

Benefits of Aging, *Mentoring, and Beginner's Mind*

By Mara Bishop, MS, ThM, CSC

When we think about aging, we often think of the health issues facing us, or likely to face us, as we get older. Aging is interesting and challenging, because unlike many kinds of experiences (like marriages, jobs, or learning new things) there are no opportunities to redo the process. Our movement through time is one-directional. We can look back with perspective on our younger years, or with anticipation to the future, but we can never move back into or out of youth or old age. We have one or the other. In our society, we tend to value the smooth vibrancy of youth more than the depth of understanding that often accompanies our elder years.

ANCESTORS AND DESCENDANTS—A CHAIN OF EXISTENCE

During a shamanic journey, I was shown an ever-expanding circle of ancestors and descendants. This was in response to my question, "How is grace unfolding in my life now?" In order to fulfill our roles—wherever we are in linear time—it's helpful to place ourselves in that chain of existence, and know that what we do, and who we are, impacts the greater circles of our communities. The concept from the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy of thinking forward on how our actions will affect seven generations is a valuable and often overlooked guideline for living responsibly. Epigenetics shows how the experience of our ancestors passes to us for remarkably long periods of time; more evidence for the potential power we hold to affect the health of our descendants. Also, from many spiritual and scientific perspectives, everything that has ever existed exists now, continuously evolving and transforming. Since everything is connected on some level (atomically and spiritually), perhaps we can affect our ancestors too.



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For a teenager or young adult, time seems to spool out indefinitely. The cliché of time speeding up as we age is founded in the reality of the mathematics of ratio. The ratio of "time that has passed" to "time yet to come" shifts, and our perception of how much is left changes as well. I currently sit in middle age. I can't speak about what it feels like to be a senior citizen, but I can re-

member how old my current age felt to my 20-something self. It was a horrifying thought to be my current age! But here I am and I like this age. I am decidedly wiser than my 20-something self, but I also sense that I know very little in the grand scheme of things. Perhaps I will feel even more so at 90.

BEGINNER'S MIND, ELDERS' PERSPECTIVE

Beginner's mind is a beautiful place to revisit at any time. It can be joyful and expansive to revisit our practices from the perspective of the novice, or to learn new things without the baggage of past experiences, or the assumption of knowledge. Many patterns are cyclical but not regressive. When we have the openness and humility to bring fresh eyes to practices, both old and new, we make space for creating new cycles of depth.

Simply having lived a requisite number of years does not necessarily give a person wisdom and perspective. However, many of our elders are able to see the world in a way that is virtually impossible for the young. Connecting with those who have lived long lives and combined practical experience with an expansion of character is beneficial to individuals, and to society as a whole.

Being mentored by sage and experienced people can be inspiring, but acting as a mentor is also beneficial. Psychologist Erik Erikson believed the process of passing knowledge from one generation to another helped foster the value of caring. He labeled it "generativity." Dr. Susan Krauss Whitbourne, a professor of Psychology at University of Massachusetts Amherst, applied this concept of generativity as a starting point to her research on midlife baby boomers. She tracked a group of people from college through their late 50s and found that those who were involved

in mentoring were most likely to experience the "greatest happiness and sense of purpose."

While caring for our physically aging bodies is important, staying focused on the strong connection between the way we feel internally and the way our bodies react is likely to yield good results for our overall health. When we are emotionally and spiritually content, our bodies are more inclined toward health and vitality at any age. Fostering dynamic relationships between the generations contributes to healthier individuals and healthier communities. We are all connected. **h&h**

Mara Bishop is a shamanic practitioner, intuitive consultant, teacher, author, and artist. In her Personal Evolution Counseling™ practice in Durham, she combines shamanic healing, intuitive consultations, and energetic healing. She works with clients locally, nationally, and internationally. She is the author of Inner Divinity, Crafting Your Life with Sacred Intelligence, and the companion CD of guided meditations.

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