

Theme for May-Aging: *The Practice of Growing*

Introduction

Aging, is a process, unique to each of us that starts at birth and ends at death. Children look forward to growing up, imagining that they will no longer be bound by rules. A five year old will announce his age as “five and three quarters”, since it sounds closer to being grown up than 5. A series of pencil marks gradually moving up a door jamb with dates sketched next to them, record evidence of physical growth leading to adulthood.

When does “*My you have grown!*” get replaced with “*You haven’t aged a bit!*” as a complement? Adolescents crave the independence and status they anticipate that comes with driving a car while older adults fear loss of their independence. Sandwiched between the two is a middle-aged adult teaching her child to drive while encouraging an elderly parent to consider giving up their driver’s license.

The appearance of youth is highly marketed in our culture. Products and procedures are advertised to counter and slow the effects of gravity on our physical selves. The culture this promotes can leave us feeling devalued and in a state of decay as we age into middle and older adulthood. What if, instead of seeing the superficial effects of time on aging skin and bodies, we focused more on our spirits and, as our third principle urges us: **acceptance of one another and encouraging spiritual growth in our selves and congregations?**

Each phase in one’s life journey is marked by change. With age comes potential for new appreciation of our place in the universe and increased ability to share the wisdom which comes to us with years and experience. We grow into and through realities that shape our spirit and allow us to engage in harvesting an understanding we have cultivated over a lifetime. Recognizing **the inherent worth and dignity of every person** is a part of this growth.

Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi In his book, From Age-ing to Sage-ing proposes a model of late life development in which elders are agents of evolution, attracted by the future of humanity’s capabilities as much by the wisdom gleaned from past experience. The elder synthesizes this wisdom to formulate a legacy for future generations.

Our Unitarian Universalist church recognizes the value of growing multigenerational community in our celebrations and traditions. In child dedication ceremonies, the congregational community comes together in shared promise to nurture the child’s spiritual growth. The Coming of Age program honors the transition to adulthood. Youth who participate in this program, work with an adult mentor sharing their values and beliefs and putting faith into action. This program provides a structure for growth based on what two generations can learn from and share with each other and culminates in the sharing of the youth’s credos in May.

May is also celebrated nationally as Older Americans month. The theme of this year’s celebration is “Get into the Act,” to focus on how older adults are taking charge of their health,

getting engaged in their communities, and making a positive impact in the lives of others. In 1970, 10% of the population in the United States was over 65. By 2050 the population over 65 is estimated to be 20% of the total.

Sharing our stories in a community of learning and support encourages us to embrace aging and continue to grow into our selves. At all ages we can help one another **promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning** and discover what it is that we give our hearts to.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, around the table, or with each other:

1. What words come to mind when you hear/see “Aging”?
2. What do you look forward to and what concerns you about aging?
3. What has been your favorite age and why?
4. What transition in aging have you learned the most from?
5. How do you see spiritual growth as related to age?
6. Is there an age at which you felt most ready to grow spiritually? Why?
7. What might it be like to feel like you are growing while you parallel age with someone who seems not to be growing?

Reading and Quotations:

“I grow old ... I grow old ...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.”

~T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems*

“Men do not quit playing because they grow old; they grow old because they quit playing.”

~Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

“It's paradoxical that the idea of living a long life appeals to everyone, but the idea of getting old doesn't appeal to anyone.”

~ Andy Rooney

“Wisdom comes with winters”

~ Oscar Wilde

“Beautiful young people are accidents of nature. Beautiful old people are works of art.”

~Eleanor Roosevelt