



RON PEVNY: CONSCIOUS ELDERING-TRANSITIONS IN AGING

Ron Pevny is an author, elder retreat leader, workshop facilitator educator and director for Center for Conscious Eldering, in America. Pevny is considered a leading pioneer of conscious aging transitions, especially in transformations of older people experiences associated with productive aging.

In this new paradigm of consciously aging Pevny shares this field with many others including Carol Osborn, Ashton Applewhite, Bob Atchley, Tom Pinkson, Harry R Moody, Ram Dass, Rabbi Zelman Cowan and others. This transition process provides golden opportunities for older people to move beyond merely chronological or medical approaches to aging. Pevny suggests that people over fifty-five in human development terms are highly likely to face changes in relationships, meet health challenges, and refocus their purpose in life. Apart from retreats, public awareness-raising, Pevny offers a digital newsletter free to subscribers. An extract outlining conscious eldering titled “Transitions in Aging,” featured the center’s Autumn-November 2019 e-newsletter follows.

—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

RON PEVNY: DOING, BEING, SAVOURING - CONSCIOUS ELDERING

FINDING A BALANCE AS CONSCIOUS ELDERS

“There is a common theme echoed by nearly all those I know who feel called to conscious Eldering: the need to be of service to something larger than themselves and to use their gifts, skills, and wisdom developed over many decades to make a real difference in this world. These are people who believe they have a lot of legacy-building yet to do, and they are committed to finding ways to do it. **At the same time, realizing the unique opportunity of their elderhood, they want to honor their inner call to a quieter, less goal-oriented way of life where emotional growth and spiritual deepening are priorities.**

They want to savor life, focusing more on being and less on doing. Learning how to understand doing and being, and what it means to balance these, is a critical task for those seeking to age consciously.

It is natural for the earlier stages of our lives to be heavily focused on doing. We learn much about who we are and what we are capable of by acting in this world. It is through doing that we develop a strong, effective ego and use that ego in service to our career, relationships, and sense of fulfillment.



At the same time we also learn much about how others expect us to be. Most of us have internalized these expectations, having learned how to act effectively in the world but losing much awareness of our authentic uniqueness in the process. One of the significant shifts that occurs as we enter life's later chapters and become increasingly aware of our mortality is an inner call (sometimes heard, sometimes not) to focus on discovering who we are as unique beings.

And with this awareness to find how we can best express those gifts (**which I call signature or soul gifts**) that our authentic inner voice tells us need expression if we are to find fulfillment in our elderhood. Aging provides an opportunity to choose the kind of person we will be, and to have that define us more than what we will do. This redefinition of ourselves becomes especially important as we experience the inevitable declines of ability and energy that aging brings.

Seeking balance between serving and savoring, doing and being, conscious elders become increasingly able to have the doing we choose to engage in be in service to our deepest callings rather than to the needs of our egos. This seeming dichotomy between doing and being is often spoken of when the subject of conscious aging comes up. It is commonly presented as a dichotomy between doing or not doing, activity or non-activity, which I see as mistaken. Non-activity does not necessarily equate to truly being, to truly savoring life's precious moments.

It is as easy to go numb, to live unconsciously, when we are not doing as when we are heavily engaged in being active. **The key is cultivating conscious awareness of what brings us truly alive, of what helps us be fully present in each moment, and what does not. Conscious Eldering is a commitment to doing all we can to foster such aliveness.**

In an interview I did with the late Bob Atchley, that wise elder and pioneering voice for conscious aging, who wrote the inspiring book *Spirituality and Aging*, Bob said: "You hear a lot of people saying, 'What I want to do is cut back on the doing so I can really enjoy the being.' And I think that doesn't sit too well with my experience. My experience is that I have had to learn how to be-while-doing.

That means to have one foot in the part of me that is connected to my deepest spirituality and one foot in the practicalities of whatever it is that I'm engaged in at that moment in the world....



As you move in the direction of connecting up with the witness consciousness, with real presence, which is the essence of true spirituality, you're moving in the direction of being while you're in the act of doing things. And to the extent that you're doing that, you're growing into the role of the true Elder, the Wisdom Keeper so needed in today's world." **In my own conscious Eldering, I am facing a challenge that confronts many people who recognize the importance of their contributions as elders to a world urgently needing their gifts.**

I am passionately committed to having my Center for Conscious Eldering be a significant force for transformation. I am also very aware of a strong tendency in me to approach my work at the age of seventy-one in the same driven way I approached projects when in my thirties, forties, and even fifties. There were many times back then when I lost touch with my joy and inner balance as I pushed ahead.

For that time in my midlife adulthood, such an approach may have been totally appropriate. I needed to learn to push beyond my perceived limits and learn something critical about my drive and passion. That was a time of building a strong, effective ego that could succeed in the world.

Now my growth requires something else. It requires learning to allow my soul and its energies to work through my personality as I give my best to my calling, rather than believing that my personality self has to do it all. I see that I am most effective when I am living and working from my wholeness, balancing the needs of my body, mind, emotions, relationships, and spirit. When I allow myself to get out of balance, my work begins to feel not like my calling but like a big de-energizing "should," and my well being suffers.



Conscious elders are not martyrs. Older people who become martyrs are not acting with consciousness. When our call to service becomes a "should" or an exercise in ego rather than a balanced out flowing from our whole selves, we run the risk of having our work be compromised by our imbalances, and of burning ourselves out physically and emotionally.

Imbalanced people produce imbalanced results, even when their intentions are noble. As I recognize my changing needs at this stage of my life, this means that I may quantitatively accomplish less with my organization than I might prefer.



But paradoxically, I believe that what I do accomplish will have a greater impact than would be the case if I pushed myself to do more, because I am aligning my actions with the power of that essence in me that is wiser than my personality self. I am gradually learning to infuse my doing with being.

Service to others as a conscious elder is not defined by how big or visible our actions are. Rather, it is defined by the intention to serve others, presence, self awareness and love—those qualities of Being—that we bring to whatever we feel the need to do. That doing may be volunteer work, working for an income, an avocation, social activism, grand parenting, or spending special time serving as mentor to a young person. Valuable service may not even look like doing, such as engaging in practices to raise the quality of the energy we emanate into the collective by deepening our spiritual life.

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Conscious elderhood is about committing to have our lives, whether we are engaged in outer doing or not, be lived with authenticity. There will be times when we feel called to be outwardly active.



And times when deepening our inner lives and savoring these precious days of life's elder chapters are in the forefront. The key is finding the balance that is right for us, a balance that will change as we move deeper into our elderhood, a balance that we can gauge by how alive we feel in both our inner and outer lives.



Suggested resources:

Autumn Conscious Eldering Inspiration and Resources

<https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Autumn-Conscious-Eldering-Inspiration-and-Resources.html?soid=1105280230787&aid=SdjcvGviBn8>

<https://www.centerforconsciouseldering.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Books-that-Supportv-Conscious-Aging.pdf>

Book: Conscious Living-Conscious Aging, Ron Pevny

<https://www.centerforconsciouseldering.com/2016/04/15/conscious-living-conscious-aging/>

<https://www.bookdepository.com/Conscious-Living-Conscious-Aging-Embrace-Savor-Your-Next-Chapter-Ron-Pevny/9781582704388?ref=grid-view&qid=1>

Bob Atchley: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhcLQo6HZUw>

Tom Pinkson: <http://drtompinkson.com/about-a-new-vision-of-living/>

Ashton Applewhite: https://www.ted.com/talks/ashton_applewhite_let_s_end_ageism

