

Spiritual Living in Assisted Living

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People commonly think that we elders don't change much, but I am becoming aware that I have changed a great deal, particularly here in the assisted living facility I moved to last year.

Yes, old dogs can learn new tricks!

I grew up very misunderstood due to my shyness, as an extremely-introverted only child. I'm still somewhat introverted, but because of my profession, the years I served as a therapist, and my Baha'i community activities, my shyness gradually disappeared.

In the same way, my fears about growing old and moving to assisted living have now disappeared.

Since I moved to this place and lost those fears, I feel compelled to make caring personal connections with everyone. Every day and night, when I take my walks, I make efforts to connect with the other residents, as well as all the caregivers. They have become my family now, and I love them and feel the love from them. I look back to my shy, withdrawn adolescence, and realize that the inner person who occupies my decaying body has changed dramatically.

I keep wondering – who was that person? I like the person I am now much better, and I thank God for the aging and the cancer that forced me to come to this point in my life. That may sound quite strange, but it's true. Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

Oh, how I see the accuracy of this statement now, and how it comforts me! The more I act on it, the closer I feel to the Creator, and the more inner peace I experience.

I'm grateful for everything now – my little room, my friends, even my insurance company. For the past 21 years, I've paid for long-term care insurance – but for many months after moving to assisted living, I've tried to qualify for receiving the benefits of that insurance. I was told that I “did not fit into their criteria,” so I was not able to get those benefits, even though I have stage 4 cancer and am in long-term care!

My best friend Anne, my angel, tirelessly worked on it while trying to keep my hopes up. Me, with my naysaying nature about what I will get or what I will not get, lost all hope at one point. I felt comforted by the fact that, at least for the time being, I could stay at the assisted living center, since I sold my house and car to afford it.

A few weeks ago, Anne called me and said we got a letter from that insurance company. I really had to control myself in order to be polite and stay silent, while in my mind I was shouting at her, saying “what’s the use, I know how that letter starts: ‘Dear Mahin, we regret ...’”

But Anne sensed my impatience, started reading, and what a shock – the letter said I was approved. I am beyond grateful to God. I am also grateful to my three medical specialists and the assisted living center for their help in sending my full and helpful records to this insurance company, which apparently became the absolute deal breaker of their earlier denials.

What do all these blessings tell me? They tell me, once again, that when I lay all my affairs in God’s hands, He will make it right, on His time and in His way – that is, if and when I leave my ego behind and my presumptions about how things should go out of the picture. When I say this prayer, attributed to Abdu’l-Baha, it comforts and reassures me:

O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.

O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.