

Spiritual Eldering®—A New Look at Growing Older  
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As we approach “senior” status, we may be brought up short, thinking of our future. We suspect it will be different from our lives to this time, but different how? Common wisdom suggests a decline in both physical and mental capacities, and clearly seniors face some age-related changes. However, more recent information suggests that one’s senior years can also be a time of growth and development, of living productively and compassionately.

One such positive model of aging is Spiritual Eldering®, as developed by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in his book From Age-ing to Sage-ing (Warner Books, 1995). Reb Zalman holds that we all have the potential for fulfilling elder years, but first we may need to free ourselves from resentments or angry feelings over past events by doing forgiveness work. We also may need to deal with fear of the future and come to terms with our own mortality. Only then will we be able to pursue our elder years with an open heart.

Loosely speaking, a Spiritual Elder is one who has transitioned from full-time involvement in career or child rearing to a new phase of life that has a balance of caring for self and others. A Spiritual Elder is likely to spend much of his or her time in service to others, in spiritual pursuits, in new learning activities and in life review. She or he may pursue new (or old) passions, such as art, music, reading, or gardening. Connections and repairing relationships with family and friends attain new significance at this time. Mental and physical health benefit from these activities.

Gary first encountered Spiritual Eldering® as he was approaching retirement seven years ago. It provided a roadmap to his future that was positive and productive. Thinking about his mortality, Gary began working as a hospice volunteer, a pursuit he finds highly satisfying. Rounding out his service work are volunteer activities related to wildlife (Rio Grande Nature Center) and computers (North Valley Library). Gary also pursues his passion as a studio potter, and conducts workshops and seminars on Spiritual Eldering®. He is active in the men’s movement and participates in couple’s groups with his wife Charlotte. He sees this time of life as the most exciting and fulfilling yet!

Elizabeth enjoys Spiritual Eldering® as a path to balancing positive psychology and spirituality of aging. As a counselor who encourages adults and elders to take their stories and wishes seriously, she appreciates the helpful ideas and exercises that the program offers. Participants of Spiritual Eldering® groups offered by Elizabeth and Sandy Giles review and celebrate their lives while placing attention on planting new seeds for late life blooms. Elizabeth uses her private time for meditating, journaling, walking, playing and reviewing relationships. She deeply appreciates Reb Zalman’s saying that a life lived well benefits everyone.

For information on upcoming Spiritual Eldering® activities, Gary can be reached at 897-1850 and Elizabeth at 243-2551.