

Embracing the Aging Process



DR. TONI LAMOTTA

Embracing the Aging Process

**A 4-Step Guide to
Conscious Aging**

Dr. Toni LaMotta

Copyright © 2014 by Dr. Toni LaMotta

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.

In-Lightened Enterprises
3509 Norwood Court
Sarasota, FL 34234

ISBN-13: 978-1497449657

ISBN-10: 1497449650

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any Web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

For more information about Dr. Toni and further work with midlife and conscious aging, go now to <http://www.tonilamotta.com/consciousaging> and sign up for her free videos and newsletter.

Printed in the United States of America.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special word of thanks goes to my friend, encourager and master mind partner, Dr. Frank Bonkowski. Frank is a Canadian-based educational writer, web publisher, and business consultant His insights and expertise helped to make this work so much richer. You can find his book “*Write Now*” and the rest of his latest work at <http://www.businessenglishhq.com>

Contents

Introduction.....	1
SECTION 1: Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging.....	7
Chapter 1 – Uncovering Lies, Myths and Beliefs about Aging.....	9
Chapter 2 – Journaling Your Beliefs about Aging	31
SECTION 2: What Does My Life Wish to Become?	35
Chapter 3 – Life Review	37
Chapter 4 – Journaling on Life Review.....	59
SECTION 3: Growing Spiritually	71
Chapter 5 – The Spirituality of Aging	73
Chapter 6 – Journaling on your Spiritual Insights	99
SECTION 4: Setting Intentions for the Future	103
Chapter 7 – Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future	105
Chapter 8 – Journaling on Intentions	123
About the Author	127

Introduction

Welcome to your personal Journey to Conscious Aging. If you are in midlife or beyond, this book is for you. When we look in the mirror and start to see ourselves as getting ‘old’, it can be a frightening experience. Many people take active means to attempt to ‘stop the aging’ process – which of course, is impossible. They often go into either fear or denial. What I have found is that when anything is resisted, it persists even more and so facing aging ‘head-on’ is the best way to actually begin to enjoy the process and find all the benefits. I’d love to change the way the world looks at aging, and this is my attempt to do that – one person at a time. I trust that by reading this, you’ll join me in that quest.

This book is not meant to be read in a single sitting. It is more like a course that you can work with over the long term. Use it as you see fit and

Embracing the Aging Process

feel ready for the processes presented. The course consists of 4 major sections-as well as a list of journal questions to enhance your reflection on the materials presented.

Relax, enjoy and KNOW that you are getting all you need when and as you need it.

Society and the media have filled our minds with ideas about aging that frankly frighten most people. It doesn't have to be that way. Once you come face to face with the actual facts, the myths and lies disappear. You can then do some work to release the remnants of those fears and face the aging process with a new found freedom and delight. It is my intention that you find this work supportive in exactly that process and that aging becomes something you no longer fear. Here's to a world that values the aging process and a life fully lived.

Introduction

In this first section dedicated to your Journey to Conscious Aging you'll come face to face with those myths, lies and truths about aging. You will become conscious of what the beliefs behind your fears are so you can easily release them and be free to enjoy the aging process.

In the second section, we'll address how to do a Life Review as a means of releasing the past and looking at the possibilities still waiting to be born. There are several techniques you can use to do this process and they all result in insight that can spearhead a whole new way of being. I find this process most exciting and trust you will as well. Our lives want to tell us what they want to become!

In the third section of this book, we'll discover the spiritual gifts that await us when we begin to recognize that the very process of aging can be a doorway into deeper spirituality. This book uses

Embracing the Aging Process

universal spiritual principals throughout and when you embrace these ancient truths and apply them to the aging process, you might just discover a whole new meaning in these years of your life.

Finally, by facing the rest of our lives, and even our own death, we'll find the resources to live each day more fully.

In this book, you will be given the opportunity to name and acknowledge your deep beliefs about aging, to uncover fears, both hidden and overt, and discover techniques to release those fears.

In order to do that, I recommend that you read these pages once through. You can skip over the parts where it suggests that you reflect and write in your Journal. I want you to get a feel for the whole concept first – and then go back and do the exercises when you can give them the proper

Introduction

time. Be sure you do to get the most out of this experience. Becoming conscious is a life-long quest. Every spiritual teaching invites us to 'live in the now' and accept 'what is.' I have found that when I, and the clients I have worked with apply these principles, life becomes so much more peaceful and joy-filled. I want that for you. So, let's begin.

SECTION 1: Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

Chapter 1 – Uncovering Lies, Myths and Beliefs about Aging

How do you view old age? What is OLD for you? Are you Old? Or is old something- anything beyond where you are at the present moment? We don't like to identify ourselves as old when the view that we hold of aging is not a good one. This is especially true if we automatically see aging as becoming feebler, less aware or less mentally alert and having a greater need for dependence on others. We fear being unable to take care of ourselves. And, yes, in many cases we fear illness, loneliness, isolation and eventual death.

However, researchers are discovering that these beliefs are simply myths, which then become self-

Embracing the Aging Process

fulfilling prophecies. Fortunately, there is a new view of aging, which recognizes the abilities and potential of the elderly individual and debunks the misconceptions of the aging process.

Do you want to find out which lies and myths you have bought into? There's a simple quiz you can take. No one will see the answers you give, so be honest with yourself. I promise you will have your eyes opened in many cases. So, go here now and take the quiz.

<http://www.tonilamotta.com/consciousaging/myth-quiz> password is CONSCIOUS

Myths about Senility and Personality Change

One of the common misunderstandings about the aging process is that it inevitably leads to senility. Memory loss, intellectual decline, and confusion are NOT normal parts of aging. Researchers have clearly demonstrated that while

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

there is some decline in memory and sometimes in intellectual function, the changes are inconsequential for those who remain physically and emotionally healthy. The truth is that the accumulated knowledge alone helps someone to make better judgments and solve problems more easily when one keeps active and healthy while aging.

The key factors in maintaining or improving mental capacities in later life are social involvement and flexibility. That means, that you can retain mental capacity by staying actively involved in family and society and by staying open to change and new experiences.

Other research implies that emotional well-being may be as influential on the aging mind as mental activity. I've been visiting a woman who is 104 and she's a perfect example of someone who finds life satisfying. She tells me all the time, and

Embracing the Aging Process

shows me how content she is with her life, which keeps her from negative emotions like anger, depression and anxiety. I have seen the opposite in people much younger who are continually fighting with what is and longing for things to be the way they used to be. Both studies and spiritual teaching tell us that the key to consciousness is acceptance of whatever IS. The research shows us that the key to mental and emotional well-being is the same.

One of the strongest beliefs about old age is that it causes dementia. Dementia is the result of disease, not aging. Scientists who have studied the brain assure us that the mind's accumulation of knowledge remains intact, though it can at times be harder to tap into during old age. Neuroscientists have found that it is primarily the brain's "hardware" -- the billions of connections and relay switches that act as processing

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

equipment -- that is vulnerable to wearing out with age. Meanwhile, the brain's "software" -- the actual information that fills up the mind over a lifetime -- does not deteriorate and continues to grow more sophisticated with each passing year. When you run new software on an old computer, it takes more time and often causes problems. The same is true of the human brain – speed and accuracy may be affected later in life as well.

While at times, everyone experiences some memory lapse, the question of memory loss as we age has been well researched and may be surprising.

Ellen Langer and Harvard colleague Rebecca Levy, Ph.D., did one of the most famous studies about memory loss. They have shown that becoming forgetful in old age is not inevitable. At least part of the reason our memory gets worse is that we expect it to.

Embracing the Aging Process

To test this idea, the two psychologists conducted research on memory and attitude towards aging in two groups: Americans who are deaf and people from Mainland China. These groups are less likely than most Americans to have been exposed to negative cultural stereotypes of aging.

Using standard psychological measurements of memory, the researchers tested both groups and compared them to a group of elderly mainstream Americans. In addition, the researchers compared memory retention in the elderly with younger people in all three groups.

Not only did the mainland Chinese and American deaf far outperform the mainstream Americans on four psychological memory tests, but the oldest in these two groups, especially the Chinese, performed almost as well as the youngest. The strength of their performance even

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

surprised the researchers. They concluded that the results could be explained entirely by the fact that the Chinese have the most positive, active, and "internal" image of aging across the three cultures studied.

What is particularly striking about the Langer-Levy study is that it meticulously tracks how our fears, which are so culturally constructed, become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Our fear of memory loss can create actual memory decline. You may want to pause here and journal about this. What have your beliefs been about memory loss? Have you believed it was inevitable, or maybe even hereditary? Let this study guide you to a new way of thinking and help to release some of your fears.

Another common misconception about old age is that personality inevitable changes and that

Embracing the Aging Process

individuals become grouchy and harder to live with. Once again, research studies have proven that the personality remains extremely stable with aging. In other words, someone who is cheerful and optimistic remains so throughout life, while a person who is grouchy and pessimistic in early life keeps the same personality characteristics in later life. When changes do seem to occur, once again, it is a function of disease – not age.

In addition, the dread of aging may be taking its toll on many other body systems. Physical and mental decline is not inevitable. Belief that it is, is what accelerates any decline.

Myths Regarding Functional Decline and Aging

Another misconception about older people is that growing old inevitably results in untreatable health problems. There is an assumption that there will automatically be substantial

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

deterioration of physical capabilities, and that nothing can or should be done about them. How often have you heard even doctors say – oh – it's just your age! Do you ever attribute physical symptoms such as back pain and hearing loss to the "natural consequences of getting old?"

Well consider this - Scientists are increasingly realizing that both these symptoms are reflective of treatable diseases, and are not just the inevitable realities of the aging process. Of course, older persons must take the steps necessary to take care of themselves holistically or get the medical attention needed and not just succumb to the myths of aging.

How individuals approach aging can make all the difference in how the years affect them. "People slow down as they grow older because they expect to," says Deepak Chopra, M.D., in his book *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*. "We think of

Embracing the Aging Process

older people as wrinkled and plump, with gnarled hands and feeble gait -- and gradually, inexorably, we let ourselves become those people."

Of all age groups, the elderly have the most to gain by being active. Many studies have shown that the elderly can retain vigor, muscle tone, and a strong immune system in the later years through an exercise regimen. Terence Kavanagh, M.D., director of the Toronto Rehabilitation Center in Ontario. "The less you do, the easier you fatigue. And the more you fatigue, the less you are able to do."

In addition to exercise, diet makes an enormous difference in how people age. "The right foods can help protect against ailments such as heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, arthritis, and high blood pressure," states Tom Monte, an editor with Prevention magazine. "Getting enough of certain vitamins and nutrients can increase the

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

body's resistance to infectious diseases."

Health habits have a strong influence on both life expectancy and quality of life during old age. Healthful living not only promotes longevity but also increases the chance of having the physical ability to enjoy life to its fullest in later years. And it is never too late to change.

Douglas MacArthur once said, "You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair."

It's time now to take another look at the true false test you took earlier.

Go to:

<http://www.tonilamotta.com/consciousaging/myth-quiz>

The password is CONSCIOUS

Embracing the Aging Process

This time take a look at the answers and compare them to your own. And then, once again, record in your journal what you have found.

To become free of your fear of fear:

- Name the fear and talk about it with trusted mentors or guides
- Imagine your life set free from what you fear
- Act on your fear and diminish its power

Notice how your fear of fear was greater than the thing you feared and that beyond it your life and magnificence become more fully alive.

So, once you've discovered the fears, how do you release them? If you sign up for the free videos on <http://www.tonilamotta.com/consciousaging> from time to time I'll send you various programs and techniques – as a supplement to the ideas found in this book.

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

For now, I'd like to share the three techniques that I most use in my own life and have found incredibly helpful.

The first is Affirmative Prayer; the second is a process called Fear to Faith and the third is a solution known as EFT – Emotional Freedom Technique.

We'll start with AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER.

Affirmative Prayer is different from the prayers of petition you may have learned as a child. This type of prayer is a scientific process that speaks to the truth of who we are and gets amazing results when applied correctly. It's a five-step process:

RECOGNITION

UNIFICATION

REALIZATION

THANKSGIVING

Embracing the Aging Process

RELEASE

It's impossible to give a thorough explanation of this type of prayer here in a short time – more on my blog-a link on:

<http://tonilamotta.com/consciousaging/affirmative-prayer-3/>

But, for now-

Think about the main fear that has come up for you so far, and allow yourself for a moment to feel what the opposite of that feeling would feel like. Perhaps it's PEACE or LOVE or some form of RESTING in a KNOWING of security. Set that as your intention for the prayer and then begin by RECOGNIZING the quality of GOD that would best represent what it is you think you are missing.

So – for example, I might pray-

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

God is Love and God's love is unconditional. God's love is the same for everyone at every age. God's love cannot be diminished over time. It is ever present. And in God's love, there is perfect peace and a sense of everlasting security.... *you can continue in this vein...

NEXT – Unification – When we understand that we are made in God's image, we begin to realize that we actually are an individualized expression of God itself and so, whatever we know is true about God, is also true about us.

So, we continue our prayer –

This day, this moment, I see and know that I am made in God's image. I am made of pure love and pure Peace. Security is my birthright. Nothing can separate me from that love and unity. I know this now. Who I am is perfect Peace.

Embracing the Aging Process

The third step is the REALIZATION – ah – if this is true, then, what does that say about my fears?

WE continue the prayer - Right here and right now, I know and I accept the end of any fear to the contrary. I know that God's love is everlasting and so it does not stop as I age. I know that no matter what happens in my life, at the center of my being, there is a place of Peace and I can go there at any time and remember the truth of who I am. I do that now. I see myself feeling an incredible sense of union with God itself. I see myself surrounded and filled with perfect love. I allow peace to flood my being and I let go of any myth or belief I may have held in the past. This moment, this day, I accept the truth about my life. It is Free from fear. I am whole and perfect as I am – right here and right now.

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

And then we move into the next step, which is
THANKSGIVING –

We pray – I allow myself to feel and to experience profound gratitude for knowing this truth. I see the perfection in life just as it is and just as it is not. I am grateful. I rejoice in my life experience. I see it all as good and only good.

Finally – the last stage is the RELEASE –

We pray – So, I easily release any fear or doubt that I had up until now. I accept the truth of who I really am. I surrender to this moment. I no longer allow my thoughts to be fearful. I entrust myself into the Love that I know I am. I let my word go into the perfect law of the Universe, which says, “it is done unto me as I believe”. I do believe. And so it is. Amen.

You don't need to use the words that I have used here. Just follow the idea. I like to begin each day

Embracing the Aging Process

with Affirmative Prayer. Sometimes it is for release of a particular fear. Sometimes it is an opportunity to set the intention for my day or week.

When you change your thinking, you change your life. This is the **CLEAREST** way I know to change your thinking. Give it a try.

The next technique I want to teach you is something I learned from two awesome spiritual teachers, Marsha Sutton and Lloyd Strom – and they call it Fear to Faith. There is a full explanation of this process in my #1 Best-Selling book: **What You REALLY Want, Wants You**. You can download a complete copy of this book at <http://www.reallywantsyou.com> or buy a paperback at Amazon or Barnes and Noble.

I've also provided two audios and a worksheet on the website:

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

<http://www.tonilamotta.com/fear-to-faith>.

The first talks about the process you can use with the worksheet and the second answers questions that may come up after you have tried the process for seven days. Basically, you'll be taken through a set of questions to help you see what's behind the FEAR you might be experiencing and as a result of the worksheet, you'll come away with a releasing prayer that you'll be invited to use for at least 7 days. It's amazing how you'll see the fear dissipating when you use this process.

I could site example after example of people who have used this process and have seen amazing changes. It does take DOING it, however. How badly do you wish to eliminate those fears?

Do the work. It works.

The third technique I find extremely beneficial is called the Emotional Freedom technique. EFT

Embracing the Aging Process

It uses the end points of the 12 major meridian channels and the 2 governing vessels found in Chinese medicine.

It has been observed that by tapping on these points while focusing on the problem, a release takes place clearing the physical or emotional pain being worked on.

It is based on the principal that...

The cause of all negative emotions is a disruption in the body's energy system.

It seems that while experiencing or focusing on a specific problem, and tapping on the meridians that carry the energy, trapped emotions are cleared and normal function can resume.

I've provided a video on the website which shows you exactly where and how to tap

<http://tonilamotta.com/eft-tapping-points/>

Overcoming the Myths and Lies about Aging

You'll also find other helpful resources on that page as well that will help you successfully use this powerful technique.

From time to time, I'll be adding to these resource pages – so be sure to bookmark them. And, if you signed up for the free video, I'll also email the links to you and send periodic reminders to USE all three techniques as well as others that I will recommend from time to time.

Please be sure to use your JOURNAL – reflecting on the questions there will help you to unravel and reveal any and all FEARS you may have about aging – and any of the MYTHS that you have bought into - so you can experience genuine FREEDOM and PEACE OF MIND once and for all.

Be sure you go back now and DO THE WORK. Take the quiz, journal and reflect. Then spend at

Embracing the Aging Process

least a week on each of the techniques that have been suggested here, and be sure to go to the website <http://www.tonilamotta.com> for lots more information.

The next chapter provides journaling questions so you can further pursue these ideas.

Once you feel confident that you have discovered greater Freedom from these fears, go on to the second module on doing a LIFE REVIEW.

Chapter 2 – Journaling Your Beliefs about Aging

Set aside a special notebook or journal for these processes. Find one that pleases the eye and that you'll feel good writing in. Then just use these questions as a starter and let your pen just write. (Yes, you could use a computer, but something EXTRA happens when you take pen to paper!)

How do you view old age?

What is old?

Are you old?

How do you view aging?

Do you believe older people are weak?

Embracing the Aging Process

Do you fear illness?

What are your personal fears about aging?

Are you more or less depressed as you age?

How much of your time is spent in thinking about the past?

How satisfied are you with your life?

How is your social life?

What are the stereotypes you believe about aging?

Do you believe aging includes mental decline?

What makes you believe that? Do you have PROOF?

What is your social involvement?

How flexible do you believe yourself to be?

How is your emotional wellbeing?

Journaling Your Beliefs about Aging

List the old memories that still haunt you.

What things are you still longing for things to be just the way they used to be?

How well are you accepting “what is”?

Do you expect your memory to fail? Have you experienced that to be so?

How did your family view age? Were your elders revered or feared?

What are your beliefs about memory loss? Inevitable? Hereditary?

How many healthy “old” people do you know?

Do you attribute negative physical symptoms to aging?

What steps are you taking to care for yourself?

Are you happy to be aging?

Embracing the Aging Process

What are you expecting for your future?

What kind of exercise are you doing?

Is your diet helping you to age well? What changes might you need to consider?

Do you believe your longevity is determined by genetics?

Do you have a mentor/guide that you can share your fears with?

Which techniques are you using to release fear?

Are you using:

Affirmative Prayer?

Fear to Faith?

EFT?

SECTION 2: What Does My Life Wish to Become?

Chapter 3 – Life Review

This section is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Dr. Ira Progoff who started me on a process of Journaling that has had profound effect, not only on my life, but also on the lives of all the clients that I have had the privilege to serve.

A life review is something I recommend doing around midlife and then approximately every 6-12 months from then on. It's not something you do in one sitting! I have found it most useful to do at least a partial life review when my life is in transition.

There are several techniques explained in this chapter. Use the one that calls to you. You will find that when you do a life review, two major things show up.

Embracing the Aging Process

First, you get to see where your incompletes are in life. You may have some forgiveness work to do or releasing and letting go of past hurts. I give you several techniques to work with this experience. Remember, it's a process.

Secondly, you may find hidden potentials. Things in your past that still have a germ of possibility for the future. Your life wants to tell you what it wishes to become and there is no time like the present to begin!

For many people, the thought of a life review conjures up a soul going through a near death experience, where someone has their life 'flash before their eyes' in an instant. And, yes, that is something they many who have had 'near death' experiences tell us happens.

The fascinating thing about all the stories of life-reviews is that, in almost all cases when people

Life Review

see that they have made wrong choices, they never feel judged during this experience. That's worth pondering.

Take on an attitude of a non-judgmental observer as you prepare to begin your own life review. I recommend not waiting until you are 'dying' but rather to do frequent life reviews from midlife on. Perhaps every year on your birthday, or in times of transition when you are looking at the possibilities that may be available to you.

A life review is an awesome opportunity to discover more fully who you truly are. I have found that working with clients in midlife and beyond, that it can also be a proven pathway to more conscious aging.

May Sarton, a poet, novelist and memoirist, wrote in one of her journals: "I suppose real old age begins when one looks backward rather than

Embracing the Aging Process

forward, but I look forward with joy to the years ahead and especially to the surprises that any day may bring.”

I believe in the importance of a life review as a way to understand the past and to complete any business left unfinished, as well as a way to find the gems of possibility still waiting to be pursued. In the words of one of my favorite mentor/teachers, Dr. Ira Progoff, it's a way of looking at what our life still wishes to become.

In the life review process that we are now exploring, there will be opportunities both to look backwards as much to complete what needs to be left behind as well as to look forward to the new experiences of life that have yet to be explored

Doing a life review can be a way not only of remembering past events, but an opportunity to

Life Review

reframe these events as well. One goal is to come to attribute new, different and more empowering meanings to those past events. The focus is not to dwell on the past, but to revisit and integrate it in order to live more fully in the present and prepare for the future. A significant body of research has demonstrated that Life Review can help individuals to integrate losses, resolve “unfinished business” accumulated over the course of a lifetime, and significantly contribute to adjustment to aging. That’s reason enough to give it a chance!

Some people may choose to create a written form of a life review or a video as a way of leaving a legacy. In all cases, it can become a means of evaluating one’s personal accomplishments and disappointments, thus achieving a more integrated sense of self. It is an opportunity to re-evaluate all of one’s life stage transitions.

Embracing the Aging Process

One of the normal developmental tasks of later adulthood is the process of reminiscence. Reminiscence is often unfortunately viewed as the mere rambling of someone who isn't quite coping with the present. But, studies have shown that reminiscence is the way the personality reorganizes itself as we age. When Eric Erikson, the sociologist, talked about the stages of adult development, he described the final stage as one of integrity vs. despair. At this stage it becomes important for one to look back on one's life with satisfaction before facing death.

Eric Erikson proposes that the critical factor in accepting death is one's acceptance of his or her personal life-career fulfillment. In other words, those who feel that their life's work has been accomplished find it easier to face death than those who feel like they have unfinished business.

Life Review

Isn't that the quest of someone in midlife? What have I done with my life so far and what do I still need to complete? It is important to do a Life Review around the time of midlife and then continually – in order to more fully answer those questions and avoid the proverbial midlife crisis. Conscious aging is all about finding meaning – both in what has been and in what is yet to be.

A life review gives us the opportunity to both define and re-define ourselves in the areas where we feel the need for greater growth and change.

Rollo May, an American existential psychologist, once said:

Memory is not just the imprint of the past time upon us; it is the keeper of what is meaningful for our deepest hopes and fears.

Successful aging causes us to move gracefully

Embracing the Aging Process

from the doing part of our lives to greater BEINGNESS. Aging can be the opportunity to redefine one's being in the world by attributing meanings to the joys, accomplishments, as well as the sorrows and losses of our lives.

So, how does one do a Life Review? . Well, there are several ways. The actress and political activist, Jane Fonda, discussed recently in a book and on TV one way. I saw Jane do an interview on Oprah and I read her new book, *"Prime Time"* where she talks more about doing a Life Review when she was 59. I'd like to suggest that while that is as good a time as any, it could be even more powerful to BEGIN the second half of life by doing a review of the first. Now, you ask, when does the second half begin? And the answer, of course, varies.

But, I'd like to suggest that you give it to yourself as a present for your 40th birthday (or anytime

Life Review

after if you've already passed your 40th.) and perhaps do one for every birthday after that.

The process I use, which I will share in a moment, is one where I get to experience an ongoing revelation. Even though my life experiences don't change, I am different at different times in my life.

Each time I do some of the exercises I'll be sharing, I find myself going deeper and finding new insights depending on what I am dealing with at the present moment. I believe that the answer to all of our life questions is within us and when we ask the right question and put ourselves in the right frame to hear the answer, our life sometimes brings us back to a memory that has the seed of possibility for the present still waiting to be born. I'm often amazed at how this process works.

Embracing the Aging Process

You can watch the interview Jane did with Oprah by going to:

<http://www.midlifemessages.com/jane-foundation-oprah-on-the-life-review-process/>

And while you are on the blog – midlifemessages.com, you can also find lots of other good articles about Jane’s experience and about the life review in general.

Some people do a life review by writing their autobiography and taking notice of what comes up as significant and important. You can read an excellent example in the book *Tall Grass: A baby boomer’s struggle to discover himself* – a memoir by [Kerry Grinkmeyer](#)

Here’s a small excerpt:

My mother died when I was eight years old, that in its self had an effect but more important was my emotional reaction and how I dealt with the event for the balance of

Life Review

my life. I felt abandoned, I felt Jesus ignored my prayers, I felt I was alone, I was mad. All these emotions had a daily effect on the balance of my life. (Chapter six of Tall Grass)

To write your own autobiography, you might consider a simple format that represents particular Life's Stages. You can simplify it by considering the following:

1. From Age 0 through 14 – we are forming our character and personality from our family and the environment we are exposed to. - Up until the time. We then either integrate these into our lives or rebel against them approximately through the age of 22.
2. From 23 to about 50 we are doing what is known as Empire building. In this stage we focus on career and family and we are usually unaware of how much our earlier belief formation has

Embracing the Aging Process

been directing our actions, relationships and decisions. It is during this time that we develop our DOING in life; we learn to provide for ourselves and those for whom we are responsible. A lot of emphasis is usually placed on earnings and accumulation.

3. At some point, we begin to look at how well we have either achieved our goals, or haven't. For many people, this happens as they reach retirement age – for some in their 50s, and others in 60's – when we reflect back on the earlier stages and see where and how we have achieved meaning and life fulfillment. It is important during this time to resolve any unexamined issues from our past in order to reach a place of deep peace, acceptance and serenity.

In the journal that you can later purchase to accompany this program, you'll find questions

Life Review

that go along with each of these stages that will guide you in exploring some of the deeper issues. For now, I'd like to guide you in elaborating on Stage 1.

To begin, we will simply focus on the early years of your life. As you identify people and events your memory will open and you will gather more information. Don't limit your writing to the event; search your mind for the related emotions and feelings.

You can pause after each question and write your reflections in your journal.

1. What are the ten most important events in your life that influenced the formulation of your character? Think of the events that were turning points in your life in the first 14 years of your life. (Birth of a sibling, death of someone close, divorce of a parent, abuse of any form,

Embracing the Aging Process

achievements, failures, guilt, or new self confidence)

2. What do you know of your parent's upbringing and life before you? (How did their early lives affect your early life, Financial, Abuse, Failures, and Achievements)?

3. What role did money play in your early life? (Was money an issue in your early years, Bankruptcy, Inheritance, and Wind Falls)?

4. What were your early life successes and failures? (School Achievements and recognition, Athletics, Drama)

5. When did death enter your life? (Grandparents, parents, siblings, friends)

6. How was your sexual identity formed? (How did your parents deal with your sexual development, abuse)

Life Review

7. What part did God, religion and spirituality play in your early life? (Was God a friend, a fear, a mentor, someone who deserted you?)

8. Other than your parents who most influenced your early life. (Positive influence or negative influence)

Here's another idea -

Many people use audio or video to record their experiences rather than write them out. I once did a project where I took each year of my life and created a scrapbook – one page for every year. I talked with my parents and other members of my family when my memory failed me about a particular year. But, for the most part, I found pictures – either some I had or magazine pictures that represented the FEELING at that time and each year was memorialized in its own page. I then went back to think about the people

Embracing the Aging Process

who were important that year; the events that stood out; the works I was doing that seemed significant and the beliefs that I took on at the time. It took me almost a year to complete the project – but, it’s something I’ll treasure and it was a springboard to a lot of discovery about myself and about what was and what still is important to me.

During the last 30 or so years of my own life, I have studied various journaling techniques that have helped me to do the two things I believe are important for a life review:

1. Complete the past – through closure and reconciliation.
2. Find the gems of possibility waiting to be explored for the future.

In this final part of this book, I will guide you through some of the exercises that I believe will be particularly helpful to accomplish both of

Life Review

these tasks.

Take time now to consider the WAKE UP calls of your life. If you could only list 10-12 events that have shaped your life, what would they be? You get one free one to start –

I WAS BORN and name the date.

Stop here and take the time to write out the events. Don't worry about having them in chronological order. You can do that later. Just invite your higher wisdom self to bring to your mind those things that happened that you can now say your life changed forever because of them. They could be choices you made; they could be physical challenges – perhaps an accident or an award you won. It could be the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one. (Any event that YOU see as significant.) No one else need see your list. Keep it simple and brief. Just

Embracing the Aging Process

write a phrase or sentence that you can go back to later and you'll know exactly what it refers to.

If you have not done this exercise yet, PLEASE STOP and do it NOW. .

Once you have this list – allow yourself to get quiet – use whatever mediation techniques work for you – especially work on your breathing to be sure you take a few deep breaths – and then let yourself look over the list and ask your higher wisdom self which of these WAKE UP calls might still have something to say to you.

Once you have chosen one – go to a clean page in your journal – and begin gathering the following information:

Who were the people significant during that time?

What were those relationships like?

Life Review

What works were you involved in?

How was your health?

What was your experience of your body?

Were there any major decisions that you made at that time?

Any significant losses, regrets or gains?

How were your finances?

What emotion does answering these questions bring up?

See if you can describe a metaphor that represents that part of your life. E.g. It was like a roller coaster; My life was in full bloom; There were continual new births; I felt lost and alone...

Once you have a general feel for this time – begin to go question-by-question and flesh out what comes up for you.

Embracing the Aging Process

I suggest that you begin to write as a conversation –

E.g. Between you and your body. First write a description of what your relationship with your body was like and then let your body speak to you – and you answer it until it feels complete.

You can do the same kind of exercise with a person who may feel significant at this time – they can be living or dead. Describe what the relationship was like and perhaps what it is like now and then begin the conversation.

You'll be amazed at the wisdom that comes forth.

Can you see where this process can be unending? You can do this with each of the above questions and then for each of the periods marked off by the Trigger events you called your wake-up calls.

Life Review

If you want to experience this type of process even more fully, I highly recommend you attend an Intensive Journal Workshop – you can find out where they are by going to

<http://www.intensivejournal.org>

Whatever method you feel drawn to will work for you.

Be sure to stay with a question or emotion until you feel you have gained all the wisdom you can from it at the moment. You will find yourself reliving past events and perhaps in dialogue with them, discover that you had made up meanings that are no longer true for you. You can re-invent your past this way and certainly find fuel to move you forward in your future.

Be kind to yourself during this process – remember it is not about any kind of judgment of yourself or others. It can be an amazingly freeing

Embracing the Aging Process

experience and one that will bring you to a greater consciousness and therefore a greater peace and happiness. Happy Writing.

Chapter 4 – Journaling on Life Review

How do you view your life so far?

Are you satisfied?

What judgments, if any, do you hold about who you are and who you have been so far?

Are you looking forward with joy?

How much time do you spend ‘looking backwards’?

Are there things in my life that you still wish to complete?

To explore some of these issues, I invite you now –if you haven’t done it already – to list the 10-12 most significant AH-HA moments in your life.

Embracing the Aging Process

You might want to think of these as the WAKE-UP calls you have had, after which you have said, *“I am no longer the person I was.”*

Once you have this list, sit with it in a meditative state and let ONE of the incidents on your list call out to you.

Trust that this is an area where there are incompletions or insights to be gained for your current life.

Once you have chosen the area. Write out the following:

- The important people during that time
- The situations in which you found yourself
- How your body was at the time
- The beliefs you may have formed
- With what work or works were you

Journaling on Life Review

involved?

- Do you remember what was happening in the world at large at that time?

Now, with each of these lists, choose ONE that stands out and begin to do a process known as Dialogue. For example: for the person you choose ... attempt to step into their shoes and write out what you believe might have been their 10-12 major life wake-up calls. Once you have established a feel for their life, write out a statement on where your relationship with that person is today – whether living or dead.

Eg: “I still have not forgiven you for divorcing mom”.... Or “ I will never forget how kind you were to me when I was feeling lost”... or “I’m still in love with you and trust I always will be.” Write whatever comes to you – without censoring, or editing

Embracing the Aging Process

Next begin a dialogue. Make a statement or ask a question – and then write the other person’s name and a response to your statement or question. Continue this process until it feels complete. You can go back to this at a later date and add to it when it calls to you.

You can do this same process for an event or situation that occurred. List the things that took place leading up to the event. Write out how you feel now about this event and then do a dialogue as if the event or situation was a person.

Do the same for a work you may have been involved with...

When you go to dialogue with your body, take time to recall some physical sensations you may be experiencing now – or remembering from that time in your life. Often the body has great wisdom it wishes to reveal.

Journaling on Life Review

As you can see, this process can be one that is ongoing – and never actually ending. Each time you sit with your journal, you may decide on a new Ah-Ha moment – or new person or work, etc. Just invite your intuition to be your guide. You cannot do this wrong.

Alternately, you can choose to do a life review by using the age spans often covered by those who write about age-state theories. Eg. 0-14; 15-22; 23-50, 51-75, 76+

Here are some things you might consider under each of these categories:

0-14

- Who were the people most influential in your life at that time?
- What were your favorite pastimes?
- Were there any illnesses or injuries at this

Embracing the Aging Process

time?

- How did you feel about yourself?
- What was it like to begin school?
- How well did you adjust?
- What was puberty like for you?
- Were you frightened?
- When did you experience your first love?
- Did you do any sexual exploring?
- Were you conscious of homosexual or heterosexual tendencies?
- How did you feel about your body?
- What did you dream about being or doing during this time?
- What role did money play in your early life?

Journaling on Life Review

- How well were you recognized for your unique gifts?
- What was your spiritual or religious experience during this time?

15-22

- What decision did you make at this time that effected the rest of your life?
- What was your social life like?
- If you began work, how did you choose what you were to do?
- If you were a student – what was that like for you?
- What involvement did your parents play in your life at this time?
- Where did you live?

Embracing the Aging Process

- Who were the people you spent most of your time with?
- Were there particular talents you developed during this time?

23-50

- What was your definition of ‘success’?
- Did you make a decision to marry?
- Did you start a family?
- What was that like for you?
- Are there things that you gave up during this time?
- Were there any people who got in your way or who supported you?
- What did you decide about your earning potential?

Journaling on Life Review

- Did you compromise your values in any way?
- Did you follow your dream?
- What important decisions did you make during this time?
- Who were the people important to you?
- Did you have a mentor?
- Did you mentor anyone else?
- How was your body?
- Any illness?
- What did you do for leisure? Fun?
- What have been your favorite vacations?

51-75

- How well did you acclimate to the 'aging

Embracing the Aging Process

process'?

- Who were the people important in your life at this time?
- Did you fulfill your life dreams?
- How did you feel about your finances?
- What things were you no longer doing?
- Did you have any unfulfilled dreams?
- Any regrets?
- Who are the people who are no longer in your life?
- Is there any person or situation you haven't yet forgiven?
- What are your plans for 'retirement'?
- In what ways are you 'giving back' and contributing to society?

Journaling on Life Review

- Are you involved in any kind of volunteer work?
- How well are you caring for your body?
- What is your relationship with your neighbors?
- **76+**
- What's your purpose in waking each day?
- What friends/family members are still an important part of your life?
- Are you taking care of your health?
- Is there something you've been longing to do but still haven't done?
- Who are the people you have influenced?
- What mark have you made on the world?
- Is there anything you'd like to do to leave a

Embracing the Aging Process

fuller legacy?

- What can you do to make your life even more pleasant?
- Do you believe you have failed in any way?
- What have been the greatest achievements?
- How prepared are you to die?
- What does death mean to you?
- What have been the significant losses in your life?
- How have you dealt with these?
- If a book were being written about your life, what would its title be?
- How does that make you feel?

SECTION 3: Growing Spiritually

Chapter 5 – The Spirituality of Aging

The process of aging, in itself, can be challenging at times. We are asked often to let go of an old identity. Sometimes we experience physical symptoms - even simply a slowing down of energy at times.

We can join the ranks of the world that bemoans the fact and do all we can in the realm of 'anti-aging' ploys, but, the true source of happiness is not in keeping young, but in accepting WHAT IS.

In this regard, aging itself can be fuel for spiritual growth.

It has been my experience that the aging process gives each of us the spiritual lessons we haven't

Embracing the Aging Process

learned in any other way up to now. What a gift!

There is so much more to life than what we can perceive with our senses and know with our reason. It is easy to get lost in what we think is the “TRUTH” simply because we are experiencing it. And yet, life takes on the greatest meaning when we come to realize that there is so much more than what appears. Perhaps that’s what true spirituality is after all. It’s coming to deeply KNOW that there is a Perceiver behind everything we perceive. There is a Knower behind everything we know and that the only true Reality is that which endures forever. Basically, it is seeing life from the ‘soul’s perspective and ultimately coming to recognize our Oneness with all of Life. Many spiritual wisdom teachers, myself included, believe that, In essence, that is the aim of all spiritual growth or development. True transformation is moving

The Spirituality of Aging

from a limited here and now view of all that is to a view that helps us in all situations and circumstances to say, “I am more than this.”

In the previous modules we looked at the fears and beliefs we have around aging and learned some techniques to address these. Then we learned about doing a life review. The purpose of a life review is to complete anything from our past that might need forgiveness and reconciliation as well as to find the gems in our past that are signposts of where there is still life to be lived more fully. We are now about to take a look at the aging process itself and how it can support us on this spiritual journey.

As I continue to age and work more and more with people from midlife and beyond, I have noticed that when approached consciously, the aging process itself can truly foster spiritual transformation. In this module, I invite you to

Embracing the Aging Process

explore your own experience and what you are learning. I hope you'll share your ideas on <http://www.facebook.com/consciousaging>

With a shift in attitude, we can discover that in life's second half — or fourth quarter, the very experiences we have during the process of aging itself are meant to be a call and an opportunity for spiritual growth. The changes we experience as we age can become a source of discouragement and complaint, or we can use them as a source of spiritual inspiration and even transformation. To age consciously, rather than deny what is happening, we need to develop spiritual resources to adapt and begin to look at EVERYTHING that we experience as a Gift inviting us to take a deeper look at what life is calling us to become.

One of our basic needs in life is to find meaning and purpose. Like the dragonfly that doesn't get

The Spirituality of Aging

it's true colors until it reaches maturity, sometimes it is only when we have lived a full life and become more conscious, that our true soul purpose and our life's deepest meaning begin to appear. Many of us, when younger, confused our work with our purpose – although for some they may have overlapped. Our purpose is not necessarily the way we make money in this world; it is more about the reason our soul decided to incarnate. It takes a bit of living to discover what that is for most of us.

What is the purpose of YOUR life?

The renowned spiritual teacher, Ram Dass (born Richard Alpert, April 6, 1931) an American contemporary spiritual teacher and the author of the seminal 1971 book [Be Here Now](#) and the more recent work, *Still Here: Embracing Changing, Aging and Dying* suggests that one purpose is to learn to grow old well. He asserts

Embracing the Aging Process

that some of his greatest growth has taken place since he had a stroke at age 65. "I realized that stroke was grace," "I had been superficial and arrogant and the stroke helped me to be humble. I had gotten power from helping people and now I need help for everything. That was the grace. The stroke happened to the ego, and when I could witness the pain, my life got better."

Fortunately, most of us do not have to have something as dramatic as a stroke to learn spiritual lessons. For example, we can learn mindfulness as we find our bodies slowing down and as friends, family and the media caution us more and more about being alert lest we become one of the statistics of those who have had a fall. Consciousness, after all, is all about being alert and is one of the most important ways of keeping ourselves balanced. Being conscious is synonymous with living in the present.

The Spirituality of Aging

All spiritual teachings tells us that the most important lesson is to be in the NOW, to live in the moment and to learn to accept Whatever IS rather than worrying about what could be or was.. So much of the ‘pain’ of the aging process is because we are holding on to who we were rather than embracing who we are at the moment.

A sign of spiritual maturity comes when we don’t split everything up according to what we like and what we don’t like, what we label as good or bad. All spiritual teachers point the way to learning how to leave the moment open, to let it be what it is in itself, and let it speak to you. We miss an opportunity for transformation by tightly holding on to who we were. Besides, the real spiritual truth is that we were never really who we thought we were anyway, so what are we holding on to?

Perhaps that’s some of the gift of memory loss as

Embracing the Aging Process

we age. We have to live more in the moment!

Now that we can't remember details so well, it's also easier to allow ourselves to forgive and forget and let our hearts expand. Forgetting can actually become an art form when we allow it. I believe that when our memories fail us, it is a reminder to seek out what is really important and I have adopted a belief that if I can't remember it, it can't be that important. It's actually very freeing.

There are lots of things that are just not worth remembering. Somehow I think our souls know that and allow us to forget.

We learn the art of letting go or what spiritual teachers call surrender. This can happen, for example, as we let go of roles –perhaps redefining our role as parents as we experience an empty nest, or releasing our work identity as we

The Spirituality of Aging

retire or retread. Thomas Merton, Trappist monk, writer and mystic - said the way we have structured our lives, we spend our whole life climbing up the ladder of supposed success, and when we get to the top of the ladder we realize it is leaning against the wrong wall—and there is nothing at the top. As we experience aging, we have to let go of all of the false agendas, unreal goals, and passing self-images. It is all about letting go. The spiritual life is more about unlearning than learning.

As an adult educator, I have studied various age-stage theories and in the past had at least an intellectual understanding of the lessons to be learned and things to be ‘achieved’ at each age and level of life. During our earlier years, life is all about doing, achieving and accumulating and we find as we age that we long to live a simpler, more clutter free life. As we age, acquiring no

Embracing the Aging Process

longer seems as important. In fact, most people I know are shedding and releasing and downsizing or right-sizing. Simplification becomes more attractive and a simple, more clutter free life becomes more and more desirable. We are at a point in our lives when we set new priorities and explore what is REALLY important to us. We are learning to move from an outer focus to an inner focus and from a mind control orientation to a soul centered approach to life. We stop asking what do I want? and begin to ask, what does my soul want here? As we age, we can come to identify more with our soul than with our former roles. The aging process itself demands that we move from the acquiring, doing, achieving, manifesting, solidifying identity stage to learning to let go, and to be.

As we age, we learn to spend more time being and less time becoming prolific and

The Spirituality of Aging

productive. Spirituality teaches us that life is about BEING and not about DOING and one of the ways we learn that is by not being able to DO the things we did in the past. Most of the time we did things because of the FEELING that it brought us. So, as we age, we can look at incomplete goals or things we once enjoyed and ask, what FEELING am I looking for in this experience? Usually, we can find something or some way to achieve that same feeling from a different experience that is still available to us.

All through our spiritual lives we are taught about surrender and letting go. When we begin to experience life as being ‘taken away from us’ or ‘slipping away’, we can either panic, rebel, or deeply allow what is happening to happen. Of course, that doesn’t mean being passive about our health or about keeping intimate relationships alive, but it does mean that we get

Embracing the Aging Process

to recognize the impermanence of all that we have on this planet earth, while coming to KNOW and experience that life is truly eternal. When we get to glimpse that truth, our focus changes and we set different priorities. We realize that for certain, we cannot take it with us – when the ‘it’ are material possessions and while we treasure and appreciate them for what they are, we no longer feel ‘attached’. That’s ultimate spiritual growth and true freedom.

I recently listened and watched a video of Esther Hicks – the woman who speaks in the name of “Abraham” which is best described an extension of Source Energy into our world. (see www.abraham-hicks.com) She was talking about the transition of her husband and soul-mate, Jerry. She made a clear distinction that while Esther missed Jerry’s physical presence, she was even more clear that the veil between this world

The Spirituality of Aging

and the eternal world became even thinner with his passing. One of the jobs of the aging process, if you will, is to come face to face with the experience we call 'death' and to recognize that it is a continuation of our essence which we know of as Life. That's pretty powerful stuff if we get it. So much of our youth is lived in denial that this life is only temporary, as we age, we can become aware of what is permanent and thereby discover that nothing can ever be truly lost.

The spiritual journey is about going deeper and deeper to find that which does not change. The one thing we can be certain of as we age is faster change and in many instances, change is seen as synonymous with loss. The aging process itself is often viewed as a time of grief and loss. Besides letting go of old identities and abilities, it is often experiencing more and more deaths of loved ones. It can be a time of declining or loss of

Embracing the Aging Process

health. At the very least, it is the loss of things that are perceived of as youthful beauty – such as hair color, or even hair itself!

Dr. Wayne W. Dyer , an internationally renowned speaker and best-selling author has said : To be attached to your physical appearance is to ensure a lifetime of suffering as you watch your form go through the natural motions that began the moment of your conception.

Certainly when we watch our parents and sometimes even our friends and children die, we learn of this life's impermanence. Our grief is almost always about what could have been. Learning to grieve can be a true source of spiritual growth when viewed from this perspective.

Many of my clients have told me that they no longer fear death, (and that's a great thing) but,

The Spirituality of Aging

what they fear is the process of dying. None of us like to suffer. And, spiritually speaking, we never have to. I am reminded of what an Indian guru once taught me while doing Yoga. We held some pretty challenging postures for quite a long time – or at least it seemed quite long to me! – He said to us, “change the label of pain to “sensation”. I’ll never forget those words. I use them frequently when my body decides to exhibit less than pleasant moments. Truly, suffering only comes when we push away and resist whatever we are experiencing. It is not what is happening that causes suffering, but what we are telling ourselves about what is happening. It’s never going to get better... I can’t go on with this... or other such statements.

Someone recently heard that I had shoulder pain and said – you must be struggling... I couldn’t help but laugh as I realized that so many people

Embracing the Aging Process

see pain as something to struggle or fuss about rather than simply our bodies signal that it wants us to come back to balance.

Our bodies are amazing that way. The problem we have with them getting older is an old spiritual problem of identification. Ask any Eastern spiritual teacher and he or she will say, “I am not my body.” You’ve probably heard that – and maybe even intellectually agreed to it- but when you start to experience what you label as ‘decline’ of the body, it is essential to remember that you are more than that. What a gift our bodies give us when we are ready to really hear that truth.

Maybe the pain that comes with the breakdown of bodily processes is especially tough on us as we age because we probably aren’t going to physically heal from many of these changes. They’re signs, reminders once again that we are so much more than our bodies, and the more we

The Spirituality of Aging

identify with the body, the more pain we'll experience.

I have also found that having health issues as I age has really been an opportunity to help me transform. These experiences have challenged my beliefs about who I am and why I came here in the first place. They have also taught me another radically important spiritual lesson and that is the recognition that all of life is about interdependence, rather than independence. I have had times where I need help – something I never knew how to ask for or even sometimes believed I deserved. “I” was here to help others and in my ‘serving’ I often neglected the truth that others are served when I allow them to support me. I read recently that even the Buddha was awakened when he came face to face with an elderly sick person and with a corpse. If it hadn't been for them, who knows what his life would

Embracing the Aging Process

have been! We can all be gifts to help others awaken.

Another part of awakening to our fullness is learning to live with the opposites that life presents. True maturity is about learning to live with the questions. Ultimate spiritual understanding leads us to a place of non-duality and living with questions is a way of practicing that life is not either-or, but often both –and.

I recently read an article from the diocese of Washington that talked about people's experiences of aging – One person said

“As I age, I am less physically able to accomplish things I once did on my own. I now fear heights and can't climb tall ladders. I have a hard time lifting heavy things without injury. But all this has made me more humble and more appreciative of the help that others can give. Gratitude and a

The Spirituality of Aging

proper sense of interdependence are a gift I have discovered with age. In the gift of age God has helped me be more grateful and connected to others.”

We are all One. We were often taught that it is better to give than to receive, but the truth is that Giving and Receiving are one. As we learn to ask for the help we need, we truly learn the meaning of interdependence. Needing help can also help us become more understanding of the struggles of others. I don't know about you, but when I was young I was impatient. There was little I could not do, or at least thought I could not do. But, now, experiencing more of my limits both compassion and understanding have been awakened in me and I'm learning patience as well.

A while ago, I had a hip replacement followed by a broken femur, infection and blood clots. It left

Embracing the Aging Process

me flat on my back for almost 3 months. During my time of rehab and healing, I learned to be grateful for the smallest things and for the care that others offered me in so many ways. I became more humble and appreciative of all those people who are ill or disabled who would never recover as I did.

There are so many unexpected gifts hidden in situations like this. The most important lesson I received was the message I got while lying immobile: “There is no where to go and nothing to do.” While that was literally true then, it has become my mantra everyday when I find myself feeling overwhelmed or rushed or berating myself for not meeting a deadline or achieving a goal. Those words are worth pondering: There’s nowhere to go and nothing to do. I believe that’s what true enlightenment is all about. It’s a gift of grace.

The Spirituality of Aging

I've even learned to be more grateful even for the gift of a brief rest. Naps are a great way to remind myself that there is nowhere to go and nothing to do!.

What are some of the other things that people fear about aging and what are the lessons that can be learned from the aging process?

When you fear running out of money, ask yourself, what is true wealth and true abundance? You can't take it with you after all. Have you defined yourself by the money you earn or by the things money has allowed you to accumulate? Who are you with or without money?

If you are downsizing, leaving a home for assisted living or nursing home, you can ponder the question: Where is our true home? Yes, living on this earth, it is nice to be surrounded by nice

Embracing the Aging Process

things and to have the safety and security of a roof over our heads. I visit hospice patients weekly and one 104 year old who is living in an assisted living facility often tells me about the homes she once lived in – about the boats on the lake outside her window and about the long treks she took just to buy groceries. You know, she says, “I loved what I had – but I am so content with where I am now. I don’t need these things to be happy. It’s enough to remember all the good that has been part of my life and while it is different today, I still see it as good.”

She is one of the most conscious and content people I know and she teaches me to learn to be satisfied with WHAT IS – instead of longing for what used to be or can no longer be. What a gift.

She also tells me that she loves living alone and is NEVER lonely. “I have learned to love my own company. I was quite social in my younger years.

The Spirituality of Aging

I belonged to and ran lots of organizations. But, now, it's time for me and I am enjoying every moment. I am part of all I've ever been." What wisdom she teaches us. When you experience Loneliness begin to recognize that you can choose to see life lived a- lone or all one.

When your eye-sight gets weaker, rejoice in the new inner vision that can come upon you in this second half of life and look with great expectation to the even deeper vision as you change from an outer focus to a more inward quest. Learning to live more consciously is all about discovering or rediscovering that the interior life is the real life and can be far richer than any outer experience. And besides, it is lasting.

If your hearing begins to diminish, see it as a sign to listen more attentively and to look at others while they speak. This can serve to connect you

Embracing the Aging Process

more deeply to them. And learn to listen to the voice within – you'll be amazed at what you can now hear when you shut out some of the outside noise.

Perhaps falling apart is just another way of letting go, of releasing our beliefs about ourselves and what we believe to be true. A main theme of the spiritual classic, the Bhagavad Gita, is the importance of learning to be unattached to the fruits of our labor, of emptying ourselves — I read once that it is about becoming teflon instead of velcro. Nature kindly assists us as we age, for as our mind and memories dim, it becomes a little easier to release the images we hold about who we are.

Finally I am gradually coming to realize that everything that happens to us in a life can be seen as a blessing, even the most devastating reverses. It's all a matter of seeing it with the perspective

The Spirituality of Aging

of compassion and love. Spiritual vision allows us to see life as a treasure worth cherishing right up to our final breath. How are you handling the process?

Chapter 6 – Journaling on your Spiritual Insights

What is your current spiritual practice?

Do you believe that everything happens for a reason?

Are you willing to look for deeper meaning in the events of your life?

Has the aging process taken a toll on your body?

How are you reacting to this?

Can you see (without blame) why this is happening?

See if you can list at least 10 GIFTS that are now yours because of this experience.

Embracing the Aging Process

Have you had to face the death of someone you love?

What was your reaction to that?

Can you see a deeper meaning for yourself because of it?

Are you part of the 'sandwich generation' – caring for both children and parents?

What is that teaching you about yourself?

Has your life's work changed over the past few years?

Are you considering, or experiencing retirement?

What does this mean for you?

How well have you handled money up to now?

Are you prepared for the future?

Do you know the difference between money

Journaling on your Spiritual Insights

CHANNELS and the SOURCE?

Have you learned to receive?

How do you feel about your physical appearance?

Has your beauty or youth defined you up to now?

What do you value?

What are the things that are REALLY important as you age?

Have you allowed yourself to deepen your friendships?

What do you feel the ‘aging process’ has done to your life?

Can you answer the question, “why is this in the movie of my life?”

What area of your life do you think still needs

Embracing the Aging Process

more work?

Could what is happening in your life right now be giving you the opportunity for just such growth?

If any of these questions are bringing up FEARS or DOUBTS, be sure to go back to Affirmative Prayer EFT and the Fear to Faith process you learned earlier.

Feel free to share questions or comments with other participants and I'll get back to you with any insights that may come to me as well.

SECTION 4: Setting Intentions for the Future

Chapter 7 – Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future

In this chapter you will have the opportunity to truly face what is important to you in life. What do you want to be remembered for? What would you like to have accomplished in your life? It's more than a bucket list of things TO DO. It's more of a list of who TO BE!

If you have done the work up to now, you have a lot of ideas and hopefully a lot more freedom. It's now time to face the biggest fear that most of us have - our own DEATH. Make this FUN for yourself. Decide what you'd like your obituary to say and what you want said as a eulogy. You just might discover how you want to live the rest of your life. ENJOY.

Embracing the Aging Process

If I had to choose one principle taught by every spiritual teacher it would be ‘acceptance of what is’ or what many call, living in the present or living in the now. We are encouraged to perceive what is, as it is, without judgment and prejudice, and even more fully with acceptance and gratitude. We are invited to keep an open mind, to let go of old beliefs and fears. While being with WHATEVER IS at the moment, it is also important to hold onto what has been helpful from our past as well as to create an ever-expanding and even exciting future.

Hopefully, if you’ve been doing the work and following this program, you are coming to experience all of this more and more consciously. You have discovered and hopefully released your fears by first understanding the myths that have been populated about aging and then using at least one of the techniques presented there to

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future
dissipate the fears.

By now, you have begun a practice of doing a Life Review periodically and have released things that no longer serve you. Doing this process, you have also found new potential that was hidden in past experiences - because as Soren Kierkegaard, the first existentialist philosopher, once exclaimed, “Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward.”

And then, I trust that you have learned to notice the gifts inherent in the aging process itself. So, now it’s time for the last step – which is setting intentions for a happy and healthy future.

We’re going to start with what some may think as the hardest thing they’ve done so far – and that is – facing and planning for death. I’m not sure who said this but I love this quote: “Death is not a period but a comma in the story of eternal life.”

Embracing the Aging Process

It's an important part of every life story and in fact once you feel prepared for death, you may even feel a new sense of freedom, and a resolve to live every day of your life to the fullest. This book won't be addressing all of the end-of-life issues, but I would recommend doing a web search on this idea and at least becoming aware of some of the important decisions to be made at that time.

I also suggest that you spend some time reflecting on your personal views about what happens after we die. Werner von Braun, the German engineer who played a prominent role in all aspects of rocketry and space exploration, once said, "Science has found that nothing can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation!" What does that mean to you? Does it influence your understanding of what happens when you die,

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future

and does it effect the way you are now living your life?

Next, I'd like you to take a moment and think about what it is you would like to have people say about you when you are gone. Stephen Covey, whose book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, has sold more than 25 million copies worldwide since its first publication in 1989, taught us all to "begin with the end in mind." When we get clear on what we want said about us after we die, we get a clearer picture about how we want to live right now.

As part of the preparation for becoming a Minister, I had to write my own eulogy and memorial service. I want my service to start by having someone say, "We are gathered here today to celebrate Toni's life because we felt loved in her presence." Now, with each encounter I have with others, I get to ask myself,

Embracing the Aging Process

“is what I am saying or doing something that will support the other in feeling loved in my presence?” It’s amazing how that helps me live a more loving and respectful life.

So, now it’s your turn. What is it that you want people to say about you? Take the time here to pause and think about it. Write it down. Create an epitaph for your tombstone, an obituary for the newspaper, a eulogy to be read at your final service, and if you feel so inclined, write the whole memorial life celebration. Choose the songs you want sung or played, any special readings that are meaningful to you and any prayers you’d like said at that time. I promise, these exercises can be both creative and revealing. It might even be something you want to wake up each day thinking about as you create the intentions for how you’d like that day to evolve. PAUSE and write... right NOW

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future

Welcome back! Now, it's time to decide what kind of legacy you want to leave. I'm not just talking about your finances here or about charitable giving, although that's an important consideration as well. Perhaps you already included some thoughts about a legacy when you wrote about what you want to be remembered for in your eulogy. If not, you can always go back and add them. Many people today are creating bucket lists of what they would like to do, be or have before their time on this earth ends. How much of that list involves things that are lasting? Perhaps there's a book you always wanted to write, or on a more personal note, perhaps you have family photos that need organizing so your children can enjoy them later on. One of the things I treasure that my sister created was a book of family recipes. Each time I use them, I am reminded of the relative who created that special treat or the times we spent

Embracing the Aging Process

together enjoying them. Spend time this week thinking about what legacy you want to leave and have some fun creating it.

Speaking of fun, this is the time of life when it is important to continue to build new habits. Remember, it's a myth that 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks', so make certain that each day you challenge your brain with new learning.

Gandhi once said, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

When was the last time you explored a new activity? Find a mentor teacher, a study group, and/or a social network that supports your explorations. Explore new behaviors and experiences either locally or in a virtual social setting.

If you love to travel and are still able, perhaps this is the time to see new things and experience

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future

new cultures. If you are unable to travel, consider watching travel shows or reading books about places you've always wanted to visit.

Remember also to keep your mind sharp. For some, it may be by watching game shows. Shows like Jeopardy! can help you to continue expanding your knowledge about many things.

It doesn't all have to be serious learning. In fact, it is important to find things to laugh about each day as well. A good sense of humor is essential. Start the day off on a light note by reading the comic sections of your local newspaper. If you're over 60, you might refer to this section as "the funnies". A good dose of humor can often ward off illness as well.

It goes without saying that healthy eating and regular exercise are even more important for seniors than other age groups since the risk of

Embracing the Aging Process

disease and lost mobility is greater and the positive effects are realized more quickly. Look for daily opportunities to exercise in work and play. Walk, swim, climb, bicycle, dance, fish! Just keep moving.

Part of the challenge of aging gracefully is that you have to continue to find things that are important to you.

That can include reading, theater, spiritual pursuits, hobbies, new social groups, lifelong learning, or recapturing time with family if you didn't take the time during your working years. It is important, especially for those who are younger, to plan for purposeful activities before you retire so that it can be a gradual transition rather than an abrupt ending. This could be the perfect time to follow where your passions lie and to complete those parts of yourself that you may have neglected or ignored.

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future

I have found that rather than recognize that we are composed of body, soul, spirit and emotions, most people spend the earlier part of their lives focused on only one or perhaps two of these aspects. The lessons and experiences of the later part of life, then becomes an opportunity to develop the missing links. For example, people who have taken great care of their bodies as they were growing, perhaps avoided looking at the spiritual aspects of life and so the aging process for them becomes a spiritual awakening. For others, who may have focused on the spiritual, learning to live more fully in THIS life with all of its physical and material aspects might be their final frontier. I know many people who neglected the mental part of their lives and who then return to study during their later years and perhaps even getting the degree that once was only a dream. If you are alive and breathing, there is more to discover and room to grow. One of the most

Embracing the Aging Process

important keys to psychological health is accepting that your life won't stay the same. Aging changes everyone and those who age consciously are more in control of how to deal with those changes as they come – and even take a pro-active step in creating them.

As we age, it is important to continue to develop new friends and new relationships. There are millions of stories of people meeting and even marrying well into their 80's and 90's. It's never too late!

It's especially important as we age and often experience the loss of friends and family our own age and older, that we connect with people of younger generations. One of the ways many choose to age graciously is to take time to spend with children and use that time to ask them what's important in their life. It can become a way to help both of you to grow and discover

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future
something new every day.

"Generativity" is a term coined by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in 1950 to denote "a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation." It can be expressed in literally hundreds of ways, from raising a child to stopping a tradition of abuse, from writing a family history to restoring land. It's all about making a difference with your life, giving back and taking care of your community and your planet.

"Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the Spiritual Eldering Institute, says that this is a time when we can act "as guide, mentor, and agent of healing and reconciliation on behalf of the planet, nation, tribe, clan, and family. It is a time to become "wisdom keepers." And this special time is not given to everyone. So, why not pause for a moment to acknowledge the millions of people

Embracing the Aging Process

worldwide who will not grow old this lifetime!”

We grow as we help others grow. And while aging is a personal process, and personal growth is extremely important, aging consciously is more than a personal quest. For many, it provides an opportunity to be part of the transformation of their local or even world community. When raising a family or accumulating wealth are no longer priorities, many people have found that volunteering brings them immense joy and satisfaction. The simple act of offering your skills and enthusiasm will positively impact the lives of others, as well as your own. It may be an opportunity to explore a new skill, or perhaps a chance to pass on some of the learning and knowledge that you have accumulated over the years.

Volunteering is the perfect way to feel connected to others in your community. Everyone has a

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future
talent to offer. I invite you to explore places and organizations where you can volunteer.

Several factors drive people into community service, but one of the most powerful forces behind volunteering is the social change that is possible through helping those currently in need. According to the National Institute on Aging, "The aging of the 75 million strong baby-boom generation could have an impact on our society of equal magnitude to that of immigration at the turn of the century." This certainly is our generation's opportunity to make a difference in our world.

As we close this portion of our learning together, I want to remind you of what many would call the most profound and important spiritual practice – and that is GRATITUDE.

Practicing thankfulness is one of the most

Embracing the Aging Process

powerful ways of thinking to bring about a change in our circumstances.

Being grateful raises us to a new level of consciousness, giving us the ability to see possibilities, discover what we truly want, receive ideas on what to do next, and realize a vision for the future. So, take time daily to list the things you are grateful for and if you do it at night, you might find yourself looking for things to be grateful for all day long. It's amazing how many more show up when we put our focus on this. Perhaps when you catch yourself thinking self-defeating thoughts, you can take a deep breath, exhale deeply, and ask yourself, "What can I be thankful for in this moment"

If you haven't already done so, spend time in gratitude for all you have had in your life thus far. And then begin to ask, "What is still mine to do?" "What matters most? What is my soul's

Setting Intentions for a Healthy & Happy Future
agenda for the rest of my days?” Based on these reflections, you can craft a statement of intention with which you can use at the beginning of each day. I promise, it will help you to age more consciously and live with greater joy.

Chapter 8 – Journaling on Intentions

Here is your last set of journal questions:

1. When your life is over, how many people can say they felt loved by you?
2. What have you accomplished that you have loved and are proud of in your life?
3. What people have been important in your life?
How have they inspired or influenced you or you them?
4. Have you contributed to your community in any way? What is still available for you to do?
5. What do you want to be remembered by?

Embracing the Aging Process

Write it down. This is the man/woman who _____.

6. What has been your unique contribution to humanity? What can you still do about it?
7. What have you overcome in this life? What changes do you think you have made for the better?
8. What are your favorite memories?
9. What have been your greatest worries? Is there still something you can do about them?
10. Is there anything you regret?
11. What would you like written on your tombstone?
12. Have you written your obituary? What's

Journaling on Intentions

stopping you if you haven't done this yet?

13. List the 10 things you want said about you in your eulogy.
14. What message do you want to leave behind with your children and your friends?
15. What are your most painful memories? Is there still something you can do to make amends?
16. What feeds your spirit? How can you do more of it?

What is the meaning of life – YOUR LIFE?

About the Author

Dr. Toni is a keynote speaker, best-selling author and spiritual teacher who supports people (in Midlife and Beyond) in reinventing themselves and in growing spiritually through the process of aging.

Her experience? - From Catholic nun, to computer programmer, dinner theater actress, entrepreneur, professional speaker, New Thought (Center for Spiritual Living) Ordained Minister and spiritual life coach.

She is also the author of the Best-selling book - ***"What You REALLY Want, Wants You: Uncovering Twelve Qualities You Already Have to Get What You Think Is Missing"*** and many other works on Conscious Aging.

Embracing the Aging Process

Read Dr. Toni's blog for more about spirituality in midlife and beyond at:

<http://www.midlifemessages.com>

Get videos on Conscious Aging at:

<http://www.tonilamotta.com/consciousaging>

Get a free copy of ***What you REALLY Want, Wants You*** as well as audios and other support material at:

<http://www.reallywantsyou.com>

To order other books by Dr. Toni, go to Amazon.com and type in Toni LaMotta