



Top Ten Spiritual Practices for Older Adults

by Nancy Gordon

Our spirituality is the core of who we are and our way of being in the world. The following is a list of suggested spiritual practices that can deepen our awareness of the essential spiritual part of life and provide frameworks for navigating aging with grace and zest.

Practice Breathing — Breathing is something we do without thinking, yet paying attention to our breath brings us to our center while at the same time bringing us to an awareness of our body, the address where our soul lives. Sustained attention to breathing becomes a form of centering prayer or meditation. Even a short period of consciously, slowly breathing in and breathing out reminds us of the gift of having the breath of life and centers us for what lies ahead.

Practice Gratitude — Looking for and noting the small and large graces and gifts of each day infuses our lives with meaning, even in the midst of great difficulties. Expressing our gratitude — to God, to the person who blessed our day with helpfulness and humor, or to our gratitude journal — contributes to becoming a person for whom others are grateful.

Practice Wonder — Poet Mary Oliver in “Instructions for Living” says: “Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.” This poem captures the heart of practicing wonder: seeing what is present all around us and being astonished by it, whether it is a sunset, snowcapped mountain peaks, the call of a bird or the sweetness of a baby’s smile. When we share our wonders, we build connections between ourselves and others, ourselves and the world.

Practice Creativity — Many of us gave up on art in grade school when we discovered that we couldn’t draw. But discovering new me-

diums for expressing our innate creativity can be a powerful antidote to the boredom of passing days. Challenge yourself to find creative solutions to old problems; set out to try new routes and to experience new things. And see your life as a creative work in progress. What do you need for this portion of the journey?

Practice Kindness — We don’t always have control of our life circumstances or what is going on around us. What we can control is our response, and we can almost always find a way to be kind. Giving others the benefit of the doubt, or making that extra small gesture, doesn’t cost much in the end but contributes to our soul’s growth and expands our capacity for empathy and compassion.

Practice Releasing — Aging has sometimes been compared to a process of stripping down to the basics. Spiritually mature people have discovered that this stripping-down process can usher in a new sense of freedom. We can cooperate with the process by voluntarily releasing our excess possessions, unrealistic expectations of others and ourselves, and old grudges and resentments. New energy is discovered when we release what we no longer need or what is ultimately harming us or weighing us down.

Practice Connecting — If we are fortunate to live long enough, we find that with added years our circle of friends and family diminishes in size. Yet study after study has shown that those with significant ties to others fare better in the aging process. So practice making new connections and keeping old ones vital. Don’t wait for others to contact you — pick up the phone, write that note, invite a new neighbor for coffee, or send your grandchild that email. And if you



value connection with God, put yourself in the places where you make that connection most easily on a regular basis.

Practice Resting — One of the laments of aging is the increased lack of energy and the inability to do as much or as many of the activities that we previously enjoyed. We live in a wider culture that values and validates productivity and busyness. A counter-intuitive response is to actively practice resting — intentionally taking an hour each day, a day each week, where we give ourselves permission to do nothing but rest in whatever way that renews and restores us. A restful pause, a time that is unhurried and unharried, can be a delightful oasis and give us a fresh perspective on our life.

Practice Making Music — Not everyone is musically talented, but we all have a need for melody and rhythm. Sing in the shower, with a choir or with the radio, but find a way to sing. If singing is too much to ask, join a drum circle or find another way to keep the beat going. Dance to the music that others make. Find a way to join in the music of your life for an increased sense of vitality and belonging.

Practice Being Who You Are — The goal of the spiritual journey of life is to become our most authentic self. After a certain age, it no longer matters so much what people think of us. What matters is that we are being true to ourselves, our own uniqueness. Say yes to the things that bring you joy, and quit doing the things that don't. Explore those parts of yourself that you left behind as you climbed the career ladder or raised a family.

Practice Giving Yourself Away — Listen to your life in all of its complexity and give thanks for the journey you've taken. And then share yourself, your wisdom, and your joy with the wider world.

About Nancy Gordon and the Center for Spirituality and Aging

Nancy Gordon, M.Div. is the director of the award-winning California Lutheran Homes Center for Spirituality and Aging. With a core belief that 'Aging is a spiritual journey,' the Center offers education and resources about spirituality as it is experienced in the aging process for both aging services professionals and faith communities. Located at Walnut Village Retirement Community in Anaheim, California, the Center is a respected resource for residents and staff at Front Porch retirement communities and for those in the greater community. More information can be found by visiting www.spiritualityandaging.org.

About Front Porch

Front Porch is one of the largest not-for-profit providers of retirement living communities in Southern California. Front Porch active adult and full-service retirement communities offer a full range of options from independent living to continuing care, along with specialized programs like memory support. With innovative communities and programs that meet the changing needs of people as they age, Front Porch communities represent a leading-edge approach to wellness in aging. Front Porch is comprised of 11 full-service retirement communities in California and two adult living communities: one in Louisiana and one in Florida. Of these, six are Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC). Front Porch, based in Burbank, Calif. and founded in 1999, is a not-for-profit organization that gives back to its residents and the communities it serves.