

**WORLD  
GOODWILL  
COMMENTARY**

**AGING ON THE PATHWAY  
OF THE SOUL**

**Number 23  
May  
1999**



## **WORLD GOODWILL COMMENTARY**

*A bulletin on current trends in world affairs*

---

### **No. 23 AGING ON THE PATHWAY OF THE SOUL**

---

Instead of regarding physical age as a period of withdrawal, a time when life is closing in, becoming limited, quiet and restricted, people should realise that what is really happening is that spiritual opportunities are multiplying; the vistas of the soul are spreading in increasing glory, as the barriers of small daily duties fall away, leaving them free to live as souls.

M.E.Haselhurst, *The Beacon*, July/August 1971

---

*World Goodwill Commentary* is not offered on subscription; it is financed by the voluntary donations of men and women of goodwill. To receive future issues or to secure additional copies of this issue, please write:

### **WORLD GOODWILL**

**120 Wall St.  
24th Floor  
New York, NY 10005  
U.S.A.**

**3 Whitehall Court  
Suite 54  
London SW1A 2EF  
England**

**Rue du Stand 40  
Case Postale 5323  
1211 Geneva 11  
Switzerland**

## AGING ON THE PATHWAY OF THE SOUL

*Old age ought to be spent meditating on the works of the philosophers, an occupation which will bring peace and felicity and will open the way to eternity.*

-- Seneca, 1st century A.D.

### **Introduction**

As we embark on a new millennium, we in the human kingdom are facing a phenomenon unprecedented in our long history: a growing population of older persons in almost every country in the world. This growth at the older end of the scale is, on the one hand, a matter of concern for governments and communities whose responsibility it is to care for their elder citizens, and on the other hand, it can be seen as a huge human potential that is largely untapped as a valued resource. For several decades we have seen this elder growth developing, especially since the end of World War II and the birth of the baby-boom generation, roughly 1946 - 1964. The boomers have created an "age wave" phenomenon that is impacting every segment of society - housing, food production, clothing, education, culture and medical care - as it moves along. In another decade and a half it will finally crash upon the shores of retirement. The big question is, will the force of this wave devastate the land, leaving the younger generation drowning in impoverishment, or will this elder force provide fertility for a new kind of growth, the benefits of which we are only now beginning to realise? If we ride the wave with minds open, it will be the latter case.

The choice does involve the mind, the deep thinking, reflective mind, because the potential of the elderly lies primarily in the realm of consciousness. It is for this reason that World Goodwill considers this a subject of great interest. Consciousness, we believe, is a gift and a product of the human soul. And what humans think, say and do in the world is largely conditioned by the presence or absence of soul consciousness and soul values. The soul's influence in a person's life--seen primarily in the qualities of light, love and will--is a matter of degree, the degree to which we are sensitive to our innermost self.

Human consciousness has undergone a tremendous awakening since World War II, and largely because of the war. The war was pivotal for the human family, more so than we realise. Had the allied forces of light not been victorious, the world would have been plunged into another long age of material darkness. But they did triumph, and a great door was opened

for the inpouring of a new group of highly creative and awakened souls. They are flooding the world with their energy, stimulating both the good and the bad in the human condition, but overall, the effect has been extremely good. Much light has been shed on countless human problems never before addressed. And the plight and the promise of older persons is one that is receiving increasing attention. It is hoped that this Commentary will help to heighten awareness of the creative potential of our older citizens, and perhaps offer a fresh vision of new spiritual possibilities on the pathway of the soul.

### ***The Role of the United Nations***

Acquiring a complete picture of the number of older persons in the world and their personal needs is a formidable task. Fortunately the vast resources of the United Nations have been able to compile the statistics and other vital data necessary to enable us to see the immensity of the problem. (Incidentally, it might be noted here that the United Nations is itself one of the first products of the inpouring forces of light and love into the post-World War II world. It is living evidence that the universal heart and soul of humanity is finally vital and strong.) With all the data accumulated it was evident that an international plan of action would be necessary to deal with an increasingly aging population. Such a plan was adopted by the World Assembly on Aging held in Vienna, Austria in 1982. The aim of this international plan of action was to “strengthen the capacities of Governments and civil society to deal effectively with the aging of populations and to address the developmental potential and dependency needs of older persons.”<sup>1</sup> The plan included recommendations for action addressing research, data collection and analysis, training and education in such areas as health and nutrition; protection of elderly consumers; housing and environment; family; social welfare; income security and employment; and education. Later, this International Plan of Action was adopted by the U. N. General Assembly and the year 1999 was designated as The International Year of Older Persons.

The Introduction section to the Plan of Action provides a picture in brief of the scope of the world population growth. In part the Introduction states:

“Only in the past few decades has the attention of national societies and the world community been drawn to the social, economic, political and scientific questions raised by the phenomenon of aging on a massive scale. Previously, while individuals may have lived into advanced stages of life, their numbers and proportion in the total population were not

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. *International Plan of Action on Aging*, Foreword, 1982

high. The twentieth century, however, has witnessed in many regions of the world the control of perinatal and infant mortality, a decline in birth rates, improvements in nutrition, basic health care and the control of many infectious diseases. This combination of factors has resulted in an increasing number and proportion of persons surviving into the advanced stages of life.

“In 1950, according to United Nations estimates, there were approximately 200 million persons 60 years of age and over throughout the world. By 1975, their number had increased to 350 million. United Nations projections to the year 2000 indicate that the number will increase to 590 million, and by the year 2025 to over 1,100 million; that is, an increase of 224 per cent since 1975. During this same period, the world’s population as a whole is expected to increase from 4.1 billion to 8.2 billion, an increase of 102 per cent. Thus 45 years from now the aging will constitute 13.7 per cent of the world’s population.”

And within that aging 13.7 per cent the “oldest old” category, over age 80, is increasing even more rapidly than all other age groups. A United Nations report estimates that in 1998 “there were 66 million people over 80 years of age, which amounts to one person for every 100 on earth, and they are expected to increase to 370 million by 2050. There are already 135,000 people who are more than 100 years old.”

The International Plan of Action on Aging report contains many recommendations on the humanitarian care of the elderly that communities and governing bodies should consider. Older persons are still a vital resource and have a definite role to play long after they have passed retirement age. The Plan of Action report states this quite eloquently:

“The human race is characterized by a long childhood and by a long old age. Throughout history this has enabled older persons to educate the younger and pass on values to them; this role has ensured man’s survival and progress. The presence of the elderly in the family home, the neighbourhood and in all forms of social life still teaches an irreplaceable lesson of humanity. Not only by his life, but indeed by his death, the older person teaches us all a lesson. Through grief the survivors come to understand that the dead do continue to participate in the human community, by the results of their labour, the works and institutions they leave behind them, and the memory of their words and deeds. This may encourage us to regard our own death with greater serenity and to grow more fully aware of the responsibilities toward future generations.

“A longer life provides humans with an opportunity to examine their lives in retrospect, to correct some of their mistakes, to get closer to the truth and to achieve a different understanding of the sense and value of their actions. This may well be the more important contribution of older people to the human community. Especially at this time, after the

unprecedented changes that have affected humankind in their lifetime, the reinterpretation of life-stories by the aged should help us all to achieve the urgently needed reorientation of history.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Human consciousness has now the intellectual and technical ability to address the problems of older persons on a global scale. An expression of this global consciousness is seen in the United Nations Plan of Action on Aging drawn up in Vienna. This marks a significant stage in the growth and expansion of human awareness. Within many countries in the world, particularly in the developed regions, specific social, financial and health programs have been created to address the needs of their citizens. These programs have grown out of a conscious recognition that a society has a responsibility to care for all of its citizens, from childhood to old age. No age group can, in all good conscience, be dismissed as being unimportant. Responsible citizens--who have the conscious ability to respond to need--take this for granted. But such inclusive awareness has not always been the case. The history of human responsibility for older persons has, until quite recently, been pretty dismal.

## **Historical Perspective**

In ancient societies, particularly in the rural and agrarian regions, old age was not seen as a separate category; old people were only elderly adults. The criteria was usefulness. Once children were old enough they were put to work, in the home or in the fields. Once they became old and physically incapable of work, they stopped. There was never any concept of retirement. Older adults were usually respected as long as they were useful. But if they were incapacitated by senility or physical disease, they were seen as a burden, especially by the younger generations. If the older person had some wealth and owned property--usually the elderly male in the family--he might live out his remaining years in relative comfort on his farm or estate. But if the elderly person had no family who was willing to care for him, he might be put out of the house and left on his own to beg in the streets.

The fate of the elderly was not much better in some primitive societies. If they became ill and useless to the tribe, they might be put to death or encouraged to commit suicide. But in these same primitive societies, usefulness didn't always mean only physical ability. In so-called oral societies many elderly were respected as a source of knowledge and wisdom; they were the tribe's memory and represented continuity between the generations. They were also often called upon to act as judges in disputes.

Such respect for the elders of a tribe, a clan, or a village was also seen in the early Hebraic world. Every town or clan had its council of elders who were considered to be the leaders of the people and they were all-powerful. In the *Book of Numbers* the Lord instructed Moses to

“Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone”<sup>2</sup>

Here, a group of elders is invested with the divine spirit, and they possessed considerable religious and judicial power and respect.

This respect, however, wasn't universally held. As towns and societies became more developed and organised the question of who would have control over the wealth--the taxes--often became a divisive issue between the elders and the younger, more ambitious men of the town. In the *Book of Kings*, written in the seventh century B.C., there is the account of the conflict between King Rehoboam--son of Solomon--and the council of elders. The elders wanted a reduction in taxation. Rehoboam did not agree and consulted with the younger men that were grown up with him; they advised to increase the taxes and the King followed their advice.<sup>3</sup> From this time on, as young monarchies became more powerful, respect for the wisdom of the elders began to decline.

### ***Old Age in the Greco-Roman World***

While the Jewish world of the Old Testament period bestowed privilege upon the elderly, no such attitude prevailed in the youthful days of early Greece. As historian George Minois observed, “For a people searching for human perfection, beauty and the achievement of full human potential, old age could be classified among the divine curses.”<sup>4</sup> The orientation of consciousness in the early Greek society was decidedly toward the exploration of Truth and Beauty as expressed in the vigour of youth. The infirmities, the senility, the decrepitude that often inflicted the bodies of the elderly were an anathema to the pursuit of beauty. Beauty was

---

<sup>2</sup> *Numbers* 11, 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> *I Kings* 12, 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> *History of Old Age. From Antiquity to the Renaissance.* trans. Sarah Hanbury Tenison, 1989, Univ. of Chicago Press, p.43.

expressed in the graceful design of the temples. Sculptors laboured to discover the perfect dimensions of the human form - but the form of a young adult. As with Alexander the Great, their heroes were young and lauded for their physical strength. Old warriors were sought out for their wisdom. But they were honoured more for their past experience and knowledge than for their age.

Eminent Greek philosophers, on the other hand, wrote at length about the old and pondered on their value. Epicurus, who died at age 72, wrote: "Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when he is young nor weary of the search thereof when he is grown old. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. And to say that the season for studying philosophy has not yet come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more. Therefore both young and old ought to seek wisdom."<sup>5</sup>

Plato (in the *Republic*) wrote of a conversation between Socrates and Cephalus, a wealthy merchant of Piraeus. Socrates said, "I enjoy talking to old men, for they have gone before us, as it were, on the road that we too may have to tread, and it seems to me that we should find out from them what it is like and whether it is rough and difficult or broad and easy."

Plato, who lived 81 years, also wrote of the ideal old man. In his *Utopia* he dreamed of an ideal republic governed by a group of elders: "...it is for elder men to rule and for younger to submit...The old must set an example to the young: if anyone mistreats his parents, he will be judged by a tribunal made up of 101 oldest citizens; the law courts are to be supervised by persons...between 50 and 70; in all difficult cases, the oldest guardians of the laws will be consulted."<sup>6</sup>

If Plato envisioned the ideal society governed by the wisdom of old men, Aristotle, by contrast, took an opposite view. In the *Rhetoric* he presents a very repulsive image of the old. "The old have lived long, have been often deceived, have made many mistakes of their own; they see that more often than not the affairs of men turn out badly. And so they are positive about nothing... They are cowards, apprehensive about everything - in temperament just the opposite of youth; for they are grown cold, as youth is hot, so that advancing age has paved the way to cowardice, since fear itself is a species of chill."<sup>7</sup>

Attitudes about the elderly varied widely in early Greece. While Plato wrote of the ideal use for certain respected elderly citizens, the city-state of Sparta actually put it into practice. It established a governing council of 30 men all over age 60. They were chosen for life; they governed all of

---

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, X.122, Quoted in *History of Old Age*, p. 54

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, trans. A.E.Taylor, London 1960, III.690 (Ibid, p. 59).

<sup>7</sup> Trans. Lane Cooper, New York 1932, Ibid, p. 60-61



politics and acted as judges in criminal cases. The Athenians, on the other hand, didn't hold their elders in such high esteem, bestowing on them only honorific powers. The vigour of youth held a more powerful image in the consciousness of the time. Indeed, these attitudes were reflected in the philosophical writings, in the Greek plays, in medical studies and in politics. The needs of older people were not taken too seriously because their numbers were small; they, for the most part, did not constitute a social problem.

It seems that old age was not a stage in life many Greek citizens looked forward to, particularly if it meant suffering the pains of disease and senility. Consequently, rather than face this (to them) humiliating condition, many chose suicide as an early way out. It was an acceptable solution, and, as we know, it was an option taken by Socrates.

These attitudes prevailed through the period of the Roman empire and even deteriorated after the invading Visigoths of the North took power. In fact, from this period on, through the Dark Ages of Europe, the value of the old and the weak was low. The law was rule by the sword; punishment for murder was a fine or a tax, the amount depending on the age of the victim; for old men the tax was less than for a younger man, and for women beyond child bearing age, the fine was practically nothing.

The one saving grace during this dark period was the influence on consciousness of the Christian Church. Christian teachings emphasise love and compassion for one's fellow human beings, regardless of their station in life. From the third century A.D. onward, the Church monasteries and hospices began to take in the less fortunate. This marked a real turning point in human consciousness, which grew in strength as Christian values gained a more dominant role in European thinking. While the compassionate actions of the Church were paternal and noble, and saved many from an agonizing death on the streets, a rather dark twist began to develop in the Church's view of old age. The illness, disease and decrepitude that commonly afflicted the elderly was now being seen as some sort of divine punishment, an evil curse being placed on a man because of his sins. And such a curse didn't bode well for anyone hoping to find peace in the afterlife. Salvation, in this life and in the next, became a matter of real concern. So while the Church teachings injected the fear of damnation upon society, it also provided a way to absolution. Thus began the practice of indulgences. And the wealthy, particularly wealthy old men, took full advantage of this assurance of survival.

The wealthy class had always had the option, upon reaching old age, of retiring to their farms or villas when they were no longer able to work. But from the sixth century A.D. on, the wealthy, if concerned about their salvation in the next life, had the option of retiring to a monastery where they could live out their remaining years in preparation for eternal life.

Of course the Church received financial benefit for this service, so it wasn't an opportunity open to the poor. Poverty was seen by the Church as evidence of one's sinfulness and fall from grace; the poor became the object for charitable alms-giving, of course insuring salvation to him who gave. But even though this practice affected only a small wealthy minority, it did introduce a new idea about old age: voluntary retirement in a separate institution cut off from daily family life and society. It created a break in the normal course of life when work activity ceased. In short, it was the forerunner of the old people's home, built around the theme of salvation, no less!

By the fourteenth century the idea of retirement in a separate home began to catch on. "In 1351, in France, King Jean le Bon--who had created the chivalric Order of the Star--founded a retirement home for the old knights where they were to be treated with respect and served by two valets each. This was the first *Hotel des Invalides* for elderly ex-servicemen."<sup>8</sup>

From this time on, the idea of retirement began to spread among the middle class. Merchants, artisans and certain groups of labourers donated a portion of their earnings to rest homes and hospitals as a way of assuring they would have a place to go in their old age. That such institutions for retirement were established at all was evidence of an expanding social consciousness. This was at the beginning of the Renaissance in Europe and new creative energies were being expressed in art, music, architecture and literature. Many of the great artists, like Leonardo da Vinci, Titian and Michelangelo, did their most creative work in their later years of life. So a new respect for the creative abilities of the elderly was appearing. But ironically the older persons who were diseased and decrepit were still often portrayed negatively in art and literature. It was the time of the Greek revival in Europe which brought a return to a fresh pursuit of truth and beauty and the worship of youth in form and thought.

It seems there has always been a quest for eternal youth. It has been a recurring theme, at one time or another, down through the centuries. It's as if the immortal soul within us keeps impressing us to create a more perfect form - one that is seemingly impervious to the ravages of old age. Studies of the aging process go back to early Greece with Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.), who is considered to be the father of modern medicine. His theory was that the process of aging involved the loss of heat and moisture; the body grows old and dry. The source of this heat resides in the left side of the heart, and from there spreads through the body. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) developed this theory further. "Everything that lives," he wrote, "has a soul, located in the heart, and which cannot

---

<sup>8</sup> *History of Old Age*, p. 246

survive without heat. The soul and natural heat are closely linked at birth, and life consists of maintaining this heat and its relation to the soul. It is like a fire which has to be maintained and fed with fuel, but which is destined to go out after a long period of weakening. Every organism has a certain quantity of innate latent heat at birth, which is progressively dissipated and ends by running out, giving rise to natural death”.<sup>9</sup>

During the Dark Ages there seemed to be little curiosity about the aging process. As mentioned above, this period was influenced by attitudes espoused by the Christian Church which tended to view old and diseased bodies as being cursed. But studies of aging were revived again in the Middle Ages by Roger Bacon (1210-1292). He approached aging more scientifically. Among his writings was *The Cure of Old Age, and the Preservation of Youth* and *On the Retardation of Old Age*. He was perhaps the first to emphasise improving one's lifestyle as a way to gradually extend one's longevity and limit the suffering experienced in old age. Three hundred years later in the sixteenth century, Paracelsus, a Swiss doctor, advanced the notion that life was a “spirit” derived from the air and endowed with “power and virtue”. He compared aging to rust on metal, leading to decomposition. He, too, saw aging being affected by one's quality of life; that this process may be slowed down by following a balanced diet and living in a pleasant climate.

Attitudes about the value of older persons didn't change much through the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The average life-expectancy was still relatively low. In the mid 1700's in America it was only 35; a century later it had risen to 40. The elderly were still a small minority of the total population and were usually cared for by their families. Says author Ken Dychtwald, “Early Americans didn't give much thought to their old age. Middle-aged people didn't worry about how to care for their aging parents, because most of their parents were gone”( i.e., had died by that age).<sup>10</sup> It was only after 1900 that the numbers of older people in the population became significant. There has been a tremendous increase in longevity during the 20th century. With advances in medicine, improvement in preventative medical care and above all, a better knowledge of the value of nutrition and exercise, the average life-span increased rapidly. In 1900 it was 47 years. Today, in the developed regions of the world it is 70.6 for males and 78.4 for females.<sup>11</sup> And with this increase in longevity, attitudes about the value of older persons is

---

<sup>9</sup> From *On Youth and Old Age, On Life and Death, and on Respiration*, trans.W. Ogle, London 1897, Ibid, p.71.

<sup>10</sup> *Age Wave. The Challenges and Opportunities of an Aging America*, Ken Dychtwald and Joe Flower, 1989, Tarcher.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Population Fund. *The State of World Population 1998*.

changing for the better. Older persons are now more organised and have become a political power that no politician or government can ignore.

## THE GIFT OF WISDOM

We have had a brief look at the dimensions of the world's aging population and the evidence that it is growing more rapidly at the older end of the scale than at the younger. It is a phenomenon unprecedented in all of human history. Because of the increasing numbers of older persons in almost every country in the world, governments, both local and national, are realising that programs and plans of action must be instituted in order to address the needs of their aging citizens. They recognise they have a responsibility to care for them if elders do not have adequate means to care for themselves. This recognition of responsibility marks a truly significant stage in the development of human consciousness. Responsibility (literally the ability to respond) is a reflection of the soul and is evidence of its love in action in the world. As we have seen in the previous section, such responsibility and respect for older persons was not always uppermost in human thinking in the past. We, today, should be heartened by the fact that, for the most part, our consciousness is no longer so conditioned by the degraded mentality of the Dark Ages.

We recognise now that, aging bodies notwithstanding, older persons have much to give to society long after they reach "retirement age". In fact, for increasing numbers, retirement isn't even an option they would consider. They may stop their period of "paid labour", but they continue to work as volunteers or consultants. It has even been suggested (by a contributor to this Commentary) that we adopt a new terminology for the so-called retirement years. Terms such as "retired" could be replaced with "not in paid work", or else "retired from paid work". That leaves the term "work" free for consideration of unpaid work - such as work in teaching or other work in connection with interests of the heart or mind. Perhaps we could move towards the time when the ending of paid work comes to be seen as making way for a period of self-definition, often minimised in earlier life by the pursuit of livelihood demands. Ending paid work might thus be seen as means of access to light.<sup>12</sup> Whether paid or unpaid, many older persons still see themselves as vigorous individuals; stopping work entirely is boring. Their inner consciousness seeks more growth. For them, a mind that shuts down at 65 or 70 is an invitation to a premature death.

This raises another significant feature of the aging process. It is inevitable that the physical body will deteriorate during its natural cycles

---

<sup>12</sup> Comments offered by T. S. C.

of birth, maturity, slow decay and death. We may try to “reverse” or slow down the aging process, but ultimately, as we know, it is a losing battle. Our physical body is not meant to last forever; nor should we want it to. Many now see the physical body as simply a temporary “vehicle” which we use for a while. We should therefore try to keep it as healthy as possible but not really treat it as the only object of worth; because within this vehicle is anchored a point of consciousness, an identity, that doesn’t seem to be affected by the aging process. In fact, it is quite *ageless* in its own nature. It is believed to be the presence of this ageless self, if you will, that gives rise to the feeling that many older persons have of being younger than their actual physical age. “I may be 65 but I feel more like 45” is a common feeling. One could say they are just going through a stage of denial, refusing to admit that they are growing old, but more than likely, because of a general awakening in human consciousness, they are developing a sensitivity to that ageless point of inner being which conditions the way they identify themselves in life. The recognition of a dual self—one ageless and the other aging—is perhaps motivating (even if unconsciously) some older persons to look beyond their physical age. Their identity is shifting to seek out that potential that lies within. They are seeking to tap into that inner, subjective part of their being which is unaffected by the aging process. They are discovering that they can continue to grow in knowledge and wisdom even as their physical body systems are slowing down.

It is a process of growth that author Zalman Schacter-Shalomi calls “sage-ing”. “People don’t automatically become sages”, he says, “simply by living to a great age. They become wise by undertaking the inner work that leads in stages to expanded consciousness”<sup>13</sup> It is a path he describes as “spiritual eldering” - “an inner search for God, a self-directed flowering of the spirit that unites all people in a common quest, no matter what their (religious) affiliation”<sup>14</sup>.

Sage-ing is a pathway of discovery that more and more elderly are exploring. As an example, a few excerpts are included here from written comments of a small group of elders who have spent a good part of their lives seeking and developing their inner spiritual potential. Their sage-ing stage didn’t necessarily begin in their retirement years; in fact, with some it has been a life-long quest. But their later years have been a time of affirmation of the value of deep spiritual study and meditation in what is called the “ageless wisdom”. True wisdom has no age, and those who seek it express the joy of its eternal livingness.

---

<sup>13</sup> *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald Miller, 1995, Warner Books, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

## LIVING WISDOM

*You must learn as long as you don't know - and that's as long as you live---(Seneca).*

(From **M.B.** age 89)

There comes a time in the lives of many of us (perhaps most?) when “the daily round, the common task” no longer “furnish all we need to ask.”

When that time came for me I was nearly 40 years old, that age which is supposed to be so dramatic an event in the life of a woman. At that time I was fortunate enough to be brought almost immediately into contact with what I came to know, to recognise and to understand as the ageless wisdom teachings.

My own studies and research and my periods of meditation have revolutionised my way of life, my state of consciousness and my daily activities. I have been brought to a constantly expanding understanding of what constitutes my human responsibility to love and to serve the purposes of our planetary God for His creation.

I well remember the day I first *experienced* the reality of world unity for myself. This was not merely the unity of the “one humanity”, but the unity of all life in all kingdoms. This experience brought with it an indescribable sense of joy and of the rightness and fitness of “God’s Plan for humanity”, which has never left me. It has made me more fully aware of the responsibility the human kingdom must accept, not only for the evolutionary progress of humanity but for all the kingdoms in nature we call “lower”: the animal, plant-vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. There is in reality no such thing as “inanimate” matter. All of manifestation is in a state of evolutionary development and the human kingdom is in a key position of service to all, because, for the first time in history, we have evolved a state of planetary consciousness which *can* love and serve selflessly, which *can* contact the Light, the Love and the Power which represents the Mind, the Heart, and the Will of God, and which *can* bring the energies through into manifestation.

All these things have revolutionised my way of life, my relationship with others and my state of consciousness. The inevitable personal sacrifices involved in the early stages have long since dropped below the level of consciousness, to be replaced by a serenity and a peace of mind and of heart which no earthly disaster can disturb. I know that the present worldwide crises and cataclysms are the inevitable prelude to the emergence of a new and more inclusive state of mind and heart for the world of tomorrow...

From **R. H.** age 91

I have, from my earliest years, been spiritually inclined and have searched for a belief that I could accept.

In memory, I follow the threads I have woven as I walked the path of this incarnation. I reflect on what I may have accomplished and realise it has been more of a learning process than of achievement.

To help me become that which I desire to be, I begin each day in meditation and dedicate myself anew to the service of the Coming One. My physical body I use intelligently according to its strength; my emotions or feelings, I think of how they may be feeling and not how I feel. Sometimes this is difficult to do but the rewards are bountiful. The mind, the greatest asset given to us to develop...is a potent power that can be used destructively or reoriented and used constructively. Through right thought we are able to control the emotions - think before we speak. We should choose carefully the words which proceed from the mouth, for them we are held accountable. It requires great effort and perseverance and, to me, the correct use of the mind is the Will of God in action. These are the goals I set for myself. Old age is a good time to learn self-discipline.

From **J. B.** age 80

Years ago, my first attempts at meditation took the form of a concentration exercise. I endeavoured to concentrate upon a theme or concept for a short period of time without the mind wandering in every direction...The question which kept passing through my mind was: how does the mind know it is wandering? Can it observe itself? Can it control itself? Surely that can only be done from a higher level. It slowly dawned on me that there might well be something else which was the potential Observer and Controller, something which was beyond the physical, emotional and mental natures. The well known analogy sprang to mind - that of the charioteer driving (or being driven by?) three spirited horses, symbolising the indwelling soul and the three aspects of the lower nature. The degree of control over these three horses (the threefold lower self) was entirely dependent upon the training, the experience, and the skill of the charioteer (the soul).

From **P. B.** age 72

One's Regeneration (Re-gene-ratio: to make rational again) is in DOING, not just sitting down waiting for Godot, or expecting people to run around after you.

A primary task during retirement has been *synthesis*. There are signs that this is rapidly being achieved, and may in a deeper sense--a soul sense--be already a reality. In truth it is...However, the necessary synthesis is in clear view. There is now a prevailing calmness, a feeling of

wholeness, a sense of spiritual purpose, and an understanding and knowledge of those techniques necessary to preserve equilibrium at the point of Light when conflicting and unredeemed forces seek expression. This knowledge and awareness has, in fact, been present for a long time; but making it real, making it stick, and doing what the spiritual intuition insists must be done - all this is a lifetime's work.

What is required of us is: that we should aim to radiate Light through the recognition of who and what we are; and likewise that we should seek to be channels of Love and intelligent creativity...There is no need to speculate about what the word *God* means when the light is already shining. Nor is it necessary to worry about continuity of consciousness through death when one is, from the spiritual standpoint, "dead" already, and when there is true faith in the Light and regular practice of meditation on the Path leading to it. One just has to be totally open to the Light with no strings attached...Remember these propositions: Selfishness is death. Selflessness is deathless.

But just as physical death ends the physical body, and any feeling of identification with it, so spiritual self-giving means yielding up all that one *thought* oneself to be. In Buddhist meditation, one recognizes *now* that one is *not* the body, *not* the emotions, *not* the thoughts and that one is not even the "I" - and relinquishes even that. It is this selfless awareness which is the foundation of true service in the world.

From **J. B.** age 80

The onset of old age can be greeted with confidence, even with joy, if it is recognised as a soul-given opportunity to prepare for the next incarnation. As the fires of the emotions die down and the events and busyness of an active life cease, the personality has a chance to look back with detachment and dispassion in order to evaluate the usefulness of the present life expression.

When I was about six I had an experience which fixed my attitude to death. One evening...while lying in bed, and gazing vacantly at the drawn curtains through which a shadowed daylight outlined the stylised pattern of endless upright-twining roses, the thought dropped into my mind that there was no death. It came to me that death was not an end but that everyone in the world wasted their energy being afraid of it. I determined then and there that I was not going to waste my energy that way. I should say up to that time there had been no hint of death or disaster in our family or in our environment. In later years this insight on death worked out in a belief in, and acceptance of, reincarnation. When struck by adverse circumstances I never asked "Why me?" I knew why!



From **R. D.** age 76

Soul contact...was present even in my teens, when I was given a brief glimpse of what my life would be. I knew even then that I would travel extensively, as I have indeed done.

Looking back over the interval of time...there has indeed been that “underlying continuum that slowly unfolds throughout one’s life”. There has been joyous reunion with those who have been friends and companions throughout the ages - they have been recognised - and acquaintance renewed with those who, if not quite friends and not quite enemies, formed a link with one’s past.

The spiritual study, meditation and service...brought about the *discipline* and further training so badly needed. The necessity to organise oneself, to climb down from one’s ivory tower...the need to get outside of oneself and meet people, to see them as they really are, were some of the lessons learned.

In the past few years, ill health has complicated the daily life, but one learns to live by the dictum of “keeping on keeping on”. There is simply naught else to do.

From **J. G.** age 88

In looking back on my life I realise how much has been gained through the many opportunities presented from an early age and accepted as challenges to be met and understood. A Celt, I was fortunate to have been born with an enquiring mind and no sense of fear... .

I have always been surrounded by love, but a loving approach which instinctively taught me to be impersonal, an impersonality that is liberating, achieving rewarding relationships at every level.

I look forward to the next phase of our return to the source, of more use to the new group of world servers and alive to the power of goodwill. Life is full of interests and I am deeply grateful for continuing opportunity to serve within the group as a whole.

From **S. G.** age 80

It would appear that adherence to a disciplined structure of each day and week plus purpose and a sense of responsibility make a good recipe for productive aging.

I am blessed on many scores. First among these are: my caring and understanding husband, now 90 years and still doing weekly voluntary work in the community, and a cooperative body and mind - the latter two supported by daily yoga and meditation. These enable me to “do my part in the one Work” by being as best as I can a reliable link, a transmitting agent within that vast interconnected sphere we call Life.

That I may be granted the privilege to continue so to live and work until the day of transition into another realm of activity will arrive, is my fervent wish and prayer.

From **R. C.** age 88

Although each of us in this category [of elderly] has evolved from circumstances different from those of others, we all fit a pattern of growth in different stages of development, but all moving in the same direction. In those early stages [of spiritual study] it became apparent to me that reincarnation was a fact of existence and not a theory.

Today I find that impressions I had acquired throughout this lifetime have been crystallized into a logical organized pattern of existence. Through constant unbroken meditation my thinking is clearer and I grasp solutions to problems more quickly. My attitude toward people is more loving and understanding and their attitude toward me is reflected back. I have also found that I am better able to cope with round the clock custodial care of my wife who is in advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease and at the same time carry on cheerful relations with our neighbors. I find increased happiness in all of my associations. I am optimistic about the future and seldom if ever suffer from depression. I believe all of these trends have been latent within me and have now been considerably enhanced.

Another doctrine which has evolved from my...studies is that of the necessity of completely independent growth. Symbols and reading can show the direction, but that is all - and there is never a pat on the back for doing the right thing. This does not impinge but enhances my contribution to spiritual life.

From **L. H.** age 89

It became quite clear early that this lifetime would be an inner-directed one.

Those years (during the Great Depression) taught us patience and persistence; our parents were encouraging and in spite of a rigid schedule, the soul within embarked on its pursuit of the great mystery...

With retirement...came the priceless gift - leisure. What a joy it was to have time to read widely, to reflect, to study world news in depth, to expand my horizons, to keep in touch with a widely scattered family...In these last years I have gained a sense of community, of purpose, of a common goal with students of the ageless wisdom everywhere. It has been a delectable journey, full of delights, of love and humor and hope.

From **M. A.** age 84

I think I always felt that somehow I ought to be able to think my own thoughts, but never was allowed to, even though in some entirely

inarticulate way the “something other” (which I later came to see as the soul) was keeping me going... .

Now for well over 15 years I have been widowed, and am in the present wonderful stage of the entire freedom to think and act as I will, within the simple but adequate outer circumstances in which I am enabled to live. And I see all the above [the earlier life experiences] as stages in which the soul was taking hold of this individualised mechanism and working within its processes, so that in achieving liberation from them they could be used for the transmission of light. It is as a spiritual interpreter that I see my particular line of service...Wordsworth wrote somewhere “Now I am free, enfranchised and at large/ May fix my habitation where I will.” There seems to come with this a deep recognition of “space.”

Thus, partly from all the above, and partly from the evident fact of the aging process now, the evolution of the subjective life within the form becomes an entirely embraceable fact, not only in consciousness, but also in comprehension. As in all experience, only those who also undergo its specifics can in truth find shared realisations. Perhaps this is one of the constituents of group relationships, whether within an esoteric school, any outer groupings of choice, and very much including one’s contemporaries in old age. It is so much easier to laugh at diminishing physical energy and loss of immediate vocabulary recall with others who find themselves in just the same situation.

In my own case, I begin to sense that the form is becoming less adequate for the work to be done, and that I am, as it were, now on the home straight. I have no concerns whatsoever about the transition, and whenever it may come I believe it will be for me a welcome and welcoming event.

Meantime, I believe that this present stage is also a precious experience, and to be valued. It brings with it a different sense of “time”, of “having done all, to stand”, as St. Paul put it...It becomes easier to stand back and glimpse something more of “the gorgeousness of the design”, as [a Tibetan teacher ] describes it...and to share something of the vision of “that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude”. “In solitude the rose of the soul flourishes”, as [the Teacher] so memorably said.

My favourite quotation comes at the end of Longfellow’s poem “Morituri Salutamus”:

For age is opportunity no less  
Than youth itself, though in another dress,  
And as the evening twilight fades away  
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.

From **S. M.** age 72

In his poem, "The Coming of Wisdom with Time", W. B. Yeats wrote: "Now I may wither into truth." In the sense that, in later life, there is a progressive letting go of the thoughts and feelings and hence, of the things which form a cumulative baggage of outworn relevance, it is true that a contracting, or withering, into simplicity does occur. Actually, I suppose it is a by-product of the more and more conscious endeavour to "stand in spiritual being", and so to exemplify, as far as one can, the fact of that essential but all-too-often obscured divinity which is the ground of all life in form.

While, personally, I cannot claim to have rid myself of more than a portion of the accumulated irrelevance in my life, nevertheless a critical mind is becoming a forgiving one, acceptance is replacing the emotion of anxiety and, in spite of what relatively little acquisitiveness remains, I am simply grateful for what I have, and for the fact that little of it is surplus to need.

For those fortunate enough to be aware of this dropping away of much that has stood between them and the light of spiritual truth, the significance and the joy of aging is found especially in the vision of the interrelation of past and future in the present moment. Indeed, in this child-like relation to time, the aging person finds an aspect of "second childhood" quite different from the childishness of senility. The physical senses may wither but, in doing so, they make way for a growing spiritual alertness.

One may regret the prospect of discomfort in the process of death but, as the time approaches, one includes the physical body among all the other things marked ready for the discard. Attention is, rather, upon what, in consciousness, happens next, and the experience of life as it is - and not as one thought it might be - brings the very gratitude and joy that, being qualities of the eternal Soul, transcend time and place altogether.

Such qualities as these are an indication of essential truth emerging from an ephemeral world of illusion. Regret for personal short-comings and missed opportunities in the "past" is seen to be as pointless as it is to worry about a rapidly nearing "future", and so one is released into that reflective condition in which meditation, study and service merge into one activity. No longer separate, although related, they become in daily experience a threefold unity in which the joy and gratitude of the aging person express the Soul and, unhindered by the cares of relative youth, radiate the power of goodwill.

Goodwill is Love-in-action and, in this universe, Love is Truth. It seems to me that the privilege of age is to serve in this way, and so one willingly accepts "withering into truth" as nothing less than a spiritual opportunity to be received with open, and unencumbered arms.

## SPIRITUAL ELDERING TODAY

Aging on the pathway of the soul may, indeed, be a “withering into truth”, which should be accepted, as S.M. says, as “a spiritual opportunity to be received with open...arms”. With the world population growing faster at the older end over the next fifty years, a potential “group mind” is forming which has the opportunity to develop this thought power as a constructive tool of service. As we have seen from the above comments, using one’s later years as a time for deep, reflective thought can instill a sense of upliftment and joy that transcends the limitations of a withering body. As the demands of an active personal life begin to diminish and fade in power, a new potential comes into view: **wisdom**. But it doesn’t have to be a wisdom that is deep and profound; most of us are not philosophical thinkers. We know that old physical age doesn’t automatically equate with wisdom. But most of us have gained a certain perceptiveness just from the experience of living all these years. And that is a place to start on the path to some new level of truth.

Historian Theodore Roszak, in his book *America the Wise*, sees this growing senior population as somewhat of a threat to the business elites who manipulate the strings in the competitive marketplace. What they fear, he says, is “Wisdom, the hard-won result of experience and reflection...The last thing they want is a searching discussion of the meaning of life, its highest values and ethical responsibilities. In effect, they cannot afford wisdom. But questions that lead to wisdom are what fill the minds of people as they grow older.”<sup>15</sup> Because of the potential impact on society of the baby-boom generation--those he calls the “New People”--Professor Roszak observes that “A new world is opening before us - not across the seas, not in outer space, not in cyberspace, but in time. *Living* time. Longevity is our voyage of discovery...a voyage that is so easily affordable that money is the least interesting issue to address. Far most fascinating are the powers of the mind, the resources of the spirit, that wait to be explored.”<sup>16</sup>

For many in the pre-boomer generation this exploration has already begun, and they are the unsung, unrecognised pioneers. This is all right with them because one of the prerequisites for true wisdom is selflessness. Selflessness makes way for the soul - that inner selfless being--our Real self--whose nature is all-inclusive love. If this selfless quality of love comes increasingly into the forefront of consciousness in the decades ahead, it will indeed set a new standard of values that may revolutionise the marketplace. This will depend, in part, on whether the

---

<sup>15</sup> *America the Wise*, Theodore Roszak, 1998, Houghton Mifflin, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.

“gray wave” of the New People will be sensitive to the changing needs of the world. This wave, because of the huge numbers, has affected the economy with every new decade since their birth. Will they find within themselves that point of quiet peace which will enable them to alter the world in new constructive ways? The opportunity is theirs and with the generations that follow. Wisdom is a valuable resource because it opens the way into the spiritual life, and into the life of the spirit. As one teacher defines it, wisdom “deals with the life side of evolution. Since it deals with the essence of things and not the things themselves, it is the intuitive apprehension of truth apart from the reasoning faculty, and the innate perception that can distinguish between the false and the true, between the real and the unreal.”<sup>17</sup>

Aging on the pathway of the soul is a journey of revelation in consciousness. The pioneering work of spiritual eldering has already begun. The pathway in consciousness is being prepared for the full flowering of the human soul in the world. If the New People follow the wave and strive to seek their higher spiritual potential, the new millennium will be off to a good start. It will be a good time to be old.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>17</sup> *Initiation, Human and Solar*, Alice A. Bailey, Lucis Publishing Company, p. 11.

## THE OBJECTIVES OF WORLD GOODWILL

To stimulate and encourage men and women of goodwill everywhere to establish right human relations between races, nations, and classes by an intelligent understanding and adequate communication.

To assist men and women of goodwill in their studies of world problems and in the effective application to these problems of goodwill, cooperation and sharing for the common good.

To cooperate with other organizations in constructive activities contributing to world unity, stability and right human relations.

To make available up-to-date information on constructive current action in the main areas of human life through the publication of a quarterly newsletter.

To establish a goodwill Commentary on issues of world interest.

To aid in establishing goodwill as the keynote of the new civilization.

To create a worldwide mailing list of men and women of goodwill.

To support the work of the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies as the best hope for a united and peaceful world.

---

**WORLD GOODWILL** is an activity of **LUCIS TRUST**, a non-profit, educational organization first incorporated in the USA in 1922.

Lucis Trust is on the Roster of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. World Goodwill is an accredited non-governmental organization with the Office of Public Information of the United Nations.

*Printed on Recycled Paper*

