

Which Self Will Win

Making the Choice to Live and Age Consciously

By Ron Pevny

Many of you are familiar with the oft-told teaching story, attributed to the Cherokee people, where the young person asks the wise elder, "Which wolf will win?" I'd like to offer you a revised version of this story as it relates to conscious eldering.

A passionate woman in her early sixties, feeling she was finally emerging from a difficult passage that led her out of her mid-life adulthood into her next life chapter, approached a wise, white-haired elder widely recognized in the community as an exemplar of wisdom. The young emerging elder said to the wise elder, "I have within me a beautiful vision, or at least parts of a vision, of becoming like you. I have an inspiring sense of how I can use my best qualities, skills, and gifts to serve our community and be personally fulfilled as I age. I'm having some wonderful experiences of spiritual connection. My creativity seems to be coming to life again. I'm feeling more peace, joy, and optimism than I have in a long time.

"However, I'm also very aware of a whole other side to me. I often feel fear. Sometimes it is fear that I'm just deluding myself about conscious elderhood, and that growing old is really just a drag. Sometimes it's fear that no matter what visions I have, there's no way I can achieve them in the real world I live in. Sometimes, it's just a free-floating fear of the world and my life and the future. I'm also aware that I have so many habits that I can't seem to change that seem to numb me out. My passion and optimism seem to fade so easily, and I don't know why. My heart feels open one day and closed the next. It seems there are two selves within me, at war with each other. How can I resolve this painful conflict? The elder looked into her eyes with understanding and compassion and said, "The self in you that will win is the one you feed."

Most of us who feel the call to age consciously recognize the importance of finding ways to remain conscious when we have received a glimpse of what is possible for us as we age. We know what a challenge it is, no matter how inspired and motivated we feel at times, to grow into a conscious elderhood in a culture that offers little support for doing so. There are many practices that aid in keeping our hearts and minds open, with meditation and journaling about our goals being invaluable for many of us. Such practices are vitally important, but alone are often not sufficient.

At least as important are those things we choose to remove from our lives. Which self will win—whether we are increasingly able to live consciously or not—depends very much upon what self in us we feed. Healthy, conscious bodies, minds, and spirits cannot thrive on a physical, mental, and emotional junk food diet.

So, I pose these questions for your reflection, as aids in determining whether you are nourishing the self you aspire to be as you age.

___ Do you feed your body healthful, vitalizing foods, most of the time—or artificial foods with no vitality?

___ Do you daily feed your mind uplifting food, such as poetry, beautiful music, artwork, inspiring films, and stories of people who are helping to heal the world—or is your diet filled with media-generated images of fear, greed and crassness?

___ Do you do your best to spend your time with people who uplift you, support you, bring out the best in you—or do you have many people in your life who are drains on your joy and energy?

___ Do you spend time amid the healing, soul-invoking energies of the natural world—or is your life confined to man-made environments and influences?

___ Do you feed your spirit with activities and practices that bring you alive and make your heart sing—or are you in a rut, surviving but not thriving?

___ Do you feed yourself with the gift of doing your best to live consciously and intentionally in each situation, making a practice of noticing when you are living on automatic so you can make the choice to be more conscious in those moments—or do you primarily live out of habit with little true intentionality?

We all feed ourselves plenty of devitalizing, disempowering, things, images, addictions, and experiences. It is extremely difficult to experience vision, inspiration, and passion for life when we are filling ourselves with toxins, no matter what spiritual practices we add to our lives. Conscious eldering implies a commitment to doing our very best to increase our awareness of what nurtures the best in us and what feeds unconsciousness and spiritual/emotional numbness. And it asks us to make lifestyle decisions that reflect this awareness. A conscious elder is committed to living more and more with intention and less and less out of habit. What self are you feeding? What changes are you willing to make so that your body, mind and spirit thrive as you age?