



# Health as a Sacred Fire

**WHAT POWERS THE BODY** is a very slow fire. We take in oxygen and release carbon dioxide just like the flames you sit around camping out at night. Though “antioxidants” and “free radicals” have given it something of a bad name these days—combustion still powers our cells. But if that’s true, if we are fueled by internalized oxidation, perhaps we can learn something from the life-path of that simple campfire. What if what’s healthy for fire, always but especially in its late stages, is also what’s healthy for us?

Start a good fire by creating a cone or teepee-like structure with three layers. The inner core is tinder. It consists of flammable materials that are dry, lightweight, and present lots of surface area. Crumpled paper, bits of cardboard, and brittle twigs the up to the size of pencils work well. You make a small pile with the twigs leaning against, and above the paper.

The tiniest flames, like you as an infant, need special care. They need lots to learn and grow on, but also shelter. Too much oxygen, as in a strong draft, will cool them below ignition temperature and—blow them out. Dampness also cools them, because water evaporating steals lots of heat in order to become a vapor. Dampness, we might say, is like trauma in the young family. Areas of learning and growth get shut down as parts of the tinder cannot ignite.

The next layer of the cone has no name in English—but I call it “bonewood.” It’s dry sticks about the thickness of the bones in your arms or legs just long enough to lean up against the core of tinder and touch at the top. As you surround it with these, you begin to see the form of the

teepee more clearly. The final layer is branches or split logs more like the thickness of your whole arm.

Reach a long match in and in minutes you will have a crackling blaze that draws in its own air and shoots heat out of the top. The parts are ready to burn and the conical structure is perfectly organized so that they support one another. This is like the strength and resilience in healthy adults in their prime. And it’s at this point that our analogy to lifelong health starts to get interesting.

What happens, for instance, if you do nothing else in the way of tending this fire? Well, the center burns out and the bone and arm wood, growing shorter from that center outward, begins to fall in haphazard ways. Some outer casing pieces tend to roll off. And, in general, fuel for the blaze empties out in the middle, leaving a kind of ring of half burnt logs around the edge.

Of course, you can just throw more wood across that middle, but the same thing will always happen. It will always eventually burn out and log-ends near the edges will sit alone, smoldering and smoking until they go out. There’s still plenty of unused fuel. It’s just that it’s not organized to share their heat anymore. The real remedy is very simple. Whether you add more wood or not, simply reverse the logs so that the unburnt ends are together again in the middle.

So let’s think of this later stage fire now as your body, your overall health, as you get on past your prime. The problem is most often not lack of fuel to feed your passions in life, but rather that your various component parts are less resilient and more easily disorganized. But that’s not how our medical system sees it. It isolates each lonely log end, makes up diagnoses for what’s “wrong” with it, and tries to “fix” just that log end.

One specialist treats “Oak Log Low Ignition Syndrome” by chiseling it into smaller pieces, so that it can hopefully make its own little blaze. “That log has a bad case of OLLIS.” Another prescribes pouring flammable liquid on “white pine cooling disease.” Big pharma gets rich devising special fluids. Do you see how this leads down rabbit holes that entirely miss the point? Just get the log ends cooperating again.

In fact, unlike a fire, your body is always trying to reorganize itself around life changes. With intelligent, holistic support, the fire of your passions can burn hot for a very long time. What might “reversing your log ends” mean for you? ▲