

Human Values in Aging Newsletter – Aug. 1, 2009

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H.R. Moody, Editor

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THE WISDOM OF AGE

The Middle Eastern folk hero Mulla Nasr Edin had reached old age and was sitting in a tea house with friends looking back on his life.

"When I was a young man I was filled with the goal of awakening everyone and I prayed to God to give me what was needed to change the world.

One day in middle age I realized that my life was half over and I had accomplished little. I had changed no one. So again I prayed to God to give me what was needed to change only those near me, since it was obvious that they needed to change.

Now that I have reached old age my prayer is much more simple. 'God,' I pray, 'give me what is needed to change myself.' "

Another time Mulla Nasr Edin was playing on his violin, just a single note over and over again.

Those around him asked, "Mulla, why do you not play all the notes on your violin, like other people?"

Mulla replied: "Fools. They are looking for the right note. I have found it."

ELDERQUEST

The last stage of life can be called "an elderquest" "because its successful completion requires the mastery of a whole new set of skills (today's developmental psychologists would call them ?developmental tasks?), those that are necessary to navigate not midlife but old age?, trust, wisdom, and the willingness to let go," writes Charles Nicholas, who has analyzed the elderquest motif from Home and Sophocles up through films such as "Wild Strawberries" and "The Trip to Bountiful."

Nicholas has created a new version of a program guide "Elderquest II: Four Programs on Gender and Aging." The first guide, "The Elderquest in Today's Movies and Novels," was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and widely used in Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes. had a very successful run at 19 Osher programs around the country. The second version includes screenings and discussions of the films that feature more positive narratives for later life.

For details on how to buy a CD version of the program, contact Charles Nicholas at (978) 526-9228

To read more about Elderquest, visit:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrql/190752/66/50738/7237/0/S/huji.pdf>

CELEBRITY, PERFORMANCE AND AGING

"Celebrity, Performance, and Aging: The Shaping of Attitude and Expression in Modern Culture" is the theme of a collection of papers to be edited by Aagje Swinnen and John A. Stotesbury and published by the Age Studies in Europe group.

According to Roland Barthes, myths are socially constructed phenomena representing the worldview of the dominant class. These myths are represented as a "matter of course" in the texts of popular culture and in various art forms, and they contain socially accepted concepts of gender, values, and age.

The editors are looking for papers that focus on a range of questions, including (but not limited to) the following: What meanings are attached to age and aging in various genres and texts of modern culture? How do (popular culture) texts and the values connected with these representations interact with society and serve as indicators and projectors of dominant ideologies and values? How does aging shape identity constructions in popular culture? What genres and/or texts undermine the dominant representation of age?

For details on submitting papers, visit:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrql/190752/67/50738/7238/0/S/huji.html>

LESS IS MORE

It was Mies van der Rohe (not another architect) who was known for aphorisms such as "less is more" and "God is in the details."

Mies (as he was often called) served as the last director of the famous Bauhaus School in Germany before emigrating to the USA.

He lived to age 83, continuing to be productive. In the last decades of his life Mies intensified his vision of monumental "skin and bones" architecture reflecting deeper spiritual goals. From earlier years he was influenced by the writings of Catholic philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and the mystical writer Siegfried Ebeling, whose arguments inspired an architecture striving for spiritual transcendence anchored in material existence.

Thomas Aquinas himself ceased writing anything after his own profound mystical experience. Just after Mass at the feast of St. Nicholas, in 1273, Thomas came back to his room with a strange appearance, enveloped in silence. His secretary, Reginald, asked him why he was not writing more on an unfinished treatise.

Thomas answered, "I can write no more. Everything I have written up to now seems like straw" compared to the vision he had been given.

For more on this phenomenon, see THE SILENCE OF ST. THOMAS, by Josef Pieper (St. Augustine's Press, 1999).

But aren't we all supposed to aspire toward "Active Aging?"

Maybe not: "Doing less can actually be very hard. Too often we mistakenly believe that doing less makes us lazy and results in a lack of productivity. Instead, doing less helps us savor what we do accomplish... Every life has great meaning, but the meaning of our own can often be obscured by the fog of constant activity and plain bad habits... Doing less leads to more love, more effectiveness and internal calmness, and a greater ability to accomplish more of what matters most ? to us, and by extension to others and the world."

From LESS: Accomplishing More By Doing Less, by Marc Lesser (New World Library, 2009)

AMERICORPS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act includes, as a new benefit for volunteers, educational opportunities for older volunteers. In the new "Silver Scholars Program" AmeriCorps volunteers 55 and older may be eligible for "Encore Fellowships" for continued learning. They can also transfer their education award to a child or grandchild. For details, visit:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrq/190752/68/50738/7239/0/S/huji.html>

BOOKS OF INTEREST

FORGET MEMORY: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia, by Anne Basting (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE: Finding Meaning in Times of Change, Challenge, and Chaos, by Geri Burdman (Bellevue Press, 2008).

For details visit:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrql/190752/60/50738/7240/0/S/huji.html>

A LONG BRIGHT FUTURE: An Action Plan for a Lifetime of Happiness, Health, and Financial Security, by Laura Carstensen (Broadway Books, 2009).

WEB SITES TO SEE

LOOKING FOR SPEAKERS? Take a look at a speaking bureau exclusively listing speakers who specialize in aging, "Next Age Speakers," a nonprofit group which charges no commissions.

Visit them at:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrql/190752/61/50738/7241/0/S/huji.html>

CREATIVITY. Research on creativity and aging is available at:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrql/190752/62/50738/7242/0/S/huji.pdf>

SAGE-ING. The Sage-ing Guild is a group specializing in conscious aging and spiritual eldering. Visit them at:

<http://msg1svc.net/cmrql/190752/63/50738/7243/0/S/huji.html>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

PIONEER NETWORK: "Coming Together. Creating Community." (Aug. 12-14, 2009, Little Rock, Arkansas). The Pioneer Network's 9th National Conference will host 1,200 participants and feature an award to culture-change pioneer Dr. Bill Thomas.

For details, visit:

www.pioneernetwork.net

CONSCIOUS AGING: The Ethical Will. (Aug 19, 2009, Seattle, WA).

"Leaving a Legacy: The Ethical Will" is Part 4 of the Conscious Aging Workshop Series, offered by Elderwise at 1820 E Pine St, Suite 201, Seattle WA 98122. Facilitated by Sandy Sabersky, Director of Elderwise and a Certified Sage-ing Leader.

For details call (206) 325-0471.

