

## Spiritually Active After 50

By Rev. Dr. Judith Pruess-Mellow



**Later life is a time to embrace questions about faith and spirituality. One “gift of years” is that we are more comfortable with ambiguity and**

**mystery. We tend to see complex issues more in shades of gray rather than black and white.**

We may occasionally think about our own mortality, about what our “buckets” might hold—what we want to experience before we die—and even, what we would like as a memorial service?

While it is presumptuous to offer a definition of spirituality, I will use one adapted from Elana Peters of Caregiving Solutions: “Spirituality is affirmation of life in a relationship with self, community, environment

### SIX SPIRITUAL TASKS FOR LATER LIFE:

1. Find a sense of self worth apart from the externals such as job, children, money.
2. Surrender graciously those areas in which there is no longer ability.
3. Seek and share wisdom.
4. Mentor others. (*Check out the book on Spiritual Eldering by Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, From Age-ing to Sage-ing.*)
5. Though life is not perfect, realize it still has meaning and value.
6. Face death and questions of immortality.

and some Higher Power/the Universe/Ultimate Truth.”

Our spirituality can blossom in later life, provide us with resources to help us cope with some of the inevitable losses and give us the joy of new found relationships, including communion with the Divine, however we define it.

#### Later Life Spiritual Tasks

Sometimes when we are in our late 50s or older, we wonder if there is anything left for us to accomplish. We may struggle to create new life goals.

#### Reflecting on Your Story

Later life is the perfect time to begin reflecting on your life story. Even if you don’t want to record your story in order to pass it on to family and friends, journaling is helpful in discerning the meaning and purpose of your life. Journaling is a private affair, written just for you. Life stories, in contrast, are written to be shared.

You can begin by listing periods of your life, trying to perceive a pattern. Some guiding questions in spirituality might be:

- ◆ What spiritual event would you relive and why?
- ◆ Which year was most growth-producing and why?
- ◆ How has your faith/spiritual practice evolved over time? What were major turning points?
- ◆ What would be a 25 word message to the people most important to you?
- ◆ What is your happiest memory and why?
- ◆ What spiritual leaders have you admired?

- ◆ Whom have you loved and why?
- ◆ What were difficult but fruitful learning experiences?
- ◆ What do you need to give up to experience the fullness of your later years, and what do you need to hold on to?
- ◆ Is your faith and spirituality sustaining you through losses and other difficult times and guiding you in daily living?

**In contrast to private reflections,** consider writing down your spiritual life story. You might ask yourself: How do I want to be remembered? Who are some people who could benefit from my wisdom and life experiences? What are some wise things I have learned over the years?

You might spend time on gratitude—thanking those who have helped you become who you are and being grateful for whatever blessings you have, even if you can’t do physically as much as you used to. You might discern what rituals are important to you.

You might even create rituals to mark later life passages such as downsizing to a smaller place, giving away heirlooms before you die, organizing photos and albums, entry to semi-retirement, some volunteer work well accomplished. You might want to write an ethical will ([www.ethicalwill.com](http://www.ethicalwill.com)).

In later life, you begin to get off the hamster wheel. You can savor your mellower reactions. Gene Cohen says the amygdala in our brains, which makes us choose fight or flight in our earlier years, becomes less active in later life, enabling us to be calmer.

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*Former executive director of Senior New Ways, Rev. Dr. Judith Pruess-Mellow is executive director of Gold Country Seniors Alive. She can be reached at [judithpm@theunion.net](mailto:judithpm@theunion.net). 650.823.0559. [Goldcountryseniorsalive.com](http://Goldcountryseniorsalive.com).*