

Human Values in Aging Newsletter  
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IN THIS ISSUE

- Remembering Bob Atchley
- Aging: Darkness or Light?
- Embracing the Tao Is Enough
- The Shadow of Age
- The Way of Silence
- Books of Interest
- Web Sites to See
- Coming Events
- The Energies of Love

XX

REMEMBERING BOB ATCHLEY

When news comes of the death of a friend, it always seems impossible, and so it was when Sheila Atchley sent me news that Bob died on Nov. 13, 2018, here in Boulder.

Just the day before we had planned for Bob to be at our local Positive Aging lunch group to share experiences from the recent Sage-ing Conference in Minneapolis, where Bob entertained us with his guitar and his songs. Hearing him at that time brought me back to the time a few years ago when I took his singer-song-writer workshop and to the time, 20 years ago, when Bob, Sheila and I led a Conscious Aging week at Omega. Bob directed the Gerontology Program at Naropa University, and, before that, he chaired the Gerontology Program at Miami University in Ohio, where he had spent most of his career. But his academic work was something he left in retirement, to pursue the music that inspired him and us so deeply.

Many knew Bob through his writings. His textbook in gerontology, Social Forces and Aging, went into 10 editions, and brought generations of students into the field. Bob was a towering intellectual presence, as President of the American Society on Aging and co-editor of the Encyclopedia of Aging. Those who did not know him personally recognized him as the most distinguished sociologist of retirement. Others who knew him

more intimately understood that his last book, Spirituality and Aging (Johns Hopkins University Press) expressed what was deepest in him: his longstanding engagement with Eastern wisdom and with the Quaker movement. Sage-ing International, the organization inspired by Reb Zalman Schachter, with whom Bob was so close, celebrated Bob as one of their "Honored Elders," as indeed he was to so many around the world, whether they knew him personally or not.

About Bob's passing, I can only find words from the great sage Ramana Maharshi, who spoke from the Vedantic tradition that nourished Bob for so many years:

"Find wherefrom thoughts emerge. Then you will abide in the ever-present inmost Self and be free from the idea of birth or the fear of death...

The question 'Who am I?' is not really meant to get an answer, the question 'Who am I?' is meant to dissolve the questioner."

On Bob's CDs you can hear songs like "Time Goes Too Fast" and "Pay Close Attention," and the titles give us a message from his passing. The day before he died Bob spoke about his current medical crisis and said it "makes me more aware of the blessing that is life. As I say in my song, The Source, 'an amazing wonder, this life that burns within me, it is the Source, the Source of what's to come.'" The sudden shock of losing him reminds us all of a message from the Psalms: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

But I prefer to remember the words of a song from Bob's childhood, whose words, Bob said many times, echoed down through all his 80 years:

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

Your light still shines for us, Bob.

For more on Bob and his music, visit:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12492&F=T>

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AGING: DARKNESS OR LIGHT?

"Is aging a way to the darkness or a way to the light?  
It is not given to anyone to make a final judgment,

since the answer can only be brought forth from the center of our being... What seems the most frightening period of life, marked by excommunication and rejection, might turn into the most joyful opportunity to tell our community top to bottom."

-Henri J. Nouwen and Walter J. Gaffney

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## EMBRACING THE TAO IS ENOUGH

Embracing the Tao  
we do not fear fading away.  
The more we age,  
the brighter we become.  
We become humble  
and find we are honored.  
We stop meddling in the lives of others,  
and find that our influence increases.  
We forget about ourselves,  
and are remembered by all.

From William Martin, *The Sage's Tao Te Ching: Ancient Advice for the Second Half of Life*, New York: Marlow & Company, 2000.

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## THE SHADOW OF AGE

Edwin Edinger discusses the case of one of his therapy patients, a woman in her fifties who had lost some of the energy of youth but was unable to accept the challenges of the second half of life. After two years of therapy she had dreams about long trips or ocean journeys to unfamiliar places. Then she had the following dream:

"Eclipse"

She and her sister were returning to the town in which she had spent her childhood. They knew they were on the right road but abruptly it came to an end in a field. Down the hill and to the left she recognized her home town. As she went downhill, the sky darkened until it seemed to be night, although it was only nine-thirty in the morning. The dreamer was terribly

frightened but attempted to reassure herself by saying, 'It must be an eclipse; it will pass. I will hold on and not be afraid.'

"Eclipse" is a dream about another journey to an unfamiliar place: namely the town of the dreamer's childhood, the place of youth, the first half of life. The dreamer is carrying into the second half of life the same attitude she had previously, so she is convinced she is "on the right road." As Jung puts it, "The nearer we approach to the middle of life, and the better we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal attitudes and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right ideals and principles of behaviour."

But this confidence in the dreamer is abruptly shattered. As in other dreams of turning inward, there is a characteristic "darkening." In this case, the darkening happens as the dreamer goes "downhill," which represents her attitude toward the second half of life. The message is that there can be no return to childhood in any conventional sense. The dreamer is naturally frightened by this darkness and so she explains it as an eclipse, which is both a physical explanation of the darkness and a resistance to the psychological message of the dream as intimation of age.

For more on dreams of this kind, see *Dreams for the Second Half of Life*, at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12493&F=T>

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#### THE WAY OF SILENCE

Three monks decided to spend the night together in silent retreat. After a time, their candle went out, and one monk said, "Our candle has gone out." The second monk said, "We weren't supposed to talk." Then the third monk said, "I'm the only one who hasn't talked."

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#### BOOKS OF INTEREST

THE GRACE IN AGING: Awaken as You Grow Older, by Kathleen Dowling Singh (Wisdom Publications, 2014).

THE AGING OF AQUARIUS: Igniting Passion and Purpose as an Elder, by Helen Wilkes (New Society, 2018)

AGELESS SOUL: The Lifelong Journey Toward Meaning and Joy,  
by Thomas Moore (St. Martin's Press, 2017)

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#### WEB SITES TO SEE

TRUE LONGEVITY. One of the most inspirational films you'll ever see: "The Lady In Number 6: Music Saved My Life" which profiles 109-year old Alice Herz Sommers, the world's oldest Holocaust survivor.

The film won an Academy Award in 2014: don't miss it. Trailer at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12494&F=T>

AGING: THE CULTURAL TURN. See "The Challenge of Cultural Gerontology" at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12495&F=T>

CONTEMPLATIVE AGING. See "A Contemplative Inquiry About Aging" inspired by a Buddhist perspective, at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12496&F=T>

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#### COMING EVENTS

CONSCIOUS AGING: "Spirituality and Conscious Aging: Finding Meaning and Purpose in Our Retirement Years" (Dec. 7, 2018, Danville, CA)

Details at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12497&F=T>

LIVING AND DYING: "No Regrets - Living Well and Dying Well" (Dec. 8, 2018, Birmingham, AL) A Sage-ing International "Beyond-the-Basics" Event at 2305 Montevallo Road, Shades Valley Presbyterian Church. Details at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12498&F=T>

LONGEVITY: Washington Innovation in Longevity Summit (Dec. 10 -11, 2018, Washington, DC). Wellness, cognitive fitness, and many aspects of positive aging and the marketplace are featured at this event. Details at:

<https://mailer.luxsci.com/link.php?M=19981157&N=8846&L=12499&F=T>

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"The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on

