

AWARENESS

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**JOHN
ROBBINS**
LIVING LONG,
BEING VITAL

GREEN DIMES
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JOHN ROBBINS

Living Long, Being Vital

By Donna Strong

John Robbins is a revolutionary man. He has served as a significant catalyst to change our way of thinking about what we eat and why, not only in America, but in numerous countries around the globe. In his books he offers compelling presentations of science combined with his own perceptive, sentient and far-reaching vision.

As an activist, he has raised our awareness of what is needed to restore right relationship within ourselves, with the Earth, and with one another. His purposeful use of heart-based intelligence is informative and inspiring. It is no wonder that he has been a recipient of the Rachel Carson Award, the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award and the Peace Abbey's Courage of Conscience Award.

This award-winning activist is passionately pursuing his version of the American Dream; "of a society at peace with its conscience because it respects and lives in harmony with all life forms."

In this issue on the Environment, we focus on John's most recent book, "Healthy at 100." With nearly 80 million Baby Boomers heading straight toward 'retirement' age as of now, we are a nation that is urgently in need of wisdom and action to turn the tide on the abysmal situation that now exists for too many elders of our nation.

John has provided an intriguing and rewarding perspective on the later years of life. John's book busts many misconceptions that we have about aging through a cross-cultural look at elders thriving in other parts of the world. His book serves as a considerable offering to inspire action, so that becoming an elder may be a time that is more 'golden,' than laden with chronic illness and despair.

We welcome your enjoyment of John, who is truly the model of a passionate, thriving sixty-year old American man. We would all do well to turn our focus to sincere American leaders such as John, who shine in their authenticity and provide a beacon for us all to live more fully and consciously.

Awareness: One of the more compelling findings in the book was that our perceptions about aging have as much or more impact on the length of our life than some of the better known health factors, such as smoking and cholesterol for instance.

John: Isn't that amazing? It speaks to the body/mind connection, the power of our perceptions and the stories we tell ourselves about our lives. Becka Levy and her colleagues at Yale did a study, interviewing a group of middle-age people over the course of twenty years.

Basically they were tracking people's perceptions of themselves, and of aging and their health. Some people believed as they got older they would be less useful, that they would deteriorate. Others at the outset had more optimistic views about aging. They didn't think it was necessarily a terrible thing, they understood that each life phase had its own opportunities and beauties.

What she found, over the course of the study, was that those people who began the study with positive orientations toward aging lived an average 7.5 years longer than the people who had less positive images

about aging. There's an inner beauty, an inner power and an inner health that can radiate from an older person who has taken care of themselves and taken care of others along the way, and has shown respect for life.

There is a luminosity that is present from sages, and from elders who have come to a mature consciousness and relationship to life's challenges and possibilities. I've known people like that.

Awareness: As you discuss in the book, in this country, many of us are not only living longer, we are living with more protracted illness than before in elder life.

John: Yes, there is much more time spent with chronic illness and disability now than ever before. I think we have a misguided view spending tremendous amounts of money to keep people alive who have zero quality of life and are in intractable pain with no possibility of any kind of reversal of the problem, but we'll do that.

Yet, we don't spend one hundredth of that on making sure pregnant women have adequate food or taking care of the vulnerable people who are younger in our world. Western medicine is fabulous at extending the life span, but not at extending the health span, and that's the distinction I make. I think there is no virtue, per se, in living longer unless our later years are worthwhile.

Awareness: In that regard, you share a comment from one of the four cultures your book covers, and I want to discuss a quote from the Abkhasians. To them, "sickness is not considered a normal or a natural event."

John: Yes, they have very little of the illnesses that plague our society. We spend close to 15% of our GDP on medical care. This is more money spent on medical care than the entire world spends on petroleum! Even with that, 45 million Americans don't even have access to medical care. The Abkhasians don't spend one thousandth of what we do, and yet in many ways, they are healthier people.

Awareness: It seems like this is a good way to illustrate a major point in your book, that the perspective we have will be fulfilled, even if it is a negative one!

John: It is amazing how our fear can be self-fulfilling. If we go into situations that are challenging with a positive attitude about our own creativity, our own problem-solving ability, our own ingenuity and resourcefulness, our own ability to communicate across differences, our own ability to understand other people; when we have that confidence, usually we transmit that consciousness to other people and the whole situation shifts into a better direction. Our attitudes become real. They are part of how we shape our lives.

Awareness: That leads me into another major aspect of the book, where you refer to the Hunzas as people who have responded to their environment with 'courage and creativity.'

John: Yes, most of the cultures I profiled, but specifically that one, are remarkably ingenuous people, and they don't ever seem to be victims. They don't get passive, resigned and defeated in the face of challenges. I mention that because of the contrast between what I see in our culture. I see many people who are bitter and broken, who don't feel like their actions or their love will make a difference to anybody. Within that is great hopelessness and great despair.

In these other cultures that is not the case. How have we become so distant from knowing what actions can lead in a healthier more positive direction, with less despair and more joy, less hopelessness and more sense of courage, less disease and more health?

Awareness: One of the things I have been most interested in is how one stays most connected to their

own creative problem-solving ability, because to me that is one of the core ways people have meaning in their lives and remain passionate, versus what too often happens to the elderly in our culture. One of the comparisons in these cultures is that they have a much more direct response to their natural environment. We don't, as a culture. In addition, we have this enormous 'indigestion' trying to figure how to handle all information surrounding global issues that comes with a sense of despair.

John: We are overwhelmed by all the information. The old environmental movement saying is still apt — think globally and act locally. When you see the enormity of the problems, the momentum behind them and the vested interests perpetrating them, it is easy to throw up your hands and feel completely defeated. But that won't get us anywhere.

Acting locally may mean in your community, your own household, in your own body, your personal relationships or your work location, anything you can handle and get a grasp on to move into a more sustainable and socially just, thriving direction.

The important thing is to be taking steps that are moving you along, because the power of that cannot be measured. It's a little arrogant to say, there's nothing you can do. You know there are people who say, "who am I to be fabulous and powerful?" To that I say, "Well, who are you not to be?"

Awareness: My comment is, "God is an equal-opportunity employer, everybody has work to do!"

John: It is indulgent to sink down into states in which your own vibration and healing power is diminished. With it, your own capacity to act with exuberance, vitality, creativity and passion and joy is also drained. What is needed is for a lot of us to become more fully alive.

Compared to what is possible, I think most of us are like light bulbs that haven't been plugged in yet. We need to plug in so we will have more strength and ability to connect with one another, so we will deal better with the problems that exist.

Awareness: John, I really felt that personally while reading the book. It was a tremendously positive catalyst to act!

John: When I thought about this book and conceived it, that was one of the key ideas. There is so much negativity now, we are inundated with it. I have this phrase, "Too much information." It is too much of a certain kind of information, really.

I saw a study that the more television people watched, the more afraid of their neighbors they were. The researchers called it 'the dangerous world syndrome.' The mathematical correspondence was compelling. The more television people watched, the more crime they thought there was in their neighborhood and the more exaggerated their belief about how many murders and burglaries were taking place.

I don't get my news from the television. I get it from certain Internet sources if I want to know about what is going on in the world. I also have this very deep feeling, if you want to know the real news of our times, go on a media fast. Turn off the TV, don't read the newspapers, listen to your own heart, and listen very tenderly to the hearts of those people who are within your circle of care and affection.

You will sense the forces at work in all of our beings, in all of our hearts, working toward a better world, that have the power to create a spiritually-fulfilling, environmentally-sustainable, and socially-just human presence on this planet.

We are all racing around, and the media is one of the ways we drive ourselves crazy, going at such a speed. We don't take the time as a rule to listen to ourselves, to one another, to nature, to the deeper levels of our

psyches and beings. What I have noticed about these other cultures is they have time for each other.

They are not doing a thousand things, multitasking. They hang out with each other, tell stories, joke, gossip and also talk about deep things, from chit chat to the meaning of life and death. They have conversations across generational lines, including both elders and children, and there is a deepening that takes place.

Awareness: I used to call this echolocation with my mother. There was a deep resonance in which she listened that nurtured me to grow up in a way that was profound. There is some kind of alchemy that happens from being present with another, through all the streams of consciousness from mundane chatting are at the book. It was a tremendously positive catalyst to act!

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Awareness: I used to call this echolocation with my mother. There was a deep resonance in which she listened that nurtured me to grow up in a way that was profound. There is some kind of alchemy that happens from being present with another, through all the streams of consciousness from mundane chatting to deep sharing. The quality of life is very different where this occurs.

John: Yes it is. I wrote the book because there are things about these cultures we can learn from, as well as other things I wouldn’t want to emulate. But the bigger question is, how do we translate what we learn from them into our lives here? The four “Step” sections in the book are ways to put the best learning from these cultures into practice. People can pick and choose what appeals.

Awareness: So much of the time people wonder where they can start and these sections are very practical ways to act. Action has its own appeal, because it does create more momentum and ‘reward.’ In talking about translating the traditional wisdom of the four cultures profiled, what are some forms of wisdom we are expressing to be viable and thrive in our environment?

John: The growth of organic agriculture and more and more people choosing to buy and eat

organically grown food is a huge step. It is a powerful move away from the standard practice of petrochemical agriculture and the use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides.

All of these are various forms of poison, many of which are neurotoxins and we know very little about how they interact with the other chemicals and within our bodies as well as the earth, water and air.

It is as though we are doing this mass experiment and we are all guinea pigs. We are all being exposed to a vast number of chemicals that have never been on earth before. We didn't evolve with these chemicals, nor did any of the other life forms on whom we are inflicting our pollution.

I think everyone knows that the environment is deteriorating under the impact of human activities. What people don't tend to know is what they can do. Eat organically, drive less, consume less, get out of the trance that 'you are what you own,' and 'you are what you buy.' Wake up from the trance to realize that you are really the quality of your love, your presence and your way of being with life. You are how you respond to pain and anguish around you and inside you.

There are so many ways to live more healthfully. Don't eat junk food. Don't watch junk media, don't read junk books, and don't listen to junk music. Move away from relationships that are toxic, that require endless maintenance and don't ever go anywhere because the other person doesn't really want to go anywhere!

Instead, put your energy into relationships that feed you and source you, where you feel recognized and affirmed, and you can help each other to grow. These kinds of steps move you from hopeless to hopeful, to really being engaged with generating a positive future. We need to do this for ourselves, we need to do this for our children, we need to do it for our parents, our spouses and friends, and all our relations, including all the other animals on this earth.

We need to get animals out of factory farms, whether you're a vegetarian or not. Don't be a slave to the corporate mind set. Find a way to relate to the world so that you wake up with joy in your heart. That is our birthright. It is a given in these other cultures.

For a lot of us, we wake up and the first sound we hear is an alarm clock. I hate alarm clocks, what an irritating intrusion. In the cultures I write about in "Healthy at 100," the first sound people hear is either birds or their family singing. As a rule when people do rise, one of the first things they do is sing. They don't have this complex we do that only the best should sing. No one is performing, everyone is enjoying.

They have certain songs to greet the day and others for important events, such as birth, death, marriages, and during planting and harvest times. They create songs for people to honor them and one another. We have lost touch with life's magic in many ways, but it is still in us, because it is our nature to be connected to each another, the Earth, the seasons and the songs in our heart. The question I am always asking is, how do we as individuals and families and communities start to restore ourselves?

We need to have the courage to acknowledge how out of phase we have become as a society from our own natures and what is truly sustainable and will enable us to thrive. And then, facing that pain together, how do we move, so as to restore and replenish and reconnect? There are a lot of answers to that, once we get engaged in that kind of exploration.

Awareness: What you are saying is full of hope and inspiration and information someone can use to take action and do something positive.

John: Our predicament is dangerous. We live with great toxicity psychically, chemically, and electromagnetically. On many, many levels there is so much pollution. If we can generate a clean mind and heart so we live in a way that our thoughts and actions are in alignment with our spirits and with the greater

good for all beings, then our lives become part of the answer.

The revolution we need to generate will help us be fulfilled and to fulfill the purposes for which we have taken birth. It won't solve all our problems, it is not a path to paradise or a panacea, but it would be a great improvement.

Edmund Burke once said, "Nobody made a greater mistake than the person who did nothing, because they thought that they could only do a little." I don't think we are required to do great things, but we are asked to do the things we do, large or small, with great love.

We don't know what that will create. Who knows what would happen if we, individually and collectively, truly committed ourselves to a life that was congruent with our souls with every thought and every deed each day? We don't know where that might lead.

We are afraid of our power as much as our darkness. I am hoping that all the forms of communication I am putting forth will help all of us, myself included, to touch the greater possibility that lives inside us.

For more information about John's books and activities, go to www.healthyat100.org.

For more information about the writer, Donna Strong, go to www.donnastrong.com. Her first book is "Coming Home to Calm," which will be available soon.

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