

"A Zen monk was once being chased by a tiger. He barely made it to the edge of a cliff, when he spotted a vine dangling over the edge. He quickly scampered down the vine as the tiger closed in. Half-way down the vine, he look down at the bottom and saw a fearful sight. Another tiger was waiting for him, mouth wide open and salivating. The monk then glanced upwards and saw two mice slowly and happily nibbling away on his vine.

In the midst of all this, he happened to notice a strawberry patch, growing on the cliff wall next to him. In it was a huge red strawberry. He reached over, plucked it, and ate it. It was the most delicious strawberry he had ever tasted."

.....Zen parable

So, what's the moral of this Zen parable? This is the story of everyone's life. There are always "tigers" chasing us. There are always "tigers" in front of us, just waiting in ambush. And there are always little "mice" in our lives, just aggravating and frustrating us. In the midst of all this commotion, however, if you can still find and enjoy the "strawberry" each day, that's what life is all about.

IDEAS FOR LIVING MORE FULLY

Paul Hamilton, M.D., an oncologist and founder of the QuaLife Wellness Foundation, once remarked that "I want to die young, as late as possible." In his 70's, he still carried a trail bike on the back of his car, so he could ride whenever the impulse hit him. He also carried roller blades in his trunk, and enjoyed inviting friends to blade with him. If there was a new workshop on "Jungian dream interpretation," he'd be there. If the Inca Elders were doing a spiritual presentation, he'd be there. When the opportunity arose to climb his favorite 14,000 foot mountain in Colorado, he'd be in his hiking boots at a blink of the eye. Paul Hamilton was a visionary who forgot what it was like to "grow old." He had too much fun staying young. There just wasn't time to get older....too much to do...too much to enjoy....too much to learn....too much to grow.

1) *Never stop learning:* The elixir of youth is to be eternally curious...to have an enthusiasm for fresh learning ...to challenge oneself continuously. Martha Bartfeld, at age 75, retired from 35 years of government work. At age 82, she published her first book on ancient geometric designs ("Magic Mandala Coloring Book"). She is working on two other books. She related, "I never think about aging or illness." She's too busy being excited about learning new things.

There are book clubs to join, new languages to learn, an entrepreneurial risk to take, adventure travel to consider. Having a touch of adventure and risk in one's life adds to the longevity juices. Keep your brain alive and sprouting with new learning challenges.

2) *Develop an optimistic spirit:* As Norman Cousins wrote in his classic book, "Anatomy of an Illness," laughter is the most healing of all medicines. A good sense of humor and hearty laughter is "internal jogging." Humor bolsters the body's immunity while it reduces stress hormones that are on the loose. Laughter and humor lightens the soul. Perhaps it's no accident that the spiritual quest relates to en-lightenment ...learning to lighten up. Developing your tickle bone can be achieved at any age. Buy a few joke books and memorize 10 jokes. Watch video funnies. Exchange jokes with friends.

In most studies of "passive" vs. "successful" aging, a positive attitude emerges most frequently as a crucial factor. There nothing like the joy of getting out of bed each

day with enthusiasm and anticipation that can propel those brain endorphans and mobilize tired bones into action. This may sound idyllic, but attitude adjustments need to be made to become a member of the "long-life generation."

Dr. Lawrence LeShan, a New York psychologist, has been able to put 70% of "terminal" cancer patients into long-term remissions. He helps them to find the "music" of their lives that they have never played, the "song" that they have never sung. This might be a project that they never started, or an outdoor fountain that they never built. He asks them to discover a compelling **purpose** for their lives that would make them feel passionate and excited about greeting each new day. Every cell in your body will know if you are living a fulfilling life...and will inform your DNA that you should have a longer life. This may sound idyllic, but attitude adjustments can be made to become a member of the "forever generation." Go to any bookstore and find 100 current titles on ways to change one's thinking patterns.

3) *Learn to Express Gratitude.* If one is living a "conscious" life, one finds a bit of magic in so many precious moments. Life feels so much richer when gratitude is expressed for all the "blessings" we take for granted. On a mountain hike the other day, a friend enthusiastically called my attention to a "paint brush," a beautiful red Colorado flower. I didn't see it. I probably would not have noticed it. So much of life is like that...it goes by unnoticed and unappreciated. I remember a poem from the 5th grade: "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its fragrance on the desert air."

There are too many "flowers" out there waiting to be seen. Our lives are really filled with abundance that we take for granted. For a change, make a conscious effort to express gratitude for waking up, for taking a walk, for cool water, for that apple, for that nap, for whatever you notice from moment to moment.

You might want to start a "**Gratitude Journal**." At the end of each day, you write down something for which you feel grateful. It could be that you saw a "paint brush," or that you used a paint brush. It could be a friend's smile...or a dog's wet kiss... or a song you heard. It doesn't have to be spectacular. Having a great life is learning to notice the small things and events that surround you every day. But you need to look for them! By committing to a daily "gratitude entry," you begin to focus on the little "miracles" of life. With time, you start to look for things to be grateful for. A 17th century monk kept a daily gratitude journal for 17 years. He related that he never repeated an entry!

**"The lightning-bug is brilliant, but he hasn't any mind;
He stumbles through existence with his head-light on
behind."
.....E. F, Ware**

4) *Never "Retire."* Living an "eternal" life means that one becomes allergic to rocking chairs. "Work yourself to death," as David Brown states it so eloquently. The husband of Helen Gurley Brown (editor of Cosmopolitan Magazine), he states that he never reached his prime as an author and theatrical writer until he reached his sixties. Staying busy and staying alive are synonymous. Over 52% of American over the age of 65 now have part time jobs, compared to 30% in 1950. According to Gail Sheehy, retired

people need to feel a sense of continual excitement about life in order to feel happy. In fact, if retirement is necessary, she recommends "serial retirement." retirement in small stages. That way, one can gradually find new challenges for living a meaningful life.

Ten years ago, it was calculated that 50% of a working individual's medical expenses occur between two years before retirement and two years after retirement. Within that narrow period of time, 50% of all medical expenses are incurred! What's the message? It's not a coincidence. Retirement could be hazardous to your health!

At the Washington, D.C. Center on Aging, Dr. Gene Cohen stated that the relationship between sound physical health and sound mental health is greatest in later life. He recommended that people start early in life to construct a "social portfolio." This would include a range of activities to build upon in later years. Some would involve people and some might be personal time with enriching hobbies. To be mentally and physically healthy, to a large extent, is having fulfilling work and a supportive community throughout one's life.

5) *Get Involved Outside of Yourself:* *After working in a 9 to 5 job most of her life, Sally R. retired in her 60's to enjoy a "stress-free" life of roller blading, relaxation and friends. She worked a long time to receive those retirement benefits. It wasn't long, however, before she sunk into a dark pit of depression. Medications didn't seem to help very much. Shortly thereafter, Sally decided to work as a volunteer in a non-profit organization dedicated to helping people with chronic diseases. She soon found her "calling" and became a dedicated and effective member of the organization, receiving a great deal of positive feedback. Her depression lifted... without benefit of America's pharmaceutical industry.*

The quickest pathway from a dark hole to a sense of fulfillment is to reach outside of yourself. Extending a hand to others is nourishing to the soul. One can't be focused on helping someone else and preoccupied with oneself at the same time. Do you want a shortcut to feeling good about yourself? Volunteer for a non-profit organization...or, become a Big Brother/Sister....or, help out a friend anonymously It's all about giving back. It's win-win.

6) *Take Responsibility For Your Health and Happiness:* "You may not have been responsible for your heritage, but you are responsible for your future." If our lives could be compared to riding on a speedboat, some people are focused on the wake behind the boat, while others are holding the steering wheel and looking ahead. Successful aging...or living forever...requires a conscious choice. Past the age of 65, there will be great variations in the health and well-being of Baby Boomers. Heredity has much to do with health and longevity, but not as much as lifestyle choices.

According to a study by Belloc and Breslow (1965) of several thousand people in Southern California, simple lifestyle changes such as eating a regular breakfast, regular exercise and getting 7-8 hours sleep per night, add more years to one's life than having long-living parents and grandparents. Of the seven "healthy habits" studied, those

following six or seven lived 50% longer than those following only two or three. A person age sixty who followed all seven lifestyle choices was as healthy as a person age 30 who followed only one or two. The lifestyle habits included: sleeping seven or eight hours a night; eating breakfast almost every day; not eating between meals; keeping a normal weight; regular physical exercise; minimal drinking; never smoking cigarettes. Lester Breslow is now Dean of Public Health at UCLA.

In another study, Dr. Stephen Jewett studied people above age 87 who had "successfully" aged. He found distinct differences from those who aged poorly. Among several factors listed, certain healthy lifestyle habits prevailed. His "successful" subject ate modestly, were physically active, kept involved and interested in current events, kept busy ---did not retire early, enjoyed day-to-day living, had a optimistic attitude and saw beauty around them.

Choice can be a large factor in living well and having a "long" life. We're educable.....trainable....able to learn. Therefore, new habits for living can be acquired.

7) *Live a Life of Integrity:*

**"Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself.
I am very large. I contain multitudes."Walt Whitman**

However, to contradict Walt Whitman, an unknown author once wrote:

"Don't be fooled by the face I wear. For I wear a mask, a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off, and none of them is me. Pretending is an art that's second nature with me. I tell you everything that's really nothing, and nothing that's really everything, of what's really crying within me. I don't like playing superficial games. I want to stop. I want to be genuine and spontaneous and me."

Does that sound like anyone you know? It's **all** of us, to one degree or another. There is often a growing rift between our "True Self" vs. our "False Self." We feel compelled to put on a front, exaggerate, distort.....in order to feel acceptable. We believe that we wouldn't be lovable if others knew who we "really" were.

Learning to accept our "dark side" and learning to accept the validity of what we really think and feel is the true mark of adulthood. Integrity is having the courage to take off the mask and BE who you are. Integrity is living life more truthfully. It feels good to be able to express our "Truth"...to express what we really believe. And, it feels fraudulent and unpleasant when we try to act or speak in a manner that betrays the truth of our core beliefs. While we consist of "different parts" ... "multitudes" as Walt Whitman would say, our bodies resonate positively when we're authentic and acts up on us if we violate ourselves.

Sheila W. would stand in the shower and feel numb and terrified. She'd forget who she was or what was happening. She was having frequent anxiety attacks and felt totally incapable of dealing with life. Yet she had a family with children and had to function. As she later spoke of her distress, it became clear that Sheila didn't understand the concept of speaking her truth. She always told people what they wanted to hear. In fact, she was unsure whether anything she said was true, false, or an exaggeration. All that was important was her sense that others accepted her. She didn't know how she really felt or what she really thought about anything. Her "False Self" was

blurred with her "True Self." At that point, Sheila became determined to live a life of "integrity." She would try to be honest with herself and others. This was new territory and it frightened her. With courage and determination, Sheila took a risk. She began to say what she sincerely felt and believed. Her symptoms gradually disappeared as her friendships became more authentic. She felt herself enjoying life more and her circle of friends enlarged.

As Alfred Adler, the famous Viennese psychiatrist once stated, "Have the courage to be imperfect." To speak your truth is to be "whole"which is derived from the Greek word root, *hal*, which means "health." To live a life of integrity is to be whole and healthy. Your stress level is reduced and your bio-molecules will rejoice. There will be balance and harmony in all the systems of your Being.

"In unity, every moment is as it should be. The shadow of the past does not spoil the fullness that is possible only in present time; therefore, each moment is like a clear window letting in the possibility of joy and appreciation of what is unfolding in front of you."Deepak Chopra

8) Develop a Spiritual Life-View: Some years ago, Dr. Kenneth Pelletier decided to interview long-term cancer survivors who had received terminal diagnoses and were not expected to live. Yet, somehow, they lived and thrived. He wondered if they had anything in common. His research showed that, indeed, they had about five factors in common. They had all changed their diets and were eating healthier; they had all become more interpersonally caring and had more friends; they had all found some form of meditation or prayer that centered them; they all said their healing was hard earned; and...they all said they had become more "spiritual." Dr. B.J. Kennedy at the University of Minnesota Medical School found a similar response with long-term cancer survivors....those sturdy souls who confounded their physicians and got well after being told they were "terminal." They also said that they had become more "spiritual." **What does that mean?**

A friend once remarked in a group, when asked about her spiritual viewpoint, "I'm not religious or anything. I just feel a part of the earth. I love wonderful music and art. And when I go outside, the world explodes with beauty." For her, a spiritual sense has to do with her connection with the earth and a deep feeling of gratitude for the abundance she sees all around her. Others might say that their spiritual connection arises in religious worship at their church or temple. There are as many definitions as human creativity can come up with.

Most who describe themselves as "spiritual" believe that there is some order to the universe...that the universe is benign...or neutral at best...and that Love is at the core. It's a sense of perspective that we're not at the center of the Universe...that there's some Higher Power or Being at the apex of this mystery. Choose a synonym for "God".....Supreme Being; Truth; Divine Essence; the Light; Love; the Source, etc. In general, the most basic questions are "spiritual:" Who am I? Where am I from? What am I here for? Where am I going? Any attempt to understand these questions requires a spiritual pursuit.

Some "spiritual" people would say that there are four questions of value in life: 1) What is sacred? 2) Of what is Spirit made? 3) What is worth living for? 4) What is worth dying for? They would then say that the answer to all four is the same....Love. Perhaps the value of a spiritual connection can be distilled to a capacity to give and receive love, both with respect to our fellow human beings and the planet we occupy. Service to both is a form of love.

Therefore, it is certainly worthwhile to feel a sense of gratitude for the "gifts" that surround us....from loving people, to our plate of food, to the trees that shade us. And it is worthwhile to acknowledge this abundance in some way. It could be prayer, or meditation, or inner reflection. That's us to you. To feel appreciative and grateful is to feel joy and well-being. And to feel a continuous sense of joyfulness and well-being is an acknowledgment from your body that all systems are functioning in harmony. A spiritual perspective, as related by Drs. Pelletier and Kennedy relieves stress and helps the immune system to function at its peak. This will contribute to your endeavor to have a healthy, well-extended life.

9) *The Joy of Sage-ing Rather Than Age-ing:* As Baby Boomers move into the next millennium, they will either age "passively" or "successfully." In order to age "successfully," one needs to have **increased physical vigor, continual intellectual growth, and meaningful work** Or, Dr. Pamela Peeke of the National Institute of Health uses the following criteria: "the attainment of love, financial stability, family, friends, peace of mind...and without self-destruction." Weaving together both definitions seems to work just fine. To accomplish these healthy goals for aging, one needs purpose for one's life..

According to Rabbi Zalman Schachter, currently holding the Chair of Wisdom at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, there will be a growing role for evolved "Elders" in the future. For eons of time, in cultures all over the world, Elders have had honored roles in society. They have been sages, seers, judges, leaders, shamans, gurus and wise-men/women. Their "gifts" to society have included their mature perspective, their seasoned creativity and their spiritual vision.

In this regard, they have helped to shape the social order. Their life-times of accumulated wisdom had been put to good use. Unfortunately, with the rise of the industrial revolution, Elders have become disempowered. Into our modern age, they became stuck in "social security," wasting much of their talents and capabilities.

With a new era of transpersonal psychology and spirituality there's a revitalized role for eldering. Jean Houston, Wise-woman of the Mystery School in New York, relates that Elders of the future can unleash new energies for self-growth and the benefit of mankind. They have this potential as they're released from social obligations and the need to meet other's expectations. There's so much that Elders can give back... helping to rebuild cities... reforesting our planet... mentoring our youth.

Zalman Schachter has developed an Eldering Institute in Boulder, Colorado, dedicated to teaching the skills necessary to become effective Elders and mentors. To become a designated Elder is not an automatic title. One must go through a process of deliberate growth. "Sagehood must be earned." Part of this training is to "synthesize wisdom from long life experience," according to Barry Barkin, a gerontologist. The question must be asked and worked through, "Where did I come from and what is my next destination?"

Some of the useful strategies that the Eldering Institute uses for self growth include the following:

- 1) Journal writing to reframe painful issues of the past ... "emotional abscesses"and to envisage the vital use of one's energy for the future.
- 2) Taking a meditative "journey" into the future and obtaining wisdom from one's "Inner Elder."
- 3) Group discussion about one's parental and societal models for aging....what one fears...what one wants.....what one has to offer the upcoming generation.

This combination of life experience, self growth, and a dedication to serving the next generation of society is a powerful tool for living enthusiastically and purposefully.

"A new set of faculties seems to be coming into operation. I seem to be awakening to a larger world of wonderment –to catch little glimpses of the immensity and diversity of creation. More than at any other time in my life, I seem to be aware of the beauties of our spinning planet and the sky above. And now I have the time to enjoy them. I feel that old age sharpens our awareness."

.....Polly Francis (Songs of Experience)