

Response 1 - What Is My Relationship To Aging

Ugh! While I know this aging thing is happening more in the present moment than in the future I do not want to write on this topic. That was thought #1. Then I had thought #2- What are the alternatives to not looking at this? And what are the benefits?

So the alternative to old age is obvious (death) - AND having been given this “ one wild and precious life” as Mary Oliver says, is a privilege that is not granted to all. What will I do with this life? NOTHING will escape old age, sickness and death. I see this is clearly the agreement that my soul made with choosing to come into a body. SO I figure that thought #1 (remember thought number 1 was UGH) Well that is negated quite naturally.

I also have some experience in this realm of aging. Being in this 68 yo body and having watched it SLOWLY BECOME 68 I now have the choice about how I look at and accept the natural aging process that all things go through. Buddhist psychology teaches that starting meditation training with a reflection on death helps us to really have a clear understanding so we can embrace the present moment of life that is right here right now. It teaches that until one completely accepts that this is the inevitable journey of a body, one will never truly live. There is always some form of denial present. As if this dyeing part of life will pass by me. That this is something that happens to other bodies but not this one. How does acting like it will not happen to me allow me to TRULY LIVE THIS ONE WILD AND PRECIOUS LIFE?

So same thing with aging. Now this part is in no way helped by the culture we live in. Youth and beauty are the standard. Put those “ old bodies” that are not as pleasant to look at away in a home where “ we the living” don’t have to be reminded. Complete industries built around keeping us thinking that just like death, we may be able to cheat aging as well. So how am I dealing with this? Some days are good and some days not great at all. Especially since I am 4 1/2 years older than my husband. When we decided to marry I was training for high level triathlons and had a very strong and fit body. I was also 29 years old. I

am still relatively strong and fit for a 68 YO body. Yet the reality of this aging now looks like this.

This past November with a very shocked and bewildered look on my face I received the news that I needed a cardiac stent, for what turned out to be a 99% blockage of the main artery. Then, following that, for the past 3 months I have been dealing with excruciating pain from sciatica that may require back surgery. When we met, my husband and I competed in triathlons, we skied, windsurfed, and did all sorts of physical things. I was a PE teacher and the last 15 years of my career was spent climbing trees, poles, rock walls, and traversing wires at height, while I trained and taught a high ropes adventure course at the HS I retired from 5 years ago.

My first year of retirement was still spent on the physical realm. In November of that year I went out to Death Valley California to take part in a 12 days rights of passage vision quest. There were 10 of us seekers and 3 guides. I was the oldest (most ranged in age from 23 to 52) except for the 70 yo head guide. All we had with us was what we had in the pack on our back. There was a year of preparation at home prior to our meeting, and an initial ceremony that symbolized a giving up of the self and life we left behind called severance, a willingness to be open to the vision of what may come now through this quest (transition), and a knowing as we stepped back into our lives with a more clear understanding of how we would contribute to the earth community (integration). 3 days of the 12 included a solo experience, where each of us found our place away from camp and each other with no shelter, no food, just water. You see a lot about life when you are stripped of the basics and just spend time with the earth. You see a lot about yourself as well. This body at that time was 62 years young, and what I learned on the final solo night was that I was an elder. A term I did NOT want to receive or embrace and yet one I knew deep down was true.

So aging is the teacher for each of us. Aging for me is huge right now as I walk through the ashes of betrayal. Last year I made the decision to stop east coast skiing. While I am still usually a very able bodied person, I am seeing the slowing down, especially as

compared to my 30 and 26 yo children. Yet both of them have shown a reverence for me just being out there, even if it means taking it slower and maybe a bit less intense than they can do on their own. My husband on the other hand seems to be going in the other direction. WANTING TO SKI MORE - NOT SLOWING DOWN, trying to PROVE THAT HE CAN AT SOME LEVEL KEEP UP WITH THE KIDS and maybe at a deeper level cheat aging. This has not helped our relationship and while I used to joke that I was marrying a younger man because most men die earlier than women, now this thinking gives me pause. I recently read a quote that said “you are never given a wrong person in your life - every person comes into your life to teach you more about yourself”. And so it is!

When my head is in a good place I believe I have this amazing body that has limits. I do my best to remember that it is the sacred vehicle that allows me to experience life in so many incredible ways. However I do know this about myself. I am attracted to youthful athletic bodies performing their craft in a way that looks effortless. There is a poetic form of art that I find delightful in watching bodies at the top of their sport, move with a grace that I once had in a tiny way. I know this is what attracted me to Physical Education. The joy in watching kids master their mind body in a way they never believed possible.

So where this leaves me is with myself. I can still walk, swim, snowshoe, cross country ski, hike , sail and be very active. When I forget self care (which for me means the monitoring of my thoughts) I can spiral into the darkness of despair. So I do my best to be as mindful as possible. To bring awareness to every thought. I am careful to limit social media. I read what fills my mind with relevant and positive influences, since I know the influences from the culture can make me feel like I'm not enough. There are wise spaces especially in indigenous cultures where the elders are honored above the youth. The knowledge, traditions, medicine, wisdom that is part of their bodies is held up as sacred. Maybe this is not the case in my culture but that does not have to stop me from seeking out practices that support what my mind knows is truth.

SO while I will freely admit that I am in a constant boxing matching with myself,

I make a choice EVERY day to see what I do have and not what I have lost, what I have gained in the lived experience of years, versus the ignorance and arrogance that I once possessed when living in a more youthful body. I do my very best to take care of the 68 year old me knowing that in a short time she will leave and become 69 and eventually cease to be here at all. I try not to fight this reality because what I have come to know is that the true essence of who I am has nothing to do with the body and how it looks. It has to do with the energy that shines through the eyes. The energy that is connected to creation.