

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Aging

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY,

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Opening Words

“Ever since the age of six I have had a mania for drawing the forms of objects. Towards the age of fifty I published a very large number of drawings, but I am dissatisfied with everything which I produced before the age of seventy. It was at the age of seventy-three that I mastered the real nature and form of birds, fish, plants, etc. Consequently, at the age of eighty, I shall have got to the bottom of things; at one hundred I shall have attained a decidedly higher level what I cannot define, and at the age of one hundred and ten every dot and every line from my brush will be alive. I call on those who may live as long as I to see if I keep my word.”

- *Japanese painting master Hokusai, who lived to be ninety*

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Covenant (optional)

Check-in (Optional focus: as the winter comes to a close, how have you fared? Are you looking forward to something in particular with spring?)

Topic Introduction

With the passage of time come changes: physical, cognitive, psychological, emotional, spiritual. We call it aging. All living beings age. What we think about aging, though, depends greatly upon our culture. Our Western view of time as linear, with a progression through beginnings, middles and endings, influences the way we view aging. Our lives have birth, childhood, youth, adulthood, old age, death. In other cultures that view time as more cyclical, such as in Asia, the idea of rebirth or reincarnation appears. Zen Buddhists say time is all in the mind.

Our experience of time is not static. It shifts as we age. Many people report that time seems to go by faster the older we get. For infants, we measure time in months. When we are children we measure our time in fractions. "I'm four and a half." As teenagers we might spend some time wanting to be older, to reach the age when we can drive, or vote, or drink. And the ways we think about aging change yet again in times of adulthood and old age. In this session we will explore our own experiences, feelings and attitudes toward aging.

Quotations

Activity [*Facilitators -- you will need paper and pens*]

Ask participants, individually, to make two lists -- positive words/terms/phrases about getting older or being older and negative words/terms/phrases. Ask people to share

some or all of what they wrote. What does the group notice about their lists? (For example, are there more positive words than negative? More negative ones?)

Questions for group reflection

1. How were elders treated in your family when you were growing up? How was aging regarded? Has your family ethnicity influenced your attitudes and behaviors regarding aging?
2. Can you think of ways you have changed as you yourself have aged, (physical, emotional, spiritual, etc)? What is the greatest blessing that getting older has given you and what is its greatest curse? What advice would you give to people about aging?
3. Has anyone(s) served as a model for you regarding ways to grow older? What about them do you admire? What has that person taught you? What qualities in them do you want to imitate?
4. Is there anything you fear about getting older? Is there anything you look forward to? Have your feelings about aging changed as you have gotten older? Have societal attitudes influenced how you respond to your own aging?
5. Regardless of your chronological age, do you think of yourself as any particular age? If so, what is it? Did anything special or noteworthy happen in that year of your life? If you could be any age you choose, what would it be? Why?
6. What goals and/or dreams do you have for the years left to you? How do you want to live the rest of your life? What would you like to happen? Anything on your bucket list?

Likes and Wishes

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing

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

Quotations

I think people would live a bit longer if they didn't know how old they were. Age puts restrictions on things. ~ Karl Pilkington

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. ~ Robert Fulghum

Wholly unprepared, we embark upon the second half of life . . . with the false assumption that our truths and ideals will serve as before. ~ Carl Jung

I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. ~ Madeleine L'Engle

Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm sixty four? ~ Paul McCartney

Age has no reality except in the physical world. The essence of a human being is resistant to the passage of time. ~ Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened. ~ Terry Patchett

I was writing a new program for the afternoon of life. The scales tipped away from suffering and toward openheartedness and love. ~ Dani Shapiro

You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing. ~ Michael Pritchard

The fear of becoming old is born of the recognition that one is not living now the life that one wishes. It is equivalent to a sense of abusing the present. ~ Susan Sontag

It is not grey hair that makes one respectable but character. ~ Rana Junaid Mustafa Gohar

Aging must be like wearing a heavy, itchy suit. ~ Tom Cardamone

Time held me green and dying though I sang in my chains like the sea. ~ Dylan Thomas

One loses, as one grows older, something of the lightness of one's dreams; one begins to take life up in both hands, and to care more for the fruit than the flower, and that is no great loss perhaps. ~ W. B. Yeats

Cheer on your birthday, you're among the lucky ones. ~ Shady Hallab