

Finding Meaning In The Second Half Of Life – How To Finally, Really Grow Up

by James Hollis

The second half of life is entirely different than the first half. Doorways and options appear in the second half of life which were unavailable to you in first half. And like in the S-curve of business, skills talents and assumptions that led to success in the past, are now likely to lead to the failure in the future. This transition requires enormous courage. Your world is full of clues about what might not be working in your life and about what could be working if we walked that path of ambiguity. Mostly we don't see the clues. They show up in our dreams, our patterned behavior, how others relate to us and how our body reacts. These are all clues to sources of energy available for some things but not others.

These are clues to the doors that open the second half of life are implicit and explicit messages of our family of origin the most powerful determinant in our lives. These messages are so deeply internalized and ingrained that they become difficult if not impossible to see. Being intelligent is not the same as being conscious which requires continuous effort every moment your ego will do whatever it takes to become more comfortable. Whereas your soul is about wholeness and this in fact makes the ego uncomfortable. The goal of life meaning when one learns that beneath the current anxiety there is a buried filament that reaches back to a childhood fear, then one learns the secret to disabling power of the anxious. Yet most of us do not like to anxiety or fear so it is buried or suppressed or repressed.

Anyone who wants to know the human psyche will learn next to nothing from experimental psychology. For even psychology has banished psyche or soul from serious consideration. Behavioral therapists and cognitive therapist focus on changing a person's behavior. Not on integrating the unconscious parts of yourself into your conscious life.

The ego's agenda is comfort, order, control, security. Thus the ego prevents our learning to read the signature of the invisible at work in the visible world. We have limited our deeper access to this world and the soul that psychology,

behavioral modification and cognitive reprogramming along with the psychiatrist's mind numbing pills prevent us from ever exploring. In the same way fundamentalists of all stripes have an unwillingness to look at the complexities and paradoxes that exist in our life and our world.

In the second half of life there are two tasks. First, is the recovery of your personal authority as distinct from the authority in our life that comes from our family of origin, socioeconomic conditions and cultural norms. The second task is discovering our spirituality. I will

Soul is what drives us toward more conscious engagement with the four abiding elements of our lives: the Cosmos, nature, the other, and the self. Most psychology today deals with behavior, thinking and pharmacology. Individual and individuation is a lifelong project of becoming more nearly the whole person we were meant to be. Individuation is not self indulgence. It is reported to have been said in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas "if you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you." Our greatest sin may be choosing to remain unconscious since I have served the expectations of my culture, reproduced my species, become a socially responsible and productive citizen and taxpayer.

But now by midlife one may finally be strong enough or desperate enough to ask disturbing questions to yourself. During the first half of our life you are ego focused on succeeding in education or family or marriage or business or in our community or in several of those spheres. Much of what you learned that helped in the first half of life is likely now to hinder you in the second half of your life. This is a trip to leave the old assumptions behind, and risk living amid the real ambiguities of life. We make the assumption that we know all we need to know about ourselves in the situation to make wise choices. Many of us however in midlife are appalled by some of the choices we made an earlier decades misunderstanding, retreating, avoiding, procrastinating or hiding out. Or on the other hand seizing control of every situation and hurting or becoming sweet and personable and compliant and easy-going. All of these are accommodations avoiding risk, self-sabotaging, overcompensating with power and wealth, the

right partner, or fame or sovereignty. Anxious and obsessive in our need for reassurance. When things don't work out, we repeat old patterns. Some seek to understand themselves and others seek to blame others.

What we immensely desire or despise is difficult to own, so we project those qualities on another individual or group of people. Learning to identify the four stages of the projection and how to disentangle yourself is a part of becoming yourself. Our challenge is that we would rather be ruined than change. Such projection can occur for a group of people, even a nation. Where we choose to blame and hate others rather than examine ourselves. Only with insight in the second half of life have we that real capacity for choice and development beyond simple repetitive and often unfulfilling activities first half

A Dark Matter Analogy From Astronomical Research

Astronomers have struggled for decades to understand how galaxies, including our own, hold together and not fly apart from centrifugal force in their spinning. The amount of matter or mass or gravity within the galaxy turns out to be incredibly insufficient for the speed and centrifugal force of the stars in the galaxy.

It is like swinging a bucket full of water around your head with a string from your hand to the bucket. If you spend too fast you may break the string. In the case of the galaxy it is as if the string is not there yet the bucket is still spinning around our head. What magical force is holding there?

Now two separate experiments provide evidence that galaxies contain some forty times more matter than can be accounted for by all the stars and gas and dust that exist within galaxies. No one has been able to detect this invisible matter; it goes under the name of dark matter in astronomy. Dark matter is described as extremely weak particles, that are very massive, so that they exert an invisible force on the observable universe.

This seems like an entirely appropriate analogy for us as human beings where our subconscious- meaning we are not aware of it- exerts persistent forces on our conscious behavior.

Doorway Questions

These 10 questions posed by James Hollis act as doorways to your deeper unconscious or barely conscious Self. That part of you that sees wholeness, and exerts a continual and subtle force on your ego as it tries to manifest itself. Answer these questions honestly explore them deeply and you are on your way to the insights of wisdom that will lead to changes in your larger life.

1. Where has life, and its unfairness, fixated you, caused you circle back and back on this wounding as a provisional definition and limitation of your possibilities? _____
2. Where has life blessed you, and given you a gift? And what have you done with that gift? How have you accepted the responsibility that goes with it?

3. Where are you blocked by fear, stuck, rigid resistant to change?

4. What is the fear beneath the fear? The fear that intimidates you, leads to deeper fear, a fear from your past. _____
5. Where was your father stuck? And where has that stuck place shown up in your life? Where was your mother stuck? And where has that place shown up in your life? Is this a legacy you will pass on to your children?

6. Where do you avoid conflict, the necessary conflict of values, and therefore avoid living in fidelity with who you are?

7. What ideas, habits, behavioral patterns are holding you back from the larger journey of the soul? What secondary gains do you receive by staying mired in the old security, predictability, validation from others?

8. Where are you still looking for permission to live your life?

9. Where do you need to grow up?

10. What have you always felt called toward, and fear to do? What new life wishes to come in being through you?

See also the exercise in living your unlived by Jerry Ruhl.