



## “Zen without bells and whistles.”

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### **Giving and Living**

"Let me not so much seek t be consoled, as to console...to be loved as to love," says the St. Francis prayer. Now science has come up with confirmation of the spiritual truth that it's better to give than to receive.

It's been well established that social contact has a positive effect on health. Psychologists at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, now say they've identified the active ingredient: It's the giving. A group led by Stephanie L. Brown reports in this month's issue of *Psychological Science* on a 5-year study of 423 elderly married couples. Each individual was surveyed at the beginning as to the amount of "instrumental" support (help such as rides, errands, and child care) they gave to and got from friends and relatives. They were also quizzed on the emotional support they gave to and got from their spouses.

Over the course of the study, 134 participants died. The researchers found that receiving support from others did not have much effect on mortality. But even after controlling for numerous factors, including age, sex, physical and mental health, and

socio-economic status, scientists found a 42% reduction in mortality risk among the instrumental givers and 30% reduction for the emotional givers.

University of Michigan psychologist Toni Antonucci says she agrees with the authors that "we have underestimated how important giving is." Brown suggests that the study could lead caregivers to design interventions that focus more on "what people do to help others."

muscle tension. All stress responses were elevated, to the point that they mirrored those of people remembering Vietnam combat events or childhood sexual abuse. More than half of the alien abductees exhibited some symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.

The responses to trauma "is driven by emotional beliefs, whether accurate or not," McNally reported. "If you sincerely think you were being abducted by aliens, you were." The result "is troubling," says Leichtman. "It underscores the similarities between true and false memories at an even more profound level" than researchers generally think.