

# Serving the Aging Population Needs a Change in Attitude

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I read this sad story on social media, and it made me more determined to follow my dream of building a shelter for underprivileged elders who have no assistance from their children or any government support.

This is the gist of the story that highlights the plight of millions of our elders.

“Today is my 89th birthday, and I am sitting in the nursing home with a plate of meatballs in front of me. I don’t know who made these for me or who is wishing me a happy birthday today. I have three kids but haven’t seen them in a long time. They brought me here and told me it was for my own benefit, but time flies, and the phone doesn’t ring.

I’m not angry, I’m sad. It is sad because deep in my heart, despite their absence, I never stopped loving them. It is sad because I don’t want much. I just want a hug, one word, one “Happy birthday, Daddy.”

I just wish somebody would remember me today. If you are reading this message, think of me.

Today, I hope this message reaches the hearts of those who have forgotten the value of giving kindness before it is too late.”

The world’s aging population is increasing every year, thanks to the miracles of modern medicine and technology. People live longer, wish for a fulfilling life, and be part of the community’s everyday life.

There has been great improvement in taking care of our beloved elders since COVID exposed the tragic inadequacies of many senior citizen homes.

Still, due to financial factors, the prevailing practice in the West is to provide service on a large scale by having our elders and caring for them in big complexes. In some underdeveloped countries, elders are not so lucky. They are left at the mercy of their children, who in most cases have no time for them, or financial and other priorities of their lives do not allow them to take care of their parents and in many cases, the elders have been left to themselves without help from government agencies or any other organization. I have witnessed them being on the streets begging or dying in poverty.

That made me dream of building Nazz Rest Home in India. This idea is based on the writings of the Baha'i Faith to cover all aspects of our elders' physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs who spent their lives making the world a better place for the next generations.

Our generation must reflect on their needs and develop a holistic approach to caring for our elders. We should allow them to be productive by imparting their knowledge, wisdom, and the long-lasting lessons they have learned.

There are many experiments and new methods of providing service, and Nazz Rest Home focuses on older people who are poor and disadvantaged. But these innovations will not change the minds and hearts of the world. We need to re-examine the needs of these precious souls who may be weak in body but are treasuries of wise advice required for the young generation to get started on the right path to maturity. The quotation below has become the guideline for Nazz Rest Home:

**“That there must be full integration of the aging in the human community, since the community should be an extended family in which everyone, of any age, is an essential part, and not only allowed, but encouraged, to make the fullest possible contribution to the wellbeing of the whole; and that in considering the needs of the aging in the process of development we must take into account the wholeness of the human being the moral and spiritual dimension, besides his emotional, intellectual, and physical nature when discussing the special contributions of older persons to development and their sharing in the resulting benefits.” ~Bahá’í International Community**

Our aging population needs our care and support to contribute to the community's quality of life. Sadly, the spiritual and emotional needs of the elderly have been ignored and forgotten in the process of planning for them. Our elders have been, in most cases, separated from society to care for their physical needs efficiently, and their spiritual and human needs have been overlooked. This approach is far from a spiritual approach that sees every human as a spiritual being. The body's condition or age should not distract us from nurturing the soul, no matter how old we are. Baha'u'llah reminds us of the relation of the soul and the body.

**“Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments.” ~Baha'u'llah**

We need to reflect, do soul-searching, and adopt a new approach to recognize and reward our elders' contributions in their lifetime for the betterment of the world. This approach of care is in harmony with the spirit of Baha'i life.

In short, either we have or will have health issues that indicate that we need help, and it would be wonderful if we were conscious of this fact and begin reflecting, planning, and taking action in the direction that Abdu'l-Baha set for us to follow.

There is no better way of pleasing the Creator than through the path of service. Abdu'l-Baha explains:

**“We know that to help the poor and to be merciful is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man, nor can the poor be warmed by knowledge or words in the bitter winter; we must give the practical help of Loving-kindness.” ~Abdu'l-Baha**

Let us dream of a future where, in every community, the elderly, based on the goal of full integration, can be involved in activities with people of all ages, such as arts, gardening, and various community events. They can be involved in planning activities and a source of guidance to impart their life experiences to younger generations. We can imagine each elder spiritually adopted by a family who takes care of them and includes them as members of their families.