

Elders, seniors, oldies: is there a difference? Learning from Findhorn's Experience



Universal Hall at Findhorn

My involvement in the Men Beyond 50 project has prompted me to explore elderhood: for myself and others. This is one reason for my recent visit to the [Findhorn Foundation](#) in Scotland. For more about Findhorn in general, see my [blog](#) (link to Findhorn posting once published) on this topic.

There is an Elders Circle at Findhorn, and I joined their fortnightly meeting. The first part of this is a half-hour meditation, guided by different members of the Circle each time, with a range of relevant themes. When I was there, the focus was tuning into the guiding spirits of the community, which I see as a valuable part of the elders' role.

The meditation is followed by sharing and discussion, and then social time at the nearby [Blue Angel Café](#). I found the conversation fascinating, as it centred on different meanings of the term elders. The aim of this Circle is as a gathering of what could be called tribal elders: those who carry and offer wisdom for the community, who could be any age: see more on this below.



A work team at Cullerne Market Garden, Findhorn

However, some at Findhorn, in their 50s and 60s, who have this wisdom, have stayed away from the Elders Circle because they believe it is a social group for oldies. The discussion recognised the ambiguity in the term, and the need for different words to describe those older in age, such as seniors.

I suspect part of the problem in all this is that most people, until really advanced ages, don't like to think of themselves as old, or even as senior, let alone elderly or aged. Do we need a new word? At least oldies sounds a bit more fun.

My short definition of elderhood, from my forthcoming [book](#), *Men Beyond 50: Lost and Found*, is set out below: most of this applies for men *and* women. This broadly matches the views of the Findhorn Elders, who don't have a written statement. So here's mine:

The Elder is a term you often find connected with maturing men, and I hear it in many men's groups. It's a word with various meanings, and

maybe each man needs to quest for its significance for him. This is a summary of what it means to me.

Traditional tribal cultures had a lot of wisdom still relevant to our times. The warrior had a crucial role in protecting the tribe and hunting food. Men beyond warrior age were elders. Although we imagine these tribes as hierarchies with a chief, many were guided and governed by the elders as a group. The elders carried the wisdom, knowledge and history of the tribe, and were respected for this. They guided, trained and initiated the young men. Elders resolved disputes, dreamed dreams, talked to the spirit world, wove stories, and lived in a continuity between the present time, the past and ancestors, and the future – including their own death.

The role of the elder needs skills which many men in our times lack, but would be enriched if they learned: collaborating with other mature men, and supporting younger ones, for example. See Chapter 11 for more on all this. However, we don't live in a tribal culture which makes this easy and natural. This is one reason why men's groups are so vital, to encourage and recognise these traditional, archetypal roles.

This is an excerpt from Alan's forthcoming book: if you would like to receive further excerpts and information about the book, sign up to this blog as a subscriber.

I hope this debate will continue! Please feel free to comment on this blog.

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