

## From One Golden Ager to Another

By Abraham J. Twerski

**D**o not cast us away in the time of our old age.”\* In addressing this fervent prayer to God, we would do well to direct it inward as well. Let us not abandon ourselves in our later years.

Although retirees may feel secure with adequate income from pensions, Social Security and savings, the long days devoid of prior activities, such as working or taking care of a household, can be boring and empty.

An ounce of prevention is worth tons of cure. People in their forties and fifties may be immersed in work and cannot imagine that too much leisure time could be burdensome. They would be wise to begin developing interests, perhaps hobbies, which would provide fulfillment during retirement.

Is all lost if a person hasn't planned ahead? One must resist the doubts that abound: "What can I do? No one is going to hire me at age 67!" The greatest obstacle to an enjoyable life in the later years is an attitude of resignation.

Torah has helped prepare us. On Shabbat we say Psalm 92, "A Song of the Sabbath Day." Reread it and notice that there is not a single mention of Shabbat! How is this a song of the Sabbath day?

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Consider this: Shabbat is a prototype of how to enjoy a day in which most of the things we customarily do are restricted. We do not work, we do not drive, we do not cook, knit, or do the laundry. We do not watch television or work on the computer. *We can learn how to live with inaction; we can learn how to relax.*

On Shabbat we have more time to study Torah. We can learn about the history of our people, and we can learn about the wonders of the world.

I suspect that this is why this psalm is called "A song of Shabbat." Perhaps

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this is why it closes with the verse, "They will still be fruitful in old age; vigorous and fresh they will be." Properly observed, Shabbat prepares us for the golden years.

We need not deny reality. Vision and hearing may not be what they were. One may not be able to play basketball. Sometimes one may no longer be able to drive a car. But instead of focusing on what one cannot do, one should begin looking at the things one *can* do.

What about going back to school? I know of a 67-year-old retiree who applied to law school. Because of the law against age discrimination, he could not be turned down. He was hired by a law firm to help elderly people with problems that were age related.

Let me share a personal experience. I had resigned myself to being "computer

illiterate." I just could not get the hang of the computer, and I felt that at age 70 I was hardly going to learn something so new. I then realized that even if my mind is not as quick as it was at 30, I am still as bright as my six-year-old grandchild who can make the computer jump to his commands. I am now enrolled in a course on computers. I refuse to allow a "spreadsheet" to frighten me away. By the way, if you master computers, you are likely to find many opportunities for part time work.\*\*

Some people volunteer in hospitals, which is certainly worthwhile. You can also volunteer in schools. There are children who can use some special attention, and many teachers would be thrilled to have someone give a child one-on-one instruction while they teach the class.

The single biggest obstacle to making later life more productive and more enjoyable is the notion that at this age we are set in our ways and cannot change. This is not true. We *can* change if we want to. It is probably easier to avoid change and feel sorry for yourself for being out of place in a youth-oriented environment. Easier, yes. More pleasant, no.

There is an excellent book, *Secrets of Becoming a Late Bloomer*, (Hazelden Publishers) which has many great ideas for putting the golden years to good use.

It's a matter of attitude. Consider the words of a very active nonagenarian I know, who says, "I am not an old man of 93. I am three young men of 31." **JA**

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\* From *Slichot*

\*\*The editor happily notes that Dr.

Twerski prepared this article on his computer and successfully emailed it to Jewish Action.