

Spanda® Yoga for Resilient Aging™: The *Gaudium* Factor

As I combed through various studies and writings on both longevity and on living well into old age, I discovered not only that the items listed were very relevant to the sponsoring agency—so that economic status was focal when funded by an investment firm, and quality healthcare was high on lists published by insurance agencies. I also found throughout the literature an undeniable nod toward meaning or purpose in life. One list called this, “putting something or someone ahead of oneself.” Another related item on many lists was rather clinically named, “social factors”, “family connection”, or simply “relating to others.”

My tendency is to look to these somewhat unmeasurable, less tangible things to see if I can unpack them on a more personal scale. What are “social factors” exactly? Are they just rolling a wheelchair to the card game hour or bringing someone into a room with other residents for TV and a nap? Or are they (hopefully!) something more? And does the fact that one man’s pleasure equal another man’s poison make these kinds of factors in well-aging more difficult to track?

As I dove deeper, two ideas emerged: connection and enjoyment. Looking further into these words, I found they were intertwined in an interesting way. The root of enjoyment is “*gaudium*” (Latin) to rejoice, giving rise to enjoy and joy. Also, *Cara* from the Greek indicates “the beloved.” Connotations of both roots for connection and enjoyment point to a “power greater than ourselves”. And we find in them the sense of losing oneself, such as when one loses oneself in an activity. With this there is lessening of an isolated sense of self, combined with that of pleasure, interest, and fun. This is true whether one is solving a puzzle, dancing, or serving loved ones.

In the traditional culture within which yoga arose, there are two final stages of life: retirement (*vanaprastha*), the transition away material concerns, and renunciation (*sannyasa*), full detachment from material life to focus on life’s goal of union with the Divine. It seems in the west with so much material focus, we get stuck at the retirement phase. The two interwoven factors of connection and joy point to the *sannyasin* stage. I’m not suggesting that to age well everyone must go off foraging barefoot into the forest! But research and tradition both indicate that entering this phase of life with conscious awareness of how we each find our own sense of connection, meaning, purpose and joy is very beneficial. It’s an important factor to work toward putting in place for retirement and beyond.

Some questions for your consideration:

What’s fun? What’s nourishing and sustaining?

What do you see yourself enjoying years from now?

Is there anything you’ve always wanted to try, learn, or do you haven’t gotten to yet?

Do you prefer to connect with other people, some engrossing activity, or both? ☺