

# Old age is not is sickness

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## The meaning of old age

Aging is a biological, natural and universal process, which applies to any living creature. On the one hand, the attitude towards aging is highly subjective and depends on society and on personal needs. On the other hand, the attitude of the aged is related to his or her feelings of being productive, that s/he is needed, and the respect and treatment given by his or her family.

According to legends, books and films, every old person belongs to one of the prototypes characterizing this age group. Sometimes, s/he is rich and miserly, a tyrannical, wicked, bitter soul who estranges him/herself from his or her family, drives his or her workers crazy and threatens to exclude his or her family from his or her will. At other times, s/he is poor, lonely, neglected, homeless and penniless, submerged in depression and longing for the family that abandoned him. In real life, an old person is first of all a human being.

A song by David Avidan reads:

An old man - what does he have in his life?  
He wakes up in the morning, and sometimes not,  
He drags himself to the kitchen, where  
The tepid water will remind him,  
That at his age, his age, his age,  
An old man - what does he have in his mornings?  
(Avidan, 1964)

As already said, an old man is not a character, but first of all a person. Usually, s/he is what s/he was all his or her life, only older, feebler, of poorer memory and slower in his or her movements. S/he cannot manage without his or her glasses, and it is difficult to run to catch the bus. Usually, the aging

person does not change his or her character; the only difference is that some of his or her qualities are diminished while others become more salient. For example, a person who was always stringent will be excessively stringent when s/he is old; if temperamental, s/he will become more annoyed by every little thing, and so on.

The younger society tends to judge the old harshly and is not tolerant of their faults. What was once part of the person's personality becomes with age a dominant and irritating trait. In modern society, there is an inter-cultural phenomenon called "ageism". "Ageism" is a systematic process of creating stereotypes and discrimination against people on the basis of age. In this perception, old people stop being the people they were when they were young and are assigned to a different race (Bytheway, 1995). Geriatric experts say that every person has more than one age. It is customary to discriminate between four types of "age": chronological (years of life according to birth date), biological (the estimate of the years of life based on the physical buildup of the body), psychological (functional, expressing changing states of compatibility, such as memory, the ability to learn, energy and will power, refreshed feeling, flexibility and adjustment to changes) and social. Society expects people at a certain age to behave in a certain way: to study, to marry, to work, to become a grandparent, etc. That is, at the certain age, certain events "should" take place in the person's life, which are appropriate to his or her age.

Usually, there is no overlap between the different types of age in the same person. S/he could be younger than the average in his or her psychological age, but older than the average in his or her social age. S/he could, at the age of 72, work from 6 in the morning to midnight and make crucial decisions. S/he could, at the age of 81, go bowling but not read, because s/he never remembers where s/he left his or her glasses.

### Aging and old age

Aging and old age create problems for any aging person, and also for the individuals and the society among which s/he lives, eventually becoming a problem for society at large. The changes experienced by the aging person, such as decreased physical stamina, health problems, decreased libido, weakened sight and other senses, deteriorating memory and concentration and decreasing working ability cause tension in the life of the aging individual and may disrupt his or her relationships with his or her environment.

The problems of aging were exacerbated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for two reasons:

- a) The respected social position of the elders was undermined as a result of socio-economic developments, related to the processes of industrialization and urbanization and their influence, which were expressed by changes in the structure of the family and other traditional institutions.
- b) The relative number of old people in society increased as a result of demographic developments.

Aging, in both physical and mental terms, is expressed in different people in different ways, depending on sociological and biographical factors. Although psychology has developed tests to identify and even measure the processes of mental deterioration that usually occur in old people, it is still impossible to know in advance how the individual will respond to the aging processes, which differ from one person to the next.

Aging is an inevitable mental process, the signs of which cover a wide area and begin to be apparent in the individual from the late fifty's to the late sixty's of his or her life; in most cases, in the second half of the sixth decade. However, the time when they will appear in the individual cannot be accurately or clearly envisaged, because the phenomenon itself and its physical, social and mental are still not sufficiently known.

The appearance of mental aging and its intensity depend, first of all, on biological aging. However, mental factors play an important role as well, the most important of which is the individual's awareness of the aging process: "Man is old to the extent he considers himself to be old". The more the individual is troubled by the awareness that he or she is getting older, and the more s/he notices the signs of aging, the greater will be the anxiety it causes him or her, the faster will be his or her pace of aging, and the greater his or her willingness to give up life activities.

Most of the elderly are not engaged in professional work by the end of their sixth decade, and have plenty of time to reflect on their condition and

notice the signs of aging. Retirement from work is actually a formal announcement of the entry into the old age, and might catalyze the awareness of being old.

### Who is old?

The question we wish to consider here is: Who is actually an "old man or woman"? This question cannot be expected to have any one clear answer, since it depends on the specific approach guiding the person asking the question in the first place. The word "aged" can be defined in accurate chronological terms. The definition is then bureaucratic, reflecting the interest of the institution or of the authority responsible for the definition. For example, according to the National Insurance Institution, a man of 65 and a woman of 60 are old and are entitled to an old age pension. Here, being old is defined in terms of chronology and functioning, or, more accurately, lack of functioning, that is, the cessation of active work (Nizan, 1977). This definition provides a basis for a series of decisions of a legal and economic nature, such as those that concern the tax authorities, various discounts, services, etc.

The term "old" can be defined in terms of physiological changes. These include changes in the body posture, facial wrinkles, color and amount of hair, various physiological functions, acuity of the senses and so on. In this respect, the level of general health is one of the criteria used for the definition of "old".

Since physical changes are reflected in behavior as well, the term "old" can be defined according to specific behaviors that are identified with old age: the phenomenon of forgetfulness, especially when accompanied by organic impairments, such as slower reactions, slower and less coordinated motor activity, changes in sleep habits and so on (Turner, 1995). Sometimes, ideologies and social perceptions define what is "old". Many stereotypes of old people present them as being conservative, hostile to the young, obsessed with religion and opposed to social change. "Old" can also be defined in terms of social functions: a person who has retired from work, one who lives in a protected residence ("golden home", "nursing home", etc.), or is a grandparent is thought of as "old" (Hazan, 1995).

These assumptions, too, are simplistic. There are many who either choose to take early retirement or are "pensioned off" by their employers while still in their fifties. Many people who are not old live in protected residences, including even children and youth. Today, it is not uncommon for a person to become a grandparent during his/her fourth decade of his/her life and people of 60 years and older attend educational institutions.

There is also a personal-subjective definition of age: I am as old as I feel, and according to my feeling I choose how to behave. When the chronological definition of age is used arbitrarily - age 65 and over - then this group includes hundreds of thousands of people, making it clear that this is a meaningless generalization in terms of anything but chronological age. This group includes people whose health is excellent and people who suffer from

poor health; people with extremely high intellectual levels and those with senile dementia; those who are actively employed and those who do not work at all. Many people in this group continue to be active and involved in all fields of society, in the economy, in sports and in physical activity, as consumers of culture and art, in politics and in all fields of life. It is possible to reach old age and still be functioning normally, in good physical shape, with sharp senses and with a general feeling that is optimistic and positive.

In Israel, less than 5% of the people aged 65 and more are institutionalized. In addition to these, about 10% of the old people with different disabilities live in a protected community, so that about 85% of the population of 65 years old and older are defined as being independent.

It can be concluded that it is very difficult to rely on chronological age as a variable that defines being old. A person does not become "old" on his or her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Professor Marian Rabinowitz, in the book *The Age of Man*, writes: "Actually, such a thing called 'old age' does not exist" and it would not be accurate to call a person "old". Professor Rabinowitz has developed a theory that a person's "age" is judged by his/her capacity in at least six fields of performance: chronological, biological, cognitive, emotional, social and functional. These are a person's six "ages". Only a few people age uniformly over all six. He suggests abandoning the "young-old" dichotomy and considering instead "changes in compatibility" (Rabinowitz, 1985). The person's position on each of the six age curves indicates the level of his or her competence. Whether we accept Rabinowitz's theory or not, society has to

change its attitude towards the aged, without ignoring the aging processes as these are expressed in terms of health and biology. The elderly person should be valued just as the young one is: according to his or her character, qualities, behavior and skills, and regardless of his or her age.

### Old age is not a sickness

Old age in Western society is defined as a social problem, as a condition that should be fought against and postponed for as long as possible. Old age is even defined as illness, or as an undesirable condition that through personal efforts – changes in diet, in life style and in physical activity – can be deferred. Society allocates resources and attention to find new ways to combat old age and erase its external marks, those caused not by age-related diseases but by aging itself, such as wrinkling of the skin and uneven pigmentation. Commercial companies encourage consumers (mainly female) to devote huge financial and mental resources to staying young forever. People use linguistic terms to distance the aged. Old people are physically distanced, by being put away in institutions and special dwellings and by barriers which deny them entry to places because they cannot afford to pay the entrance fee or cannot stand in line long enough or climb.

Many people are ashamed to admit how old they are, and to ask a person's age is taboo. The feeling is that we have to hide our age, as if aging

were a shameful and malignant disease. The following paragraph clarifies this point:

Since our facelift a new chapter has opened in our lives. Now we love how we look and feel much better about ourselves. We have even started to appear in movies as actors and no one can guess how old we are. What can be said, life is smiling at us... (Bodar & Bodar, 1999).

Society's attitude towards aging is shaped by the stereotyped characteristics of old age: disease, disability and deteriorated functioning. People tend to see the elderly as conservative, as people who are incapable of changing. They are physically ill, senile, unable to learn new things, depressed most of the time, lacking in libido, ugly, and unable to think and solve problems (Harrigan & Farmer, 1992).

### Old age as a sickness

Sickness in the sense of disability, invalidism or defect serves as a means to describe situations and dictate the passive or active coping strategies of the individual or of the general society. Sickness can be perceived in two contrasting ways: on the one hand, as a metaphor of social disorder and as a limitation, and on the other as a virtue. A society comprises a collection of individuals, each having his/her own character and particular way of behaving. This individuality is expressed in variety, in being special and in coping or not coping with the self and with the society of which he/she is a part. Society is capable of accepting the "other", in this case the aged, or it can stigmatize him/her, depending on its condition and on the individual's condition. The analysis of the individual means the analysis of his or her personal state and perception of him/herself in relation to his or her surrounding society. Studies indicate that the self-image of old people is projected on society. Old people having a good self-image will be perceived as such by the society in which they live, while those who feel sorry for themselves will be seen as pitiful.

Analysis of the society's moral attitude to the aged means how it treats them, with all that that implies, both social and mental. Is society's attitude towards the aged cold and alienating, manifested by rejection and non-acceptance, or, is the society open and willing to accept the aged, to reach out to him/her and treat him/her with patience, tolerance and as an equal?

Sickness can serve as a metaphor for the social, political, national or moral state of society. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term "sickness" has been used to describe a state of disorder or "any state that is disrupting" (Sontage, 1977). In addition, in 1920, communism was condemned as follows: "Communism is the evil of the bureaucratic cancer, that has always destroyed humanity. A German cancer, the outcome of the German obsessive character. Any pedant preparation is anti-human" (Sontag, 1977). These words imply a metaphoric description of sickness, in which communism is perceived as the cause of oppression and destruction of the humanity. Sickness is used to describe a state of disorder while Machiavelli, whose words appear also in Sontag (1977), is using a metaphor of a curable disease. "In the beginning, consumption is easy to cure and difficult to understand; but if not detected on time, and not treated according to the suitable principle, it is easy to understand but difficult to cure. The same it true of state affairs. If it is envisaged in advance from a distance (which can be done only by the talented), the evils emerging from them can be cured at once. However, if, because of lack of foresight, they are allowed to grow to such an extent that anyone can notice them, there is no cure. Machiavelli presents consumption as a disease whose development can be arrested if it is detected early enough. With foresight, it is possible to prevent the disease, and the same is true concerning impairments in the political body. He suggests a metaphor of a disease which relates less to society and more to statesmanship (which is

perceived as the art of prevention): just as wisdom is necessary to stop serious illnesses, a need exists for foresight to prevent social crises".

If the authorities provide for the aged from the health, social, moral and occupational perspectives, and see them as equals, the self-image of the aged themselves will improve. They will feel wanted, loved, productive, contributing and not alienated.

### The positive side of old age

Old age has a positive aspect, which can be learned about from the literature. To demonstrate this point, I will present the story of Rabbi Nahman of Braslav "A Story about Seven Beggars" (Dan, 1975). The story is about the marriage of two young people who as children had wandered in the forest and met seven crippled beggars who helped them. The beggars came to their wedding and brought with them gifts. The defects of the beggars are their virtues. For example, the blind one had good inner sight and saw reality from beginning to end with one glance. Another beggar stammered and therefore sang well. The one-armed beggar knew how to stretch a bow and the seventh beggar, who had no legs and whose story is not told (because it belonged to the counting of salvation), worked well. The first beggar, the blind one, bestowed his virtue, i.e., blindness in the sense of sobriety and longevity, as a wedding gift, from which it seemed that the disability is perceived as a positive attribute that could contribute and give both to the giver and to the

receiver, as we have seen in places where the aged is valued as a wise and experienced person.

Reading the Bible in search of support for praising disability, one finds in the book of Exodus (Ch. 3, v. 5) God's revelation to Moses in the burning bush: "And God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, "Here *am* I". At this stage God commands Moses to free the Jewish people from its enslavement in Egypt. Moses is delayed on the task and at a certain point says: "O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exodus, Ch. 4, v. 6). The rabbinical tradition interprets this as saying that Moses suffered from a speech impediment, the result of the blow he had suffered in his childhood. Moses answers that he is unable to do what God expects of him, because he is disabled. In response, God answers: "Who hath made man's mouth or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD?" (Exodus, Ch. 4, v. 11). Continuous protests on Moses part cause God to suggest that Aaron, Moses' brother, serve as his voice. Moses has to transmit the words of God and it is Aaron who actually delivers them. In this case, the disability is not perceived as a punishment of God or as a heavy burden for a brave man to carry, nor does this concern a God who creates people with defects as a result of his limited powers. The conversation between Moses and Aaron indicates that disability should not prevent the person from making his or her unique contribution to humanity. On the contrary, God is trying to help Moses

discuss the arrangements that will help him succeed in his life mission. Moses refuses to accept the role of the leader because: "I am not a man of words". Deuteronomy, however, begins with the words: "These *be* the words which Moses spake unto all Israel" (Deuteronomy, Ch. 1, v. 1). With this deed, Moses has achieved spiritual fulfillment in the field in which he has defined himself as a cripple.

Finally, let us remember the event in which God told Moses: "for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground" (Exodus, Ch. 3, v. 5). Not only is Moses standing on holy ground, but also anywhere we stand is our holy ground. This is where God has put us and this is where He wants us to be at this moment. It can be concluded that one's holy ground is different from that of one's neighbour, and if God has put one here, this is where one has the opportunity to struggle and grow and turn one's disability into a virtue, for one's own sake and for the sake of one's surrounding environment.

If the definition of aging is considered to be a disabling illness, or a "disorder" and a "lack of balance", the same attitude as is presented in the Bible should be applied to the aged and the understanding of the meaning of these terms for both the individual and the society. The individual is the mirror of society and part of it. If s/he differs from it in certain ways, it reflects, of course on his or her social relations in terms of acceptance, help, rejection or ridicule by his or her surroundings.

### Leisure in old age

Leisure is the time at the individual's disposal, when s/he is free of work and other activities required for daily living. It is accompanied by a feeling of freedom and related to cultural values. Work and leisure comprise the elements of daily functioning of most people. In defining leisure, it also possible to consider a continuum, one of the poles of which is pure leisure and the other quasi-work leisure. Pure leisure is an activity or a situation that has one or more of the following characteristics: the activity is selected out of a feeling of freedom; inner motivation; the activity is a goal, not a means. Conversely, leisure-work is an activity or state that has one or more of the following characteristics: the activity is not selected out of a feeling of freedom but out of a sense of commitment; external motivation; the activity is a means to attain or realize a certain desire.

An occupation defined as work for one person could be the other's leisure. The subjective dimension of leisure allows a distinction to be made between the two on the basis of the idea that leisure is everything that the individual defines as leisure.

A historic review highlights the relation between leisure, work, religion and the establishment. The more puritan the society and the more dominated by religion, the more work is accorded supreme importance and leisure is perceived as a low-status value. Conversely, the more liberal and democratic the society, the more value and significance it gives to leisure.

The perception of leisure in old age has been developed in the modern Western world. In the past, the old were seen as respectable and adored family members who, when they could no longer continue with their physical work, took care of their grandchildren. At that time, old age was perceived as another stage of work in which other roles are adopted, not as a stage in life that allowed the person to avail himself of a variety of activities (Markus, 2000).

Today, with retirement from the cycle of work, after a long pursuit of leisure time for desired activities and/or rest and relaxation, the old person is left with plenty of free time. In old age, this free time means the time left as a result of retirement and the children having left the house, after fulfilling basic daily tasks (Wacker, Roberto & Piper, 1998).

#### Leisure as a mental state in old age

The importance of leisure in modern society is increasing the more people are in control of their time, and the more the traditional boundaries of leisure become blurred. Modern society has changed beyond recognition the time allocation of the individual, allowing more time for leisure activities. Technical and scientific developments, the shortening of working hours, the limitations on the age of starting to work, retirement and pension laws, the prolongation of life expectancy and the search for sources of pleasure and entertainment are some of the factors which acknowledge and validate the

importance of leisure in Western society. Moreover, despite social mobility and globalization, significant differences still exist between groups, communities and social strata, creating sub-cultures within the general culture and variety in the patterns of modern leisure.

In light of this, a broader approach to leisure is developing, which no longer settles for considering leisure only (the time free from the pursuit of existential needs), but considers the total life quality of the individual, who lives in an environment that is characterized by accelerated processes of technological progress and a borderless world. This creates plenty of stimuli and opportunities to use spare time for personal development and to realize one's potential.

Leisure and a life of leisure are one of the goals pursued by people in the modern era. Being free from the burden of work, doing what the heart wants and investing time in satisfying activity is a normal objective. To live and act according to the subjective perception is a major concern of the Western society.

Aristotle considered leisure as a state in which activity takes place for its own sake and this is actually the classing aspect of leisure (Weinblatt, 2000).

We use the term leisure in three meanings:

- A. Free time: the time that is at our disposal after fulfilling our duties at work and in the household and after we have satisfied our basic needs for survival, such as sleep and food. The spare time can be at the end of the day, the week or after retirement. Leisure is free time, in which we are allowed to do whatever we want.

- B. Leisure activity: activities defined in a certain culture as leisure activities. For example, in our culture, activities in the field of art such as painting, social activities such as family visiting, physical activities such as sports, and intellectual activities such as studies.
- C. A mental state of enjoyment from the activity, a feeling of self-enrichment and relief resulting from the fact that the person engaged in the activity is doing it from his/her personal choice.

The two first definitions, the objective ones, contrast leisure with work in terms of time or of content. The third definition adds the qualitative dimension and the meaning of leisure in terms of the individual, thus shedding some light on the multi-dimensionality of the leisure issue in retirement, since plenty of free time may lead to a feeling of boredom and depression if not filled with enjoyable content, while work can provide possibilities of creativity, enjoyment, friendship and other experiences that characterize leisure.

When people are still working, leisure plays a marginal role in their lives, but with their retirement, the role that leisure plays in the life of a person changes as follows:

- A. In the absence of work, various occupations that are not work fill the time.
- B. The different activities structure the individual's time, creating a new routine. Creating regularity, such as, for example, swimming every morning, participating in artistic groups on different days, a family outing at the weekend, create a distinction between

morning and evening, between weekdays and weekends, and between certain days in the week, and prevent the feeling that each day is similar to the next and that time is uniform and continuous.

- C. The field of leisure presents also new challenges to activity and social involvement for people what were previously immersed in their work.
- D. Being active in leisure activities creates a buffer zone between the pensioner and aging and prevents him/her from being pushed into the margins of society. The image of old age in our consciousness is associated with passivity and inactivity. If the pensioner "proves" to society and to himself that s/he is still active, s/he will not enter the "old age" category. The pensioner no longer works, and because of this is perceived as someone who is no longer productive (it is known that productivity is a major value of our culture). However, if s/he will prove again to society and to him/herself that s/he is busy in non-work activities, and preferably become very busy, s/he will be then "forgiven" for leaving the circle of work and will retain his/her social recognition. Often, it is possible to find pensioners who, in response to the question: "How are you? What are you doing these days?" Answer: "I'm so busy now that I don't know how I had time for work earlier". In many cases, the answer reflects the way in which the respondent wishes to present himself in the eyes of the listener (active, busy, as in middle-age), not necessarily factual truth.

As we have noted, leisure as a mental state is a perspective based on the assumption that when a person is busy in a leisure activity, s/he feels relief,

enjoyment, self-expression and self-enrichment. The person who is engaged in leisure activities is aware that s/he is doing so out of personal choice and for reasons that are related to the experience of the activity, not for achieving any other goal.

Maimonides wrote on this subject: "If a person is deeply depressed, he can relieve the depression by listening to songs and other music and by taking a walk on the roofs and through luxurious buildings with nice shapes and so on, things that lift the spirit and remove boredom and depression" (the Introduction to Aboth Tractate, Talmud, Fifth Chapter). That is, if a person feels depressed, s/he can take a break from his or her studies and listen to music, take a stroll in the garden or go to a museum and look at the works of arts.

Being a doctor, Maimonides knew that the beauty of nature and art have a calming effect on the person's mind and therefore recommended it, not as having value in its own right, but for its curative powers. He also gave permission to hold conversations, to tell stories and sing songs, on condition that they teach good virtues, and on condition that they are included among the five types of speech defined as "speech that is removed and serious", intended to "encourage the soul with speeches and songs".

Clarifying the different aspects of leisure shows that work and leisure are not necessarily two contrasting phenomena. The aim is to view leisure as a rehabilitative means and as a cure for a low mental state, the answer to which is to be willing to do things and to be constantly curious, not accepting things

at face value, but looking for new angles of vision. People can live in different ways and express themselves creatively, such as, for example, through music, art, movement and drama, and reach quality of life and self-fulfillment.

The words of several elderly people who participated in workshops at the Elderly Center in Kiryat Tivon can clarify the meaning of creativity and pleasure:

It gives me a sense of accomplishment. It's very relaxing. It helps me to recognize beauty. I am able to transfer onto paper and canvas the things I see that are beautiful. To be able to express myself at this point in life is very rewarding.

It means educational and creative growth. It means new friends, new ideas and ways of thinking. It opened up my spiritual side more than ever before. Even on days when I don't feel like painting... this was the place I wanted to be and I felt comfortable and part of the group.

The goals of the third age activities are to help people fill their time, helping them to realize the potential inherent in them, while considering their needs and aspirations. The role of the coordinators dealing with developing programs for leisure time and work as consultants is to help members of the third age consolidate patterns of time spending, choosing activities and structuring a suitable mixture of activities for each individual (Ronen, 1999). The goal is to achieve a quality of life at an optimal level, which is the core of the rehabilitative perception in modern life.

### Leisure activities

The attitude towards leisure in the third age has to be based on the assumption that it is never too late and that a person develops throughout his or her life. There are many examples of this. Kato, the Roman elder began learning Greek at the age of 80 and Rabbi Akiva began to learn how to read and write at the age of 40 (Ronen, 1999).

A study conducted in 1997 found that aging people aged 67-78 prefer non-isolated activities. Women, contrary to men, prefer activities that involve direct interaction with others. The better educated the elder is and the more financially independent, the higher is the level of his or her activity, the more varied are his or her activities and the more his or her preferences concentrate on the area of outdoor social activities (School-Bacon, 1997).

The Prussian Chancellor, Otto Bismarck, set the age of retirement, 110 years ago, at 65 years. The increase in life expectancy has pushed back the old age period, and as a result, the life period following the formal age of retirement is longer than before. This fact has serious actuary implications on pension funds, on the labor force, on the pensioners' position and on leisure.

When the trade unions won the right of retirement for male workers at age 65 and for female workers at age 60, the average life expectancy was 67 years, and it was believed that people deserve to rest in the last two-three years of their life. In the last century, life expectancy has risen in the developed countries by ten years. At the same time, due to the high standard of living, the elderly have managed to retain their physical and mental

stamina (their psychological and biological age is less than their chronological age).

In many cases, retirement is perceived no longer as a right but as a punishment. For many, retirement signals the beginning of deterioration and the feeling that they are no longer needed. Society finds it difficult to cope with the problems of the aged. Geriatric experts maintain that the problem is only that of the society. The older population is swelling, demanding more resources, while the average age of the world population is increasing.

#### The importance of creativity

The following story will clarify the importance of productivity for the individual and for society.

#### **The secret of long and happy life**

The traditional Jewish blessing "May you live to be a hundred and twenty" (unknown source) is no longer valid these days. Some researchers claim that in certain regions of the world, people live up to a hundred and thirty years. Not all of them, of course, but some of them. One of the researchers who has investigated the subject thoroughly is Dr. Alexander Leaf, who spent his sabbatical leave in three parts of the world, whose inhabitants excel in their longevity: the republic of Azerbaijan in the Caucasus (the Former Soviet Union); the Honza region in Pakistan and the Wilkambra region in the

Peruvian Andes. What is common to these three regions is that they are mountainous and are located high above the sea level.

Dr. Leaf interviewed hundreds of old people and their relatives in these regions, examined their birth certificate, the periods in which they were born and the historical occurrences that took place in these times (in some cases, the old people were born in the 70's and 80's of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). He claims that his findings are reliable and sound. Other researchers have examined Dr. Leaf's data and his considerations and have fully approved his conclusions. What is the secret of the longevity of the dwellers in these three regions?

Environmental conditions: clean mountain air, not like the city air in the developed world (and in recent years in the developing world as well), which is polluted with gas emissions and car exhaust, machines and all kinds of garbage. Living in these regions is not easy, but it is healthy. They have to exert themselves every day climbing up and down the mountainous slopes. Therefore they continuously exercise all their muscles, including the heart muscle.

The inhabitants cultivate the gardens by their houses, almost everyone having a small vegetable garden, fruit trees and flowers by their homes. Working in the garden has been known for generations to strengthen the body, being both healthy and enjoyable, and a healthy mind, as is well known, adds to the health of the body. Their diet includes lots of natural food, especially fruit and vegetables. On the other hand, it is very low on animal fats and on sugar, in its various forms. The residents are not fat and the

calcium level in their body is optimal. Most of them do not smoke and do not consume alcohol.

The elderly spend their time in the bosom of their family, contrary to many elders in the world who are lonely and neglected. They are useful to their families and contribute from their long life experience, from their wisdom and industriousness. Even widows and widowers are not lonely. Last but not least, and this is perhaps the most important factor, the old people of Azerbaijan, in the Honza areas and in the Wilkambra region are respected by their communities, where they serve as advisors and mediators.

#### summery

People should be educated throughout their life to accept aging and view it as part of the life cycle. It should not be feared, but on the contrary, people have to keep busy in terms of work, studies, maintaining relations with family members and so on. Thus the possibility of a large vacuum being created in their daily routine that cannot be filled is not actualized. Many claim that retirement has affected their health. However, studies indicate that there is no evidence supporting the claim that retirement affects health, although it is undoubtedly accompanied by pressures, especially if not entered into willingly. Not all celebrate their retirement from work, although this too is a beginning of something new, of another stage in life. The years of retirement are not necessarily a bad thing, and there are ways of turning them into

something that is very positive. However, the help of the aged themselves and of society at large is needed to bring this about.

If the elderly view themselves in a positive light and they feel vital and that they contribute to their community, society will also see them as such. Once a person feels that s/he is no longer needed and that his or her opinion is no longer considered, s/he feels himself rejected and his or her self-esteem is affected. When a person presents him/herself as such in society, this is the impression s/he gives and s/he is treated accordingly.

My assumption is that the busier the person is, the better will be his or her mental state, and as a result, physical state. A bored person sits at home in idleness, immersed in his or her own depression and self-pity. Hence, it seems that willpower assists in physical and mental recuperation. This is the place to present the words of Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who said that with the help of willpower it is possible to fight diseases (Sontag, 1977). In this case, while the fact of aging has been accepted, at the same time it must be "fought" and made more pleasant for the individual and for society.

Here, on the one hand, I see our role as a society as being to educate the aged to accept old age and to live their lives to the full, and to improve the image of the old in their own eyes. On the other hand, it is our role to educate the youth to respect the aged through appropriate programs.

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