



CENTER FOR SPIRITUALITY  
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## **"SUCCESSFUL" AGING REQUIRES POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND MORE New Year is a Time to Re-shape Future, Revel in Past**

Heralding in a new year often triggers thoughts about getting older and getting on in life. Perhaps a more pertinent thought to ponder should be: "What does it mean to age successfully? According to some experts, it's not enough to just tick off the birthdays. "Successful" aging requires deliberate forethought, a conscious effort and the right attitude.

Attitude is 90% of the aging issue. It has been said that the results of life's twists and turns is 10% of what happens to you, and 90% is what you do with what happens to you. No doubt there is a physical decline that comes with age, but he counters, this decline is one that can be mitigated and shaped rather than given into. It's that very decline that can become the spark when coupled with the experience gained through the years. The end result can give older adults, while different than the past, as much of a fulfilling, exciting, and fun life as they enjoyed in previous years.

Climbing Mt. Everest at 93 years of age might be theoretically possible for some, but not realistic for most. In his book, From Age-ing to Sage-ing, (1995 Warner Books) Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Zalomi coins the phrase, "conscious aging" where a person ages deliberately and intentionally. He advocates living life as it is rather than allowing life to live us.

For those who seek to consciously participate in the aging process, here are some specific methods for developing a more positive lifestyle and attitude:

- Be realistic. Maybe you don't have the energy or the strength of your youth but you are more creative than ever because, and over the years, you have learned about yourself, your strengths as well as your opportunities to grow (some mistakenly call these opportunities weaknesses.)
- Take risks in life. Life has always been a series of risks: getting married, flirting with financial disaster by connecting yourself with one company for a lifetime, having children, serving in the military. The real goodies in life require risk-taking, a stretching of the envelope, a willingness to try new things.
- Respect your own opinion, especially, your inner self. While culture might try to suggest that you are 'out of date' because you can't (really don't want to) operate

the latest electronic gadget, you have learned more about life and living through experience, something that is much more valuable.

- Be flexible and adaptable. Older adulthood should be the time of the greatest flexibility because there is a perspective on life that can only be sculpted by years of experience. Older people have already experienced significant change and have survived, even thrived. The change in age is the only difference from those of the past. Who knows what lies beyond this specific challenge?
- Take on new challenges and learn new things. It has been said that a person only grows old when they can no longer learn. Many people treat the past as a fortress to be preserved rather than a foundation that enables them to grow and risk and learn. Don't forget that while some challenges of the past were painful, most became life-giving and renewing.
- Deal with pain and losses, but don't hold on to the suffering they bring. Suffering is in the eye of the beholder. A person can be in pain but not suffer as well as suffer but not be in pain. Pain and loss often signal something 'old' is dying in our life. We need to look for the new that always is there, if we are attentive, open and ready to receive.
- See the half full glass. Be optimistic. You have successfully coped with challenges in the past. Why not the challenges of today or even the fears of the future?
- Take care of yourself with healthy eating and regular exercise, not only of the body but of the spirit. Take time to walk, to reflect, to consider, to remember. Read a good book, one that interest you but never had the time to read until now. Many find meditation as essential to life as an hour at the gym. But don't forget to go to the gym as well.
- Don't accept society's myths as true about you. Society sees aging only in terms of decline. Because older adults are not able to DO the same things that they did when they were younger, they are to be pitied and even marginalized. But as an older person once said to me, "There are some things that a person just can not learn until age 85." To quote Dr. Jacob Pressman, Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Ben Am in Los Angeles, "As it takes a village to rear a child, so does it take a lifetime to create a fully human being."
- Don't deny your age, learn from it. It is teaching you the life-lessons of wholeness that you have always been meant to hear.