

Aging

Pre-Meeting Preparation

At the end of the previous session, or sometime before this session, give to group members the preparation page for this session (attached at the end of this document.)

Preliminaries

Report from the service project committee.

Chalice Lighting and Reading

Ten thousand flowers in spring,
the moon in autumn,
a cool breeze in summer,
snow in winter.

If your mind isn't clouded by unnecessary things,
this is the best season of your life.

---Wu-Men

Check-in.

Transition Meditation/Reading

Help the group move from check-in preliminaries to silence with directed deep breathing, soft words, music, or other meditative techniques. A guided meditation through the life stages would be appropriate. Using the meditation reading below, allow silent time before deep sharing, deep listening.

A Yom Kippur Prayer

Birth is a beginning, and Death a destination;
From childhood to maturity and youth to age,
From innocence to awareness and ignorance to knowing.
From foolishness to discretion and then, perhaps, to wisdom.
From weakness to strength or strength to weakness, and back again.
From health to sickness and back, we pray, to health again.
From offense to forgiveness, from loneliness to love.
From joy to gratitude, from pain to compassion.
From grief to understanding, from fear to faith.
From defeat to defeat
Until looking backward or ahead, we see that
Victory lies not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the Journey, stage by stage.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

In deep sharing and deep listening, we consider our thoughts during this meditation and the questions we worked with in the prework.

Open Discussion Backup Questions

1. How old is your 'person' in the mirror? If there's a difference from your actual age, what's the reason for the disparity?
2. What's your view of aging? Can you sum it up or is it too complicated? What do you think influenced you toward this view?
3. Do an "aging" inventory for yourself. Make two painfully honest lists: What's BAD about aging for you? What's GOOD about aging for you? If you feel comfortable, bring the list to the group discussion.
4. How can we approach aging in a life-affirming way?

Check-out

Closing Reading/Extinguishing the Chalice

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the verities

And realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth

The glory of action,

The splendor of beauty;

For yesterday is but a dream,

And tomorrow is only a vision;

But today, well lived, makes every yesterday

A dream of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day.

- attributed to Kalidasa, Hindu dramatist and poet

Participant Preparation for CCUU Session: Aging

Food for Thought

In Robert Fulghum's book, *From Beginning to End*, he makes an interesting observation, speaking of himself in the third person:

"I speak of (myself) in the third person because I often think of him in the third person. He is the man in the bathroom mirror I see everyday. For as long as I can remember, I have gone to meet him each morning; and I see him each night before I go to bed. Sometimes I ask myself, 'Who is he? What will become of him?' This daily conversation with the man in the mirror is the oldest ritual in my life. It is a sacred habit.

"I recall when I was a kid going through puberty I anxiously checked to see if he was becoming taller, growing hair, and getting pimples. I felt older than the kid in the mirror. Now, it's another story. Now I notice the man in the mirror is going through middle age, and I worry when I see he's growing older, losing hair, and getting wrinkles. Actually, that man in the mirror is older than I am now. While I've been thirty for many years now, he'll be 58 next June."

It's old news that aging has so much emotion, so many cultural stereotypes, and so much misconception surrounding it that it's rarely a topic for serious conversation. It's just too hard to sort out. No matter what age we are, we are getting older. Fact. It affects how we think and act. Fact. But almost everything else surrounding age is so culturally-driven, individually perceived and experienced, that we find we're often not speaking the same language about it. That's true between cultures, between generations, and even between individuals in the same generation.

In the Western culture, aging is emotionally loaded. Our culture values strength, independence, and above all, contribution and productivity. An example: In the 1960's, if you were over 30 you were washed up. But even as the 60's generation glorified youth, it heard its own words and now, definitely over 30, are wondering about their own value in the world. "Will you still need me when I'm 64?" Paul McCartney wondered when he was twenty.

There are many examples of this type of thinking and acting in our cyber age, thinking that leads us to what we have to lose in the aging process, rather than what we have to gain. But there are other models, models that lead us to recognize and appreciate the achievement of wisdom, insight, and the journey inward. In our next covenant group session, we'll explore both types of thinking.

Issues to Consider

1. How old is your 'person' in the mirror? If there's a difference from your actual age, what's the reason for the disparity?

2. What's your view of aging? Can you sum it up or is it too complicated? What do

you think influenced you toward this view?

3. Do an “aging” inventory for yourself. Make two painfully honest lists: What’s BAD about aging for you? What’s GOOD about aging for you? If you feel comfortable, bring the list to the group discussion.

4. How can we approach aging in a life-affirming way?

Background Reading

“Wholly unprepared, we embark upon the second half of life . . . we take the step into the afternoon of life . . . with the false assumption that our truths and ideals will serve as be-fore. But we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program 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 the evening have become a lie. For a young person it is almost a sin, or at least a danger to be too preoccupied with [the] self; but for the aging person it is a duty and a necessity to devote serious attention to [the] self”

--- *Carl Jung*

Across the Great Divide

By Kate Wolf, Sundown Publishing

I’ve been walking in my sleep, counting troubles instead of counting sheep.
Where the years went, I can’t say.
I just turned around, and they’d gone away.

And I’ve been sifting through the layers of dusty books and faded papers.
They tell a story I used to know, and it was one that happened so long ago.

It’s gone away, Yesterday. Now I find myself on the mountainside, where the rivers change direction, across the Great Divide.

Now I heard the owl a’calling, softly as the night was falling.
With a question, and I replied.
But he’s gone across the Borderline.

He’s gone away, Yesterday. Now I find myself on the mountainside, where the rivers change direction, across the Great Divide.

The finest hour that I have seen is the one that comes between
The edge of night and the break of day, it’s when the darkness rolls away.

It’s gone away, Yesterday. Now I find myself on the mountainside, where the rivers change direction across the Great Divide.