



White Robed Monks of St. Benedict
Network News

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The presence of that absence is everywhere.
Edna St. Vincent Millay

Abbot's Notes

Elder Rage

Peace be with you and yours.

Obvious fact: we each are aging. All things that are, age. Aging is a natural phenomena that we encounter throughout our lives. Some of us resist aging more so than others.

Whatever we resist, as the proverb goes, persists. The more we resist aging, the more pain and suffering we encounter. Perhaps we even invite an earlier, rather than later, death due to the added stress of resistance.

Some of us are younger, some of us are older, some of us admit to neither. We all share our lives with those who are aging. What does aging invite? Among other phenomena, we encounter forgetfulness, anger, impatience, anger, worry, anxiety, hope, despair, laughter, sorrow, joy, amusement, befuddlement, and sometimes even awe. In that we ourselves are aging, we might find the same phenomena emerging within our own selves in response to our own personal aging process.

Whether or not we are witnessing an infant, child, teenager, or adult age, we are always present to our own mortality. We are all getting older. Some of us deny, *i.e.*, resist, this reality and try to escape in delusional fantasies of "eternal youth" via cosmetics, surgery, the gym, alcohol or drugs. Age graciously.

Resistance and denial—two very human traits that invite much pain and suffering for all parties concerned. The aging parent, the aging child, our own aging self — we can accept and surrender to the facts of Life and act accordingly rather than engage in non-productive wishful thinking. We each will die and in many respects are dying with each inhale and exhale. What we choose to be

and do between each inhale and exhale influences our aging and our death, if we would do such naturally.

When we surrender (and not resign or give-up) to our own aging, we can more readily acknowledge and accept the aging of those in our family: infant, child, adult. Many of us are witnessing our children and our parents aging. The more we struggle with the aging child and the aging parent, perhaps the more we are struggling with our own aging. Does not charity in all its many forms begin "at home" within our own selves?

Some of us mourn (as the verb is often used in this context) the loss of our youth, others mourn our lost childhood, some of us mourn the now lost "best years of my life." We are mourning aging.

We want situations to remain the same, or to have been better, or at least not like they are now. Only in absolute surrender, when we surrender to our own somewhat selfish, narcissistic desires to have people, places and things the way we want them to be, are we free to live life just as it is, unconditionally.

Life. Many of us place life in opposition to death, creating "life and death" situations. Perhaps it would be wise to remember that death is certainly not in opposition to life, but more so correctly as the fulfillment of one's birth. Life is constant. Is it not so that on the field of Life there are blips: here a birth, there a birth, and here a death, and there a death, and so on within the magnificent field of Life Itself? Aging — just a by-product of Life. **Be Peace.**

Enjoy the Merry Dance of Life.
Peace and joy!
+Robert OSB

In surrendering to a situation, one opens up to readily receive new information.

Elder Rage—or— Take my Father ... Please!: How to Survive Caring for Ageing Parents by Jacqueline Marcell comes most highly recommended to glean a better perspective.

From the back cover:

Are You At Your Wit's End?! Coping with an elderly loved one who:

- Makes unreasonable demands, wanting all your time?
- Has memory loss, is obsessed over ill health, but refuses treatment?
- Has become depressed, manipulative, distrustful, critical or hostile?

Then you'll connect with this riveting true story, written with compassion and humor — and real-

ize that you are not alone with your countless frustrations and conflicting emotions. This incredible roller coaster ride is a "can't-put-it-down" page turner, as well as a how-to guide for struggling caregivers. Triumph with this devoted daughter as she mends her frail mother and turns around her rebellious "Jekyll & Hyde" father — with the right doctors and medications, adult day care, and behavior modification — at 85 years old!

You will learn:

- How to get an accurate diagnosis/treatment for dementia or Alzheimer's.
- Creative ways to encourage an obstinate elder to give up driving.
- Techniques for managing difficult behaviors and to help reduce *your* stress.
- Where to find resources to successfully navigate the maze of elder care.

ISBN 0-9679703-1-8

Special point of insight:
www.6seconds.org

There is a kind of economy of renewal. This intangible force of energy that flows between us - all over the world. We can exchange it though words, or in a more refined state though a look or touch. It powers all enterprise, all relationships, and all healing. It's free, and precious

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THE AGING CHILD

When I was childlike, I liked it,
I always thought I'd stay that way,
But as I look into my mirror,
I see I have turned gray.

Upon more examination,
I see my eyelids sag,
And beneath my baby blues,
Are two big, puffy bags.

I have crow-feet lines around my
eyes,
And wrinkles in my skin,
My once pink cheeks have sallowed
some,
And both have sunken in.

A fold of skin hangs from my chin,
And I can make it swing,
It was never there before,
Such a silly, wiggly thing.

Where once I had soft, luscious
folds,
Now flab has settled in,
And wrinkled crepe's begun to drape
Upon my naked skin.

My kidneys don't work as they
should,
Nor do my lungs or heart,
My equilibrium is shot,
Perhaps I've begun to fall apart.

I'm not complaining, mind you,
For I know things could be worse.
At least my transportation's not...
In an undertaker's hearse.

If I remove all of my mirrors,
And keep my lights down low,
Then I'm still the kid I used to be
And I have not grown old.

I still know how to giggle,
And I can laugh when so disposed,
I still can flirt a little,
And be thrilled down to my toes.

I'm not a tired, old lady,
Though physically I'm spent,
I'm still in love with life,
I just wonder where it went.

In my heart I'm still a child,
I guess I'll always be,
I can't get the hang of growing old,
That's plainly not for me.

Virginia (Ginny) Ellis
Copyright February 2003

More Reference Books

Mirrored Lives: Aging Children and Elderly Parents by Tom Koch

In the first book to deal with the geriatric decline connected to non-terminal illness in old age, Koch takes a sensitive but thorough look at the declining years of his father. The book is a narrative record of an elderly man unable to accept the physical realities of his state. Because it is told by the patient's caregiver—a son—it also chronicles the issues and mechanics of the aging child's role in caring for a parent. Koch defines aging as more than a series of physical symptoms and places the issues of caring and aging within the perspective of socially accepted values; independence, social function, family dynamics, and financial worth.

ISBN: 0275936716

Coping with Your Difficult Older Parent: A Guide for Stressed-Out Children by Grace Lebow and Bar- bara Nane

From the back cover:

Do you have an aging parent who —

- Blames you for everything that goes wrong?
- Cannot tolerate being alone, wants you all the time?
- Is obsessed with health problems, real or imagined?
- Makes unreasonable and/or irrational demands of you?
- Is hostile, negative and critical?

Coping with these traits in parents is an endless high-stress battle for their children. Though there's no medical definition for "difficult" parents, you know when you have one. While it's rare for adults to change their ways late in life, you can stop the vicious merry-go-round of anger, blame, guilt and frustration.

For the first time. Here's a common-sense guide from professionals, with more than two decades in the field, on how to smooth communications with a challenging parent. Filled with practical tips for handling con-

tentious behaviors and sample dialogues for some of the most troubling situations, this book addresses many hard issues, including:

- How to tell your parent he or she cannot live with you.
- How to avoid the cycle of nagging and recriminations.
- How to prevent your parent's negativity from overwhelming you.
- How to deal with an impaired parent who refuses to stop driving.
- How to assess the risk factors in deciding whether a parent is still able to live alone.

ISBN 0-380-79750-X

Caring for Yourself while Caring for Your Aging Parents" How to Help, How to Survive by Claire Berman

From the back cover:

For women and men who are involved in caring for aging parents, and for those who see caregiving in their future, this empathetic and practical book focuses on the emotional stresses and needs of caregivers while addressing all the practical issues they are likely to confront. The author—drawing on her own experiences, the experiences of many other adult children, and interviews with specialists in the geriatric field—discusses the wide range of emotions that can accompany caregiving.

Through the voices of wisdom and compassion in these pages, readers will understand that they are not alone and that there is much they can do to help themselves and their parents through the stressful and humbling challenges that so many of us face today.

ISBN 0-8050-6804-X

And lastly from a Christian perspective:

Caring for Your Aging Parents: When Love is Not Enough by Bar- bara Deane

From the back cover:

In this warm and well-researched guide, author and care-

(Continued on page 3)

Books (con't)

giver Barbara Deane deals comprehensively with many challenges of caring for an aging parent or relative. By combining insights gleaned from his own experiences, interviews with experts, testimonials from other struggling caregivers, and helpful reference lists, Dean furnishes the emotional support and practical advice caregivers need to provide good care—and keep from burning out in the process.

Topics covered include:

- How to adjust to role reversal and loss of independence
- Reconciliation of past differences
- What to do about tension in the family, health problems, financial worries, special medical care
- How to understand the emotional stress of aging
- How to hear what your parents are *really* saying (learning to decode the hidden messages they are trying to communicate)
- How to preserve your marriage while caregiving.
- Preparing for and responding to the death of the person you are caring for

ISBN 0-89109-578-0

From The Sage's Tao Te Ching: Ancient Advice for the Second Half of Life by William Martin

Growing older

either reveals or hides the mystery of existence.

If you are becoming a sage

you are growing in trust and contentment.

You will discover the light

of life's deepest truths.

If you are merely growing older, you will become trapped by fears and frustrations.

You will only see the darkness of infirmity and death.

The great task of the sage

is learning to see in the darkness

and not be afraid.

What's Your Aging I Q?

Quiz prepared by the National Institute on Aging
True or False?

1. Everyone becomes "senile" sooner or later, if he or she lives long enough.

2. American families have by and large abandoned their older members.

3. Depression is a serious problem for older people.

4. The numbers of older people are growing.

5. The vast majority of older people are self-sufficient.

6. Mental confusion is an inevitable, incurable consequence of old age.

7. Intelligence declines with age.

8. Sexual urges and activity normally cease around age 55-60.

9. If a person has been smoking for 30 or 40 years, it does no good to quit.

10. Older people should stop exercising and rest.

11. As you grow older, you need more vitamins and minerals to stay healthy.

12. Only children need to be concerned about calcium for strong bones and teeth.

13. Extremes of heat and cold can be particularly dangerous to old people.

14. Many older people are hurt in accidents that could have been prevented.

15. More men than women survive to old age.

16. Death from stroke and heart disease are declining.

17. Older people on the average take more medications than younger people.

18. Snake oil salesmen are as common today as they were on the frontier.

19. Personality changes with age, just like hair color and skin texture.

20. Sight declines with age.

Source: LIFELONG LEARNING FOR AN AGING SOCIETY - AN INFORMATION PAPER. Prepared for use by the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate. Serial No. 102. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC: 1991.

Answers on page 4 and 5

To everything there is a season

To everything there is a season; a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, and a time to lose; A time to keep, and a time to throw away;

A time to tear, and a time to sew; A time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; A time of war, and a time of peace. -

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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of

Network News

are available in PDF format at

<http://www.wrmosb.org/archive>

Answers to "What is your Aging IQ"

1. **False.** Even among those who live to be 80 or older, only 20-25 percent develops Alzheimer's disease or some other incurable form of brain disease. "Senility" is a meaningless term, which should be discarded.
2. **False.** The American family is still the number one caretaker of older Americans. Older people live close to their children and see them often; many live with their spouses. In all, 8 out of 10 men and 6 out of 10 women live in family settings.
3. **True.** Depression, loss of self-esteem, loneliness, and anxiety can become more common as older people face retirement, the deaths of relatives and friends, and other such crises--often at the same time. Fortunately, depression is treatable.
4. **True.** Today, 12 percent of the U.S. population is 65 or older. By the year 2030, one in five people will be over 65 years of age.
5. **True.** Only 5 percent of the older population lives in nursing homes; the rest are basically healthy and self-sufficient.
6. **False.** Alzheimer's disease or other conditions, which cause incurable damage to the brain, can cause mental confusion and serious forgetfulness in old age but some 100 other problems can cause the same symptoms. A minor head injury, a high fever, poor nutrition, adverse drug reactions and depression can all be treated and the confusion will be cured.
7. **False.** Intelligence per se does not decline without reason. Most people maintain their intellect or improve, as they grow older.
8. **False.** Most older people can lead an active, satisfying sex life.
9. **False.** Stopping smoking at any age not only reduces the risk of cancer and heart disease, it also leads to healthier lungs.
10. **False.** Many older people enjoy--and benefit from--exercises such as walking, swimming, and bicycle riding. Exercise at any age can help strengthen the heart and lungs, and lower blood pressure. See your physician before beginning a new exercise program.
11. **False.** Although certain requirements, such as that for "sunshine" vitamin D, may increase slightly with age, older people need the same amounts of most vitamins and minerals as younger people. Older people in particular should eat nutritious food and cut down on sweets, salty snack foods, high-calorie drinks, and alcohol.
12. **False.** Older people require fewer calories, but adequate intake of calcium for strong bones can become more important as you grow older. This is particularly true for women, whose risk of osteoporosis increases after menopause. Milk and cheese are rich in calcium as are cooked dried beans, collards, and broccoli. Some people need calcium supplements as well.
13. **True.** The body's thermostat tends to function less efficiently with age and the older person's body may be less able to adapt to heat or cold.
14. **True.** Falls are the most common cause of injuries among the elderly. Good safety habits, including proper lighting, non-skid carpets, and keeping living areas free of obstacles, can help prevent serious accidents.
15. **False.** Women tend to outlive men by an average of 8 years. There are 150 women for every 100 men over age 65, and nearly 250 women for every 100 men over 85.
16. **True.** Fewer men and women are dying of stroke or heart disease.
17. **True.** The elderly consume 25 percent of all medications and, as a result, have many more problems with adverse drug reactions.
18. **True.** Medical quackery is a \$10 billion business in the United States. People of all ages are commonly duped into "quick cures" for aging, arthritis, and cancer.
19. **False.** Personality doesn't change with age. Therefore, all old people can't be described as rigid and cantankerous. You are what you are for as long as you live. But you can change what you do to help yourself to good health.
20. **False.** Although changes in vision become more common with age, any change in vision, regardless of age, is related to a specific disease. If you are having problems with your vision, see your doctor.

Source: LIFELONG LEARNING FOR AN AGING SOCIETY - AN INFORMATION PAPER. Prepared for use by the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate. Serial No.102. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC: 1991. Last updated January 28, 2002.

Change of Address?

To update **s-** and **e-**address, please visit:

<http://www.wrmosb.org/update>

**Thank you.
Peace.**

The Most Beautiful Flower

The park bench was deserted as I sat down to read
Beneath the long, straggly branches of an old willow tree.
Disillusioned by life with good reason to frown,
For the world was intent on dragging me down.
And if that weren't enough to ruin my day,
A young boy out of breath approached me, all tired from play.
He stood right before me with his head tilted down
And said with great excitement, "Look what I found!"
In his hand was a flower, and what a pitiful sight,
With its petals all worn - not enough rain, or too little light.
Wanting him to take his dead flower and go off to play,
I faked a small smile and then shifted away.
But instead of retreating he sat next to my side
And placed the flower to his nose
And declared with overacted surprise,
"It sure smells pretty and it's beautiful, too.
That's why I picked it; here, it's for you."
The weed before me was dying or dead.
Not vibrant of colors: orange, yellow or red.
But I knew I must take it, or he might never leave.
So I reached for the flower, and replied, "Just what I need."
But instead of him placing the flower in my hand,
He held it mid-air without reason or plan.
It was then that I noticed for the very first time
That weed-toting boy could not see: he was blind.
I heard my voice quiver; tears shone in the sun
As I thanked him for picking the very best one.
You're welcome," he smiled, and then ran off to play,
Unaware of the impact he'd had on my day.
I sat there and wondered how he managed to see
A self-pitying woman beneath an old willow tree.
How did he know of my self-indulged plight?
Perhaps from his heart, he'd been blessed with true sight.
Through the eyes of a blind child, at last I could see
The problem was not with the world; the problem was me.
And for all of those times I myself had been blind,
I vowed to see the beauty in life,
And appreciate every second that's mine.
And then I held that wilted flower up to my nose
And breathed in the fragrance of a beautiful rose
And smiled as I watched that young boy,
Another weed in his hand,
About to change the life of an unsuspecting old man.

If this message has inspired you,
or touched you in anyway or if you feel that it can brighten up
someone else's day, please share it.
(Author Unknown)

I Am Responsible

(Expanded upon and adapted from: *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, Stephen R. Covey; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.)

Whether or not one speaks from "heart" or "mind," it is commonly accepted that no one else can do our own thinking, feeling, emoting, sensing, perceiving, or acting. We each source our own thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensations, perceptions, and actions. Ultimately, each of us is responsible for how we each configure and experience our

I Am Responsible

worlds. The world itself – genes to the environs – may invite a reaction. Helen Keller was born blind, deaf, and dumb. Christopher Reeves fell off a horse and was paralyzed. It is each of us who chooses how we respond to life events. Like it or not, in a nutshell, does not such responsibility bespeak of the awesomeness of our humanity?

Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions – no matter what those conditions are or may have been: a alcoholic parent, an emotionally or sexually abusive parent, a marriage, a job, an environment. If I now am feeling happy, mad, glad, sad, depressed, enraged, abandoned, lost, gleeful, such is my choice, my decision. Situations and people may invite me to experience a particular emotion. How I choose – moment by moment – to behave in response or in reaction to that invitation is my choice. I am responsible. In short, I decide and source my behavior: what I perceive, what and how I think, what and how I feel, and how and what I act.

A responsive individual acknowledges and accepts that one's behavior is a product of one's own conscious choice. The responsive individual acts in accordance with values. The reactive person, on the other hand, re-acts to conditions usually in accordance with how one feels.

Do I empower the weakness of others – a parent, a boss, a child, a spouse, or even my own weakness – to control me? If I do, I tend to react. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "No one can hurt you without your consent." Gandhi, in the same vein, said, "They cannot take away our self-respect if we do not give it to them."

The responsive individual acknowledges and accepts that what really hurts is that s/he permits or gives consent to what happens or has happened. Thus, "it is our willing consent to what happens to us, that hurts us far more than what happens to us in the first place." The hurt of our willing consent holds true for each of us at any age – infant, child, or adult. If we are an infant or a child, it is this hurt that we bring into our adulthood and which tends to be a base of our self-sabotage. In adulthood, thus hurt is a basis for our (self-righteous, reactive) anger. In sum, the responsive individual realizes that the thought that the problem is "out there" is itself THE problem.

For example, fear is symptomatic of a belief system I maintain. The belief I maintain is the belief I cannot handle the situation. What I fear is not "out there." Because I believe I cannot handle the situation I grow fear. When I own my belief, when I acknowledge that I source both the fear and the belief, experience them both, then I can let them go. Only when I am responsible am I free.

Admittedly, to some, such responsiveness is very hard to accept emotionally. Such difficult acceptance is especially true if a person has had years and years of explaining his or her misery in the name of circumstance or someone else's behavior. "But until a person can say deeply and honestly, "I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday (from the moment of my birth if not before), "that person cannot say, "I choose otherwise." (72) "I am responsible."

Peace.

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Please visit
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Thank you.
(New e-mail address, too.)**




Peace and Joy!

How to Detach from a Belief—Why?

How to detach from a belief and experience freedom and peace of mind? Use a centering meditation taught by Tarthang Tulku in his *Hidden Mind of Freedom*:

"Working with thoughts (beliefs) by opening them as they arise can bring many pleasant feelings, which—without attachment—also become our meditation. We can even go into the thoughts that judge other thoughts, and, embracing this judging mind, become united with it."

"By relying on the light of awareness you can see that the difficulties you face are manifestations of your own concepts. Going deeply into your thoughts, you will see how you create your experience, how you alone are the judge who determines heaven and hell, good and bad."

"Whatever experience arises, stay with it, expand it, and heat it up. If you remain within the intense

core of the experience, the meditator unites with thoughts and emotions, and everything dissolves. Then awareness grows powerful and one-pointed. As thoughts and emotions are increasingly included within this field of awareness, they become more useful. Instead of being a cause of frustration or confusion, they become agents of well-being. . . ."

And why?

A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt. He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one." The grandson asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?" The grandfather answered, "The one I feed. (Thank you Michael Butler)

May all beings be happy.
Amen.

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And thank you. May many blessings be to you and yours now and forevermore. Peace and joy!

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