Elderhood
Reflection Series

Elderhood
Institute
Dedication

This series is dedicated to the growing number of older men who have decided to harvest their long lives by giving back to others, offering themselves as sources of blessing, act as partners with Earth and who share their stories in a first step toward accepting the possibility that they have wisdom to share.
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Introduction

The Elderhood Institute educational and consulting organization publishes the Elderhood Reflection Series. This interactive educational experience can help you understand the concept of elderhood and develop elderlike behaviors. The concepts and exercises are based on material found in three books: two by Terry Jones, *The Elder Within* (Bookpartners, Wilsonville, Oregon, 2001) and *Elder* (Elderhood Institute, West Linn, Oregon, 2006) and one by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sageing*, Warner Books, New York, 1995).

The lessons and exercises in the series follow a logical sequence, which is especially useful in situations where structured learning is desirable. The sequence is based on the seven stages of Elder Journey created by a committee of the elder community of the ManKind Project. The stages are:

One, The Awakening: “At some point there is an awakening to the call to become an Elder…It will be a call…to move on and/or change ones path…The person will know it as an invitation to function without doing.”

Two, The Choice: “…if an older person has chosen to continue to grow and develop, he or she is ready to…realize the power of choosing consciously how to live the rest of one’s life.”

Three, The Struggle—Facing the Shadows of Old Age: “Our culture defines old age as a time of decline and disengagement. Choosing otherwise will sometimes feel like ‘swimming against a current’”.

Four, Resolution and Development of the Tools and Skills of Elderhood: “Participating in gatherings and activities of ‘The Elders’, storytelling, ceremony, and passing of family history and gifts of wisdom and blessing to the next generation are key parts of elder activities in this time of life.”

Five, Acceptance and Being: “This is the turning point—the break through. It is a time to enjoy the vibrancy of life, to stop worrying and come to each day with joy and the gift of another day.”
Six, Passing it On and Passing On: “The elder has faced and lives with the absolute certainty of his approaching death. We also want to leave a legacy. This season is a time to share what we have acquired with those who are ready to receive it.”

Seven, In Service: “I am aware that, as an elder, my mission has changed. With my elder mission of service, I can live out my life with a sense of purpose and meaning.”
Module One, The Awakening: “At some point there is an awakening to the call to become an Elder… It will be a call… to move on and/or change a person’s path… A person will know it as an invitation to function without doing.”

A three hour module: Begin each with a ritual.

1. Ritual Opening: Have men put themselves in order by age outside of room.

2. Offer poem:

   Rumi: There are many whose eyes are awake
       And whose hearts are asleep;
       Yet, what can be seen
       By mere creatures of water and clay?
       But he who keeps his heart awake
       Will know and live this mystery;
       While the eyes of his head may sleep
       His heart will open hundreds of eyes

3. Ask participants to enter room and circle up with oldest person lighting a candle in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

4. Then, each person declares, name, why they are here today and says, “I have lived_____ years of life. The value I place on this is ________.”

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of years of experience represented by the people in the gathering.

   b. Introduce Council concept.

   **Handout #1: Council**

5. Explain seven stages

6. Trainers reveal how the Awakening occurred in our life: (This is where trainer could share it as the end of the Heroes journey and the rebirth of the soul. Embracing the role of elder has caused
personal growth, changed the focus of my work life, and enlivened my spiritual life.)

7. Ask men to Journal about the Awakening in their life: 10 minutes
   a. Comment on importance of journal throughout series of seven.

   *Make sure each man has an empty journal.

8. Small group discussion of Awakening: 15 minutes

9. Read Hopi Elder speaks with flute background: Handout #2

   Stretch/Break: 10 minutes (90 minutes to here)

9A. Autumn asks that we prepare for the future—that we be wise in the ways of garnering and keeping. But it also asks that we learn to let go…

   DH Lawrence said:
   “Now it is autumn and the falling fruit and the long journey towards oblivion.
   The apples falling like great drops of dew to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.
   And it is time to go, to bid farewell to one's own self, and find an exit from the fallen self.
   Have you built your ship of death, O have you? O build your ship of death, for you will need it.”

10. Comment on elderly versus Elder.
   a. Share here MKP document, “The MKPI Eldership Process”, 1996 “Sooner or later, if a man chooses to look inward, and to acknowledge and fully embrace all his energies, and to stay conscious, he begins to take on a greater awareness that his time here is limited. When that occurs, and it will, he will begin to sense in himself a new, different energy; a shifting sense of
priorities and context; a developing desire to teach, to mentor and bless, and to leave something of value after he has gone on.”

b. Consider the roles of elderly, senior citizen, and retiree.

Journal for ten minutes on how they fit you or don’t.

11. Discuss in group: 15 minutes

12. **Handout #3: Elders.** Introduce *celebrant, wisdomkeeper, mentor and earthkeeper* as suggested focus for elder roles and as alternative to what society has asked of us.

   a. Increasing longevity is creating a vacuum for older people who choose to follow the typical American model of aging that leads to retirement and pulling back.

Exercise: Journal for ten minutes about the elders I know or have known.

*(2 ½ hours to here)*

Exercise: Large group sharing about elders we have known: 15 minutes.

13. Read Elder Journey committee definition of Awakening.

14. Review Reading list

   **Handout #23**

15. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.


17. Introduce Choice as next stage of Elder Journey.

18. Now begins the work necessary to becoming more elder like: confront your biases about aging and death…confront your mortality…consider the contrast between elder and elderly expression.
19. Close: Stand in circle

   a. Check out with a brief thought from each man
   b. Youngest man put out the candle.
Module Two, The Choice: “…if [an older man] has chosen to continue to
grow and develop, he is ready to…realize the power of choosing consciously
how he is to live the rest of his life.”

A three hour module:

1. Ritual Opening: Have men put themselves in order by age outside of
   room.

   **If this module is done the same day as and later than Module One,
   ask men to circle up and then ask if they have thoughts to share
   that have come up during the first half of the day. (Goal here is
   again to practice calling on the wisdom of the elders).**

2. Offer Rumi: “On a day when the wind is perfect, the sail just needs to
   open. Today is such a day.”

3. Ask men to enter room and circle up with oldest man lighting a candle
   in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

4. Then, each man declares, name, animal name and says “I have _____
   years of life experience. The value I place on this
   is__________________.”

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of
      years of experience represented by the men in the gathering.

   c. Introduce Council concept or reintroduce if covered in earlier
      module on this day.

      **Handout #1: Council**

(30 minutes to here: However, if this module is done on the same day
as Module One, items 1-4 above need not be repeated and, therefore,
Five minutes to here requiring more activities to make a full three
hours)

5. Trainers reveal how the Choice occurred in their life.

6. When a man becomes an elder in MKP:
a. Read first MKP document, “The MKPI Eldership Process”, 1996, “When a New Warrior approaches his fiftieth birthday, he may choose to begin the process of claiming his eldership. We recognize that some men at this arbitrary point may not wish to begin this process of embracing elderhood, and some men may wish to begin it at an earlier age. To those who do, we say “Welcome”.

b. Read Guidebook section on definition of elder:

   **Elder:** within the MKP an elder is an initiated man who is at least 50 years old.

   **Declared Elder** is an elder who has self-chosen to serve by declaring himself an elder of and in his community and within MKP. He further intends to integrate Elder qualities more fully into his life.

c. If he is already a “declared MKP elder”, have each man comment in his group on when this occurred, when he made The Choice.

d. In small groups, ask each man to use this time to consider whether he has declared himself as an elder and/or how he feels about the idea

7. Even though age fifty is an “arbitrary point of life” there are at least five stages of personal development beginning about that time:

   A. Midlife itself, which nowadays begins at ages 40-50.

   B. The transition into the time after we stop working the way we were at mid-life (the transition into the mythical “retirement”): Two to Three years!

   C. Making The Choice: about whether we want to move into the community as a resource after doing the necessary personal work

   D. Expressing our creative energy for 15-30 years

   E. Engaging the “golden years”

   F. Planning for a serene end of life
8. (The following only necessary if this module done on its own)
Review of Awakening module this group has already been through:

A. Consider the roles of elderly and elder in contrast.
B. Consideration of our fear of aging and death.
C. Elders as celebrants, wisdomkeepers, mentors and earthkeepers.
D. Seven stages of Elder Journey.
E. The Awakening: “At some point there is an awakening to the
call to become an Elder…It will be a call…to move on and/or
change his [a man’s] his path…He will know it as an invitation to
function without doing.”

(one hour to here or 30 minutes to here if module done on same
day as Module One)

9. The Choice then consists of choosing to:

A. Continuing to grow personally

B. Continuing to learn

C. Considering that old age is the Newest Age: The Newest Age is a
phenomenon of the last three generations in the West. It has
resulted from longer life spans. The Newest Age is potentially
an elder renaissance: a time of rebirth of the culture based on a
spiritual vision.

D. Seek pleasure like a child allowing chaos, play, creativity into your
life

G. To synthesize wisdom from long life experience

H. Create a legacy and tell your story.

But also to:

I. Be accessible to the young and the anawin (the forgotten and
oppressed persons in society)
J. Be a partner with Earth

K. Prepare for a graceful end of life.

**Break: (90 minutes to here)**

10. Finding the strength and support to carry out one’s elder journey, we can go within.

Exercise: Inner elder meditation to ask, “Am I ready to make the Choice?”

**Facilitator tool: #5**

a. Large group sharing about meditation.

Exercise: New Warrior/Old warrior

**Handout #6:** New Warriors/Old Warriors

11. The four seasons of a man’s life are Spring (new life), Summer (ripening), Fall (harvest) and Winter (completion).

Elders are in the Fall and Winter of life.

12. Life as a cycle of one year: Life review begins the process of harvesting and provides data for life repair (recontextualizing, embracing loss).

**Handouts # 7 and #8**

**Exercise:** Two part review of life handout.

Each seven years marks a beginning of a new phase of development and corresponds to month of the year.

First part: Remember each phase and list at least two significant events and people from that phase.
Second part: Reflecting on each phase write down, 1. what this phase contributed to the continuum of your life and who were your guides, mentors and severe teachers?

13. Co-facilitator invite men to stand in this safe container of sages and declare that he is on the journey, declares eldership or simply ask for the men’s support in their consideration of trying on a more elder-like personal walk. Centers who provide a Declared Elder process may not want to do this.


15. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.

16. Review seven stages of Elder Journey and introduce Struggle as next stage of Elder Journey.

17. Now begins the work necessary to becoming more elder like: begin writing your story. In this process test your willingness to celebrate your long life, to find the fruits you need to harvest and determine if you are “one of the ones we’ve been waiting for!”

**Point out Reading List.**

18. Close: Stand in circle

   a. Check out with a brief thought from each man
   b. Youngest man put out the candle.
Module Three, The Struggle—Facing the Shadows of Old Age: “Our culture defines old age as a time of decline and disengagement. Choosing otherwise will sometimes feel like ‘swimming against a current’”.

A three hour module:

1. Ritual Opening: Have men put themselves in order by age outside of room (unless this has been done recently in previous module)

2. Read **A New Way of Struggling** by Susan Rauch

   To struggle used to be
   To grab with both hands
   And shake
   And twist
   And turn
   And push
   And above all not give in,
   But wrest an answer from it all…

   But there is another way
   To struggle with an issue, a question…

   Simply to jump
   Off
   Into the abyss
   And find ourselves
   Floating
   Falling
   Tumbling
   Being led
Slowly and gently
But surely…
To watch the answers unfold
Before our eyes and still to be a
part of the unfolding

But, oh! The trust
Necessary for this new way!

Not to be always reaching out
For the old hand-holds.

3. Ask men to enter room and circle up with oldest man lighting a candle in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

4. (Unless the following has been done recently) Each man declares, name, animal name and says “I have _____ years of life experience. The value I place on this is________________________”

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of years of experience represented by the men in the gathering.

   (Handout #1: Council: Introduce Council concept)

5. Trainer shares how The Struggle looks in his life.

6. Consider the Box: looking back and whining, looking forward in fear of death and aging.

7. Brainstorm areas of focus for the personal work an elder man could do.

   Handout #10: Personal Elder Work

8. Comment on items on list not discovered during brain storm.

   Handout #11: Approaching Elderhood


10. Small groups after taking a few minutes to answer the questions on
the *Approaching Elderhood* handout.

**Handout #12**

**Exercise: Review of My Severe Teachers**

A. On handout, make an invitation list of your enemies and the troublemakers in your history.

B. Write next to each name what each one did that was so difficult for you.

C. In another column write the benefits of each severe teacher’s actions.

Consider welcoming each person back into your life, acknowledge what they did and that it was difficult for you. Tell each what the outcome and blessing of their injustice was.

11. Small group debriefing:
   If you couldn’t think of a severe teacher, does this mean you have resolved all the tough relationships?

12. Offer Forgiveness Prayer

**Facilitator tool #13**

**Break (11/2 hour to here)**

13. Discussion of meaning of “forgiveness”

   A. Does it mean saying those who hurt us are now declared as good?

   B. Does it mean letting go our investment in the hurt they caused us?

   C. Could forgiveness include finding the opportunity that was created when it happened.

   D. Is forgiving, forgetting?
14. Developing journal outline of personal elder work you need to do:
   
   a. List the things that you would benefit from addressing,
   b. Prioritize them
   c. Select those you wish to address as action items in the next year
   d. Draft an action plan covering the next twelve months that embraces your action items.

**Exercise: small group discussion of action plans.**

15. Read Elder Journey committee definition of Struggle.

16. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.

17. Review seven stages of Elder Journey.

18. Now begins the work necessary to becoming more elder like: Launch your Personal Elder work action plan.

19. Close: Stand in circle
Module Four, Resolution and Development of the Tools and Skills of Elderhood: “Participating in gatherings and activities of ‘The Elders’, storytelling, ceremony, and passing of family history and gifts of wisdom and blessing to the next generation are key parts of Elder activities in this time of life.”

A three hour module

1. Ritual Opening: Have men put themselves in order by age outside of room.

2. From Africa comes the story of the woman who was hurt, lying in a ditch and was found by a man who offered to help her. She raised her hand saying, “If you want to help me for my sake, don’t bother. If you are called by your need for salvation, come ahead.”

3. Ask men to enter room and circle up with oldest man lighting a candle in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

4. Then, each man declares, name, animal name and says, “I have _____ years of life experience. The value I place on this is ________________.”

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of years of experience represented by the men in the gathering.

   (Handout #1: Council)

5. Trainer shares how Development of the Tools looks in his life.

(30 minutes to here)

6. Recalling “Life as a Cycle of a Year” exercise in Module Two, we reach back into the past in part to repair events and heal the wounds.
7. We don’t want to pretend there wasn’t loss but we will gain from letting go our investment in painful memories.

**Exercise:** Healing a painful memory

**Handout # 14**

8. Paying Attention to Body, Feelings, Mind and Spirit

Elders take responsibility for feeding and healing themselves physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

**I. Elder Body:**

Do an assessment of your body. A wise elder is present in his body, and is aware of what his/her body can and cannot do. They get physicals annually: testing for prostate problems; blood pressure; cancer signs and weight.

They model good health for the young.

Consider that *Elder Beauty* is an aspect of our physical existence. One can learn to resist the seductiveness of the youthful look and value oneself by other than an adolescent standard of beauty.

Responsible physical aging includes considering the three concepts,  
A. biological aging,  
B. chronological aging and  
C. psychological aging.

We can do things about biological and psychological aging.

*Conscious aging* understands that in the first half of life we push our bodies. But, in the second, we can listen to the body, healing and honoring our increasing need for energy.

**II. Elder Mind:**
The spiritual elder mind shifts to macro-management and simplification of life.

We use wisdom tools of contemplation, meditation and listening to steer the “inner voyage”.

_Spiritual elder_ mind is the next step in the evolution of the brain according to Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi.

**III. Elder Emotions:**

**Exercise:** Brainstorm the emotions of elderhood (grief, joy of work freedom, sadness over condition of the earth, patience, sorrow, etc.)

Elders learn something about their emotional side from the physical feelings they have.

**IV. Elder Spirit:**

The soul is fed by the spirit which is the “energy of the Universe”. The soul is that aspect of the human that is eternal.

**Exercise:** Brainstorm behaviors that facilitate a more spiritual existence. Such as:
- Developing a meditative, contemplative or other quiet time.
- Creating a meditation space in your home and live daily the Blessing Way: setting a sacred intention for the day seeking to affirm life any way possible and showing gratitude.

(one and one/half hour to here)

9. Elder appreciation of life on Earth is the source of one of the elder’s greatest values to the community. Elder energy is felt in part by the connection it gives us to an ancient sense of oneness.

10. Anthropologists believe that despite their cultural diversity, elders of indigenous communities worldwide are bound together by a number of shared ecological and spiritual perspectives which form a kind of universal consciousness. These include:
A. Viewing nature as holy.

B. Believing that spirit is not the expression of one Supreme Being but is dispersed throughout the universe.

C. Assuming human beings are responsible for sustaining harmony in nature and with man.

D. Depending on natural cycles in time rather than progression caused by humans.

E. Accepting that the universe possesses mysteries that will never be solved by humans.

F. Tending to celebrate the orderly design of nature rather than dissecting it for science’s sake.

11. Our most esteemed elders are often those individuals who have the knowledge of the orderly and harmonious whole that is the universe. The role of these elders is to assist people in becoming aware of their relationship to the earth.

   **Exercise**: Journal about the way you find yourself connected to nature and how it may be different for you than it was when you were younger.

Follow with Small Group discussion

BREAK

(two hours to here)

12. Building tools for the elder journey can be based on the four roles:

   a. Earthkeeper
   b. Wisdomkeeper
   c. Mentor
   d. Celebrant
13. The Experience of Mentoring and Intergenerational Work

A. Many say that elder work is intergenerational. Being accessible to the young and respecting them is an elder challenge.

B. The mentoring relationship results from mutual consent to the mentor-mentee relationship.

C. Mentoring, unlike teaching, is a process of being present for another offering support and holding a container of energy for the other.

D. A mentor follows-up, provides feedback and asks about the outcome of ventures the mentee may take on.

E. The sincere mentoring interaction contains enthusiasm and an expression of genuine mutual interest.

F. Information may be shared that assists the mentee in adjusting to a new environment, employment market or social milieu but the mentor is primarily a listener.

G. The give and take communication should include give and take by both mentor and mentee.

H. Mentoring occurs over an extended period of time. A one-time encounter is not mentoring but rather allows for an assessment of the potential of a mentoring relationship.

**Handout #15: Mentoring**

**Exercise:** Journal on the six questions in the handout

14. Read Elder Journey committee definition of Resolution and Development of Tools.

15. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.

17. Introduce Acceptance and Being as next stage of Elder Journey.

18. Now begins the work necessary to becoming more elder like:
Continue the building your Personal Elder work action plan. Focus on
the tools of mentoring and balancing elder Body, Mind, Spirit and
Emotions.

19. Close: Stand in circle
   c. Check out with a brief thought from each man
   b. Youngest man put out the candle.
Module Five, Acceptance and Being: “This is the turning point—the breakthrough. It is a time to enjoy the vibrancy of life, to stop worrying and come to each day with joy and the gift of another day.”

A three hour module:

1. Ritual Opening: Have men put themselves in order by age outside of room.

2. Read poem from Elder as Revived Child chapter in Elder:

   Elders are as old as yesterday
   As young as today

   As old as last night’s rain
   As young as the dawn of today

   As old as their fear of death
   As young as their hope and enthusiasm

   As old as their memory of regret
   As young as their belief in good

   Elders are as old as their doubts
   As young as their dreams

   Bring old and young into one,
   One in spirit, One with God. (Jones, 2005)

3. Ask men to enter room and circle up with oldest man lighting a candle in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

4. Check in

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of years of experience represented by the men in the gathering.
5. Barry Barkan said that an elder’s work is to synthesize wisdom from life experience.

6. Rabbi Schachter said this is a way of harvesting our long life experience.

When October winds do blow,
Then a man his wheat must sow.
Thus must act a man of worth
Who has arrived at sixty years:
He must sow in young folk’s ears
Wisdom all their hearts to fill,
And give them charity if he will.

7. Eldering is wisdom in action:

**Handout #16: Sharing Wisdom**

**Exercise:** In small groups discuss the contrast of offering interpretations, meanings to raising questions. Imagine you are preparing for a one on one with someone who is looking to you as wise. Offer an opinion to the small group on whether truth is a subject you want to grapple with.

(One hour to here)

8. Moderated but also enriched by life’s experiences, masculine archetypes give rise to adulthood archetypes in maturity.

In the growth process maturing people don’t lose their childish qualities. The mature person integrates the qualities of childhood, building upon them rather than demolishing them.

However, John Izzo says in **Second Innocence**, “As we age, somehow our capacity for awe and wonder is diminished, just as our skin looses its elasticity.”
9. As we consider the elder, it is not so difficult to imagine the influence of the Sovereign and the Magician archetypes on elder behavior. The Sovereign is the conduit for sacred energy into the world. This energy from within our soul and psyche celebrates life and is, therefore, generating life in the way a wise elder does.

10. The Magician is a source of healing energy, of magical influence and is a scholar, teacher, seer and philosopher. These qualities can make a good mentor.

11. Less obvious, however, is the influence of the other elder archetypes, the Warrior and the Lover.

The Lover, in particular, may feel childlike rather than elder like for it is sensuous, playful and impulsive.

Paradoxically, however, elder expression is quite dependent on Lover energy.

12. The Lover archetype is alive in us throughout all stages of life. The energies emanating from this aspect of self include playfulness, intuitiveness, spirituality, sensuousness, companionship and connection through feeling.

13. Let’s access our Lover within.

**Handout #17:** Accessing the Lover Within

**Exercise:** In groups consider ways of accessing your Lover energy

Break

(13/4 hour to here)

**Handout #18**

14. Blessing consists of:

A. Meaningful touch
B. Spoken word
C. An attachment of high value to the other
D. Picturing for the other a special future
E. Eye to eye contact with the blessed one

15. Blessings transmit empowerment from generation to generation, Initiations into elderhood such as croning ceremonies, give definition and sacredness to elderhood.

**Exercise:** share stories of instances where a blessing occurred.

16. Read Elder Journey committee definition of Acceptance and Being.

17. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.

18. Introduce In Service as next stage of Elder Journey.

19. Now begins the work necessary to becoming more elder like sharing wisdom, embracing the Lover within and sharing your power through blessing.

20. Close: Stand in circle

   d. Check out with a brief thought from each man
   e. Youngest man put out the candle.
Module Six, Passing it On and Passing On: “The elder lives with the absolute certainty of his approaching death. Before we pass on some of us want to leave a legacy. This season is a time to share what we have acquired with those who are ready to receive it.”

1. Ritual Opening: Have men put themselves in order by age outside of room.

2. Rumi poem on Aging

3. or

   When you see me walking, stumbling,
   Don’t study and get it wrong
   ‘Cause tired don’t mean lazy
   And every goodbye ain’t gone.
   I’m the same person I was back then,
   A little less hair, a little less chin,
   A lot less lungs and much less wind.
   But ain’t I lucky I can still breathe in.
   - Maya Angelou

   Or

   Then there was the summer—our grewed up lives—
   and autumn when we got older and had that peculiar feeling in our spirits of being back in time. Some folks called it nostalgia and sadness.
   The winter with everything dead or seeming to be,
   Like our bodies when they die, but born again
   Just like spring. Granma said the Cherokees knew,
   and had learned it long ago.
   -The Education of Little Tree

4. Ask men to enter room and circle up with oldest man lighting a candle in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

5. Check in with each man commenting on his awareness of his mortality.

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of years of experience represented by the men in the gathering.
(30 minutes to here)

6. Trainers reveal how Passing it On and Passing On looks in their life.

7. Andrew Weil says that aging and death give life “One way it does so is by forcing us to consider what aspect of self does not change, even as time alters our bodies and minds. Awareness of aging and mortality can inspire us to engage more in life, to live it to the fullest, and to fulfill our potential for accomplishment.”

Exercise: Offer this intention: “Have I carefully considered my needs and desires and made provisions…May they not be needed for a little while.”

Review Handout # 21: Checklist for creating peace of mind.

Large group discussion of handout.

(one hour to here)

8. In the book, In the Ever After, the author suggests there are at least five issues for us to address as we face the end of life:

A. Dealing with the specter of decline and the reality of multiple losses as we grow older.

B. Accepting the shadow aspects of aging including anger over the indignities of aging, despair over recuperating from losses, envy for what young people still possess and greed for more life.

C. Turning from the youthful frustration with human error to empathy for human nature.

D. Breaking free of ambitions and dreams that dominate youth.
E. To reclaim our original sense of wonder and awe and thus give hope to the young who are watching.

Exercise: Living Will review by individuals and then moving into small groups.

9. Writing an ethical letter

A. Make a list of the people to whom you wish to write a letter defining your values.
B. Consider the essential thing that you would like to transmit to each.
C. What do you wish to say to their heart, to their spirit, to their mind?
D. Some suggestions for topics:
   - By what definition of morality have I lived?
   - What has been most important in my life?
   - What in my life would I like to see endure?

10. Guided Imagery: Last moments on Earth

This is a guided meditation. Ask participants to sit comfortably and to become aware of their in breath and out breath. The goal is to become aware of the pattern of your breath but not to change your pattern.

Tell them that as they quiet their mind, to picture their last day in this life. Ask them to imagine the place they are in and to imagine their final moments in the most ideal manner.

Ask:

i. What music would you like to hear as you are dying?

ii. What poems, prayers or sacred texts would you like recited

iii. Who would you want present?

iv. Who would you not want present?
v. What tastes, aromas or sounds would you enjoy?

vi. What objects would you want near you?

vii. What would the surroundings be like?

viii. What would you want to say?

ix. What would you like those present to say to you?

x. How do you imagine the moment of you death?

xi. What would you like done with your body?

(two hour to here)

Break

11. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.

12. Now begins the work necessary to prepare for the end and consider your legacy.

13. Close: Stand in circle

- Check out with a brief thought from each man
- Youngest man put out the candle.
Module Seven, In Service: “I am aware that, as an elder, my mission has changed. With my elder mission of service, I can live out my life with a sense of purpose and meaning.”

A three hour module:

1. Ritual Opening

2. Ask men to enter room and circle up with oldest man lighting a candle in the middle as we “take our place at the fire”.

3. Offer William Dare story, “The Perfect Heart”.

**Handout #19**

4. Check in

   a. Comment on the power of this circle of elders and the number of years of experience represented by the men in the gathering.

5. Trainers reveal how idea of Service occurred in their life.

**Handout #20 Service Inventory**

**Exercise:** In preparation for service, let’s do a personal inventory Journal on these questions:

xii. Does an elder serve others?

xiii. Am I inclined to contribute to others my time, ideas and energy?

xiv. What does service look like?

xv. If I have served others professionally, can I rest in the second half of life?

xvi. If I choose not to be in service can I do so without feeling guilt?
6. Small group discussion

(11/4 hours to here)

7. Another way to consider the idea of service is considering **Accessibility**

   - Elders need to be available.
   
   - In the West we have built a tradition of less visibility for older people.
   
   - We travel more or actually move away from our extended family thus reinforcing the myth that elders are less useful.
   
   - Genuine wisdom is attributed to those with the capacity to exhibit compassion and to develop intimate, insightful and empathetic relationships. Building relationships requires regular exposure to those with whom we relate.
   
   - Elders needn’t do anything while remaining within reach, but they must remain within reach.

   - Wisdom doesn’t exist if it is not shared.

   - Elderhood is wisdom in action.

8. On the other extreme is the philosophy of Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Grey Panthers:

   A. Take responsibility for mentoring the young.

   B. Elders are needed as mediators facilitating non-violent problem solving.
C. Be a watchdog of society, monitoring public bodies, speaking before them if needed.

D. Mobilize social change ensuring that sound values and principles guide our community decision making.

E. Model what it means to move away from self-centeredness toward the public good.

BREAK (1 hour, 45 minutes to here)

Exercise: **Acting as an Elder of the Tribe guided imagery**

Ask participants to sit comfortably and to become aware of their in breath and out breath. The goal is to become aware of the pattern of your breath but not to change your pattern.

Tell them that as they quiet their mind, to recall a time with family, friends and/or colleagues where they have spoken with passion and clear sighted vision, voicing their opinion about the problems they see in the world about them.

Ask them to think of issues about which they have opinions for possible solutions. Even if they had been too timid or reluctant to voice their opinions and ideas in the past, ask them to imagine that they are now safe, in this container, able to express themselves clearly and with great confidence. Remind them that the other elders are looking forward to their story.

Tell them to focus their attention on their breathing and become aware of their energy, the buoyancy of feeling and the sense of courage that is available to you.

Slowly bring the meditators back from this exercise.

Ask them now to speak to the circle of elders sharing their passion one man at a time.
9. Creating a Vision for the Future

Handout # 22

10. Read Elder Journey committee definition of In Service.

11. Review of key areas covered in six modules in large group

Seven stages of Elder Journey:

One, The Awakening: “At some point there is an awakening to the call to become an Elder…It will be a call…to move on and/or change his [a man’s] his path…He will know it as an invitation to function without doing.”

Two, The Choice: “…if [an older man] has chosen to continue to grow and develop, he is ready to…realize the power of choosing consciously how he is to live the rest of his life.”

Three, The Struggle—Facing the Shadows of Old Age: “Our culture defines old age as a time of decline and disengagement. Choosing otherwise will sometimes feel like ‘swimming against a current’”.

Four, Resolution and Development of the Tools and Skills of Elderhood: “Participating in gatherings and activities of ‘The Elders’, storytelling, ceremony, and passing of family history and gifts of wisdom and blessing to the next generation are key parts of Elder activities in this time of life.”

Five, Acceptance and Being: “This is the turning point—the breakthrough. It is a time to enjoy the vibrancy of life, to stop worrying and come to each day with joy and the gift of another day.”

Six, In Service: “I am aware that, as an elder, my mission has changed. With my elder mission of service, I can live out my life with a sense of purpose and meaning.”

Seven, Passing it On and Passing On: “The elder has faced and lives with the absolute certainty of his approaching death. We also want to leave a legacy. This season is a time to share what we have acquired
with those who are ready to receive it.”


13. In large group, consider whether participants have or will declare themselves as an elder.

14. Remind them that as a legacy you might keep working on your story using the format of Life Review given in Module II.

15. Remind them to define what personal work they need to do in preparation for their elder journey.

(2 hr, 15 min. to here)

16. Silently observe the fire in the center of the room after explaining that claiming your place at the fire means living a life on purpose.

17. Now begins the work necessary to becoming more elder like: Creating a vision for your future, prepare for the end and consider your legacy and acting as a elder of the tribe.

18. Close: Stand in circle

   - Check out with a brief thought from each man
   - Youngest man put out the candle.
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Council

-To meet together as peers, confident that each participant is willing to share wisdom and vision.

-To meet together to consider what might be possible without competition, without the struggle for position, recognition or the last word.

-Council is a form of deliberation practiced historically by indigenous people including Buddhists and Native Americans.

-To meet in council implies meeting as men and women without title, rank or constituency.

-Council is a profound forum where each, in turn, speaks truthfully, from the heart and where each listens with unconditional regard and great attention to the speaker.

What one can expect of Council:

1. No one prepares a statement.
2. No one challenges any one else’s statement but, rather, makes “I” statements to enhance a point made by another.
3. Each person’s personal story is acknowledged, valued and urgently requested.
4. Each admits grief, ignorance, despair and a willingness to learn.
5. Each is naked and honest in his speech.
6. Each offers his wisdom as a harvesting of his long life experience and growing connection to other people and the earth.
7. Each allows himself to be enlightened and transformed by the others.
8. Council continues until consensus has been reached.

Council is energized by the recognition of a transpersonal power that both supports the council by its light and expresses itself through each council member.
Hopi elder speaks to other elders:

You have been telling the people that this is the 11th hour. Now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered………

Where are you living?
What are you doing?
   What are your relationships?
      Are you in right relation?
         Where is the water supply?

Know your garden.
   It is the time to speak your truth.
      Create your community.
         Be good to each other.
            And don’t look outside yourself for the leader!

He clasped his hands together, smiled, and said,
   “This could be a good time.”

At this time in history, he thought, we are to take nothing personally.
For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves!

Banish the word struggle from your hunt and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we’ve been waiting.

(Will Numkena is full-blooded Hopi elder. This is his Zuni chant to thank the Creator)
Elders

Celebrants:
Are persons who are a source of blessing, a natural resource that can empower others

They initiate others and affirm them through unconditional positive regard

Wisdomkeepers:
Are persons who put elderhood into action by sharing their impressions and beliefs and telling their story

Their work is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience

They share their long life experience by being accessible

Earthkeepers:
Are persons who are partners with Earth and who sense they are one with nature

They are stewards, partners of both man and Earth

Mentors:
Are persons who are stirred by cooperation and consensus and who enjoy the synergy of facilitator and facilitated in co-creation

They believe the role of older people is to facilitate creativity in the young

They believe that the patterns of the past don’t need to prevail and so they listen to youth
Definition of an Elder

An elder is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential, and whose life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to the future.

An elder is still in pursuit of happiness, joy and pleasure, and his birthright to these remains intact.

Moreover, an elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations.

Barry Barkin
The Live Oaks Project
Sobrante, California, 1995
Inner Elder Meditation

Many questions confront you as you make your way through the terrain of your life. In the external world, we find answers from reliable resources but within ourselves lies access to the collective unconscious. Just as we can access the child within, we can find our way to the elder within through meditation.

Our Inner Elder is the archetype of ourselves evolved over 120 years who resides beyond time and space, in the future as well as in the past. This part of ourselves has the ability to reassure us of what it knows from the future.

In meditation you can make an appointment to visit your Inner Elder who is already enlightened and who can inspire you with compassion and wisdom to carry on your struggle for self-knowledge. Establishing a permanent relationship with our Inner Elder can also provide us with guidance.

- Begin this exercise by finding a quiet place to sit, where you will not be disturbed. Follow your in breath and your out breath as you allow yourself to be calm and centered.

- Count slowly from your current age to 120—the biblical age of accomplished wisdom. While doing so, visualize your present self walking up a flight of stairs leading to a door. Imagine that you are able to climb with extreme ease.

**Very important to move slowly up the stairs**

- When you reach the door, knock on it. When it opens you will be greeted with a warm embrace by your spiritual self, your Inner Elder. Gaze into the Inner Elder’s eyes and feel unconditional love and reassurance about your progress in life.

- Next, ask your Inner Elder for guidance about an issue that has been of concern to you. After asking, remain in a state of receptivity, allowing an answer to imprint itself.
• When you receive your answer, rest in the silence for awhile. Now, look again into the eyes of your spiritual self and hear 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.”

• With confidence and gratitude, take leave of your Inner Elder. See yourself walking out the door, down the stairs and slowly returning to your point of departure—your present age.

• Sit quietly for a few moments, then open your eyes and return to consciousness. Know that you can establish a long term relationship with your Inner Elder by visiting when you need guidance.
New Warriors and Elder Warriors

Elders embrace the four energies of lover, warrior, magician and King in a different way than younger men:

a. Lover energy in the Eastern direction represents letting go, playfulness and spirituality.

b. Warrior energy in the South represents assertiveness, and a commitment to high values that guides the elder as an advocate for people and Earth.

c. Magician energy in the West represents celebrant and being in service.

d. Sovereign energy in the North represents the mentor and the celebration of life.

Contrast the Warrior energy of the young warrior, the Hero, with the old warrior energy of the Elder:

If the Hero: Rides grandly high on his white horse,

The Elder Warrior _____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

If the Hero seeks conquest and new horizons,

The Elder Warrior _____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

If the Hero wants control and competes for it,

The Elder Warrior _____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

If the Hero saves the down trodden and wields a sword,
If the Hero is energized by the drives of the libido and eros,

If the Hero is the teacher,

As you consider elder expression, what other ways might the elder show warrior energy?
Life Review: Part I

Our Lives As A Cycle of A Year

The process of life review begins with identifying the significant and life changing experiences at each phase of our lives. Note below both the highs and lows of each phase:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Season</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>0-7 years</td>
<td>Winter</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>8-14 years</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>15-21 years</td>
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<td>April</td>
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<td>Spring</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>29-35 years</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>36-42 years</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>43-48 years</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>49-56 years</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>57-64 years</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>65-72 years</td>
<td>Fall</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>73-80 years</td>
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<td>December</td>
<td>81-? Years</td>
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**Life Review: Part II**

Consider each life phase as and the contribution it was to your life:
- Who were the people that guided and influenced you?
- What did this phase contribute to your life?

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Here is a list of areas of focus for personal work. Prioritize the list. Indicate as first, second and third and so on on the areas that you most need to deal with. Add to the list the kinds of personal work you want to do that is not listed:

Life Review (to rediscover our gold memories and undone areas of personal work)

Confronting mortality

Coping with the cultural bias toward aging

Defining our legacy

Addiction recovery

Healing relationship issues

Developing confidence in our wisdom

Determining if and how I will serve

Attempting intergenerational dialogue with the young

Becoming a source of blessing

Healing Earth

Increasing our personal accessibility

Confronting and honoring our shadow

Forgiving those who have harmed us
Life completion activities including writing a will, describing our day of death and writing advanced medical directives

Balancing within our soul and psyche both the energy of the masculine and the feminine

Taking care of our bodies including diet, exercise and stress management

What would you add?
Approaching Elderhood

Images of Aging

As you read each question, consider what comes to mind first and what arises emotionally as you continue to contemplate the question.

What are your feelings about aging?

What do you look forward to as you grow older?

What do you fear?

What negative images of aging have you internalized?
## Severe Teachers Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Their Action</th>
<th>Benefit of Their Action</th>
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Forgiveness Prayer

Eternal Friend,

Witness that I forgive anyone who hurt, upset or offended me,
Damaging my body, my property, my reputation or people I love;
Whether by accident or willfully, carelessly or purposely;
With words, deeds, thoughts or attitudes;
In this lifetime or another carnation.

I forgive every person.

May no one be punished because of me.

Help me eternal friend,

To keep from offending.
Help me to be thoughtful and not commit outrage,
By doing what does not nurture my soul.

Whatever errors I have committed,

Blot out, please, in Your abundant kindness,
And spare me suffering or harmful illnesses.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart
Be found to be a source of love.

Thank you Eternal Friend, who walks with me and frees me.

AMEN
Healing a Painful Memory

This is a guided meditation. Ask participants to sit comfortably and to become aware of their in breath and out breath. The goal is to become aware of the pattern of your breath but not to change your pattern.

Tell them that as they quiet their mind, to reach into their past and return to a time of emotional turmoil and pain. They shouldn’t resist the memory but but make contact with their young self. When this younger self was hurt they might have felt alone, misunderstood or angry.

Ask them how it looked, to view the environment that they were in and to open their senses to the scene.

Say, “Let your present self reach back with reassurance and hold your anxious, younger self in your arms. Visualize this embrace as the mature self speaks to the younger self and says: I come with assurance from the future. You are going to make it. You lived through this difficulty, healed from it and you learned important lessons that grew into wisdom. You acted courageously, and in the end everything worked out well. Be at peace. Even though it seems impossible now, unforeseen blessings will result from your present course of action.

Ask what else might they want to say to their younger selves?

Say, “Still feeling the embrace of your present self, leg go of the cramp around the pain. Reach into the pain, hugging, consoling and finally sanctifying it. Offer this pain as a sacrifice along the path of your elder journey, knowing that this, too, shall pass and will be a blessing for your future.
As you let go the burden of the past, focus your attention on your breathing and become aware of the increased energy, the buoyancy of feeling and the sense of courage that are now available to you. Breath in a sense of well-being and give thanks for having rescued and harvested a holy spark of your life.”
Slowly bring the mediators back from this exercise. Tell them to journal about their experience, write a poem or play some music.

**Mentoring**

The mentoring relationship results from mutual consent to the mentor-mentee relationship.

Mentoring, unlike teaching, is a process of being present for another offering support and holding a container of energy for the other.

A mentor follows-up, provides feedback and asks about the outcome of ventures the mentee may take on.

The sincere mentoring interaction contains enthusiasm and an expression of genuine mutual interest.

Information may be shared that assists the mentee in adjusting to a new environment, employment market or social milieu but the mentor is primarily a listener.

The give and take communication should include give and take by both mentor and mentee.

Mentoring occurs over an extended period of time. A one-time encounter is not mentoring but rather allows for an assessment of the potential of a mentoring relationship.

Answering no to any of these questions suggests one is not ready for a mentoring relationship:

1. Do I possess insight that might benefit someone else?
2. Am I willing to share myself?
3. Can I consistently follow-up with this person?
4. Is this the kind of interaction I am looking for?
5. Do I have something in common with this person?

6. Do I have enough time to do a good job?

**Sharing Wisdom**

Consider your behavior if you were to be approached by someone younger seeking your wisdom.

Share your sense of responsibility. Consider these issues:

1. Contrast offering interpretations and meanings to simply raising questions. Does the one seeking your wisdom really want advice?

2. Do you feel you should share your version of the truth concerning concepts the young person brings up?

3. How have you made yourself accessible to the person?

4. What is the difference between a teacher and a mentor?

5. Describe how you would hope the interchange would look:

   Consider: - Affirmation
   - Listening
   - How it would look with strangers vs. our children

6. What is wisdom?
Accessing the Lover Within

In *The Lover Within*, Moore and Gillette suggest these methods:

- Schedule into each day at least one activity that means “play” to you
- Seek to experience the world around you through your senses rather than your intellect
- Try accessing the artist within through song, playing an instrument, drawing, gardening, etc.
- Dance!
- Develop your capacities for being in mystical experience through visits to sacred places or being apart of spiritual experiences
- Plan out ways of doing the Lover’s work in the world by becoming more active in causes or projects that express love and appreciation for other people, other species or for the environment as a whole.
Blessing consists of:

a. Meaningful touch
b. Spoken word
c. An attachment of high value to the other
d. Picturing for the other a special future
e. Eye to eye contact with the blessed one
A Perfect Heart

By

William A. Dare

A handsome young man was blessed with a perfect heart. His heart was so perfect in form and function all were amazed who saw it. The young man grew so proud of his perfect heart he showed it to everyone he met.

On a journey one day he showed it to an old man who marveled at its perfection but didn’t see much beauty in it. The young man asked to see the old man’s heart to better understand the difference. The old man showed the young man his powerfully beating heart but it was a mass of misshapen pieces and patches. There were many different shades and shapes comprising the old man’s heart.

The old man shared with the young man how he too had once had a perfect heart but met another whose heart was missing love. He gave them a piece of love from his heart in exchange for a piece of loneliness. The patch grew strong. While his heart was no longer perfect, the heart beat with even more love than before.

The old man said this was true when exchanging happiness for sadness, gladness for grief, healing for pain, joy for anger, forgiveness for shame, and so on. He explained how with each exchange his heart grew even stronger in whatever he shared.

The young man looked at this perfect heart and then at the old man’s strong rainbow colored heart of many patches. He asked the old man if he needed anything in his heart he didn’t already have. The old man smiled and thanked the young man for asking. Then he indicated his heart pained him slightly in one spot and a bit of youthful pride might be a good trade.

So the old man took yet another piece of his heart and exchanged it with a piece from the young man’s heart. When the young man received the piece of pain from the old man’s heart he hardly felt a twinge. His heart beat ever stronger and began healing the patch immediately. As his wound healed the young man realized the power of the old man’s love growing in his heart and his pride began to fade.

The young man slowly began to understand the difference between what he had thought beauty was and the true beauty he had received. He thanked the old man as they parted. The old man seemed to stand a bit taller and walked away with a livelier step. As the old man turned to wave a farewell from the hilltop, the young man felt his heart surge with renewed strength and joy. The young man turned and continued his journey. He now knew what he must do.
Service Inventory

In preparation for service, let’s do a personal inventory journal on these questions:

1. Does an elder serve others? __________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

2. Am I inclined to contribute to others my time, ideas and energy? __________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

3. What does service look like? __________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

4. If I have served others professionally, can I rest in the second half of life? __________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

5. If I choose not to be in service can I do so without feeling guilt? __________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
Checklist For Creating Peace of Mind

- My living will is located________________________
- My will is located_____________________________
- Copies of my will have been given
to______________________________________________
- My insurance policies are located at____________________
- My safe deposit box and keys are stored____________________
- My funeral wishes have been given to____________________
- My burial plan includes________________________________
- I want the following on my epitaph__________________________________________________________
- Who do I wish will arrange Kadish/Mass or other prayer service at my transition?____________________
- Who do I want to care for me if I am incapacitated?______________
- What might be left undone?________________________________________________________
Creating a Vision for the Future

Imagine that you are approaching your 95th birthday celebration. Before the event, you decide to take stock of your accomplishments since you first considered the idea of elderhood.

**Journal** on these questions:

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

- In your personal life
- In your family
- In the community
- In the planet

**In Dyads:** Now, looking forward from this time of your life what might be some things that you would do in the next couple of years that would move you in that direction?

- What groups or individuals would you work with in achieving these outcomes?
- What would you do to add joy and excitement to these years?
- What could you do within the next month to get started toward your desired outcomes?
Rumi, Poem on Aging

Why does a date-palm lose its leaves in autumn?
Why does every beautiful face grow in old age
Wrinkled like the back of a Libyan lizard?
Why does a full head of hair get bald?
Why is the tall, straight figure
That divided the ranks like a spear
Now bent almost double?
Is it that the
Lion strength weakens to nothing?
The wrestler who could hold anyone down
Is led out with two people supporting him,
Their shoulders under his arms?
God answers,
“They put on borrowed robes
And pretended they were theirs.
I take the beautiful clothes back,
So that you will learn the robe
Of appearance is only a loan.”
Your lamp was lit from another lamp.
All God wants is your gratitude for that.

(For Rumi, it is not aging that is loss. On the contrary, life itself is loss, a nostalgia for our origin from which we find ourselves separated.)

Reading List: Elderhood


