SACRED AGING – SERMON MATERIAL
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
Kol Nidrei 5778

Opening Joke?:
A priest, a minister, and a rabbi were speaking at a symposium on death. Each of them was asked to consider the question: if you were lying in a coffin and people were looking at you, what would you like them to say about you?The priest and minister spoke first. Each talked about how they would like the people looking at them to say that they were good men, men of virtue and that they performed their tasks on earth well, and that they left the world a better place.Then it was the rabbi's turn. "Let me get this straight," he began. "I'm in a coffin and people are looking at me. What would I like them to say about me? I would like them to say – LOOK, HE'S MOVING."

Ascend in Holiness
Hanukkah, Shamai argued we should start with 8 and go down to 1, Hillel argued we start with one candle and increase to eight. The Halacha follows Hillel. "We ascend in holiness we do not descend."

Judaism we get better with age, in the secular world we decline with age
We can easily imagine the pain that cuts so deeply when a man recognizes that yesterday he was the symbol of power and today he is merely groping in utter helplessness.

People who can still grow and change remain young regardless of their chronological age.

"In order to be a master one must learn how to be an apprentice," Heschel teaches. "Reverence for the old, dialogue between generations, is as important to the dignity of the young as it is for the well-being of the elderly."

My friend and teacher Mark Winer wrote the following when he addressed the 40th reunion of his Harvard class: "We once were the future, we became the present and soon enough we will be the past."

Moreover, as Thomas argues, we live in a society that does not value elderhood. Aging is perceived as declining, and every day society views us as less important. Our society places so much emphasis on being productive that elders do not have any real role. The problem is that we measure elders by the yardstick of adulthood and then find them wanting – instead of seeing elderhood as a new stage of life, with new opportunities, that holds the potential of a new kind of emotional and spiritual life.

There is a strain of popular American culture that identifies growing older with personal diminishment and decline. American life is lived in the future tense; tomorrow is always superior to yesterday. Everything that's good in America is new and improved. Ever hear of a product guaranteed to make you look older in only minutes a day? Youth means energy, creativity, possibilities. Old is used up. (Feinstein)

"Getting older is not some sort of disease that only certain unfortunate people catch. . . Even you will find yourself getting older some day. That is, if you're one of the lucky ones."- Goldstein, Rebecca

“Life”, it has been said, “is three words: anticipation, realization, and memories.” (Susan Berrin)

We want more time to do things

In the High Holy Day liturgy, we even read a passage from the Psalms, “Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone”[1]. At this time of year, on this Day of Atonement, we ask God to grant us another year; keenly aware that our days are numbered. But also important is that we do not cast away the value of what we have learned in days past.

Don’t put our old out to pasture, don’t infantilize them

"And (Moses) besought the Lord at that time saying, '0 Lord God . . . let me go over, I pray You, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan . . .' But the Lord was angry with me ... and said . . . 'speak no more unto Me of this matter . . . for you shall not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him ... for he shall go over before this people and he shall cause them to inherit the land.' (Deuteronomv 3 - 23-28)

Recognizing the many problems of aging and the kind of psychological pain and agony that are associated with it, the rabbis brought to our attention three major considerations as they are related to Moses, the leader of Israel:

1. Change in Status
2. Exclusion from the Life of the Community
3. Introspection and Soul Searching

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress (W B Yeats)

"An aged man is a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick". It's a vivid picture. An old man is no better than a scarecrow. A stick in the ground with some rags thrown over it. "Unless soul clap its hands and sing and louder sing for every tatter in its mortal dress". An aged man is nothing unless, says Yeats, we are able to rejoice as we get old and rejoice even more with every step of ageing.

We devalue the treasures of age when we treat our elders as children, when we substitute television for companionship, when we believe that card game and handicrafts are an adequate substitute for meaningful pursuits. For those who are of sound mind and body, the droning of a TV cannot replace the voices of family and friends, nor can recreation take the place of a sense of significance and purpose in life. We trivialize the existence of elder Americans when we believe they only need a deck of cards or a jigsaw puzzle to be content. In the words of the late theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Old men need a vision, not only recreation; old men need a dream, not only memory.” The same, of course, would apply to women of mature years as well. (Rabbi Lubliner)

Rise before the aged, honour the old

Judaism holds that a culture is judged in large measure by the way it treats its elders. As the Torah commands us in the book of Leviticus, "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:32).

Old age is exalted, even with its disabilities. A legend tells us, in fact, that Abraham and Sarah were honored by being the very first humans to age noticeably. Until their time, one could not distinguish between young and old. Abraham, apparently, was distressed, for people kept confusing him with his son, Isaac. "Master of the Universe," he beseeched God, "Make a visible distinction between father and son, between youth and old age, so that the elderly may be honored by the young."

"Very well," God replied, "I shall begin with you." Abraham went off to sleep, and when he arose in the morning, he saw that the hair of his head and beard had turned white. He was not amused! He complained to God. God tells him, though, that his white hair is a "crown of glory." "That's fine for Abraham," we might say. But how do we transfer that sense of glory to our friends and family members whose aging takes so much of their own glory away from them, causes such suffering for them, and so much pain for us? How can we watch as the cruelties of aging rob them of the very qualities that brought them respect and honor? Why would God allow such sadness, or even create it?

"When is Israel able to stand?", asks the Midrash. "When it has elders. . . for one who takes advice from elders never stumbles." And our elders must know that they cannot and should not withdraw from the community, for their sake and for ours. The prophet Isaiah offered these words of comfort, "Even in your old age I will carry you: I have made, and I will bear; and I will carry and I will deliver you." God does not abandon us and neither should we abandon God.

Danny Siegel suggests some of the specific ways we as a community should insure that our elders are given the honor due them. "Dying should be gentle. People should live as long as God believes they should live and they should not die for the wrong reasons: from loneliness, boredom or uselessness; for lack of food because the money of their youth will not suffice for the needs of their old age; because of reliance on medications when love and care will suffice; for lack of heat in the winter and lack of cool air in summer; for lack of good teeth because of inaccessible dental care; because no one asked them to dance or play with their babies or to advise them on their troubled love lives; because someone did not hug them or kiss them or touch them enough; because no one asked them, 'What are you good at doing?'; because young people did not rise in their presence; because the Jewish community built them gorgeous old-age homes but mistook their emotional needs for medical needs; because no one asked them to share their life stories; because no one said, 'Explain this verse in the Torah for me'; because they were told too many times, 'Let me do this for you'; because no one asked them for tsedakah money when everyone else was being asked, or suggested they help prepare meals for other elders in need; because not enough people adopted mitzvahs that would contribute to elders' longevity and well-being." His words are a powerful challenge to us to create the kind of environment we want for ourselves as we grow older. The Talmud tells us that the fragments of the first set of tablets which Moses broke were set in a place of honor in the aron kodesh, in the Holy Ark, alongside the replacement set. We learn from this that as we age and perhaps become broken, whether physically or mentally, that we retain our original holiness and that the elderly must be accorded the greatest reverence. (Koppell)

Choose life – Nitzavim
Dylan Thomas on the death of his father "Do not go gentle into that goodnight, rage, rage against the dying of the light."

“We must live each day fully, not as if it was our last, but as if it was our only one,”

Fear of Growing Older
Today’s life expectancy is longer than ever. On the surface this would seem to be good news, but it is not always clear that longevity is a blessing. The issue goes beyond the fact that those who live longer are more vulnerable to chronic ill-health. There are also many men and women of mature age who lead lives of great loneliness; sound of mind and body, yet bereft of family and friends. Having worked a lifetime to attain the freedom of retirement, time now weighs heavily on their hands -- not as a gift, but as a burden. For them, Jacob’s response to Pharoah is more than a biblical phrase; it is a living reality.
“Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be. Youth shows but half. . .” so wrote the 19th century English poet, Robert Browning. Each month as we announce the
new moon in Birkat Hahodesh we ask God for ohfurt ohhj -- long life, the blessing of many rich years of work, the privilege of watching our children and grandchildren grow
up. What could be better than attaining a ripe age in relatively good health?
Yet even as we hope for the gift of a lengthy life, we are ambivalent and suspicious of the aging process. As the actress Doris Day once noted, “The only frightening thing about middle age is the knowledge that you’ll grow out of it.” People despair at the first gray hair or the first wrinkle, enlisting the aid of a multi-million dollar
2industry in the campaign to turn back the clock. Many are the potions and lotions, the botox injections, and types of plastic surgery found in the arsenal of those who would do battle with the signs of aging. Birthdays increasingly become occasions for depression, rather than causes for celebration; while poking fun at the process of aging has become the most popular birthday greeting card theme of all. Indeed, after a certain point in life, people are often reluctant to share their ages with others as if such were a cause of embarrassment instead of celebration. It would seem that we are a nation of modern Ponce de Leons searching in vain for that mythical fountain of youth. (Rabbi Lubliner)

We fear the visible signs of aging because they remind us of our mortality. Precisely for this reason the ancient Jewish author, Ben Sira, tells us,-- Shame not the old; we shall all be numbered among them” (Ben Sira 8:6). Let us not forget that mature age is a privilege, not a punishment; a resource, not a drain. It is true that wisdom does not automatically accompany age; yet wisdom is the crown of experience, and much experience requires time to gain. When we relegate older members of our community to the sidelines we miss the benefit of their insights. In the long run, it is our foolish society which loses the most because we stand in dire need of just such wisdom. (Rabbi Lubliner)

An anecdote reported in Aging as a Spiritual Practice goes like this:Once, after a lecture, someone asked Suzuki (we all called him “Roshi,” which means “old teacher”), “Roshi,…I can’t understand anything you are saying. Can you say one thing…that I can actually understand?” Suzuki waited for the nervous laughter to die down and then quietly said, “Everything changes.”Richmond, Lewis (2012-01-05). Aging as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemplative Guide to Growing Older and Wiser (p. 5). Gotham. Kindle Edition.The Greek philosopher Heraclitus

taught a beautiful lesson on impermanence. “No man ever steps in the same river twice,” he is said to have stated, “for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.”Everything changes. Children grow up and leave the nest, and sometimes elders do too. Nothing is forever. Not the good times, not the bad times, and not our youth. But love remains,

Hope to die at 75

One week before my 75th birthday this past October, I read an article that Ezekiel Emanuel had written for The Atlantic, an article lovingly entitled, “Why I hope to die at 75.” Now a moderately sane person who was 74 years, 11 months and 3 weeks old might be expected to have the SAYCHEL not to expose himself or herself to what Dr. Emanuel had to say about 75th birthdays. Right. You would think. This brilliant brother of Ari and of Rahm held nothing back. You see, my colleagues and friends, it’s all over by 75. We will have no more contributions to make to our world. We will have lost clarity of mind and agility of body (though quite frankly I have never been blessed with agility of body). We will have at best a few high-quality years left. Disability lurks in our near future. Extended years for most of us are really no more than an extended dying process, with the minefields of dementia and Alzheimer’s awaiting us; 75 is in no way the new 50!Of course, there are the outliers, those exceptions to whom we can all point, but such outliers do not contradict the accumulating data. And even in the best of circumstances we will still end up on the receiving end of the tender concern of others. That tender concern will forever change how we will be remembered. Not as the vibrant, creative and active individuals we once were, but rather as dependent and diminished old-timers. Thus concludes the Emanuel analysis of what being 75 really means. By the way, at the end of his essay Ezekiel Emanuel added the following: that he is currently only 57 and thus reserves the right to change his mind. Good move, Dr. Emanuel. You see, there is life to be lived. And we are choosing to live it. (Stanley Davids)

Dr. Brian Thomas Fletcher M.D., who posted the case for some of us to read. It simply stated, “Saddest case ever.”

“95-year-old male comes in for suicidal ideation. When asked why, he said, “My last friend died last week. I don’t know one single person on this earth anymore. Not one.” :(.

Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, the psychologist Abraham Maslow published his paper “A Theory of Human Motivation,” which famously described people as having a hierarchy of needs. It is often depicted as a pyramid- with our basic needs- such as food, water and air, law and order on the bottom. As the pyramid narrows, the essential character of our motivation narrows as well. One level up is the need for love and belonging. Above that, our desire for growth- the opportunity to attain personal goals, to master knowledge and skills, and to be recognized and rewarded for our achievements. Finally at the top is the desire for what Maslow termed “Self actualization”- self fulfillment through pursuit of moral ideals and creativity for their own sake.6The pyramid would suggest that what is on the bottom- health and safety are what are MOST important to us. Yet reality is more complex. As Dr. Atul Gawande explains in his powerful book, Being Mortal: “People readily demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice their safety and survival for the sake of something beyond themselves, such as family, country or justice. And this is regardless of age. And what’s more- as we age and start to acknowledge that our time and energy are not-in fact- infinite, we narrow our priorities further.”7From a 21st Century perspective then- With the possibility that our ‘twilight years’ might actually stretch into several ‘twilight decades,’ focusing solely on the physical is not sufficient. We find ourselves equally

concerned with the emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of 'ourselves', The pyramid…it seems has flipped itself on its head.Of course we still desire to have shelter and basic sustenance. We all require a network of people we trust to help make our lives 'happen'. But we cannot ignore how those more abstract ideals play a role in determining our well being. Without them, the basics lose their meaning as well. (Rabbi Mara Nathan)

A large study at Stonybrook University polled 340,000 people on happiness, and found that people in their fifties are generally happier than those who are younger. The results revealed that "People's overall satisfaction with their lives showed a U-shaped pattern, dipping down from the early thirties until about the age of fifty before trending upward again." [One] theory proposed that "older people might focus less on what they have or have not achieved, and more on how to get the most out of the rest of their lives." "Happiness research" is a new specialty, of which the Stonybrook study is just one example. Continued analysis has identified three factors that tend to encourage lasting happiness: "reframing" difficult experiences (looking at things in a new way…), generosity, and gratitude.Described in Richmond, Lewis (2012-01-05). Aging as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemplative Guide to Growing Older and Wiser (pp. 55-57). Gotham. Kindle Edition.

We make the best of the abilities we have (Broken String)

To this, the experience of the renowned violinist Itzhak Perlman can speak. It was 1995, when the world famous Perlman came on stage to give a concert at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City. Stricken by polio as a child with both of his legs in braces, just the walk onto the stage was a struggle. After Perlman painstakingly made his way to his seat, the conductor began. Yet after just the first two bars, one of the strings of Perlman's violin broke. The snap could be heard across the auditorium. Those in attendance expected him to painfully make his way off stage to find another violin or new string. Yet he did not. Instead Perlman signaled for the conductor to begin again and he played right where he had left off: modulating, changing, re-composing the piece in his head, so that he could play the symphonic work with just three rather than four strings. As the piece concluded, the passionate standing ovation said it all. Wiping the sweat from his brow and taking a bow, Itzhak Perlman said in a quiet and pensive tone, "You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."

People Used to Want to be Old Now they Want to be Young:

Meet Sitaram Gawande. He was a farmer in a village called, Uti, about 300 miles from Mumbai. He lived a life that most of us cannot imagine. He lived to be more than 100 years old, and maintained his dignity—indeed, was revered– to the very end of his life. Atul Gawande, the grandson of Sitaram, became a physician and author of many books and articles. His book, "Being Mortal", chronicles the life of the aged, as he sees it both through the eyes of a physician and through the eyes of someone who visited his elderly grandfather in India. In this passage, Gawande recalls what life was like for the aged in a different time. He writes:In the past, surviving into old age was uncommon, and those who did survive served a special purpose as guardians of tradition, knowledge, and history. They tended to maintain their status and authority as heads of the household until death. In many societies, elders not only commanded respect and obedience but also led sacred rites and wielded political power. So much respect accrued to the elderly that people used to pretend to be older than they were, not younger, when giving their age…The dignity of old age was something to which everyone aspired.

Caring for Aging Parents:
Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in her book Jewish Visions for Aging, outlines three specific challenges that arise in part because of these demographic issues and in part because caretaking in any society is difficult. The first is guilt. We never feel like we are doing enough. We blame ourselves for not adequately balancing our responsibilities or taking enough time to sit by the bedside of a loved one. And we feel that we have to repay our parents for the care that they gave us. However, like the story of the mother bird and her babies shows, we have competing claims on our time and resources – children, spouses, jobs, and a variety of other commitments, and we simply cannot do everything.The second is conflict among family members. If we have siblings, we may disagree with them as to how we should care for our parents. We may share the caretaking responsibilities unevenly, which can lead to feelings of resentment, disempowerment, and anger. Conflicts from long ago may resurface among family members, and it can be emotionally complex to care for a parent because we are used to them caring for us.Lastly, we are faced with hard choices. As our loved ones age we are called to be increasingly involved in decisions that affect their lives. It can be complicated to figure out how best to care for our parents. Do we take over our parent's finances? Do we allow our parents to continue to drive? Do we move our parents to a nursing home? When it comes to end of life decision-making, when do we decide to stop trying new medications and let our parents die?These challenges create enormous stress. Caregiving can be exhausting, overwhelming, and isolating. Watching a parent grow sicker with each passing day is painful, and it can leave us short-tempered, irritable, unable to sleep or focus on our work, or incapable of experiencing joy.

A Jewish Folktale:A mother bird was carrying her three babies across a river. As she carried the first baby in her beak high above the river, she asked it, "When I am old, will you do the same for me?" "Of course, Mother," replied the baby, "It will be my honor." The mother bird dropped the baby into the river, saying simply, "You're a liar."As she carried the second baby, the mother again asked, "When I am old, will you do the same for me?" The second baby bird replied as the first, and the mother bird dropped it, too, into the river.When she carried the third baby across the river, the mother bird asked it, "When I am old, will you carry me across the river as I am carrying you now?" The baby bird answered dolefully, "Oh no, Mother, when you are old, I will have children of my own, and I shall have to carry them across the river. I won't be able to carry you as well." The mother bird replied, "You are my darling child, for you have told the truth." She carried this baby to the other side of the river and gently put [it] down. (Jewish Visions of Aging, Rabbi Dayle Friedman, p. 85; taken from Yiddish Folktales, ed. Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, p. 24)

Phases of Life
At the basis of the institution of retirement is the notion that life is composed of productive and non-productive periods. The first 20-30 years of life are seen as a time of little or no achievement, as a person acquires knowledge and training in preparation for the productive period of life. The next 30-40 years are the time in which his or her creative energies are realized; he now returns what has been invested in him by his now passive elders, and invests, in turn, in the still passive younger generation. Finally, as he enters his "twilight years," he puts his period of "real" achievement behind him; he has worked hard "all his life," so he now ought to settle down and enjoy the fruits of his labors. If the creative urge still agitates his aging body, he is advised to find some harmless hobby with which to fill his time. Indeed, time is now something to be "filled" and gotten over with as he whiles away his days on life's sidelines, his

knowledge and abilities filed away in the attic of old age. He has now returned full circle to his childhood: once again he is a passive recipient in a world shaped and run by the initiative of others.Torah, however, recognizes no such distinction between life's phases, for it sees productivity as the very essence of life: the words "a non-productive life-period" are an oxymoron. There are marked differences between childhood, adulthood, etc., but these differ in the manner, not the fact, of a person's productivity. Retirement and the passive enjoyment of the fruits of one's labor also have their time and place--in the World To Come. In the words of the Talmud, "Today is the time to do; tomorrow, to reap the reward." The very fact that G-d has granted a person a single additional day of bodily life means that he has not yet concluded his mission in life, that there is still something for him to achieve in this world. (The Rebbe)

from Pirke Avot, The Talmudic Wisdom of the Sages:
At age 5, one studies Bible.
At ten, the Mishna.
At thirteen, one is responsible for the mitzvoth.
At fifteen, one studies Talmud.
At eighteen, one is ready for marriage.
At twenty, one begins a career.
At thirty, one is at the height of one's powers.
At forty, one achieves understanding.
At fifty, one is prepared to give wise counsel.
At sixty, one is given the deference of seniority.
At seventy, one is considered a sage.
Eighty is the age of heroic strength.
In the Talmud's vision, life is not a tragedy of decline. Each stage of life has its own beauty, value, and measure of success. Growing older is not about the surrendering the qualities that make us vital and beautiful. In each age of life, we gain something. Each stage of life brings new qualities – the very qualities we associate with God -- learning, love, creativity, wisdom, power. At each successive stage of life, we gain an opportunity to appropriate aspects of divinity. Growing older, we grow Godly.
In the Talmud, the development of the human being doesn't stop with the end of childhood. Grown-ups are meant to keep on growing. 40, 50, 60, 70 -- each decade brings its own qualities. We're not finished once we become adults. The object of childhood is literacy. The object of our 20's is intimacy. The object of our 30's is achievement. The objects of later adulthood – our 40's and 50's and beyond, are of a different order: bina, aitza, zikna, sayva, understanding, counsel, seniority and wisdom. These are qualities of the inner life, qualities of the soul. (Feinstein)

Alice Shalvi, writes that, "What I have lost in longevity, I have redeemed by profundity. Compelled by failing physical strength, I sit more, recline more, rest more frequently. But in those moments of physical nonaction and bodily passivity, the spirit can soar if I unleash it from everyday concerns." Her words give me great comfort in suggesting that we can continue to grow as spiritual beings even as our bodies begin to wear out. As the sense of limitations increases, many people report that their patience begins to wane for what is perceived as meaningless or trivial, and they experience a greater sense of urgency to focus on "the more creative, artistic and spiritual aspects of (themselves)." This re-ordering of priorities sounds like a good thing to me! (Koppel)

Grandparents don't know their grandkids (Loneliness)
The central theme was that they did not know their grandchildren because travel sports had robbed them of weekends and Sunday night dinners and countless other opportunities to interact. Going to their baseball games in the middle of the summer — or sitting in a loud gym — was just not a bonding experience for them; it was physically exhausting. Besides, you can't talk about rationing sugar during the war, or marching on the mall, or sitting through the Watergate hearings between timeouts. It doesn't work like that, that's not enough.

"I want to teach him how to make pickles, just like my grandmother taught me…how to needlepoint, how to build a chair, or change the oil. I want to tell her about the time I was a little girl and made my own clothes, or how to play gin rummy. I want to go fishing, or show him the books I read when I was 10 because I still have them. I want to tell them about stamps, and record players, and how Elvis took the world by storm. I want to talk about Jim Crow and Tuskegee and jazz and how to make greens and about the time we all sat transfixed trying to figure out who shot J.R." (Dr. Louis M. Profeta is an emergency physician practicing in Indianapolis)

Becoming Middle Age:
This year I celebrated my 50th birthday. My longest living grandparent, affectionately known as Poppa Hymie, alav ha-shalom, died at age 93. Why is this significant? Do the math. What I gather from these statistics is that I am now definitively middle-aged. I'm not quite sure how this happened, but I do know that Yom Kippur is the appropriate time for us to focus on our own mortality. So, I can't help but reflect on the fact that, even with the mazel to live a full life span, my life is definitively more than half over! Have you seen that New Yorker cartoon, where a man is reading the obituary page and the headlines over each death notice read, "Two Years Younger Than You", "Twelve Years Older Than You", "Exactly Your Age." I think we can all relate! "The really frightening thing about middle age", Doris Day accurately quipped, "is the knowledge that you'll grow out of it." "In 1900, the average American was dead by age 49; fifty was considered old age, and only one person in ten survived to sixty-five- which was thought of then as extreme old age." We are indeed blessed in our generation with time beyond the years of child rearing to make all kinds of contributions to our communities and to continue to grow and develop as spiritual beings. One local 86 year old tells us that "It's never too late to be what you might have been." And this from a person who is 80, "If wrinkles must be written upon our brows, let them not be written upon the heart; the spirit should never grow old." (Bonnie Koppell)

Physical Decline
Granny D, that is, Doris Haddock, wrote an inspiring account of her walk across America at the age of 90. She undertook this walk to bring attention to the issue of campaign finance reform, and, along the way, challenged many of our assumptions about aging. "After age forty", she write, "it's always something. But after eighty-five, it's always nearly everything." Now there's a sobering thought, and a reminder to make the time to care for our bodies. Guarding and protecting our health is a mitzva unto itself. "It goes so fast, you know", she reminds us. "One minute you are noticing odd changes in your young body, and the next thing children are popping out, running into the house with their high school and college friends and their husbands and wives and children, and you are suddenly wrinkled- your friends and family falling dead around you. Remarkable! Beautiful! And so horribly sad to be quickly gone forever."

“The secret to a happy life”, she concludes, “especially in your later years, is to help other people until you don’t notice your own needs and pains anymore.” If Doris Haddock can have this attitude at the age of ninety, while literally walking across the United States, I think that each of us can look within and ask ourselves what more we can be doing to better our community, to move beyond our own needs and concerns. (Bonnie Koppell)

ACCEPTING DEATH

The German existentialist Martin Heidegger in his masterwork Being and Time, taught this, he said that in order to truly live authentically we have to confront death head-on. Knowing that I am going to die is what allows me to truly live.

Heidegger wrote:
If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life – and only then will I be free to become myself.

Ernest Becker – Denial of Death. Ernest Becker in his Pulitzer Prize winning masterwork, The Denial of Death wrote that even though we objectively know that we are all going to die, we don’t actually believe what we know to be true. When we accept/reisgn ourselves to death, that is when we are able to live.