

## Changing Course in the Second Part of Our Life

*One cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning; for what was great in the morning will be of little importance in the evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie.*  
(Carl Jung)

Can you believe that 2024 is already half over? It really does feel as though life speeds up exponentially in our later years doesn't it? Noticing this sobering phenomenon recently has led me to share with you this month some extremely wise advice from Richard Rohr about the need to change course in the latter part of our life. (See Richard Rohr *Falling Upward*)

Each and every one of us born into this world has to begin our life journey here by creating a separate egoic identity for ourselves. We have no choice whatsoever over this. Becoming an egoic-self is biologically built into the design of all human beings so there is absolutely no point in feeling guilty about being 'egoic'.

The first half of our life is inevitably all about 'me' and 'mine' – searching for what makes 'me' look good or feel good and what keeps 'me' safe in the world, including desperately seeking approval from other members of our tribe. But the price we pay for this 'me versus the world' mentality is a kind of alienation, an inherent loneliness, and a separation from wholeness.

Most of us in our 20s and 30s strive and strive for success in our chosen field of endeavour. We also desperately look for a suitable mate. Then, many of us spend so much time, effort and energy bringing up children for at least 16 years and these days probably longer. The first half of our life thus flies by in a busy blur and most people have absolutely no time or energy left to ask any deep questions about the true meaning of life. They are far too busy just trying to survive and then - if they are really lucky – to thrive in a cut-throat world.

There is no point in regretting any of this. However, by late middle age, if we want to be truly fulfilled, we should begin to move beyond egoic searching for happiness in the future and begin to live joyfully moment to moment.

For us to be fulfilled in the second half of our life, our carefully constructed egoic container needs to crack at least once so we can expand our horizons beyond our separate, extremely limited and 'ignorant' egoic identity to find the core part of us that never dies.

Sadly, many of us never take that big step into the big unknown in the second half of our life. Think for example of 70 or even 80 year olds that are still looking for a special romantic partner to ease their deep loneliness and anxiety, or multi-millionaires who still work 24/7 to make even more money.

Most of us never leave the comfortable nest we have built for ourselves to go on some kind of spiritual quest or to begin a hero's journey through unknown territories in search of the deepest hidden truths about life.

Most middle aged and older individuals just keep climbing the same ladder they started climbing in their youth without realising that it is now placed against the wrong wall. Quite a few older individuals even shrink as they age – physically, mentally and/or emotionally. For some older people, their health problems become their whole world. Other older

individuals spend a lot of time reminiscing or regretting a past that is long gone. Their horizons simply close in on them.

Only a minority of elders go on some kind of spiritual quest during which they learn to open up their awareness so that they can begin to dwell in a spaciousness that is vast compared to the ego's little 'me' kingdom.

After a pretty dramatic initial spiritual awakening in my late 40s, I spent the next two decades of my life following an awakening and healing path that gradually led me out of more or less constant fear and anxiety into experiencing more and more love and light.

Sometimes on this path, I felt as though I was on the top of a mountain, but then I would quickly spiral downwards and feel as though I was going through hell for a while. All in all though, it was an unforgettable roller coaster ride that I would not have missed for a billion pounds or even for a marriage proposal from Prince Charming himself.

So, having changed course quite dramatically in the second part of my own life, I now feel pretty confident to give you some tips on what you can do to find deep fulfilment in life if you too are no longer a spring chicken (as Master Chan used to say to us!).

First of all, in the second half of life, if you are wise, we will no longer keep competing to be better than anyone else. You will no longer insist on being the best dancer on the dance floor. You will do your best to participate in the general dance called 'life' but without being competitive about it.

However, as well as enjoying all the pleasures this world has to offer you, as you move into older age, you also need to answer that deep inner calling that sends us looking for our True Self. It is only once we make initial contact with this core self that we can begin to fill a big hole inside of us that can never be filled with food, drugs, alcohol, romance, sex or any kind of worldly success.

Our logical mind will never grasp the deeper mysteries in life. But if we commit to sitting still for a while every day and bring our attention within, we can then expand our awareness beyond our logical mind from time to time. The wisdom we then find at the silent core of our being turns out to be life changing. When we touch base with a reality that lies beyond the dream world that we call 'our world', we will finally have a strong, intuitive sense that Life Itself is eternal and that on the highest or deepest level of life all is always perfectly well despite all appearances to the contrary down here.

As well as touching base with our core self as often as we can in the latter part of our life, we also need to begin to accept and even befriend all our personality-self's weaknesses and limitations. Once we do this, we will find that we are much more tolerant of other peoples' 'faults'. We can then start to extend genuine compassion to others without trying to change or improve them. We can thus become a true blessing as a wise, mature person in our immature, troubled world!

If we mature well, and thus begin to rise above all our egoic preoccupations of the first half of life, we can eventually become a strong, stable, loving presence in a chaotic world. Can you think of some older individuals whom you know personally who exude this quality? I can think of one or two only! But they inspire me so much.

In order to lead a wonderfully fulfilling and helpful life until the day that we depart this world, I would suggest that we need to do the following each day.

**Slow down:** We all rush about like headless chickens in our modern, hyperactive world. Even when we are retired from work, many of us are still frantically busy one way or another. So we all need to make a real effort to spend some time each day moving slowly and mindfully or just sitting and doing absolutely nothing. (If anyone gives you a hard time about this tell them you are meditating for world peace and harmony.)

**Spend more time in silence and stillness:** We all tend to distract ourselves from our deepest inner pain by keeping busy doing stuff. But the greatest joy in life can only be found in the silence of our heart. In order to make contact with the ultimate truth about life, we need to spend at least some time each day withdrawing from the world so that we can keep spiralling inwards until we finally make contact with an intuitive knowing that is so different from worldly knowledge or logic which is always stuck in a dualistic version of reality rather than the mystery of how everything interconnects in an infinite field of love energy.

**Practise Unconditional forgiveness:** Young people are usually quite angry with life. They inevitably hold many grudges or grievances against their own loving parents as well as with all those with authority in their world. But as we move into the second part of our life, we need to forgive all those people, events and places that caused us so much grief in our earlier life. If as we become a little more emotionally mature, we practise letting go of all our stored pain and grievances until there is nothing or nobody left to forgive from our past, we will naturally become a truly wise and joyful elder to our tribe.

**Wrap ourselves in the life-supporting energy of self-compassion:** We have all spent many, many years being busy bees making our way in the world. As we change gears in the second half of our lives, we need to be incredibly patient with ourselves. We will get nowhere fast by criticising ourselves if or when we fall back into our old ingrained egoic habits of striving too hard and being too busy day in and day out. It is fine to make mistakes even in our old age. Just love the part of you who still stumbles and falls from time to time whatever your age.

Criticising ourselves when we make any kind of mistake in life however large is so counter-productive. So whenever we notice that our 'pain body' has been triggered by someone or something in this world, we need to pause and wrap ourselves in a soothing wave of unconditional self-compassion. Only once we have learnt how to hold ourselves in infinite compassion day in and day out will we be able to extend compassion out into our troubled world and thus become part of the deepest solution to all of our endless human problems.

So there we have it. As part of ageing with grace, shall we commit this month to taking a few more steps towards becoming a wise, truly helpful elder in our society by waking up every morning and asking ourselves: 'Today, what can I think, say or do to set myself free from egoic fear and anxiety so that I can dwell in love and nothing but love and then extend this unconditional love out to everyone I meet?'

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