



Late-Life Spirituality: A Choice!

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THREE WESTERN MODELS OF SUCCESSFUL AGING

1. Sociomedical Model

Age comes with a litany of diminishment—of health, attractiveness, cognitive ability, income status and the list goes on. This model tries to remedy such dysfunction. This is the focus of gerontologists, doctors and the government.

Much good has surely come from this approach—Medicare, prevention measures for diseases, and more. However, this model reinforces the sense of aging as dysfunction; it highlights the losses of later life, not the creative possibilities.

2. Productive Model

This model puts aside dysfunction and discovers that older people can be just as productive as anyone else. There are inspirational examples of octogenarians activists, artist who excelled in later life, lovers who performed in the sack well into their nineties. A good old age is busy and engaged. Some retired individuals complain that they've never been so busy since they stopped working.

There is benefit from countering old-age incapacity. However, it is not really an aging model but an extension of middle age. The down side is that it does not prepare one for life's losses. If only we could die like Maury, with a page half-written, or have sudden heart attack or die in a plane accident! With the onset of diminishment, one may sink into depression or feel like a failure, become fearful or enraged.

3. Consumer Model

Retirement communities offer nice housing, fun activities, well-prepared meals, all spiced up with outings to golf and the malls. This is the flip side of the productive model. It encourages us not to produce but to consume. Living seems pleasant for a time, but can finally grow trivial, boring, disconnected. Missing is the call to social contribution and psycho-spiritual growth.

WHY A COMMUNITY OF LATE-LIFE SPIRITUALITY?

The later years can have a meaning of their own-- one that involves a sense of wholeness and fruition. The Hindu proposes an alternate paradigm. "When a householder sees his skin wrinkled, and his hair white, and the sons of his sons, then he may resort to the forest." Dr. Leder has called this **THE SPIRITUAL MODEL OF AGING**. The losses of the aging provide the impetus to mature and the leisure to plunge into a spiritual quest.....to go beyond our ego-self.

Definition: Spirituality is the human quest for personal meaning and mutually fulfilling relationships among people, the non-human environment, and, for some, God.

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