

**Shrink Rap Radio #414, July 31, 2014, Fairy Tales and the New Aging
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews John C.
Robinson, Ph.D., D.Min.**

(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Paula Bautista)

Introduction: On today's show, I'll be speaking again with Dr. John C. Robinson, who was my guest on Shrink Rap Radio episode number 354, on What Aging Men Want, and subsequently on episode number 380, in which we discuss his book, The Three Secrets of Aging. Today we'll be discussing his book Bedtime Stories for Elders: What Fairy Tales Can Teach Us About The New Aging. For more about Dr. Robinson, please consult the show notes for this episode at ShrinkRapRadio.com. Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. John C. Robinson, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

John C. Robinson: Thanks so much, it's great to be here again.

Dr. Dave: Yes, it's good to have you on again. I think I've had you on twice before, if I remember correctly.

Robinson: Yes.

Dr. Dave: So, we're going to be discussing your book Bedtime Stories for Elders, and before we lose a bunch of listeners, do you think it might have...

Robinson: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs) ...might it have any relevance for people who don't consider themselves elders yet?

Robinson: Oh, well, of course, people need such stories that universally talk about the second half of life and the paths of aging, so we can expand the scope a little bit. And also, anything you learn about understanding the symbols of myth and fairy tale will help you understand all myths, whether they're in movies or Greek myths or coming-of-age stories. It's all the same kind of process. It's just that it's the right hemisphere of the brain that deals with symbolic understanding, rather than the left hemisphere. So this is applicable to everybody if you have any interest at all in the symbols of human development and transformation.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I think lots of my listeners do. And so your book focuses on some fairy tales. How did you first become interested in fairy tales?

Robinson: Well, I first ran into fairy tales in the 90s, going to these Mendocino men's conferences with Robert Bly and Michael Meade and James Hillman, and we were just a bunch of tired guys, mid-life men who were feeling burned out by the masculine model of conqueror and push to compete and so forth. It didn't feel true to us. So, at the Redwoods in Mendocino, Michael Meade would drum these wonderful stories and Robert Bly would unpack his Iron John story.

And suddenly I understood that these were stories that held so much deep wisdom in them, and the reason is that fairy tales are stories that have been told over and over and over again across the centuries in the oral tradition before the printing press, so being told over and over again, they collect the wisdom and understanding of hundreds of generations. These stories were popular because they mirrored the psyches of the audience. I mean, a storyteller who told a crappy story would not have an audience, so when he grabs people he knows he's talking about something deep inside. And so this book is really a companion piece to my other book, *The Three Secrets of Aging*, because *The Three Secrets* are really a left-hemisphere book that explains things, and *Bedtime Stories for Elders* is a right-hemisphere book that takes the same material and touches you deep inside with its symbols.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Yes. And by the way, I should mention – you mentioned Mendocino, and we're talking California and we're talking the county just above the county that I'm in, Sonoma County, and I've certainly been up to Mendocino a number of times, but I remember those men's gatherings in Mendocino. I knew about them, but I didn't go. Sounds like I missed out on a great time.

Robinson: Oh, yes, we would have loved to have you here. Very powerful. Very powerful.

Dr. Dave: Yes. I had friends who went and know other people who went. Now most of us associate fairy tales with childhood. What's the relevance to us as adults, especially as older adults?

Robinson: Well, as a psychologist I had been given all these diagnostic categories and complex scientific studies about human personality and so forth, but when I discovered fairy tales and myths, I understood that they are like a different kind of diagnostic manual. You begin to understand, from any of these tales, like Iron John or the ones that I include in the book, when you begin to interpret and you say, “Oh, my God, that's why I feel this way.” You know, “that's what's going on between me and my wife,” or “me and my kids,” or “that's why I'm having

trouble with age.” These stories carry insights that just light up the light bulbs in your brain.

Dr. Dave: You know, earlier, you were remarking that these stories had been around a long time – the classic fairy tales have – and so they've gathered the accumulated wisdom over the years and that wisdom is condensed in there from all the retelling, and I guess they contain the collective imprint, if you will, of the human psyche, and some of the dilemmas. So I was a little surprised to see that you note in your book you seem to approve of stories that somebody makes up today. I've always been a little suspect of those myself.

Robinson: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Robinson: Yes, and I don't blame you. I had that same question with myself, like, “So why am I including those?” But it's quite clear that really good stories come from the same place in the unconscious as these ancient stories. The stories my grandmother would tell about fairies, you know, when I was a kid I thought they were ridiculous, but when I came of age and began to interpret them myself, oh my gosh, she was tapping into her own collective unconscious, her own connection to this great archival world of ultimate stories and myths, and so forth, so when she told a story, my gosh, it was the same thing. All the same rules applied in understanding it.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Do I recall that you discovered a collection of her stories in an old trunk in the attic, or something like that?

Robinson: Yes. Yes, something like that. I carried them around for, like, four, five decades, just being loyal to her, but then when I really began to read them, finally, in my fifties and early sixties, I thought to myself, “Oh, my gosh, I found stories that she'd written just for me, one of them I included in the appendix, that really was a kind of guidance in my transition from being a [unintelligible] little boy into an adolescent, and the dangers that I would need to deal with as I moved across that line, as I separated from the world of the mother to the world of the father and man. And my gosh, she had wisdom. I don't think she had fully understood all of her wisdom but she was tapping into it, and now I'm just greatly, greatly appreciative of it.

Dr. Dave: Yes, what a wonderful heritage to have, and for you to discover that. Another interesting thing that you noted in the book, in the left-brained part of the book (laughs), was that there aren't many fairy tales that seemed to be aimed at older age. Why is that?

Robinson: Isn't that interesting...and there was a discovery of Allan Chinen, a lovely Jungian analyst who has endorsed a couple of my books on fairy tales and aging. Because the human psyche just has very little experience with getting old. In all of recorded history, only one in ten people ever even got to 65 and they were probably in pretty bad shape when they got there, with very few exceptions. And now, four out of five people are going to get to 65 and if you get there, you're going to get to 85, more than likely. So we're opening an entirely new stage of human development, which is quite remarkable. I mean, this is a new developmental stage, and the psyche just has hadn't enough experience yet to give it the depth that it deserves. That's why these few stories that we do have are so interesting. They're like harbingers.

Dr. Dave: Yes. If I understand you correctly, then the stories that we know as fairy tales have come from the Grimm brothers and from Hans Christian Andersen. People died quite early compared to today, and so those stories really weren't shaped with those lessons in mind.

Robinson: Exactly. Yes, and our picture of aging in those years was very grim and depressing. And also, I've collected and I've looked at probably a hundred stories of the fairy tales about aging, but the vast majority of them have themes of "the person's old, they're rejected by society, their son and daughter-in-law hate them and they're a burden," you know... (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Robinson: "...they're made to live out at the hen house, what are they going to do about that?"

Dr. Dave: Yes, so that is really reflective of a different time and a somewhat different social structure. I'm under the impression that the older characters in fairy tales, especially women, they're often portrayed in a negative light – for example, evil witches. This kind of what you were just saying, evil witches and wicked stepmothers. And I suppose some might make reference to evil kings and wicked stepfathers as well. Why do you think that is?

Robinson: Well, there were, of course, always evil kings and evil demons, and evil men are all over the place, so I don't think it's one-sided. But of course, so much of our history, sadly, has been recorded by men. And so men record the stories that reflect men and there are not enough women-who-run-with-wolves kinds of writers who capture all the stories that women have told. And being a crone is not a bad thing at all, as the women's movement and depth psychologists will tell you. That's a wisdom figure of profound significance.

Dr. Dave: Yes. So how did you go about finding the fairy tales that you chose for this book?

Robinson: I don't know, and when I'd been collecting them over the years, I had thought about using them in another book just to illustrate certain principles. And I thought, "No, I just want to put them all together in one book, and let the teachings percolate, simmer, a good stew simmering, and let the flavors, in a sense, come out." And so as you go from one story to the next, it [unintelligible] and my advice on this would be "Don't just rush through it, because these stories percolate down like ground water and they'll touch deep places inside, so what you need to do is to read a story, maybe at night, and go to sleep and then see what your dream life tells you the next day or so, what things popped into your mind the following week."

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, you talk about a relationship between dreams and stories like this in terms of how to unpack a fairy tale.

Robinson: Yes, in the appendix, I have a whole bunch of rules about interpreting and unpacking fairy tales and they come right from dream interpretation, years and years **of being 12:13 the people** as they tried to make sense of their dreams. And so I have five or six techniques that you can use to take a story. If a story grabs you, even though you don't have any idea why, it's a story meant for you, and then it's time to say, like your dream, like, "Wow, what does my psyche want from me here now? What should I understand about this?" And then if there's a problem of deduction, it's not left hemisphere. You don't look it up online, like, "What did this story mean?" What you do is you work with your own emotions and unconscious and imagery, and you begin to discover what it's trying to teach you about your life. A dream or a fairy tale – well, Campbell put it beautifully, he said that dreams are individualized myths and myths are collective dreams. So they're really...they're both the same process and each of them speaks personally to you.

Dr. Dave: Yes. I think in a previous interview with someone else on the topic of fairy tales, I shared that there's one that has stuck with me from my childhood. I loved fairy tales as a kid, and yet there's one that stands out, so it's got (laughs) to have a lot to say about my psyche and I think I've figured out some of the ways that it does, and maybe went through that in a previous podcast. The one I'm referring to is The Tinderbox. You might not know it by that title. Do you know that one?

Robinson: I'm familiar with it but I can't remember it all [unintelligible].

Dr. Dave: Yes, it's a Hans Christian Andersen one, I believe.

Robinson: Ah.

Dr. Dave: Maybe you'd like to share one of your fairy tales from your book with us. Is there one that comes to mind that seems particularly appropriate?

Robinson: Yes, actually I was thinking about that and there's one that is really wonderful, because it really captures so many of the core elements of aging in a way that is both fun and very deep and wise. So this particular fairy tale is called King O' Toole and His Goose. So if you don't mind, I'd like to just tell you the story and you will try to make sense why would this fairy tale have anything to do with aging, and in particular, with our own modern aging. So it goes like this.

“In the long-ago past of Ireland, in another time, in a time before this time, there lived a king named O'Toole, and a fine king he was. He supported the parishes in his kingdom, lived his life fully and most of all loved the hunting sport. In the years of his prime, off he'd go riding up the valleys and mountains of the land, from sun up to sun down, and fine times they were for this jolly and portly prince. And I'd take you would see him galloping over hill and dell, chasing foxes or whatever he was doing.

“But in the way of all things,” the story goes on, “time eventually changed the king. His body grew old, his limbs stiffened, and one day even his heart failed him. Stricken, he had no chance but to give up the hunting life, and a mighty sad day it was.

“For want of sport and diversion, however, the poor old king at last took on a goose. A goose, you say? What need a king of a goose? But 'tis the truth I'm telling you, and the king loved to watch his goose swim across the lake, dive for trout, and bring him a fish every Friday night for dinner. And every other day, the goose would fly completely around the lake, thrilling the crippled old monarch with her sporting ways.

“Well, the old king was happily diverted like this for some years. But eventually, the goose got old, too, and just like her master, and could no longer fill his life with sport and diversion. 'Ah, it was a cruel, cruel ending,' the King lamented, and one day he approached the edge of the lake with the thought of throwing himself into its cold, dark waters. And just as he turned to face the bitter end, the king spied a fair young man, modest in dress and manner, who approached him directly.

“God save you,' said the king to the stranger.

“And God save you, too, King O'Toole,' said the younger man.

“Startled, the King replied, 'Surely, I am King O'Toole, the sovereign prince of these seven parishes, but how came ye to know me?'

“Ah, never you mind,' answered St. Kevin, who was himself the great Irish saint in disguise. 'But may I inquire about your goose, King O'Toole?'

“Och,' cried the king. 'How do you know about my goose?'

“It matters not,' replied the young man, 'but I am an honest man who earns his keep making old things new again.'

“A tinker, you say?' asked the king.

“No, no itinerant mender of pots and kettles am I,' said the young man, 'but what say you if I could make your goose as good as new?'

“Well, no one in all the lands could have spoken happier words to the king, who instantly whistled for his goose. Like a loyal hound dog, the crippled old bird waddled over to her master, and St. Kevin could see how they were alike as peas in a pod, and so he said, 'I'll do it.'

“And if you do,' cried the king, 'you will be the cleverest fellow in all these parts.'

“But,' said the young man, 'you [unintelligible] must offer more than praise for this deed. What would you give to have this goose be good as new?'

“Anything you ask,' replied the king without hesitation. 'Anything at all.'”

Dr. Dave: Uh-oh. (laughs)

Robinson: Yes. (laughs) [unintelligible] not many of us who make that response.

Dr. Dave: Yes. (laughs)

Robinson: “Now that's the way to bargain!' the young man said, 'but here is the final price. Will you surrender to me all the countryside the goose flies over on her first jaunt after I make her new again?'

“And again, without hesitation, the king replied, 'I will indeed!'

“Then it's a bargain,' said St. Kevin said, and he picked up the poor old goose by her wings, made the sign of the cross, and threw her into the air. Miraculously, this tired old bird was new again, flying swift as an eagle, darting like a swallow,

happy as a lark. A soft rain fell from the heavens as the goose landed at the king's feet. 'And what do you think [unintelligible]?' asked the young man.

“I say 'tis a blessed day that my goose flies again.’

“And what else do ye say?’

“I say you are the cleverest lad in all the world.’

“Ah, but what of our bargain?’ persisted St. Kevin. 'Am I given all the territory your goose just flew over? Will you keep your promise to me?’

“Yes,’ replied the king. 'And you're welcome to it though it's my entire kingdom and all I have left.’

“Then St. Kevin said to the king, "Tis a wise man you are, King O'Toole, for if you had not kept your bargain, the devil himself would have bit your goose and he'd never fly again.’

“Now St. Kevin was well pleased with the king, and finally revealed his true identity. The king dropped to his knees, paid the proper respect, then at last, St. Kevin explained, 'I came here to test you, King O'Toole. And you were a true and decent man. You may stay on your land and I will support you.’

“And so the king's beloved goose was returned to him, good as new, giving him pleasure every day until he died. And on that fateful Friday, the goose dived into the lake after a trout, struck an eel instead, and died instantly. The eel, however, would not eat the goose for the fear of anything the blessed St. Kevin had touched. And so ends the story of King O'Toole and His Goose.”

Dr. Dave: Yes, okay. (laughs)

Robinson: Yes, so what do you think?

Dr. Dave: Yes, well that story has a lot of elements in it. I've never heard of St. Kevin. Had you?

Robinson: Oh, yes, he is actually a famous saint in Ireland. He was [unintelligible] early man who had been blessed with various mystical experiences and powers and became a hermit and...but he's got a long story which is of course been [unintelligible] to a legend, so [unintelligible]...he is a real figure turned into a mythic figure.

Dr. Dave: Yes. One of the things that struck me was that he made the goose young again, but did not reverse the aging of the king.

Robinson: Exactly. That is such a good insight. Now, you can't make yourself a middle-aged person again. This is what the aging people keep trying to do with their anti-aging creams and their nutritional exercises and positive attitude. You can't turn the clock back. But you can touch that part of yourself that's the imagination, the spirit, and that part can be made new again if you understand where this whole thing's going.

Dr. Dave: Now you say spirit, and that brings to mind the fact that the Holy Spirit is represented by a bird, by a dove. And so here we have a goose. So maybe you're saying that what the goose symbolizes is something about spirit.

Robinson: Well, actually, yes, but it is, you would say, more likely that the goose symbolizes this king's feminine side that we would call the anima. For several reasons, the goose looks just like the king. Short and fat and wobbly...

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Robinson: ...he just waddles about, has the same portly bearing, the same love of sport and diversion, and because the goose is feminine. So even though it's not a human being, the king has found a way to mirror that feminine side of himself and turn it loose and so that the feminine author carries the imagination of an individual. So what the king has done, albeit unconsciously, is he's found the resource for setting his imagination loose so that he can fly over his whole kingdom, fly over the lake, which in many ways represents the breadth of unconscious, that part that carries all the archival wisdom of the eons. And then sometimes the goose even dives into the lake and pulls up a fish, which symbolizes lots of things, not only deep insight but also the Christian symbol of transformation, which is getting this...because it's sort of a Christian tale. And what we have here is the king has gotten in touch with his feminine side in a most remarkable way, and has given him...and gives him years of new growth even though he can't get on a horse at all. So this is one of the...[unintelligible]

Dr. Dave: Okay, it all makes sense to me. Yes, say that again?

Robinson: Yes, this is one of the tasks we have as aging people. We are going to face a series of losses. Our senses diminish. Even though we get hip and knee replacements, our body's not what it used to be. If you have any doubt that the process of aging is changing you, look at a recent photograph. It's startling. We are shorter, we are different, and if we want to cling to the past, we're going to cause ourselves suffering, but if we turn ourselves loose in this imaginative way, all manner of new possibilities rise to the surface.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Yes. I certainly have that experience, when I look in the mirror and the thing that everybody reports and that I experience, and I'm sure you experience is that the person looking out (laughs) of those eyes feels pretty much the same aside from the aches and pains. You feel like the same person and so the looking in the mirror is a little shocking.

Robinson: And that's one of the most important insights of aging, that the person on the inside is still not only younger, but you discover that that person is actually ageless and timeless. The outside is a disguise. It's like things change and suddenly you look like somebody old and nobody talks [unintelligible] people ignore you, etcetera, but on the inside you're as vital and young as ever.

Dr. Dave: And that's a source of pain many times.

Robinson: Well, it can be if you're attached to how you look, (laughs) and how good a soccer player you were, or how good a basketball player, or how far you could jog. It gets painful. You're going to lose a lot of stuff getting old that it's an initiation. The first secret of aging is that it's an initiation into an entirely new stage of life, but that initiation involves losses oftentimes and letting go.

Dr. Dave: Yes. You have some history with that yourself, and that you shared in your books, and maybe some people are listening who didn't hear our other interviews, so one of the things that I like about after each story you have several levels that you work at. You invite the listener to...first I guess you give an interpretation like you did here with this one, and then you invite the listener to associate it and think about their own life, and then you have a section where you really share from your own life how this story helps you to understand your own journey. So maybe you can share some of that with us now.

Robinson: Sure, yes. I write books really to understand myself. I long ago realized it was a selfish process that I hope would be of use to other people that I did it because I had to do it. So I was liking those [unintelligible]. I mean, here I was in midlife, chugging along, seeing way too many patients everyday, busy doing men's gatherings, and so on and so forth. And one day, I too had a heart attack, not [unintelligible] kind of heart attack but I had an [unintelligible] atrial fibrillation and, you know, your upper chamber of your heart loses [unintelligible] and starts quivering and racing and you have to go to an emergency room. And usually in those days you had to get defibrillated, meaning that you got the shock through the chest, and it stopped and started your heart. When I was told by the ER doc that that's what needed to happen, I was terrified. I don't think I've been [unintelligible] never been that frightened in my life. It was just terrifying to me. Even though rationally I knew that this was a pretty straight technique – I'm not going to die – but I could not watch this. And so they went

ahead and did it and after it was done I asked the guy, “Well, you know, am [unintelligible] converted?” And he says, “Yes.” He says, “You're Jewish.”

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Robinson: So that didn't [unintelligible] thought he was done and it was over, but in the following weeks and months and actually years, I began to experience body memories of an open-heart surgery that I had as a boy. I was born with a congenital heart defect that eventually needed correcting at the age of 14, where I didn't know and nobody knew that I woke up in the surgery. So you're paralyzed with curare-like medications and your arms are closed, and if anesthesia levels rise too high, oh my god, you start to feel it.

Dr. Dave: Oh, what a nightmare. Wow.

Robinson: Inside my heart it was horrifying. And so what happened was this shock to my body, to my heart, triggered those body memories. And then I kept working for about another 13, 14 months, but I just could not pay attention well to my clients because I couldn't hold their pain when I was bearing the awful pain of a fourteen-year-old boy inside who went through virtually a living autopsy, where these hands, this cutting, this tearing, it was just all of it. So...

Dr. Dave: Oh, wow.

Robinson: So I finally closed my practice and moved back to therapy. I've been in therapy off and on in training purposes and finally, I had to give up my life as a psychologist because I can't bear it. I can no longer bear this pain. And so I did. I closed my practice and then I was just like King O'Toole: “What I do now? Do I jump in the lake?” (laughs) This is horrible.”

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Wow.

Robinson: I lost my [unintelligible] I lost my income, I lost all my professional friends and connections, and so I just knew it was time for a new life and I let my imagination soar like that bird and I went back to school. [unintelligible] it's “Go back to school.” So I went back to the graduate program and got a doctorate in interfaith and spirituality with Matthew Fox. And then I went through an interfaith seminary and was eventually ordained as an interfaith minister. And what I was really doing here was I was rekindling and exploring a love for [unintelligible] I was fascinated by the mystics from across traditions and that's just [unintelligible] my fire. Now it's been ten, twelve years later, I realize that I had to give up that way of life if I was going to really enter the next stage of life, because if I had kept on driving myself like I see so many of my friends do, just working 'til you're 70, working until you're 75, I wouldn't have the chance to let

that tired overcoat drop to the ground and come alive again from this numb place inside and see what my psyche wanted from me next. So that's what I did, just like King O'Toole.

Dr. Dave: Wow, I love that image of letting that tired overcoat drop to the ground.

Robinson: Yes, that was me. I was so tired. Yes.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Boy, the story really does fit your journey very well, doesn't it?

Robinson: That's right, yes. But what I like about St. Kevin is that he represents God or the spirit in this story – actually the spirit of death, who approaches each of us disguised as a symptom or an accident or an illness or premonition or a lament or whatever. In other words, St. Kevin came to King O'Toole in order to initiate him across this threshold from middle-age issues and attachments to this aging time. But this kind of initiation has to be about death and rebirth. We have to face the reality of our own completion. In order to give up stuff that we can't take with us anyway and in order to stir in the lake and the deeper spirit inside, the deeper psyche to give birth, to blossom for us in this new way. So what happened, King O'Toole just happens to symbolize a really wise person who says, “All right, I'll give up everything if you can bring me back to life.” And that is exactly the recipe required for enlightenment. You don't get to be enlightened and hang on to all your money because that's duality. You can't do both. But if you can let go of this stuff and come into a state of consciousness beyond attachments – oh, my gosh, it all opens up again and you are made young again just like the goose.

Dr. Dave: Wow. One of the things that I'm struck by is that in a way, your fear and your pain saved you. Because without those you might have just gone on ahead as you had been used to going, and then died.

Robinson: You mean when I was younger or when I was older?

Dr. Dave: Yes, when you were at that point of crisis, if you had not listened...

Robinson: Oh, yes.

Dr. Dave: ...if all of that stuff had not resurfaced, and you had tried to carry on, it would have killed you and...yes, so what I guess I'm trying to underscore here is because I know there are listeners out there who are struggling with fear and with pain, and sometimes that can be our biggest friend.

Robinson: Oh, absolutely. Let go. Well, I remember one – and actually one of the Mendocino men's gatherings – [unintelligible] the martial arts teacher who came, but he had a heart condition. He was in heart failure, and he kept insisting that he

had to teach this course, and we were there and then [unintelligible] his lips were turning blue, he was getting whiter and whiter, and people, the docs...gathering and they said to him, "You've got to stop. You need to be in the hospital." And he said, "No, I just finished this thing." And he died two weeks later.

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness.

Robinson: We've got to listen to our body.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Robinson: [unintelligible] emotions. They're important.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Yes. Well, I wonder if you have another story in your kit bag.

Robinson: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Robinson: Yes, actually I do. Well, I had lots of them but I'll pick a short one because I know we don't have forever. And this is a story from another tradition. I think it's from the Hindu tradition.

Dr. Dave: Did you say Hindu?

Robinson: Yes, the Hindu tradition. I picked stories from across traditions because in my study of mystics and mythology, at that level we're all talking about the same stuff and the stories are wonderfully consistent and what they're trying to reveal, they just use a different language or different set of symbols.

This one is called Rahula Eclipses Age. Wow. Rahula Eclipses Age – what could that even mean?

“Rahula had become an old man unable even to control his basic bodily functions. Despised and abused by family and neighbors, he left home and settled in a cemetery to await death and thereby move into his next birth.”

So you can see that this the way it used to be. [unintelligible] we looked at it that when you're used up in the work force you go away and you die because nobody wants you around. So here's this guy sitting in the cemetery waiting to die.

“Soon thereafter a yogin, a practitioner of Tantric Buddhism” – this one's a Buddhist story, I'm sorry – “approaches Rahula and asked him why he lived in a cemetery. And Rahula replied, 'The moon of my youth has been eclipsed by the

Rahu-dragon of old age.” So a Rahu really refers to a particular character in Hindu mythology who lost his head to Vishnu after he was trying to steal the nectar of the gods. And so he floats around up in the heavens as the head that only eats and devours things. And so it's a great symbol for how his youth [unintelligible] had been devoured now by old age.

“My sons and others abuse me, and so I remain here, happy to die.’

“And the yogin replied, 'Well, your karma is ripening: the rivers of childhood, youth and old age have all flowed past.’” I love reading this. “The river of death has now arrived. Shouldn't you practice the Dharma as provision for death?’

“So with gladness in his heart, Rahula asked to be given the Dharma, the teaching of Buddha that ends mortal suffering.” And here is what happened.

“The yogin explained that the awakened state is free of old age, nor do wealth and poverty, being conditions of mind only, affect this pristine consciousness.” So it's saying that nothing can touch this consciousness, even aging, even an aging body or poverty.

“So the yogin initiated Rahula, transferring his own spiritual power to the old man, and instructed him to meditate on an image of the moon's circle positioned above the letter A at the top of his head. He was then to picture all the concepts of the world flowing into this circle. And yogin explained, 'Eclipse all concepts with the Rahu. When you feel the great bliss at the top of your head, the profound seed-point will arise. By the continuous merging of emptiness and bliss, you will overcome the enemies, the skhandas. The qualities of the Buddhas will arise in you and lo, there will be unceasing wonders.’

“So the old man experienced the joy of increasing enlightenment, practiced thus for the next sixteen years, passing on his growing wisdom to others, and finally achieving the highest stage of realization. Thereafter he lived for many years in the paradise realm of this world, in the land of divine beings.”

So this is a story that at first seems completely esoteric and ridiculous to really... “What do you mean? We get the part about you sitting at the graveyard then this guy comes and you end up...but, you know, 'Sit and meditate on this – picture an image of a circle above an A, and imagine all the concepts of the world going in.’” But then, if you begin to understand the nature of enlightenment and the nature of unity, you begin to appreciate that these concepts [unintelligible] without thought that open the doors to enlightenment, to awakening. And that all our beliefs, all our ideas in time begin to create a kind of a prison. See, within a prison of aging because this idea said, “You're worthless, you're no good, nobody wants you, and you have nothing to give back to the world. You might as well

die. You're ugly. And I suspect a lot of us feel that way in aging, because we [unintelligible] characterize most of our last three to four thousand years of development. But he's telling Rahula, he's saying to him, "Stop thinking, wake up, take all these belief systems and put them in this open space [unintelligible] Rahula so they can disappear from consciousness. And then you'll discover that you're not what you think; you're not what you look like. You are that timeless, ageless consciousness within that is free of the burdens of aging. And so, this is of course idealized tales, absolutely [unintelligible] simply or perfectly but the gist is there. Then we begin to wake up...this is the – actually the second secret of my Three Secrets of Aging. When we begin to wake up from the belief systems we have about who we are, who we're supposed to be, what the world is supposed to be and stop thinking, we come into a consciousness we discover is actually not just our own consciousness. It's the consciousness of the universe. And that consciousness begins to transform us and aging becomes an entirely new and different experience.

Dr. Dave: And you've had some glimpse of that in your own life, I gather?

Robinson: Yes, it's been a progressive experience for me. When I was young, I always had a sense [unintelligible] living in a divine world and then as I began to grow up and, you know, [unintelligible] fourth, fifth grade and I began to realize that everybody compared themselves with everybody else, whether it was sports or grades or looks or attitude. It was a great sadness for me because you might...I was giving up something in order to enter the world of Man, this world of competitive beliefs and ideology, especially for men. We all have to be strong and go on this conquest. So when I began to age, I began to realize that we come back to that. We come back to that original consciousness and the world is once again transformed, right? In our own vision it becomes infinitely beautiful again. That's the ultimate boon of aging, that aging is a gift of a perception of a divine world that never left. We left it to enter the world of concepts and as we begin to erase the world of concepts and let them dissolve, my gosh, we discover it's radiant, that the world is so beautiful and so pristine, and always perfect and you think, "Oh my gosh, I'm so glad to be home again." That occurs with aging.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. I think nature...there's a renewed appreciation and experience of nature, and also I think if one's lucky enough to have grandchildren, you can't be so driven (laughs) with grandchildren. You have to kind of be present, just there.

Robinson: If you're going to make a relationship with your grandchildren, you've got to do it on their terms or they will lose interest in you.

Dr. Dave: Yes. (laughs)

Robinson: But that makes you young again. It's an act of play through hours on

the floor with tracks and building blocks. I'd love to be down in that state of consciousness again.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Excellent. Now you mentioned that in the appendix you have maybe six principles for understanding a fairy tale. This might be a good time to take us through those.

Robinson: Well, I'll be happy to. One of them is the tried-and-true method of free association. And really what that is [unintelligible] psychoanalytic technique, but really means just you hear the story, and without censoring anything you just start talking about what you think...what it brings up to you. "Oh, I was so upset when the king got so depressed and wanted to walk into the lake right?" "I really didn't like the way Kevin tried to tricked the king." You know, whatever comes up to you, that begins to bring the story alive and you begin to make connections like "Oh, that begins to remind me of the way my father used to be hard on me when I didn't learn his lessons fast enough." [unintelligible] material that you're working with, that will allow you to transcend that [unintelligible] the story is saying. So that's one of the things we love to do.

The second one comes from the Gestalt tradition of becoming the symbol. And that just means you want to know what that goose is all about, be the goose. So imagine that you got this wonderful ability to fly and soar and dive and just how fun that would be, and so what you've given to the king is this great sense of freedom and life and poignancy and excitement. And so then you might ask yourself, "Well, where do I find that in my life right now? Is it while taking a walk, is it playing with my grandchildren, is it reading about civil war history?" Whatever lights your fire is that thing.

Then you take up the next step and you can dialogue with the symbol. If you wonder what St. Kevin's all about, start having a conversation with him, and write it like a script. So you say your name and then you say St. Kevin's name, and you say [unintelligible] "St. Kevin, I understand that you're here to help the king, to save the king, but I don't get it, what were you trying to do?" And just to let it come – and then right then [unintelligible] St. Kevin's name, and see what comes out of you spontaneously. I [unintelligible] a lot of these for my [unintelligible] when you did this intensive journal method, it was an incredibly wonderful method that was always about dialogue. So your dialogue with this symbol and it will unfold itself to you in some truly amazing insights.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. I often used to work in a class that I taught with the tarot cards, not to give readings about the future or anything remotely like that, but to have the students dialogue with the cards that really spoke to them. And that would immediately take them to a very deep place. It was so powerful.

Robinson: Totally agree with you, and I've always had that same feeling [unintelligible] tarot cards really [unintelligible] pick the one that you really like tell me what's going on for you about that card.

The next method is interpretive [unintelligible] make up a story about the symbol. And the story can be...it can go forward or it can go back, fill out or flesh out a certain – “What is the background of King O'Toole? What was his childhood like? Where are his wife and children? What was he doing all these years?” And so you begin to tell the story, you're really telling your own story and through the symbol, bring alive your story in a way that allows you to enter it. [unintelligible] Using poetry, song, dance, art, anything like that is wonderful too. You draw a picture of the goose, you want to write a poem about the king's friendship with his goose. If you're a poet – gosh, all sorts of fun stuff would come out of you. And one of the techniques that Michael Meade always tried is that...notice the one detail in the story that got you. So you listen to stories going on and on and then something happens and you can feel a jolt inside. You feel like, “Oh, whoa, whoa, whoa, what was that?” [unintelligible] You have a response like that in the story, when you actually spoke out loud, that detail is your entrance into the story. That's the way that it's touched a theme inside of you, so the question...the place to begin often is with that detail and explore “Why is that detail so significant to me?”

Dr. Dave: Yes, interesting when you mentioned that. I recall that I think what you're referring to was when I said, “Uh-oh.” And that was when the king said he would give him everything he had (laughs) or...

Robinson: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ...so I think that's a hot button for me. (laughs)

Robinson: It's a hot button for all of us.

Dr. Dave: Yes, how much am I willing to give away? Uh-oh.

Robinson: Exactly. “Why is this enlightenment so important? Well, I'm not sure I want to give up my football game.”

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Robinson: And, you know, Jeremy Taylor has added another technique that [unintelligible] reminds me of it, from what you're saying is that... Another technique, dream interpretation is to have somebody else associate to your dream, and so when you listen to other people's responses to the story like the one you just gave, “Wow, that's [unintelligible] with me.” So the more people

[unintelligible] who their reactions to the story, the more it deepens, the more you begin to see the multifaceted nature of the teaching and somebody says something that you say, “Oh, my gosh, I feel exactly the same way.”

Dr. Dave: Yes. Yes. I've observed that phenomenon in dream groups over the years and never thought really to apply it to a fairy tale.

Robinson: Yes, that's what I found was so interesting, was that they're the same process.

Dr. Dave: Yes, that totally makes sense.

Robinson: [unintelligible] about until I started doing this stuff and just like when we talked earlier about the Odyssey, I read and [unintelligible] and suddenly I realized this is the story about me and aging, and I couldn't wait to unpack each sub-story, each adventure to get that “Oh my gosh, this is what we have to do.” And this is why we have to have this experience.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Well, I wonder if there are any final thoughts that you would like to leave our listeners with and also I want to give you an opportunity to mention any workshops or presentations that you have coming up.

Robinson: So final thoughts. Aging is not what you think. And it's not what most books are going to tell you. It doesn't feel like what Rahula was teaching us. Beliefs we have about aging, whether they are...the typical beliefs are it's awful, or you do not have a set of beliefs that you can transcend it and overcome it, and that's just as self-defeating. It works for a while but it won't work forever because aging wins. [unintelligible] The third [unintelligible] with aging is transformation. And that's really what we're looking at. And that's why, as you comment early on, that the person inside of you does not feel the age of the person outside the [unintelligible] the workshop, I often ask people, “How many years younger do you feel inside than you look in photographs? Let's start with 10 years [unintelligible] 12 years, [unintelligible] 30, 40 years, [unintelligible] you're still up there because nobody feels that they're 80 except when they're [unintelligible]. And then you need to take care of that so you can recover the youngness again.

And that's what [unintelligible] say that aging, with all its challenges and hardships it represents an opportunity for incredible personal and spiritual growth. You [unintelligible] need to let go of our scary beliefs and the untrue mythology we have. I'm talking about the mythology of the culture that says, “You're worthless, you're useless, you're old; you're going to hurt, get ready to die.” It's a new consciousness. My god, that's incredible, and we get 20, 30 more years to explore it.

To add to the second part of your question, I'm doing a couple of workshops for the Sage-ing International Conference that's coming up...next month, actually, the month from yesterday. [unintelligible] the 24th in Seattle. So if you go to Sage-ing International [unintelligible] you'll find conference information and application material. So it's going to be a wonderful conference. And I'll be doing a workshop on What Aging Men Want, [unintelligible] tell our stories, stories of male aging, personal stories, in the hopes of bringing men to life. So many men don't feel comfortable, don't know how to talk about their inner life, so they really make their wives talk for them and their wives drag them to workshops or whatever. We really want to help men find [unintelligible] men's groups...men can talk about their lives just fine. They just need to start and we're hoping to light the fire. And the other [unintelligible] on The Three Secrets of Aging, [unintelligible] on my first book, and we'll be talking a lot about the tasks and the gifts and the magic of aging that the divine has offered us here if we'll take the time to understand it.

Dr. Dave: What is this organization? Sage-ing? I'm not aware of that organization.

Robinson: Sage-ing International. Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi, who just now died about a week or so ago, wrote this really wonderful book called From Age-ing to Sage-ing. It's spelled "From Age-ing," A-G-E-hyphen-I-N-G, "to Sage-ing," S-A-G-E-hyphen-I-N-G." He is a very progressive rabbi who really recognizes his own aging. It was not what he was taught, that there were so many possibilities and he wrote this book that I recommend everybody because it's filled with good ideas and exercises to help transform your aging. Anyway, he created this organization, and this organization is now thriving teaching the same techniques and stories and wonderful concept of the new aging.

Dr. Dave: Wonderful. Well, that's a good resource to know about. So I guess we've come to the end of it here, for now...

Robinson: Yes, and if you want to know more about my work you can go to my website, which is www.johnrobinson.org. Just to follow up.

Dr. Dave: Okay, great. Well, Dr. John C. Robinson, I want to thank you for being my guest once again on Shrink Rap Radio.

Robinson: [unintelligible] cut from the same cloth. It's always fun to be with you.

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Great. I like that image, thank you.

