MINDFUL AGEING

BECOME A HERO

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1: INTRODUCTION

When Shakespeare, in As You Like It, characterised old age as “second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything”, he portrayed a widely held view of ageing as a time of decline and decay. He wasn’t the first: Cicero commented “The fact is that when I come to think it over, I find that there are four reasons for old age being thought unhappy: First, that it withdraws us from active employments; second, that it enfeebles the body; third, that it deprives us of nearly all physical pleasures; fourth, that it is the next step to death.”¹

In the academic world this has been reflected in theories such as Disengagement, which “assumes an inherent and natural drive to disengage mentally and socially when growing old” [Tornstam 2005:9], and the pathological perspective which “more or less equates aging with disease, and interprets various behaviours in old age as manifestations of a physical or mental pathology” [Tornstam 2005:8]

In this paper we explore alternatives to this dismal picture of ageing, and argue that the role of mindfulness and compassion in this is potentially considerable. We argue that mindful ageing should embrace four key themes:

- **Heighten mental and physical wellbeing**: recognising how important these are, we do all we can to keep active, both mentally and physically
- **Enhance life through mindfulness**: we embrace the possibilities offered by mindful practice, enhancing the eight aspects of life which comprise Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement
- **Realign toward the positive**: we challenge the restrictions and negativities which come with the Seasoned Mind, encouraging the Beginner’s Mind through mindful practice
- **Open to new possibilities and new beginnings**: we accept and embrace change, seeing ageing as bringing with it new opportunities, and even a new mindset

We consider each of these in turn, leading to the conclusion that both individuals and agencies should be giving serious consideration to the contribution which mindfulness can make in an increasingly elderly society.

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¹ *De Senectute (Of Old Age)* available at http://www.bartleby.com/9/2/1.html
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

2: HEIGHTEN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ACTIVITY

We begin with one of the main alternatives to disengagement developed in social gerontology, the activity perspective, which “assumes that all kinds of physical and social activity are beneficial for the ageing individual” [Tornstam 2005:8]. This therefore embraces the Five Ways to Wellbeing identified by the New Economics Foundation [NEF] from evidence gathered in the UK government’s Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing. The Project, published in 2008, drew on state-of-the-art research about mental capital and mental wellbeing through life. It asked the New Economics Foundation to develop the Five Ways to Wellbeing to communicate its key findings, and these provide a sound starting point for our discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: THE FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONNECT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BE ACTIVE</strong></td>
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<td>Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TAKE NOTICE</strong></td>
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<td>Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons! Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>KEEP LEARNING</strong></td>
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<td>Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GIVE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.</td>
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New Economics Foundation 2011

Since its first publication, NEF have monitored the use of the Five Ways of Wellbeing, and they report a number of projects targeted at older people. We can take this further by considering in more detail the idea of active ageing. A good representative of this approach is Vickery. He argues the need for a new mindset, in which we “accept the unchangeable with grace and serenity, and change what we can change with courage, confidence, and determination. This means staying involved, staying positive, having a purpose, not taking things for granted, building spiritual strength, having close friends and family, and self-managing behaviors and exposures. … A new view of “normal” older age should be active, involved, productive, and valued for wisdom and guidance. This requires rejecting the negative stereotypes and the attitudes and behaviours that go with them. It takes courage to act and think differently and to lead by example. As more middle-aged and older folks reject the stereotypes and become examples of a new vision of older age, social learning will reinforce this new vision. It will change the expectations of what is possible and expected in our 60s, 70s, 80s, and even 90s.” [2012:493]

Vickery draws on a key concept in mindfulness – acceptance – to identify four rules to live by:

- Accepting what we have no control over
• Coping with unchangeable adversity
• Strengthening relationships
• Building spiritual strength

Vickery [2012:13-15] identifies three major factors that cause us to grow old:
• “Disuse – when we don’t use our body and brain enough, they get weak – that is, old. It’s the ‘use it or lose it’ law of the biology of adaptation. We can use our body and brain to our advantage to reverse our weaknesses.
• “Chronic disease – disease processes begin long before there is a diagnosis, but our doctors and health care system pay little attention until the diagnosis is made, at which time considerable ‘aging’ has already taken place.
• “Real aging – this is the mysterious unchangeable process that we don’t know much about, except that it is minor compared to the other two.”

He argues that we should focus on the first two, and identifies ten root causes of these: physical disuse, mental disuse, diet, tobacco, alcohol, stress, environment, medications, attitude and genes. Most important of these are physical and mental disuse, but as Vickery argues “the good news about disuse is that it is reversible. It is the best investment we can make in ourselves.” [2012:71]. Two of the Five Ways to Wellbeing address this directly: Be Active, and Keep Learning.

Particularly important to our discussion here are the mental difficulties that become more common with increasing age, which “are usually attributed to aging until they become severe enough to be labeled dementia. These difficulties include:
• Forgetfulness, especially short-term memory [repeating things, forgetting names
• Slower processing of information
• Difficulty learning new tasks or techniques
• Increasing rigidity in thinking, less able to consider alternatives
• Poorer motor control—problems with balance and coordination
• Poorer concentration” [2012:74]

Vickery argues that “all of these processes are reversible with increasing mental activity. Neurons, neurotransmitters and neural networks get stronger and more efficient” [2012:74] Vickery’s approach is an example of active ageing, which has been identified by Walker as having seven key elements, two of which are particularly important here:
• Activity should comprise all meaningful pursuits that contribute to the well-being of the individual concerned, his or her family, local community or society at large, and should not be concerned only with paid employment or production.
• Any strategy for active ageing should equally be participative and empowering. There must be opportunities for citizens to take action in developing their own forms of activity [Walker and Maltby 2012:126]

“Use it or lose it” is therefore a valuable prescription. Thus Stuart-Hamilton argues that “Generally, declines in intellectual skills in later life are correlated with decreased brain volume. This can be interpreted as meaning that physical decline will produce a reduction in mental skills, but it can also be argued that the brain is more plastic than this [i.e. it can physically change in response to inputs] and that changes in brain volume might be the result of less demand being made of neural processes because of changes in behaviour and lifestyle. In other words, the brain physically declines because it is not being exercised enough.” [2012:47]
We now consider the contribution that mindfulness can make to ageing. NEF recognise the role mindfulness can take in wellbeing. They comment, for example, in relation to education that “the Five Ways to Wellbeing could be directly applied to thinking about a broader curriculum that provides more opportunities around sports, arts, creativity and mindfulness in lessons” [2011:28-9]

While we argue in this paper that mindful ageing is worth pursuing, it must be recognised that there are considerable problems facing many people as they age, and these go well beyond the recognition that we shall never win Wimbledon [or become a striker for AFC Wimbledon]. First, health – both physical and mental – is a major issue related to age. We later consider some of the evidence that mindfulness has a positive role to play here, but it is no panacea. A second major issue is finance. Age UK report that 1.6 million pensioners are living in relative poverty, and 900,000 of these are in severe poverty.2

Third, Help the Aged report that loneliness is endemic among pensioners3. Penny Marshall4 reports that over 50% of the elderly [aged over 75] now live alone, a rise of 10% in 40 years. She comments: “Few do so by choice and many report acute loneliness. Keith Arscott, the director of the charity Contact the Elderly told me that many of those who contact him feel isolated and vulnerable. While people are aware of the emotional problems of loneliness, the charity warns few recognise the potential physical damage as well. Mr Arscott said loneliness can lead to depression. A tenth of elderly people see their friends or families less than once a month and that lack of social interaction can make old people more vulnerable to depression and to problems such as excessive drinking, poor diet and ill health.” The International Longevity Centre argue that “loneliness and isolation has become a a serious issue for our ageing population. Half of the UK’s older people say television is their main source of company” [2014:10]

Stuart-Hamilton comments that “it must not be supposed that the added life many modern people experience is necessarily blissful. Wilkins and Adams [1983], working from Canadian actuarial tables, calculated that for older adults about 75 per cent of this ‘extra time’ is spent suffering from one or more physical disabilities and hence discomfort. Brattberg, Parker and Thorslund [1996] cite a similar figure of 73 per cent of Swedish adults in their late seventies reporting mild or severe pain.” [2012:30]

Thus the contribution of mindfulness and compassion to ageing has to be seen in the context of wider social and economic policy which needs to address the issues cited above. If ageing is accompanied by poverty, poor housing, isolation and social stigma, it is little surprise if the response by some is withdrawal and disengagement. “The trick is to promote lifelong well-being, reduce the negative impact of environmental factors [diet, pollution, employment, housing and so on] and, if mobility is restricted, to maintain participation in social relationships [a key to well-being)” [Walker 2009].

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4 http://www.itv.com/news/2013-03-07/more-than-half-of-elderly-over-75-now-live-alone/
We can take this further by considering the contribution which a course such as Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement [Darwin 2014] can make. This course was specifically developed for a general audience [it is not therapy], and is underpinned by a number of beliefs:

- We are already mindful at times; formal mindfulness practices enhance this capability
- We recognise the problems that automatic pilot, negative thinking and rumination can cause, but may not have explored the full consequences and seen the possibilities of changing our relationship to these
- We display the qualities of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity at times, but all of these can be deepened and enhanced through formal practice
- We all have our own levels of optimism, hope, gratitude and forgiveness, but these can be extended and enhanced
- We know how to savour, but often lose sight of its full potential, especially when we get trapped on the hedonic treadmill
- We understand the importance of the link between mind and body, but this understanding can be easily lost, and can be enhanced through mindful movement
- We all have existing values and our own worldview; MBLE should be compatible with these and an enhancement of what we already have.

**FIGURE 1: MINDFULNESS BASED LIFE ENHANCEMENT AND THE FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING**
MBLE has four key components: mindfulness [of both body and mind], mindful learning, the Four Immeasurables, and Positive Psychology. The Four Immeasurables are Loving Kindness, Compassion, Empathetic Joy and Equanimity. There are six themes from Positive Psychology: Challenging Negativity, Optimism, Hope, Savouring, Gratitude and Forgiveness.

The course has been running now for more than three years, with over 200 participants thus far. Research and evaluation based on their experience has shown that they see MBLE as involving eight aspects, which emerge for participants from the initial components. These are illustrated in FIGURE 1 which also indicates the links to the Five Ways to Wellbeing. We can Take Notice by savouring – the small as well as the large – and by taking joy in both our own happiness and that of others. Among the things we can Keep Learning are recognition of automatic pilots which are unhelpful, the harmful stereotypes we create about ourselves and others, the power of negative thinking, and the second darts we often fire at ourselves. We can Give by expressing gratitude, by practising tonglen, by forgiving [ourselves and others]. We can Connect through meditations such as the Four Immeasurables, and through informal practice such as Random Acts of Kindness and the expression of compassion. And we can Be Active through mindful movement and greater somatic awareness.

MBLE was designed as a non-clinical course for adults of all ages. While research on the specific relevance of mindfulness to ageing remains limited, there are already a number of examples of the ways in which the eight aspects of MBLE can contribute to a rewarding experience of ageing, and we consider these now.

**FORMAL AND INFORMAL MINDFULNESS**

Research has identified the value of formal mindfulness practice in several areas: reducing cognitive decline, improving executive function, improving attention, addressing loneliness, decreasing psychological distress, and addressing depression. There is also evidence that mindfulness may impact the ageing process itself. Let us take each of these in turn.

First, Pagnoni and Cekic [2007] used MRI to compare grey matter volume and attentional performance in 13 regular practitioners of Zen meditation and 13 matched controls. They concluded that “the regular practice of meditation may have neuroprotective effects and reduce the cognitive decline associated with normal aging” [2007:1623]

Second, Moynihan et al, in a study of MBSR for older adults, conclude that “To our knowledge, this is one of the first reports of the use of MBSR for a relatively healthy older adult population. Our data do suggest that MBSR maintained initial levels of theoretically meaningful changes in left frontal brain alpha asymmetry, and increased executive control, consistent with theorized effects of mindfulness training and with some previous research with younger populations.” [2013:10]. Since executive function helps connect past experience with present action, it is valuable for activities such as planning, organizing, strategizing, paying attention to and remembering details, and managing time and space.

Third, McHugh et al undertook a study of 24 people aged 71 to 90, giving half of them a focussed attention task. They concluded: “Ageing is related to significant declines in cognitive functioning. This effect can have a serious impact on the physical and psychological health of older adults as well as their quality of life. One phenomenon linked to cognitive deficits, particularly attention, that has been
demonstrated to emerge with ageing is over-selectivity. Over-selectivity occurs when behavior is controlled by a limited number of stimuli in the environment. ... The results of this study indicated that the level of emergent over-selectivity in an elderly population was significantly reduced after a focused attention induction when compared to an unfocused attention induction. The findings are discussed in terms of the efficacy of mindfulness training in reducing over-selectivity” [2009]

Fourth, we have already seen that loneliness is a major problem for old people. The findings of Creswell et al are therefore important. They took volunteer healthy adults aged 55-85 through an MBSR programme. They concluded: “Using a randomized controlled trial design, the present study identifies MBSR as a novel approach for reducing loneliness in older adults. Although previous studies suggest a role for mindfulness-based treatments in reducing distress and in fostering improved relational well-being this is the first study to show that mindfulness meditation training reduces feelings of loneliness. ... This study provides a promising initial indication that the 8-week MBSR program may reduce perceptions of loneliness in older adults, which is a well-known risk factor for morbidity and mortality in aging populations” [2012:6,8]

Fifth, Young et al studied 141 adults aged over 60 who completed MBSR training. They found that: “Overall emotional distress and all sub-scale mood measurements improved significantly following MBSR training. MBSR training resulted in >50% reduction in the number of older people reporting clinically significant depression and anxiety.” They conclude: “MBSR training is a promising, group-based intervention for decreasing psychological distress in older adults.” [2010:59]

Sixth, Smith et al [2007] studied 30 people over 65 who completed an MBCT course, and concluded: “In this study many older people with recurring depression reported benefit from a course which taught them mindfulness meditation, integrated with elements of cognitive therapy targeting risks for depressive recurrence.”

The impact mindfulness may have on the ageing process itself is also of interest. The Observer comments: “After several years of number-crunching, data from the so-called Shamatha project is finally starting to be published. ... one result in particular has potentially stunning implications: that by protecting caps called telomeres on the ends of our chromosomes, meditation might help to delay the process of ageing.” [24.4.2011] The report of the lead scientist is cautious, but encouraging: “I’m not saying that meditation will make you live longer,” said Dr. Saron. “Meditation alone—I’m not saying it raises your telomerase levels or results in longer telomeres. This is for future work, but this kind of finding will motivate that work. “It does look like activities that foster meaningful positive psychological change, like meditation, positively impact cellular ageing.”

MINDFUL MOVEMENT AND SOMATIC AWARENESS

The value of continued physical activity as we age has already been highlighted. Park and Bischof lend support to the mental benefits of physical activity: “There is a growing body of research that suggests fitness training in older adults enhances both neural structure and function.... studies that yield increases in volume of brain structures as a result of experience, such as the expertise research, provide good evidence for plasticity of neural function with age. Similarly, the fitness research provides convincing evidence that there are modest gains to be realized in cognitive function by maintaining a moderate to high level of fitness at older ages.” [2011:117]

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Although in MBLE mindful movement focuses on practices drawn from yoga and Qigong, many participants have seen the benefit in a variety of other activities, from mindfully walking in the Peak District to spinning. Wang and Glicksman studied the benefits of community gardening identified by low-income minority older adults living in senior housing. These included mental health benefits, beauty and connection to growth, and connecting with others. They comment: “The older adults who expressed that gardening was a way to increase internal peace of mind and calmness demonstrated the need to move away from superficial relationships to more of a relationship with one's self” [2013:102], and cite this in support of the gerotranscendence theory which we will explore later in this paper.

The interlinking effects of the eight aspects of MBLE are supported by the findings of a Finnish study of elderly persons, which found that “physical activity had a positive effect on both meaning in life and self-rated health and functioning ... meaning in life has been recognized as an essential factor of maintaining personal well-being.” [Takkinen et al 2001] In his exploration of the body-mind connection Rejeski concludes: “A mindfulness perspective can benefit the promotion of physical activities and a new relationship with the body in aging. Likewise, physical activities in the context of aging provide an ideal means of developing mindfulness in day-to-day life.” [2008:139]

For many, the problem with physical exercise is that ‘the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak’. Stuart-Hamilton comments that: “With regard to choosing the right lifestyle, the answer seems to lie in the things a lot of people hate: namely, taking more exercise, eating and drinking less, and smoking not at all.” [2012:26] Mindfulness can help us to explore the barriers we often develop to physical activity, or to sensible eating – as Thich Nhat Hanh has argued [2011]. [Here speaks the zeal of the converted: I was once an obese desk potato, but mindful eating sorted the weight, and mindful movement led to enjoyment of physical activity.]

And this in turn will make it more likely that we can have an old age to enjoy: “Thanks to a recent review of 22 separate studies which followed nearly a million people from Europe, North America, East Asia and Australasia, we know that a couch potato who gets off the sofa and starts doing around 2.5 hours of moderate activity a week [walking, cycling, jogging, swimming] can expect to reduce their mortality by around 19%.” [Mosley 2013:27-8]
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ENRICHING OPTIMISM AND HOPE

The value in addressing optimism and hope when ageing is well illustrated in the following comment: “Attitude to ageing can itself have an effect and a positive attitude can extend life by some five years. In 1968 a team studied a group of people, who were aged 18 to 49, and who completed a questionnaire that measured the extent to which they agreed with 16 negative views of ageing. These included beliefs that elderly people are ‘feeble’ and ‘helpless’. Thirty years later, 25% of those who had negative beliefs about ageing had suffered heart disease or a stroke, compared with 13% of those who rejected such views. Those who viewed ageing as a positive experience lived on average seven and a half years longer.” [Wolpert 2011:134]

PRACTISING GRATITUDE AND FORGIVENESS

Richmond comments that “Researchers have found three factors that reliably increase happiness as we grow older -- gratitude, generosity and reframing [seeing your situation from a more positive perspective].” He quotes Suzuki as saying “Gratitude is this moment”, and the Benedictine nun Joan Chittister: “We have every right to live in gratitude for all the stages that brought us here, for all the memories that give us great joy, the people who helped us get this far, the accomplishments we carved on our hearts along the way” [2012:62] One of the practices he recommends is a gratitude walk.

Research by Toussaint and Friedman showed that there was strong support for their hypothesis that “forgiveness and gratitude would be positively supported by all the measures of well-being” [2009:649]. Neto’s study of 152 participants concluded that “gratitude explained a significant amount of variance of overall propensity to forgive” (2007:2313). He quotes Vaillant’s (1993) argument that “a key to mature adaptation to life is the ability to replace bitterness and resentment toward those who have perpetrated harm with gratitude and acceptance” (ibid:2321).

ENHANCING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

Phillips and Ferguson [2012] undertook a study with 185 adults aged 65 and over, and found that self-compassion was significantly positively associated with four indicators of well-being: high positive affect, low negative affect, ego integrity and meaning in life. They link ego integrity to Erikson’s psychosocial theory of personality development, which will be considered further below, pointing to this as a successful resolution of the last of his eight stages, and involving “a composite of wisdom, wholeness, integration and acceptance in relation to one’s past life experiences” [2012:530].

ENJOYING LIFE AND SAVOURING

Powell considers the ‘season’ of old age, and suggests four “enhanced powers and opportunities unique to this season” [2011:200-201]. These are:

- The pleasure of ‘touching base’, reconnecting with those people and experiences that evoked pleasant memories
- A relative abundance of unhurried time
- Better regulation of emotions
- More curiosity and more openness to the unfamiliar

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As we shall see later, enhancing our ability to savour the everyday experiences of life is a significant contributory factor to a fruitful old age.

ENHANCING BALANCE AND EQUANIMITY

Vickery adapts the Serenity Prayer to propose three principles:

- Develop wisdom to know the difference between what we can and can’t change about getting old
- Use courage to change what we can change
- Accept what we cannot change

Although there is no agreed view on whether age brings wisdom, an important link can be made through several strands of MBLE. Thus Ardelt concludes: “Although a uniform definition of wisdom does not exist, there is a general consensus among wisdom researchers and the general public that wisdom entails [a] cognitive knowledge, understanding, and insight, [b] reflective thought and an integration of one’s own perspective and self-interests with that of others, [c] compassionate concern for the welfare of others, and [d] equanimity”.[2011:287]

CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THINKING THROUGH MINDFUL LEARNING

In their study of Good Neighbours, the International Longevity Centre recommend that “help is needed to develop positive thinking and to feel more in control of one’s everyday life” [2011:13]

Negative thinking about age is prevalent – an example of ageism which we will explore further below. An important finding therefore is that a positive view of retirement can increase longevity. Larra et al studied a cohort of 394 participants who were followed for 23 years. They concluded: “As predicted, participants with positive attitudes toward retirement at the start of the study lived significantly longer than those with negative attitudes toward retirement. The positive attitudes-toward-retirement group had a median survival advantage of 4.9 years.” [2012:1418]
4: GOING FURTHER

But a big problem remains, illustrated by the title of Vickery’s otherwise excellent book: “Live Young, Think Young, Be Young ... At Any Age”. This encapsulates another dominant view of ageing – that it is something to be resisted. Young is good – do your best to avoid becoming old. Sherman [2010] describes the activity theory as claiming “that the optimal pattern of aging is exemplified by the older person who maintains the activities of middle age as long as possible”. Liang and Luo critique another version of the activity approach, arguing that “Successful aging as a theoretical framework fundamentally denies old age by advocating agelessness - old age is simply "more of the same,” a resemblance and/or an extension of youthfulness and middle-age values. It fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of old age - "old age has both less and more" compared to the young.” [2012:328] And Walker points to the genesis of the active ageing concept in the idea of ‘successful ageing’ developed in the United States in the 1960s, in which “successful ageing was to be achieved by denying the onset of old age and by replacing those relationships, activities and roles of middle age that are lost with new ones in order to maintain activities and life satisfaction”. [2002:122]

Yet as Shunryu Suzuki said: “Things change. For the usual person this is very discouraging. ... When you change your understanding and your way of living, then you can completely enjoy your new life in each moment. The evanescence of things is the reason why you enjoy your life.” [2002]

The desire to stay young is challenged by the Swedish gerontologist Tornstam, who argues that “White, Western, middle-class, middle-life society has, since the reformation, been characterised by an overwhelmingly strong performance orientation. Productivity, effectiveness, and independence are prestige words” [2005:12]. Drawing on the work of Ofstad, he says that the consequence is that “we come to look down upon and hold in contempt those who are unproductive, ineffective, and dependent” [ibid]. An example of such a negative perspective on the old is this: “The interests of the young are at risk of being marginalised, while the old ride proud. It is the new political dividing line that no one acknowledges. British government in the modern age requires middle-aged ministers, but they kowtow to the prejudices of the elderly.... The cost of pandering to pensioners is social arthritis. ...Someone needs to fight the selfish, short-sighted old. They are the past, not the future.” This is an illustration of the way in which “Older people are being transferred from the safe political haven of the deserving to the radically more exposed position of being one of the main threats to Britain's economic future.” [Walker 2012:812]

Ageist stereotypes draw on this negative perspective, and it is important to challenge it. But we need to go further. Suppose we consider instead the possibility that age brings with it a new perspective on life which challenges more than this emphasis on ‘productivity’ - a term which itself brings multiple assumptions about what it is to be productive. For example, is it more productive to manufacture cigarettes than to provide unpaid childcare for your grandparents? Conventional economics says Yes – others may disagree! [See EXHIBIT 4].

Tornstam provides such an alternative perspective in his theory of gerotranscendence. “Human aging, the very process of living into old age, includes a potential to mature into something I have called gerotranscendence. Simply put, gerotranscendence is a shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and rational view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an

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6 Chris Huhne: ‘Someone needs to fight the selfish, short-sighted old’ in The Guardian 22 December 2013
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increase in life satisfaction.” The full articulation of gerotranscendence involves sixteen signs, covering the cosmic level, the self, and social and individual relations [Table 2]. Examples of the sixteen signs are given in Appendix One, drawn from researchers and also from people who have taken an MBLE course and now form part of the MBLE Continuation Group who meet every month. We explore the relationship of gerotranscendence to mindfulness when we look at the fourth element of HERO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: SIGNS OF GEROTRANSCENDENCE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THE COSMIC LEVEL</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time and space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to earlier generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life and death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject of rejoicings</td>
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| **THE SELF** | |
| Self-confrontation | The discovery of hidden aspects of the self - both good and bad - occurs |
| Decrease of self-centredness | The removal of self from the centre of one's universe occurs |
| Development of body transcendence | Care of the body continues, but the individual is not obsessed by it |
| Self-transcendence | A shift occurs from egoism to altruism |

| **SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL RELATIONS** | |
| Rediscovery of the child within | Return to and transfiguration of childhood |
| Ego-integrity | The individual realizing that the pieces of life's jigsaw puzzle form a wholeness |
| Changed meaning and importance of relations | One becomes more selective and less interested in superficial relations, exhibiting an increasing need for solitude |
| Role-play | An understanding of the difference between self and role takes place, sometimes with an urge to abandon roles. A new comforting understanding of the necessity of roles in life often results |

| **Modern asceticism** | An understanding of the petrifying gravity of wealth and the freedom of 'asceticism' develops |
| Everyday wisdom | The difficulty in separating right from wrong is discerned and a preference for withholding judgements and advice is developed. Transcendence of the right-wrong duality ensues |

Source: Tornstam [1996b]

Here we have a very different view of ageing, as a time of transformation, a time to be embraced, not resisted. At first sight there are potential conflicts between Active Ageing and Gerotranscendence. For example:

- How does active engagement relate to an increasing need for solitude?
- How does physical activity relate to body transcendence?
- How does rediscovery of the child within relate to the active mind?

7 http://www.soc.uu.se/forskning/forskningsprojekt/gerotranscendence/
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But accepting gerotranscendence does not require a rejection of Active Ageing – in the true Zen spirit, we can have both/and, not either/or. We can seek to keep active physically and mentally, but without this becoming an obsession with youth. Thus in yoga we are taught to focus on our own practice, and not compare ourselves with others in the room. It is the same here: we focus on being as healthy as we can be, accepting change as it comes, and not seeking to compare ourselves with an ‘earlier self’. No “60 is the new 40” here! And as we shall see later, ‘the child within’ relates well to the Beginner’s mind.

EXHIBIT 4: SENATOR ROBERT KENNEDY

"Too much and for too long, we seem to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product . . . counts air pollution and cigarette advertising and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman’s rifle and Speck’s knife and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children.

"Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans."

This means that our two themes of **Heighten** and **Enhance** provide only half the story. The third theme is **Realign to the Positive**. Ageing offers the opportunity for reappraisal. Here it is useful to introduce the idea of the Seasoned Mind. Suzuki famously stated: “In the Beginner’s Mind there are many possibilities; in the Expert’s Mind there are few.” [1970:21] The Seasoned Mind has many characteristics in common with the Expert Mind – it is the product of experience and brings with it expertise, drawn from a lifetime of activity. It also brings with it the accumulation of many habits, stereotypes and set patterns. Many of the habits are beneficial, some are not. Most, if not all, of the stereotypes are unhelpful. Mindfulness, in which we bring the Beginner’s Mind to the forefront, helps us identify and distinguish the beneficial from the harmful, and then address the latter.

The Seasoned Mind also looks for continuity. This can be an issue with ‘use it or lose it’, if this comes to mean the pursuit of ‘staying young’, of maintaining some form of status quo. But if we accept the inevitability of change, we can also recognise that while some changes are unpleasant [a close friend dies, or we develop a physical impairment], others can be to the good – and these include the signs of gerotranscendence.

**THE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE**

We are moving here toward a developmental perspective which views the ageing process not as something to be resisted, but rather a process which brings new ways of thinking and being. We can begin this discussion with the challenge Cohen [2005:3-4] makes to conventional thinking about the brain, which he suggests includes the following ‘facts’:

- The brain cannot grow new brain cells
- Older adults can’t learn as well as young people
- Connections between neurons are relatively fixed throughout life
- Intelligence is a matter of how many neurons you have and how fast those neurons work

Cohen argues that recent research has established “four key attributes of the brain that lay the foundation for an optimistic view of human potential in the second half of life:

- **The brain is continually resculpting itself in response to experience and learning**
- **New brain cells do form throughout life**
- **The brain’s emotional circuitry matures and becomes more balanced with age**
- **The brain’s two hemispheres are more equally used by older adults**

Cohen sees the possibility of continual development: “development is highly individual. The goal, ultimately, is simply to manifest your own unique potential” [2005:34-5]. He introduces the term ‘developmental intelligence’, which he defines as “the maturing of cognition, emotional intelligence, judgement, social skills, life experience, and consciousness and their integration and synergy. With aging, each of these individual components of developmental intelligence continues to mature, as does the process of integrating each with the others” [ibid:35].

This developmental intelligence involves three related thinking styles, all of which relate well to Gerotranscendence:
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

- Relativistic thinking, which involves recognising that answers are not absolute
- Dialectical thinking, the ability to uncover and resolve contradictions in seemingly incompatible views
- Systematic thinking, which is the ability to see the forest rather than the trees

Like other authors, Cohen pays tribute to the developmental theory of Erikson, which involved eight stages. But Cohen considers this incomplete, in particular because only two stages relate to life beyond the age of 25. Instead of the single final stage of ‘old age’, Cohen argues for four phases:

- Re-evaluation, exploration, and transition
- Liberation, experimentation, and innovation [liberation]
- Recapitulation, resolution, and contribution [summing up]
- Continuation, reflection, and celebration [encore]

Joan Erikson has also extended Erik Erikson’s original eight stages, focussing on people in their eighties and nineties. This is a time when “despair, which haunts the eighth stage, is a close companion because it is almost impossible to know what emergen- cies and losses of physical ability are imminent. ... To face down despair with faith and appropriate humility is perhaps the wisest course” [Erikson and Erikson 1997:105-6]. She saw a link between this and Gerotranscendence, and added a chapter on the theory to her late husband’s original book.

Cohen’s stages may be usefully compared to the four stages of ageing identified by Richmond [2012]:

- Lightning Strikes - the moment we truly wake up to our aging, which could be at any time of our lives
- Coming to Terms - comparing ourselves now to how we once were
- Adaptation - letting go of who we were and embracing who we are
- Appreciation - acknowledging that “This is my life, I have no other”

Although there are differences in these various approaches, what we have in common is a view of the ageing process as an extensive period, which can begin early – for Richmond, lightning struck when he was 36 and was told by his doctor that he had cancer, while Cohen sees his first stage as typically occurring when one is in the 40s or 50s. And during the process many things can happen, both positive and negative. In Realignment we focus on addressing the negative, and then in Opening to New Possibilities we move to the positive.

As we have argued, the Seasoned Mind has a lifetime’s accumulation of habits and patterns. This is reflected in some of the most common ageist stereotypes, as identified by Nelson: “they’re slower at pretty much everything, they don’t change their ways, they are grumpy, and they can’t or don’t want to learn new things.” [2011:37] Nelson continues: “While those characteristics may be true for a number of older people, it is also true they don’t apply to many older adults”. The perspective taken here is that the Seasoned Mind should be complemented by the Beginner’s Mind, and we can add Langer’s three aspects of Mindful Learning: the creation of new categories, openness to new information, and awareness of more than one perspective. The negativity of a restricted perspective, the unhelpful limitations of unnecessary habits, the restrictions of fixed ways of thinking – all these can be explored through mindfulness.

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8 See Appendix Three for more on the stages of Erikson and Cohen
So we begin in a spirit of acceptance, an openness to the possibility that these traits are within us. And where we find the characteristics in ourselves, we can then change them. Here we address four aspects of this approach: reminiscence and reframing, self-stereotyping, getting unstuck, and attending to the five poisons. After reviewing the first three, we look at modes of enquiry which can help address these, and form a basis for practice to address the fourth also.

**REMINISCENCE AND REFRAMING**

We have already seen that for Richmond reframing is one of the factors which help increase happiness as we grow older. This can begin with reminiscence: “Through reminiscence - the sharing of memories of our personal life experience, with all their similarities and differences - we discover ourselves anew and encounter other people with enlarged understanding. We discover and rediscover the importance of relationships and recognise afresh our shared humanity with all its potential for good or ill. Far from locking us into the past, recalling and sharing memories brings new understanding, fresh perspectives, and courage for facing the future.” [Gibson 2011:9]

While this can be done with others, it can also be done by oneself, for example through diaries and journals. Mindful learning can then help us explore the new perspectives. As Rejeski comments: “In recent years, several authors have sought to identify key dimensions of mindfulness training. The most elaborate framework is offered by Wallace and Shapiro [2006]. Particularly relevant for older adults is the concept of conative balance, in short, re-evaluating priorities and making certain that their daily behavior is consistent with how they want to be remembered. ... Mindfulness challenges people at any age to look back, not to stir the pot of suffering, but as a means of increasing wisdom.” [2008:140]

**AGEIST STEREOTYPING**

An important aspect of positive realignment is the challenge we need to make to the ageist stereotypes which dominate thinking on age. Ageism is pervasive in modern society. In 1981 a number of us published a booklet Against Ageism [Darwin et al 1981]. In this we identified many examples of ageism, including prejudice against age, and self-stereotyping. We then challenged a number of the myths that surround age: chronology, ill health, senility, inflexible personality, rejection, misery, unproductivity. It is cautionary to note that more than 30 years later examples of ageism persist – and these myths still need to be challenged. Stereotyping of the elderly is well summarised in Age Concern’s publication on ageism [2004]. One of their branches discovered participants on a computing skills course were being turned away from a local computer store because the young staff “assumed that because of the customer’s age they would not be able to deal with the ‘complexities’ of buying a computer.” [2004:11] Appendix Six illustrates how easy it is to be ageist.

De Hennezel quotes de Ladoucette: “People are afraid of growing old because they cannot bear the way other people will see them. Old people are made to feel that they are an ugly, useless burden on society.” [2011:58] Langer argues that “Stereotypes regarding the negative consequences of old age are widely known and are almost unconditionally accepted, at least in the West. Studies have shown that old people are seen as forgetful, slow, weak, timid, and set in their ways” [2009:153-4]
According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel\(^9\), ‘senior moment’ was named Word of the Year by Webster’s New World College Dictionary in 2000. They commented: "Our aging population, especially those retired snowbirds in Florida, was the target of much political finger-pointing, for stalling the 2000 presidential election process. But whether too feeble to completely punch the chads out of the voting cards or too confused to understand the ballot, or too forgetful to even vote, senior moments are not the sole province of the elderly. Can this year’s national historical presidential cliff-hanger be chalked up to one big senior moment?"

Since then it has become a popular term – a quick website search will show jokes, multiple images, books, even games and tea towels devoted to the term. The Senior Moment is a good example of self-stereotyping. Several years ago a younger friend began to describe memory failures as Senior Moments, and I found myself doing the same – it becomes an easy way to excuse such lapses. Looking at it more closely, I realised that the memory problems I had – such as forgetting someone’s name – were ones I had always had. This terminology gave me an excuse – but at the expense of assuming that my mind, and in particular my memory, was in decline.

Levy et al [2011], in a study of 87 people aged 40-74, found that “memory decline was significantly greater over time for participants who held more negative age stereotypes compared to those with less negative age stereotypes” [2011:434]. So while there is evidence that short-term memory is impaired with age, I prefer to challenge it. The term ‘senior moment’ is now banned from my vocabulary.

Kite et al [1991] surveyed research, concluding “Characteristics associated with older individuals are not well defined, but there is general agreement that the stereotype is multidimensional and includes characteristics such as ill, tired, grouchy, unlikely to participate in activities, unhappy, undesirable for company, and physically unattractive” [1991:20].

More recently, Cuddy et al [2005] argue that seniors are stereotyped as low on competence. A brief survey of internet articles adds: they are bad drivers, set in their ways, all have Alzheimers, are mean and crotchety, smell like old milk, or mothballs, can’t remember important things.

Particularly relevant here is self-stereotyping, including learned helplessness. O’Brien Cousins [2000] surveyed 143 women aged 70+ about their beliefs regarding six fitness activities, including slow stretching. She found their beliefs about risks were strong and sometimes sensational. A good proportion could not see the relevance of exercises making their bodies stretch and bend. She suggests “Older women may have adopted an attitude of learned helplessness because many of them simply lack the confidence and personal resources to participate in active recreation” [2000:290]. In addition to challenging this learned helplessness, mindful movement could provide a wider context for seniors to see the relevance of these exercises, while the bodyscan could help them explore further the sensational aspects of their concerns.

Langer comments that “older adults often hold negative feelings about the elderly that are as strong, if not stronger, than those held by younger adults” [2009:154]. Levy [2001] argues “research suggests that after a lifetime of exposure to a culture’s age stereotypes, older individuals direct these age stereotypes back towards themselves.”

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\(^9\) http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1683&dat=20031229&id=kj8pAAAAIAJ&sjid=aUUEAAAAIAJ&pg=2322,5407237
stereotypes inwards” [2001:579]. She draws on the finding of a number of researchers to conclude that “As individuals age, these stereotypes tend to be reinforced by repeated exposure to the mainly negative aging stereotypes that exist in North America and Europe” [2003:203]. Moreover, these self-stereotypes “can operate without awareness to influence cognitive and physical outcomes” [ibid:2008]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXHIBIT 6: THE SEASONED BODY</th>
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<tr>
<td>While the discussion in this section focuses on the Seasoned Mind, we should recognise that the same issues arise with the body. Over time we develop physical habits and behaviours which can be as unhelpful as mental ones.</td>
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O’Brien Cousins asked 143 independent-living women aged 70 and older to respond to open-ended questions on their beliefs about benefits and risks for 6 fitness activities. She reports that while they recognized broad health benefits to fitness activities, beliefs about risks were strong and anatomically specific. “The findings suggest that many older women feel physically vulnerable, are unsure about their actual risks and benefits in exercise settings, and, in the face of that uncertainty, report medical reasons why they should be excused from fitness-promoting exercise.” [2000:283]

Levy and Myers explore a similar theme, and conclude: “the predictive value of aging self-perceptions relative to other promising covariates suggests that it has considerable importance for elders’ approach to preventive health behaviors. It therefore seems appropriate for those who either study or treat the old to also give importance to aging self-perceptions when exploring ways to enhance preventive health behaviors.” [2004:628]

Challenging these concerns is especially important because the mind and body both benefit from physical activity. Thus Morone and Greco reviewed trials involving yoga, tai chi and Qigong, and conclude: “The trials we reviewed indicated that mind-body therapies were especially well suited to the older adult with chronic pain. This was because of their gentle approach, which made them suitable for even the frail older adult. Additionally, their positive emphasis on self-exploration was a potential remedy for the heavy emotional, psychological, and social burden that is a hallmark of chronic pain.” [2007:371]

A landmark study relevant here was Langer’s ‘Counterclockwise’ research, in which she took elderly men to a timeless retreat and had them live as though it was 20 years earlier and then measured how that affected the body. She comments: “The results were remarkable—these men showed amazing improvement in physical strength, perception, cognition, taste, hearing and visual thresholds.” Reflecting on this, she concludes, “Over time I have come to believe less and less that biology is destiny. It is not primarily our physical selves that limit us but rather our mindset about our physical limits. ... Mindful health ... is about the need to free ourselves from constricting mindsets and the limits they place on our health and well-being, and to appreciate the importance of becoming the guardians of our own health.” [2009:11]

However, both positive and negative ageing self-stereotypes can be activated, and with colleagues she has undertaken research which found that seniors with more positive self-perceptions of aging lived over seven years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions. They conclude that this can in part be addressed by “encouraging older individuals to monitor the correspondence between the ways they are targeted by others and the ways they target themselves” [Levy et al 2002], leading to “ways you can see your thoughts differently” [Segal et al 2013:323]. Here the dynamic between acceptance
and resignation is important: as they point out, acceptance requires conscious commitment and energy, whereas resignation “implies passivity and a degree of helplessness” [2002:221].

Cuddy et al conclude that “exposure to stereotype-inconsistent and individuating information could help to undo the elderly stereotype by restoring a sense of esteem for older people.” [2005:280]

In a review of self-stereotyping Levy concludes that “Mitigating the impact of negative self-stereotypes of aging ... might be achieved by seeking a technique to provide the aged with awareness of the aging-self-stereotype phenomenon. ... The process is likely to require two phases. First, instilling a recognition that stereotypes may operate in everyday encounters. ... Second, instilling a recognition that this distortion may be unknowingly engaged in by themselves” [Levy 2003:209] Many of the techniques to challenge negative thinking introduced in MBLE are very relevant here.

RECONCILING THE PAST

In Erikson’s theory there are conflicts to be faced at each stage of life; for example, in his final stage the conflict is between integrity and despair. And as Gibson argues, “In general, many people as they grow older become increasingly aware of past experiences, especially painful, difficult, unfinished business or unresolved conflicts.” [2011:40] As we age we need to come to terms with all that has happened in our life – the good and the bad. And this will include unresolved matters from earlier stages. Thus de Hennezel comments “It is a fact that anything left in suspense from our past, such as repressed emotions and unresolved conflicts, hinders our development. If we do not become reconciled to our past, we may find ourselves joining the ever-swelling ranks of those who end their lives with dementia.” (2011:154)

Yount has identified the consequences of positive or negative resolution of the conflicts which arise in each of Erikson’s eight stages. The negatives include insecurity, depression, timidity, apathy and boredom [See Appendix Three for full listing].

EXHIBIT 7: MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING

1. In general, elderly people are alike.
2. The majority of elderly persons are senile or demented.
3. Elderly people have no more worries once they retire and start enjoying life.
4. The elderly do not desire, and do not participate in, sexual activity.
5. Most elderly people are set in their own ways and are unable to change.
6. The elderly are unproductive and uncreative; they cannot work as effectively as younger people.
7. The elderly are slow to learn, less intelligent and more forgetful.
8. Elderly people are crabby and hard to get along with.
9. The majority of elderly persons are socially isolated and lonely.
10. Elderly people become more religious as they age.


MODES OF ENQUIRY

There are a number of ways in which mindfulness can help address the issues discussed above. We limit ourselves here to four mutually supportive practices of enquiry, whose interrelationships are illustrated in TABLE 3. Here each is briefly outlined – a fuller discussion is given in Appendix Two.
**Analytical Meditation**

Analytical meditation is “a method for developing insight into something that is being investigated. It involves reflection and close observation of the object of investigation. Just as a lab scientist engages in research by closely observing an object in order to identify what it is and what its characteristics are, so a meditator analyzes an object during analytical meditation.” [Ozaqa-De Silva and Geshe Lobsang Tenzine Negi 2013:424]

Hangartner provides the following description: “The Tibetan tradition introduces another dyad of categorizing meditation: analytical and stabilized meditation. During analytical meditation the meditator investigates multiple aspects of a chosen object and of one's assumptions, while during stabilized meditation the meditator single-pointedly fixes his or her mind on an object without examining the aspects of the object analytically.” [2013:482]

**Mindful Learning**

The term ‘Mindful Learning’ is used here to emphasise the link between Western and Eastern approaches. Taking the Western first, as described by Langer: “When we are mindful, we implicitly or explicitly [1] view a situation from several perspectives, [2] see information presented in the situation as novel, [3] attend to the context in which we are perceiving the information, and eventually [4] create new categories through which this information may be understood.” [1997:111]

This parallels the advice of the Dalai Lama: “The ability to look at events from different perspective can be very helpful. Then, practicing this, once can use certain experiences, certain tragedies to develop a calmness of mind. One must realize that every phenomena, every event, has different aspects. ... If you
can make comparisons, view your situation from a different perspective, somehow something happens.  
... Generally speaking, once you’re already in a difficult situation, it isn’t possible to change your attitude simply by adopting a particular thought once or twice. Rather it’s through a process of learning, training, and getting used to new viewpoints that enables you to deal with the difficulty.” [1998:143,144,146]

The methods used in mindful learning may well be the same as those involved in analytical meditation [see the Appendix for further discussion on this]. A key difference is that analytical meditation is a process of introspection, while mindful learning may involve retrospection, reflecting on what has arisen in meditation, dialogue, and wider reading and comparison with other thinkers. In both, there is a leaning toward the Expert Mind, while the following two practices lean more toward the Beginner’s Mind.

**DROPPING THE STONE**

This reflective meditation is well described by Richmond, as an approach he used when he was addressing cancer, months of treatment, and depression. “I began an exercise in inner inquiry and ‘sent’ a question into my body. From my Zen training I knew that the body has its own wisdom and often knows better than the mind what is going on” [2012:34]

It is a meditation – Dropping the Stone -used several times during the MBLE course, using the metaphor of sitting by a lake or well and dropping in a stone with a question attached. For example, the Day of Practice begins with a meditation in which participants are invited to drop the question "What brings you here to be sitting today”.

One way of using this approach is WIKAWIKI: What I ‘Know’ And Why I ‘Know’ It. We identify our fixed belief patterns, and then question them – we drop the question, Why do I ‘know’ this to be the case? ‘Know’ is deliberately put in quotation marks to recognise the question mark.

A personal example will illustrate this. When I was looking for ways to tackle my obesity, I recognised that one issue I had was a dislike of fruit, despite being a vegetarian. So here the question was Why do I know that I don’t like fruit? In this case the solution came not in formal meditation but in mindful learning – supporting the strong interlinkages between these four modes of enquiry. While discussing the matter with friends I had a small epiphany – I realised that there was a voice in my head which said “you can only eat grapes when you are ill, and you can only eat strawberries during Wimbledon”. These were two fruits I loved, but never bought, and here was an explanation. I suspect this to be an echo from childhood – an echo which I could then easily address, transforming my apparent dislike of fruit into pleasurable, and healthy, eating of these, and later other, fruits. So I ‘knew’ I didn’t like fruit, but underpinning this was the ‘why’, a strange mantra from long ago. And knowing the ‘why’ enabled me to transform my knowledge base for the better.

We can use this approach to Reconcile the Past, choosing an area of negative resolution, reviewing its impact on our life, and taking this as the theme when we ‘Drop the Stone’. This can be complemented with Self-forgiveness – another meditation introduced during MBLE.
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LETTING GO

There are times when it is best to let go completely of the enquiry, and allow the mind freedom. Insights can arise at any time – the ‘Eureka moments’ often found in science and elsewhere. We can see here once more the importance of the Beginner’s Mind: “in the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few. ... If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of our self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner’s mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless. So the most difficult thing is always to keep your beginner’s mind.” [Suzuki 1970]  When the mind is stuck, perhaps the best thing is to take a mindful walk, savouring the sights, sounds and smells. An ‘a-ha moment’ may occur. And if it doesn’t, you have still had an enjoyable experience!

INTEGRAL ENQUIRY

As can be seen from the discussion above, these four forms of enquiry interlink. When we are exploring issues we can move between the four, with insights from each contributing to our developing understanding. This integration is illustrated in the following explanation which the Dalai Lama gave to Cutler, who asked him to illustrate how analytic meditation can be applied to overcome a harmful emotion like anger [Cutler 2001] "One begins by learning about the destructive effects of anger," he explains. "One should systematically investigate and reflect upon the destructive effects of anger on one's physical health, one's family relationships and in society. One should analyze this and reflect upon it not just once or twice, but repeatedly until it becomes part of one's deeper understanding.

"Then, let's say that someone does you harm. Your immediate response might be to become angry, but then you reflect upon the destructive nature of anger, and that immediately makes you more cautious of giving in to the anger and letting it escalate. Then you continue your analysis, investigating whether responding with anger is ultimately constructive or destructive, whether it will improve the situation or not, and so on. This process of reasoning and analysis can continue in other directions. For example, you might investigate to see if perhaps you have contributed in some way to the situation that made you angry. Also, when you are in the midst of anger, your tendency is to perceive the person who harmed you as 100% bad. But if you analyze further, you will realize that every human being is composed of both positive and negative characteristics, and you can try to get a more realistic view of the person by attempting to find some positive aspects of the person.

"So, with practice, various lines of reasoning and investigation can be used to reduce the force of your anger. This doesn't mean you shouldn't respond, or try to do something if someone tries to harm you. On the contrary, one should take countermeasures to prevent harm to oneself and others, even strong countermeasures. But using analytic methods such as these can help diffuse the intensity of your anger, which can have destructive effects, and instead allow you to respond to the situation without a feeling of hatred arising."

In this case the subject is anger, but the same can apply to many other emotions as well as belief patterns, such as self-stereotyping to which we now turn.
THE FIVE POISONS AND THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

The Four Immeasurables are an essential component of MBLE, and participants are invited to recognise in themselves not only the capacity to deepen each quality, but also the traits of the Near and Far Enemies which may show themselves in everyday life. The Four Immeasurables can helpfully be linked to the ‘five poisons’, five destructive emotions which restrict our lives [TABLE 4]. We can then practice meditative enquiry linked to the relevant Immeasurable. For example, we may review an instance of anger from recent experience, and then practice loving kindness. There is therefore a strong link to the four modes of enquiry. Indeed we can see these modes of enquiry as linked to the first three of the Four Noble Truths – investigating the nature of the problem, the cause of the problem, and the solution to the problem. We now move to the fourth Noble Truth, here involving practices which will address the solution.

As with many of the practices discussed in this paper, these practices need not be age-specific. But we may well come through reminiscence and reflection to recognise that one or more of these emotions has become part of our Seasoned Mind, and therefore merits attention. Regular practice of meditations on the Four Immeasurables is an integral component of MBLE, and is therefore important to continue, as is a Beginner’s Mind in everyday life – something that can particular help in recognising the Near Enemies within us.

### TABLE 4: THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES: THE NEAR AND FAR ENEMIES, AND DESTRUCTIVE EMOTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEAR ENEMY</th>
<th>FAR ENEMY</th>
<th>DESTRUCTIVE EMOTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOVING KINDNESS</td>
<td>Attachment, greed</td>
<td>Hatred, ill will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASSION</td>
<td>Pity, grief</td>
<td>Cruelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPATHETIC JOY</td>
<td>Joy tinged with insincerity or personal identification; forms of joy that are excessive such as elation, exuberance; Schadenfreude</td>
<td>Envy, jealousy, Aversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EQUANIMITY</td>
<td>Indifference, foolish unknowing</td>
<td>Greed, taking of sides, partiality, resentment, reactivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One near enemy particularly relevant to this discussion is that of compassion, namely pity. It is a quality that can masquerade as the original, but is not the same. Yet in western treatments compassion is often seen as equivalent to pity. Thus the American Heritage Dictionary gives pity, compassion and empathy as synonyms. As Hangartner puts it: “In close vicinity to compassion, and often understood as compassion, another emotion can appear: it is pity, the near enemy disguised as compassion. Pity is the feeling of sorrow for the misfortune of oneself, or others. Pity is not useful. It engenders a sense of superiority, and that feeling of supremacy is a cause of arrogance and countless related problems. Pity

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10 This section draws on the excellent Insight and Wisdom module taught on the University of Aberdeen’s Master of Science in Mindfulness Studies.

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also blocks one’s impulse and activities to alleviate suffering in an appropriate way, and it can even lead to more sorrow. It seems that in our culture pity is often misunderstood for compassion.” [2013:162]

The reason pity is highlighted here is that it is the sentiment most often felt toward the elderly. Cuddy et al [2005] explore out-group stereotypes, concluding that every stereotype combination includes at least one of four intergroup emotions – envy, pity, admiration and contempt, and “pity tends to be directed downward.” [2005:271] They found in their research with college students that they “endorsed pity as the emotion they were most likely to feel toward older people. Pity is the main emotion uniquely directed to this group. Pity may look benign on its surface, but it can create a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy. Practitioners have discovered that the linguistic expression of pity and sympathy by doctors and other geriatric specialists conveys the idea that elderly people are helpless. Some older people internalize this message, and this can decrease their independence.” [ibid:272]

We have seen earlier that Tornstam [2006] draws upon ideas from the Norwegian philosopher Ofstad who “argues that the different types of conflicting values in society may produce a tendency to look down with condescending pity on those who do not measure up to society’s values of productivity, efficiency and independence.” [2006:55] This is a resolution for Ofstad of the conflict between a tradition of holding old age and wisdom in high esteem with value patterns generating contempt the old. “According to Ofstad, we tend to "resolve" this conflict by hiding the contempt, or by changing it so as to mute it with the respect for old people found in, for example, the Hebrew tradition. What happens is that some of us transform our contempt into condescending pity. We feel sorry for "the poor, feeble, sick and lonely old people". Moreover, our pity for old people forces us to "construct" them in such a way that the correctness of our pity is validated. We produce a negatively biased image of old people at the same time as we think their conditions ought to be improved.” [2006:55]

North and Fiske explore the consequences of this for the old-old, arguing that “the predominant perception of the pitiful "elderly" old-old is one of high warmth and low competence, or pitifully "doddering but dear". As a result, ageist behavior toward the old-old often takes a benevolent form, free of ill intent but nevertheless demeaning and deleterious. For instance, much as people treat babies and small children, well-intentioned people unwittingly speak to older people using patronizing, high-pitched "baby talk" and demeaning, exaggeratedly slow and loud overaccommodation in everyday settings.” [2013:42]

Compassion practice is therefore important to counter both pity and self-pity, the latter often reinforced by the internalisation of these negative stereotypes. As Germer argues, “Self-pity seems to contract our world around us, cutting us off from others, whereas self-compassion opens us to the universality of suffering among living beings.” [2009:89] An example of such a practice is given in Appendix Four.
If our third theme, Realignment, is primarily about recognising the unhelpful aspects of the Seasoned Mind and Body, and realigning ourselves to a more positive stance, then this fourth theme, **Open to New Possibilities and New Beginnings**, is taking advantage of the space created to expand our horizons. “The bottom line is a new idea of old age, as a time of opportunities, to replace the present largely passive, dependent and discriminatory images, and a new approach to ageing.” [Walker 2009]

One aspect of this, as Walker and Maltby argue [2012:S127], is to move from the sequential life-course model of education, followed by work, followed by retirement, to a parallel model, as shown in their diagram [FIGURE 2]. The discussion in this paper lends support to the parallel model – thus every participant on a mindfulness course is embarking on a programme of education and training which also has the potential to benefit their family and community [for example, through enhanced practices of kindness and compassion]. In addition, the practice of joy and savouring can benefit their leisure time, while work – in the widest sense of making a contribution to society, paid or unpaid, can also be an expression of the Four Immeasurables. Education and training, in the form of lifelong learning, is also helped by the adoption of a Beginner’s Mind – one of the great joys of learning post-retirement is that one can choose the subjects out of pure interest, not for any career advancement.

**FIGURE 2: PARADIGMS OF AGEING**

There is a lively debate on whether age brings wisdom. Here I make a simpler claim – that age offers the opportunity for insight – into ourselves, our relationship with others and with the world. Thus I have found that a simple but powerful approach to opening the mind to new possibilities is to Drop the Stone, with a question which adapts the final lines of Mary Oliver’s poem: “What will I do with my one wild and precious life?”
MINDFUL AGING: BECOME A HERO

Vaillant writes “We may fear that at 75 or 80 we will ask, 'Is this all there is?' But from everything I have learned from the Study of Adult Development, those among the old-old who love life are not exceptions—they are just healthy. As they surmount the inevitable crises of aging, the Study members seem constantly to be reinventing their lives. They surprise us even as they surprise themselves. In moments of sorrow, loss, and defeat many still convince us that they find their lives eminently worthwhile. They do not flinch from acknowledging how hard life is, but they also never lose sight of why one might want to keep on living it”.

(2001-2:5]

And this is where gerotranscendence theory is helpful. There is a debate also about the extent to which gerotranscendence is found in seniors. And again, I make a simpler proposal – that the theory indicates areas of change which we can choose to pursue. Thus the theory provides a heuristic [this concept is discussed further in Appendix Five, which considers the nature of Gerotranscendence as a scientific theory].

Mindfulness of the mind and the body can help in this. Meditations on acceptance, on gratitude, and all the Four Immeasurables are very relevant here. Many of the new possibilities can stem directly from mindfulness practice. We looked earlier at the Signs of Gerotranscendence, which are further illustrated in Appendix One. TABLE 5 shows the ways in which the eight themes of MBLE relate to these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5: MINDFULNESS BASED LIFE ENHANCEMENT AND GEROTRANSCENDENCE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MBLE</strong></td>
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<td>Mindfulness</td>
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EXHIBIT 8: HARMONIOUS AGING

Liang and Luo put forward the concept of harmonious aging which has interesting parallels with the arguments presented in this paper: “The proposal for harmonious aging is expected to heal the disharmony between body and mind that exists within the dominant discourse of successful aging. The major wisdom of the Taoist philosophy is the importance of harmony between body and mind. Contrary to the whole capitalistic scheme of anti-aging, one important principle for Taoism is to follow "the true laws of nature" [fu lao] by acknowledging the aging body and realizing the physical and functional changes. Different from the self-denial mechanism of successful aging, Taoism encourages self-acceptance through an integrated relationship between body and mind.” [2012:331]
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

This interrelationship implies that many of the practices involved in MBLE or in earlier sections can help develop or enhance aspects of gerotranscendence. Thus the practice of Empathetic Joy, which includes the aspiration “May I enjoy life just as it is”, relates to Modern Asceticism. The Four Immeasurables relate strongly to Decreased of Self-centeredness, and Self-transcendence. The four modes of enquiry introduced in the previous section also relate equally well to the signs of gerotranscendence.

Here we outline seven additional practices. The first comes from Richmond, who looks at the relationship between Vertical and Horizontal Time. The others provide illustrations of the way mindfulness can link to gerotranscendence.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL TIME

Richmond explains this practice: “Aging includes its share of reverses, losses and sorrows. What makes the difference is our attitude about them. If a bad knee means we can't jog anymore, we needn't despair; we can take up swimming. If we lost money in the recession, we can cherish what we still have. If we become ill, we rejoice when we recover. I have developed a meditation called "Vertical Time" that focuses on the positive aspects of the present, rather than regrets of the past and worries about the future. We tend to think of time as linear and horizontal, but it is also vertical -- one breath at a time. Vertical Time is really breath-based reframing.”

Richmond also incorporates this into a ‘Day Away’ – a Day of Practice which includes also a gratitude walk and journal, mindful meals, and resting in awareness. The popularity of Days of Practice on MBLE [with many participants taking up the opportunity to attend the Day on subsequent courses] attests to the value of occasional intensive practice like this.

BREAKING UNNECESSARY RULES

This practice proposed by Tornstam relates well to those discussed earlier as ways to Realign to the Positive. It involves finding out “which unnecessary social norms or rules have hampered you earlier in life. ... Find them, play with them, and experience the freedom and joy of gerotranscendence.” [2005:197-8].

SELF-TRANSCENDENCE AND GIVING

We saw earlier that Giving is one of the Five Ways to Wellbeing, and this links strongly to the MBLE theme of Loving Kindness and Compassion. It is worth noting how much this already happens. The International Longevity Centre [2013] report that “the vast majority of care [for older people] is provided by family, friends and relatives, and the care they provide is worth an estimated £119 billion per year – considerably more than total spending on the NHS”. Much of this will be by older people. In addition, “the value of older people’s volunteering contribution was estimated at £10.59 billion in 2010 and is expected to grow to £15.53 billion by 2030. ... The annual value of childcare provided by grandparents in the UK was estimated to be worth £2.73 billion in 2010 and this figure could rise to £4.47 billion per annum by 2030.” [ibid] These are examples of the shift from egoism to altruism. So the practice here is simple – continue to Give!

12 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lewis-richmond/five-spiritual-practices-aging-well_b_1165552.html
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

DEVELOPMENT OF BODY TRANSCENDENCE

This sign of Gerotranscendence is characterised by Tornstam [1996b] as “Care of the body continues, but the individual is not obsessed by it”. Mindful movement fits this well. Take Pilates as an example. It is sometimes advertised as a way to lose weight and get a better figure. While this may be the case, when Joseph Pilates first developed his system, this was not the way he described it. He outlined six key principles: concentration, centering, control, breath, precision and flow. The close relationship of these to mindfulness is clear\(^\text{13}\). The same applies to yoga, Qigong, and TaiChi.

Isabella Rossellini provides a fine perspective on body transcendence: “In interviews, the first question I get in America is always “what do your do to stay young?” I do nothing. I don’t think aging is a problem. Yes, my face has wrinkles. But I don’t find it monstrous. I’m so surprised that the emphasis on aging here is on physical decay, when aging brings such incredible freedom”.\(^\text{14}\)

SAVOURING LIFE

Tornstam describes rejoicing as moving “from grand events to subtle experiences. The joy of experiencing the macrocosm through the microcosm materializes, often related to experiences in nature, such as by experiencing a transcendence into the universe when looking at a flower. Also mentioned by several informants is how music has come to be experienced as a qualitatively new language, giving access to a new dimension of reality.” [2011:170-171] One of the exercises he suggests is to find a beautiful flower, concentrate on it, and “contemplate the fact that you and the flower are made of the very same basic molecular components” [2011:178]

This focus on subtle experience relates well to mindfulness practices introduced on courses – one of the classics being ‘mindfully eating a raisin’. It is therefore worth noting the way in which this can be misinterpreted. Thus Tornstam quotes a woman for whom “my best times [now are] when I sit on the kitchen porch and simply exist”, and who now prefers talking to one older woman rather than going to parties. He then comments: “A lack of interest in participating in parties, as described by Eva, can be understood as differently as a symptom of a beginning dementia [the pathology perspective] or as a way to cope with reduced mobility by means of selecting where and how often to go to parties [the SOC perspective].” [2005:9]

He reports also on interviews done with nurses and care aides working in a Swedish service house for the elderly. “All of the interviewees reported noticing that the elderly tend to appreciate and express pleasure in simpler events and experiences. However, this behaviour pattern is interpreted in various ways. In some statements, it is seen as a sign of different pathological states, in others as a sign of loneliness. … The Wadensten and Carlsson study also showed that elderly people’s rejoicing in small events was interpreted negatively by the staff they interviewed.” [2005:160-162]

So savouring in old age may be a dangerous thing! Which is rather a shame, as it offers so much. One wonders what these interviewees would make of the sight of 16 people in a mindfulness class taking five minutes to eat one raisin. If we consider the ten ways to savour suggested by Bryant and Veroff [2007], which are explored in MBLE, then we can see that a number of them resonate strongly with the four

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\(^{13}\) See for example http://www.mindfulpilates.co.uk/
\(^{14}\) http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Isabella-Rossellinis-Aha-Moment
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

central themes of this paper. Thus we can share positive feelings with others; we can build memories, which can relate to reminiscence and reframing; we can congratulate ourselves on what we have done well in life; we can fine-tune our senses; we can seize the moment, staying in the present; we can avoid killjoy-thinking, which includes self-stereotyping; and we can cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

THE REDISCOVERY OF CHILDLIKE WONDER

For Shakespeare’s Jaques ‘second childishness’ was entirely negative, and this characterisation of ‘the child within’ is widely held. But ‘rediscovery of the child within’ is one of the signs of gerotranscendence, and this can be seen to relate to a much more positive view. Thus based on the Harvard Study of Adult Development, Vaillant [2002] concludes that there are four basic activities that make retirement rewarding. “First, retirees should replace their work mates with another social network. ... Second retirees must rediscover how to play. ... The third basic activity is creativity. ... Fourth, retirees should continue lifelong learning. The challenge in retirement is to combine the fruits of maturity with the recovery of childlike wonder.”

Vaillant quotes Freud: “As people grow up, they cease to play, and they seem to give up the yield of pleasure which they gain from playing”. Gilbert points to the advantage of playfulness in compassion-focused therapy: “In childhood, learning is best conducted under conditions of playfulness and low threat. The same is true in therapy. We have greatly under-estimated the importance of playfulness in terms of creating emotional contexts that facilitate exploration”. [2010:206] Vaillant describes a number of people who have rediscovered play in old age, commenting “play produces joy, and joy requires neither reinforcement nor reward”.

There is a good parallel with this in the field of work. The ‘Fish Philosophy’ has become widely used in organisations. Based on the experience of Seattle’s Pike Place Fish Market, it has four key themes:

- Play
- Make Their Day
- Be There
- Choose Your Attitude

It is easy to see parallels between this and mindfulness – for example, Be There is about being present, Make their Day is about serving others and enhancing their lives. Of Play, the originators say “Most of us learned early in life that work and play are separate, and that if you are playing you could not possibly be working. But to have a livable work environment, one in which human beings thrive, a certain amount of playfulness or lightheartedness is required. We have found no exception to this rule” [Lundin et al. 2002:9] They suggest activities which can easily be translated to ageing, including ‘Find ways to play at work’ and ‘Have some fun’.

So there is a close link here to savouring, and a suitable meditation might be to Drop the Stone with the question “How do I rediscover the child within me?”
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

THE MOUNTAIN OF LIFE

Tornstam invites us to “imagine that living your life has been like climbing a mountain”. This can be it as the landscape of our life. As Ingrid Bergman put it: “Getting old is like climbing a mountain; you get a little out of breath, but the view is much better!”\(^\text{15}\)

We can take this further, exploring what Pirsig [1974] beautifully described as “the high country of the mind”, where “one has to become adjusted to the thinner air of uncertainty, and to the enormous magnitude of questions asked, and to the answers proposed to these questions. The sweep goes on and on and on so obviously much further than the mind can grasp one hesitates even to go near for fear of getting lost in them and never finding one’s way out.”

THE SOCIAL PORTFOLIO

Cohen proposes that we each create a balanced ‘social portfolio’, which has four quadrants as shown in Table 6. As can be seen, the various practices address all four quadrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: THE SOCIAL PORTFOLIO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GROUP EFFORTS</td>
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<td>HIGH MOBILITY / ENERGY</td>
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<td>LOW MOBILITY/ENERGY</td>
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Cohen [2006]

\(^\text{15}\) Quoted in Gerotranscendence – a possible path toward wisdom in old age, available at [www.soc.uu.se/research/gerontology/gerotrans.html](http://www.soc.uu.se/research/gerontology/gerotrans.html)
So we have HERO – Heighten, Enhance, Realign, Open. This is not a proposal for staying young – it is a proposal for ageing well and fully experiencing every moment, accepting that everything changes. As we age there are many losses, not least of friends and loved ones. The Seasoned Body experiences the effects of use and time, and this brings limitations. But there are also many gains. As Rumi said, “Welcome and entertain them all!”

We began with Cicero identifying “four reasons for old age being thought unhappy”. However, after examining and critiquing these, he comes to an encouraging conclusion: “The fact is that old age is respectable just as long as it asserts itself, maintains its proper rights, and is not enslaved to any one. ... I am studying hard at Greek, and after the manner of the Pythagoreans—to keep my memory in working order—I repeat in the evening whatever I have said, heard, or done in the course of each day. These are the exercises of the intellect, these the training-grounds of the mind: while I sweat and labour on these I don’t much feel the loss of bodily strength. ... my old age sits lightly on me, and is not only not oppressive but even delightful.”

But I leave the last word to a participant on the MBLE programme: “Many thanks for this wonderful course. I feel privileged to have been able to attend. I look forward to a wild and wonderful old age!”

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WADENSTEN B. [2005] Introducing older people to the theory of gerotranscendence Journal of Advanced Nursing 52[4], 381-388

For more on MBLLE and mindful ageing, please visit the Centre for Mindful Life Enhancement at http://mindfulenhance.org/.
# APPENDIX ONE: EXAMPLES OF THE SIGNS OF GEROTRANSCENDENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGNS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Time and space</td>
<td>‘Talking to men and women of my generation, I am struck again and again about how we shed freight from that heavy goods vehicle, memory, as we age and gently drift back to early events that were the making of us. Growing old, as it separates us from the world, returns us to our original selves.’ Irma Kurtz in About Time: Growing old disgracefully</td>
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<td>“Unlike horizontal time, vertical time has no before and after. It is always just here. It doesn’t have room for memories or imagined futures. Memories and futures are like beads on a string; they roll into view one after another. Vertical time is more like the string itself.” Richmond</td>
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<td>“We have every right to live in gratitude for all the stages of life that brought us here, for all the memories that give us great joy, the people who helped us get this far, the accomplishments we carved on our hearts along the way. These experiences cry out to be celebrated. They are no more past than we are. They live in us forever.” Joan Chittister in The Gift of Years, quoted by Richmond</td>
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<td>“During these years I have been, I think, more open to new ideas. The ones of most importance to me have to do with inner space, the realm of the psychooogica powers and the psychic capabilities of the human person.” Carl Rogers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to earlier</td>
<td>“When I was young, I felt like an isolated lonely little spot in the universe, but nowadays I feel like a link in a generational chain, where the chain itself is the important thing, not me, just a single link” quoted in Tornstam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generations</td>
<td>Life and death</td>
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<td>Robert Misrahi: “We should teach the old to grow old, to re-educate them so that they see old age as a chance for a veritable rebirth. He envisages this re-education as taking place on three levels: creativity, joy and serenity in the face of death. ... invite the elderly subjects to travel mentally, to think through their lives, listen to music, read, write, contemplate, explore works of art, walk or meditate. In short, they should be invited to live!” quoted by de Hennezel</td>
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<td>“During the question and answer period, someone asked “Why do we meditate?” Suzuki answered with a laugh, “So you can enjoy your old age.” Richmond</td>
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<td>“My experience as I am getting older is that I am much more aware that I am going to die at some point and that has helped me to stay in the present a lot more, to be much more generally and to take pleasure in the actual day I am in.” MBLE Participant</td>
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<td>“Mindfulness can help with issues about mortality and death and that’s the big frame in which we live our lives and finally die, and it doesn’t mean accepting decline, but there is something about being aware of our human limitations. And so much of the focus on staying young and not declining is about not facing that fundamental aspect of who are as human beings.” MBLE Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery in life</td>
<td>Misrahi: “Human life is not condemned to suffering, but destined for joy, happiness, and serenity. The present must be lived for itself; a rich, fulfilled now. In order to rejoice in the present moment, the elderly subject must ‘rediscover his ability to enchanted and amazed. If converted to life, old age can successfully turn the present moment into a delight’, by opening the individual up to enchantment.” quoted by de Hennezel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There is less time in front of me than there ever has been so I am going to make the most of it. Taking more pleasure in every day things.” MBLE Participant</td>
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<td>“I wonder how much of it is getting older and how much is life changing circumstances, because you start to experience the loss of people of your own age more frequently and you start to appreciate how precious life is.” MBLE Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject of rejoicing</td>
<td>Alice Sommer, aged 106: “There are very good things. Experience. Looking backwards and enjoying knowledge. Only when we are so old can we appreciate the beauty of life. We are surrounded by miracles. Memories are so important. There are no bad things about growing old. None at, and I am not at all afraid of death as that is the natural order of things. I was lucky to have been born with a very good temperament. When I am faced with a bad situation I immediately find something good in...”</td>
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**Self-confrontation**

“...But in order to accomplish this we must accept and subscribe to reality: no further compromise is possible between what we would like to be and experiencing. It takes a lot of courage and clear thinking to get there.”  
*de Hennezel*

“...As we get older we do perhaps become more mindful.”  
*MBLE Participant*

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**Decrease of self-centredness**

“...The individual experiences a new awareness of the fact that he or she is not the center of the universe...”  
*Tornstam*

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**Development of body transcendence**

“...There are probably hundreds of people in U3A in Sheffield in walking groups that walk once, twice, perhaps three times a week and walking is a very mindful activity.”  
*MBLE Participant*

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**Self-transcendence**

“Looking back, the individual notices how the focus on one’s own needs has gradually been transcended and replaced with a focus on the needs of others...”  
*Tornstam*

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**Rediscovery of child within**

“...I think rejoicing in small things has been one of the fundamental things that I have taken away [from MBLE], and it all started when I became a grandma...”  
*MBLE Participant*
When did I stop being that child? Why did I allow that child to disappear from me?” MBLE Participant

“I can’t imagine a wise old person who can’t laugh. The world is full of ridiculous dichotomies. The importance of the senses came to us in old age. We start to lose touch with the senses in school: we call play, which stimulates the senses and makes them acute, a waste of time or laziness. The schools relegate play to sports. We call that play, but it isn’t; it’s competitive, not in the spirit of a game.” [Erik and Joan Erikson, quoted by Daniel Goleman at http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/08/22/specials/erikson-old.html]

“{Ego-integrity} Yes, you can see the wholeness of the view, and how the bad parts fit into this view, and even if you are a little out of breath it is stunning, and it gives a view not only of the individual past, but also of the sky and the mountains in the distance. The life lived is fitted into a new frame of reference.” Tornstam

“Aging is an ideal time for the cultivation of the inner life: a time for spiritual practice.” Richmond

“I used to dine at their feast with the members of my club—one the whole with moderation, though there was a certain warmth of temperament natural to my time of life; but as that advances there is a daily decrease of all excitement. Nor was I, in fact, ever wont to measure my enjoyment even of these banquets by the physical pleasures they gave more than by the gathering and conversation of friends. I am thankful to old age, which has increased my avidity for conversation, while it has removed that for eating and drinking.” Cicero

“The individual reaches an understanding of the difference between self and the roles played in life, sometimes feeling an urge to abandon and transcend roles in order to come closer to the genuine self, which may also be manifested as a new comforting understanding of why roleplaying has been necessary in life.” Tornstam

“I find attractive this comment which they record as being given by several of the elderly: ‘Thank God I no longer have to be nice to people.’” [Skinner and Vaughan: Enjoy old age] [quoted in Wolpert]

Mindfulness is really good in terms of making you expand your horizons so that you are not limited by people’s perceptions of ageing.” MBLE Participant

MBLE participants also recommend the poem Warning by Jenny Joseph, available at http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/warning/

“Being cocksure about right and wrong, good and bad, as in youth and sometimes even in midlife, gives way to an understanding that the answer is seldom that easy in reality. A reluctance to superficially separate right from wrong, and thus withholding from judgments and giving advice, is discerned. The transcendence of the right-wrong duality is accompanied by an increased broadmindedness and tolerance. In this perspective, the ‘stubborn’ cocksure old gaffer, when encountered on occasion, can be understood as an individual who has been hindered in his or her development.” Tornstam
APPENDIX TWO: MODES OF ENQUIRY

In this appendix we say more about the four modes of enquiry outlined in the paper.

ANALYTICAL MEDITATION

The description of analytical meditation by Ozaqa-De Silva and Geshe Lobsang Tenzine Negi is here given in greater detail: “Since at least 2005, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been encouraging the study of analytical styles of meditation. Analytical meditation is often misunderstood to mean discursive meditation, that is, merely thinking about something. It is better understood as a method for developing insight into something that is being investigated. It involves reflection and close observation of the object of investigation. Just as a lab scientist engages in research by closely observing an object in order to identify what it is and what its characteristics are, so a meditator analyzes an object during analytical meditation. Similarly, just as a physicist comes to understand the nature of subatomic particles through indirect evidence, such as that gleaned from a particle accelerator, so the meditator also employs indirect evidence and reasoning when engaging in analytical meditation to gain insight into his or her feelings, emotions, motivations, relationships and experiences. Relating to a given situation from one perspective – say, a distorted perspective – will give a certain response; seeing the same situation from a different perspective – one that is more in tune with the facts of the situation – elicits a completely different response. In this way, insight is essential to being able to relate to experiences in a more positive way that benefits oneself and others, and prevents one from falling into the same mistakes that result in the same problems.

“The point of analytical meditation is to achieve insights or what one could call “a-ha moments”. Such insights are not enough on their own, however; they then need to be deepened. This can happen in one of two ways: analyzing the same topic from additional angles, or “sitting with” the insight once it has been arrived at, that is, remaining focused on the insight in an undistracted manner until it penetrates deeper into one’s being.” [Ozaqa-De Silva and Geshe Lobsang Tenzine Negi 2013:424]

Acharya Lama Tenpa Gyaltse explains: “When we are engaging in analytical meditation, we can practice its methods both within one’s formal meditation sessions and also when one is not in an actual meditation session. However, in the beginning, it is recommended that the practice be done in formal sessions. Such a session would begin with a period of shamatha, or calm abiding meditation, and then be followed by the actual analytical meditation, which is considered the main practice. One concludes the session by again engaging in a period of shamatha.

“What one does analyze or investigate is the relationship between how things actually are—their abiding or “true nature” and the conceptual perception of their “apparent reality”. That is, one investigates the relationship between the way things truly are and the way they appear; and moreover, not only how they appear, but also how one is clinging to this appearance. One investigates the relationship between these two and asks, "Are these two in accordance with each other or are they not?" 17

Kuan [2008] identifies four different functions of mindfulness [sati] as found in the early Buddhist literature:

17 http://www.bodhionline.org/ViewArticle.asp?id=227
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

• Simple awareness
  “In the practice of simple awareness, sati is the conscious registering of the presence of objects, which can be any incoming sensory data or experiences, whether in normal daily activities or during meditation ... practices consist of non-judgmental observation and recognition. The mind is simply aware of an object objectively without evaluating the object, the subject (i.e. the observer or the mind) or the interaction between the two. [41-2]

• Protective awareness
  “While one is perceiving incoming sensory data, one is further aware of how the mind reacts to the objects. In this instance, sati is related to the restraint of the senses and requires moral judgment. ... the sati-sampajañña formula indicates that one is not just “fully aware” of what one is doing at the moment, but more importantly one is fully aware with the purpose of avoiding unwholesome mental states.[42, 50]

• Introspective awareness
  “While one is in contact with incoming sensory data, one’s mindfulness can have an introspective function with regard to one’s own mind. This function serves as a remedial measure when “protective awareness” fails to act. In case evil unwholesome states arise in one’s mind, one should be able to activate the faculty of mindfulness so as to notice and recognize them and get rid of them in time.”[51]

• Deliberately forming conceptions
  “This function of sati is not contemporaneous with sense perceptions. It consists in the wholesome functioning of sañña in the sense of conception rather than apperception. It is based on constructive memories.[52]

Analytical meditation relates to the second, third and fourth of these. In similar vein, Wallace in argues that “in addition to its onnotation of ‘retrospective memeory’, sati also refers to ‘prospective memory’, which enables us to remember to do things in the present and future, and this requires that the mind engage with concepts” [2006:61]

Kang and Whittingham [2010] review Kuan’s analysis, and conclude: “The cognitive and emotional space opened by the deployment of simple, moment-to-moment bare awareness creates the foundation for the subsequent steps of protective, introspective, and deliberate conception-forming awareness. ... In a more sustained, reflective, and focused manner, mindful-ness can also deliberately construct wholesome thoughts, concepts, and images as a way of engendering and consolidating skilful states in the mind. In Buddhist terms, mindfulness as deliberate concept formation serves to nourish the “seeds” of positive, wholesome emotional energy conducive to both temporal happiness and ultimate liberation of mind (nibbana). ... Analytical meditation involves the use of multiple reasons and inferences to support the focal object or intended purpose of the meditation (e.g., attentively analyzing, without distraction to other mental objects, the supportive reasons and sequential stages of developing universal compassion). With diligent and sustained practice, attention is then able to hold its focal object for as long as it likes without the slightest distraction, at which time a deep familiarity of the mind with its object is said to have occurred.” [166]

Weiser [2012]describes his experience of practising analytical meditation, following the guidelines of Lama Tempa, which included examining ‘the source of your most disturbing emotion’. He concludes: “Analytical meditation focuses on the content of conceptual mind. It examines concepts, particularly those that have solidified into views. It targets these solidified concepts by way of logical reasoning (hat corresponds to the analyses found in the Madhyamaka teachings. Practicing analytical meditation led
me to an understanding that such solidified views are not reliable, that they lead to suffering and not to happiness, and therefore to the renunciation of such views.”

**MINDFUL LEARNING**

As the comments of Acharya Lama Tenpa Gyaltsetn illustrate, the methods used in mindful learning may well be the same as those involved in analytical meditation. This is further illustrated in a dialogue with the Dalai Lama Aaron Beck describes a consultation he had with a physics professor who had been passed over for the Nobel prize, and had become depressed. When Beck asked him how important this was in his life he replied 100%. Through a series of questions about the importance of his family members Beck brought the professor to the point where he realized ‘what I am missing out on’ in terms of family connections, and “he left the office and he was not depressed any more.” The Dalai Lama’s response is “Very wise. I think that method we call exactly analytical meditation”. [Dalai Lama and Beck 2006:38]

The same applies to the debating methods developed in Tibetan Buddhism: “All Buddhist practices are based on the trilogy of hearing the teaching of the doctrine, thinking about it, and meditating on it. Philosophical debate fits into all three of these levels of practice, but is mainly included in the level of thinking. ... The debating process may be utilized in the level of meditation as when one is pursuing analytical meditation and raising qualms as if one were debating with oneself. Analytical meditation is the main type of meditation, and debate is able to help this process by sharpening the reasoning capacities and providing one with a procedure for orderly investigation an analysis”. [Perdue 1992:7]

Falcone argues that these processes are more practised than meditation in many Tibetan monasteries. “Tibetan Buddhist meditations can be concentration enhancement exercises, or elaborate Tantric deity visualizations, but sometimes they are ‘analytical meditations,' in which worldly norms are deconstructed through logic: ‘meditation on impartiality,' ‘meditation on love,' ‘meditation on sympathetic joy,’ or classic meditations on ‘emptiness,’ or ‘impermanence.’ However, meditation is not ubiquitous practice in Tibetan Gelukpa monastic contexts, and one finds that there is far more scholarly learning, debate, and reflection going on in monastic institutions than what is commonly thought of inside the tradition as actual meditation (sgom) practice.”[2010:410]

The interrelationship between meditation and mindful learning is further illustrated by several of the practices outlined by Nairn [1999]. Thus in Backtracking we meditate, and then “when you find yourself thinking a particularly strong or clear thought, stop meditating and see if you can discover where it came from” [69]. Similarly with ‘the moment of arising’ we begin meditating and then “when you find yourself thinking a particularly strong or clear thought, stop meditating and backtrack until you can’t go any further back” [77].

**DROPPING THE STONE**

Meditating with an open question has a long lineage: “When the Buddha gave up hope in his search for answers, he found an alternative he didn’t know he had – the mind of an open question. The Buddha discovered that when he asked a question, his mind was engaged yet open. The process of inquiry itself protected him from the extremes of either ignorance or false certainty, providing room for the expression of mind’s creative intelligence” [Mattis-Namgyel 2010:14]”
This approach is also proposed by McCown et al [2010:93] as a “meditative inquiry on your authenticity”.

**LETTING GO**

Although few, if any, of our insights will be as momentous as classical Eureka moments, they may have a strong impact on us as individuals. Topolinski and Reber [2010:402] suggest that this is because these ‘aha’ moments have four characteristics:

- **Suddenness.** The solution of the problem pops into mind abruptly and surprisingly
- **Ease.** However difficult the problem-related processing might have been before, it is processed fast and easily after a solution has been found
- **Positive affect.** An insight yields a genuine positive affective experience; this positive affect comes before the assessment of the solution and therefore is not pride.
- **Truth and confidence.** After an insight, problem solvers judge the solution as being true and express confidence in that judgment, even before systematically assessing the solution’s veracity in a formal analysis.

Ren et al suggest that meditation can help increase insightful awareness, concluding from an experiment with 48 university students “Our results showed that after 20 min of meditation or a control cognitive task, participants were able to solve some of the problems they had failed in the pre-test. This is generally in line with previous research on the role of incubation. However, participants who engaged in meditation solved more previously unsolved problems compared to participants in the control condition, thereby providing direct evidence for the role of meditation in promoting insight” [2011:964]

There are many examples of Eureka moments in scientific enquiry. Weil [2002] comments: "Every mathematician worthy of the name has experienced ... the state of lucid exaltation in which one thought succeeds another as if miraculously ... this feeling may last for hours at a time, even for days. Once you have experienced it, you are eager to repeat it but (are) unable to ... unless perhaps by dogged work."

Boorstein [1993] uses a visual characterisation: "For a research worker, the unforgettable moments of his life are those rare ones which come after years of plodding work, when the veil over nature's secret seems suddenly to lift and when what was dark and chaotic appears in a clear and beautiful light and pattern."

Einstein links the visual and the emotional: "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed."

Lin [2002] provides a further example: “Legend goes that when Archimedes discovered how to measure the volume of an irregular solid and thereby determine the purity of a gold object, he jumped out of the bathtub, running into the street, buck naked, yelling “Eureka! I have found it.” While slightly less dramatic, some UBC researchers’ eureka moments are no less inspiring. “For me it happened at about 3 a.m. when I was feeding my niece,” remembers Pharmaceutical Sciences Assoc. Prof. Kishor Wasan, who was doing research on how hydrophobic drugs interact with plasma lipoproteins. “I noticed how the baby was sucking on the nipple, in a sort of pursed lip motion, and it hit me that the drugs partition the
lipoproteins in a pursed movement. The next morning, I woke up and read my notes and was delighted that it wasn’t gibberish. It actually made sense."

In the world of business, two good examples are Velcro and post-it notes:

“We wouldn’t blame you if you were pretty sick and tired of hearing about how so many great inventions and scientific advances come from nature, but in the case of Velcro it’s really true. One day George de Mestral took his dog for a walk in the woods. When he and Fido got back, Mestral noticed burrs all over his pants. The tricky little devils would not come off. Louis Pasteur said, "Chance favors the prepared mind," and boy was Mestral prepared. Looking at the burrs under a microscope, he saw that they had tiny hooks that had attached themselves to the loops of thread in his pants. No word on whether he was specifically thinking about kids who can't tie their shoes when he brought Velcro to the world, but they are certainly among his most satisfied customers.

“Spencer Silver spent years trying to get his colleagues at 3M excited about his low-tack, pressure-sensitive adhesive. The world yawned. But one day another 3M scientist was in church, not a bad place for a eureka moment, and came up with a use for Dr. Silver’s glue. Arthur Fry was annoyed that the bookmarks in his hymnal wouldn't stay put. He thought adding Dr. Silver's adhesive to some paper might do the trick. Not only was he right, but people have been coming up with uses for the Post-Its ever since.”

There are some guidelines which can be developed from these reflections, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss [1967]: “do not read too much about the technical area, so that you can maintain your fresh gaze.” Support once more for the Beginner’s Mind!

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## APPENDIX THREE: DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE THEORIES

### ERIKSON’S STAGE THEORY IN ITS FINAL VERSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Resolution or ‘Virtue’</th>
<th>Core Pathology Basic Antipathies</th>
<th>Culmination in old age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy [0-1 year]</td>
<td>Basic trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Appreciation of interdependence and relatedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood [0-3 years]</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame, doubt</td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Compulsion</td>
<td>Acceptance of the cycle of life, from integration to disintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play age [3-6 years]</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Inhibition</td>
<td>Humour; empathy; resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age [6-12 years]</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Inertia</td>
<td>Humility; acceptance of the course of one’s life and unfulfilled hopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence [12-19 years]</td>
<td>Identity vs. Identity Confusion</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Repudiation</td>
<td>Sense of complexity of life; merging of sensory, logical and aesthetic perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early adulthood [20-25 years]</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>Sense of the complexity of relationships; value of tenderness and loving freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood [26-64 years]</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation Integrity vs. Despair</td>
<td>Care vs. Wisdom</td>
<td>Rejectivity Disdain</td>
<td>Caritas, caring for others, and agape, empathy and concern Existential identity; a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old age [65-death]</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

http://www.intropsych.com/ch11_personality/eriksons_psychosocial_stages.html

### COHEN: THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE: FOUR PHASES

**Phase I: Re-evaluation, exploration, and transition** [midlife re-evaluation], mid-thirties to mid-sixties but usually occurring during one's early forties to late fifties.

- People in this phase seriously confront their sense of mortality for the first time.
- Plans and actions are shaped by a sense quest or, less commonly, crisis.
- The brain changes during this phase spur developmental intelligence, which is the basis for wisdom.

**Phase II: Liberation, experimentation, and innovation** [liberation]; mid-fifties to mid-seventies but usually occurring during one's late fifties to early seventies.

- People in this phase often have an "if not now, when?" feeling that fosters the new sense of inner liberation.
- Plans and actions are shaped by a new sense of personal freedom to speak one’s mind and act according to one’s needs.
- New neuron formation in the information processing part of the brain is associated with a desire for novelty.
- Retirement or partial retirement gives people lime to experiment with new experiences.
**Phase III: Recapitulation, resolution, and contribution** [summing up]; late sixties into the nineties but usually occurring during the late sixties through the eighties.

- People are motivated to share their wisdom.
- Plans and actions are shaped by the desire to find meaning in life as we look back, reexamine, and sum up.
- Bilateral involvement of the hippocampi contribute to our capacity for autobiographical expression.
- People in this phase often feel compelled to attend to unfinished business or unresolved conflicts.

**Phase IV: Continuation, reflection, and celebration** [encore]; late seventies to end of life.

- Plans and actions are shaped by the desire to restate and reaffirm major themes in our lives but also to explore novel variations on those themes.
- Further changes in the amygdalae promote positive emotions and morale.
- The desire to live well to the very end has a positive impact on family and community.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Negative Resolution</th>
<th>Positive Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranoia</td>
<td>Feelings of contentment and trust in others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Difficulties in self-concept And impulse control</td>
<td>Can adjust to changing external demands without losing their sense Of self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent procrastination</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for direction and structure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embarrassment when complimented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easily influenced by others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Easily depressed</td>
<td>Take the initiative to learn new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-abrasive</td>
<td>Meet life's challenges with confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tend to have a low energy level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Timid</td>
<td>Continue to develop new skills as they engage their world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overly obedient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observers more than producers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequently question their own abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lack confidence</td>
<td>Know who they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tend to reject authority</td>
<td>Live in a balanced state of confident Interdependence with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Emotionally isolated</td>
<td>Able to establish personal relationships based on openness and mutual confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have difficulty giving or receiving love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Find little meaning or purpose in life other than their own self-indulgence</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>Productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bored</td>
<td>Engaged in teaching the next generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Self-contempt and desperation</td>
<td>General feeling of well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regret things still undone</td>
<td>Satisfaction with life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worry that time is running out</td>
<td>Acceptance of what they have done and who they are, including failures and limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harbour bitterness in the shortness of life and the fact that they cannot start over</td>
<td>Sense of dignity and wholeness in one's life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cohen 2006

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**SENIOR ADULT CHARACTERISTICS RESULTING FROM POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE RESOLUTIONS OF EACH STAGE: ERIK ERIKSON**

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Yount 2009
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

APPENDIX FOUR: ADDRESSING PITY AND COMPASSION

Set intention: to transform the mind of self-pity. Reflect on your motivation for doing this Settling and Grounding as normal. Then Rest in the midst of your present moment experience.

Bring to mind a time recently when you felt self-pity. Let your mind run with the familiar stories and projections associated with self-pity: "I wish I didn’t feel so old; I wish I didn’t have these pains, I wish things weren’t like this....etc!"

Can you see how your mind is affected by this emotion? Can you see how this colours your whole experience?

Now let go of the story, ground your attention in the body and rest once again in the midst of your present moment experience.

From this stance of resting in an embodied way turn your focus inwardly to look directly at the self-pitying mind. What do you notice? Is there any energy of the self-pity in your body? How does it feel?

Now let go of the practice and just rest.

Enquiry

What was it like to first just run with the story?

What was it like to look at the mind of self-pity directly?

Can you see that there is a choice?

What happens to the energy of self-pity when you learn to hold it and do not project it outwards?

Antidote of Compassion

Bring to mind someone you care about and who you know to be suffering or struggling in their life. Allow this person to arise spontaneously in your mind.

Now practice tonglen for them: breathing in their suffering and allowing it to transform within your heart; then breathing out to them love, kindness, spaciousness and relief from their suffering.

Then bring to mind a situation where you felt sorry for yourself. Let the feelings and stories of self-pity play out in your mind.

Now practice tonglen for yourself.

Consider that the pure aspect of your being—you as the embodiment of enlightened compassion—is the aspect of you sitting on your meditation cushion or chair. Directly in front of you is the "ordinary" aspect of you that feels self-pity.

As you gaze toward your ordinary self and become aware of the self-pity you’ve been carrying, you feel a deep warmth and tenderness, a sense of friendship and unconditional love. You accept the suffering of this other part of yourself, you understand it. Your awareness of this pain or difficulty opens your heart and generates a fearless wish to release and transform the suffering of the "ordinary" you.

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19 This draws on the Insight and Wisdom module in the M.Sc. Mindfulness Studies, University of Aberdeen
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

Consider that the self-pity of the "ordinary" you takes the form of a dark cloud, and with each in-breath, visualize that you breathe it in. As the dark cloud of self-pity enters your being, it disintegrates any final traces of egoistic clinging or fear in your heart, and reveals the radiant source of wisdom and compassion at the core of your being, which shines out even more powerfully, like a brilliantly shining sun.

As you exhale, freely give out understanding, joy, unconditional love and peace, in the form of light, to the suffering and self-pitying aspect of you. Continue this giving and receiving with each breath for as long as you like.

As you continue the practice, visualize the "ordinary" aspect of you is gradually relieved of self-pity and filled with well-being and joy. Each time you conclude, consider that the practice has been completely effective: the "ordinary" aspect of you is released of all self-pity and is now radiantly happy and at peace. And, since there is no difference now between these two aspects, dissolve the visualization and remain in meditation.

**Now let go** of the tonglen practice and allow your experience to be as it is - just rest in this experience.

Become aware of the whole body and the space surrounding the body. Become aware of the whole mind and allow space within the mind for both self-pity and compassion.

If there is any energy of self-pity present, recognise that this is one aspect of a much bigger experience. Then just rest without any focus.
Is gerotranscendence a scientific theory? This is a question that has been the subject of some debate. Jonson and Magnusson argue that “Provided that sociological rules of method matter, gerotranscendence theory can be subjected to the so-called "falsification criterion." According to this criterion, a theory can be proved or disproved through empirical application. A theory that cannot be empirically tested for falsification is not considered relevant for scientific purposes. From this point of view gerotranscendence theory is empirically weak. Old people are supposed to gerotranscend, but if they do not, it is explained by the obstructive influences such as "Western” mid-life performance orientation. The obstruction hypothesis is used in some of these studies to explain why even modest correlation can still be interpreted as proof of gerotranscendence.” [2001:322] They later consider “a more Kuhnian perspective”, in which “The genealogy of the concept adds up to an almost perfect example of a natural history of a paradigm in an early stage of development, with its mythology about professional insights and rejections of previous truths. As Kuhn predicts, examples that support gerotranscendence are cited and anomalies are explained away. Supportive ad hoc hypotheses are included in spite of discouraging empirical results.” [323]

However, both the Popperian falsificationist route and the Kuhnian paradigm approach have been critiqued by, amongst others, Lakatos and Feyerabend. Thus Lakatos rejects Popper's distinction between the logic of falsifiability and its applied methodology. When anomalies arise the working scientist will usually, and necessarily, assume that the auxiliary hypotheses which are associated with the theory can be modified to incorporate, and explain, existing anomalies. He rejects also the ‘mob psychology’ of Kuhn, recognising that anomalies do not necessarily imply falsification. He seeks instead a pragmatic approach to scientific progress, in which theories are seen as Scientific Research Programmes. These are characterised by a negative heuristic which identifies the hard core of the theory, to be protected against anomalies, and a positive heuristic which identifies the areas of investigation. Progress is measured through the distinction between progressive and degenerating problem shifts. Lakatos takes Popper’s idea of verisimilitude, which he took as ‘truth-content minus falsity-content’ [1978:156], and adding to it: “We have to recognize progress. This can be done easily by an inductive principle which connects realist metaphysics with methodological appraisals, verisimilitude with corroboration, which reinterprets the rules of the ‘scientific game’ as a – conjectural – theory about the signs of the growth of knowledge, that is, about the signs of growing verisimilitude of our scientific theories.” [ibid.]

This leads Lakatos to an approach – sophisticated falsificationism – which explicitly incorporates pragmatism. “It does not matter whether we stress the ‘instrumental’ aspect of imaginative research programmes for finding novel facts and for making trustworthy predictions, or whether we stress the putative growing Popperian ‘verisimilitude’ [that is, the estimated difference between the truth-content and falsity-content] of their successive versions. Sophisticated falsificationism thus combines the best elements of voluntarism, pragmatism and of the realist theories of empirical growth.” [1978:100]

Gerotranscendence theory is best viewed as a Scientific Research Programme, with the Signs of Gerotranscendence constituting the basis of the hard core. The positive heuristic in this case
MINDFUL AGEING: BECOME A HERO

identifies not only the areas of investigation, but also the areas of practice. There are a number of studies which have come out since Jonson and Magnusson’s paper which provide support for the theory. Thus Wadensten introduced gerotranscendence theory to a group of older people and invited them to discuss their ageing process in relation to the theory. She concludes: “All women had an experience of ageing that was in some way in line with the theory's description, and they more or less agreed that this description of ageing was in accordance with their own ageing.” [2005:381] Dalby reviewed 13 studies of spirituality in later life from a developmental perspective. He comments: “The studies of gerotranscendence reviewed here point to partial support for the idea that age brings a changing relationship to ‘the cosmic’, self and social relationships. These changes appear to be linked to age, but not exclusive to it, and are not universal. They seem to be mediated by life experiences, gender, religious beliefs and practice, and culture.” While he cautions that “Given the diversity of studies reviewed and their limited number, only tentative conclusions can be drawn”, his conclusion is that “There appears to be some evidence of an increase in spirituality or aspects of gerotranscendence with age in a number of the populations studied” [2006:10]

The question of whether the signs of gerotranscendence are age-specific has also been explored, and Braam et al conclude: “It is still uncertain whether gerotranscendence is really age specific, or whether it is based on a life-long cognitive-psychological ability to foster transcendent views. ... Nevertheless, the impact of cosmic transcendence on framework of meaning in life was significantly more prominent among the older participants than among the younger ones. Tentatively, the current cross-sectional study indicates that with increasing age, cosmic transcendence seems to unfold as a more important domain in one's life view.” [2006:S127]

These studies do not verify the theory, any more than counterexamples falsify it. They indicate instead that this is a fruitful Scientific Research Programme, with signs of a progressive problem shift.

[On Scientific Research Programmes see also Darwin 2004 and Darwin 2010]
To see how easy it is to be ageist, choose any number between 0 and 999, and you will have an ageist phrase.

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<th>Number</th>
<th>Word 2</th>
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<th>Word 3</th>
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