

More information is available through our website:

**[www. quakeragingresources.org](http://www.quakeragingresources.org)**

**\* Sources and Suggested Resources:**

1. Nancy L. Eiesland, The Disabled God, Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability, 1994, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN

2. John Zeisel, PhD pg 177, I'm Still Here: A Breakthrough Approach to Understanding Someone Living with Alzheimer's. 2009, Avery, New York.

3. Ram Dass, pg 6, Still Here, Embracing, Aging Changing and Dying, 2000, Riverhead Books, NY

John Yungblut, On Hallowing One's Diminishments, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 292, 1990, Pendle Hill, Warrington PA

Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, The Spirituality of Imperfection, Storytelling and the Search for Meaning, 1992 Bantam, New York, NY

<http://www.co-intelligence.org/index.html>

<http://livinggratitude.wordpress.com/>

[http://www.simpleabundance.com/gratitude\\_journal.html](http://www.simpleabundance.com/gratitude_journal.html)

## *Autonomy, Interdependence, and Interrelationship*



***Q:** Am I willing to offer assistance as part of my religious community serving its members? Am I equally willing to graciously accept the help of others?*



**[www. quakeragingresources.org](http://www.quakeragingresources.org)**

Quaker Aging Resources is a collaborative project of New York and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Quakers and is funded by the Thomas Scattergood Foundation and Friends Foundation for the Aging.

## *Autonomy, Interdependence and Interrelationship*

Nancy Eiesland, in The Disabled God refers to people who are not living with disabilities as the “temporarily able-bodied”.<sup>\*1</sup> At least half of us will experience some form of disability during our lifetime, either short term or lasting. As our population lives longer, this becomes even more likely.

We live in a society that promotes independence and self-reliance. Friends may find themselves better prepared to offer care than to receive it. We may be compassionate when others have needs, but how willing are we to accept our interdependent natures when it comes to our own needs?

“Whenever major change disrupts any relationship-disability, or moving from one stage of life to another-everyone involved has to build a new relationship with the other if that relationship is to continue and flourish,” says John Zeisel, PhD, in I’m Still Here.<sup>\*2</sup>

This new relationship involves changed roles both for people who need care, and caregivers. Understanding that we need to rely on others may not come naturally, but this acceptance can give us strength and allow us to focus on deeper aspects of our relationships. Accepting change allows us to make the most of our lives under changed conditions.

In PYM’s Faith and Practice, Jennifer Faulkner is quoted, “I have a vivid memory of looking down on myself on the bed; doctors and nurses worked on that body, and I felt held in such secureness, joy and contentment the utter rightness of things...” Later, as she experienced setbacks and finally recovery, she said she “never completely lost the memory of being held and the wonder at being alive.” (1982) PYM Faith and Practice, 2002.

Ram Dass in Still Here writes of his acceptance with using a wheelchair, even coming to like being wheeled around and calling it his “swan boat”.<sup>\*3</sup>

These stories show how some have found peace with illness and disability. Many of us, when faced with challenges, need to work to reach such acceptance. This may likely include acknowledging any losses our illness or disability presents.

### ***Tips for Finding Peace with Being Cared for:***

- Follow the trail of what truly enables a person to accomplish a task. For example, Joe went to the market, loaded groceries in the car, and put them away at home, all apparently without assistance. However, what if the workers had not been there to open the store, the farmers to grow the food; the traffic lights were not working? Even the simplest tasks, when we really think about it, require a system of interdependence. You have participated in this system, and you still can, though perhaps in new ways.
- Be mindful of what you can do, small and large. Make a list of what you are able to do for yourself, and be willing to think in small increments. You need help getting dressed, but you can choose what to wear, perhaps get one arm in one sleeve. Encourage your helpers to allow you to do what you can, regardless of how small, and even if this slows things down. Think in big picture terms of what you can do as well- you can listen to others, give advice, and appreciate beauty.
- If losses or frustration come up, honor your emotions. Hold yourself in the light as you would a friend who was experiencing what you are.
- Practice gratitude for what you have, your experiences, and the people around you. List it. If you cannot write, allowing someone to record this for you will be a gift to that person.