~ Harriet Doerr

Now at sixty what I see,
Although the world is worse by far,
Stops my heart in ecstasy.
God, the wonders that there are!
~ Archibald MacLeish

Meaningful creativity, service, and engaged generativity
often take us to states of being in which we feel
alive, full of joy, and inspired.
When we fully engage our life force and take action,
a generating quality occurs where one project or idea leads to others.
We can become stuck when we fail to recognize that creativity is a process,
and that the goal is only a part of the process.
~ Angeles Arrien

The elders say we must let go of the shore,
push off into the middle of the river,
our eyes open, and our heads above water.
And I say, see who is in there with you...and celebrate!
~ Hopi Elder

What boomers left undone in their youth,
they will return to take up in their maturity,
if for no other reason than because they will want to make old age *interesting* .
Just as the Dutch won land back from the sea, we have won years back from death.
That gives us the grand project of using those extra years
to build a culture that is morally remarkable.
~ Theodore Roszak

Our purpose ... is to replace the "over the hill" metaphor of aging
With one in which new life potentials are opened to us.
We may acquire, for example, a richer sense of ourselves
in relationship to others and our environment.
We may learn new skills and explore new places.
Our appreciation for life's offerings may expand,
interests deepen, our awe at the unknown, rekindled.
~ Kenneth and Mary Gergen

The great task of the sage
is learning to see in the darkness
and not be afraid.
~ William Martin

There is one primary choice

facing every aging person:
 Will we become sages,
 harvesting the spiritual essence of our lives
 and blessing all future generations?
 Or will we just grow older,
 withdrawing,

circling the wagons,
 and waiting for the end?
 ~ William Martin

Is comfort and luxury
 really what it has all been about?
 Rich or poor,
 we must adjust our thinking.
 Serenity and compassion are the true rewards of aging.
 Anything else is superfluous.
 ~ William Martin

It is the creative potential itself in people that is the image of God.
 ~ Mary Daly

Greek philosophy encourages constant self-examination and improvement –
 "The unexamined life is not worth living."
 Taoist philosophy acknowledges the partial truth of this sentiment
 but adds its own encouragement:
 "The un-lived life is not worth examining." Are you living?
 ~ William Martin

To keep life-giving ties alive... is our Fountain of Age.
 ~ Betty Friedan

If wrinkles must be written upon your brows,
 let them not be written upon the heart.
 The spirit should never grow old.
 ~ James A. Garfield

Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence.
 Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance.
 Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence.
 Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance.
 ~ Yoko Ono

We receive and we lose, and we must try to achieve gratitude;
 and with that gratitude to embrace with whole hearts
 whatever of life that remains after the losses.
 ~ Andre Dubois

Fundamentally, helping, fixing and serving are ways of seeing life.

When you help, you see life as weak;
 when you fix, you see life as broken;
 and when you serve, you see life as whole.
 ~ Rachel Naomi Remen

It is not difficult to be bold when one is young.
 The finest audacity is that at the end of life.
 ~ Andre Gide

We should make use of our security, seniority to take risks,
 to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular.
 ~ Carol Heilbrun

You are never too old to set another goal or dream another dream.
 ~ CS Lewis

Writing regularly fosters resilience - a quality that enables people subjected to difficulties to thrive despite them.
 ~ Louise DeSalvo

As we grow old, the beauty steals inward.
 ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

One of the few advantages of age is that you can report on it with a certain authority;
 you are a native now, and know what goes on here....
 Our experience is one unknown to most of humanity, over time.
 We are the pioneers.
 ~ Penelope Lively

This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.
 ~ George Bernard Shaw

There is a fountain of youth:
 it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life
 and the lives of people you love.
 When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age."
 ~ Sophia Loren