

Approaching Elderhood

Purpose of Exercise

This is an introductory exercise in self-observation. We want to recognize what images of aging hang in our internal gallery and how they might be pre-programming our responses to elders and to our own aging.

Background Information

We are all powerfully affected by the “age-ist” images projected in our society through books, magazines, movies and TV, in jokes, greeting cards, etc. They are strong influences in the group mind of our culture that we uncritically absorb. Many of our negative feelings about our own aging result from images that portray old people as useless, as sick, as unproductive moochers robbing the inheritances of the young.

Other images may come from advertisements that airbrush out the wrinkles and sags, so that we develop unrealistic internal images of “beautiful” elders that inhabit unnaturally young bodies. Many of us try to erase the evidence of long life experience, or look to surgical rejuvenation, unable to see the beauty of well-earned wrinkles. All of this results from a culture’s obsession with youth and denial of death.

Yet inhabiting our psyches, along with the negative images, are all the memories and images of elders whose beauty we have experienced. These are important to unearth, to remember from which to evolve and build our own eldering images.

References for Further Study

See, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, Chapters 1-3; and pages 269-271

Application

In this exercise we learn to reprogram ourselves for positive feelings—based in reality—about the possibilities of our growing ever more beautiful as we mature.

Suggested Methods

This exercise may be used as a **Journaling Exercise** or for **Socialized Meditation**.

Specific Steps

BEGIN this exercise by finding a quiet place, where you will not be interrupted, in which to contemplate and write or talk into your tape recorder.

Exercise 1

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As you read each question, consider:
What comes to your mind first? And,
What arises as you continue to contemplate the question?

What words come to mind when you see/hear the term “aging?”

What are your feelings about aging?

What do you look forward to?

What do you fear?

What negative images of aging have you internalized?

Consider various sources: have they come from the media? books? your family? friends? professional contacts? community?

What positive images of aging have you internalized?

Again, consider their various sources.

Take a few moments to sit back and close your eyes. In your mind, review your list of positive images. With this list in mind, **create an image of your ideal elder.**

Imagine going through your day as your ideal elder... interacting with your family, friends, professional colleagues, younger friends and others that you might meet. How does this feel? What might you be doing?

Journey to Meet My Inner Elder

Purpose

As elders-in-training, participants learn to contact their inner source of wisdom to receive guidance. We call this the Inner Elder, the part of us that is our spiritual Self.

Background Information

Many perplexing questions confront elders as they make their way through the unexplored terrain of their lives. In the external world we find answers from many reliable and knowledgeable resources. Within us, this Inner Elder is the archetype of the “Ancient of Days” who resides beyond time and space, in the future as well as in the past. This part of our self has the ability to reassure us of what it knows from our future.

In meditation we can make an appointment to visit our Inner Elder who is already enlightened and who can inspire us with compassionate wisdom to carry on our struggles for self-knowledge. Establishing a permanent relationship with our Inner Elder can also provide us with guidance for all aspects of daily life.

Suggested Methods

This may be used as a journaling exercise or as a socialized meditation.

Specific Steps

Sit comfortably in your chair; place your feet flat on the floor. Begin by following the in flow and out flow of your breath. . . As you take two deep breaths become calmer and even more centered. Breathe in peace and exhale all concerns, all distractions. . .

While I slowly count from 1 – 10 representing the biblical age of accomplished wisdom, visualize yourself walking up a set of stairs leading to a door. 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 . . . 6 . . . 7 . . . 8 . . . 9 . . . 10 . . .

In front of you is a door. . . knock on the door. As the door opens, you are greeted with a warm embrace by your Inner Elder, your spiritual self—the embodiment of boundless compassion and wisdom. . . Be in the presence of your Inner Elder and feel unconditional love and reassurance about your progress in life. . .

Journey to Meet My Inner Elder

Ask your Inner Elder for guidance about an issue that has caused you concern or about a direction for your life. Then remain in a state of receptivity, allowing an answer to imprint itself in your consciousness as a sign, a symbol, or an inner sense of knowing. . .

Rest in the silence . . . Look again into the eyes of your Inner Elder, your spiritual self, and receive these parting words of encouragement: “Journey on with confidence and with blessings as you proceed on your path. Visit me again whenever you need further guidance.” Your Inner Elder may have additional words for you. . .

With deep gratitude, take leave of your Inner Elder. . . With joy and confidence, slowly walk down the stairs, returning to your point of departure—your present age in life. 10. . . 9. . . 8. . . 7. . . 6. . . 5. . . 4. . . 3. . . 2. . . 1. . . Sit quietly for a few moments, open your eyes and return to normal consciousness. . .

Record your experience in your journal.

You can establish a long-term relationship with your Inner Elder by visiting whenever you need guidance or direction. Over time you will begin to trust the guidance that comes from within. You will learn to incorporate this wisdom into your everyday life.

Deepening: Harvesting a Post-Dyad Exercise

The following questions may help to process your dyad experience.

Consider what you said. Notice how you felt when you said it. Are there certain themes or ideas that seem to repeat?

What predominant impressions do you come away with?

Was there anything that came up that is troubling to you?

What seems to be the most significant thought or idea? Can you reduce it to a phrase? Reflect on this for a few minutes. Does it reveal something about your current self?

The Cycles of My Life

Remember each phase of your life . . . what were the significant moments and events of each life phase? Who were the people that guided and influenced you? What did this phase contribute to the continuum of your life? Write your thoughts to the right of each phase.

	Significant Moments and Events	People Who Guided and Influenced Me	Contributions to the Continuum of My Life
January 0-7years			
February 8-14 years			
March 15-21 years			
April 22-28 years			

The Cycles of My Life

	Significant Moments and Events	People Who Guided and Influenced Me	Contributions to the Continuum of My Life
May 29-35 years			
June 36-42 years			
July 43-49 years			
August 50-56 years			

The Cycles of My Life

	Significant Moments and Events	People Who Guided and Influenced Me	Contributions to the Continuum of My Life
September 57-63 years			
October 64-70 years			
November 71-77 years			
December 78-plus years			

Meditation on My Physical Body

Purpose

Knowing our own bodies allows us to modify our expectations and develop our strengths. Someone who has difficulty walking, for example, may be a gifted listener who is really present with others, or shares some other unique gifts.

Many of us who live with physical challenges (whether imposed by age, illness or accident) have discovered that attitude trumps bodily limitations.

Each of our limitations is an opportunity to develop strengths in other areas. Our personal challenge is to find where our strengths lie and then to develop them.

Background Information

Our bodies are our vehicles – our “spacesuits.” They support us, sustain our breath of life, and allow us to do our work in this world. Each is unique and permits us to experience the world in our own way.

Our strengths, as well as our weaknesses, provide the framework in which we view the world. A strong body reflects energy, movement, and speed. A weakness in our systems provides a natural space to develop increased sensitivities. For example, those who do not see generally have heightened abilities to hear, touch, smell and use their other senses.

It is very important to do this exercise with honesty. As with aging, our society considers weakness to be a limitation. You may not like your answers, but they will provide you with the truth from which you can make honest decisions about who you are and what you wish to continue to become.

References for Further Study

See *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, Chapter 5, *Tools for Harvesting Life*.

Suggested Methods

This may be used as a journaling exercise or for socialized meditation.

Specific Steps

BEGIN by finding a quiet place, gathering your journal, pens, and allowing your body to become comfortable.

- How do you feel about your physical body?

Meditation on My Physical Body

- How do you view your state of health? Do you feel well? In what ways?
- Unwell? In what ways?

Write about how you experience the different “systems” of your body.

- Appetite?
- Weight?
- Digestion and Elimination?
- Energy Levels?
- Physical strength?
- Sexual Energy?

Meditation on My Physical Body

- Will to live?
- How might your family describe your physical state?
- What would your health providers say about your health and physical body? Why do they think this?
- What is a realistic estimate of your possible life-span?

The diminishment of old age school us in the art of humility and self acceptance. Because we can't rely on our former attainments and on our physical strength, we must search more deeply within ourselves for a fund of inner strength and wisdom. Increased reflection and contemplation in elderhood, as taught by the world's mystical traditions, are invaluable in helping us befriend our hidden depths.

—Sister Ann

Exploring My Psycho-Spiritual World

- My SATISFACTIONS are. . .

- My HOPES are. . .

- I take DELIGHT in. . .

- I find MEANING in. . .

- I want to BE ASSURED that. . .

- I want to AFFIRM that. . .

- I want to present as MY SACRED OFFERING. . .

Lifetime Map of the Significant Actions in My Life

Journaling Exercise

Specific Steps

To begin this exercise, find a quiet place in which to contemplate and write where you will not be interrupted. As you read each question, consider –

What comes to your mind first?

What arises as you continue to contemplate the following questions?

- What have been my successes?
- What have been my failures?
- Which of my behavior patterns continue to lead to difficulties?
- What have I learned?
- What lessons have I yet to learn?
- What am I drawn to contribute to society and to the world?

Relationship Maps

Significant People in My Life

Purpose

This exercise is designed to look at those people who have been significant in our lives.

Background Information

Relationships are a clue to learning about who we are and how we have lived our lives. Thus, we study them as a part of the process of determining our own philosophy.

References for Further Study

See *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, Chapters 4 and 5.

Application

You may want to transfer the chart to a larger format allowing one or more complete pages for each part of the cycle.

Suggested Method

This is a **Journaling Exercise**.

Specific Steps

BEGIN this exercise by finding a quiet place where you will not be interrupted, in which to contemplate and journal.

As you read each question, consider:

What comes to your mind first? And, what arises as you continue to contemplate the questions?

- When I think of the people in my family...
How have I felt about them? In the past? Now?

How do I think they feel about me? Why do I think this?

- **Who else in my life has been significant? Now? In my past?
...as a friend, close to my heart?**

Relationship Maps

Significant People in My Life

...as a mentor, a guide, a role model?

...as a source of strength and advice in times of turmoil?

- **To whom would I like to write *Thank You Notes* or *Letters of Appreciation*?**
- **Whom have I helped during my lifetime?**
- **With whom do I have regrets?**
(List these people without judgment.)
- **Whom do I really not like?**
How can I make this list smaller and save my own energy?
- **With whom do I want to spend more time?**

Harvesting Wisdom

This can be a valuable exercise as part of doing your philosophical homework. Number the squares randomly, not by importance or preference. Pair off with another person and decide who will be Person A and B. Person A picks a number (e.g. 20), and Person B finds that number (e.g. 20) on the handout, reads the question aloud, and then responds to it. Person A listens with full attention and does not comment on what is shared but simply says, “thank you,” when Person B is finished. The roles are then reversed.

What do I fear?	What was a significant event or moment in my life?	Whom would I like to send a letter of appreciation or thanks to?	What do I really not like?
What behavior pattern of mine creates difficulties?	How do I want to be known?	What is one of my negative images of aging?	Who has most influenced me as a mentor or role model?
Who have I helped in my lifetime?	What has been my greatest success?	What has been one of my greatest learnings?	How can I help someone in need?
What is one of my positive images of aging?	How do I feel about my family?	With whom do I have regrets?	What has been my greatest failure?
How do I view death?	What inner voice of mine am I ignoring or denying?	What is a resentment that I have not released?	What words of wisdom do I want to pass down to the next generation?
What is my life purpose?	What has been something I have wanted to do and have not done?	How does my family feel about me?	How am I currently making the world a better place?

Philosophical Homework

A Resource for Wisdom

Purpose

As we consider the “Definition of an Elder” that guides us in this work, we might ask, “How do we synthesize wisdom?” “How do we create my own living philosophy that is individual to our life experience?”

Background Information

Philosophical inquiry is about asking questions to obtain one’s answers. This exercise is designed to provide you with an opportunity to ask questions of yourself. Many of us have asked these questions at an earlier time in life, particularly as we became young adults seeking to become uniquely ourselves. Now, it again becomes a passionate inquiry as elders, with a long-range durative view, we are able to share our perspective and create a legacy from our life as they encounter their mortality.

References for Further Study

See *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, pages 124-127.

Application

This is an exercise that you might want to repeat many times, asking yourself the questions, seeking your own internal answers, and giving yourself time to consider the answers as you allow “your own philosophy” to emerge and become visible.

Suggested Methods

This may be used as a **Journaling Exercise**.

Specific Steps

BEGIN this exercise by finding a quiet place to reflect, having your journal nearby and creating an ambience in which you can reach deep within yourself and share your internal voices with your external experience.

Allow your mind to wander, fanning your imagination as you ask yourself the following questions:

Philosophical Homework

- If I were to be an Elder Delegate to another planet, what might I say about life as a human?

- If I could take a part of life with me as I leave this world—a piece of who I am or an experience of this human world—what might that be?

- If I am no longer alive in my body, what might I be?

Testimonial Dinner for My Severe Teachers

Purpose

This is an exercise in which **we utilize the broad perspective of time to “re-frame” a hurtful situation**. It is an opportunity to experience the negative and to now see the pearl of wisdom that has developed from the hurtful situation.

You **do not have to forgive the other person** for who they are or for what they have done. They are the ones who ultimately must encounter their own selves. This exercise gives you the chance to re-frame the situation and give up the burden of anger, resentment, and hurt which keeps us in the role of the victim.

Background Information

As we review our lives, certain people seem to stand out as trouble-makers. We believe that they have been responsible for a great deal of our pain, and we still hold them responsible. Our anger and resentment tie us to them. How can we break those bonds of pain, anger and resentment?

This is **an exercise for re-contextualizing or re-framing such memories**. Sometimes, pain-filled experiences turn out to be our greatest teachers, as they take us unexpectedly to where we need to grow. In this exercise we shall re-experience our “enemies” and hurtful situations from an extended perspective, with wisdom gained from life experience.

The name of this exercise, “A Testimonial Dinner for My Severe Teachers,” is an allusion to Psalm 23 which reads, “Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies.” The author of this psalm feels such divine protection that he is able to eat and enjoy a delicious, leisurely banquet in the presence of his enemies.

Reb Zalman teaches us that contemplative life review provides us with a framework for creating divine protection. He asks: “What if you were to invite your enemies, those that inhabit your memories, your consciousness, to a banquet dinner? What if you were to look at the events that made you see and feel them as enemies, but now from a wider perspective?”

Oftentimes what was a harmful act, in the moment, turns out to have had good consequences for us, in spite of the hurtfulness of the past.

The hurtful situation might have forced you to:

- Deal with a difficult part of your personality;
- Make a change in our life that you did not want to make;
- Honestly face an aspect of your life that you had been avoiding.

Testimonial Dinner for My Severe Teachers

Perhaps we lost an opportunity and because of that our lives changed, yet, the end result was very good for us. But who could have foreseen that? You lost your job and as a result moved to another part of the country where we found what we really wanted to do.. We all have stories like that!

What do we do with the painful memories we work so hard to access? We get wisdom from our experiences. That's the real spiritual alchemy—spinning wisdom from the threads of our experience.

Suggested Methods

As a **Journaling Exercise**:

- Make an invitation list, including each of your “trouble-makers.” Write your view of what each one did that was so difficult.

In another column, list the benefits of each “trouble-maker’s” actions. Perhaps you learned some valuable lessons, or your life took a turn for which you are now grateful. Perhaps none of these “good benefits” were the intention of the trouble-maker, but nonetheless the outcome was beneficial for you! This trouble-maker might just have been a very well disguised angel!

- With this perspective perhaps you are able to reframe the situation and release the negative emotions. And perhaps you may even welcome each person back into your life. You acknowledge what they did and that it was very difficult for you. You thank them for what they have done. Share with them the outcome of the blessings of the unexpected good that resulted from past injustice.

As a **Contemplative Exercise**:

Imagine that you invite these seeming “trouble-makers” to a Testimonial Dinner where you are the Master of Ceremonies.

Address each one of your “severe teachers” directly and acknowledge the good that came from the difficult situation.

Toast each one in appreciation of all that you have learned. You may experience the sharp edge of your feelings diminish or soften.

Testimonial Dinner for My Severe Teachers

In your imagination, share with each the blessing that unexpectedly resulted from that difficult situation. Feel the depth of the blessing and allow the light of good feeling to flow.

The Gift of Forgiveness: A Gift to Ourselves

Purpose

In this exercise we will explore two aspects of forgiveness:

- Forgiving others, in order to free ourselves; and,
- Acknowledging our part of the interaction.

We will explore self-forgiveness—as a necessary part of forgiving someone else. We will look again at the particular situation to see what part the other person played in the interaction.

Background Information

Reb Zalman teaches that when we cannot forgive someone, we keep them jailed in our hearts. Then we are forced as the jail keeper to stay in jail along with the prisoner. We need to forgive others—in order to free ourselves! We need to learn to unchain both our self and the other person in order to move forward in our lives. Holding onto anger and resentment drains us of our vitality and closes us off from our ability to love and to receive loving.

We do not have to wait for the other person to ask for our forgiveness in order to free ourselves—or for them to admit that we were “right” in the situation. **To forgive is not to condone the act. To forgive is to free ourselves to move forward in our lives.**

Forgiveness takes practice and effort, for we often hang onto anger and resentment as a habit or as a comfort that may give us a touch of a sense of superiority—“*If I have been wronged, certainly I am better than the one who wronged me.*”

The other side of forgiveness is learning to ask for forgiveness. In doing so, we relieve ourselves of our burdens of guilt. In forgiveness work, begin with what is possible for you now and then stretch, just as we build the strength of any muscle.

This work is best done slowly, working in layers—like peeling an onion. Select something you are ready to work on—a relatively “small” incident, with someone you feel ready to forgive.

Suggested Methods

Record the exercise in your own voice. Allow enough time within the directions to have your inner response emerge.

The Gift of Forgiveness: A Gift to Ourselves

This exercise may be used as a **Contemplative Exercise** or as a **Journaling Exercise**.

Specific Steps as a Contemplative Exercise

- **BEGIN** by sitting comfortably, closing your eyes or softening your gaze. Breathe deeply, inhale relaxation and exhale all tension.
- Let yourself look back into the past. Ask yourself who you still have a grudge against—someone(s) you believe have wronged you. Anyone you want to free yourself from unforgiveness.
- Look at one relationship in particular. As you examine your relationship with that person toward whom you feel anger, resentment, a grudge, can you feel how your own resentment and lack of forgiveness keep you chained to this incident and to this relationship, draining your energy and disturbing your emotional equilibrium?
- To find the key to let the other go free and let you go free, look into your heart and remember an incident. What happened? What role did you play in the interaction? How were you feeling and thinking? What was happening for you beneath the surface of this encounter?
- Acknowledge whatever feelings you may have—any anger and/or remorse and/or grief about the interaction.
- What did the other person say and do? Imagine yourself in their shoes. What might they have been thinking and feeling?
- Ask yourself whether any of your own unacknowledged needs or expectations or misunderstanding in communication contributed to the upset or disturbance in your relationship. Listen for a response.
- With a sincere desire to mend the relationship, say: “I forgive you with all my heart and wish you nothing but unalloyed goodness. And I forgive myself for my part in creating this misunderstanding. May neither of us have to suffer any further painful consequences from our past encounter.”

The Gift of Forgiveness: A Gift to Ourselves

- Now allow your awareness to move back and forth between yourself and the other, **giving you an enlarged perspective and new objectivity** with which to view the relationship.
- Ask that you be given the insight to see what you have to learn from that moment. As you feel that being granted, see before you the key you need to unlock forgiveness. At this moment, in a sincere desire to mend the relationship, ask yourself: “is it time now to forgive?” Listen for your inner response.
- If your answer is, “yes, I want to forgive,” or even, “I want to want to forgive,” then can you say, as hard as it is, something like “I forgive. I forgive myself for whatever part I played. I forgive the other for their part. I let go of this next layer.” And/or say something like: “I forgive you. May neither you nor I have to suffer further consequences of this moment. And with the blessing that comes with forgiveness, I bless you, I bless me. Amen.”
Take a moment to say what is in your heart.
- Hold up all the results of that moment and pray, that it all be turned into good and blessing. And perhaps you can reach into the sacred space in which sin is forgiven and in which is guilt is removed. And from there imagine that you draw to yourself and to the other a ray of golden light and blessings.
- Imagine all the energy locked up in that memory of bitterness and lack of forgiveness has now turned to strengthen you and the other person whom you may now choose to give the blessing of god-speed: go where you must be.
- Feel a sense of inner peace that comes from having mended this layer of your relationship.
- Focus on your breathing, be aware of your feet on the floor. Open your eyes slowly and relax before recording your observations in your journal.
You may choose a time to ask your Ateek Yomeen “what more do I need to be doing in this holy process?”

Specific Steps as a Journaling Exercise

Exercise 12

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The Gift of Forgiveness: A Gift to Ourselves

- **BEGIN** by sitting, feel your body supported by the chair. Breathe deeply, inhale relaxation and exhale feeling the tension leave your body.

- Who is the person who has wronged you and towards whom you harbor a grudge?

- Describe the specific incident. Where were you? Who else was present?

- What happened?

- How were you feeling? What were your thoughts? What was happening for you beneath the surface of your encounter?

- How has your lack of forgiveness kept you chained to this incident? In what ways does it drain your energy?

- Now, imagine yourself in your adversary's shoes. What might they have been feeling, thinking under the surface?

- In what ways might your own unacknowledged needs, or communication problems, have contributed to the situation?

The Gift of Forgiveness: A Gift to Ourselves

- Now, expand your awareness so that it moves back and forth between yourself and the other person. Can this enlarged perspective provide a new objectivity with which to view the relationship?
- Notice if you can imagine the two of you, bathed in a ray of golden sunlight that melts your resentment and allows forgiveness to take root in your heart. Rest in the warmth of this sunlight for a while.
- If you are ready to forgive now and with a sincere desire to mend the relationship, you might say: *“I forgive you with all my heart and wish you nothing but unalloyed goodness. And I forgive myself for my part in creating this misunderstanding. May neither of us have to suffer any further painful consequences from our past encounter.”*

What other kind words would you say?

- Pay attention to your breathing, inhaling relaxation and exhaling any tension.
Notice how you are feeling.

Healing a Painful Memory

Purpose of Exercise

Remembering and healing memories free us to be in our present. For, what? To live, to enjoy, and to find the joy in helping others.

Background Information

Life Review involves reaching back into the past to repair events and relationships that caused us pain or disappointment. Through contemplative techniques that “stretch” and “reshape” time, we can mend our personal history.

Remembering our past is not always enough. We must also heal the wounds around which memories collect. Each painful memory affects how we behave in the present, as we strive to avoid the situation from happening again.

Yet, we are drawn to similar situations—as there is also something that draws us back to heal the pattern, to learn what we need to learn. We find ourselves creating situations similar to those in which we suffered. Freud called this a “repetition compulsion.”

In this exercise, to heal the part of ourselves that may still be imprisoned by the past, we return to the scene of a questionable decision or a bruised relationship and apply the balm of our more mature consciousness. **It works by developing in us the ability to experience that hurt younger “me” from an Expanded Consciousness instead of falling back into that pain—time and time again. We learn to forgive and heal with our present, more enlightened awareness.**

Application

Life Review is only one of many ways in which to heal our past wounds.

You might also want to try extended meditation and prayer, in which, over months and years, the projections arise until they have been healed and pacified.

There are also techniques to focus on specific memories with the direct intention to heal. “Healing a Painful Memory” directs the imagination and teaches a powerful means to heal ourselves.

Suggested Methods

Record the exercise in your own voice. This exercise may be used as a **Journaling Exercise**, or for **Socialized Meditation**.

Specific Steps

Exercise 13

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Healing a Painful Memory

- **BEGIN** by sitting comfortably, letting your eyes or gently softening your gaze. Take several deep, slow, rhythmic breaths to still your mind.
- Imagine that through your memories you reach to a time of difficult, painful emotional turmoil that you would like to heal. Be aware of any resistance to a memory and just note that without judgment.

Allow yourself to watch the scene. Be aware of all that is happening in the scene as if you are watching a movie.

View the environment. Open all your senses to the scene.

See your younger self who then perhaps felt alone, misunderstood, angry hurt or inconsolable. Be aware of what your feelings were then.

- Now let your present self, with all your strength and awareness, walk into the scene to make contact with and to give your younger self reassurance from the present.

What is it that you need to give and say to your younger anxious self? Perhaps you will hold your younger self. Visualize this embrace in your mind's eye.

- Imagine reaching through the emotional turmoil where your present, mature self speaks to your younger self with compassion and assurances. Perhaps you say SOMETHING LIKE: "I come with assurance from the future. You are going to make it. You will live through this difficulty, will be healed from it, and will learn important lessons that will grow into wisdom. You did the best you could and in the end everything is going to work out."

Is there anything else you need to say to your younger self?

- As your younger self feels the support/embrace of your older self, your younger self lets go of the cramp around the pain. Allow yourself to reach into the pain, hugging, consoling, and finally blessing it... Offer the pain as a sacrifice along the path of your life, knowing that this, too, shall pass and will be a blessing for your future growth.

Let your present self BLESS your younger self.

- As you breathe out, let go of a layer of this burden of the past.

Healing a Painful Memory

As you focus your attention on your breathing, you may become aware of an increased energy, a buoyant feeling, a sense of courage that is now available to you.

Allow yourself to breathe in a sense of well-being and give thanks for having rescued and harvested a holy spark of your life.

- Bring back the sense of well-being as you step back out of the scene, find yourself gently back in the room and once again focus on your breathing. Feel your entire body.
- When you are ready, open your eyes and become aware of your surroundings. Sit quietly for a few minutes. Record your observations in your journal: writing, painting, drawing.

When using this as a **Journaling Exercise**:

- What scene did you reach back to remember?
- What blessing did you receive from this memory?

Bedtime Prayer of Forgiveness

Purpose of Exercise

The work of forgiveness strips away the residues of resentment which constrict how we connect with our own hearts, as well as, how our heart connects with others.

This process works best with daily attention. Angers and resentments rarely release completely or overnight, but rather peel off in layer by layer. Sometimes we need to return again and again to our memories as we continue to release. It may take several sessions before you become aware of increased energy and a sense of lightness and joy.

- In our daily lives we inevitably rub up against each other—creating many opportunities to practice forgiveness and release. As we end our day, we are accustomed to clean our bodies and brush our teeth, preparing for the night's rest. It makes good sense to take another few moments to clean our psyches and our souls from the residue of our day's experiences. As we unburden ourselves from anger and regrets, we can live more fully and joyfully, and sleep more restfully.

Background Information

The **Bedtime Prayer of Forgiveness** is adapted from the Jewish daily prayers, which include a bedtime period of self-examination. You may wish to change the wording of this prayer/meditation, to reflect your own beliefs and tradition.

References for Further Study

See *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, pp. 93-134

Suggested Methods

This exercise may be used as a **Journaling Exercise**, or for a **Socialized Meditation**.

Specific Steps

- **PREPARE** for this exercise by providing yourself with some personal, quiet time before going to sleep each night. You may want to take a late evening walk, sit by a downstairs window, or simply lie quietly in bed. It is important that this time be regularly available to you and that you establish this practice as a daily routine.
- **Repeat the prayer with full attention to whom and what you wish to forgive.**

Bedtime Prayer of Forgiveness

- **Stop after each line**, allowing yourself time to absorb and to feel your soul releasing each painful moment or feeling of injustice to the Source of All Being.
- Be aware of the lightness of your soul & experience its natural joy as you prepare for sleep.

Bedtime Prayer of Forgiveness

You, My Eternal Friend,
witness that I forgive anyone
who hurt or upset me or who offended me—
damaging my body, my property,
my reputation or people that I love;
whether by accident or willfully,
carelessly or purposely;
with words, deeds, thoughts, or attitudes;
in this lifetime or another incarnation—
I forgive every person,
May no one be punished because of me.

Help Me Eternal Friend,
to keep from offending you and others,
help me to be thoughtful
and not commit outrage,
by doing what is evil in Your eyes.

Whatever sins I have committed,
blot out, please, in Your abundant kindness
and spare me suffering or harmful illnesses.

Hear the words of my mouth and
may the meditations of my heart
find acceptance before You, Eternal Friend,
who protects and frees me.

Amen.

Rendered from the Hebrew by
Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Forgiveness Breath

Make yourself comfortable in your chair. Breathe! Invite, in your imagination, the person you wish to forgive into your safe space.

Step 1: Physical Level—Breathe!

What is it that you need to forgive? (List) Where do you feel it in your body?

Step 2: Emotional Level—Breathe!

In your imagination, tell the one being forgiven all of the pain you have suffered because of him/her. Ask that person to tell you his/her pain. Allow yourself to go back and forth between you and the other. Picture the other as the young, innocent child that he/she once was.

Step 3: Mental Level—Breathe!

Consider how you would have preferred it to have been (positive), but did not experience. Cancel these expectations.

Step 4: Spiritual Level—Breathe!

Extend open hands out to the imaginal one being forgiven, and say: “I give you total responsibility for your actions, attitudes, and behaviors. I take responsibility for my actions, attitudes and behaviors.”

Step 5: Breathe!

Move your consciousness up to God or your higher self. Open yourself to receive love from this all loving, all accepting part of you. Allow this love and light to flow into every part of you to heal all hurt and pain. Slowly let it fill the void left by letting go.

Step 6: Breathe!

When you feel ready, extend your hands outward and say: “With the help of my higher self, I send love out to you and your higher self just the way you have been and the way you are now.”

Step 7: Breathe!

Name what is good about the one who has just been forgiven, and what is good about yourself.

Adapted with permission from work by Edith Stauffer and the Seton Sisters of Charity

Scripting My Last Moments on Earth

- Imagine your surroundings. Where are you?

- Whom have you invited to be present with you?

- Who is definitely not involved?

- Have your say to those who have assembled around your deathbed.

- What would you like to hear from them?

- Is there anything else you would like to have with you or have happen in your final moments?

- Is there anything else you would like to have with you or have happen in your final moments?

Scripting My Last Moments on Earth

- Now imagine the moment of your actual death...
- Ideally, what would you like to happen to your body?
- Who would you like to care for your body and in what manner?

Once again, focus on your breathing, feel yourself inhaling and exhaling, then feel your feet on the floor, your body in the chair. And when you are ready, open your eyes and become aware of your surroundings. You might want to take a few moments to jot down some of these things that came to your mind in this process.

Take a few minutes to record your process.

Follow-up Exercises

- Read over what you written after several days have passed and then write a follow-up entry to see whether this exercise has made you more accepting about the reality of your physical death.
- Give yourself the opportunity to write your own epitaph or obituary.
- Write out the script of your movie.
- Role-play the entire scenario or parts of it.
- For a group: create the skit and act it/them out.

Checklist for Creating Peace of Mind

Purpose

The purpose of this checklist is to help create peace of mind so that we feel free from worries when it is our time to die. This list can help others know what practical business needs attention.

Background Information

Reb Zalman z"l had a (G*d Forbid) Book compiled for the time when he died. These are instructions to help make it easier for others to deal with our unfinished business.

References for Further Study

“What My Family Should Know,” available from your local funeral home for a more complete list of possible arrangements and concerns.

Specific Steps

BEGIN with this intention:

I have carefully considered my needs and desires and have made the following provisions. . . . May they not be needed for a while.

- My **LIVING WILL** is located:

- **I have discussed, with the following people, how I wish to be treated.** If I am not able to care for myself, I trust that my wishes and my intentions will be respected.
- Check with my Five Wishes Document. (Located where?)... See (page 68)
- Concerning my **LEGAL AFFAIRS: The following items are all in order and can easily be located...**
 - My Will is located...?

 - Copies have been given to...?

Checklist for Creating Peace of Mind

- My Insurance Policies are located...?

- My Safe Deposit Box and keys are located...?

- Who is authorized to gain access to my Safe Deposit Box on my behalf?

- Passwords to my electronic accounts are located...?

- What else needs my attention?

- Concerning my **FUNERAL**
 - My arrangements have been made with...

 - I have discussed these arrangements with...

 - How do I wish to be buried?

 - With what particular items, clothes, prayer books do I wish to be buried?

Checklist for Creating Peace of Mind

- I want for my epitaph...
- Who will arrange Kaddish/Mass or other prayer service for me?
- What might be left undone?

Living Will

Purpose

The following is a fairly generic form of a Living Will. We hope that it will inform you and encourage you to take care of this important matter yourself.

Background Information

A Living Will is a testament of your wishes as to how to care for your body if you are unable to communicate with your medical providers and family. Without a written Living Will the state may have to decide how you shall be treated. This can be very painful for yourself and your family. Be sure that close family members and your medical care providers have a copy of your Living Will.

References for Further Study

The Complete Guide to Living Wills, Evan R. Collins, Jr. with Doron Weber. (Bantam Books, 1991).

Choice in Dying, 200 Varick St. New York, N.Y. 10104 (800) 989-WILL; publishes a "Living Will Declaration"

Suggested Methods

This may be used as a journaling exercise.

To any individual who may be responsible for my health, welfare or affairs -- my family, physicians, lawyer, clergy person, or any medical facility in whose care I happen to be -- if the time comes when I can no longer take part in decisions for my own future, let this statement stand as an expression of my wishes while I am still of a sound mind.

If the situation should arise in which there is no reasonable expectation of my recovery, I request that I be allowed to die and not be kept alive by artificial, invasive means or "heroic measures." Should I ever have a terminal illness with irreversible brain damage that makes me unable to recognize people or swallow, I would not want these measures taken:

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation to start my heart beating;
- Use of a respirator if I cannot breathe;
- Feeding by a tube in my stomach;

Living Will

- Treatment with antibiotics if pneumonia or other infections develop.

Should I develop Alzheimer's disease or any other disease in which only further deterioration can be expected, and there is no lucidity of mind in me, I ask to be allowed to die with food withheld and sedation administered.

I do not fear death itself as much as the indignities of deterioration, dependence and hopeless pain. Furthermore, I do not wish to be given costly treatments that would use up the resources of my family. In all this I ask that medication be mercifully administered to me to alleviate suffering even though this may hasten the moment of death.

Should I die as a result of accident or even by natural consequences of a disease or aging, I ask that all still transplantable parts like kidneys, corneas, etc., be utilized to save or enhance the life of another.

This request is made after careful consideration. I ask that you who will care for me feel morally bound to follow its mandate. I ask this in order to relieve you of the responsibility as I place it upon myself in accordance with the strong convictions in which I make this statement.

This _____ day of _____ 20____

Signed:

Witnessed by:

Copies of this request have been given to:

Acting as an Elder-Sage of the Tribe

An Elder’s work is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulae this into a legacy for future generations.

Purpose

Like tribal elders of the past, today’s sages are wisdom-keepers entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the well-being of our families and communities.

Elders bear witness to the durative views that secure our future, living in what is known as “deep time” with a commitment to serve the next seven generations—meaning that we consider the impact of our actions and decisions on those who will live generations from now.

Background Information

The following exercise will help you make a contribution of enduring value. By exercising your responsibility as an Elder, you serve as a leader in rebuilding our sense of community and restoring health and balance to our planet Earth. It will take you through a process of connecting with what it is that you love along with your greatest concerns. The first part of this exercise is adapted from Joanna Macy’s *The Work That Reconnects*.

Suggested Method

This may be used as a **Journaling Exercise** or you can adapt it for **Socialized Meditation**.

Specific Steps

BEGIN by finding a place where you will not be disturbed, sitting comfortably, taking several deep breaths, relaxing your body, and quieting your mind.

Allow yourself a full 3 or 4 minutes, as you quiet your mind, to journal your responses to these first 3 sentences.

1. Some things that I love about being alive on Earth are...
2. When I think about the world we are leaving to future generations, what concerns me most is...
3. The values that have served me throughout my life and are most important to me are...

Let your concerns arise in your mind.

Acting as an Elder-Sage of the Tribe

- What issues are most important to you?
- Who are the friends, colleagues or acquaintances that might share these concerns?

Now, let the question arise: what resources are available to me to address these concerns? e.g. classes, book/study groups, organizations

Consider how you can go forth using your feelings, values, resources, skills, experience and wisdom—speaking and acting as an Elder in “your tribe.”

- How can I best serve the planet?

- How can I serve the nation?

- How can I serve my community?

- How can I be of service to my family?

- How can I serve those who are in the process of becoming an elder-sage?

Experience of Mentoring and Intergenerational Work

Purpose

Mentoring is a means of transmission, of listening—of “giving ear”—of creating the avenue in which a true exchange may occur.

References for Further Study

Grandparent Power! By Arthur Kornhaber, M.D. with Sondra Forsythe, (Crown Publisher, Inc., 1994).

Mentoring by Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch (Harper San Francisco, 1995).

Tao Mentoring: Cultivating Collaborative Relationships in all Areas of Your Life by Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch (Marlowe & Co., 1999)

Suggested Methods

This may be used as a journaling exercise or for socialized meditation.

Specific Steps

BEGIN by focusing your mind and imagine that you are in the presence of your mentor.

- Who is this person?

- Why is this person your mentor?

- What in their attitude attracts you?

Experience of Mentoring and Intergenerational Work

- What feelings do you have in her/his presence?
- How does this person relate with you?
- What are your expectations of your meetings with this person?
- Think of your grandchildren, children, or, perhaps a younger person for whom you care. Imagine sharing a particular moment of importance with each of them. How might you share this?
- What do you not want to hear from them? Why?
- What do you not want to share with them? Why?

Creating a Vision for My Future

Imagine that you are approaching your 95th birthday celebration. Before the event you decide to take an inventory of your accomplishments since you attended your first *Age-ing to Sage-ing* workshop.

What has happened as a result of your self-directed elderhood?

- ▶ In your personal life...

- ▶ In your family...

- ▶ As a result of your work with individuals and groups in your community...

- ▶ Now, looking from this place (your 95th birthday celebration), what are some things that you will do within the next two years to make a difference as an elder?

- ▶ What groups or individuals will you work with in achieving these outcomes?

- ▶ What will you do within the next month to get started toward you desired outcome?

- ▶ What will you do to add joy and excitement to these years?

The Gift of Counsel

This exercise provides one way in which to share your counsel.

- Begin with a deep breath. Focus your body, mind and heart.
- Become aware of the person and the concern that you want to address.
- Picture the person who will read this Testament. What part of his/her being will you address?
- “I am writing this for _____ and I will speak to his/her [body], [mind], [heart], [soul].”
- With this person I want to counsel my [prudence], [reason], [feeling], etc.
- Find the voice that you want to use and consider the points that you want to make. List them on index cards, then sort and prioritize them. When you feel ready, write to the person you wish to counsel, using your voice, addressing the different parts of his/her being.
- Consider beginning your testament with one of the following verbs: “I exhort. . . welcome. . . advise. . . suggest. . . invite. . . you to read and hear my counsel.”

Writing Legacy Letters

References for Further Study

Reimer, Jack, and Stampfer, Nathaniel. (1991). *So that your values live on –wills and how to prepare them*. Jewish Lights Publishing.

Suggested Methods

This may be used as a journaling exercise.

Specific Steps

- Find a quiet place and be prepared with your pen, pencil and journal.
- Make a list of people to whom you wish to write a legacy letter.
- Consider the essential ideas you would like to transmit to each?
 - Picture the reader of your letter.
- Find the voice that you want to use.
 - How do you wish to speak to this person?
 - To their mind, what do you wish to say?
 - To their heart, what do you wish to say?

Writing Legacy Letters

-To their soul, what do you wish to say?

- You might ask yourself some questions in composing your letters:

- By what definition of morality have I lived?

- What has been most important in my life?

- What of my life would I like to see endure?

Self-Forgiveness Exercise

We do forgiveness work to untie our tangles so that we feel the freedom to live life fully, to be more present to the beauty and joy in our lives. To forgive oneself may be **the hardest practice of all**. So we'll look at ourselves in all four worlds—physical, emotional, mental, spiritual—and as we review our lives, **become aware of where we need to practice self-forgiveness**.

I ask myself: How do I need to take better care of my body? Or to be more discriminating about what I expose my senses to? Do I dump my negative feelings on others? When I get caught up in culture-induced judgments, my thought habits become pre-judgments or prejudices: Can I learn not only to transcend them, but also to forgive myself for them?

Am I sufficiently mindful of my responsibilities to all the environments in which I participate? Am I honoring the sacredness of the life with which I am being gifted? Do I make this whole life holy by acts of *tikkun olam*/healing the world? Can I become more loving? And so on. All of these transformations call us to change and heal, to practice *teshuvah*/forgiveness. When I can't forgive myself, it's hard to change, and it's hard to forgive others.

So, here's a template for the practice:

EXERCISE:

1. Make yourself comfortable. Sit, breathe and relax.
2. Become aware of incidents that you feel guilt and/or shame about.
3. Imagine yourself on a **train going back in time** and feel drawn to the memory of one of those incidents.
 - Remember how your body was feeling at the time.
 - Remember your feelings of stress or anger or fear.
 - Then recall what was going through your mind.
4. In your imagination ask yourself, "Why did I do that then?"
 - Look at the motives that caused you to act as you did.
 - It's important to understand why at that moment it's what you needed to do.
5. Ask yourself, "From where I sit now, with whatever wisdom I've gained, would I do the same thing again?"

Self-Forgiveness Exercise

6. And if I answer to myself no, then it's important to feel deeply the regret for what I've done. However, even though I feel regret and even guilt for what I did, that does not mean that I now must conclude that I should not have done it then. Perhaps my answer might be "yes, I would have done the same thing again even knowing what I know now." And yet, I may still feel regret/guilt/remorse and therefore I still need to do my self-forgiveness.
7. And then imagine you hold your younger self with love—as unconditional as it can be on the spectrum of love.
8. Forgive that younger person who didn't know **what you know now**.

Perhaps say to yourself, "I didn't behave well. I learned from it and vow not to do it again."

(Know that there are times when it is appropriate to say, "I vow.")

Or you may perhaps say to yourself: "I learned from it. May I not be in that position again."

Listen to what you have to say.

9. Feel yourself bathed in the light of forgiveness.
10. Feel gratitude as you **travel back** on that train **to the present moment**.
11. Focus on your breath.

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Repeat as needed with other examples.

My Life's Severe Teachers

Make a list of those whom you wish to invite to your Testimonial Dinner...	What did they do that was so difficult and hurtful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How has this action benefited you?• What has been the unexpected blessing?• For what are you now grateful?