

Dr. Montalcini's Secret to a Superior Brain Later in Life



A lot of people talk about living to be 100 ... and most likely they are the ones under 40 who haven't experienced any of the aging effects as yet. Even to us who are older the idea has some appeal since it would be nice to hang around for awhile and see how things turn out.

At the same time, there is the fear that we may be one of those lingering on with our brains in a fog of dementia or Alzheimers.

During a pre-birthday celebration where she was honored by The European Brain Research Institute, Rita Levi Montalcini, an Italian neurologist, responded to the typical inquiries by saying that " At 100, I have a mind that is superior – thanks to experience – than when I was 20." While this is not a response we expected, we are immediately curious as to why she would thank "experience" for her 100 year old superior mind.

Dr. Montalcini tells how during the 1930's she had to leave her university studies because of Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime enforcement of anti-Jewish laws. Passionate about her research in early embryology tissue, she moved her make-shift lab and research into her bedroom and her life's work continued. When discussing those difficult times she says "Above all, don't fear difficult moments,"... "The best comes from them."

Dr. Montalcini also wisely understands the value of experience without bitterness when she says... "I should thank Mussolini for having declared me to be of an inferior race. This led me to the joy of working ..." Her joy working would lead to discovering the nerve growth factors affecting the growth of nerves in the brain and spinal cord, and this subsequently led

to receiving the 1986 Nobel Prize for medicine with Stanley Cohen.

When we are challenged by life, many times we allow fear to override our brain circuits and our mind begins to shut down into inaction and depression. We lose our joy for working and for living. We allow our mind and brain to be stifled by the difficult moments rather than giving them something vital and passionate to pursue.

Dr. Montalcini's secret to a superior brain later in life tells us to value our "difficult experiences" and find a life's purpose we can pursue with passion and commitment. We may not reach the 100 year old mark but at least we will have enriched our mind, our brain and our life along the way.