

## A Final Blessing

### Anam Cara

May you be blessed with good friends.  
May you learn to be a good friend to yourself.  
May you be able to journey to that place in your soul  
    where there is great love, warmth, feeling and forgiveness.  
May this change you.  
May it transfigure that which is negative, distant or cold in you.  
May you be brought in to the real passion, kinship and affinity of belonging.  
May you treasure your friends.  
May you be good to them and may you be there for them. May they you all the blessings, challenges,  
truth and light that you need for the journey.  
May you never be isolated.

*-Blessing, Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

May you always be in a gentle nest of belonging with your Anam Cara (Soul Friend)

*This journal has been offered as a tool for your journey  
to claim yourself as an Elder. May your journey continue and may you  
be richly blessed with WISDOM, the gift of your years.*

This reflection journal is based on the work and wisdom of Brenda J. McCutcheon, certified Sage-ing® Leader and a licensed Pastor at the United Church of Christ. Brenda's inspiration comes from the vision of sage-ing developed by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, author of *From Age-ing to Sage-ing, A Profound New Vision of Growing Older*.

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Sage-ing® Age-ing

**Embracing the Gift of Years**  
**Claiming the Blessing of Being an Elder**  
**A Reflection Journal**

## Introduction

Social scientists, economists and other scholars affirm that global aging is a major cultural factor in the United States and throughout our world. For most of history, older adults composed only a tiny fraction of the population. Globally, older adults now comprise about 15% of the population. By 2050 that percentage will shift to 25%. The world is entering a demographic transformation of unprecedented dimensions. It is a fundamental demographic shift with no parallel in the history of humanity.

This reality can be sobering. Or, it can be an invitation to embrace the gift of years and initiate the process of becoming an Elder.

*When we consciously embrace our growing older we can avoid becoming elderly and instead initiate the process of becoming an Elder. This attitude enables us to harvest our lives, bless all that we have lived through, the triumphs and the tragedies, the realized dreams and the bitter disappointments, the acts of love and the shock of betrayal, and to convert this into a gift of wisdom. When we reflect on our experience the potential for gathering wisdom is incredible. In the rush of our days, we have lost too much of our story and the learning we have integrated into our lives.*

*Brenda J. McCutcheon*

This journal is offered to you as a support for your own process of becoming an Elder. The reflections within it invite you to slow down from the “rush of your days,” harvest your life experiences and claim the WISDOM your life has given you. For women who have lived full and deep spiritual lives, this call to Elderhood is especially relevant. What is the gift of years that is yours to give? May the reflections in this journal be a helpful companion as you ponder and shape the answer to this question.

*Elderhood is a time to discover inner richness for self-development and spiritual growth. It is also a time of transition and preparation for dying which is at least as important as preparation for a career and family. Out of this time of inner growth come our sages, healers, prophets, and models for generations to follow.*

*Gay Luce, Longer Life, More Joy*

What objects do you want nearby?

What would you like to say to those around you at this time?

What would you like them to say to you?

Is there a particular voice you would like to hear?

How do you imagine your moment of actual death?

Have you prepared your will?

Have you prepared your funeral?

## The End of the Journey...MY WISHES

The end of the Elder's life is marked by a careful preparation that gives meaning to one's last days. Take some time to consider how you want the gift of your years and the WISDOM they bring to be celebrated as you end your life journey on earth.

What would you like your surroundings to look like?

Who do you want with you as you end this part of your life journey?

Who do you not want with you?

What poems, prayers, sacred text will be important for you to hear?

What would you like to see?

What would you like to taste?

What would you like to smell?

How do you want to be dressed?

## What is an Elder?

Historically, Elders held honored roles in society, as sages, and leaders. Longevity was treasured. The Elder functioned as our wisdom keeper. Today, we have lost the sense of the Elder.

Barry Barkin, founder of the Live Oak Project defines the Elder in the following way:

**An Elder**, a sage, offers experience, balanced judgment, and wisdom for the welfare of society.

**An Elder** is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential, and where life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to the future.

**An Elder** is still in pursuit of happiness, joy and pleasure, and her or his birth-right to these remains intact.

Moreover

**An Elder** is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations.

How do you describe an elder?

## Image Yourself As An Elder

Our food,  
our rituals,  
our mistakes,  
our memories,  
our wishes,  
are gifts  
to those  
we love.  
They are our  
continuation.

Brenda J. McCutcheon

*What do you aspire toward in your Elderhood?*

*Is there an Elder who emanates how you want to be?  
What is it about this person that you admire and aspire to imitate?*

*What do you perceive as the gifts of your years?*

*At this moment, what treasure within you are you inspired to share with those you love?*

*How can you view Elderhood as a crowning achievement and open the door with reverence and anticipation?*

*What are your barriers to claiming Elderhood?*

## Legacy Questions

What stories in your family history need to be written down?

What dreams and aspirations, words of wisdom do you want to pass on? To whom?

How can your ideas, causes, hopes for the world continue?

Is there someone to inherit the work you began?

Make a list of stories, quotes, scriptures, causes, justice work, memories, you wish to convey.

Choose a person to whom you can will the seeds of your life. What is the gift of your years that you want most to pass on?

## Our Legacy

***“Our legacy is the footprints we leave behind”.*** Rachel Freed, legacy writer

We have all lived. Thus, we have a legacy to share. One of the tasks of the Elder is to mine the diamonds of our life by conveying the story and giving it to our family and friends. Consider what you desire to leave behind for those you love by considering what you have to say about.....

### Legacy Reminders and Prompts

The experience of battle

The understanding of pain

Dreams dashed

Surviving heartache

Family traditions and rituals

Letters from parents and friends

Photos, momentous

Things you treasure and bless

Items that are imbued with meaning

Favorite quotes, music, art

Times you are most alive

What you've learned from your mistakes

What you hope will be carried on

## Sage-ing: Harvesting your WISDOM

Sage-ing is a gift we give ourselves! It encourages us to review our life with a wide angle lens and to come to terms with our own mortality. It is an invitation to touch the sore spots of our lives with a healing balm.

Sage-ing calls us to transmit our wisdom learned from life experience so that we can be a channel of growth, not a reservoir where learning stays contained. It is an opportunity to create ones legacy and to be a mentor to others. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, author of *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, identifies sage-ing as a necessary process for becoming an Elder.

### The Gifts of Sage-ing

Sage-ing imparts the wisdom of lived experiences.

Sage-ing gives us a new lens in which to look at aging with expectation, anticipation and the measure to our days. How will we spend our time?

Sage-ing embodies a deeper awareness of the gift of years and serves as a model for late life integration.

Sage-ing creates time for weeding out the pain and hurt and for savoring the good and honorable. It creates new images of aging well.

***The practice of sage-ing is transformational  
if we embark on the journey.***

*Sage-ing® / Age-ing*

## Harvesting Life Experiences: Life Lessons

*Lord teach me to number my days that I may attain a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:12*

Complete the following phrases and reflect on the lessons life has taught you.

My fears . . .

My regrets

My consolation . . .

My satisfactions . . .

My hopes . . .

My deepest experience of the Divine...

I take delight in . . .

I find meaning in . . .

I want to be assured of . . .

I want to affirm that . . .



## Imagining the Gift of Years

Metaphors provide us with images that can help us describe our life experiences. Consider the following metaphors. Claim one of these or one that's not mentioned as a metaphor for your life. Consider, *Why is it a metaphor descriptive of you?*

Clay Jar

Spool of thread

A caterpillar

A hammer

A diamond

A butterfly

A quiet block

A pitcher

*Read and reflect on your responses. What WISDOM do these hold for you as an Elder?*

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi  
teaches us that  
contemplative life  
review provides  
us with a framework  
for inviting our enemies,  
those that live in our brain  
free of rent,  
that still inhabit our memories,  
to a place on the  
dance floor of our lives  
to move freely toward them  
and set them free.

## Life Map: Significant Actions in Our Life

**Our lives are marked by successes and regrets. Use the following questions to reflect on some of the successes and regrets of your life and the WISDOM they offer you now.**

What successes in your life do you want to celebrate? What attitudes and behaviors led to these successes?

What things could you have done better? (careful of the word failure) What attitudes and behaviors contributed to not doing these things better?

What attitudes and behaviors do you want to sustain as an Elder? Which do you want to change or reconsider?

What wisdom have you gained from these experiences that you would like to share with another person?

What lessons have you **yet** to learn?

## Peace Making: Recognizing What Needs Healing

When we do not look at our broken places, the places that still sting with hurt, we imprison ourselves. We carry weight from which we can set ourselves free and we hold the keys. Forgiving others and ourselves frees us from the resentments and anger that can immobilize us. Rabbi Zalman reminds us that when we fail to forgive we become the jailor and the warden of our own hearts. Forgiveness is not only a gift you give others but a gift you give yourself. Accepting and giving forgiveness are like two sides to a coin. If you have been given the gift, how could you not give it back? How can you offer an open door to painful times, to create peace, healing and freedom?

**Are you carrying the weight of hurts from a time when someone....**

*--hurt you with words?*

*--betrayed you?*

*--lied to you and you were swept up in disbelief?*

*--pretended to be someone they were not?*

*--gossiped about you?*

*--stepped over you to get what they wanted?*

*--let you down?*

*--broke your heart?*

*--disappointed you?*

**What would help you forgive these hurts and let them go?**

**For what do you need to forgive yourself?**

*Is there someone to whom you want to write a letter telling them how they've impacted your life and changed you for the Good? Use this space to write this letter.*



ON the edge  
of old age myself,  
I sense that  
we may be  
'newborn spirits'  
at any moment,  
if we have courage.  
Old age  
is not an illness,  
it is a timeless ascent.  
As power diminishes,  
we grow more  
toward the light

May Sarton



## All That I Remember

All that I remember of my life  
are the great round rocks and not  
the unimportant stones.

I know that  
I experienced pain and yet  
the scars have healed so that  
I am like the tree covering itself  
with new growth every year.

I know that  
I walked in sadness and yet  
all that I remember now  
is the soothing autumn light.

I know that  
there was much to make  
my life unhappy  
if I had stopped to notice how  
the world sings a broken song.

But I preferred to dwell within  
a universe of fields and streams  
which echoed  
the wholeness of my song.

When you have  
malevolent thoughts  
don't speak them, but  
write them.  
Write them in the sand  
as close to the water  
as possible.

Yogi Bha

## Life Map: Relationships

Take time to reflectively read the words to this song from the Broadway musical, *Wicked*. Using the questions that follow, consider how the song's message is true for you and the significant relationships you've experienced in your life.

### *For Good*

I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason,  
bringing something we must learn.  
And we are led to those who help us most to grow  
If we let them, and we help them in return.  
Well, I don't know if I believe that's true, but I know I'm who I am today  
Because I knew you . . .

Like a comet pulled from orbit, as it passes a sun;  
Like a stream that meets a boulder, halfway through the wood  
who can say if I've been changed for the better?  
But because I knew you, I have been changed for good.

It well may be, that we will never meet again, in this lifetime,  
so let me say before we part . . .  
So much of me, is made of what I learned from you,  
you'll be with me, like a handprint on my heart  
And now whatever way our stories end,  
I know you have re-written mine, by being my friend . . .

Like a ship blown from its mooring, by a wind off the sea,  
like a seed dropped by a sky bird, in a distant wood;  
Who can say if I've been changed for the better?  
But because I knew you, because I knew you,  
I have been changed for Good!  
And just to clear the air, I ask forgiveness,  
for the things I've done you blame me for.  
But then, I guess we know, there's blame to share,  
and none of it seems to matter anymore.

Like a comet pulled from orbit, as it passes a sun,  
like a stream that meets a boulder, halfway through the wood;  
Like a ship blown from its mooring, by a wind off the sea,  
like a seed dropped by a bird in the wood.

Who can say if I've been, changed for the better?  
I do believe I have been, I have changed for the better.  
And because I knew you . . . because I knew you . . . Because I knew you . . .  
I have been changed  
FOR GOOD . . . .

## In Light of the Message in the Lyrics of For Good

Who comes to mind when you consider the words of this song? Consider persons in your family, your friends, teachers, colleagues; mentors; role models, guides.

How did these persons change your life for good or change the direction of your life?

What wisdom did these persons teach you that will remain as a handprint on your heart?

Who in your life do you "blame" for something that happened to you? How will you seek their forgiveness?

From whom do you need to seek forgiveness?

With whom do you want to spend more time? Why?