

# AGING *in His Grace*

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## WEEK 2 ~ *Aging or Awakening?*

### I. Is There More?

- **Review:** “the spirit of the age is characterized by a seductive invitation to well-being through independence, bodily perfection and agelessness. The pimple-free obsession of our youth has become the wrinkle-free obsession of old age.”
- **Today:** a new (or old) perspective

### II. Gerotranscendence

- “We lead our lives with the erroneous apprehension that continuing with the tasks of the first half of life is all there is. As a consequence many of us meet our death as only half-developed individuals, exhibiting signs of depression, despair, fear of death, and disgust with ourselves and others, together with a feeling that life has been uncompleted or wasted.” ~ Carl Jung
- These words inspired Lars Tornstam to re-examine the theories of aging

### III. Transcendence in Old Age

- Mainstream thinking about old age is prejudiced by ageism (youth biases), functionalism and individualism
- “We shouldn’t have made it up... We hadn’t been there yet. Maybe we should have talked to a lot of old people...” ~ Joan Erickson

### IV. Discovering a New Orientation

- Tornstam spent years interviewing the elderly. He discovered that every loss came with a gain. Many elderly had discovered a new orientation to life and the cosmos
- New Orientation to Mystery, Happiness, Time, Material Wealth, Purpose, Cosmos..
  - Example: “I guess I have taken for granted [when I was younger] that science knows what it talks about. But now I have realized

that there is an awful lot beyond the reach of human knowledge [and] especially senses, that we can't know anything about.”

- “The enlightened maturity which, at very best, accompanies the process of aging, or rather the process of living, might be described as a shift in Metaperspective – from a materialistic and rational perspective to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction.” ~ Tornstam
- Human Development is defined by Transcendence.

## V. Shortcuts and Roadblocks

- What about everyone else?
- Gerotranscendence is a movement in old age, which can be obstructed or inspired at any point.

## VI. The Gift of Crises

- Are crises negative or positive? Is the cup half empty or half full?
- “...crises might challenge, question, and undermine basic ontological assumptions, replacing them with *new* ontological assumptions.”  
Tornstam
- “Metaphorically, it may be that ‘the seed of gerotranscendence’ is within us all, but needs proper watering to grow.” Tornstam

## VII. The Zen Buddhist

- Imagine a Buddhist monk who withdraws from society, moves into the forest, and spends the rest of his life meditating. From a western perspective, he would seem disengaged, antisocial and unhealthy. From the Buddhist's own perspective, his disengagement would appear differently. He sees his disengaging as an endeavor to transcend. So we must be willing to look at old age...

## VIII. Aging in the Lens of the Church

- Gerotranscendence dovetails with the Christian story

## IX. What I Found in Greece

- The Greek culture has managed to maintain a very ancient and traditional perspective on old age, which was once held by all Christian countries.
- The elderly are revered.
- They have a specific role in society, as icons of wisdom, teachers, and contemplation

- Death inspires joy and peace, not fear and embarrassment

## X. Looking Forward

- Next week we will look at what Holy Scripture and Church History have to say.