

Survey on Aging

A few months ago I sent out a survey to around twenty-five members who were over 60 years old. Two of the questions I asked were:

What is most difficult for you about getting older?

What helps you the most in spite of the difficulties?

You may be nowhere near 60, but regardless of how old you are—even if you're in your thirties—you still may have to deal with some of the difficulties in getting older. So please reflect on this first question for a minute or so before continuing: What is most difficult for you about getting older?

Here are some of the responses I received. Many of them I reworded or combined. As you read these you can reflect if you may have some of the same thoughts or feelings.

- Physical pain and the fear that it will only get worse.
- Dealing with diminishing physical abilities, including less energy, stamina, and flexibility. Often accompanied by the thought: "It's not supposed to be this way."
- Declining cognitive abilities. Even not remembering names can trigger the fear that this is the beginning of the end.
- Loneliness, and the fear of becoming dependent with no one to help.
- The fear of facing a painful and isolated death.
- Accelerated rate of losing the people you care about and



February Sesshin Enrollment is still open for the three-day February sesshin (Feb 16–19). This sesshin will be focused on the training of three essential practices: Hara practice, the koan "What is this?", and the practice of loving-kindness. The practices will be presented consecutively, and each will be given equal time. All applicants must attend the full three days.

April Sesshin February 3 is the first day of enrollment for the five-day April sesshin (April 3–8). If you can't attend the whole sesshin you can apply for the first or last three days.

Planning for 2018 The 2018 sesshin [schedule](#) is now out. The teachers strongly encourage everyone to look at the schedule and plan in advance which sesshins you would like to attend. The idea is you would then not allow other activities to interfere with your sesshin attendance.

The same is true for the 2018 Practice Period. The dates are September 15–October 13. If you wish to participate in the full Practice Period, note the dates and please don't schedule any trips or activities during that month that would interfere.

New Board Members The 2018 Board members are the following:
Moniza Brozio
June Cressy
Shayna Kaufman

watching them struggle with pain.

- Dealing with the image of my body. Looking old. No longer having the culturally valued assets of being youthful, energetic, and attractive. Our aging body can invoke sadness and grief.
- Loss of sex drive. Again, this can invoke grief.
- Feeling unimportant, marginalized; that my life won't make a difference or have meaning.
- Coming to grips with regrets of both what we've done and what we haven't done.
- Being reminded by small and large things throughout every day that I'm different now than I once was, and not for the better. The grief that I will never get my old life back.
- The resistance to regarding myself as older. We can have this even when we're forty or fifty.
- The sense that the world is changing so fast that we don't understand it or relate to it in the same way we used to; the anxiety of uncertainty.

*

The second question was: What has helped the most in spite of the difficulties?

Please reflect on this question for a minute and see what comes up for you.

Here are some of the responses that I received.

- Being of service and doing something of value; being involved with organizations and activities—something larger than myself—that also connects me to other people.
- Being present, which has the effect of making me more authentically “with” people when I'm with them, and more

Bob Posert
Jodi Reed
Steve Schroeter
Kate Watson

Announcements

Sesshin Application

Click [here](#) to see this newsletter online.

“What makes aging difficult? What helps me the most?”

content to be alone.

- Connection with myself by simply pausing—slowing down and experiencing breath, body, and environment.
- Awareness of the simple vibrancy of Just Being, and the realization that this awareness is enough.
- Not taking things for granted—appreciating life, family, friends, nature, going for a walk.
- Loving relationships. Love makes life meaningful. It is more fulfilling to love someone than to receive love. (Please note that this does not just apply to couples, but to whomever we love.)
- Meditation helps me to see through negative and disabling thoughts and beliefs, to see that they're not all true.
- Reflecting on aging as part of the natural order of things seems to have given me acceptance.
- Seeing others in much worse condition has given me both compassion and gratitude.
- Reminding myself that life doesn't have to be the way I want it to be for me to be happy.
- Doing what I really enjoy (rather than what others say I should do).
- Finding things to distract me when times are too difficult. Having a sense of humor helps.
- Perseverance.

*

A large part of my practice revolves around these two questions:

“What makes aging difficult?” and “What helps me the most?”

I've finished writing my new book, *Aging for Beginners*, and it has helped me immensely in clarifying the answers and giving me a new perspective—seeing with new eyes. Probably knowing that I don't have endless time—not as an intellectual understanding, but as a visceral taste—has helped me the most in seeing more clearly. It has also helped me in adjusting my priorities. At the very least it helps me remember that none of us

knows what's right around the corner. And when I remember this I'm much less likely to take people and things for granted.

Ezra Bayda

[Zen Center San Diego](http://zencentersandiego.org)
zencentersandiego.org