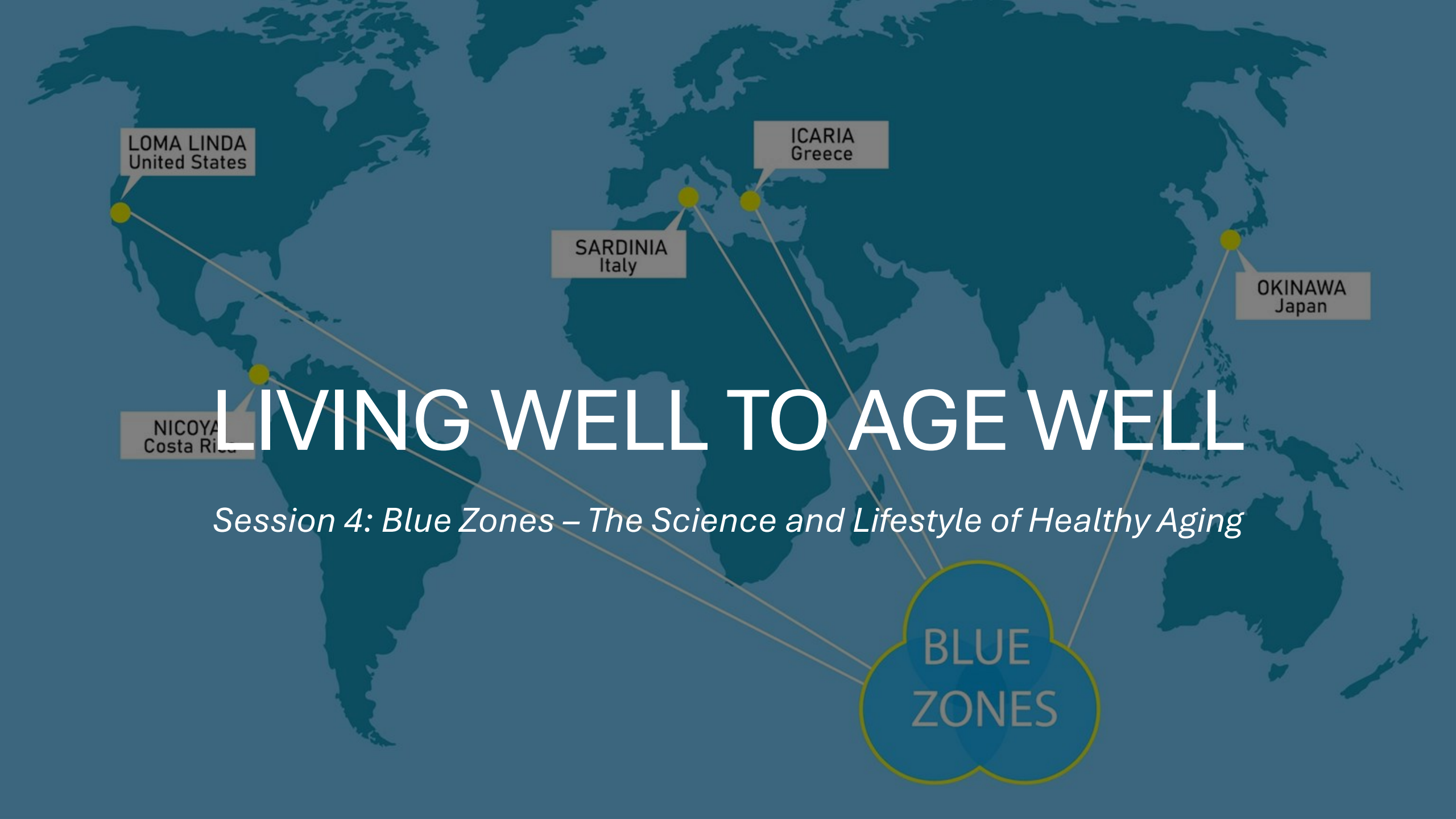


A world map with a dark blue background. Six yellow dots are placed on the map, each connected by a thin white line to a central Venn diagram of three overlapping circles. The circles are labeled 'BLUE ZONES' in white text. The dots represent the following locations: LOMA LINDA, United States; NICOYA, Costa Rica; SARDINIA, Italy; ICARIA, Greece; and OKINAWA, Japan. The sixth dot is in the Pacific Ocean, near Japan, but is not labeled.

LIVING WELL TO AGE WELL

Session 4: Blue Zones – The Science and Lifestyle of Healthy Aging

BLUE
ZONES

What Are the Blue Zones?

- Blue Zones are regions of the world where people not only live longer than average, but also remain healthier, more active, and more independent well into old age.
- Researchers became interested in these communities because they appeared to have unusually high numbers of centenarians (people who live to age 100 and beyond), along with lower rates of many chronic diseases common in Western societies.
- Rather than representing a single diet or lifestyle, Blue Zones provide an opportunity to study how everyday habits, environment, culture, relationships, and purpose may influence healthy aging.



A Note About the Science

- The Blue Zones are based primarily on **observational research**.
- This means the people living in these communities were observed rather than assigned to follow a particular lifestyle.
- Observational research cannot prove cause and effect, but it can identify important patterns that deserve further study.
- The goal is not to copy every aspect of these cultures, but to identify practical habits that may contribute to healthier aging.



The Seven Blue Zones

- Okinawa, Japan
- Sardinia, Italy
- Ikaria, Greece
- Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica
- Loma Linda, California, USA
- Singapore
- Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates



Okinawa, Japan

Known for:

- High concentration of healthy older women
- Strong social support groups ("moai")
- Lifelong sense of purpose ("ikigai")
- Traditionally plant-rich diet
- Daily natural movement
- Deep respect for elders

Sardinia, Italy

Known for:

- Exceptional longevity among men
- Mountain villages with daily walking
- Strong family connections
- Multigenerational households
- Mediterranean-style diet
- Close-knit community life

Ikaria, Greece

Known for:

- Very low rates of dementia
- Low rates of cardiovascular disease
- Daily walking on mountainous terrain
- Afternoon rest
- Mediterranean eating pattern
- Rich social life



Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica

Known for:

- High number of healthy older adults
- Strong family structure
- Clear sense of purpose ("Plan de Vida")
- Simple whole-food diet
- Regular physical activity
- Positive outlook on aging



Loma Linda, California

Known for:

- Seventh-day Adventist community
- One of the longest-lived populations in North America
- Little or no smoking
- Minimal alcohol
- Regular exercise
- Strong faith and community involvement
- Predominantly plant-based eating



Singapore

Known for:

- One of the world's highest life expectancies
- Modern healthcare
- Public health initiatives
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Excellent sanitation
- Healthy aging policies
- Strong preventive care





Abu Dhabi

Known for:

- Rapid improvements in healthy longevity
- National focus on preventive medicine
- Investment in healthcare
- Promotion of physical activity
- Healthy aging initiatives
- Community wellness programs

What Do They Have in Common?

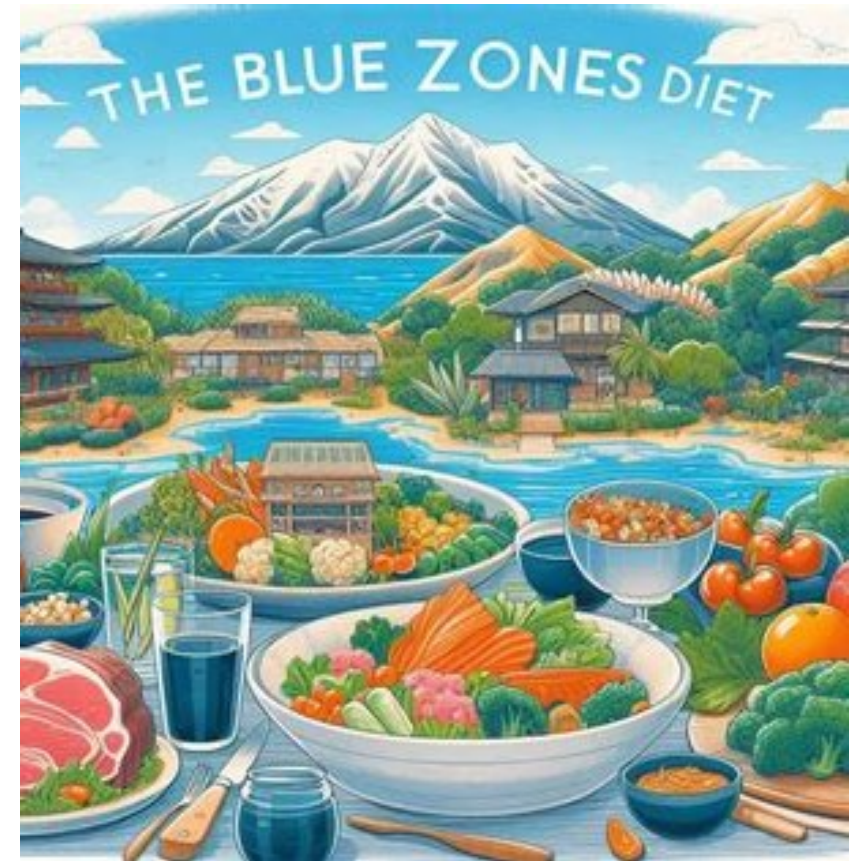
Although each Blue Zone has its own unique culture, geography, and traditions, several themes consistently emerge.



Important Distinction

One of the **greatest misconceptions** surrounding the Blue Zones is the widespread belief that they represent proof that people live the longest on a completely "**plant-based**" diet. That simply is not an accurate portrayal of these traditional cultures. With the partial exception of the Seventh-day Adventist community in Loma Linda—where many, but not all, residents follow vegetarian diets—the Blue Zones have historically included animal foods such as fish, eggs, dairy, and, depending on the region, lamb, goat, pork, or poultry.

The real lesson is not the exclusion of animal foods, but the abundance of whole plant foods that accompany them. Vegetables, legumes, fruits, herbs, nuts, and other minimally processed foods occupy a prominent place on the table, while animal foods are generally consumed in moderate amounts rather than dominating every meal. Perhaps the most valuable takeaway is not simply to eat less meat, but to make far more room for the nutrient-rich plant foods that are too often missing from the modern Western diet.





Natural Daily Movement

Not necessarily gym workouts. Instead:

- Walking
- Gardening
- Household tasks
- Climbing hills
- Carrying groceries
- Standing frequently
- Remaining physically active throughout the day

Movement is built into daily life.

Whole Foods



Common characteristics include:

- A wide variety of vegetables
- Fruits
- Legumes
- Whole grains
- Nuts and seeds
- Herbs and spices
- Fish and seafood (where traditionally available)
- Eggs
- Fermented dairy, such as yogurt and traditional cheeses
- Modest amounts of meat or poultry, depending on the region
- Healthy fats, such as olive oil in Mediterranean regions
- Meals prepared from scratch
- Very little ultra-processed food
- Minimal refined sugar and highly processed carbohydrates

Healthy Body Weight

Most Blue Zone populations naturally maintain:

- Lower obesity rates
- Smaller portion sizes
- Less overeating
- Greater metabolic health



Strong Family Relationships

Families often include:

- Multiple generations
- Regular shared meals
- Caring for aging parents
- Frequent interaction with grandchildren

Older adults remain integrated into family life.



Community

A sense of belonging appears repeatedly.

- Communities provide:
- Friendship
- Emotional support
- Practical help
- Accountability
- Shared traditions

Longevity is rarely lived in isolation.

Purpose

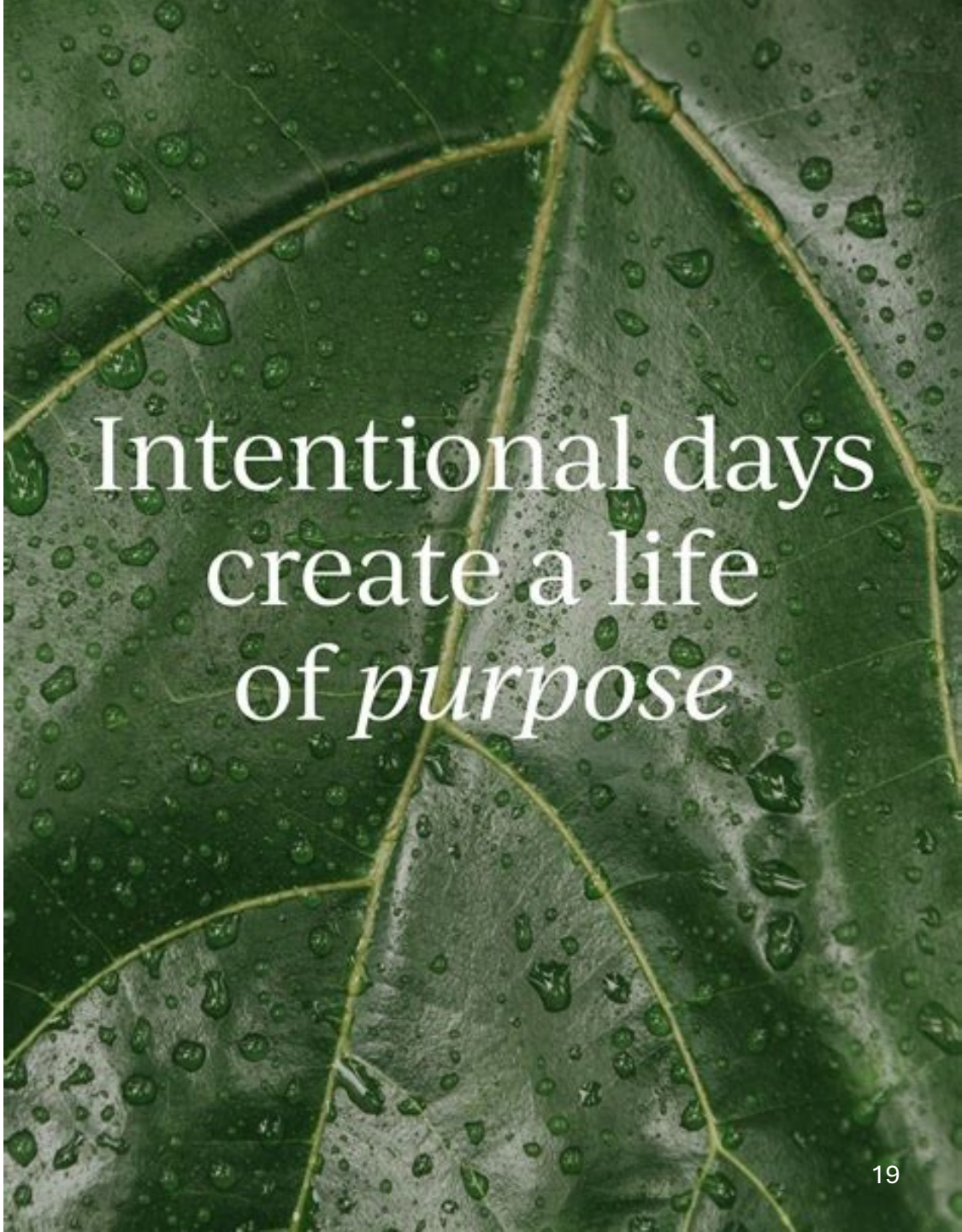
Many Blue Zone cultures describe a reason to get up each morning.

Examples include:

- Ikigai (Japan)
- Plan de Vida (Costa Rica)

Purpose has been associated with:

- Better physical health
- Better cognitive health
- Lower mortality
- Greater resilience



Intentional days
create a life
of *purpose*

Every day brings a reason to get up, contribute, and engage with life...

For example, in Okinawa, older adults often continue gardening, growing food, practicing traditional crafts, participating in community events, and contributing to family and village life well into advanced age.

One 101-year-old Okinawan artisan continued making the traditional textile *bashōfu*, while another resident was still actively growing crops at age 91. Their purpose was not necessarily a grand mission, but the ongoing knowledge that they were active, capable, needed, and still had something meaningful to contribute.



Purpose may come from many sources, including:

-
- Family and caring for loved ones
 - Meaningful work or volunteering
 - Faith and spiritual life
 - Hobbies and lifelong learning
 - Serving the community
 - Mentoring younger generations



Research suggests that having a strong sense of purpose is associated with:

-
- Better physical health
 - Better cognitive function
 - Lower rates of depression
 - Greater resilience during adversity
 - Increased longevity



Managing Stress

While stress cannot be eliminated, healthy long-lived populations tend to include regular opportunities for recovery.

Examples include:

- Prayer
- Family meals
- Afternoon rest
- Time in nature
- Social gatherings
- Faith practices

Positive Attitudes Toward Aging

Older adults are often viewed as:

- Wise
- Valuable
- Needed
- Respected
- Active contributors

Aging is not viewed simply as decline.



Lifelong Social Engagement

Remaining socially connected has been associated with:

- Better cognitive function
- Lower depression
- Better immune health
- Longer survival

Relationships may be one of the strongest predictors of healthy aging.



Important Perspective

There is no single Blue Zone lifestyle, no one "superfood," and no single habit that can fully explain the remarkable longevity seen in these communities.

Rather, healthy aging appears to be the result of many beneficial influences working together over the course of a lifetime.

Nutritious whole foods, regular movement, strong relationships, a sense of purpose, effective stress management, and other healthy lifestyle practices combine to create an environment that supports health, resilience, and vitality well into older age.



Bringing Blue Zone Lessons Home



Many principles can be incorporated regardless of where someone lives.

- Move more throughout the day.
- Eat mostly whole foods.
- Build and maintain muscle.
- Nurture meaningful relationships.
- Stay mentally engaged.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Manage stress.
- Sleep well.
- Live with purpose.
- Continue learning.
- Stay connected to family and community.



Coming Next...

In the next session, we'll take a closer look at the foods commonly enjoyed throughout the Blue Zones and discover why these seemingly simple, traditional foods are anything but ordinary. Behind colorful vegetables, herbs, legumes, olive oil, fermented foods, seafood, and other whole foods lies a remarkable world of vitamins, minerals, healthy fats, fiber, polyphenols, carotenoids, flavonoids, and thousands of other naturally occurring compounds that work together to nourish our cells, reduce inflammation, support the microbiome, protect our brains and hearts, and promote healthy aging. The more we learn about these foods, the more we appreciate that nature has been practicing nutritional science all along.



Thank you!

Wondrous Roots, Inc.

103 Roxbury St.; Keene, NH 03431

603-439-2603

www.shopwondrousroots.com

www.wondrousroots.org



Rebecca Roentsch Montrone, BS

“You have more power than you know...”