

# Transforming Your Journey of Aging™

## Creating the Legacy of Our Elder Chapters

### Module Five

**[0:00:00]**

Chogyop:

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Transforming Your Journey of Aging Module 5, "Creating the Legacy of Our Elder Chapters," with Ron Pevny. This is your host Chogyop at The Shift Network.

Just a couple of reminders: For those of you that have dialed into MaestroConference, you can press 5 on your keypad at any time if you have technical issues or questions, and someone will assist you. For those of you on the webcast, please type any questions or technical issues directly into the message box, and be sure to include your email address so we can reply to you by email.

That is it for announcements before we get started. Ron, I'd like to welcome you and let's get started.

Ron:

Thank you, Chogyop. Hello, conscious elders and elders in training. Our focuses tonight are going to be legacy and purpose. I'm delighted to be with you again this week.

Let's begin our time together by taking a minute to become as fully present as we can to this experience. Take a few deep breaths. Let go of any cares and concerns that you've been carrying. I invite you to focus on your heart.

Feel the love for yourself that fills your being with warmth and peace when your heart is open. Feel your love for the precious opportunity to experience, to learn, to grow, and to serve that is your life. Feel your love for all those beings, human and nonhuman, with whom you share this journey called life. Feel your love for the planet that we celebrate today, Earth Day. Remember that this love is your essence and sharing it is your deepest calling for this journey.

Now, as we've been doing at the beginning of each session, in your mind's eye, see a large circle of all of us in this course, all present and passionate about coming alive as we grow into the fullness of that precious life stage called elderhood. Remember that by our being present and focused, by our invoking the presence of the sacred for our work together, we do create a circle of energy that touches and empowers us all.

As you deeply relax and experience yourself as an integral member of this circle,  
I'd like to share this invocation from Jane Hooper, *Please Come Home*.

Please come home. Please come home.  
Find the place where your feet know where to walk,  
and follow your own trail home.

Please come home into your own body,  
your own vessel, your own earth.  
Please come home into each and every cell,  
and fully into the space that surrounds you.

Please come home to trusting yourself,  
and your instincts and your ways and your knowings,  
and even the particular quirks of your personality.

Please come home and once you are firmly there,  
please stay home awhile and come to deep rest within.  
Treasure your home. Love and embrace your home.  
Get a deep, deep sense of what it's like to be truly home.

**[0:05:02]**

Please come home and when you're really, really ready,  
and there's a detectable urge on the out-breath, then please come out.  
Please come home and please come forward.  
Please express who you are to us, and please trust us  
to see you and hear you and touch you  
and recognize you as best we can.

Please come home and let us know  
all the nooks and crannies that are calling to be seen.  
Please come home, and let us know  
the more that is there that wants to come out.

Please come home for you belong here now.  
You belong among us.  
Please inhabit your place fully so we can learn from you,  
from your voice and your ways and your presence.

Please come home. And when you feel yourself home,  
please welcome us too  
for we too forget that we belong and are welcome,  
and that we are called to express fully who we are.

Please come home, you and you and you and me.

May we all wake up and remember who we truly are.

So please join me in saying out louder in your heart "May it be so." May it be so.

There have been some wonderful postings in our Facebook group this last week, some wonderful sharings of people's experiences on this journey of conscious eldering, people's sharings of some really nice resources that are meaningful and valuable to us. One gentleman asked a really important question that I responded to. I'm delighted that many of you are participating, and I encourage those of you who aren't to join in, and those who are to make even more use of our Facebook group because there's a lot of value there.

As we start in with today's work, I'd like to ask if there's anything from the last week that any of you would like to share or ask about from the deepening work we suggested last time or from the breakout groups. Remember, the focus of the breakout sessions was guidance, how have you found you could best gain access to guidance. The deepening work was centered around how you deal with some of those difficult feelings that come up in the neutral zone.

You might want to share something about your experiences with some of that or anything else or ask about anything related to the course that feels important right now. We'll take about 10 minutes for that and then we'll get into the work for the evening.

Chogyop: So if you would like share, please press 1 now on your telephone keypad. While we wait, we do have a question that has come in from the webcast, Ron. So I'll go ahead and read it.

From [Participant] in Blue Mountains. "Hi, Ron, a question about my inner elder. He came out of an Inca-like pyramid temple in the jungle. He was a bit like a wise American-Indian chief with a big headdress, lots of feathers in his cap. My question was around money. Spiritual work doesn't pay and I thought cynically, money wasn't part of your culture. How would you be able to advise me?

That thought took me away from him. No response came and I haven't been back." From [Participant].

Ron: Well, [Participant], I would remind you and everybody else that when we are seeking to be in touch with our guidance, for many of us, a symbol of that guidance like an inner elder, and in your case, [Participant], it took a particular form of an Inca medicine person, it seems.

**[0:10:15]**

When we're doing this, it is a skill that it takes time to develop. It takes time to learn to make that connection with this inner guidance or with these images of

guidance that can be valuable for many of us. It's a practice that we need to engage in more than ones. It can deepen and deepen for many of us over time.

The other thing that occurs to me is that it can be so important to be asking the right question. And if we have some kind of a sense that we have indeed gotten in touch with some inner image that could be a source of wisdom and guidance, and if we don't get a response, maybe it's the case that that is not the right question for us to be asking at the time. Perhaps we should be looking to see if there are some other questions that might be more appropriate or more central or maybe more at the core than the particular question we have post.

So I encourage you to see if you can get back to that inner place if this guide appears again, and just kind of work to form a relationship with this particular guide. Maybe more important than asking a specific question, especially at the beginning, it just kind of being in that presence and feeling that love and wisdom, and just kind of being there and seeing what happens, what wants to emerge. So thank you for asking that question.

Chogyop: Thank you very much, Ron. That was a nice answer.

We have on [Participant] on the phone. She would like to share. [Participant]?

Ron: Hi, [Participant].

Participant: Hello. Hi, Ron. It's so good. I really appreciate that I was able to listen to the replay several times and do the "In Search of the Inner Elder." I really like that one, that guided meditation. I did adapt it for myself where I could use it as a walking meditation. I felt that I have several inner elders like a wise woman as well as kind of an ancient yogi because I'm really into the yoga philosophy, and just finding that there are several parts of me that I can access.

Again, like you said, it's a process. I wasn't expecting a total conversation just as much as that intuitive guidance that I can find there and also just from being out in nature, looking for signs and synchronicities, as well as following my dreams in which my own long deceased grandmother showed up in a dream. I felt that was she's acting up. I think it's a liaison. That was what my sense of it was.

And then it's really interesting. My brother who we talk regularly but not about this, really, I mean I've mentioned it in passing, but then he's been getting into genealogy and was saying about so many things about what he is finding about our relatives that go back hundreds of years. I just feel like that was like a synchronicity and to be able -- that we're sharing that part of our history because I was asking -- it was interesting. When I went through on a guided meditation, I

was asking for collecting and calling in that ancestral energy. There it was a day or two later. My brother is calling with this. We hadn't discussed that.

Again, I think you're helping -- this is helping me pay attention to these things that perhaps they were there already, but I'm much more, I guess, receptive to them and taking that time, like you said, to have silence and solitude. Again, I'm just very, very grateful for this process.

Ron: Thank you, [Participant]. I'm glad you've had such a fruitful week.

Participant: Thank you.

Chogyop: Okay. Ron, we do have another question that's come in from the webcast.

Ron: Okay.

Chogyop: This is from [Participant] in Sacramento. "Ron, you have mentioned early elderhood and also the December years. What are you calling the years in between? I am 77 and feel I am in that in-between time, and it has been a shift from early elderhood, quieter, more reflective, more time in nature, much less doing. I am so enjoying these sessions. Thank you for all the time and effort you're putting in." This is [Participant].

**[0:15:11]**

Ron: Well, thank you, Elizabeth. Terminology is, I don't know, it's tricky. I think we're all -- as we're coming to understand conscious aging and conscious eldering better, we're all trying to come up with terminology for things that -- sometimes it's hard to have hard and fast terms for things. You might say that there's an early elderhood, a middle elderhood and a later elderhood. But I think in reality, what it really is is like a continuum. You have a bit of a shift of focus from our early elderhood years that might be more focused on outer activity and being out there serving in dynamic ways in the world, to a gradual shift to more and more of the inner life, focus on the inner life, but still wanting to be engaged out there.

And then you get into later elderhood, what Rab. Zalman Schachter called the December years. That's when the focus really is on preparing to leave this life and that particular work of really bringing this life to a good close.

So I think I view it as a continuum. When you get to be 77, for a lot of people, there is indeed more of a focus on the inner life and the inner work and on that quiet reflection than there is when we're 65. And when we get to be 85 or 90, that focus will be even more intense on the inner work, I think. So I hope that's helpful.

Chogyop: Very good. Very good. And then one last request from the webcast.

Ron: Okay.

Chogyop: This comes from [Participant]. She really liked the invocation. She said it was lovely. She's asking if it can be posted as part of our postings that we do, Ron. So I think we can make that available to everyone.

Ron: Well, I'll remind everybody that after each course session, the deepening work is posted on the website, and I also post the poetry and invocations that I do. So we've got a mechanism in place, and it's my intention to have this be posted along with a couple other pieces of poetry I'm going to share tonight.

Chogyop: Excellent.

Ron: Okay.

Chogyop: Okay. So that's it for comments right now.

Ron: Okay. Thank you all.

With this session we're going to begin to focus on the journey forward, the journey ahead of us. In this course, we explore a journey that takes us through that deeply significant transition from identifying as midlife adults to identifying as elders. I'll just remind us that the more awareness and intentionality we bring to this passage, the better able we are to support this process as it seeks to unfold in us bringing us the fullness of our potential as elders.

So the work of severance from a life chapter is crucial. We've been focusing on that. The work of negotiating our passage through the neutral zone is crucial, and we've been focusing on that. Now we're going to begin to focus on recognizing and supporting the new beginnings that will inevitably emerge as we go through this passage, especially if we approach our passage consciously and we honor the needs of our psyche for severance and time in the neutral zone.

It's so tempting -- I'm sure we all know this -- it's so tempting to try to sidestep severance and neutral zone work and to jump ahead. Let's be looking toward the future. But if we do, if we do try to sidestep this work, we run the risk of our later chapters being unfulfilling attempts to continue for as long as possible to who we have been rather than our later chapters being our opportunity to grow and to becoming so much more than we have been.

Now, there are many ways to conceptualize the journey forward into the new life chapter of elderhood. There are many ways to start this exploration. The way

I'd like to move us into this is to use the theme of legacy to lead us into this topic.

**[0:20:00]**

Now, there are various ways of defining legacy. As I see it, legacy can be boiled down to this. Our legacy is the mark we leave on those who have been impacted by our life, short but sweet and powerful. Our legacy is the mark we leave on those who've been impacted by our life. So our legacy can have both negative and positive components. As human beings, with strengths and weaknesses, most of our legacies have some of each although we all certainly hope the end result is that we have a predominantly positive impact on those who are touched by our life.

Now, many people have the idea, which I think is only partially correct, that their legacy is defined by the visible contribution they make to the world, usually through their career. I've had many people tell me that they don't feel they've left the legacy at all because they haven't made any visible, significant contribution. Now, as sad as I feel this is, even sadder is the widespread belief that whatever legacy we can create is by and large created by the time we reach retirement age. After that, the chances of making any significant contribution are pretty much over.

In contrast, conscious elders know that our elder years are that period of life when we can create a tremendously important and fulfilling legacy that builds on the wisdom we've gained from seeing both the positive and negative ways that we've impacted others in our younger years. We have a wonderful opportunity to create a legacy of elderhood that's grounded in our growing wholeness. We have the opportunity to see that legacy-building is not about making big, visible contributions to the world, although we may do this. But rather it's about living our lives with an ever increasing ability to have an open heart and a willingness to share ourselves with the larger community as authentically as possible, to share ourselves in whatever ways our inner knowing tells us is right for us.

We have the opportunity, as individual elders and as a vast worldwide community of elders, to create legacy that will help heal and transform individuals, societal structures, and the earth that will positively touch the lives of millions in the generations to follow us because we can create a legacy that will leave the generations to follow us, a world that's ecologically and socially healthy and life supporting. So we have an opportunity to create a wonderful legacy of our elder years. Legacy-building is not done.

Now, I'd like to tell you about a practice that many people find to be a deeply moving way to touch and impact some of those in the generations that are following them. And this is a practice that we call the legacy letter. I'd like to

begin by telling you the story of how I came to realize the importance of such a practice.

Several years ago, I had a major health crisis that I've referred to once or twice throughout this course. I had great fear that my life was about to come to an end. As I lay in the hospital bed, one of the gifts of all of this -- a gift that you recognize when you look back -- one of the gifts of that were the strong feelings I had that if I were to die, if I were to die soon, that my children, who were both in their early 20s at that time, would never truly know who their father was.

**[0:25:05]**

And if I were to die and if my children have their own children, my grandchildren would never know who their grandfather was other than somebody whose pictures they've -- whose photos they've seen or who they saw in some videos.

This brought me a great sadness. I realized that "Yeah, my children knew me." They grew up with me, experienced me in a lot of settings that were important. They knew that I had tried very much to be a good father, a good human being, succeeded a lot of the times. At other times, probably was less than ideal. But I realized that they didn't know a lot of what was core and essential about my life that somehow felt important to me that they know.

They didn't know about some of those critical decisions I made at certain points in my life that that shaped the direction of my life and why I made those decisions. They didn't know about how some of my most deeply held values came to develop, and the role they played throughout my life. They didn't know about some of the big challenges that I had faced that were really, really important in my growth. Those are the kinds of things kids can't know. We can't tell them to kids, they can't understand or appreciate them or even when they become young adults, it's not the stuff that gets talked about. But I felt this acute awareness of the need for them to know these things, and for grandchildren that might come to know more about their grandfather.

So that's where this image of a legacy letter began to emerge for me and gradually it's become a really important on the more significant parts of choosing conscious elderhood retreats that my colleagues and I lead. So a legacy letter is a letter of whatever length, it could be a page or two or it could be much more of whatever length seems appropriate, in which we try to encapsulate for our descendents the essence of who we, one of their ancestors, are.

Legacy letter can, of course, have some biographical information but that's not the essence of it. In it, we can share some of those values we hold dearest that we'd like to impart to those who will follow us but it's not primarily an ethical will where we give advice for living well. Rather a legacy letter can be our way of

introducing ourselves to our descendents whom may otherwise know us only as people in videos or in photos.

So in writing such a letter, we have the opportunity to carefully communicate the essence of who we have been in a way that can only happen through careful reflection and writing. So when we write a legacy letter, this can be an ongoing process. For most people, it's not something you sit down and do it in a couple of hours. But for many, it's helpful to have a specific recipient in mind. It helps to make it more tangible and real, such as a grandchild or another child who is important in our life. For some, writing to descendents, a few generations down the line or to children in the future generations, if we don't have biological descendents is meaningful.

How and when we make our letter available to those who want to receive it, it's up to us. We've had people in our retreats who have written this letter and afterwards they told us that they sent it to whoever it felt important to send it to. Other people have made provisions that this letter will become available only at some later time. It's totally up to us how we do that.

There's value in writing such a letter now as part of our work to prepare for the legacy we have yet to create and to assure that we actually do this.

**[0:30:10]**

It's so easy to put off doing something like thinking that we have many years ahead of us. We can always do this later. Maybe we do, maybe we don't. Maybe we have many years of a clear mind ahead of us, maybe we don't. If we write this letter now, then as we move through our elder chapters, we can add addendums to this letter that reflect our continued growth beyond where we are now. But there's value in doing it now. So a legacy letter is a beautiful gift to our descendents. It's a way to touch their lives by letting them know about their ancestor who is me or who is you.

And it's a gift to us. It's a way to help us get in touch with the strengths, the resilience, the wisdom, and the gifts that have been important threads in our life so far that can be important resources as we look towards the legacy we have yet to create because the legacies we have yet to create are usually -- they're not total reinventions of ourselves, but rather they build on the strengths and the gifts and the sense of calling that a been reflected throughout our lives with the addition of clearer vision, greater wholeness and the emergence of the elder energy in us.

The kinds of things that people can define meaningful when writing their legacy letters are things that are important in doing life review work in general. I shared some of these in our last session. Here in the legacy letter, we address them in a careful written fashion with the intention of touching the lives of the recipients

by sharing our journey of living and learning and growing with them as a way of serving them, as a way of being the elders we are, serving them as elders, we're touching them.

Here are some of the themes you might choose to address in your legacy letter: What are big challenges I have faced and how did I meet them? What's been my contribution/contributions to the world that's brought me joy? Who are the people who have touched my life deeply? What has been the role of spirituality in my life? What are the values I hold most dear and how did I become aware of the importance of these values? What's brought me the greatest sadness? What has been one or two of the major turning points in my life? What potential am I aware of in myself that has not yet been fulfilled?

So I strongly encourage you to consider writing a legacy letter as a foundation for the creation of elder legacy that lies ahead of you. Sometimes it's hard to get started. You don't know where to begin. I'll tell you, I have seen many people after kind of hanging in there and getting through the challenge of "How do I get started? Where do I begin?" all of a sudden, it's like the muse took their hand, and some of the most beautiful, beautiful poetic inspirational letters emerged. Give it a try. See what happens. You may find it valuable, and what a gift it will be to descendants.

Now, another powerful way of touching those who will follow you is through oral history work, you being interviewed by someone else and you interviewing someone else. For me, as I shared during our first session, it was doing video-based oral history work with seniors in my community that started me in the path of conscious eldering. So I don't see oral history as a substitute for a legacy letter as much as a valuable complement to it.

**[0:35:03]**

In doing oral history you see the person, her expressions, her body language, you hear her voice, you get a sense of the person's uniqueness and life energy. What you don't get in oral history is the carefully crafted, concise telling of one's story that's only possible in writing that's been perfected until you feel you've gotten it just right.

Many of those whom I've interviewed have never had anybody ask them about their lives, and especially ask some questions about challenges and meanings and growth. So many older adults are aching for somebody to do so.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity for nine weeks to work as interim activities director at our local senior center. One reason I took this job was I wanted to see what it was like to be with seniors who are not the kind of people -- kind of a self-selected group who were interested in conscious eldering and came on our workshops and retreats. When I was there, I saw those people that

I think we've all seen in the lunch room. There's old Fred over there trying to tell the same story over and over and over, and everybody is saying, "Oh, there's old Fred going at it again" or "There's Ethel. She said that a thousand times."

I really begin to get the sense, and I can't prove this, of course, but I got the sense that many of these old Freds or Ethels who are over there trying to tell the story a thousand times are doing that because they have an ache in them for somebody to really listen, to really hear their story. So in their ineffectual way, that's how they somehow try to address this ache.

Older adults are aching for somebody to hear their story. So in doing so, we give people who may well have begun to feel they're irrelevant and have forgotten their strengths and their values. Give them an opportunity to remember this. This opportunity can be incredibly therapeutic for them. Besides helping them to review their lives, it gives us an opportunity to touch them with the gift of our presence, our interest and our love. Conversely, asking others, and especially those younger than us to do oral history work with us, gives us an opportunity to touch their lives with our stories of growth and learning.

Telling these stories has always been a critical role of the elders. So doing so, telling these stories by being interviewed ourselves becomes part of our elder legacy. Like a legacy letter, having others do oral history work with us helps us to remember our strengths, our gifts and the threads that have woven together the hero's journey of our lives.

It's not hard to do oral history work, and I'm sure many of you probably have done this. What's important is to spend time with the one you'll be doing this work with a few days before the two of you are going to sit down together and do it. Discuss the kinds of questions that the person to be interviewed can feel comfortable with and is willing to respond to. I suggest including the kind of questions that I listed just a few minutes ago as focuses for legacy letter. And then when the time comes for the oral history work, the two of you sit down together, ideally with a video recording device set up, you begin by having as comfortable a conversation as possible in which questions are woven in.

When I approach seniors about doing oral history work with them, I let them know of my interest in learning about their lives. I tell them I'll do all I can to make this as comfortable for them as possible. I tell them if they'll try this for 10 minutes, just 10 minutes, if they're not comfortable, we can stop the progress or stop the process. I won't, in any way, pressure them to go further.

**[0:40:08]**

I have never had anybody want to stop after 10 minutes. This process brings people alive.

You can find lots of information about oral history by Googling oral history. Maybe you can tell I'm passionate about this. I can get on the soapbox about this all day. I'd love to see every senior center, in faith community, in nursing home, in assisted living facility, in other places where older adults congregate, offer oral history services as a way of helping support those elders in finding meaning and value in their lives. I encourage each of us to ask someone to do oral history with us. Again, it's easy to say, "I'll do it later." Why not do it now? Why not do it now, viewing it as part of our conscious eldering work as we prepare for the journey ahead?

One other point. I think one of the most beautiful things we can do is to try to create situations where younger people, teenagers perhaps, have an opportunity to interview elders, do oral history work with elders including with ourselves. What a beautiful gift of them and to us. Or maybe you as an elder and a young person can get together and interview other elders in the community. Do it as a team. How wonderful intergenerational working together which is something that's so important that we find ways to do in our conscious eldering.

So with that, I'd like to create an opportunity now for us to break into groups of four for 12 minutes, three minutes apiece. In your group, each of you, tell about a person or two whose life has touched yours very deeply, in some way helping you to become aware of the best in you, somebody whose legacy has been to touch your life in an important way. It's all about a person or two whose life has touched yours deeply. What have you learned from them that are maybe valuable on your journey of conscious eldering? So let's break into groups of four for 12 minutes.

Chogyop: Okay. Thank you, Ron. As we move into our groups, I would first like to ask anyone that would not like to be in a group for whatever reason, you're in a place that's loud and you can't really talk, but if you would not like to be in a breakout group, please press 2 now. Everyone else, I will form us into groups of four and then we can have the 12 minutes.

You will hear several tones. One will be the bell that lets you know that the breakout group has begun. At that time, just jump right in and introduce yourself and you can start your discussion. And then about a minute before the 12 minutes is up, you'll hear another tone that will let you know that there's one minute left so you can wrap up. And then you'll hear a third tone that will say that the breakout group has ended. So you'll hear those tones to let you know these things. I will now move us into breakout groups. Just one minute.

Okay, everyone. We have now ended our breakout groups. So back to you, Ron.

Ron: Welcome back, everybody. Does anyone have anything you'd like to share about what you experienced during these last 12 minutes? If so, let's take maybe five minutes to do that.

Chogyop: So if you have a question and would like to share, please press 1 now on your telephone keypad.

**[0:45:00]**

Okay. So we have [Participant]. [Participant], you now have the microphone.

Participant: Thank you. When we started the process, I thought immediately of two older women who have been role models for me. In the course of talking and listening to the others, somebody -- a teacher from high school jumped into my mind. He was a teacher I was terrified of when I was in high school. Somehow he validated me to me in a very subtle ways. There's nothing specific that he did, but there was something about his process with me and the way he questioned that made me more aware of my strengths that worked for me in the years later on. You may find somebody from your past, far past, who does that for you too.

Ron: Thank you, [Participant]. What a wonderful gift he gave you. I would imagine that he probably touched many other people in a similar way, many other of his students. In many ways, his legacy, I would imagine, was defined by that special gift he had for touching young people like he touched you. He may not have done anything spectacular that the world would give him a claim for, but you remember him after all these years. What a gift. Thank you for sharing that.

Chogyop: Okay. So if you would like to share, please press 1 now on your telephone keypad.

Ron: And if not, we can move on.

Chogyop: Great. Thank you.

Ron: I got another poem for you. *Tides of Your Life* by Judith Gass.

Why are you waiting to begin your life?  
Do you think the world should care and come soliciting?  
Listen to the knocking at the door of your own heart.  
It is only faint because you have not answered.  
You have fooled yourself with preparations.  
Time left laughing while you considered possibilities.  
Wake up! You have slept long enough.  
Wake up! Tomorrow may be too late.  
When you finally dare open the door,  
your life will begin arriving

cautiously at first, unbelieving that the gate  
so long locked against the tide has finally been opened.  
Then with rivulets of forgotten sorrows,  
then with swells of neglected dreams,  
then with waves of joyful revelation the sea will follow.  
You will be swept by the full and magnificent tides  
of your own longing  
that no one else can give you,  
that no one else can claim.

We're now going to explore the theme of purpose. As we begin to focus on the legacy of our elderhood that each of us has the opportunity to create, it's important to look at the context in which all of us in this course and millions of others in our age range are seeking to understand the potentials of our elderhood and how we can fulfill her potential. Futurist and wise elder Barbara Marx Hubbard set this context well when I interviewed her for The Shift Network Transforming Aging Summit last month.

**[0:50:00]**

Barbara spoke about the critical role that elders can play as humanity moves through this time of great challenge and great potential for the emergence of a new humanity. Barbara stressed that no elders in human history have lived through and have been called to serve in a time of global transformation such as now. So the role of elder has to evolve to meet the realities of these important times. Barbara likes to call aging an emerging into a stage of life where one's life purpose is attuned to the energies and wisdom of an evolving world, and where the wisdom and gifts develop throughout a lifetime are fully used in service to that purpose.

She reminded us that in order to grow into true elderhood, we must accomplish a fusion between ongoing communication with our inner essence and a commitment to action grounded in what we find to be enlivening and animating. The earlier in life we began work to become conscious of both these dynamics, the more fully we will be able to live as true elders as we age. We won't have a difficult task of creating a new way of living after retirement age because such a way of living is already who we are.

That's why when people ask me and people say, "Well, I'm only in my 50s or I'm only in my early 60s. Why should I focus on conscious eldering now? I'm not old." I think that is the answer right there, so we can create a way of living and being that will serve us so well when we do enter our elder years.

Barbara closed by reminding us that we have strong support for becoming conscious elders because the evolutionary impulse that's strongly alive in these critical times increases consciousness and freedom. It supports us.

I also very much like the context that Richard Rohr, the author of *Falling Upward* and other wonderful books, creates for understanding purpose in life's elder chapters. I'll paraphrase something he wrote in his book *Falling Upward*. "In the second half of the spiritual life," which is the way he speaks of elderhood, "you're not making choices as much as you are being guided, taught and led, which leads to choiceless choices. These choices include things you do not need to do, do not need to do because they are just not yours to do, and things you absolutely must do because they're your destiny, your deepest desire, and they're necessary reflections of who you have become." He says, "Your driving motives are no longer money, success or the approval of others. At this point you have found your sacred dance."

The late great teacher, Angeles Arrien, spoke to this beautifully when she said, "There comes a time in the spiritual journey when you start making choices from a very different place. And if a choice lines up so that it supports truth, health, happiness, wisdom, and love, it's the right choice." I love those words. I'd like to thank [Participant] who's in one of our circles in this course for posting Angeles' words on our course Facebook page today. So thank you for that, [Participant].

So that's the context. It's a context that sees our eldering as a process with ramifications much larger than just our own personal fulfillment, although our own fulfillment is necessary if we are to contribute in meaningful ways to the cultural shift upon which the very futures of our descendants depends.

[0:55:00]

So let's look at purpose. It's a word that's tossed around a lot. During the summit, several of the speakers stated that purpose is fundamental to health and well-being. Without a sense of purpose, we are unlikely to experience good health and well-being as we age no matter what else we do. Richard Leider defined purpose as "a reason outside of one's self for getting up in the morning." It's a direction or an aim that we want our life to be about.

Richard spoke of the strong influence that concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl had on him. Frankl who wrote *Man's Search for Meaning* said that "The last of all human freedoms, after all else is taken away, is our ability to choose to find a purpose outside of ourselves." The last of all human freedoms is our ability to choose to find a purpose outside of ourselves.

Now, I know people who seem to have the belief that, especially in these critical times, as conscious elders we have an obligation to engage in big visible activities to do our part to contribute to a life-supportive world. It certainly is true that, collectively, the vast number of people over age 65 have tremendous political clout that I believe we can and should use in support of a sane, healthy society

and environment. I want us to start using our clout in these ways that are about something outside of ourselves.

But ultimately, ultimately it's important to remember that our purpose as elders need not be a big cause or some big contribution to the world. But rather, it needs to be some contribution to the world, a contribution that arises from that place where the world's needs and our gifts and our aliveness intersect.

Also, it's important to remember that more important than what we do is a state of consciousness we bring to whatever we do. In these evolutionary times, our conscious and openhearted lives have a bigger impact than we can imagine whether we're engaged in environmental action in the streets of New York City or writing a legacy letter or telling stories to our grandchildren or volunteering at a soup kitchen. I've often heard it said that what people remember all their lives is not so much what others did but rather the kind of person that others were. Ultimately, the legacy of our elderhood, the impact our lives have on others will be more defined by who we are as we do whatever we do than by what we do.

I believe the effectiveness we can have in being of service to something outside of ourselves is very dependent upon the wholeness we bring to that service. The fulfillment of our purpose depends upon our wholeness. Fragmented people bring fragmented energy to what they do no matter how lofty their intentions. Our world already has more than enough fragmented energy and closed hearts. As I see it, finding purpose in elderhood and growing toward wholeness are the two critical tasks of conscious elders. So hand-in-hand, they're both necessary.

A question that's so often asked is "Well, how do I find purpose. How do I find purpose in my elderhood?" We all have a purpose or a calling which may well find different expressions at different times in our lives. The dynamic of our transition into our elderhood is designed to take us deep within to find that communication with our inner essence that Barbara Marx Hubbard speaks about, that inner essence or source of guidance that knows our purpose for our elderhood.

**[1:00:14]**

Last week when we focused on the neutral zone of transition, I shared several ways for tapping guidance while in the neutral zone. For many people, these and other approaches bring forth insights and inner stirrings, awareness of passions and yearnings, all of which are signs that we're moving from the neutral zone into the new beginnings of elderhood.

However, for most of us, these insights and stirrings may be vague, may be amorphous, coming without blueprints or plans of action. It's more of a deep feeling that doesn't have a form attached to it yet. It's our task to give form to these, to flesh out these inspirations so that we can have goals and set

intentions. It's a big part of the task of the third stage of transition when we're starting to move into the new chapter.

Maintaining contact with our inner guidance is just as important in our elderhood as it is when we're in the neutral zone, and the kinds of practices that help us in the neutral zone are valuable also in supporting us as elders. We need this alignment with our inner essence to help us define our purpose and know how to enact it. We need this contact with our inner essence to help us know what we need to do to grow toward wholeness.

Here are some additional thoughts about finding our purpose, and those activities that will help us grow toward wholeness. Most of us, we're passionate about something or other when we were children. For many of us, the demands of real life like finding a career or earning a living began to take precedence and our passions that were either forgotten or dismissed as airy-fairy or they found some expression through hobbies. But it's important to remember that there was a reason we had these passions. They were reflections of the life force within us making itself known to us and showing us something about our uniqueness.

For many of us, these passions were the first signs of a purpose that elderhood provides an opportunity to fulfill. So there's much value in spending time with our journal, remembering our childhood passions, getting in touch with them, feeling them, feeling what we felt when we were engaged with them, trying to look beneath the surface particulars to see what deep values were embedded in these passions, what storylines were there in immature form. And then trying to see how these values or storylines might still be alive in us seeking expression in a mature form.

In his Transforming Aging Summit interview, Marc Freedman of [encore.org](http://encore.org) spoke about the rapidly emerging concept of encore careers, which are full or part-time, paid or unpaid commitments to service that lie at the intersection of purpose, passion and productivity. Many people who are entering their elder years are seeking encore careers to serve and be fulfilled with some needing to earn income through doing so, others not needing the income.

But an important point that Marc, Richard Leider, who's known as the Guru of Purpose, I and others stress is that patience and lack of self-judgment are absolutely important. It often takes time to find our purpose and a way to embody that purpose. It takes time to find the forms. We may have a sense of it. It's vague. It takes time to find the forms that will work for us. So for many, it takes experimentation, trying out various jobs or volunteer engagements on the outside.

**[1:05:07]**

And on the inside, doing our inner work to examine what we feel as we do this experimenting, to see what brings us alive, what taps into our values and our passions, and to see what clearly doesn't fit for us. On the inside, it's so important to regularly do our best to connect with our inner guidance, asking about what we're experiencing, asking questions about possible courses of action moving forward.

I would love to see more and more people who do not need to work for income after they retire approach the first year after retirement as a gap year similar to how many young people take a year between high school and college or between college and career to just explore, being open to many possibilities as a way of getting in touch with what they really want as they move into adulthood. Imagine what it would be like if you took a gap year to help you move into your elderhood, a year with no goals except inner and outer exploration, making no serious commitments to any particular work or service as you open yourself to guidance from within or without.

Imagine a year when if somebody asks you what you're doing or what you're going to do in your retirement you feel comfortable in saying, "I'm in exploration mode, and I'll make commitments later." I think that would be such an ideal way for us to do neutral zone work and do some of that work of helping us begin to move into the new chapter of elderhood, just being open, exploring inner lives and outer possibilities.

Now, I realized that not everybody can take a gap year. But even if we have to keep working or we have other demanding responsibilities, we can consciously choose to live as best we can with that spirit of exploration and openness, to make some time for the inner and outer exploration that can show us how we can live with purpose and grow toward wholeness in our elder chapters. Whether we need to work or not, it's all about the intention. We can find time to do some inner and outer exploration.

I'd like to tell you about three books, and there many good ones out there that I especially recommend as valuable guidebooks for finding purpose and a path toward fulfilling purpose as we age. One is *Encore* by Marc Freedman. The other is *Life Reimagined* by Richard Leider. You can also Google *Life Reimagined* and you will find that there is a program started by AARP in which will Richard Leider played a key role whose purpose is to help elders find purpose and meaningful expression for that after retirement. The third book I recommend is *True Purpose* by Tim Kelley. Many of you know that Tim will soon be teaching a course through The Shift Network. So those are three really good sources that you might spend some time with.

I'd like to share one more poem with you now that I think very much speaks to the theme of purpose and the theme of legacy. It is called *You* and the author is unknown.

[1:09:56]

You may not think the world needs you but it does.  
For you are unique like no one who has ever been before or will come after.  
No one can speak with your voice, say your peace,  
smile your smile or shine your light.  
No one can take your place for it is yours alone to fill.  
If you are not there to shine your light,  
who knows how many strangers will lose their way  
as they try to pass by your empty place in the darkness.

So with that, I'd like to ask if this has evoked any questions. We can take a few minutes for questions now.

Chogyop: Okay. So if you would like to ask Ron a question or comment, please press 1 now on your telephone keypad.

Okay. So we have someone who called in on the general PIN. They are calling from area code 949. So you now have the microphone. Hello.

Participant: I don't know if this is me. It's [Participant].

Chogyop: Yes. Hi, [Participant].

Ron: Hi, [Participant]. I hear you. This is Ron. I hear you. Hello.

Participant: Hi, Ron. I'm really enjoying what you're sharing with us. I will ask if there will be any component of this workshop that will touch on laughter and fun and the value of that in the process, how that opens the heart and allows for creativity and lightness in this process.

Ron: Well, [Participant], I am glad you just spoke those words. We don't have a specific section on laughter and fun, even though in our next session we are going to spend a good chunk of our time focused on how we can remain conscious and alive in our elderhood. I think that laughter and fun are important pieces of that. Thank you for the reminder of that.

If we take all this too seriously, if we take our lives too seriously, I think we really do squelch our aliveness. So we have to take it lightly with joy, with laughter, having fun but also realizing that what we're doing is really important. So thank you for sharing that.

Participant: Thank you. I would appreciate if you include that in your speaking to us. Thank you so much.

Ron: I will do so.

Participant: All right. Bye-bye.

Chogyop: Great. So again, if you would like to ask a question of Ron, please press 1 now on your telephone keypad. We now have [Participant]. [Participant], you now have the microphone.

Participant: Hi. Earlier you said that as elders, in order for us to make a contribution to the world, it depends upon our wholeness. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Ron: The best contribution we can make, the most effective contribution we can make is if we make that contribution from a place of -- I'm trying to think of the right word here -- if we make it from a place where we have grown, where we are not divided in ourselves, where we have healed a lot of what needs to be healed, where we're really in alignment with our deepest inner guidance and with the world around us, and healthy in our relationships, and healthy in our bodies and minds, and have a health healthy relationship with the earth. These are those components that constitute wholeness. The more we're coming from that kind of a place, [Participant], the more our contribution can really touch others deeply, because remember, as said earlier, it's not just what we do that makes a contribution to others, but it's who we are.

**[1:15:09]**

Who we are, how they experience us, the kind of person experiences us as is what really makes oftentimes the biggest difference and not just the content of what we're doing. So the more we can grow into this kind of wholeness, then whatever we do is going to be able to affect people as beautifully as possible, and we're not bringing our wounds and our fragmentation and everything to the stuff we're doing.

I'm thinking for instance, I'm thinking of people who are really committed to social action. I remember back in the '60s, so many people were over there manning the barricades and filled with hatred and filled with anger. The cause was just. But what they were bringing to it was just as ugly in some ways as what they were protesting against. I think what we have an opportunity to do as conscious elders is to recognize that whether we're manning the barricades or whatever we're doing, just being with our grandchildren or something, that the more we're bringing an open, loving heart grounded deeply in spirit, the more we're bringing that to whatever we do, the more effective we're going to be. So that's where wholeness and purpose fit together in my mind.

Participant: Okay. Thank you.

Ron: No. Thank you. Good question, [Participant].

Chogyop: So Ron, we have a comment from [Participant] from the webcast. [Participant] is in Maui. [Participant] says, "It is worth commenting that the European Union was started in 1950s by three old men who were all in their elderhood; Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and Paul-Henri Spaak." That's from [Participant].

Ron: Thank you for that, [Participant]. I think that just is yet another example of some of the incredible contributions that can be made by elders and that perhaps can only be made by elders because it's the elders who have lived long enough and become wise enough to be able to see the bigger picture. Our world really needs people with the vision to see the bigger picture and not just the small pieces that everybody is wedded to, to see the bigger picture and how we can serve a greater good from that bigger picture perspective. That's one of the wonderful gifts that we have the ability to develop and to grow into as conscious elders. So thank you for that example.

Chogyop: Okay. So we have time for any more questions?

Ron: Yes. Let's do at least one more.

Chogyop: Okay. So if anyone would like to ask a question. Okay. We have [Participant]. [Participant], you now have the microphone.

Participant: Thank you. Thank you, Ron, for this evening. My question is that as I'm getting into my elderhood last year and finding my true purpose, where my heart is, I've been faced with a couple of health challenges. So my intention this year was to become whole and healthy so that I can contribute with a whole, healthy body. Is that very selfish or should I be looking for something more? But I can't be fully myself unless I'm completely healthy.

Ron: I don't think that that's selfish. Our service, our gift to the world depends upon us coming from as healthy and whole a place as we possibly can. If what we need to do at a particular point is to focus on getting our health strong as a foundation for then being able to enact our purpose outwardly in the world, then I think it's absolutely important that we do focus on doing what we need to do for ourselves.

**[1:20:03]**

But I think an important thing to remember is that you and I and all of us on this call may reach a point where we're not going to be physically healthy, where we're going to lose health, we're not going to be able to do what we'd like to do. So I think it's important to keep in mind that there are ways that we can be of

service, there are ways that our purpose can be fulfilled that may look different than we might imagine they will look when we're thinking of us just being healthy. Whatever we lose, wherever we are, there's some way we can be of service to something greater than ourselves. So I think it's important to keep that in mind also.

We don't have to wait until we attain some ideal state of health before we can go and do something. So I think all those pieces fit together in terms of how we look at our service and our wholeness. Does that make sense, [Participant]?

Participant: Yes, it does. Thank you for putting it that way. I completely agree. Thank you.

Ron: You're welcome. Is that about it, Chogyop, for questions?

Chogyop: That is it, Ron. That is it.

Ron: Well, thank you of the good questions, everybody. In a couple days my suggested deepening work is going to be posted on our course home page, but I'd like to just give you a little preview right now to think about. You don't have to remember all this because it will be posted, but I just want you to hear it from me. So these are the kinds of questions I'd like to suggest you work on with your journal. Okay.

Now, keeping in mind that your wholeness consists of having healthy relationships, a healthy mind and body, a life unburdened by emotional baggage, purpose and service that reflects that purpose, strong connection to your inner essence, your spiritual dimension, pleasure and excitement, and enlivening relationship with the natural world. So keeping in mind that your wholeness consists of having all of those kinds of things as much as possible, your deepening work is to begin to envision what your life could look like within five years if during that time you made significant progress in each of these areas.

As you consider such a conscious, healthy future, begin to write down possible goals to be accomplished within five years that would reflect your growth in each of these areas. So this exercise is not about making commitments at this time. We're going to be talking about commitments next week. But rather, looking at the importance of each of these areas of potential growth to you, beginning to think of possibilities for how you can achieve that growth. So that's your deepening work. I think that can be really rich for you.

For your breakout session that will begin in just a few minutes, here's a question that you might consider or a couple of questions: Do you have a clear purpose, something outside of yourself, that will be your gift to the world during your elderhood? And if so, what are you doing to fulfill that purpose? If you don't yet

have a sense of purpose, what does this feel like and what are you doing to find your purpose? Are you being patient and forgiving with yourself as you seek clarity?

So let me say this one more time. Do you have a clear purpose, something outside of yourself, that will be your gift to the world during your elderhood? And if so, what are you doing to fulfill that purpose? If you don't yet have a sense of purpose, what does it feel like and what are you doing to find your purpose? So I hope that will catalyze a good, rich discussion for you.

Chogyop: Thank you, Ron. So we will now be moving into our final breakout group.

Ron: Chogyop, let me say one thing. I'd like to wish everybody a beautiful week. Remember everything that Earth Day is about. I suggest that you get yourself outside and savor this wonderful Mother Earth that we live on. Give some thought as to ways that you might make your contribution to help heal this world. I hope that springtime awakens new life in you. Until next week, be well and be conscious. Goodbye.

Chogyop: Thank you, Ron. We'll see you next week.

Ron: Okay.

Chogyop: Bye-bye.

**[1:25:24] End of Audio**

**© 2015 The Shift Network. All rights reserved.**