



# Awakening Spring in Autumn

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## **The Opportunities and Challenges of Women and Men at Mid-Life**

**Eliza Yong, Jayan Warrior and William Bergquist**



THE PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRESS

## **Awakening Spring in Autumn**

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Bergquist

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# Preface

None of us matures the same as anybody else. In many ways, no woman or man progresses exactly the same as another woman or man. Not even if the two women were born on the same day, grew up in the same house or gone through the exact same event. Aileen and her 2 elder sisters are in their fifties, and they grew up together in the same household with their parents. When their mother passed away from illness, all three sisters were in their teens. Their lives could not be more different. Aileen's elder sisters went out to work to make money. Aileen took over the care of the house and the chores. Later on, she continued to care for their father in his old age till he passed away. Aileen's eldest sister works as an administration manager and has 2 teenaged children while her second sister spends her time between two countries with her husband based overseas for work. For more than 20 years, Aileen tussles with her depression and social phobia, unable to find meaningful connection in relationships. At best, she can work only part time and never in jobs that are customer-facing. This observation of how differently women develop throughout their natural life is what we can see around us, in our daily lives. Clinically and organisationally this observation begs a question - how is this so?

In this book we focus on women and men in their middle adulthood and what the similarities or differences in what they go through during their 50s and 60s mean for them individually, in their community and in their broader society. We look at how the brain is wired in both women and men and ways in which the times, environment and culture we grew up in shape our expectations and values regarding family life, relationships and career.

All men and women are in some ways similar to one another as they confront the opportunities and challenges of mid-life - there are many common themes. Yet there are also major differences among women and men in living through the middle years of their life. From the moment we were conceived, our prenatal environment, our background, the times in

which we were born, our sociocultural environment—they all bear weight on our lifespan development. In this book we explore how the feminine and masculine brain structure and chemistry in combination with social environment made us unique. Women differ from men in some important biological ways. Our masculine and feminine brains influence our thoughts and actions throughout our existence—including our middle adulthood. On the one hand, changes in our brain hormones during these middle years can provide stabilization; on the other hand, these changes can affect our mental wellness.

### **Why This Book: Wearing Purple**

Our physical health and mental health in middle adulthood are intertwined and projected from the time we were a little embryo and from the conditions in which and during times when we grew up. The values we espoused through our experiences from youth till present day stay with us. We find ourselves reflecting upon them in our midlife; probing if there is more than what we know or are doing. At this phase, both women and men are possibly contributing on a wider scale than just their immediate surroundings. They are possibly impacting lives of their community, society and companies (depending on their role), and even nations. New associations are formed. Life could become busier or more relaxed as we are clearer on who we are and are keen to live for ourselves.

Both women and men during these years can have a profound impact on the lives of people with whom they interact—in many ways these are the most powerful and influential years in our life (regardless of the society in which we live). In the corporate world, both women and men increasingly contribute directly through their work or indirectly through mentoring others or consulting and have done so in most societies for many years. In their families, men and women are nurturing the young, looking after their partner, the house and their elders. They do not forget the outsiders who need a helping hand.

In some of the eastern traditions, this phase of life is termed the third one - after the very active life of a student (which is the first phase) and after



living the life of a young adult, (the second phase). This third phase offers the gateway to a life of detachment from active pursuits and the beginning of an inner journey. This might happen as a natural choice for many, while it is imposed on others. In this life, one tends to step out of the situation and evaluate it from the outside. Many of our myths have painted a picture of people passing through this phase, many of them experiencing the most critical dilemmas in their life, some facing emotional disturbances from denial and shocking external events. Sigmund Freud was 63 when he caught a glimpse of an elderly gentleman on the train he was on. He was horrified when he realised that he was looking at his reflection in the window – time and age had passed without his awareness (Freud, 1917).

The opportunity is there for both men and women to find meaning in their lives—furthering their studies if that is what they wish to do or forming new relationships with themselves or others. In rejuvenating themselves, they continue to impact lives, with new knowledge combined with their life experiences. With these wonderful aspects, there is also the other side of this phase. Major challenges are to be faced. Families who are not prepared for the changes could be surprised and broken up. Women and men who are prone to poorer health could suffer both physically and mentally. Our values picked up from our childhood and our commitment to focus on career or higher expectations could become impediments of the aging population. As actress Juliet Stevenson shared in her 50s, “as you go through life, it gets more and more interesting and complicated.” This reminds us of Jenny Joseph’s poem, “Warning”, that ended with:

*“But maybe I ought to practice a little now?  
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised  
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple“*

One of us will not be a woman at mid-life for another few years. A second one of us has passed through these years about a decade ago. The third of us is in the midst of his mid-life – so we can look at these years from several different perspectives. None of these perspectives prevent us from envisioning our next phase of life or reflecting on a past phase or pausing for a moment to reflect on a current phase. Life is transiting for women

who are about to enter mid-life and for men who are currently in this phase of life. Even those of us who are reflecting back on this phase of adulthood have much to learn from these years as we enter the final decades of life.

In essence, this book is for and about women and men who are now or soon will be between forty and sixty-five years of age. It is about what the three of us, living in different cultures and being at different phases in our own lives, have learned about these women and men from our experiences and our work as therapist, organizational leader, educator, consultant and coach. During this phase—and at all phases—we are looking for something more, for happiness (however we choose to define this elusive goal). If we are prepared, if we had set our foundation well, with healthy habits and mind-set and are aware of what this phase would need from us, we believe, each of us, beautiful woman or man, would navigate this time with grace. We could wear purple.

# Chapter One

## Autumn Arrives

### The Erl King

By Johann von Goethe

Who rides there so late through the night and wind?

It is the father with his child.

He holds the boy clasped in his arms.

He holds him securely. He keeps him warm.

“My son, why is your face covered up in fear?”

“Father, can you not see the Erl King.

The elfin king with crown and train?”

“My son, it’s only the rising mist.”

“Come now, my child, Do come with me!

I’ll play very fine games with thee.

There are many beautiful flowers by the shore.

My mother shall grace thee with garments of gold.”

“Father, my father, can you not hear?

Promises the Erl King has whispered in my ear?”

“Be calm, stay calm my dearest child.

Tis nothing but wind rustling leaves that are dead.”

“My handsome boy, won’t you come with me?  
My daughters will serve you well, with sisterly care.  
My daughters will dance round thee, all night in a ring.  
They’ll cradle thee, and dance with thee and sing thee to sleep.”

“My father, my father can you not see?  
The Erl King’s daughters linger in that dark place?”  
“My son, my son, I see it clearly.  
It’s the aged willow that looks so gray.”

“I love thee. Your beautiful form entices me!  
And if you are unwilling, then I will use force.”  
“My father, my father, he has taken hold of me.  
The Erl King has done me great harm.”

The father shudders. He rides fast.  
He holds the groaning child in his arms.  
The father finally reaches home in toil and travail.  
In his arms the child was dead.

---

This translation of *The Erl King* is a blending of six different translations. We have chosen to provide a rather literal translation. This means that the poem lacks a lyrical structure, which is unfortunate, given that this poem

in German is considered quite lyrical, and has been the inspiration for several different composers. We encourage the reader to read several more poetic renderings of *The Erl King* to gain a feel for the lyricism of this poem.

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### **Legend of Miaoshan**

#### **In the Precious Scroll of Fragrant Mountain**

**By Jiang Zhiqi**

Beautiful Princess Miaoshan,

Youngest daughter of King Miaozhuang.

Came to a marriageable age,

Like her two sisters before, her Father chose a powerful wealthy man for her to marry

However she refused.

Out of anger, he sent her to a monastery to do hard labour,

She was beaten and shamed there, under his instructions.

She remained unwavering in her choice.

The Emperor had the monastery burnt and the nuns staying there were killed.

Miaoshan survived.

The King ordered her execution.

She died but returned when Hades did not want to lose his paradise.

She decided to go to Mount Fragrant and stayed there

Years passed by,

Peacefully.

Her Father fell ill with no cure.  
A wise man (Miaoshan's disguise) told him,  
Go up to Mount Fragrant,  
Find the person with no anger or hatred  
Ask for their arms and eyes to cure you.

The king's men fetched the arms and eyes from Mount Fragrant.  
And the king was saved with the medicine  
He went up to Mount Fragrant to give his thanks.  
He realised it was his daughter who had sacrificed.  
He begged her forgiveness.

-----  
This version of the Legend of Miaoshan has been translated from different versions and interpretations. It is a very simplified version of the powerful legend about a woman who is facing the challenges of living in a patriarchal society. It is a legend about one particular woman who stood by her choices - one to not marry and another to sacrifice herself on behalf of her Father not out of obligatory filial piety but because she wants to help heal her father. This is a legend that dramatically conveys the impact which her choices had on her life.

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**The Great King of the Ramayana**

The King strode in glory to meet the youngest queen  
On the auspicious morning of his son Rama's coronation  
Lost in joy and ecstasy of the moment,  
Longing to see his youngest queen at her best

He stopped in his tracks out of shock and disbelief  
Listening to the sobs from the depths of the palace  
“No, it can’t be! my ears must be playing tricks on me”,  
Walking slower, little knowing the wind is blowing the other way

Eyes red in rage, filled with tears, lay on the floor in tattered clothes  
The queen of his dreams, dearest of all  
Wanting her wish to be fulfilled now, her son to be on the throne,  
“Banish Rama, to the forest, let my son take his place”, insisted she

Clutching his chest, with Rama in mind, the elderly king  
Regretting his past, grasping for air, his words broken in despair  
Pleading with queen, ‘please don’t do this now’,  
Losing his strength and mind in panic, lost himself in pain

“Oh Rama!” cried the ailing king, lying on his bed  
Remembering his son, caught in the net of the past  
Preparing to dwell in the forest, for fourteen years  
Just and fair than anyone born, kind and courageous of all those men

“How could I be blinded from truth?  
Why did I fall in this trap or shall I call it fate?  
Oh Son, could it be karma or just an evil plan?  
How could I order you to be banished?”

“You come in my dreams, I hear you in the wind  
A divine gift from heavens, born of my deep desire  
In every beat of my heart, every thought of my mind  
Like stars a million, twinkling in the night sky”

In a palace, full of comforts and three queens  
Among the wisest of all the sages  
Hopeless, confused and yearning for peace  
Missing his dearest, first of four sons

Died the king, wishing he could  
Re-live his life one more time,  
Learning the lessons he needed to learn  
With his son in his mind, wanting to see him one last time

-----

This snippet of the Ramayana is based on the rendition of this story told by Kamala Subramariam in *Ramayan* (Rajagopalachari, 2013). Originally considered to be written by a sage named Valmiki in Sanskrit, there have been many attempts to unravel the epic's historical growth and compositional layers; various scholars' estimates for the earliest stage of the text range from the 7th to 4th centuries BCE.

The Ramayana is one of the largest ancient epics in world literature. It is considered the ‘adi-kavya’ (first poem), in the Indian tradition. It depicts the expectations from relationships, portraying characters like the ideal father, the ideal servant, the ideal brother, the ideal husband and the ideal



king. It presents the teachings of ancient sages in the Vedic tradition as narratives, interspersing philosophical and ethical elements. The characters Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Shatrughna, and Ravana are all fundamental to the cultural consciousness of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and some parts of south-east Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia.

## **Poem of the Erl King**

The remarkable poem by Goethe has lingered in the minds of many artists since it was written in 1782. Schubert set the poem to music as a German lived during the Nineteenth Century. The folk singer and songwriter, Steve Gillette, wrote a song to accompany the poem. This “folk song” attained some popularity during the 1960s. One of us became acquainted with the poem through Gillette’s version as a young man of 27. Since that time, his taste in music has changed several times and the era of folk music is now nothing more than a piece of nostalgia for most men and women over Fifty years of age. Yet, the song of the Erl King has continued to haunt. It concerns how we address (or ignore) our inner dreams, demons and dialogues—and the consequences of decisions we have made leading up to and during our mid-life years.

## **Legend of Miaoshan**

The original legend was conveyed in about 1100AD by Jiang Zhiqi. Readers familiar with stories in Buddhism might be familiar with this legend which is about one of the incarnations of the Goddess of Mercy. This legend relates to our book, as it tells of the relationship one has with their family and the changes through the different phases of life. As a child, we could be expected to obey our elders, especially in Asian societies. There will be consequences for having a different point of view. The legend of Miaoshan concerns the impact, how others see us and the sacrifices we make during our life. When we grow older, the roles change. The child now takes care of the parents. We might do that out of filial piety or because we want to. Miaoshan’s legend also is a narrative about how she guided others as she

got older—toward which mid-life men and women might find themselves inclined.

## **Story of Ramayana**

The timeless legend of Ramayana remains popular in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, as well as parts of Indonesia, Thailand and a few others. It is depicted in plays, dance forms, celebrations, paintings and other creative forms of expression. It centres around Rama, ‘an icon of Dharma’. The long poetry was written by a sage named Valmiki, who was believed to have taken up the profession of robbery in order to feed his family. His life was transformed by a few wise men who challenged him with questions about the consequences of his deeds – would the family he is feeding, with the proceeds of his robbery, share his ‘karma’? He came to terms with his actions and abandoned his profession.

Later, inspired to write about a ‘perfect man ever born’, he created Ramayana (the life journey of Rama), highlighting on Rama’s steadfastness to justice and values. It seems the first few lines of the poetry were inspired from his pain and anger, ensued from witnessing a hunter shooting down a pair of birds engaged in intense love making. Ramayana portrays many dilemmas in daily life—especially those faced during the middle years of life. The King, who is the father of Rama, depicted in the earlier part of the poem is just one example.

## **Living in Autumn**

This book concerns a broad swath in the life of 21<sup>st</sup> Century men and women. While other books on adult development tend to focus on a specific decade of life (such as the 40s or 50s) (for example, Levinson and Associates, 1978), this book concerns a span of multiple decades. Given this broad scope, we are faced with two major challenges. The most important challenge concerns finding themes that are relevant for the 50 year old male who is in the midst of his life and career—and that are relevant to the three of us as authors. What will keep us committed to this multi-

year writing project: What is compelling to a 78 year old American male who is much closer to the end of his life and holds quite different perspectives regarding his life and career than his younger colleagues?

What about a woman in her 30s, of Chinese heritage, who is living in Singapore? She is soon entering the years of mid-life. Which of the themes might provide her with the most useful guidance? Finally, which themes speak to a man in the midst of his middle years who comes from the deep non-dual roots of India and now lives in another country, embracing the challenge of multi-cultural life? We have found some deeply seated themes that speak to all three of us. We offer these themes in this book. They hopefully provide insight and guidance to you the reader, as they have done for the three of us as authors. It is up to you, the reader, to decide if we have been successful in this endeavour.

The second challenge is not as daunting—though it is more immediate. What do we call this extended phase in the life of mature women and men? We could be precise and refer to this as the time in life when men and women are 40 to 65 years old. Instead, we could truncate this rather awkward descriptor and simply talk about women and men in mid-life. We decided, however, to use a term that is a bit more lyrical. We will refer to these as the *autumnal years* (the years of Autumn) and identify these 40 to 65 years old men and women as “autumnal males” and “autumnal females.”

We are basing our analysis on three poetic images—the Erl King, the Legend of Miaoshan and the Story of Ramayana. While we cannot possibly match the poetic power of Goethe, Jiang or Valmiki, we can at least play in the same park as these three gifted narrators by offering our own image of mid-life women and men living out their own Autumn—the time of life after the full abundance of Summer yet preceding the inevitable decline of Winter. Given these reasons and sources of inspiration we lay claim to the Autumnal years of life. We turn now to the primary sources of our inspiration, the poem about the Erl King, the legend of Miaoshan and the story of Ramayana – all of which were written many years ago but seem relevant to the Autumnal years of life.

## Poem of the Erl King

In essence, Goethe's poem about the Erl King concerns a man who is journeying on a windy night holding his cherished son. A mythic figure—an elfin lord called the “Erl King”—appears to his son but is not seen by the father. The Erl King tries to lure away the son with promises of riches, beauty, lovely and attentive women, and, ultimately, the threat of physical force. The father keeps brushing aside the son's concerns about the Erl King's presence, dismissing the Erl King as a figment of his son's imagination. Eventually, as the Erl King threatens physical force, the son cries out that the elfin lord has taken hold of him. At this point, the father seems to take the threat seriously. He holds the now groaning child in his arms and races home. However, it is too late. When he arrives home, the father discovers that the cherished son he holds so tightly in his arms is dead.

In one's initial reading of this poem, the tragedy is profound. The poem speaks of a dying child and a father who is too late in recognizing the threat to his son. The sorrow and regret must be unbearable for the father. There is nothing more difficult to confront than the death of one's own child. We know of a Korean man who lost a daughter. He cites a Korean saying that “we bury our spouse in the ground, but our child in our heart.” There is no way in which one resolves profound grief attending the death of a child. Friends of ours who have lost children never stop grieving. Imagine in this case, how the father must feel, having ignored his child's repeated pleas for attentive care. He thought the Erl King was nothing more than mist or dead leaves rustling in the wind!

At another level, we believe this is no longer a poem about a specific man at midlife. We propose that everyone entering the Autumnal decades of life is represented in this poem. The child in our protagonist's arms represents certain aspects of himself that are central to his being as someone in late midlife. These aspects of the father are being ignored because they are painful for the father to acknowledge. The man in the poem of the Erl King is not alone in this regard. Many men and women during their Autumnal years choose to ignore certain aspects of their psyche (or selfhood) because

they find these aspects to be frightening or the potential source of painful insight and suffering. Like the father in Goethe's poem, many Autumnals want neither to acknowledge these aspects of self nor address the implications of threats associated with these aspects of self.

The Erl King offers several temptations that both lure and threaten the son. These same temptations lure and threaten the unacknowledged aspects of our psyche. Yet, we continue to ignore these aspects, choosing instead to dismiss them as figments of our imagination—as nothing more than fantasies and dreams. The outcome of this denial in Goethe's poem is the death of the child. For Autumnal women and men this denial can lead to the death of valuable aspects of their own psyche. The Erl King poses a major challenge for the men and women of Autumn. The Erl King forces us during these decades of life to acknowledge and care for the child. We must tend to the child who is frightened and wounded within us; acknowledging and caring for those aspects of ourselves that are being tempted and threatened by many forces operating within and outside ourselves.

The poem of Erl King also symbolises the pull and temptation of our own dreams from childhood, which were ignored by significant people in our life. Our parents, our siblings, and our friends label the dreams we share as “illusions” and even dangerous “fantasies” that distract us from our real, everyday life and limitations. By the time, the child in Goethe's poem gets to safety, it is already dead. As children, we often find a part of us has died. What is left behind is a lifeless body which has lost the zest for life and excitement about the future. Living in autumn, one might remember those significant others who could have made a difference to our life as a child—but were incapable or unwilling to do so for some reason. Now is the time to come to terms with those disappointments, reconcile the past and forgive those who were not in a position to give life to our dreams and thus help us flourish. Perhaps now we can forgive—and wear purple.

## Legend of Miaoshan

Jiang was tasked with writing a story about one of the incarnations or origins of the Goddess of Mercy. The story tells of a daughter born into the royal family. Her family setting and her society dramatically reduced the scope and repressed the power of a feminine voice. It was a time where values were more patriarchal. Miaoshan was loved by others because of her personality and was pious. However, her father had a plan of his own, to marry each of his daughters off to the wealthiest or most beneficial family. He managed that with no issue with his eldest two daughters. Miaoshan was adamant about not becoming a wife, but instead she wished to become a nun (not uncommon in many societies where women faced few choices). She asked for her mother's help in talking to the king. However, both the King and Miaoshan were set in their minds. Nothing changed.

This legend addresses a fundamental issue that remains fully present in most societies today: the inability of a woman to speak up and be heard—even though this woman can see—and see a great deal. It is a matter of finding voice, not finding vision. This is a theme to which we will return repeatedly throughout this book, when identifying the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Autumnal women. Vision comes first and then voice: women who see clearly must then articulate what they see and trace out the implications of what they see. With vision and voice, they can engage in action – often in collaboration with other women (and men). This sequence resides at the heart of what is often labelled “feminine epistemology” (not to be confused with the equally important push toward feminine equality). An example of this is Malala Yousafzai, an advocate for girls' education. Six years ago, she had survived being shot at fifteen years old, for speaking up for education for girls and continued to promote and break down barriers to girls' education around the world through the Malala Fund.

Miaoshan took it all in stride, even though she was severely penalised for disobeying her father (the king) and was sent to hard labour. She worked hard at all that were given to her. However, this still did not appease the King. He was ambitious and accustomed to having his way. Most

importantly, like many men with power, the King had a robust (and vengeful) ego. He decided to destroy all that Miaoshan valued. He destroyed her peace by destroying what she most valued – the lives of other people. And when that did not work the way he envisioned, the King put her to death. The King of Hades decided to release her. Because no one knew she returned, she was able to start a new life peacefully. The King continued with his life, busy running the state’s affairs.

As the king grew older, he became unwell and could find no cure for his ailment. Miaoshan’s compassion did not stop before her father. She disguised herself to provide the king with advice: to make medicine out of the arms and eyes of one with no anger and hatred. It was a challenging task for the King, and one wonders if the king might have a deeper reflection upon the almost futile solution. Perhaps this is why the King personally went to meet with his life benefactor and to thank the person. Realizing his saviour is the daughter he punished and killed years ago, and perhaps with the challenging almost impossible mission, he could reflect on his life and its meaning. This is the phase of life on which our book focuses. This is a time of reflection. These are the autumnal years when we ask significant people in our life for forgiveness—and we might even try to forgive ourselves. This is the time of life when we care for others and ourselves. This is the occasion when we either flourish (what we will later call “being generative”) like a colourful autumn leaf or wither away in regret and isolation (what we will later call “being stagnate”) like the dead leaf that falls from the tree.

## Story of Ramayana

The story of Ramayana depicts the ‘soul-stirring, ennobling and elevating story’ of Sri Rama, a shining symbol of Dharma (life in alignment with values in tune with the whole). Ramayana is one of the largest ancient epics in world literature, consisting of approximately 24,000 verses in Sanskrit, divided into seven sections and 500 chapters. Prince Rama was born as the elder son to the Great King Dasaratha, with three younger siblings in the palace of Ayodhya in India. He is considered to have been born with the purpose of defeating the evil King Ravana, who rules over the country of

Lanka (currently Sri Lanka). King Dasaratha had three queens, the youngest of them saved his life in the battlefield thus earning a 'blank cheque' – she could ask for a wish at some time in the future and it will be granted by the kind without a question. Along with her crooked maid servant, she started hatching a plan to elevate her own son as the next king—rather than Rama the eldest son. She very well knew that her son is not the most qualified—for Rama is not only the eldest, he is also the most capable and deserving of all.

On the auspicious day of the coronation of Rama, the youngest queen summoned the King to her palace. She wanted her wish to be fulfilled and asked the King for Rama to be banished to the forest for fourteen years and her son Bharata to be enthroned instead. The King could not believe what he heard, yet he was helpless as he knew he had little choice but to grant the queen's wish. Rama received the news with poise. As he got ready to leave for the forest, his wife Sita insisted on accompanying him—as did his brother Lakshmana. Thus, the three of them left behind all the royal comforts. They were adorned in tree bark and sent to the forest. The unsettled King disowned his youngest queen and threatened to do the same with Bharata if he accepted the throne instead of his elder brother.

Six days since the exile of his son Rama, the King died in his sleep with no one around. The days leading to his death were filled with dramatic incidents. He was in agony, regret and grief, missing his dear son. He recounted the mistake committed in his youth when he shot and killed a boy, mistaking him for a wild elephant during a hunting trip. He remembered the blind and old parents who grieved the death of the only support in their life. The King knew he had to pay a price, by dying a similar death in grief, separated from his dearest son, who is the embodiment of fairness, justice and values. He wished he did not grant the wish to the evil queen, as he lost his sense of vision, hearing and all functions one by one. How much he wished he could do better in his life, in service to himself and his son.

The story further unfolds with Sita (Rama's wife) being abducted by an evil King Ravana, who carried her off in his aerial vehicle. Rama gathers a



coalition and forms an army with the help of numerous monkey kings including the legendary Hanuman. He builds a bridge across the Indian Ocean to Lanka, finds Sita and kills Ravana in a fierce battle. As he re-establishes Dharma, the royal couple is reunited, finally, though for a short period of time. The story continues unfolding daily dilemmas, debates on ideals, demonstration of values, and separation of loved ones for a bigger cause.

The great king who loved his family so dearly, did not recognise the power-play behind the scenes, where one of the younger queens wanted her younger son to be enthroned, instead of the most qualified and eligible elder son, Rama. In a moment of helplessness, driven by fear and anxiety, the King fell prey to the queen's plan that led him to banish his dearest son to the forest. As his own death draws nearer, the King realizes that his act of killing a boy during his hunting trip, is coming back to haunt him.

As the story unfolds, Rama saves the human race by killing a demon king while spending time in the forest. Remarkably, the younger son refuses to accept the crown to the dismay of his 'power hungry' queen mother yet rules the country in the name of his eldest brother, Rama, out of his love and devotion for Rama. This story conveys a compelling narrative: how interconnected events disrupt and create waves of loss and emotional turbulence, yet how perfection and wholeness can be perceived. We look back from the vantage point of the bigger picture, through the eyes of maturity and wisdom. We find new freedom in gaining this historical perspective. We can take new risks and rediscover old dreams and priorities. We can wear purple.

## Chapter Two

# Colourful Foliage: The Diverse and Changing Leaves and Lives of Autumn

Autumn is a particularly beautiful time of year for many people living in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere. This beauty resides in large part among the diverse shapes and colours of leaves that are falling from the deciduous trees that are preparing for Winter and a new life cycle. The foliage of Autumn is indeed quite wonderful—and a gift from mother (and father) nature for all of us.

One might similarly describe the beauty inherent in the Autumnal lives of people as a diversity of shapes and colours transformed by biology, life experiences, sociocultural expectations and gender identity. In some cases, these transformations are shared by all people, regardless of gender, culture or socioeconomic status. In other cases, there are major differences to be found among women and men during these years of Autumn. We set the stage for our exploration of the Autumnal years by briefly reviewing what we now know about the influence of biology, life experiences, social expectations and gender identity on these years of our life.

### Biological Influences

There were several misinterpretations of gender that have contributed to the many prejudices towards women at various times and in the different facets of society—such as that woman is less intellectually capable than man. From physical appearance, a man's brain looked larger than the brain of a woman—and because of this, researchers in the 1800s through the early 1900s took that as women being less mentally capable. It was only much later and with more advanced technology that brain studies found that brain cells are packed more densely in a woman's brain than in a man's brain.

Ben Barres has the unique experience of what it means to be a man and a woman in the field of neurobiology (Vendamtam, 2006). He was born as a

female and attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as Barbara Barres. During his undergraduate years, he solved a difficult mathematical problem that no one else in his class could solve—most of these students were men. His professor had remarked “your boyfriend must have solved it for you.” After Barres had undergone a sex change operation in 1997, when he was 42 years old, his work was commended by a peer who did not know about his operation and thought he was the brother of Barbara Barres.

The brains of men and women function differently as they appear to utilise different parts and different pathways in the brain for the same aim—such as emotion processing, language use and problem solving. For example, Kirsten Jordan, et al (2001) observed in their brain scan of mental three-dimensional figures rotation that the female participants used the brain’s visual circuit (Identification and categorization of the figures) while solving the task. The male participants used surface characteristics of the figures to perform the task. Despite differences in the way men and women engaged this task, there were no significant difference found in the overall performance of the task between the genders in this study. Different pathways to the same goal.

### **Genes and Hormones**

Women are coded genetically similar to men except for a small percentage and this small percentage though minor, has weighty difference (Brizendine, 2006). Scientists once thought that men and women are different due to how we are brought up—that is, the way we are nurtured or sociocultural influences coming from prevalent attitudes in our society, as well extensive media exposure. On the other hand, studies found that by nature, we are already different. For example, women’s brains tend to have a larger communications centre and emotional centre than the brains of men. With the additional cells in this component, women are stronger in language from youth, which they use to communicate what they want. Women typically prefer to have more social connections even in school or in their work. Because of the stronger emotional centre, it might be that

females have a greater capacity for empathy and nurturance. This could be a reason why we tend to find more females in empathetic and nurturing occupations such as nursing, teaching and counselling.

Women are driven by the concoction of her hormones—which determine what the brain is interested in and hence what we are interested in. Hormone production changes at different stages of a woman’s life. From birth till teens, a girl’s hormones are stable. That starts to change in her teens when she reaches puberty. Each month, when oestrogen is produced for about 2 weeks, she is more confident, energetic and sharper. The young woman is more productive and optimistic. Oestrogen is an influential regulator and a good connector with feel-good hormones such as dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, acetylcholine and norepinephrine. This period is followed by another 2 weeks with production of progesterone.

It is not uncommon during these weeks for women to report stronger sensitivity to emotional hints such as perception of approval and acceptance. Progesterone reverses the effects of oestrogen and can be a brain calmativie instrument. Sometimes a woman finds it hard to understand her emotional rollercoaster as she rides through the highs and lows of her hormone-driven brain activities. Besides oestrogen and progesterone, other hormones affecting a woman’s brain includes testosterone which promotes focus and assertiveness. Conversely, oxytocin produces feelings of affection, euphoria and trust—emotional states that are integral to bonding. Cortisol is also an important contributor to the hormonal balance needed by women, pumping adrenaline into the woman’s body: Under this level of cortisol arousal, a pleasant situation is experienced as excitement, while an unpleasant situation is experienced as stress.

### **The Mid-Life Shift**

This monthly rollercoaster effect changes again when a woman reaches her middle adulthood—that is, when she is in her 40s and she first undergoes perimenopause for a few years before entering menopausal phase. At this

time, production of oestrogen drops. This affects some women's feelings. At one end, a woman might experience varying degrees of tiredness, irritability and low moods. A woman in this phase of life might find herself losing interest in the normal activity, even of caregiving to her children and feeling down about the meanings of her life. She might prefer to be alone or to be with certain familiar people. There might be some disruption in family life, as her husband and children could be surprised by the changes in her. Testosterone drops too at this stage which affects some women's feelings towards love and intimacy, as well as a reduction in the biological need to closely nurture children.

At the other end, women might feel more stable, as they no longer go through the regular wave surfing of their hormones. They could figure out what additional meaning they wish to have in their life. Often one would reflect on her life and consider if there is more for her. It is often at this middle adulthood that she might go back to school to get that degree that she had postponed for her family. New interests might emerge regarding what she always wanted to engage. Or she applies for (and gets) a new job in the helping or social-oriented profession. She begins to do extensive mentoring inside her organization or in a non-profit organization instead of seeking a new position in her organization that mostly furthers her own ambition. For example, Valerie was a successful banker throughout her adult life and when she reached 50 years old, she left her bank, took up study in social work. She currently leads a successful substance abuse rehabilitation centre.

It is not uncommon that a new understanding is dawning between a mother and her children—especially if the mother is taking on a new project, assuming a new job or going back to school at this phase in her life. Typically, her children admire their mother in a new way, and they are often inspired in their work as a student by the diligent work in which their mother is engaged. Other even more dramatic transitions can occur. A middle-aged woman might want to divorce her long-time partner: she and her spouse find that they are at a different phase in their life. They have not

realised that they must change together or renegotiate this new phase together. As therapists and relationship coaches, we have often heard: “He is not going to change. I cannot carry on like this.” Bianca divorced her husband when she was in her early 50s, citing personality differences and needs. She wanted different things in her life. She didn’t want to take care of her husband; rather, she wanted to spend more time on her own interests which led to many arguments between them. They remained in contact because of their children and were amicable. When she reached her late 60s, she got back together with her ex-husband and stayed together though she did not re-enter the matrimonial status.

### **Ghosts in the Womb**

While we write about how woman might respond differently in her 50s as compared to when she was 12 years old, recent research had shown that what occurs with a mother when she is carrying her child in pregnancy has considerable effect on the child’s development even later in the child’s life as an adult. Physical health, mental wellness, as well as cognition and emotional development, are all impacted. This highly diverse impact is observed more often in female than male offspring (Brizendine, 2006). A daughter born from a mother stressed during her pregnancy is more anxious and less calm than a child whose mother was less stressed during pregnancy. This is less frequently the case with a son born to a mother who is stressed (Brizendine, 2006).

A girl can readily incorporate her mother’s nervous system into her own. This relationship between mother and daughter is found to be stronger than (or at least different from) that which exists between mother and son (Brizendine, 2006). Ellen is a young adult in her late 20s. She is an only daughter with two brothers. In therapy Ellen recounted that there were ongoing marital conflicts between her mother and father when her mother was pregnant with Ellen, Tense altercations were a common occurrence between this married couple—leaving both mother and father stressed. Ellen’s mother was also often sick and had a poor appetite. In therapy, Ellen presented with anxiety, anorexia and a drinking problem as well as self-

harm. Was there a lingering impact from the discord experienced by Ellen's mother (both when pregnant and after Ellen's birth)? What about the impact after Ellen was born? Was her father distracted, resentful, distant? Are ghosts from the womb and early life haunting Ellen in her adulthood?

Foetus prediction or "foetus programming" is a phenomenon wherein a foetus "predicts its future" while in the womb. The foetus assumes a developmental pathway that optimally adapts itself to its postnatal and adult surroundings i.e., its future world (Brizendine, 2006). The foetus' mother can signal this developmental pathway during pregnancy through her own mental health state, nutrition and addictions. Immediate effects could be observed upon birth: a baby who is easily rattled, small sized or experiencing withdrawal from substances. The bad news is that if the foetus prediction is wrong—if the foetus' physiological adaptations are mismatched with the environment in which she will be living after birth—then the foetus, as a new-born child, will be at higher risk for mental and physical health problems. These health risks include obesity, metabolic and cardiovascular dysfunctions. These risks also include impaired cognitive and mental development which has a delayed impact as the child grows older—leading to depression, anxiety, addictions and other psychiatric conditions (Grover, 2013)

Jade's mother was often unwell and could not keep food inside when she was carrying Jade. She was also grieving for the son she lost in stillbirth before Jade. The prenatal environment would have led the foetus (Jade) to prepare for a bleak future when born. However, after being born, Jade would have found that the world outside is not as bleak and is better than predicted when she was in her mother's womb. Jade would be able to have better nutrition after birth—for she was no longer relying on nutrition she could absorb only from her mother's stressed body. Jade would also no longer be as intimately influenced by the emotions of her grieving mother. However, given that her body was not prepared for the better world, at sixteen years old, Jade was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes mellitus. Foetus

prediction, unfortunately, is often alive and not-so-well in the body and mind of the growing child and young adult.

## **Life Experiences**

Erik Erikson's (1993) theory of psychosocial personality development over the human lifespan consisted of 8 stages. The middle adulthood's developmental stage, according to Erikson, is about finding meaning in life. This stage is about finding generativity and avoiding stagnation. Generativity could be said to be the desire to outlive self by leaving something of value behind for one's family and in one's society, organization or community (Kotre, 1984). Most women and men at this stage will try to establish themselves in their own careers if they feel they have not yet done so. If they have yet to settle down, some mid-life adults will begin to broach the topic with their partner, or they will devote their life to finding this partner with whom they can share a quest for meaning and generativity. If they are married and have not have children, they may begin a family of their own. These all center on a wish to gain a clear sense of being part of a bigger entity than oneself, or as Dale Carnegie wrote, a desire to feel important.

## **Autumn in the Workplace**

Autumnal women and men can be active where they work—their ambition being to move higher up in their organization or to find stability and success in their vocation or professional career. Some women and men might be more drawn to guiding the younger ones through mentorship than achieve a higher position for themselves. They might also be looking at a career change (perhaps to a more social-oriented or helping profession) if they feel their current work is not deriving purpose for them. These mid-life men might take up courses to broaden their horizons, pick up new interests or further their education to move towards the life of meaning they envision. This shift in interests and sense of purpose is sometimes defined as a shift from “being successful *in* the world” to “being successful *for* [on behalf of] the world.” (Jones, 2020)



An example is Toni, who was a company secretary in a big-chained hotel. She had always been a secretary and was very proficient in her duties. When she was in her 50s, the general manager of the chain asked if she would like to take on an additional role as an events consultant manager for the hotel. Her children were grown up and she thought, why not. She found that after taking on this role, she was really more inspired to help her younger teammates of events consultants in their challenges, Toni had often met with them and stayed back late with them to work on their projects. She felt very happy to do that. She was very well respected and sought for advice by her staff.

The Autumnal woman might wish to offer more of herself in the workplace – seeking to become more productive, taking on greater responsibilities or assuming new or additional roles. At this phase of their life, an Autumnal man might wish (like several of the authors) to make organisations more successful by serving as a consultant or executive coach. A woman in the middle of her life might seek to make organizations more successful by serving on the board of a non-profit organization or she might take steps to become a leader in her community-. She is volunteering her time and accumulated expertise to further a community cause. All these options relate directly to the search for greater meaning and wishing to be successful *for* the world rather than just *in* the world (Jones, 2020). For both men and women, this time of life typically involved this search for meaning and significance – this is what generativity is all about.

### **Autumnal Options and Opportunities**

We find other ways in which the men and women of Autumn occupy their time and shift directions in their life. An autumnal woman might experiment with different aspects of her personality or different interests and hobbies at this time. It is also not unusual to see men and women (such as several of us as authors) go back to school for that degree they had postponed. With regard to family life, it is increasingly common for both men and women to delay some of their important decisions about domesticity until early mid-life. In many cases, women are particularly

increased in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century life to hold off on married life—in order to advance their career and retain their independence (especially if living in a culture that remains patriarchal).

These “postmodern” Autumnal women might just be settling down into the matrimonial phase and building their home life and family during their early years of Autumn. If they have children at this stage, some of these women will decide at this point in their life to push aside their own needs so that they might care for young children. They become “soccer moms” (at a somewhat older age than many of the other mothers). They are driving their children to school and band practice. They attend the performances of their children and are dutiful in meeting the emotional and physical needs of their offspring—in many ways being “better” parents than are the younger moms in their community. If a woman chose to start a family at an earlier (more traditional) age, than her children are now grown up and able to care for themselves. In many instances, she will be preparing to relinquish her central role in her children’s life—though, as we will note in a later chapter, the “empty nest” syndrome might be even more commonly experienced among Autumnal men.

### **Multi-Generations and New Commitments**

There is an important social phenomenon that is occurring with the “graying” of many societies in the world. This is a phenomenon that is often overlooked – though it holds major importance for the Autumnal woman and man. At no point in human history have there been as many different generations of men and women living at the same time. Both Autumnal men and women might be reversing their role with the elders in their family-taking care of older family members such as their parents or parents-in-law who might be suffering from ailments. In addition, as they age (and their children age) the autumnal woman and man must often prepare to become a grandparent (or even great grandparent)—and devote time to attending to this next generation (or next two generations).

We find during our Autumnal years that we are often taking care of both our own children and our parents. This challenging condition is often described as a “sandwich.” Demands are being made on time and attention coming from both the younger and older generation. Many Autumnal adults will now find that they are spending more years in taking care of their parents than in taking care of their children. With smaller family sizes, it also means that the Autumnal adult might be taking care of more parents (usually a total of four older adults) than they are taking care of children (an average of two to three children). This family structure is identified as a “bean pole” (with as many older adults as younger children) rather than as the traditional “pyramidal” structure (few of the oldest generation and many of the younger generation).

### **The Autumnal Body and Relationships Between Men and Woman at Mid-Life**

Life for a woman and man at mid-life can change as a result of shifts in their physical state. Their sexual drive might become less prevalent, leading both men and women to express love through more non-physical intimacy—snuggling in bed or on the couch watching TV. Reading a book with one’s partner might be just as satisfying as a night of passion. This runs in line with a woman’s and man’s hormonal changes experienced in mid-life. New ailments are also like to confront the Autumnal woman and man: weaker bones, problems in weight control, fears of cancer, an arrhythmic heart. Life is filled with new physical challenges that can distract one from other concerns regarding life purposes, significance and caring for other people.

Health is also a concern in middle adulthood. Most chronic conditions such as hypertension and diabetes begin to appear during the years of Autumn. There is often a pervasive sense of physical weakness for both Autumnal men and women. This can lead to a change required in one’s lifestyle and to maladaptive coping. If a woman or man has already begun a healthy lifestyle of self-care, exercise, nutrition, social activities, she will often be able to move through this stage with lower stress~ coping with the emerging health challenges in an easy and natural manner.

If the health challenges facing women are not easily and naturally handled, then there can be a role reversal between the genders during the Autumnal years. One of the authors has been faced with the challenge of role reversal. His wife has had to confront some major health challenges, so both she and the author had to adjust their lifestyle and activities within the home: she needed him to take care of her while she was recovering from a fall a few years ago. She has always been fiercely independent—and he has always respected this independence (and found it comforting to know that she could take care of herself!). Things began to change, and a new sense of inter-dependence began to emerge for this couple. Generativity is to be found in this inter-dependence.

A somewhat different story can be told about another couple. For the longest time, Katrina has been a dutiful wife. She has been taking care of her husband and their family. She is strong physically and manages the household capably. However, small physical challenges begin to accumulate. Katrina's bone density decreases. She has a fall and finds that she needs a longer time to rest and recover. She also now needs her husband to take care of her and other family matters while she recovers. This state of needing help from her husband (and perhaps even her children) feels totally foreign to this Autumnal woman—Katrina having been the primary caregiver in her family for many years. She is now being cared for.

This might even provide an opportunity for Katrina's husband to shift his own role in the family and engage changes in his own Autumnal life. Perhaps the husband has always been working outside the home and has left the household decisions to his wife, He finds that roles might have changed – and he actually looks forward to demonstrating his continuing love and affection for Katrina in a new way. He finally gets a chance to do some of the caregiving for Katrina (and his children). Perhaps after retirement, he finds many alternative options to managing the household—how about taking a few cooking classes and purchases one of those fancy new robotic machines that help to vacuum the floors!!

An opposite story can also be told. Penelope is married with 2 sons in her 50s and working as an administrator. She had married in her early 30s and since then she had been taking care of the household. This further increased when she found that her husband, Kurt, had been hiding a gambling problem, 2 years into their marriage, Kurt has sought help for his gambling. During the past 5 years, he was doing better. As he was doing better, Kurt began to contribute to the household, financially and practically. He began to get involved in their sons' education options, vacation plans and family decisions. She found that she was struggling with trusting him to be able to care for the family and to give up her rein. Unfortunately, this led to many disagreements.

After family therapy, Kurt decided to abandon his new role. He continued to let Penelope care for their family in the way to which she was accustomed. We wonder how this return to old patterns impacts on Kurt's old gambling addiction. Was he finding a new purpose in his household activities? In this family can only one adult (Penelope or Kurt) find meaning in doing domestic chores? How often, in many marriages, is the husband blocked from taking on roles that have traditionally been delegated to women? Can there be barriers not only for women to assume roles traditionally assumed to be for men, but also for men to take on roles traditionally assigned to women? Is stagnation found in the imposition of these gender-related barriers?

### **Where Autumnal Paths Diverge for Women and Men**

In many important ways, the Autumnal lives of women and men are similar. We have highlighted many of these shared challenges and opportunities in mid-life. Yet there are important differences between men and women at this important time of life. Their paths tend to diverge. Consequently, at this point, we are going to shift gears and describe some of the differences between men and women during the Autumnal years – because both the physiology and society structures often have differential

impact on women and men. We begin with the role of body and society on women.

The concern for self and others becomes a prevalent polarizing struggle for many women – especially those who have served in a more traditional feminine role—devoting much of their earlier life to meeting the needs of other people. The Other-Directed Autumnal woman might turn during mid-life to her own interests. She will be happy to put her needs first instead of the needs of others. This Autumnal woman has certainly paid her dues and deserves to look after her own delayed dreams – whether this is going back to school, pursuing a special hobby or sport, or simply spending more time gardening, reading or perfecting a French soufflé.

There is another way in which many women begin a new journey in their life that is aligned with their own interests rather than the interests of other people. Some call this being “self-full” rather than either selfish or selfless. Leah, in her late 50s, became more involved in her church, organising and helping out in events and helping the needed. She had always been a homemaker and as her children had grown up and are beginning to have their own lives, Leah began to find that she needed to find another identity for herself. She opened her house to relatives and friends from overseas and made efforts to procure medications and knowledge for what her elderly relatives need for their health and bring them to doctor’s appointments. She does this, not because she feels she needs to care for others only, but because she wants to provide these serves. Leah feels happy and achieves a sense of meaning when she does this “self-full” work.

There is yet another dimension regarding the life experiences of women at this point in their life. This dimension concerns the opposite to generative. It is about stagnation. An Autumnal woman often will reflect on her life and want to do something about her past regrets, either reaching self-acceptance or making up for it. However, if a woman feels she is not able to give back to the family, work or community, perhaps because of ineptness or because she is not indisposed to direct her attention to these

matters. At this point in her life, the Autumnal woman might experience stagnation and a loss of meaningfulness. She feels a sense of regret regarding her past: what opportunities has she lost. She confronts humiliation if she attempts to compare herself to her female peers. They seem to have been successful in life—despite the barriers placed by society against women. These other women seemingly can point to many achievements in their life—often winning the race both as mothers and as successful careerists. They seem to have “had it all.” Super achievers (at least in the mind and heart of the stagnant woman).

Stagnation in mid-life can be quite destructive with regard not only to a loss sense of purpose and meaning in life, but also one’s physical conditions. This is particularly problematic for women. The stagnation for women is often coupled with a loss of oestrogen—which can increase a risk of depression. A life filled with regret, envy and alienation is a life filled with losses. These losses—compounded if there are physical losses such as the onset of chronic medical conditions or physical weakness—can lead to a path of self-harm, such as the excessive use of alcohol or opioids or the turning to excessive gambling as a way to cope with the pain and grief. At this life stage, if one’s coping mechanisms lead to financial ruins, then it becomes challenging for the Autumnal woman to earn back what she has lost monetarily.

Mary came to see one of the authors during her late 50s, to stop her alcohol addiction. Fortunately, Mary was successful in stopping her 40 years of excessive drinking. She had been using alcohol to cope with the disappointment of her mother’s neglect and her husband’s controlling ways and emotional support. Mary chose to stay in the marriage for 40 years so that she might ensure her son has support to finish school and can live his life without undue suffering. When she stopped drinking, Mary finally reflected on all that happened and in time accepted her choices (they were the best that she could do then) and to find ways to feel better for herself at this time in her life. She separated from her husband, reconnected with

her friends and siblings--and even tried working, which she was not allowed to in her marriage.

Mary's reconnection with friends might be of great importance (especially since she left her marriage). Stagnant women like Mary struggle with finding purpose and often pull away from life. During her Autumnal years, Mary and other Autumnal woman who feel stagnant will wish to be alone or relate to only a few other people (often other women who are experiencing similar despair). This is not necessarily a bad thing – for these few, special relationships often serve as pathways for a woman to move out of stagnation into new, more generative engagements (joining a garden club or serving as a volunteer teaching assistant at a nearby school). It is important to note that middle-aged adults, in general, are less likely to devote as much time and energy to friendships than do younger adults. It is critical to note, however, that these Autumnal adults typically prefer quality time with close friends. These few, special relationships provide emotional support and practical guidance. In return, they provide care and support. This reciprocity is particularly important for women mired in stagnation.

Renjith worked in the same office for more than 30 years before his retirement close to the age of 60. He worked in a quasi-government enterprise, where job security was a given and nothing much changed throughout his long career. He has not gone back to school after his teen age years and not read a book during his long career. His routine was fixed (beginning the day with a thorough analysis of the events from the newspaper and ending the day with comparing it with the latest from a radio or television news) and almost everything in his life was predictable. When he came back home on the day of his retirement, after a 'sent-off' party, he commented as he entered his home that he is not the same person who left home in the morning – indicating the impact of the transition and may be even the unknown in his life.



However, he continued his life as enthusiastically as he did before, by turning to gardening and growing vegetables at home. He continued to be punctual and organized, though there was no schedule he needed to follow. He was happier as he could spend more time now outdoor among his plants. Many suggested he could go back to a part time job or start a business. He did not consider any of them, as he thought he has done his part in earning money through work. He continued to remain healthy and free of major ailments. His family and friends appreciated his success at a career that supported his whole family financially and made positive remarks on his passion for gardening.

### **Autumnal Pathways to and from Power and Privilege**

Not all men would find their mid-life years as peaceful and fulfilling as Renjith. Some men who have lived a busy life find it challenging to deal with the reality of not going to work every day either after retirement or due to challenges related to health or forces beyond their control such as markets or technology. They find it challenging to accept the new way of life, either because they do not see any path forward or they grieve the loss of the golden past.

One of the authors remembers a man who retired from an active service from an enterprise, took on a part time job for a small income, not wanting to be perceived as lazy and sitting idle at home. He continued to stay engaged until he found himself bored with the predictable routine and lack of any challenges in his job. He took to drinking more and more, as years progressed, until he became a 'burden' for the employer and the family. Unfortunately, he did not receive any help to recalibrate his life and ended up in his death bed prematurely from a disease.

Some of the men who enjoyed their power and authority derived from their position in an organization or society find it unpleasant to move on to new way of living. We remember an experience in a hospital, where we consulted. An elderly patient was known to be activating the buzzer every now and then, needing attention from the nurses for no valid medical

reason. He was not happy with the attention he received from them and demanded more every day. He took to calling them names and using hurtful words, when he found his expectations were not met. The nurses trained to care for their clients and out of empathy, did not confront the unacceptable behaviour, yet ended up running to their private spaces to cry.

As this male patient commanded and barked orders to his immediate family members, we noticed his deserving mindset, his sense of authority and identity derived from overuse of power. Even when he was in a hospital bed, unable to manage his life on his own and needing assistance to deal with the necessities of daily life, he could not relinquish his habitual patterns and self-image he has built over the years. This is a life of stagnation which is expressed more intensely to people around him through aggressive and controlling behaviours. In some of the Asian societies where age and position are equated to wisdom, where men are 'visible' more than others, these behaviours and lifestyle becomes the norm and sometimes even symbol of strength.

Some men tend to 'soften' a bit in their middle years - as one gets more time to observe life, play with children and reflect about the future, especially the mortality. We have observed some men who used to be perceived as fierce and unforgiving, going through a transformation as their physical abilities deteriorate and the scope for contribution decreases. This in turn affects the way they deal with others, thus becoming milder in their approach to life. If they could, they would assert their control over money, daily decisions and day to day operations in the family or in their office. They would love to advise their grownup children and grandchildren - yet they find themselves unable to do so. They find many of the habits of the new generation unacceptable, yet they are encouraged to find a space of love and acceptance to operate from. In private audiences, they tend to open up more and express their utter dissatisfaction about the current situation. The interesting fact about such men is that they adapt superficially and slowly to begin with, to the changing circumstances, yet

deep down they are holding on to a glorious past and the 'rightness' of their belief systems. They might be on their way to a regenerative future.

We have come across men who have discovered a new way of life in their middle years. His life gets disrupted, for example, when he knows that his partner is dealing with a critical illness or his business collapses or his only grownup son wants him to relocate in order to look after the grandson or he starts wondering what he would do with all the money he has accumulated. This man ventures out into a new territory, being called forth to discover the vastness of the world, enjoy the beauty of travel, experience the delight from interactions with cultures, seek fulfilment from spiritual pursuits and pursue gratification from serving the family as a caretaker for children or doing service in the society. They find allies from various pockets of the society and embark on a new journey of discovery, letting go of any long-term ambitions and thus living in the present moment.

Unlike women, men face the challenge of dealing with a new definition of power in their midlife. For some men, it seems to be a period of loss and struggle, seen from their mindset of stagnation. They face the challenge of dealing with powerlessness and even unworthiness (taking to aggression and drinking) and grieving for their past 'powerfulness' (retelling the old stories, missing the past glory and complaining about the injustice). Those men wonder how they would accept the transition from one to the other. A few others slowly venture out of this stagnated place, reluctantly initially.

The concern for self that always existed in a patriarchal eastern society seems to expand to concern for others in many ways. Some men move to a space of self fulness, applying themselves in ways they have never imagined before, in service of others – including immediate family members and even the larger society. It seems the boundaries between the self and others are becoming less significant and disappearing gradually. Such men find more and more resources within them to be of service to self and others, without compromising any. Spiritual pursuits aid such a shift, providing them

clarity on meaning of life, the concept of wholeness, integrating material and spiritual and fulfilment from contribution.

We remember men who had insisted on special privileges most of their life such as a special plate for him for dinner, toothpaste instead of tooth powder and the privilege of wearing footwear which no one in the family had. Some of them had such privileges in the society as well – owning the only car in the village or having access to a telephone or running a factory with the whole intention of capital gains. Some of them are seen in their later life as being more generous to share such resources, standing up for other's rights and even relinquishing voluntarily for others. For many others, this is a time of generativity and a new chapter in their life – emanating from their willingness to redefine the meaning of power. They discover that they have more power and influence than they ever imagined, including a new identity and thus a new way of being intimate with life.

For other men in the eastern society, such a generative expansion is beyond reach, and hence end up adapting superficially to the perceived loss of power (either societal or physical). Then cope with their deeper dissatisfaction by amplifying and asserting ones' presence through aggressive behaviours or taking to drinking. Some of them withdraw into a shell refusing to engage the world anymore and find solace in complaining to others about the situation in their very private moments.

## **Sociocultural Influences**

Different eras during one's childhood bring up different expectations in life, even at middle adulthood. Much as different trees produce leaves with quite different shapes and Autumnal colours, so different societies and cultures produce quite different challenges and opportunities for women and men at all life phases. A few factors during childhood that could increase risk of mental health issues include lower socioeconomic level of the family, stressful or adverse events witnessed or experienced in the family, school or community-such as family conflicts, divorce, low academic achievement, war, natural disasters, being part of a minority race

or religion and rejection. These factors all are housed in specific societies and reinforced by enduring cultural habits and perspectives. And these habits and perspectives can shift over a short period of time within a specific society.

### **East and West: Two Histories**

A woman or man currently in their 40s, born in the 1970s, experienced a different childhood from another in their 50s and born in the 1960s. America of the 1960s saw the emergence of civil rights, the feminist revolution—and the creation of consumerism. Wal-Mart and the construction of mega-shopping malls led to an emphasis on mass consumption. Even more resources were available to women and men in their daily lives. The first automatic teller machine was introduced and the further convenience this gave to women and men to pursue even more in their lives. There was something especially poignant for women. The first woman went up into space, Valentina Tereshkova, who followed the first men in space. She was a role model for woman “we can do anything we set mind to!”

In Asia in the 1960s, there was the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a socialist movement. The Chinese Cultural Revolution infused all the countries in which Chinese resided. Regardless of the country in which they lived, these Chinese ex-patriates wanted to change the traditional Chinese elitist ideals—such as collectivism (where the group is more important than the individual). The Chinese intellectuals wanted political change leading to a condition in their society where there were no class distinctions and economic progression was available for everyone. These revolutionary ideas affected Singapore too. The decade of the 1960s marked Singapore’s independence. At the same time, Singaporeans saw the rise of women in the workforce, following the decades of 1940s where “samsui” women who wore red hats and laboured at building construction sites. Singapore’s only resources were its people—both men and women.

## Gender and History

Expectations around the world naturally changed during the last half of the 20th Century—leaving behind the earlier decades in which the post-World War II baby boom was prevalent in many societies around the world and decades during which women were valued for looks and were to focus on homemaking and taking care of the family at home. The post-World War II societies in most countries produced new perceptions regarding women and the new roles they might play (as they did during the war as “Rosie the Riveter” on behalf of their countries while their men fought the war). Women were now more independent, and divorce was not as frowned upon as before.

Things were again different for the women growing up in the 1970s. In America, Apple computer and Microsoft were invented, introducing information technology (more and quicker access to information) to the masses. Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister in United Kingdom, and women had a stronger voice and validation of a woman’s strengths (not inferior to men as the view held earlier). In Asia, there was a war between India and Pakistan and the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War was a time of hardship—where American influence entered Asia with the entrance of the American armed forces. We in the East were introduced to a quite different Western culture. Shirley, a young woman living in Vietnam during the war in her country was a singer with amazing vocals. When the war ended, she had to leave or face repercussions for singing to the American soldiers. She accepted the help of her American friend to leave with her family and has been in the United States since the war. Her values appear to be the same as when she was younger during the war: thrifty, hardworking, friendly, empathetic and alert.

Women born during the decades of the 60s and 70s would be in their middle adulthood in the current decade. Their expectations and values would differ from those women who were born in the 1980s. Those born during the 1980s grew up in the times where a royalty, Prince Charles,

married a non-royalty in an almost fairy-tale wedding, bringing back the idea of romantic marriages. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and China ended communism and the Berlin Wall was broken down.

Women and men born in the 1980s grew up where “crazy” is not just crazy and there were treatments for it. However, there was stigma of being atypical to the others and it was not talked about. In many Asian countries primary education became compulsory, and children’s healthcare was routinized. These were policies that had been in place for many years in most Western countries. With basic education and healthcare now mandated in Eastern countries, there was more knowledge shared by the general population. This increased the career and life options for the men and women living in Asian societies. Those living in most Asian countries got healthier. They were less prone to certain preventable diseases because of vaccines and improved health habits.

However, as the lives of most Asians got better (not as forecasted during gestation–foetus prediction), there were higher rates of chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. Asian men and women (particularly women) also began to consider getting married and having children at a later age. Asian women were much more likely by the 1980s to focus on career and personal development. They held higher expectations in their choice of partners. This led to a crisis, not just in Singapore and other Asian countries, but in countries throughout the world where women are more educated and independent. What will marriage look like when women take on more expanded and diverse roles?

## **Gender Identity**

The remarkable Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, believed that men and women at middle adulthood often express previously suppressed aspects of their personality. He held there are two necessary tasks in this phase of life. They are to give up the image of youth and to acknowledge the humanity inherent in their life journey. Identification appeared to be a particularly poignant issue during the Autumnal years—a transitional phase during

which most of us review the fundamental nature of our self as reflected in the events and decisions made in our life. Our identity can be affected by social roles, expectations and individual characteristics. There is expansion of gender identification in the middle adulthood-where men draw on more feminine qualities and women more masculine ones.

### **Gender Shifts**

Men in Autumn will typically continue to identify with being male; but they become more interested in the expression of feelings, intimate relationships and nurturing. Women in Autumn, while maintaining their female identity, can become more assertive, self-confident and achievement-focused (which are traditionally male masculine features). Thus, in middle adulthood, men and women each can adapt their gender identification as they search for and find meaning in this phase of their life. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a science fiction tome by Ursula LeGuin (2016), the major characters (from another world called Gethen) are “ambisexual”. They are gender neutral except for a few days in a month when they take up either male or female characteristics and enter into intimacy with another Gethenite. For other characters in the novel who come from different worlds, this ambisexuality was confusing and often quite challenging.

Not only was it amazing (and perplexing) that Gethenites were not always “in heat” (as are Earthlings), but also that the process of determining during any one encounter that one Gethenite will be the female and the other Gethenite the male. How is this determined? How do these highly evolved creatures keep from getting stuck in one role (as male or as female)? These are interesting questions to bring not only to the Gethenites in LeGuin’s novels, but also to real life Earthlings (like ourselves) who are exploring much more nuances gender identities - including transgender, non-gender specific (and the hundreds of other terms that have been used in recent years to “label” people who do not choose to be placed in one gender of the two traditional gender the two traditional gender categories).



Journalist Gail Sheehy wrote about the sexual diamond in her book, *Passages* (1974). She described changes between the male and female sexual cycle during the Autumnal years. She named this phase “the Switch 40s.” During this phase, men must be able to welcome and incorporate their more feminine side—which is turning up with greater frequency. If the Autumnal male can’t come to terms with their feminine side than they are likely to attempt the diminution of the feminine within themselves (through a defence mechanism known as “projection”) by seeking younger or more superficial women.

Sheehy also wrote about the insufficient information that is available to Autumnal men about what is happening to their own bodies. Women might know what to expect of their bodies—given that menopause has been well studied; however, Sheehy notes that even “(m)enopause creeps up on women”. Sheehy’s last words in *Sexual Diamond* were “The same can be said for both men and women. Consistency of sexual relations is the key to continuously vigorous sexual expression.”

### **Identity and Life Phases**

In a passage from her later book, *New Passages* (1995), Sheehy identified four different generations of people living in America – based on the events that were central to their life when young: the Vietnam Generation (those born between 1946 and 1955), the Me Generation (born between 1956 and 1965) and the Endangers Generation (born between 1966 and 1980). Poetically, she called the different decades of middle adulthood: the Flourishing Forties, the Flaming Fifties and the Serene Sixties. She wrote that men and women were alike in the first decade of their lives and then in the next two decades, they were as far apart as two ends of a pole due to the differences in development. In the fourth and fifth decades, they began to draw closer to each other, taking on characteristics of the other gender before they finally become similar to each other. She invited reader to consider some of the former terrorists turned peacemakers in middle adulthood such Anwar Sadat and Yasir Arafat and famous female leaders

who came into their leaderships in middle adulthood such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi.

In some of our Asian cultures, men are looked after well by their family as they are the bread winners. They wield more power in a patriarchal society. In their autumnal years, after they have crossed the finishing line of their career, they return home with souvenirs from the past. Some choose to take up a new job or start a business, yet the majority choose to spend time at home. The initial celebration of home coming does not last long – they witness their power eroding, the attention on them weakening and demands increasing.

The woman who had been caring for the family and confined to the kitchen most of the time, starts to express her voice that was never heard before. The power shifts in time even though the man tries to re-establish himself in his new identity. The woman, who begins to express the suppressed parts of herself, reveals stories and experiences never heard before, to the shock and surprise of the man. A humbling experience, of course, for him. The woman takes over the major decisions in the family, spends more time in the society and entertains herself with comforts that she missed during her younger years.

## Chapter Three

### We are the Child

What is your experience in reading the Erl King poem for the first time or for the twentieth time? It is, inevitably, an immediately riveting experience, whether one first hears the poem read by another person or reads the poem himself. This is a powerful poem whether one hears the poem as lyrics to a song (the way we first hear it) or as a poem that stands by itself. This poem pulls you in. Goethe seduces you. And the wild ride through the night begins whether this is the first reading or the twentieth.

And what about the Legend of Miaoshan? It is heart-rending to listen to (or read) this tale of child abuse and betrayal. We are drawn to the travails of children—for they are the most vulnerable among us. The pathos inherent in this legend is even greater as we read about the care Miaoshan provides to her father, even after his abuse. It seems that children are often the most forgiving—even of the failures we experience as parents and guardians of the child's welfare. Is it because there is a wisdom and compassion in childhood that often gets “drummed out of us” as we grow older? Or is it simply a matter of us having “no choice” as children regarding the parents to whom we are assigned by fate or a benevolent (or vile) god (though in some Eastern cultures it is believed that children pick their parents prior to birth)?

The ancient story of Ramayana offers yet another compelling and quite troubling portrayal of a beautiful and caring child who is not treated with kindness. As in the poem of the Erl King and the legend of Miaoshan, we witness a father who regrets what he has done in his life –yet it is too late. We might recognize the regrets inherent in the way we have led our own life and see in ourself the blindness to truth – we see that we are unable to see. Have we lost sight of our life purposes? Have we wandered without vision in a life filled with convenient (but dishonest) decisions and in a life

that lacks a caring and sustained response to important moments of interpersonal request (“please just listen to me” or “I need your help right now” or “do you really care about me.”)

## Settings for Transformation

Goethe creates a setting that is ripe with anticipation. So do the narrators of the Miaoshan legend and story of Ramayana. Goethe’s night is one of impending transformation. Both the Miaoshan and Ramayana kings are dying-leaving them open to a final transformation. These are not tales of clearly led lives. These are tales involving multiple actors and multiple generations. We are provided with fathers, children and with characters (both real and imagined) that mess things up (with the help of the father or king). The third party in each tale is often a shadowy figure of the underworld. This shadowy figure often seeks to disrupt the relationship between father and child leading to an estrangement that is deadly. The father and child are bound together by strong filial ties that don’t seem to be holding the two protagonists together. Perhaps, as in a dream, we are actually being introduced to a single protagonist who is portrayed in two different ways: as a father and a child. Perhaps, the shadowy figure is itself a part of our own psyche.

The poem of the Erl King portrays a very menacing occasion. It is “dark and drear,” as in a poem by Edgar Allen Poe. The setting is frightening from the very inception of this narrative. We know something ominous is about to occur. Even the father must have been aware that something was wrong. He puts his guard up and sets his defence. In particular, he sets the defence of denial. Goethe must have been aware of something ominous in his own life at the time. This is a much more darkly textured poem than most that he wrote during this period in his life. Perhaps, the ominous tones in his own life concerned the death of his father. This occurred at about the same time that Goethe wrote this poem. Goethe biographers suggest that his father’s death was never manifest in his work. We suggest that the

threatened or pending death of Goethe's father is evident throughout the poem of the Erl King.

The legend of Miaoshan portrays a father of power and greed and doing as he believed was the best, in his time. His culture (collectivist) plays an influence in his beliefs, so does his powerful position. He feels he needs to be in control, as a man, a father, a husband, a king. He believed his youngest daughter was defiant or wilful and unappreciative of her luxury and responsibilities of her life, as a princess and a daughter. Miaoshan also could be the child of pure intentions and innocence that the King could be not allowed to possess.

In another time, another place, with another role, the King might be different. There was still no excuse to pardon him, except his daughter did. Did she see that the King was doing the best he knew? Did she believe her life is her own responsibility and is not because of what anyone did? Are others' lives their own responsibilities as well? When the King was losing his health and facing death, he might have begun his change. Instead of taking the help to cure him for granted, he took a travel to thank his benefactor in person and continued to change from there. Miaoshan demonstrated the problem when a woman spoke up or had voice for herself in her time. No other person could help her without suffering pains (such as the nuns in the fire, her mother and sisters). And she too suffered for being true to herself. Miaoshan would reflect on these and to come to a generativity search in her autumn. Had she done well? Had she done enough? How about Miaoshan's mother and sisters? They too would have their chance for transformation.

The King portrayed in the Ramayana legend is not so much a figure of darkness as he is a figure of greed and unenlightened ambition mixed with fear. He certainly had enough wealth and power. One of his queens was equally greedy and ambitious. She had assisted him at the war front and can be admired in some ways for the assistance she provided; yet she did not seem to be satisfied with her share of power and authority. She hatched a plan for her son to inherit the kingdom, though the king was not aware of this—nor was her son.

It is fair to assume that she had accumulated lots of dissatisfaction in her role for a very long time, waiting for the opportunity to act. Was the queen recognising and accepting her need to work towards her unfulfilled desires? It doesn't seem so. We are left frustrated. We want to enter the action and fix this set of broken relationships. As in all good morality plays, we know what the right thing to do is and wish those engaged in the immoral actions would see and chose the correct path. But would we be a moral actor if suddenly thrust into the play? Would we choose the correct path given that power and wealth are so close at hand?

The opportunity for transformation resides in all three of our tales. They all begin with a deeply motivating question regarding what decisions we can (and must) make—these decisions being made (like all important decisions in life) under conditions that are not ideal regarding clarity of vision. These transformative conditions inevitably involve volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction—especially common in our postmodern era (Bergquist, 2020). While the story of Ramayana is the oldest of our three tales, it is surprisingly modern or even postmodern: it is about the confusing and elusive nature of truth (a common issue in contemporary times). This story is about the yearning for peace in a world filled with conflict. It is about unremitting Karma and the choices we must each make in life—a form of existential challenge that is all too common in our own 21<sup>st</sup> Century lives. Whether we are preparing for our Autumnal years, in the midst of these years, or are reflecting back on the lessons learned (and not learned) from these years – we are facing the challenges of elusive truth, elusive peace, and elusive choice (Anderson, 1990). Just as the protagonists of the Ramayana story faced many years ago.

### **Finding and Caring for Our Child.**

The father in Goethe's poem loves his child. He holds him tight, knowing that something is wrong. He is the defender of the child (a traditional masculine role), without necessarily being really sensitive to his child's needs. He may be defending his son against the wrong enemy. Who is the

child in the Erl King poem? The child is the small, undeveloped, innocent and vulnerable parts in each of us. This source and character of the child is replicated in the Miaoshan and Ramayana tales: the child is always innocent and vulnerable—wise but unable to take meaningful action based on this wisdom. Within each of us is this wise, vulnerable and often powerless child. Our three tales hold our attention (and the attention of many people from multiple cultures for many years) precisely because they speak to our most intimate experiences in life.

In this book we will confront the child in many domains of our psychic life. We will identify the child in terms of voices that come from other rooms in our life; voices that have not been heard for years; voices that have remained dormant, having played an important and influential role at a much earlier time in our life. We will discuss the child that lives within every mature male in terms of a powerful feminine presence—called the “anima” by Jungians (Jung 1978; Johnson, 1974). We will similarly identify the child that lives within every mature female as a powerful masculine presence—called the “animus” by Jungians. This presence tends to become more prominent in both women and men during our Autumnal years. It is also more commonplace. We will describe the child within every mature man and woman as this child is manifest and finds expression in the daily life that women and men tend to live during the sixth, seventh and eighth decade of life. We will seek to tease out the wisdom that is to be found in the three tales and in the lessons being taught us by the children portrayed in each tale.

There is one major question posed in all three tales and which we pose throughout this book: how should we tend the child? We will suggest that this tending is the work of the soul and that the poem of the Erl King, legend of Miaoshan and story of Ramayana provide women and men during late midlife with insightful and useful challenges regarding the realm and work of the soul. There is no simple way to identify what this soulful work will be for us during our Autumnal years. Each of us must engage this question for ourself—for the work of the soul is specific to each person and each setting. This question is difficult for most of us to answer

because we are accustomed to working in a quite different domain as mature and accomplished human beings. We are comfortable with individual achievement. This, we suggest, is the work not of the soul, but rather of the spirit. We will devote considerable attention in this book to this distinction between work of the soul and work of the spirit.

## **Parent and Child**

Our three tales are rather simple in terms of the number of characters involved. For Goethe there need be only three: the father, the son and the Erl King. Miaoshan requires only the father and daughter, while Ramayana is about nothing more than (nor less than) a father, a son and a conniving wife. Similarly, our lives seem to be a bit simpler during our Autumnal years than they were during earlier years. We are concerned primarily with a few important relationships: our spouse/partner, our family, a few male friends, a few female friends, and a few colleagues at work. We focus on fewer issues and learn from a smaller number of people. This book is about these few, precious relationships.

The relationship between father and child are pivotal in both the legend of Miaoshan and story of Ramayana, as it is in Goethe's poem. The third figure in Ramayana (the conniving wife) is confusing in her manipulative manner—she is the perfect villain (like the stepmother in many fairy tales) but seems to be not quite real: is the King really ready to abandon his cherished son just because of a promise he made to this one wife? This woman seems to hold something more than a promise over the head of her husband. Similarly, the third party in Goethe's poem (the Erl King) is always obscure. It is not even clear whether or not the Erl King is a figment of the child's imagination—just as the powerful influence of the wife in our Ramayana story would seem to be much greater than is realistically warranted.

All our three tales are ostensibly about a man who cares deeply for his cherished child. At one time or another, the father holds his child, clasped tightly in his arms. He holds the child safely and keeps the child warm. Yet these are painful tales concerning parental neglect and abuse (even



murder). The diligent, caring father is guilty of ignoring his child's pleas or his child's plans for her future, when his child most needs help, encouragement and support. In many ways these tales, at first glance, are about "fair weather" dads who are terrific and genuinely admire their beautiful child—until his child really needs help.

We can all benefit from the lessons these tales can teach us as parents with children of our own. We should be there with our children when they are afraid or tempted—when they are searching for an alternative life path that doesn't fit with the norms of our society~ even if we do not think these fears, temptations and plans are realistic. We all have heard stories of the child who threatens suicide, but is not taken seriously by parents, until it is successfully committed. Or about the child who talks with his parents about his friends' use of drugs, only to have his parents offer a superficial solution ("well, just say no!") or dismiss it as nothing but teenage growing pains. We read of the parent who is oblivious to her child's collection of weapons and threats to use these weapons at school. We don't need any additional evidence of parental indifference.

Nelly and Josh, a couple in their fifties had this encounter. Their youngest daughter, Kate, went on her first college summer break to a camping site with her friends. On this camping trip, Kate was introduced for the first time to cannabis. She knew her mother would see it as harmful and says "no" but that her father would say "yes" in order to be "a good father". So, she called her father to "seek approval", without knowing that when she called, her parents were together. Her mother heard everything that was said and her father after putting down the call, boasted to Nelly that Kate called him instead of her. A painful experience for father, mother and child.

### **Could We Be The Child?**

We can push our analysis of the three tales a bit deeper – actually quite a bit deeper. Could the child in all three tales be ourselves? Then who is carrying us and trying to protect us? Who is chasing us? In a collectivistic culture and undivided families (most common in the Eastern world), we

might be treated as a child even during our Autumnal years. We are expected to behave like a child especially in the presence of those who consider us as their children – uncles and aunts in addition to our parents. They have played a significant role in our lives, sometimes lifting us up from poverty, safeguarding us from natural calamities, and taking us on holidays (when our parents were working hard to manage other priorities in the big family). Even during the Autumnal years, men and women in Eastern cultures are obliged to seek out the elders advise. They must keep their elders informed, seek their blessings and allow them to continue to be guardians.

Our three tales all represent perceived deviations from the Eastern cultural tradition. Miaoshan doesn't want to be married the man chosen by her father. A woman (the queen of Ramayana) decided to promote her son as the next king instead of the elder son, who did not protest, as he was banished to the forest. Goethe's child is tempted in many ways (which his father ignores). Do we break the boundaries of a tradition when we support our children in choosing their spouse on their own, without matching horoscopes? What if our child buys an independent house, away from the family home? Do we disrupt the traditions when we (as Asians) relocate to a new country? The strong clasp of the elders and the anxiety associated with protecting the child from temptations slowly take life away from us as young men and women—and as Autumnal adults. We are torn between living the life expected of us like a child and the reality of having grown up—with the opportunity to make independent decisions.

In collectivist Asian cultures, it is not uncommon for parents or elders in the family to make custodial decisions for their children or wards, such as where or what to study, what career to pursue or even the type of relationships to establish. We see this theme in the Legend of Miaoshan, where when and who she is to marry is chosen and decided for her. In contemporary Asian societies, some children still oblige their elders; however, some like Miaoshan turn away from the advice (or demands) of their elders if this is not what they wish for themselves. There will often be social consequences depending on the matter at hand—these consequences

could include being isolated, being criticised for being unfilial, or being literally cast out by the family or community (much as in the case of both Miaoshan and Rama in Ramayana).

Miaoshan's parents could be perceived as poor parents if they did not make good decisions for her. Furthermore, what about the perception of her father as the king of a nation? Would these two roles as father and king engage polarizing challenges in this one man? While the ages of Miaoshan's parents are not mentioned, they are likely be Autumnal man and woman when their children are in their teens and of marriageable age. What would the king's personal challenge be during his Autumnal years, with his two roles? What might he be considering: "what kind of kingdom will I be leaving behind or what kind of king will I be known for? What is the future of my daughters? Will they be okay? Have I planned well for them?" We can envision that it was not the easiest position in which the King finds himself.

Even though most of us are not kings (or queens) and live in a culture that is becoming more receptive to the independence of children, there are still likely to many moments when we are challenged as caring yet open-minded parents. In our work life, when we often play a role as authority (quasi-parent), do we face the kingly challenge of being both supportive and guiding-of being both the kindly boss and the forceful leader? Of even more importance: how do we handle the child inside our own psyche. That child holds a wisdom and sense of opportunity and possibility that can easily be ignored (as in the poem of the Erl King), crushed (as in the legend of Miaoshan) or driven away (as in the story of Ramayana). We have some important decisions to make about how we relate to this child in preparing for, living through, and reflecting back upon our Autumnal years.

## **A Confluence of Generations**

At one level, our three tales concern very contemporary matters, even though these tales come from distant eras. At another level, these tales speak to issues that are eternal – neither contemporary nor dated. They are eternal because they hit at the heart of the human experience. They are sources for reflection by each of us—and they seem to be about one person,

not two or three. The child in these three tales may represent particular aspects of the father, rather than being a separate person. Many therapists and psychological theorists suggest that our dreams are always about various aspects of ourselves and that each character in the dream is representative of some dimension of our own personality. Similarly, the characters in enduring (and often universal) myths may continue to resonate from generation to generation because all these characters represent aspects of ourselves. Thus, the thief in a fairy tale steals the princess's crown. The thief might represent a part of our own personality that wishes to steal something of value from another part of ourselves. The thief might reflect a part of our psyche that wants more status in the world and is willing to do almost anything to gain this status. Perhaps the princess represents a part of our psyche that feels entitled and does not want to give anything away.

Different and often contradictory aspects of self are dramatically played out within the safe confines of our myths, fairy tales and dreams. We can apply this perspective in thinking about all of the protagonists in the Erl King, Miaoshan and Ramayana tales: all of the protagonists may represent specific aspects in the inter-workings of each of us. If we resonate to the central themes and identify with more than one of the characters in these dramas, then perhaps we are embodied in the tale just as we are in our dreams and the other myths, fairy tales – and even songs, movies, and public figures—that resonate with us in a seemingly personal and often emotional manner.

What then can we say about our three tales? What might happen if we think of the child as being part of the father rather than a separate character? This makes some sense given what we know about men (and women) in late midlife. They are in the midst (especially during their 50s) of what some developmental psychologists have described as (and what we have previously labelled as) the “sandwich generation.” That is to say, they are sandwiched between their parents and their children. Autumnal men (and women) are often simultaneously both parents and children—and often grandparents. All of this occurs at the same time.

The multiple protagonists in our three tales might thus be considered all aspects of one person—one psyche. Both parent and child. As in many other poems, legends and dreams, there is a condensation of themes and characters in our three odes. Several different themes are represented in a single symbol or poetic image. In many ways, this same process of condensation occurs during the Autumnal decades. Multiple generations all come together during these decades.

Is this a reflection of our autumnal time – a time when we ponder whether or not we have done enough for all the significant people in our life (both those who are younger and those who are older)? Even more broadly, are we exploring many different dimensions and themes in our life – so that we might discover some higher (and integrating) meaning or purpose in our life? If we are unable to find this meaning or purpose – if we are unable to find acceptance of who we are and where we are—then we could struggle through this phase in our life and find ourselves in a state of stagnation.

### **The Invisible Decades**

We have very few role models to guide us during the Autumnal years or to help us communicate with the child within us or the children whom we raise. These are the invisible decades of our life that are not featured in many societies. The Autumnal decades are invisible, in part, because these years are often a time when women and men turn toward more interior matters and abandon the spotlight. Women, in particular, are likely to be facing the very personal and private challenges associated with abandoning the traditional role as hostess, primary parent and keeper of the social IQ. The urge for spousal appreciation, public approval, and societal status has often grown thin, as has the joy of attending countless social gatherings or whooping it up at the local bar. We therefore become less visible in part because we choose to shift our attention and priorities. We value more private parts of our life, such as family, hobbies, and moments of quiet reflection.

## The New Reality of Mid-Life

This increasing reticence of mature women and men to be in the spotlight doesn't convey the whole story. There are several other major factors contributing to the invisibility of the Autumnal decades of life. Fundamentally, it is a matter of novelty. In many ways the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies are new decades of life. Until very recently, men and women during these decades of life were preparing for or entering retirement-or even preparing for death. Life expectancy and personal health were such that many members of our parent's generation were dying before their Sixtieth birthday or were at least confronting major life infirmities.

Many men and women in the lower economic classes of our societies are still dying during their sixth decade—having spent a life working in unsafe or unsanitary conditions and finding little assistance with health issues. As occupants of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and residents in developed societies, most of us during the Autumnal decades are fortunate. This is not necessarily a time for retirement and certainly not a time to prepare for death. Rather these decades are filled with potential and vitality. George Vaillant has pointed this out in *Triumphs of Experience*, as did Erik Erikson and his colleagues in a previous report called *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (1986). Most societies, however, have not caught up with this new image of the Autumnal years. These new decades of life have not yet been filled with either realistic or compelling images.

### The Leon Ames Syndrome: Where are the Autumnals?

More often than not, the mature male or female figure in a Hollywood movie is a background figure. This is the "Leon Ames Syndrome." We use this label with affection and admiration for Leon Ames, a Hollywood actor who played the role for many years of the stiff but lovable father and grandfather. Ames always seemed to be played off against a beautiful but rebellious daughter, such as Judy Garland in *Meet Me in Saint Louis*. Our colleagues inevitably point out that Fifty to Seventy-Five year old men sometimes are the romantic lead and do get their girl. However, this "girl" usually is much younger. She usually appreciates his wisdom and kindness,

but not his physical appearance—for example, Humphrey Bogart and Audrey Hepburn in *Sabrina*. Or the “girl” is a spinster who finally gets what she has long wanted but never acknowledged. Bogart and Katherine Hepburn play out these roles beautifully in *The African Queen*.

What about non-romantic images of late midlife men? Mature men don’t like to think of themselves as background figures at any point in life. They certainly don’t want to be invisible at a point in life when they are supposed to be at the peak of their power and influence. The challenge comes when Autumnal men are asked to identify the viral, influential midlife men in movies who are actually “acting their age” (rather than playing younger men). It is tough to come up with many of these images. Fortunately, for the concerned Autumnal man there is some relief. While there are not many strong and physically attractive males in Hollywood who are in their Autumnal years, our colleagues have been able to identify some actors who usually portray powerful (and often evil) kingpins of Washington or the corporate boardroom.

It is a bit different when one ventures out from Hollywood and travels across the Pacific Ocean. In the epics of Eastern cultures, there are many more visible men of influence and power. Ample male role models can be identified who are respected and revered because of their rich life experience and wisdom. There are war heroes, musicians, artists and teachers who have trained and counselled the next generation. Some of them, after having enjoyed all the ups and downs of family life, have taken to wandering in the countryside offering their experiences to those who request (and need) this wisdom – as wise counsellors. There have even been a few who ruled over kingdoms and fought off the evil to maintain the legacy and protect ‘dharma’. In recent times, it is common to see some of the Autumnal males in Asia being offered honorary positions as a symbol of respect—yet it is also important to note that they often have been kept far away from actual authority and power.

What about women in the East? During their autumnal years, many women have appeared in epics of the East—as we have seen in the legend of Miaoshan. It is also important to note, however, that these strong and brave

female images are less frequently found than is the case with the image of a strong and brave male. Wise women who taught their disciples about truth, queens who stood up for the morally right, wives who dedicated their lives to protecting their family from evil – they are worshipped and respected in the East as exemplars of profound virtues. We must hesitate, however, in our portrait of the wise and virtuous women in either the East or West – for the typical image of the Autumnal woman of consequence is often coupled in both the East and West with images of envy and vengeance (the evil stepmother and witch of Disney movies and TV soap operas come immediately to mind). These figures are often malevolent and serve as villainous antiheroes, whom the younger and more idealistic men and women in the movie eventually defeat.

Apparently, in contemporary times, the men and women of Autumn do not make for interesting (or inspiring) copy, unless they are in despair or are villains. Often, they are fighting for the good old days, thereby setting the stage for the new visionaries. They may assume the role of historian, archivist or remnant of a bygone era: “I remember when . . . “. It often seems to come as a shock to Autumnal men and women when realizing that they are now those “old” men and women who block progress, exude nostalgia and voice disdain for the new. One of us recently coached a man who confessed: “Frankly, other people often perceive me as being a bit ‘over the hill.’ I always thought of my father in this regard . . . and now I have taken on this senior role. In certain significant ways, I am my father.” Later in this book, we will have more to say about this role, enlisting George Vaillant’s notion of guardianship as a form of mature generativity. Being an “old lady” who holds on to traditions and recalls the “good old days” might not be such a bad thing!

## **Looking Backwards and Forwards**

We are our child, and the parents of our children, and the grandparents of our children’s children. We are a confluence of multiple generations. The Autumnal decades are a time in life for women and men to look both backward and forward; to re-examine old values and dreams; to create new models of maturity and success; to perform multiple roles of caring for self



and other significant people in our life. The big challenge is this: there are no strong existing models of Autumnal life. There are no compelling images in the media. We are lost at sea and therefore must hold on dearly to those aspects of ourselves that are cherished by ourselves and our society. Perhaps in this way we really do become a bit conservative and nostalgic. Or we look back upon actions we have taken during our life and confront profound regret (as in the legend of Miaoshan and story of Ramayana). We ask (or hope) for forgiveness from other people—and even more importantly from ourselves. We look backwards.

At the same time, we often seem to ignore those aspects of ourselves that are emerging or renewed, as Goethe warns us in his poem of the Erl King. We don't know what to anticipate. After all, we are living through invisible decades that have no dominant themes or images. We must look forward and craft a vision of our own personal future. This book, hopefully, helps to shed light on the often darkly lit (even invisible) decades of the forties, fifties and sixties. We wish to provide our current or anticipatory Autumnal reader with distinct illumination and challenge. After all, Autumn is a lovely time of year. The leaves may have fallen to the ground—but they are still vibrant with colour.

## Chapter Four

### Parenting at Midlife

#### Poem of the Erl King

Who rides there so late through the night and wind?

It is the father with his child.

He holds the boy clasped in his arms.

He holds him securely. He keeps him warm.

#### Legend of Miaoshan

Beautiful Princess Miaoshan,

Youngest daughter of King Miaoziuang.

Came to a marriageable age,

Like her two sisters before, her Father chose a powerful wealthy man for her to marry

However she refused.

#### The Great King of the Ramayana

“Oh Rama!” cried the ailing king

Remembering his son, driven to the forest

Just and fair than anyone born

In all three tales, the child is identified as someone special – as a beautiful creation that must be cared for. Yet in each case, something goes amiss. Parenting is not of the highest quality—no award will be given for best Dad of the year or King for the Day. So, what do we do about these tales? Are they nothing more than melodramatic odes regarding ignorance, betrayal or regret? Nothing more than the 2pm Soap Opera on our cable TV that seduces us with a bit of tawdry mischief and misery? Are these tales intended to do no more than reassure us that we are better human beings than those who are portrayed as dysfunctional parents? We suggest that there more to it and that is why these three tales have stood the test of time. At the very least, these are cautionary odes that speak to the forces operating in each of us as we navigate in a world filled with dread, uncertainty and temptation.

Let's first look at the father in the poem of the Erl King. He is a good father. He holds the boy clasped safely in his arms. He holds his child tight. He keeps his child warm. Yet, something is wrong. This is somehow not enough. A father must be something more than a protector. This poem speaks to the tragedy of inadequate fathering and to the failure of men in our society to truly nurture either their child or the more vulnerable and developing aspects of themselves. Even though it is ostensibly about two male figures (father and son), the poem speaks as well to the confusion of many women about their authentic identity.

Like the son in our poem, women are inundated and saturated with multiple identities foisted upon them by a conflicted society. Like the father in Goethe's poem, many women of our time run away from or are in denial about the powerful forces operating in their society that are swirling all around them. In their confusion, Autumnal women find it hard to be consistent and caring parents and role models for both their sons and daughters. We are wounded men who have been raised by fathers who are also wounded (Osherson,1986; Keen, 1992). We are confused and saturated women who have been raised by mothers who were also confused and seeking a clear and consistent identity. We risk perpetuating this estrangement, wounding and confusion in our own sons and daughters.

The King in the Legend of Miaoshan is similarly a good father. He must believe very strongly that his arrangement would be the best for his daughter and their family. With his experience of helping to raise his two elder daughters, it must have been a surprise for the King to receive a different response from his third daughter. Being father, and most importantly being the king, leader of the land, he might not be accustomed to managing someone who is close to him and yet does not defer to him. Furthermore, his beautiful third daughter did not change her mind. She was stubborn—could not let her defiance go. There could have been many factors that led the King to take the drastic actions, leading to the great harm befalling his cherished daughter. This must be a parent's greatest nightmare: raising a child who is beautiful, bright, cherished – yet defiant and stubborn. The child both pulls us in and pushes us away. We are enthralled with our child, yet very angry. It is often our child (as well as our spouse) who evokes the most powerful and conflicting emotions in our heart and leads us to the greatest states of ambivalence and confusion.

What about the elderly king of Ramayana? He is also facing the nightmare of beauty that is discarded. A child is thrown out and greatly harmed. This king is someone (like many parents) who believes, with considerable justification, that his intentions were good with regard to his child. He finds it hard to believe how events have unfolded in his life. Though he can see connections that seem to explain the events, he is at a loss to reconcile with them. He feels regret – the strongest of all emotions (according to recent research findings reported in the emerging field of behavioural economics). Apparently, we are more motivated to avoid regret than we are to avoid a negative experience or to experience a positive experience. The ailing and regretful King cries out—a most painful expression of sorrow.

On the one hand, the King of Ramayana is sad for his son and his plight in the forest. On the other hand, he is filled with sorrow and loneliness in the palace. He is clear that he has not deliberately done anything wrong, yet whatever he did in accordance with his royal responsibilities caused him grief in his old age. Though the treasures and might of the army remain intact, he is poor at heart and weak in his mind. At this point, he does not

know that his role is a small part of a big drama yet to unfold—a lengthy saga that ultimately has inspired generations to contemplate matters of life and death.

We suggest that Autumnals often confront a confusing set of challenges during these years—challenges that we must meet to avoid the regret and sorrow that comes with missed opportunities and wrong decisions. It is in a state of sorrow and regret that we become frozen—that we stagnate. Strategies that might have helped us during an earlier period in our life no longer seem to be effective. In the past, we may have survived major challenges in our life—even poverty, disease or a natural disaster. These survival tactics are no longer working. We may have been King or Queen of our domain at an earlier point in our life—but are now ailing and sorrowful.

Some of us find that we have hardly taken time out to pause and reflect about our own journey. It is scary for us to do it now—for this reflection might challenge our image of self and our mental models of the world in which we live (a world view that protected us during our early years). Unlearning is unsettling for us—for this unlearning is about leaving something behind and learning something new may seem to be beyond our imagination (or may seem to be of little value). It is often even more complex: in this postmodern world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction (Bergquist, 2020) we are often inclined to believe in the “rightness” and quality of what we already know to be true—especially when compared to what we think we can now learn.

As Autumnal women and men we are inclined sometimes to look down upon the life of the “kids” living around us. We disparage their lifestyle and aspirations. We risk becoming stagnant with a heart filled with resentment and a mind filled with outdated beliefs. We are lousy parents to not just our own children, but also our own ongoing growth and development. We cast away our own vitality. We drive our youthful aspirations to the forest and deny the pain in our own race through the dreary night. The central question becomes: why do we turn away from new learning and growth? And how do we remain in a vital state of Spring during the years of

Autumn? We turn now to a more detailed analysis of the forces contributing to stagnation – and suggest ways in which these forces might differ for men and women.

## The Saturated Female

Let's first turn to women and the role of mother to the children we are raising and to our own inner self. Kenneth Gergen (2000) has written about the multiple identities that we piece together during our life as inhabitants of a postmodern world. We are inundated with a wide range of realities and experiences. In *The Saturated Self*, Gergen employs a new word, "multiphrenia" when labelling the primary malady of our time. Since Gergen wrote about the saturated self in 1992, the outbreak of multiphrenia would seem to be even more extensive, given the explosion of information on the Internet and the increasing intimacy of technology in our life. We suggest that women in midlife are particularly vulnerable to multiphrenia, given that they are now confronted with an exceptionally diverse (and often contradictory) set of images about what it means to be a "successful" or "well-adjusted" or "evolving" woman in most contemporary societies. Perhaps their life resembles that of the Kings in our legend and story. Like the two Kings, they have a complex and often contradictory agenda that can easily lead to misguided priorities and unexpected (sometimes even harmful) consequences.

Many Autumnal women have accumulated multiple identities throughout their years of living in evolving societies. Carol Gilligan (1990) has found that these multiple identities can even be formed by young girls prior to or during their teenage years—one of these identities relates to being polite and attentive – being a "good girl." By contrast, there is the identity of authenticity—of being who she "really is" (complete with "inappropriate" opinions and a disdain for polite conversation) As the girl becomes a woman, her identities become even more diverse. These identities are associated with roles a woman plays as daughter, a wife, spouse, grandmother, sister, friend or favourite aunt. There are identities forged in one's career and in areas of study, avocation and recreation—and from many diverse experiences over a forty to sixty year period of time. There is

much swirling around in the head, heart (and soul) of most Autumnal women of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Multiphrenia can take many forms for contemporary Autumnal women. It can be seen in the tendency of some women (in many societies) to move during mid-life from job to job, trying out many different career paths and never quite finding the right place in life. This postmodern malady can also show up as a diffuse sense of anxiety for the Autumnal woman: not knowing what will happen next and feeling helpless and powerless when facing many forces that are demanding her attention. It is particularly important to note that multiphrenia can be exhibited in ways that are quite subtle. During their Autumnal years, some women find much to celebrate in life: career achievements, tangible assets (financial wellbeing, a home, a secure job) and positive family circumstances. Yet these women are unable to enjoy any of these treasures—for they find it hard to consider themselves worthy of these comforts. They are unable even to laugh and have some fun.

Everything these Autumnal women have accumulated stays safe in the locker – not being put to use for themselves and others. Moreover, they worry about their worth and lose sleep over it. Or they try to hold on to what they have with all their might—but find that everything is slipping through their fingers (and heart). They can't acknowledge or engage their treasurers, because these gifts seem both unwarranted and ephemeral. What can we trust, when there is nothing that is enduring and trustworthy?

For these Autumnal women (and for many Autumnal men) the answer (at least in part) resides in one specific dimension in their life: significant and sustained interpersonal relationships. Substantial research (conducted in many cultures) regarding the psychology of women suggests that relationships play a vital role in their lives and development. While men are inclined toward a lifetime developmental pattern that focus on self-sufficiency and individuation, women are inclined toward life patterns that focus on inter-dependence and community.

The Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies (for women) at Wellesley College (located in Massachusetts, USA) was established to better understand these differences among women. The center was also founded to assist female clients in finding a sense of connection with others in their recovery. Engaging a Relational-Cultural Theory, practitioners at the Stone Center empowered women to reciprocate and nurture. To be energized. Even tapping into their creativity. Through mutuality, women affiliated with the Stone Center have been able to find (or develop) and be their authentic selves (the self that Carol Gilligan discovered many young women lose during their early adolescence). Women find their own voice.

Sustained and growth-enhancing identities are formed through the relationships that women establish. Perhaps this is the anecdote to multiphrenia—and mid-life stagnation. A coherent and sustained identity can be found and sustained in the crucible of connectedness. A sense of purpose and new life can be found in the relationships being formed and nourished by women. In the midst of connectedness, finding ample support from other women in their life, the women of Autumn are more inclined to step outside their comfort zone—and wear purple!

## **The Wounded Male**

What about the Autumnal man? Frankly, we are at sea when reflecting on the Autumnal decades of life being lived by most men. Our reflections are difficult not only because these are invisible decades, but also because these reflections are likely to bring up difficult and disturbing feelings and images of our own life and the life of significant men in our lives—most notably our “wounded” father (Osherson, 1986). As mature men and women, we grieve for our wounded father. If we are men, we grieve, as well for our own wounding. We also fear that we are damaging our own sons and daughters—with the aid of our society. These are powerful accusations that we are directing toward one half of the adults living in the contemporary world! How do we come to such outlandish conclusions? And is the damage truly as widespread as we are declaring? Even more fundamentally, what does it mean to say that our fathers are wounded and that we are wounded? Why and how do we directly inflict pain on our own sons and daughters? We



will push our analysis even further by asking: do we somehow wound indirectly by perpetuating and reinforcing expectations regarding the career-orientation of both young men and young women in the middle-class society where most of us live?

To answer these questions, we must go back to the start of the industrial era in both the West and East (especially the West). We must dust off an old sociological term: “alienation.” During the premodern (agrarian) era in most societies, men and women generally worked side by side as a single economic unit. They ran a farm, tended a store, or crafted items to be sold or bartered. They shared most duties in raising their children and producing or distributing various goods and services. We still see this premodern arrangement operating in many 21<sup>st</sup> Century societies (the so-called “developing” or 3<sup>rd</sup> World nations).

In some traditions to be found in many Eastern societies, women played the role of a “partner in dharma” with a man. Her role was to walk alongside, as the man pursues a life of discipline and contribution, practising his profession and contributing to their society. He played the role of master practitioner, teacher, mentor and protector for her. She played the role of supporter, guide, nourisher and caregiver for him. They had the same map to which they could refer—same goals to achieve and a shared, complimentary lifestyle.

Family members lived together, undivided, with multiple generations under the same roof, experiencing diversity and growing older and wiser midst this extended family. Children were looked after by adults who were available, without any specific controls based on “ownership” by parents. Grandparents continued the family legacy and contributed by mediating conflicts, sharing their wisdom and creating a nurturing environment for children. We find similar dynamics operating in many traditional Western societies—the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, represents this premodern family dynamic (in an admittedly romanticized manner) and it plays well in many societies throughout the world (representing a bygone era in these societies).

## The Alienated Life

With advent of the modern (industrial) era, a critical separation of functions took place in North America and most other Western societies. Men began to work outside the home, while women stayed home to tend the children and perform various homemaking chores. Men acquired all the economic power in the family as the exclusive breadwinners. Women had to establish their own base of power by taking charge of the family's home life: child-rearing, domestic spending, food selection and preparation.

Children went to school rather than working alongside their parents in the fields or in the shop. Their mother raised them and they either learned little about work life or, in the case of girls, learned about one type of career, namely homemaking. When children did see their fathers, it was at the end of a long day of work for their father. Typically, he was exhausted and alienated from his work, having chosen (or been forced) to work for someone else. He found himself operating in a large impersonal bureaucracy, rather than working for himself or in a small, family-based business. In recent years, our modern era male also often faced the exhausting and highly frustrating experience of clogged highways and lengthy commutes to a distant workplace.

As a result of this separation of functions, the modern male became alienated from his family, given that he was no longer party to the daily experiences of either his wife or children. Furthermore, the modern male was usually not in the mood for intimacy at the end of a long day of work. He could rarely muster the emotional resources needed for open, affectionate and active engagement with his family. Rather, he was known primarily as a tired, distant and often distracted stranger in their home.

Typically, Dad became a "real person" only on weekends. Thus emerged a new entity: the "Weekend Dad." This shift occurred even before the advent of divorce and split custody parenting. Only on weekends could Dad play around, express joy in life, and show his real self. Weekends suddenly became special. They were usually reserved during the modern era for

“family activities”. In many cases this tradition came to an end during the last half of the Twentieth Century when a postmodern era emerged in many societies around the world (both Western and Eastern): middle class men (and working women) began increasingly to take work home.

Some dads (and moms) became postmodern “global citizens” ~ working in faraway lands or in armed forces, returning only once a year for a month. By the time they establish connections with their family, it is time to leave. We have worked with many of these “globalists” as therapist, coach or consultant. It is not usual for some of these postmodernists (especially men living in Eastern societies) to enforce strict discipline in their short stays with family. They often focus on academic achievements and stress education in a foreign language, thus projecting their own childhood expectations on their family. These postmodernists are just as wounded as the alienated men of the modern era.

Even if these postmodernists stay home, they feel disengaged—having been uprooted from their hereditary traditions and belief systems—especially if coming from Eastern societies. They have been torn apart by the policies of their government, the saturating influence of other cultures (a flattened world)—as well as more dramatically and traumatically by wars and political movements. Western education and way of life has become more attractive to these uprooted men (and women) as they perceive the futility and “obsolesce” of age-old and traditional professions and practices. Very few of these uprooted postmodernists know how to integrate the old and new. Most of them have tried to move to the unfamiliar, yet they are unable to let go of the tried and tested. They thus live in a confused state without clarity of purpose or path. They are caught between two worlds – suspended somewhere over the middle of the Pacific Ocean—neither Eastern nor Western.

We even find this alienating lifestyle operating among men (and many women) who come from lower socio-economic classes (particularly in impoverished societies in both the East and West). These economically challenged postmodernists often must travel to distant lands in search of a job—compelled by hunger and frustrated by living an inevitable life of

poverty. They perceive a lack of opportunities in their hometown and are pulled to the developing cities. They find work as a domestic helper or nanny. They work on construction crews or assembly lines. The wounds afflicted during their growing-up years continue to remain fresh in their minds, influencing their beliefs and attitudes in life. These wounded men and women live in a postmodern world—but are still wounded as alienated actors in a world that seems to offer little support or solace.

### **The Postmodern Parent**

This observation about the continued wounding and uprooting of life, and shifts in parental roles, relates directly to the issue of wounding, for we must conclude that many men were lousy fathers and role models during the industrial era in Western societies and are still not doing a very good job as postmodern parents in both the East and West. Unfortunately, the same can now be said about women caught up in the postmodern world. In part, the continuing dysfunction has to do with the “ghosts” that remain from past generations. During the modern era, children around the world only knew their father in limited and often unfavourable settings. They only saw him when he was alienated from work and family. He was a wounded father. This means that many Autumnal men and women in contemporary times were exposed only to a wounded and wounding model of masculinity during the formative years of their childhood. They often did not see their father when he was energetic and competent. They only saw him when he was tired and cantankerous.

When William married his wife in their early 20s, he believed he was responsible for making sure his wife and family had enough provided for them. He worked long hard hours. William left home before his wife and children were up and came home way past their bedtime. This was his daily routine. During a therapy session, William expressed that he had “no choice”. He hardly saw them. His children are all grown up now and he feels he barely knew them or his wife. These days, he is the one looking after his grandchildren while his children are at work. He expresses gratitude that for his children’s generation there is better work-life balance.

Though both his son and daughter-in-law work, they still make time to be with their children. And he is grateful for the time with his grandchildren. He is given a chance to do some parenting during the Autumnal years. We have previously noted this shifting, more nurturing role played by many Autumnal men (Bergquist, Klaum and Greenberg, 1993; Bergquist, 2012). Unlike the King of Ramayana, William doesn't have to grieve his lost opportunity to be a caring, generative adult-though it took him many (lost) years to discover the value of relationships and connectedness (which, as we have noted, many women have found earlier in their life).

William is not the exception. It is not all doom and dread. There is not just a continued wounding of children by those of us who grew up in a modern era or are now living with the challenges of postmodern life. Today, in our emerging postmodern world, there is greater diversity of lifestyle. We get to explore and try out different ways of living and different enacted values. We might have the opportunity to move back, if we are fortunate, to a more pre-industrial way of life in which family life and work life are more fully integrated. Men (and women) now often work at home. Men help around the house. They are part of a dual career couple and spend "quality time" with their kids. They don't wait, like William, to be caring grandparents. Even if we, as men and women of Autumn, don't live this life, our sons and daughters may have this choice. The "wounding" of men and their offspring may soon end, at least for those who are fortunate enough to benefit from the sporadic prosperity of the contemporary economies operating in most postmodern societies.

Unfortunately, for most of us as Autumnal males, it is too late to establish a more intimate relationship with our own father. Our father may already have died or if he is still alive old habits are hard to break. We must accept what has already occurred in our lives as wounded father and wounded son. We can never fully recover from the lessons learned about what it means to be a male: cold, distant, exhausted, and distracted. Nor can our wives undo the lessons they learned about how to relate to their own father, or about what to expect from and how to protect themselves against a husband who is wounded. We may also be too late when it comes to our own child-

rearing practices. Our children are already grown up and the wounding has already occurred.

We must acknowledge our legacy and the “ghosts” that still exist in our heritage as Autumnal men: during our midlife, as we reflect back on our own life and try to make sense of it. We can’t help but return to our own childhood and our own experiences of father (or the person who played a fathering role in our life). When reflecting on our own role as father, we must, inevitably, return to the wounding and to the grieving associated with this wounding. We inevitably grieve the lost opportunities to connect with our father. We grieve the lost opportunities to see our father in his domain of competence, control and spontaneity. This is usually his work environment. We reflect on the lost opportunities to be there for our own children. We could have shown them what we were like in our own work environment or given them a chance to talk with our colleagues about what we are “really like.”

### **The Autumnal Challenge: Understanding and Ultimately Forging Our Parents (and Ourselves)**

It is critical at this point to provide a more balanced and hopeful note. We are not powerless and can do something about this during our Autumnal years. We can hope for and encourage new child-rearing practices and priorities in our children. We can make sure that the wounding does not continue by taking time now, during our Autumnal years to be with the important people in our life. It is still possible for each of us to establish an energetic, engaging and affirming relationship with our children and our grandchildren. We can be William rather than the remorseful kings in both the Legend of Miaoshan and Story of Ramayana. We don’t have to be in denial like the Goethian father racing through the night in denial about the Erl King. There is the potential for alternative decisions about parenting as a result of the expansion of options in a postmodern world. We can still wear a parental purple.

Nevertheless, there are the challenges many of us face when coming to terms with our own parents during our Autumnal years. Some of us wonder

why we do not experience the love for our father and our mother. Why are we unable to celebrate Father's Day or Mother's Day wholeheartedly-beyond the gifts and greetings? Why can't we feel the same way as our colleagues do? Why are we still being treated like children by our aging parents? Is it out of caring or is it because they deny our growth into adulthood? How should we manage these situations, without hurting our parents and yet regaining control of our own lives? Our deepest desire to look after our aging parents aligns with societal expectations (especially in the East); yet we find ourselves half-hearted and anxious about such a possibility. We tend to live at arm's length from our parents, though we wish we could live much closer. We face daily dilemmas and get exhausted from this push and pull. We are feeling the full weight of our Autumnal years.

Erik Erikson writes about this coming to terms with our own parents and with our own role as parent in an essay he wrote about the movie, *Wild Strawberries* (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, (1986) Erikson considered the central developmental task in the second half of life to be an emotional reconciliation with our own parents. Erikson focuses on Dr. Bork, the elderly protagonist in *Wild Strawberries*. When Dr. Bork falls asleep at the end of the movie, he dreams of his own parents and a real or imagined moment with them that is filled with affection and joy. Previously, in this movie, we gain a much more negative view of Dr. Bork's parents. His mother, who is still alive, seems to be quite cold and judgmental. Dr. Bork's father is never seen in the film and is described by Dr. Bork as very punitive. The only other parental figure in the movie appears in a nightmare when Dr. Bork is being examined again for his medical license and is accused of indifference. There are only two models of male parenting in *Wild Strawberries*. The father is either absence or judgmental.

A similar conclusion has been reached in other studies of wounded fathers. They are either absent or judgmental and as a result tend to wound other men, particularly their sons, through indifference or anger. Thus, the process of reflecting backwards in time for the women and men of Autumn is often filled with sorrow and remorse. This reflection is essential to a late

midlife transformation and a move to generativity. Insofar as we refuse to acknowledge and accept these painful feelings, we will remain entrenched in an alienated world. We will never be able to accept our own father—nor will we be able to accept our own limitations as a parent and spouse. As Erikson suggests, we must first forgive our parents if we are ever to forgive ourselves. Much of what we have to say in the remaining chapters of this book ultimately have to do with this process of mid-life understanding and forgiveness of our parents and (ultimately) ourselves.

## **Parenting Our Children**

Parenting embraces many roles and functions. As biological parents we serve as financial planner, lifeguard, judge and jury, friend, buddy and even parent to our growing children. Even women and men who have never raised children serve as parents to many things in their lives. They serve as “surrogate” parents to the projects they initiate, acting in the role of initiator, overseer, wise counsellor, friendly critic and mentor (Bergquist and Quehl, 2019). Those living in the autumnal years also serve in a parental role when interacting with people who look up to them, work under them or choose in some other way to be influenced by them.

Regardless of the parental role being played, Autumnal men and women tend to look upon these experiences with both joy and sorrow. Furthermore, surrogate parents often go through the same agony and ecstasy as those who are biological parents. On the one hand, we are given the great gift of seeing the success of our children, of people we have taught or trained, of projects we began many years ago. Autumn (and the Autumnal years) is a time for bringing in the harvest; a time when we reap the abundance of what we have sown in earlier years. We observe our daughter’s graduation from medical school, the birth of our son’s first child, the promotion of a young woman we mentored, or the replications and spin-offs of a technological breakthrough we introduced two years ago in our company. Later in life, we witness the graduation of our grandson from high school, the completion of a special post-retirement project we have been putting on hold for many years.



Life seems to be a mixture during our Autumnal years. We can relish our accomplishments, but also mourn our failures. Physically, it is at this time in our life that we start recognising the reduced vitality of our physical body; yet we often also experience renewed passion from within. We explore the unknown parts of our inner world. Some of us during our autumnal years are just starting to discover our 'real' life. We recognise that we had been living someone else's life or at the very least, we have been living a "fake" life that has been strongly influenced by another person or (more broadly) societal expectations. We have been wandering away from our 'true self'.

As we have discovered doing therapy and coaching, this gradual and often both joyous and painful recognition is particularly likely to reveal itself as we deal with our client's encounters with their parents and children. The heart of the matter is often about these central relationships in the lives of our clients. They are up and down in relationship to the people that matter most in their lives. They break free from their previous inauthentic life in large part because they have been able to establish authentic relationships with those who matter most. As we previously noted, it all seems to be about relationships. The crucible of connectedness. The source of Spring renewal midst Autumn.

### **The First Step to Connectedness: Becoming Aware of Our Own Parenting**

Where does this connectedness begin? Unfortunately, it often first requires some deep soul-searching. We must face our past mistakes and inadequacies as biological or surrogate parents. While we can defer a firm and final judgment of our performance in other parts of our lives, the impact of our role as parent or surrogate parent is usually easy to assess by this time. Typically, our children have grown up and left home. Our formal job-related projects are now in the hands of other people. The young employees whom we mentor and whom we coach have moved on to other jobs and new responsibilities. We can do little to correct what has gone wrong.

We witness our son replicating our own self-destructive behaviour when confronting a strong woman. Our daughter can't establish close and trusting relationships with men in part because the two of us have never been very close or trusting of one another. Our son is struggling to find the right woman for him, in part because he doesn't really know what he is looking for (does he want someone like his mother or someone quite different from his mother)? And if our child is gay or transgender, we find it even more difficult to be fully appreciative of the life they are living—having not lived in society that allowed nuanced sexual identity “out of the closet.”

It might not be about a significant person in our life. I could be about the work we have done out in the world. Our “pet” project has been taken over by an “idiot.” He is turning it into a company joke in part because we failed to establish clear performance criteria. The young woman we mentored is not doing a very good job in her new position, perhaps because we encouraged her to move ahead too fast. It's usually too late to make reparations. We can only say “I'm sorry” and hope for some understanding from our children and colleagues, just as we must come to terms with feelings of disappointment and anger regarding our own parents and mentors.

## **The Second Step to Connectedness: Discovering the Parent Within Us**

In reflecting on these experiences in our life, it is often important for us to compare our own behaviour with that manifest by our parents. Children often follow a parents' actions. They begin to model their parent's behaviour—this being what they repeatedly saw while growing up. Thomas presented to one of us, as his therapist, when his wife filed a police complaint about his aggression towards her during the last few years. After several sessions, Thomas revealed that he had witnessed his father's own aggression towards his mother. He recalled that as a young man he felt profoundly angry about his father's abuse of his mother. When he entered his teen age years, Thomas was able to stand up for his mother literally in order to stop his father's abuse.

Following these moments of reflection and recall came realisation. Thomas drew a sad conclusion, that he had become his father, even though he had long detested his father's behaviour. Thomas sympathised with how his eldest son, who had been a witness to Thomas' abuse of his wife when they had marital arguments. Thomas began to explore the source of not only his own anger, but also the anger felt by his father. He recognized that the anger he was directed toward his wife had been displaced from anger he experienced toward his father. Was a similar displacement operating in the life of his father? Could Thomas forgive either his father or himself—as a way somehow to reduce the anger swirling in his head and heart?

A similar dynamic shows up in the lives of many women and men during their Autumnal years—the child replicates (models) the behaviour of his or her parent. One of our colleagues, Kurt, remembers an instance where one of his children (while she was 7 years old) directed a spontaneous remark one day to her father. Her observation was in response to something he said: “You are exactly like my grandfather.” Kurt could not believe what he heard, as it was his strong desire not to be like his father. It took very long for him to reconcile his daughter's comment with his own self-image of “not being my father.”

Kurt came to a realisation of deeper resemblances between himself and his father. This incident remained fresh in his mind for many years, as he continued to create his own unique identity as a father. Many times, our colleague heard his own father speaking from inside himself. Kurt revealed that he found it very compelling to follow these instructions as if they are commands. The efforts continued though for Kurt to be ‘different’ from his father. Fifteen years later, the same child, now growing into her adulthood, made a casual remark to her father: “You remind me of my grandfather and maybe you will be just like him in a few more years.” Kurt wished it was a joke, yet he knew deep in his heart that it was not. His father lingered within him.

## **The Third Step to Connectedness: Recognizing that We Are a Little Late**

This coming to terms with our own parenting is a central, though often overlooked, dimension of soul-searching for the women and men of Autumn. It is an essential step to be taken in moving to connectedness. The next step regards the reestablishment – or in some cases the initial establishment—of authentic relationships. The Autumnal years provide an excellent opportunity for this relationship-building to occur, for there is often a change in the dynamics of one’s family. Unfortunately, this change often does not lead initially to the re-establishment of relationships. It is a bit late and a bit out of synch with what we want in our life as Autumnals (especially Autumnal males). We must recognize that it might not be easy when we seek connectedness.

The change in one’s family dynamics at mid-life is about the so-called “empty nest syndrome” that is often manifest during mid-life for many women and men. Attention has usually been directed to the adjustment of women when faced with the departure of their children from home. The sense of loss experienced by women has been labelled: “the empty nest syndrome.” Researchers in the field of adult development, however, have discovered more recently, that it is not just women who are vulnerable to the empty nest syndrome, especially not women who are trying to balance family and career. These harried women often experience some relief when the kids move out. They miss their kids, but know that they have spent some wonderful, precious time with them during the child rearing years. They sometimes worry about their children’s safety and well-being, especially if they have left home for a foreign land. They might look towards their spouse for reassurance and consolation.

A quite different story can be told for most men. Some of them start remembering those good old days when they experienced deep intimacy with their wife, as they confront the emptiness created by their children leaving home. In many cases, Autumnal men are just beginning to experience the awakening of a new consciousness regarding their interpersonal needs—they are engaged in the first steps of connectedness.

They long for authentic relationships. Imagine that a man in his Fifties or early Sixties arrives home one evening, full of genuine interest in establishing a much warmer and more extensive family life.

He wants to stay home at night and get acquainted with his kids. He longs for more romance with his wife and wishes to be more spontaneous with her. Perhaps they could take an afternoon off just to walk through the garden and “smell the roses.” He begins to talk about his new intentions with his two adolescent children. They listen patiently for several minutes, declare their undying love for their father, and let him know that they have to run off to their own dates and appointments. They give him a quick hug and kiss, then dash out the door. Our midlife male is next seen waiting for his wife to come home from work. Several hours have passed. He has prepared a lovely dinner and declared to himself that he will begin learning how to make gourmet meals. She arrives much later than he thought she would. She is out of breath and distracted. The food is over cooked. He feels a bit hurt. Yet, there is still time for their heart-to-heart conversation.

Our protagonist’s wife listens intently to his declarations of love and commitment. Then, her eyes glistening, she tells her husband that she is very excited about her new assignment at work. She is finally moving into a position in her company when she is being taken seriously as a woman. She is pleased and feels honoured by her husband’s renewed interest in their marriage. He has cooked a wonderful dinner. But she also wants him to know that the job demands are great. She is under a lot of pressure.

Frankly, right now she doesn’t feel very spontaneous—nor does she have much time for evenings alone or even time with the kids on weekends. This should only last a few months or, at most, a few years, but this is a really important time in her life. She doesn’t want to lose the opportunity to finally have her own “day in the sun.” She’s sure her husband understands. She gives him a warm kiss, asks him gently if he wouldn’t mind cleaning the dishes and dashes off to her study to prepare a major staff presentation. It’s got to be ready by tomorrow morning. The scene ends with our midlife male putting on one of his favourite phonograph records from the 1960s

or CDs from the 1970s and 80s. Quietly and sadly he begins to place the dirty plates in the dishwasher.

This is a more realistic version of the “empty nest syndrome.” It focuses on the husband and father, not just the wife and mother. The man has come home too late for either his adolescent kids or his wife. Mature men must recognize the lost opportunities in their lives as lovers and parents. This painful recognition often becomes even greater during our 60s. Most of us were particularly inclined as young men to compromise the time we spend with our children. We were likely to balance off our concern for children with concern about our career. Now in late midlife, we recognize that we should have spent more time with our children and less with the career. As that old adage goes: “When we look back at the end of our life, we never regret spending too little time at work. We do regret spending too little time with the people we love.”

Harry Chapin conveyed this painful insight in his song, *Cat in the Cradle*. The midlife father recognizes that he never delivered on his promise to spend time with his son. Now, in his mature years, he wants to be with him. Unfortunately, his son has become “just like you Dad,” and has no time to spend with his father given career and family obligations. The son becomes the father, and the father must acknowledge the legacy he has left his offspring. The father in *Cat in the Cradle* grieves the loss of a brief opportunity to be an active parent to his children. Tragically, Harry Chapin died at an early age, making his song that much more poignant.

Thornton Wilder captured this same theme in his American classic, *Our Town*. The character Emily in *Our Town* was only able to recognize the profound value inherent in living every day of her life after she died. She could appreciate this life only after she was allowed to look back at the mundane, but precious, world she left behind. Just as poignantly, mature men often look back upon the world of parenting they must now leave behind. As Autumnal men we have come much too late to recognize how precious are these squandered moments.

Grieving and nostalgia aren't the answer. We are still parents. We still have a role to play in our children's lives—even when we reach our late Sixties. But it's a different role. We must rethink and renegotiate these relationships. Our children are now adults. We are ready for establishing new relationships – but in a different family context and in different modes of connectedness. And particularly in new ways with some particularly significant people in our lives who are undergoing their own changes and life challenges—namely, our parents. Through these relationships we can find Spring during our Autumnal years.

### **Parenting Our Parents**

Sometimes we have the opportunity to serve as parents to our own parents as mature men and women. Our mothers and fathers frequently are ill during these decades in our life. Or they are seeking our assistance in various matters. While Western societies usually expect daughters to do the care giving of elderly parents, some men take on the responsibility because they genuinely want to provide this care. It is a tangible way of saying “thank you” to our parents. Many years ago, a colleague, David Meuel (1997), wrote a beautiful and touching poem regarding this transition in roles and the new perspective we must take regarding our parents. He wrote this poem for his father. It is a statement of the memories he shares with his father regarding the many days they spent hiking through the Yosemite Valley in California when they were both younger. It is also a statement about his father's new status as a man who has had a stroke. He calls this poem “High Country”:

When it was time  
to climb the stairs that night,  
Dad went first, like he always did.  
He put his right hand on the railing,  
then dragged each stone foot up  
in slow and strained, supremely careful moves.  
And together we inched our way along.

As we climbed, I thought  
of the pack trips we used to take.  
He was in front then, too,  
his strong, stocky legs  
guiding us over smooth white passes  
that held the sky like open hands.  
He was in front then, too.

But now his legs were thin and weak,  
dry sticks still clinging to the ancient oak.  
Now his high country  
was a room one story up where craggy ledges hung  
in wooden picture frames  
and plants and flowers grew  
in round red earthen pots.

So, to the room we climbed  
And, as we did, I saw in his eyes  
an evening calm.  
This was not a time for tears, they said,  
simply a time for less.

Is David an exception to the societal expectations of the male role in Western societies? As mature men living in a Western society, we may often find it hard to engage in this deeply moving and intimate experience of caring for an elderly and ailing parent. Sadly, this might mean that we miss moments of true intimacy as Western men. The heart-warming children's



book, *Love You Forever*, by Robert Munsch (1995) comes to mind regarding this lost opportunity. It begins with a mother holding her son in her arms singing a lullaby that begins “I’ll love you forever.” It ends with the son holding his elderly mother in his arms singing the same lullaby: “I’ll love you forever.” Is Munsch’s book nothing more than a fairy tale (intended to calm the fears of children and prepare them for bed) Are Western males allowed to do this caring of their ailing parent?

What about the sons and daughters of those who are growing older in Asian countries? Is the son expected to assist a frail father up the stairs or is this the daughter’s duty? And should the daughter or the son take care of their mother when she becomes a widow. In the United States, the daughter is supposed to handle this caring of the elderly parent. How is life different for the Asian woman and man of Autumn? Are societal expectations in Asian societies becoming more “Westernized”? Is the daughter now expected to take a more active role (as part of the feminine liberation in their society)?

The norms regarding parent care do not seem to be changing in any fundamental way. In most Asian societies, it is still an expectation that the son will take care of the parents. The older one in some cultures and the younger in others. This is such a deep-rooted practice, that the son unconsciously takes over that responsibility and designs his life around it, anticipating the possibility that he may need to be home in the years to come. He tries to find a job near his parents’ home, sometimes rejecting offers from distant lands that seem to be beneficial for his career.

He starts preparing his own spouse and children to care for his aging parents, sometimes compromising their comforts, as he offers the best to his parents. He learns to be kind and compassionate to his parents in their old age, taking care of them, thus setting a role model for his own growing up children. The legacy continues. Would some Asian men, at some point in their life, feel they could have done it differently? For those who have been exposed to the Western way of dealing with old age,

would they break some of these norms thus causing friction in the family as they go against the tide?

As Erik Erikson has noted, coming to terms with our own parents is the primary task of the second half of life. We (the authors) have each been given a wonderful opportunity to directly address this task. What a remarkable shift and what a transforming experience this has been for us! It is also transforming for virtually every other man and woman we know or have worked with who has been given and has taken advantage of the opportunity to tend the needs of an aging parent.

## **Grandparenting**

We have already mentioned the “sandwich generation”—the challenge of caring for both a younger and older generation. Even more generally, the Autumnal years might justifiably be labelled the “decades of confluence.” Between 50 and 65 we often interact with and are transformed by two or even three generations. We not only shift our parenting relationships with our children and serve for the first time as parents to our own parents; we are also beginning, in many cases, to engage in the role of grandparent to our children’s offspring. Even if we have no grandchildren, we often begin to serve in a grandparenting role to the organizations in which we work and communities in which we live and wish to serve (Quehl and Bergquist, 2012).

In their study of men and women in their 50s, Bergquist, Greenberg and Klaum (1993, pp. 101-103) found that men were often delighted with their new role as grandparent. This role can serve as partial compensation for the squandered opportunity of many mature men to be active parents during their younger years. Grandparenting is often one of the best antidotes to the “empty nest syndrome” that afflicts many men during late midlife. Many of the women and men we have coached, counselled or interviewed offer uplifting tales regarding their own grandparenting.

Many of us have this opportunity and learn much about ourselves through this inter-generational caregiving role. It is particularly joyful if our own lifestyle has slowed down a bit, affording us more time for child rearing. It

is also a delight if the grandchildren live nearby. Sadly, we have heard many stories of Autumnal women and men who would love to spend extensive time with their grandchildren; however, current jobs or long distances make it impossible. So, they have to appreciate shorter visits with their grandchildren.

Some of the grand children born in Asian cultures grew up in a foreign country. They often look forward to coming back “home” to visit their grandparents and their big, extended family. Grandparents will treat this occasion almost like a festival, preparing months ahead to cook their favourite food, travel to their favourite locations and invite the most important guests. Their life gets a renewal during these months of anticipation and preparation. A Spring-giving time for union and reunion. In our counselling with Asian families, we have found that everything isn’t always so positive. The grand children may feel overwhelmed and exhausted by these social interactions. They crave privacy and personal space. Sometimes, they feel suffocated by the demands of their grandparents—with their “traditional” viewpoints and “constrained” lifestyles. Eventually, these negative experiences and tense family interactions may call for shorter visits that are scheduled farther apart.

These unions and reunions, however, also provide a great opportunity for some grandparents to unlearn and re-learn from this new generation of children. We have worked with Autumnal grandparents who have created a new life (a Spring awakening) as a result of these interactions~ through a balance between accelerated learning and loving support. Unfortunately, we have also worked with many Asian women and men who have missed the opportunity: they feel comfortable with the tried and tested, thus shrinking back into their own shells. As parents, we find it challenging to meet the interests of grandparents while obliging our children’s needs.

Challenges of the sandwich are particularly strong (and prevalent) in Asian societies. When it comes to critical decisions that our children make (such as choosing a life partner), some of our parents in their role as grandparents offer (and demand compliance with) a strong opinion. They insist that their grandchildren consider the reputation of their intended partner’s family.

Age old practices and society's expectations are to be taken into account. Often times, we, as Autumnal parents are caught in a dilemma, experiencing pain and fear as we try to navigate through the slippery terrain of inter-generational conflicts and contradicting views. Respect is still fundamental in Asian societies. At the same time, love for our own children and their freedom to choose their life are fundamental principles to be honoured in 21<sup>st</sup> Century societies (whether Eastern or Western). A dilemma-filled sandwich.

As therapists and life coaches, we also work with men and women have full access to their grandchildren. This is the good news. However, they do not easily connect with their grandchildren. This is the bad news. They would love to spend time playing with their grandkids, but just don't know how. The grandkids seem to be either afraid of their grandparents or feel awkward in showing them any affection or playfulness. One man of Autumn we know who lives in North America has compensated for this by building rocking horses and dollhouses for his grandchildren. He shows them his care in ways that fit with his own renewed interest in both his grandchildren and woodwork. When he is with his grandchildren, while they are rocking or playing in their dollhouse, he loosens up and can be quite demonstrative and playful.

An Autumnal woman with whom we work as her coach finds a similar challenge regarding her relationship with three grandchildren. She was fine in relating to them as youngsters, but now find that they have re-emerged in her life as dismissive adolescents who seem to value nothing other than their smart phones and Internet games. How does she remain (or once again become) engaged with them? The way in for her came through the movies. A theatre near her grandkids' home is one of the new ones that features food and action flicks. While our Autumnal grandmother is not enamoured with Spiderman or the Black Panther, she finds them sufficiently interesting to attend the theater with her grandkids - and the food is surprisingly good (a nutritious salad accompanied by a welcomed glass of white wine). There is a way into the lives of our grandchildren. We have only to be patient. It's worth the wait and exploration given the

transformational nature of these cross-generation relationships. We can find Spring as Autumnal women and men through our grandchildren—we just have to find the best route. This is one of the steps to be taken in the mid-life move to connectedness.

## **We are the Child**

Ultimately, the most important role that we play as parents concerns our own internal child. The poem of the Erl King focuses on this child. Goethe's ode primarily concerns the struggles of a child and the inability or unwillingness of a father to take care of the child that is so much a part of his psyche. This "inner child" is often the butt of jokes about the naiveté of many new age and pop psychology books. These jokes are justified when one seeks to excuse immature and inconsiderate behaviour. We must listen to the legitimate (usually painfully honest) voice of the child within us. We have no business mistaking our own selfish vanity for the authentic voice of our soulful child.

Even though we are now at least Fifty years old, we often still feel like a child. Some have labelled this the fear of being found out. This is often labelled "The Impostor Phenomenon." (Clance,1985) These "impostors" are people:

. . . who have valid, tangible accomplishments yet are haunted by the fear that they cannot keep repeating their successes, or that they are somehow not as capable or as bright as they appear to others. These people are painfully aware of any deficiencies that exist in their knowledge. They tend to see others' strengths and abilities and to admire and overrate the intelligence or accomplishments of those around them, always comparing themselves to these people, always believing that in such comparisons they come up short. (Clance,1985, p. 24)

No matter how successful we have been in our life and no matter how old and wise we are, most of us still fear that other people will catch on to the fact that we are really frightened, foolish, playful, needy and rather

immature kids. We are imposters—parading as mature, competent, rational and serious “leaders” of our family, our organization or even our society. It is all just pretend! Perhaps, we collude in this charade: “I won’t expose your child, if you don’t expose mine.” “I won’t tell anyone that you are an imposter, if you don’t tell them that I am also faking it.”

We wake up some mornings, look at our face in the mirror and surprise our self. “Why does this image in the mirror look so old?” “Isn’t this person in the mirror really the same as that young kid I once was?” We experience a powerful and sometimes either frightening or sorrowful sense that the last twenty to thirty years have slipped by without our awareness. A refrain from Kurt Weill’s “September Song” comes to mind: “But the days go fast when you reach September.” Thirty or forty years are a long time: “How did I let it go by so quickly without taking notice? How do I slow down the next thirty years so that they do not slip by so quickly? After all, I’m still only a child!”

One of the most important shifts that occur for both women and men during their Autumnal decades of life concerns memories of their own parents. In many instances, we can recall our father and mother when they were our age:

Did our father also believe he was still a child? Was our mother just as silly and playful underneath as I am now? Was she just as confused about her identity? What were our father’s experiences like as he made the transition into retirement from being a successful person at work (and a breadwinner for his family)? What about our mother. Was she exploring a new identity now that all of her children have left home? Was she finally being taken seriously in her job? Was she beginning her own soul work at this point in her life?

Can we now gain a new appreciation for our mother and father’s struggles and achievements, given that we are going through some of the same struggles and hopefully arriving at some of the same personal achievements?

What is our role in relating to our parents if they are still alive? Should we recognise the possibility of these struggles in their life and seek to

understand them? Do we have the skills? Do our parents have the openness and ability during these final years of their life to share their midlife challenges and dreams with us— their children—who were brought up in a society that expected parents to be cautious about telling their children too much about their own personal struggles and aspirations. They were supposed to “spare the rod” but “hide the heart”—raising their children in a rather detached manner. Should we as Autumnal children, leave it to our parents to have their own journey in their private world?

One of our colleagues has shared with us his dilemma in relating to his parents. Does he fully support his parents, returning their love and care with his own love and care for them? But he must attend also to his own marriage and his own children. He must attend as well to his own health for care of his parents can be exhausting and they can easily become dependent on him. The story gets even more complex. We are not only caught in the cross-generational dilemmas about appropriate relationships. We must address the connectedness not only with other people, but also the appropriate relationship we must establish with the child within us.

Even though the child is still alive in all mature men and women, there is a way in which the child is not quite what he or she used to be. There is a loss of innocence. We can't be quite as playful as we once were (except with our grandchildren). We are now the senior generation. We are supposed to be wise and patient. We become members of this “senior” generation when one of our parents dies, when we are no longer reporting to someone in our organization, when we are formally in charge, when we became grandparents to our children's own children. At this transformational point in life, we come to realize that we no longer have biological or organizational parents to run interference for us. We now must go it alone. We need to find connectedness in our own unique way with other people and ourselves.

### **What's to Come?**

We propose that women and men of Autumn must use this sense of loss as a means of searching for those aspects of their internal child that are not

only *not* lost—they are actually being found or rediscovered during late midlife. We must align this inner child with the new realities of finding a way to be connected with other people in our lives. As we shall explore more fully in a later chapter the Autumnal years can provide the opportunity for a new “moratorium”. It is a time of life when we can explore new identities, while not be flooded and saturated with multiple, contradictory identities. We can anchor ourself by looking backwards in our life. We identify some aspects of childhood that we abandoned earlier in life, when we were told to be realistic, focused and “grown-up.” Now we can be more childlike: less realistic, more divergent in our exploration of life options, less “grown-up”,

It seems that the Autumnal decades are a perfect time to grant oneself permission to be in a moratorium and to explore alternative personal identities. Important childhood needs express themselves again or for the first time during our Autumnal years. The poem of the Erl King, as well as the Legend of Miashan and Story of Rmayana, suggest that these needs often seem to come from outside the psyche. The Erl King beckons, cajoles, and threatens. The King’s stubborn daughter, Miashan, demands attention to an alternative life path, while the King of the Ramayan recognizes all too late in life that he made the wrong decision with regard to his son (acting as the King rather than the Father). While those forces, temptations, dilemmas, and insights seem to be external in nature, they are actually internal to our psyche. The child in our arms asks for help. The child in our royal family asks for freedom. The son is driven out but still wishes to remain connected. We must be attentive to this inner child or risk the loss of our child to the powerful forces swirling around us.

We will advocate in the remaining chapters of this book that a moratorium should be forged during our Autumnal years. There is no better time in our life for us to explore alternative personal identities. We will explore what it is like to live inside such a moratorium; what it’s like to be at the end of a moratorium; and what it is like to be denied a moratorium in life. It is in a moratorium that we discover the appropriate ways in which to connect with other people and our inner self. It is within the moratorium that we find



an awakened Spring and a soul-fulfilling Autumn. But first, we must turn to a more penetrating analysis of the fearful elements in our psyche that distract us from the moratorium and connectedness, as well as the traditions that block our access to the inner child and the temptations to be found in the draw to external accomplishment – the Spirit’s seduction.

## Chapter Five

### The Voices of Fear, Tradition and the Spirit

#### Poem of the Erl King

My son, why is your face covered up in fear?"

"Father, can you not see the Erl King.

The elfin king with crown and train?"

"My son, it's only the rising mist."

#### Legend of Miaoshan

Out of anger, he sent her to a monastery to do hard labour,

She was beaten and shamed there, under his instructions.

She remained unwavering in her choice.

#### Story of Ramayana

"How could I be blinded from truth?

Why did I fall in this trap or shall I call it fate?

Oh Son, could it be karma or just an evil plan?

How could I order you to be banished?"

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In this second stanza of Goethe's poem, we are faced with the powerful presence of psychological forces in our lives. These forces are at times

benevolent and serve as guides, especially during our youth and early adulthood. These forces, however, can also be quite destructive and vengeful, as witnessed by the many wars, bloody crusades and pogroms that litter our historical landscape. The poem of the Erl King mostly concerns the latter type of male presence. It focuses not on the great events in history but rather on the experiences of one frightened man racing through the night. To be frightened is to be frozen – to be caught in a race against this fear.

When this fear is diffuse, we call it “anxiety.” This is a sign that there might be trouble ahead—as we see in the poem of the Erl King. Many years ago, the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, wrote about the psychological purpose served by anxiety (Freud, 1959). For Freud, anxiety serves as a signal of what is residing in our unconscious and what might happen if this repressed material should rise to the surface. Anxiety acts like a splash of cold water on our face (or perhaps even a slash of acid), warning us not to probe any deeper into what lurks below. Perhaps this is what our father racing through the night has experienced. At some level, he knows that his child is in trouble, but doesn’t want to acknowledge this threat, let alone do anything about it.

In the legend of Miaoshan, we find a similar condition of diffuse anxiety. In this instance, the anxiety is associated with anger. Psychologists tell us that anger and anxiety often occur together. We are angry because we are anxious. We are anxious because we don’t know what to do with our anger. When we are anxious, we do stupid and often violent things. We offer harsh words or vindictive actions. Sadly, we are particularly likely to strike out against those people with whom we are close – much as the King does in sending his daughter to the monastery. The male presence looms large in this legend—exemplifying the tendency of men, in particular, to strike out in anger when anxious.

Our story of Ramayana takes the analysis of anxiety a step further. When we are anxious, we not only do stupid things – we are stupid. Like the King of Ramayana, we are anxiously blind to reality. We stay stuck in outmoded and inaccurate assumptions – and ardently defend these assumptions.

Later, in many instances, like the King of Ramayana, we recognize our stupidity: “How could I be blinded from truth?” But it is usually too late, the damage is done. We have wounded someone we love. We have said things and taken actions that can’t be withdrawn.

The King wonders if it is a matter of fate: can we find someone else to blame or can we ascribe our errant behaviour to some mysterious external force. No, it is our fault. We can only blame our own state of anxiety. As men, we become prideful and arrogant rather than asking for understanding (and perhaps forgiveness) from those we have wounded. The male presence in this tale (and the other two as well) speaks to the challenges regarding fear that faces each of us throughout our life – and in a particular and quite poignant manner during our autumnal years. It is a fear that is diffuse (anxiety) and blocking us from the awakening of our Spring.

There is more to these three tales. They are not just about fear (and anxiety). They are also about power and the hindering force associated with cultural traditions. They are about the impact of spirit and an expanded sense of self on the way in which we treat other people and deal with challenges in our own life. They are about male presence in a more expansive sense. In the second stanza of Goethe’s poem, we witness the male presence (the Erl King) for the first time. It is exhibited in all three of these ways through fear, through tradition, and through spirit.

Similarly, the legend of Miaoshan tells us about an arrogant King who demands that his daughter obey him because he is King and Father (the spirit in operation) and because he (and his daughter) comes from a tradition where masculine authority is to be obeyed. The King that is portrayed in the Story of Ramayana faces comparable challenges and only comes to full recognition regarding how an expanded ego and cultural traditions have led him to blinded, vengeful actions. It isn’t fate that dictates his actions – it is his uncritical acceptance of the traditions that saturate his own thought processes and strongly reinforce his assumptions about being a powerful leader who is never wrong.

We attend in this chapter to these masculine voices and focus on the forces of fear, tradition and spirit that operate in our lives as Autumnal men (and women). Our attention in the next chapter is drawn to the feminine voice—and a focus on options, transformation and soulful work.

## **The Presence of Fear**

The son in Goethe's poem is frightened. The father acknowledges his son's fear but doesn't recognize the source of the fear. Certain childlike aspects of our psyche perceive the threats to our life, our identity, and our integrity long before more "mature" aspects of our psyches kick in. Fear that the child experiences ultimately is related to a much deeper fear that we all experience. This is the fear of extinction or non-existence. We look into the turbulent depths and confusion of the world around us and begin to fear that this world contains no anchor points, no safety net. There is no bottom. As Freud (1959) noted, diffuse anxiety can serve a signal that we are trespassing—wandering into a cavern that is menacing and mysterious.

Kierkegaard (1980) described this existential condition many years ago by drawing a haunting analogy between the existential despair of life and the experience of sailing alone on a stormy sea. We are stranded out there on the boat and can see no shore. We know that the bottom of the sea is many fathoms below. Everything is in disarray as we look in vain for some ground, some source of stability and some sense of continuity.

David is an industrious man. He was always a high achiever in his different careers, first as a college professor, then as a management consultant. He also enjoyed time with his family on the weekends though he was seldom without his phone, to respond to his staff or clients. When David reaches sixty years old, he thought it would be a great idea to let the younger ones take over his management business and he could finally take those trips he had missed taking with his family because of work. However, he found retirement was not as he envisioned. He tried to spend time with his family, but his children now have their own families. He does not really know what he likes to do as he had always worked. Yes, David and his wife took many trips, and these were unhurried as he no longer has to go back to work.

After about a year of retirement, he applied for a part time faculty role in his local university.

The Erl King presents a fearful countenance—an unrelenting and unsympathetic masculine power. The kings of Miaoshan and Ramayana possess even greater masculine power. They are not just powerless fathers (as is the case with the father in Goethe’s poem). These two kings represent the type of power that can corrupt and destroy. Ironically, the Erl, Ramayana and Miaoshan kings and all other forms of male power stand as a bulwark against an even more menacing force. Their masculine power protects us against a profound threat of nothingness. Carl Jung (1938) borrows the term *numinous* from the German theologian, Rudolph Otto (1923), to identify and describe this deep “awe-full” experience. Otto and Jung suggest that the numinous is our experience of the universe in an unfiltered and overwhelming form.

Jung proposes that we set up religious and political institutions as barriers to this experience of the numinous. The Catholic Church protects churchgoers against the numinous, as do many Eastern religions such as Taoism. The Protestant Church, however, offers no such protection, for it encourages its followers to work directly with God, bypassing the mediating role of the church. Jung suggests that Protestants have struggled since the Reformation to come to terms with the numinous and have often constructed other institutions, such as the Third Reich, as a substitute for the church’s mediation.

The three masculine figures (kings) operate much like the Catholic Church or a Fascist state. The three powerful and malevolent kings serve as intermediaries between their subjects (and children) and the awful presence of existential nothingness. In the Goethe poem this nothingness is represented as an impending death of the child. In the tales of Ramayana and Miaoshan the nothingness is represented in the chaos that might ensue from a failure to comply with the commands issued by the mighty King. The three kings are offering several ways in which to escape from confronting the numinous. The many ceremonies, laws, rules, wars and

persecutions mounted under the auspices of masculine power serve as protections for mankind against the numinous.

The King of Ramayana and King of Miaoshan both believe they are doing right by their child—protecting him/her from making bad choices (when in fact the bad choice is being made by them). The father in Goethe's poem holds his son tightly against himself and systematically denies the presence of the Erl King ostensibly to protect his son against the elfin king's threatening presence. In each case, the father (king) and child are one. In each tale, the father is protecting himself as well as his child. Yet, at a very deep level the father knows that a much more terrifying presence lies behind the surface, just as each of us can periodically gain a glimpse of the awe-full presence of nonexistence in our life. We quickly turn away and concentrate on more immediate matters. We hope never to face the numinous head-on without the possibility of escape. We grow stupid in our attempt to control - and often escape - this impending reality.

As we turn specifically to the Legend of Miaoshan, we encounter a very powerful masculine force. This force is frightened—perhaps even more frightening than the numinous. His extreme methods to continue to maintain control and protect his power were at the expense of the lives of other important people in his life. He could not see the path his daughter wanted to traverse. She wanted to be a nun. The King did not realize that her choice could actually benefit his politics. He became stupid and lost his ability to think strategically. He too may not have wanted to deal with luminosity which he could not control. Could it be diffused anxiety that was enveloping the King? Was he fearful of something much bigger than the defiance of his daughter? Does his own frightening forcefulness trump the power of an imposing sense of nothingness? Has anxiety led to stupid actions?

What about the legendary King of Ramayana? He had a kingdom to protect, a 'guru' to which he should listen, a tradition to follow and a reputation to uphold. Did he consider calling his son back from the forest, during his last days of misery and while he is facing death? Did he choose to ignore his own desires springing from his heart in the light of his mighty

responsibilities as a king? Or did he discover something to justify his own suffering in the name of anything, he could make sense? Did he block the presence of the numinous during his last days? Masculine power pervades the Ramayana story. Power is engaged in order to address anxiety and fear of the numinous—but it leads instead to stupid thinking and to the failure of our king to test his assumptions and to find the truth.

As we look back from our autumnal years, we see ourselves in our youthful years, seeking asylum in the business of domestic responsibilities, professional growth and career. Sometimes we seek relief in societal work outside our mainstream profession. We keep ourselves engaged in our renewal routines such as exercise, diet and personal growth, thus staying away from the possibility of facing the numinous alone, without a place to hide. We look for ways in which to stave off anxiety. As we enter our Autumnal years, the old mechanisms for guarding against the numinous seem to lose their effectiveness. For the first time in our life, we must face our own mortality. We begin to count the years of our life not from the time since our birth but instead from the probable time until our death.

This shift in existential perspective may lead to a sense of late midlife crisis. The first person to identify the "midlife crisis" was Elliot Jacques (1965). He spoke of this time in life as an existential crisis, not the more mundane concerns of men in their forties about changes in their own values and aspirations (Strenger and Ruttenberg, 2008). Jacques thought that the crisis is likely to occur not in the early forties (as many later midlife "experts" have suggested) but in our late forties and early Fifties ~ at the point when we can no longer defer consideration of these deeper, existential matters.

As Vaillant noted in his own longitudinal study, there is not much of a connection between participation in religious activities or in an increased attention to spiritual matters—unless the mature Autumnal is in crisis. Vaillant (2012, p. 345) suggests that religion "is [primarily] a source of comfort for people whose concrete sources of love are limited." We would respectfully disagree with Vaillant and take more of a Jungian perspective. We think it is not just a matter of inadequate love. It is a confrontation with the awe-full-ness of the numinous and the confrontation with our own



mortality. This deeper level of spiritual struggle might not always show up in Vaillant's interviews or in the lives of the men he was studying (graduates of Harvard).

It might show up instead in poetic and philosophical inquiries regarding the Autumnal years. For instance, in his book, *Crossing the Unknown Sea*, David Whyte (2002) quotes Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry (translated by Robert Bly):

"I am the rest between two notes  
which are somehow always in discord  
because Death's note wants to climb over ~~~  
but in the dark interval, reconciled,  
they stay there trembling,  
And the song goes on, beautiful."

During our Autumnal years, we also are more likely to focus internally on our own life choices and values. This will inevitably lead us to a more serious and sustained consideration of life purposes and ultimately to an experience of the numinous. As we seek out life purposes, we are propelled downward to a consideration of the personal and spiritual foundations underlying and giving meaning to these purposes. Our meeting with the numinous and thoughts about our own mortality raises many questions. We are in a way compelled to look within, which may not be comfortable for many of us. We try to stay busy as always, getting 'distracted' in numerous ways, so that we need not face the truth within us. This will not last very long—as life surprises us with opportunities to begin this journey with renewed intensity. Though, the experiences may not always be pleasant in the beginning.

Fortunately, as Autumnal adults we are often a little more courageous. We can face the numinous head on—for at least a few minutes at a time. Our accumulated life experiences teach us much about failure and a sense of nothingness. We know that we can survive despair and that our fear of the numinous is ultimately about our own internal strength and courage. The

children of Ramayana and Miaoshan can teach each of us—at whatever our age—about courage and about what it means to stand up for our principles and our sense of self. A noted American psychologist, O. Hobart Mowrer (1961), has even suggested that anxiety is a signal not of the emergence of some unconscious threat, but is more directly a signal of our alienation from self. We have failed to be courageous and have taken the easy path—we have “sinned” in straying from our own personal integrity. Maybe this is the ultimate source of anxiety in the lives of our kings of Miaoshan and Ramayana—they have been expedient rulers and have wandered away for their own vision and sense of purpose. We can do better as Autumnals.

As mid-life Centurians, we will find that wisdom and maturity are the most powerful forces to have at our side when we attend to the numinous. Perhaps that is why the Erl King is mounting such a strong attack against our son and our self. He knows that we may soon discover a profound, transforming truth: we no longer need him to protect us from a powerful and unbridled fear of existential nothingness. The young queen in Ramayana, like the Erl King, snatches away the dear son from the King’s arms, leaving him to wonder what is left of him now. As Autumnal women and men, we can risk the loss of certainty and are willing to set sail on a stormy psychic sea—if it will bring us new personal insights and a renewed sense of life’s purposes. If it will reawaken our Spring. If it enables us to wear purple and celebrate our own unique life path.

## **The Presence of Tradition**

During our autumnal years, we fend off the numinous through the establishment of traditions. We preserve these traditions. We enact various rituals, rules and modes of governance. Autumn men and women love traditions—especially Autumnal men. Vaillant identifies this as the role in later mid-life of cultural guardian or keeper of the meaning. We will spend more time with this concept later in this book and relate it to three other forms of generativity (as well as the challenge of avoiding late mid-life stagnation).

When we are being honest with ourselves, most of us, as Autumnal males and females, will acknowledge that we respond fully and passionately to symbols and statements of tradition—parades, ceremonies, award banquets, even the flying of flags. At the heart of the matter is the sense of continuity. In our love of tradition, we like to know that things aren't going to change very much. Even if we are addicted to change, we want to perpetuate the same, predictable rates of change in our life or organization. The continuation of change at the same rate, ironically, is more reassuring than either variability or reduction in the rate of change. Autumnals who long for tradition and continuity are inclined to be loyal (even heroic) and will offer thoughtful and heartfelt appreciation for another person's accomplishments. This love for tradition and continuity, however, can also bring about resistance to change, misguided patriotism, and eventually a dogmatic perspective on the world.

Continuity in both its constructive and destructive form is an important early element in the poem of the Erl King. Beginning with the second stanza we know that some of the same things must have happened before this scene occurred. By contrast, Miaoshan was defying tradition - marriage to be determined by parents. We know this because it had happened twice before. Her sisters respected the tradition. The profound reaction of her father to her rebelliousness also signals the strength (and repressive quality) of this tradition. The king was resisting and trying to protect the tradition-one that is about being obedient to parents and elders as well as to the king of their land. Change would not be easy.

We can also point to the trap of tradition that ensnared the king of Ramayana. He justified his own anxiety, misery and suffering in the name of a tradition and for the values that he is expected to uphold. The stupidity of anxiety is exacerbated when mixed well with tradition. Societal analysts (e.g. Menzies, 1988) write about ways in which traditions and cultures can serve as containers for the anxiety that can pervade and freeze an institution that is anxiety-prone (such as health care and education). These containers can replace the alternative reaction to anxiety (violence)—the reaction that is exemplified in all three of our tales. Rianne Eisler (1986) identifies these

two optional responses as the creation of a “chalice” to contain the anxiety or the use of the “blade” to redirect anxiety toward defeat of an imagined enemy—and suggests that the chalice is more often associated with feminine energy, while the blade is more often to be found in the presence of strong masculine energy (as engaged by our three kings). We would suggest that it is possible to bring the chalice (tradition) together with the blade (power) in order to produce an even more troublesome presence.

Some of our wisdom traditions, based on their teachings, guide us to transform our perception of existence from limited to unlimited – thus overcoming the threat of damage and decay caused in space and time, imposed by the fear of mortality. In eastern traditions especially, the ritualistic life and the teachings provide us hope for a life hereafter and even a life, here and now free from the limitations and fears of the mind. In our contemplative moments, we are encouraged to recount the merits we might have accumulated and ponder about our true identity. We are invited to compensate for the slips in our early years of life, so that life hereafter is of a better quality.

This allows us to regain some of our lost power and begin trusting something outside of ourselves, especially when we are threatened with the possibility of something valuable being taken away from us. The father in the Goethe poem experiences a similar situation, where he badly needs something on which to hold on. In such situations, we are often encountered by fundamental doubts: would the tradition that I discarded till this point in my life, come to my rescue at the end? Should I switch my tradition and begin practising some new beliefs, because the one that I trusted so far does not seem to work?

The son recognizes the Erl King. He must have seen him before. Even though the son is a child, he is not naive. He has been around and has probably played through this game before. However, this time (as in the game played by George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*) the game changes and leads ultimately to destruction and even death. The child is never naive in the playing of inter-psychic games; yet the child preserves

an innocence and honesty that enables him to see everything. He even sees that which he most fears: the experience of the numinous.

How can the child recognize the Erl King? The child recognizes the Erl King because this elfin king is the primary force that has kept the inner child underdeveloped for many years. Perhaps the child can learn from the defiant Miaoshan—and stand up for what he believes is a right path. Does he really need to be protected in his father's arms? Can't he find his own identity, as does Miaoshan? Does the child believe that punishment awaits him - as it awaits Miaoshan and the son in Ramayana - if he seeks to be independent of his father. Or does the father lack the focus we find in the tales of Miaoshan and Ramayana. He might be an easy mark—meaning that his son might be able to find independence. This is where the Erl King enters the picture. Similarly, this is where the young queen of Ramayana challenges the son indirectly.

The Erl King has always been there to distract the father from tending to his son. However, previously the Erl King has probably made his offers directly to the father, offering him gold, his daughters, power, fame or perhaps a little booze or dope. This time the Erl King is even more serious in his intentions and is directing his attention to the son, for the child is threatening to grow up—and become independent.

Voices are being heard by the son and by the father. A feminine presence is more obvious in the father's life as he enters late midlife. The father is more interested in matters of the soul. Most importantly, the child's voice is becoming louder, stronger, more convincing and persistent. A voice not unlike that of Miaoshan is to be heard. It is all very threatening for both the Erl King and father. Who gets banned from the kingdom? Who will later regret the actions that have been taken? Do we curse fate or our restrictive traditions? Do we finally turn to our own complicity and make restitutions - are we left with the sorrow that befell the King of Ramayana? Would we be embarrassed to wear purple—do we deserve the awakening of our Spring?

## The Presence of Spirit

Miaoshan's and Ramayana's kings (and the Erl King) have traditional male power along with all the symbolic accoutrements ("crown and train"). They not only have both fear and tradition on their side, these kings also have spirit, which is a force in life that energizes and motivates. Spirit manifests in encouragement, aspiration, and movement to a higher plain, improvement, and achievement. Spirit is based in and manifests through vision (a "sighting"). The three kings directly manifest spirit in their crowns and other court adornments—indicating that they have attained a high status in their world (legitimate or mythic). They are kings with formal power and authority. Spirit is very responsive to and often embedded in these forms of power.

While the Erl King, Ramayana's King and Miaoshan's king all possess an impressive amount of spirit, they lack any soul. This second force, soul, is based in and manifests itself through voice (songs, shouts, groans) rather than vision. Spirit is about the future. Soul is about the present. Soul gains its power from simple acts of dedication and devotion, rather than from formal power. Soul is manifest in humility, sacrifice, community and commitment. None of the three kings exhibit these attributes. Thomas Moore (1992, p. 5) suggests that soul "is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance."

Vision gets foggy when spirit is not clear. Voice is muted when soul is not present. Women tend to move from soul to spirit (probably the male voice inside them) in their life, particularly those who have adopted a traditional role in society. They typically seek 'their' voice throughout the first part of their life yet look toward vision during the second half of life (Belenky, et al, 1997). By contrast, men tend to move from spirit to soul during their adult life. They tend to seek out vision during the first forty to fifty years of their life: the "cause," the "dream" and their "identity". During the second half of life, men turn to voice, to song, and to the sounds of loss (sobs) and renewal (shouts). Thus, as women move away from soul and toward spirit,

and as men move at the same time from spirit to soul, they “pass in the night.” (Sheehy, 1974)

We see this often sad or frustrating switching of roles and focus in the popular song, “Send in the Clowns,” from Steven Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music*. The two characters who sing this song are both in late midlife. They describe how each time one of them is at last on the ground (soul), the other is swinging in mid-air (spirit). Using the metaphor of the circus, we gain a sense that the theatre of the absurd or French farce is being played out by two aging and sad-faced clowns. One of them is always up on the trapeze seeking applause, while the other stands at the side of the ring looking up with disgust (and envy) at their partner “making a fool of him/herself.” Then the envious clown climbs up to the trapeze, only to discover that her/his partner came down another ladder to join them.

There they are . . . two clowns who have changed places. One clown (now the female) is trapped by the spotlight and seduced by the applause. This clown is soon swinging about in egoistic glee, having become inflated with spirit. Their partner (now the male) stands beside the circus ring, ruminating on painful lessons to be learned about envy, loneliness and the loss of public adoration. These lessons are hard-won gifts of the soul. They lead men to new levels of maturity, just as lessons of the spirit enable women during late midlife to mature and blossom. Often while mature men are learning their soulful lessons, they are looking up at their wives and loved ones as these women perform their spirited midlife acts on the trapeze. This also is an important aspect of our soul work, as we suggested in Chapter Three, while describing the “empty nest syndrome.”

From an Asian cultural perspective, most males were ‘given’ their voice (spirit) during their youth. Most are encouraged to be tough (“men don’t shed tears”) and to be outspoken (“speak up”). While these forces also operate in Western cultures, they are stronger in many Asian societies, where the young man’s place in society is constantly re-affirmed by social norms. The reverse is true for most females in present day Asian cultures: young women are still seen but not heard!

As these Asian men and women go through and arrive at their years of Autumn, they find their sight and voice reversed. Autumnal men might begin to speak less frequently and find that they are looking at life differently through their eyes. This shift might not be unique to Asian men—it might be a more universal phenomenon. For instance, a South African, Oliver Tambo, who was Nelson Mandela’s closest friend, recounted that young Mandela was “passionate, emotional, sensitive, quickly stung to bitterness and retaliation by insult and patronage”. Mandela himself shared that “I came out mature” after 27 years in prison. He was 71 when he was released.

Autumnal women—especially from Asia—seem to find their voice after “seeing the truth”. They cannot simply speak. They have traditionally been restricted by responsibilities—they are kept busy. They are seen but not heard, threatened by criticism. They are seen through their attire—and in some cultures only their eyes are revealed. However, young women today in all cultures can see (even through their burkas). And, in seeing, they build their own insights. Furthermore, these young women have found other ways to express themselves besides speech. For example, it is not uncommon for a Muslim woman to wear what she likes underneath her abaya (a long outer cloak) and the abayas go into the closet at a women-only party.

June shared with one of us that when she was younger, she could not go to school, as her family was poor. She helped her mother at her food stall. Every day, she would be criticised for something, “why can’t you do that properly, are you stupid”, “you are so useless, you cannot do anything” and she had no friends. She knew that she needed to find her way out. In her teens, she began to teach herself to read through borrowing books she could find at the library. She married at 21 and was able to help her husband administer his fish business. Today, in her 60s, June has begun to speak out. She more openly shares what she thinks and feels and also act on them. It took her these many decades to find her voice.

Iris used to work in a premium European bank during her early 20s. She was an event manager. Wonderful perks were available—such as the people



with whom she worked and the global events she managed. However, she barely had a break. Her phone was always on and needed to be answered. There was no day or night in this role when she was not working with different regions and time zone. It could be a call at midnight to discuss details of a project or being woken at 6am on Sunday to come into the office. She often woke up, having to figure out what date it was, where she was and what project she was on that day. She was all about work. And her personal culture was saturated with sacrifice and selflessness. When she eventually was able to remove her blindfold, to alter her perspective and take a risk, she decided to leave the bank.

Like the King of the Ramayana, she discovered that she had been blinded by the culture she had created for herself—a culture that was reinforced by the broader culture in which she lived and worked. Hopefully, Iris will not face the profound regret later in her life that is so tellingly conveyed in the story of Ramayana. When we feel uncomfortable with ourselves, with other people or with the situation in which we find ourselves, then we must find the courage to change. We must begin to do the work of the soul rather than the spirit. Our ego-centric, spirit-induced anxiety must not lead us to be abrasive or avoidant. Instead, in our anxiety and discomfort, we can choose to be patient and soulfully reflective. We can seek to understand what is happening in front of us—then decide if our perspective stays the same or is ready to be altered. As a colleague of ours once said, “to be safe is a privilege... we can however seek to be brave”.

## **Denial of the Male Presence**

When we are confronted during our Autumnal years with a powerful male presence—either in ourselves or in other people with whom we affiliate (especially those we love)—there is a typical reaction. We deny the presence of this powerful force. In the poem of the Erl King, we find that the father responds to the male voice in this very typical manner. He makes extensive use of denial – an old psychological defence. The father denies that the Erl King exists. He sees only the mist. His vision (spirit) is fuzzy, which is remarkable given that this is the preferred domain of mature men. Perhaps the father has helped to create the mist as a way of blocking out the Erl

King, who is in turn blocking out the power of the numinous. The father might even be using alcohol, drugs or sex for assistance in this blurring of vision. Gerald May (2007) has suggested that significant developmental work (especially spiritual work) can never take place as long as we rely on and shield ourselves with alcohol or other addictive and sense-dulling substances.

Our three tales are filled with male energy. This is not the voice that either men or women should be listening to at this Autumnal point in their lives. The actions taken by the Erl King and Miaoshan King represent more of the same old thing—what powerful men engage during their Thirties and Forties. The legendary king of Ramayana is not too far too – he was trying to preserve what he had gathered in his earlier years, beginning with what has been handed over to him from generations before. The young queen of Ramayana was different – she heeded to her male voice. The old, wicked woman advisor, who was her confidante and personal helper in the palace, slowly and steadily, nudged the young queen to listen to her inner voice.

Brendan prided himself for his fitness, energy and his work conscientiousness since his youth. He found that when he and his wife were in their forties, their quarrels intensified (was his wife speaking to him as his anima?). He did not understand why his wife of twenty years was picking at him. His wife tried couples therapy with him. Brendan however did not think there was any problem and blamed it on his wife going through early menopause. Truth be told, Brendan was gambling heavily and spending money indulgently. After another ten more years of being ignored, Brendan's wife told him to leave if he was going to continue as he was.

Even though Brendan did seek help for his problems, he was not entirely keen to give up gambling and spending. He would rather take up a second job to have enough money for his habits and insufficient to save. When he was almost sixty, he had been unable to continue with his fitness regime because of his increasing frailty (also from working two jobs full time) and was beginning to face health problems. He began to worry if he could continue to be hired in his company as he gets closer to retirement age or

if he would have money for medical. Instead of addressing his concerns, he hid them behind his habits of gambling (“oh if I win, then I would not have to worry about my finances”) and buying (“I feel happy, looking at these things”).

We need to move beyond denial and step beyond our early adult behaviour. We should be listening to the feminine voice, as represented by the boy in our arms or our daughter. The father cradles his son in a very protective and nurturing manner. In many ways this is a feminine image. Women are more likely than men to provide a womb, a crib, a warm and supportive container. As we noted earlier, Rianne Eisler (1986) suggests that women provide chalices, whereas men provide swords when protecting their communities. Men typically reduce anxiety in a community by providing protection and physical strength. Women typically reduce anxiety by providing a container for the anxiety. To repeat, we propose that masculine power reduces anxiety through work of the spirit. Feminine power reduces anxiety through work of the soul.

Soul is grounded, yet longs to be free. Females are filled with soul and wish as adults to be increasingly independent. We see this in Emily’s search for a more exciting life as a young woman living in Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*. (Wilder, 2003) It is only after she dies that Emily comes to fully appreciate the simple, everyday occurrences of life. To what extent is Thornton Wilder using Emily to voice his own reflections from midlife regarding the role of home and soul? To what extent is the work of Wilder reflecting the yearnings of other mature men in the early Twentieth Century American society in which he lived and about which he wrote?

Any young person (especially a male) during the first half of life longs for a spiritual quest and adventure. Each of us, in some sense, has to come to the end of our life, at least as we now know it, to gain an appreciation for the daily, mundane work of the soul. We are caught up, like George in *Its a Wonderful Life*, with the sense that life’s opportunities have been lost if we have not been successful in soaring above and beyond the common place. George had to face suicide before he could begin his soul work. He had to risk the profound transformation of death and new birth. Furthermore, he

was guided neither by a female angel nor by a top-ranking male angel. Rather his guide was a befuddled almost-angel who was still trying to earn his wings.

A high-ranking male angel might have driven George to even greater spiritual despair about having never made it in life. George's humble and ultimately quite wise angel enabled George to journey inward and to understand better his own central role in the mundane life of family and community. It is in the common place that George and each of us in late midlife find that we have made a real difference. An old Shaker hymn, "Tis a Gift to be Simple," reminds us that understanding is to be found in a place that is direct and uncomplicated. It is at the hearth and in our heart that we find three things. The hymn tells us that we will first find freedom: "Tis a gift to be free." We will also find self-integrity: "Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be." Finally, we will find contentment: "T'will be in the valley of love and delight."

Ironically, many women long for the male voice even though they are filled with the voice of soul. Men often long for the feminine vision even though the vision of the spirit fills their life and dreams. Filled with soul, the feminine wishes to give voice not just to matters of hearth and home, but also to matters of the bigger world in which men dominate. Filled with spirit, the masculine is in flight. He has a vision of the above and the future, but not of home. Like Odysseus, he longs for home but continues to travel to new lands and engage in new ventures.

The once-popular ballad, "Please Come to Boston," is about a young man who is seeking his fame and fortune. The spirit guides him in his quest for fulfilment of his dream. He wants his lady friend to join him on this quest. Odysseus left his one love, Penelope, at home; however, our balladeer wants his love to join him on his spirited journey. As young men (and increasingly as young women) we want to have it both ways. We want to follow our spiritual quest, yet also long for the roots of home life and a devoted life partner like Penelope.

The “rambling boy” in “Please Come to Boston” asks for something that most of us would like. If it were fulfilled, the rambling boy’s request would eliminate the inherent contradiction in wanting to both “move up” and “settle down” as a young man (Levinson and Associates, 1978). “Please Come to Boston” contains not only the requests of the young man to his love, but also her response to him. She repeatedly asks him to come back home to Tennessee: “won’t you come home to me?” She invites him to settle down with her—the one person who truly loves him. He is given the blessed opportunity to return home to the one person he can trust in this crazy and often vicious world.

Love songs that appeal to men are often messages coming to or from a feminine aspect of our self that is propelled by an internal animating force. “Please Come to Boston” is clearly a song that contains this feminine voice, which is called “anima” by Jungians. The anima voice of our true love can be interpreted as a voice that comes from inside us rather than from any outside source. One can imagine that the composer of this song, Kenny Loggins, wrote it while on the road—for by this time in his life and career Loggins had been a successful and widely travelled performer. The voice he heard to “return home” and become grounded came ultimately from an internal source, even if a real-life girlfriend had made such an appeal.

The voice of the anima comes to us in the dead of night—when we are alone in a motel somewhere out there in the hinterlands. It even comes to us when we feel completely alone, though lying next to our partner in bed. It is our internal voice that calls for us to quit rambling—to quit pursuing our dreams in such an obsessive manner. It calls for us to come back home and rediscover what is important in our life. This is the voice of our soul. When we are young, we assume that this voice means we must “settle down” with someone we love and live out our soulful life through our partner and the children we rear together. As we reach our Autumnal years, we discover that we must turn inward toward our own internal “home” and must return as a weary traveller to our own often ignored and abandoned soul.

Many books, poems, movies, plays and songs speak to this theme. A young traveller yearns for hearth, home and a caring partner. An older Autumnal

woman or man yearns for a return to an internal world. Odysseus journeyed for many years—yet longed for home. Cowboy songs of the campfire inevitably turn to home, as do songs of warfare. This tension between journeying outward through the spirit and journeying inward through and toward the soul is central to our Autumnal life. This tension becomes particularly conspicuous during our later mid-life, when so many of our voices from other rooms speak to our need for home and the work of the soul.

## Engaging Work of the Soul

Soul work for men and women during their Autumnal years requires a shift from looking upward and forward to attending downward and inward. This means a shift from visual to tactile modes of experience. We touch and caress rather than look and examine. We embrace our child and hold this cherished one safe from the storm. Movement downward is a journey through embarrassment, narcissistic wounds and loneliness. This contrasts with the journey of the spirit that is filled with inspiration, uplifting motives and great public adventures. We retreat to do soul work rather than “leaping up” to do spiritual work. In moving to soul work, we take on latrine duty or clean pots. As Autumnal women and men, we might even engage in the corporate equivalent to cleaning pots and latrines, namely, filling in the details, cleaning up after an event or handling a “messy” employee problem. In the past, this “clean up” was often assigned to women—so it is particularly important that men step forward to now do this soulful work. When we are doing soul work our role shifts from master to servant (Greenleaf, 1970). Even when we are alone, we begin to serve ourselves in small, but meaningful ways.

During the Autumnal years, we should tend to listen to ourselves more closely and intently. The voices that we never heard before now seem to be surfacing from within ourselves—we must listen to them. They seem strange and alien, initially, yet start making some sense, when we let go of the need for them to justify their presence. Still, we sometimes try to suppress them, ignore them and banish them – relieved that they are gone for ever. Yet they seem to return, with more clarity and intensity. Their presence cannot be

ignored – they are best listened to and acted upon. That is when we see ourselves switching from a master to a servant, at least during certain occasions. Our journey has begun.

The shift from spirit to soul work is difficult. We see a graphic and poetic illustration of this difficult transformation in the tale of Don Quixote. Quixote makes something special of the mundane. As an aging man he was not satisfied with the everyday. Hence, he looked upward (for spiritual guidance) and backward in time (for historical guidance). He looked back to the age of chivalry and valour—a romantic era that was ending at the time Cervantes wrote his epic tale. Quixote elevates the inn’s sluttish serving girl, Aldonza, to a much higher status. She is transformed into the lady of the manor. He also restores her long-lost virginity. Quixote christens her, “Dulcinea.” Windmills become foreboding ogres. The barber’s bowl is transformed into a knight’s helmet. Don Quixote is typical of a man dominated by spiritual forces. He is moved to the spirit (“in-spiration”).

We see this dominance of spirit and the compelling nature of male spirit enacted with particular force in the musical form of *The Man of La Mancha*. Don Quixote asks others to “dream the impossible dream.” Like Robert Kennedy, Quixote asks “Why not?” rather than asking “Why?” Like his older brother John, Robert Kennedy was assassinated before completing his own soul work, though he clearly was beginning the transforming journey during his short presidential campaign. Quixote was similarly denied a complete fulfilment of his own dream. This is commonly the case with men who dream great dreams. Like John and Robert Kennedy, Quixote transformed the people with whom he associated in seeking to fulfil his own dream. Quixote convinces Aldonza that her name is Dulcinea: “thy name is like a prayer an angel whispers.” As we find throughout legend and literature (such as Cervantes’ original *Don Quixote*), the spirit of man often is manifest in the form of breath, respiration or a whisper. Even the prisoners who hear the story of Don Quixote (as told by Cervantes, a fellow victim of the inquisition) are inspired. As the inquisitors lead Cervantes away for writing conspiratorial works, the previously depressed and

downtrodden prisoners exhort him “to live with your heart striving upward.”

Triumphant though Cervantes is in inspiring the other prisoners, he ultimately requires Quixote to face reality and leave the dreams behind. Cervantes forced his fictional character, Don Quixote, to see himself for what he truly is. He was required to look into a mirror, having lost in combat to the “Knight of the Mirrors.” This shattered his illusions and his dreams. The mirror is an instrument of vision and spirit, yet the triumphant knight is using a set of mirrors to destroy Quixote’s spirit. The knight is himself an illusion. He is actually a son-in-law of Quixote who has grown increasingly impatient with the Don’s antics.

The well-intended Knight of the Mirrors demands that the Don acknowledge he is actually an aging man of modest means. Quixote is jolted into “reality.” He has become a mad man who is dressed, not for a battle, but rather for a foolish masquerade. Like all mature men, Don Quixote is particularly vulnerable to ridicule and massive ego deflation. Ironically, we are most vulnerable precisely at the moment when we are most successful. We are balancing on a high wire and have a long way to fall. Don Quixote has gained many admirers and has won many battles against fictitious foes. He desperately wants to keep the masquerade going. His son-in-law won’t allow him to continue indulging his false spirit. When confronted with the mirrors, Don Quixote’s ego and spirit rapidly deflate. He is left an old and dying man, with neither illusion nor a will to live.

Like many men and women in later midlife, Don Quixote is thrown into depression, having suffered what psychologists call a “narcissistic wound.” He finds no support to match the challenge that he is forced to face in the mirrors. He only recovers his “sanity,” or at least his spirit, when his “support group” (consisting of Dulcinea and his sidekick Sancho Panza) come to his rescue. They offer him appreciation and encouragement. Such a group, sadly, is often found more often among women at mid-life than among men. It is worth noting that Don Quixote (now in a depressed state of reality) does not request the support of his friends – they just show up



to see if they can be of assistance – or at least see how the “old man” is doing.

Don Quixote (and the prisoners) is not the only one transformed by the journey and tale. Aldonza (ne Dulcinea) is transformed with the assistance of the Don. Like many important women in the life of men, it is through her interaction with a male guide (Quixote) that the change occurs. We will have more to say about this in the next chapter. It is a reciprocal relationship. Aldonza transforms herself from the highly romanticized (and distorted) love interest and pupil of Don Quixote to the role of female guide for him. She retains her identity as Dulcinea, yet now provides the Don with a bridge between spirit and soul. Similarly, Sancho serves the critical role of male friend and companion to Don Quixote. With the assistance of Dulcinea and Sancho, Dox Quixote not only returns to his world of the spirit. He also turns inward to the world of soul. While others have learned from Don Quixote to value spirit and dreams, Quixote himself must learn about the interplay between dreams and realities. He must learn of this interplay if he is not to be the victim, once again, of misdirected but necessary attempts by members of his family to restore his sanity.

Like Don Quixote, the fathers in our three tales must attend to their child—and acknowledge when they have made a big mistake. As portrayed in the three tales, our fathers are either ignoring or abusing their child. They are fearful and are becoming stupid. They must address their anxiety and their stupidity. This is a parent’s own soul work. Like many women in his life, he must create a container for his child—a cradle, a bowl, a chalice. Anxiety runs amuck without a container. Autumnal men should experience what it is like to become a servant—cooking the meals and hosting the guests—rather than giving the after-dinner speeches. Autumnal men might wish to step down from the throne and instead be the “power behind the throne.” They need no longer be “the guy in charge” with the big office and special parking place. Autumnal men can retire from their highchair. They can re-tread-concentrating on raising children or starting a modest new project. At this point in life, the Autumnal male is given the opportunity to be

patient and take delight in small things. He might nurture the next generation of leadership rather than being the leader himself.

Nathan worked in construction sites throughout his career. He spent most of the time outdoors, among large equipment and noisy machinery. He enjoyed every moment of it and took pride in the dams, power houses and buildings he has seen becoming a reality in front of his eyes. He was perceived as a controlling, hot tempered, brave, invincible man by his family members. His wife, Mira, specifically could not stop talking about his bravery and acts of courage to protect the family, to confront the gangsters and save her from disgrace in public.

As years passed after he retired from the long service, he was seen sitting in his armchair eyes closed. His voice became softer and most of the time, he had nothing much to speak. He took joy in watching his grandson play with his friends. He referred himself as a paper tiger. His wife Mira, on the other hand, took on his role and her voice was heard more than ever before – sometimes jokingly referring to her husband as a retired soldier good for nothing. She claimed that the tables have turned. It is time for her to ‘pay back’. It was the male voice in her, like the young queen of Ramayana, waiting for the right opportunity to encash the blank cheque, with the intention of starting a new life nudged her from behind the curtains, as her husband sat back with closed eyes enjoying his vision which he did not have a chance to savour in his busy life.

Unfortunately, the father in Goethe’s poem doesn’t seem to be able to attend to his son for long. He keeps wandering off in his mind to loftier matters. Perhaps in contemporary times Goethe’s father would be thinking about the national economy. The Miaoshan King might be threatened by the arrogance of a court administrator. He strikes out against his subordinate—banishing him to a low-status subsidiary of his “kingdom” (corporation)—much as he has banished his own child. The political arrangements made by the Ramayana King might be turning sour. He might strike out against his new adversary or a neighbouring king – much as he has done regarding his son. A contemporary father might be worried about and distracted by decisions he must make about specific financial

investments. Fathers are often lured away from their children. Even worst, the Miaoshan and Ramayana kings were actually threatened by their children. They became vindictive rather than distracted. They act: ordering a killing or banishment.

When men of Autumn are inspired, distracted, threatened, confronted or outclassed, they are being captured by the spirit. When mature men are enthralled, seduced or lured downward, they are being drawn to the soul. The former is a pull toward the male animus, with which mature men are familiar. The latter is a pull toward the female anima, with which most mature men are not very familiar. This pull toward the anima frightens us to death.

One of our colleagues have witnessed how his own father had difficulty letting go of his pursuits much after his retirement; though from an external perspective what he needed most was a period of rest and healing. His father has enjoyed the journey so much that it was unthinkable to live without the excitement of the daily dose of ‘drama’ in his ”life”. This full life includes both the mundane and the magnificent. There is so much to do, so much to accomplish, so much more to achieve in the name of the family and the society – all with good intentions. Yet, it was taking a toll on his father’s health, especially due to lack of sleep. He could not think of slowing down or taking a pause, such that the possibility of soul work gets incorporated into his daily routines. There is no time for the awakening of Spring if our Autumnal schedule is spirit-filled with demanding appointments.

## **The Truth of Spirit and Soul**

There are two forms of generativity that men and women experience during their Autumnal decades. There is first, the generativity of spirit. This generativity ensures that our presence is felt in the world. George’s guide in *It’s a Wonderful Life* was a male, though admitted a very gentle and somewhat clumsy male. George was having a crisis of the spirit and was consumed by this crisis. He was unaware of and insensitive to the location of soul in his life. Soul was to be found in his loving family and friends, not

in his worldly accomplishments. He had to resolve his sense of worthlessness in the world. He had to move past the generativity of the spirit before he could come to realize his deeper and more enduring worth as a loving husband, father and community servant.

Generativity of the soul concerns the discovery of that which we truly care about. It concerns caring deeply thoughtfully and patiently for that about which we care. (Erikson, 1963; Bergquist and Quehl, 2019) Generativity of the soul is about tending to sick or dying parents. It is about comforting the child in our arms. It is about protecting our child after a world-wide holocaust (as in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006). It's about protection after a personal holocaust. George needed to attend to his crisis of the spirit. Then at the end of the movie, he could attend to his soul, which was so powerfully represented in the Capra myth of hearth, home and the fabled Christmases of bygone years.

The generativity of the spirit also concerns discovery of higher order truths. We soar upward, like Icarus, as we reach the highest point in our career, the highest point of status and influence in our communities. Those who hold the power define the truth and, as men and women who hold power, we are given the opportunity to define truth. In Eastern traditions and culture, those who 'knew' (those learned ones) can define the truth – they are plentiful and diverse in their views of the truth. We may foolishly think that we have “discovered” truth, when in fact we simply have the status and power to define what truth is and how it will be judged (Anderson, 1990).

In the movie, *Network*, Paddy Chayefsky offers a penetrating analysis of contemporary corporate life and communications. He portrays a world in which those in power primarily define the truth. These powerful figures are predominantly white males. Yet, Chayefsky also notes that the new power elite is increasingly likely to come from non-western nations. Icarus doesn't soar for long. Chayefsky observes how precarious one's position is at the top, particularly concerning a grasp of the truth. His protagonist, Howard Beale, struggles throughout the movie with what truth really is and how easily it is manufactured—prophetic regarding contemporary political processes in many countries. Beale encourages all people to stand up against

the manufactured truth—yet seems always to be swayed left and right to different versions of the reality that are presented to him by other powerful men and very masculine women, in particular the Faye Dunaway character.

The truth of our identity is the one that might get challenged at this time. When we have power and influence, we can define and impose it on others. At this point, when we encounter life situations, where we recognise the fallacy of our own judgement of our identity, we are humbled and sometimes devastated: “I thought I was a loving parent, who did everything for my child. Now I realise, that was just my version of the truth. Even my identity as a parent is now under question.” This is a dark and narrow place to be. It is part and parcel of the soulful journey inward. There is an opportunity to let go of the firm grip of what we have been holding on to, like the child in the arms of the father. Then we can open our heart to tend to the child.

The great king of Ramayana had a version of the truth in his heart, which he held on to firmly. His imaginations and expectations about an ideal future were derived from his version of the truth – which was shattered in the presence of the truth defined by his young queen. What if he redefined the truth (of course evoking the wrath of those who want him to protect this truth, based on traditions and societal expectations), so that he might find a more peaceful soul at the end of his life? What was the motivation for him to continue to grieve in his last days? Did he have options? What did he consider as his top priority in his death bed?

In postmodern terms, the “grand narrative” has collapsed. The widely accepted, abiding truths in most societies are no longer viable and there is nothing to replace them. Like Howard Beale, we are all left in a vacuum and look in vain for a solid source of truth (Anderson, 1995). As mature men and women, we are particularly vulnerable to this collapse of the grand narrative. We have reached the highest point in our career only to discover, as did Howard Beale, that those truths which do seem to endure are ugly. They are based in ego and greed rather than in any sense of freedom, rationality or community welfare. They may be spirit-ful but are certainly not soulful.

As women and men living through our Autumnal years, we often discover, in addition, that we have exchanged our freedom for the achievement of social status, financial security or power. George Orwell (2003) writes of this trade-off in his short story, *On Shooting an Elephant*. The esteemed and powerful white leader of an Indian village, during the years of the British Empire, must kill a rogue elephant that is threatening the villagers. He hates the idea of killing this magnificent beast. Yet because he is at the top of the social order in this village, he finds himself walking down a path preparing to shoot the elephant.

At this moment, the white male leader discovers that he has traded his freedom (to say “no” in this instance) for social status and power. This may be one of the most important truths that Autumnal males and females must learn. We gain power in exchange for freedom. We must go “mad” like Quixote in order to gain more freedom. We must defy the system that got us to the top in the first place to confront and alter this truth. This is one of Chayefsky’s most haunting images in *Network*. We witness Howard Beale, a man in later mid-life, go mad and become “madder than hell,” as a way of discovering his own freedom.

At other times, women and men in particular find in later midlife that they have lost all truths as a result of social revolution or massive technological change. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many men in the former Soviet countries seemed to be wandering around in a haze (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). They lost their ideology or their base of opposition to the dominant ideology. Now what do they do? Where does their abstract thinking and spirit find a new home? Most of the Estonian women were able to adjust. They were accustomed to “making-do”, to adjusting, to living everyday life. The revolution did not really change their routines. The revolution only changed the ideology. By contrast, in many Asian societies, the world was profoundly changing for women: marriage laws changed, policies regarding ‘permissible number of children in a family’ changed, narratives of the nation changed and rules regarding the inheritance of property shifted. As a result, for many Asian women, the foundation of life was shaken.

There are other challenges to the Autumnal desire to retain truth—and a stable self and unchanging social environment. These challenges do not seem to be particular to gender, but rather they relate to social-class and economic status. With the collapse of the “grand narrative” in many contemporary societies, middle-class Autumnals find that they and their colleagues wander about, unable to find a new source of spirit and guidance. At the highest point in their career (maximum ego inflation and ego gratification), these prosperous Autumnal females and males may find that they are falling from grace like Icarus. Even if they don’t go “mad” like Howard Beale or seek freedom in exchange for power (as Orwell portrays). They fall from grace precisely because their middle-class success (especially if they are women) breeds envy and power plays. In addition, their age suggests vulnerability to other people. It is assumed that the Autumnal is now on the way “out”—or soon will be—or the Autumnal has already departed and like the Jack Nicholson character in *About Schmidt* finds that their carefully prepared recommendations and succession plans have been thrown in the garbage by successors.

A long tenure of the Autumnal female or male in the organization may breed impatience among those who are younger and waiting their turn to take over. As Autumnals, we may even come to realize, painfully, that our own egos and our own internal demons (unattended voices) breed mistakes, miscalculations, and a failure to grasp reality. For some of us, we might be challenged to recognise that the career we pursued, the profession we chose, and the achievements we proudly displayed in our resumes are nothing worth our soulful pursuit. The relationships that we nurtured and the expectations we built around them, only helped boost our selfish interests and inflated our ego. Like Icarus, we fall back to Earth. We are forced to grovel and return to the mundane.

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is a man gone mad as a result of confrontation with fearsome male and female forces and an enforced turning to the soul. He soars to the height of his power. He flaunts his power, inflates his own ego, then falls and goes mad. Jane Smiley (2003) rewrites the *Lear* story from a female perspective in *A Thousand Acres*. The father in Smiley’s novel

is playing games of power, while his children are dying. How many stories concerning the fall from grace do we find among political figures in the world? How many sad stories of ego inflation and deflation come from inside governments throughout the world? Other people around powerful men and women helped elevate them and inflated their egos. These assistants and loyalists also protected these powerful people from the real world. Ironically, these aides have often helped bring their bosses back down to earth. They have exposed them, shifted loyalties, and misinterpreted their aspirations and plans to their colleagues at work or the media.

The men and women of power stand, like Don Quixote, before the Knight of the Mirrors. They must confront their own reality and madness in order to begin the journey inward toward the soul. In essence, the work of mature women and men involves moving inward as well as outward. As mid-life Centurians, we must return home to our family and our own inner life. We must cross the border into new worlds and new experiences. We must ultimately bridge the chasm between soul and spirit. Only in this way do we re-introduce Spring into our Autumn and attire ourselves in Purple.



## Chapter Six

### The Voices of Option, Temptations, Transformation and the Soul

#### Poem of the Erl King

“Come now, my child, Do come with me!  
I’ll play very fine games with thee.  
There are many beautiful flowers by the shore.  
My mother shall grace thee with garments of gold.”

#### Legend of Miaoshan

The Emperor had the monastery burnt and the nuns staying there were killed.

Miaoshan survived.

#### The Great King of the Ramayana

“How could I be blinded from truth?  
Why did I fall in this trap or shall I call it fate?  
Oh Son, could it be karma or just an evil plan?  
How could I order you to be banished?”

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The poem of the Erl King concerns temptation. Like all stories of temptation, it is also concerned with change. One person, in this case, the

Erl King, is asking another person, in this case, the child, to undergo some major change. In exchange for this change a gift will be given. The child is provided with many optional gifts. How about some wonderful games to play? Is this really a good time for games when the world is threatening me? If not games, then how about beautiful flowers by the shore? But we are not anywhere near a shore. This is not a good time to appreciate beauty when it is dark and stormy. Well, I have one final offer. How about some beautiful and expensive clothes (“garments of gold”).? That should please you. But the child rejects all the offers and continues to warn his father of the threatening presence of the Erl King. Apparently, the Erl King can’t buy the child’s love.

We are all frequently tempted to make a change in our life to obtain something we really want. Men and women of achievement and wealth tempt us with a life of leisure and security. Beautiful women and handsome men tempt us with an unforgettable night of romance. Corporate leaders tempt us with visions of economic prosperity and promotion. National leaders tempt us with dreams of a new society. We proposed that temptations enable (even force) us to consider several options.

The attractiveness of the temptations in our path had been the topic of contemplation in our ancient Eastern traditions. The teachings of Eastern sages offer numerous examples from nature: a bee gets trapped inside a flower because it is enchanted (and a bit intoxicated) by the scent and the color. The bee doesn’t seem to have as much will power or perhaps understanding of the pending entrapment as the child. Perhaps the bee should be learning from an Eastern sage.

A ‘Upanishad’ (books revealing the nature of self) in the Vedic tradition, conveys a story about heavenly temptations. This piece of wisdom illustrates that many temptations can distract us from our true path. Only a resolute and thoughtful individual (like Goethe’s child) can overcome these temptations with single pointed focus on the goal. The boy in the Upanishad story is offered chariots, horses, gold, women and all the material riches – to distract him from his quest for the ultimate truth-his soul work. With a clear and discerning mind, the boy who suffered hunger

and exhaustion, rejected the rewards. He held on to his questions, finally grasping the wisdom that leads to his ultimate inner transformation, leading to unlimited perception. Unlike Goethe's child, the child of the Upanishad lives and learns and transforms.

The Upanishad child might have been more fortunate than Goethe's child. In the case of our Erl King, there is vengeance against the child for refusing the temptations. Similarly, in the Legend of Miaoshan, there is major vengeance being wrought on not just the daughter but the monastery where she seeks sanctuary. It is burnt and the nuns are killed. Still, Miaoshan survives. The vengeance does not turn her around. Rather, she gains greater strength. Like the child of the Upanishad, she is transformed. In Ramayana, the maid servant tempts the young queen with the possibility of becoming a queen mother, which led her to act with vengeance. The aftermath of the incident leads to the transformation of many. From temptation to vengeance to transformation. We see this in the Legend of Miaoshan, Ramayana and many other Eastern texts.

And what happens when this transformation occurs? What occurs when the tempter and vengeance-seeker find that they are not successful? Their efforts have led to something quite different from what they wanted and anticipated. Their potential victim becomes stronger and more independent. The would-be victim is refusing to come under their dehumanizing spell. One of the outcomes of this failure is an inward examination by the person seeking control. They come to recognize their own egocentric motives and recognize their own incompetence and profound failure to understand the human psyche when it is being threatened.

The victimizer might simply run away or up the amplitude of the temptations ("carrot") or vengeance ("stick"). Alternatively, the victimizer might seek forgiveness for their trespasses. In the Ramayana story, there is first an attempt to blame external forces (karma, an evil plan hatched by someone else). But then there is the fundamental question: "How could I order you to be banished?" At this point, a new set of options are presented to our protagonist (transformed child): do I offer forgiveness or throw the

villain out? Do I complete my transformation by seeking to understand and perhaps even appreciate the struggles faced by my tormentor? Do I turn the other cheek? Do I learn something about myself by seeking to learn something about the tempter and vengeance-seeker?

Jason was an athlete and from a comfortable family. Like the child in Erl King poem, he was offered many temptations: medals, money, women and drugs. The difference was, he fell for them. He gradually lost what he gained - his achievements, personal wealth, relationships and got addicted. He was in his fifties when he began to introspect and understand his past. He initially denied them and struggled. It was painful for him and those around him. Finally, he accepted and forgave his past. Eventually he was able to recover and find himself in a long-term relationship with a lovely woman.

These are forks in the road—often several forks. Which do we choose at this point in our life and why do we choose it? Both temptations and vengeance can lead us to transformation. Not just a slight adjustment in our life. Rather, a big, profound change. This is very scary! And all of this leads us once again to work of the soul. We face the option of transformation: we can do more than survive. We can thrive—building on the challenges we face rather than seeking to escape or remain frozen in place. The feminine and masculine voices may contain all of the ingredients of transformation and more. So, the fundamental question becomes: how does the Autumnal woman or man handle these voices?

## **The Presence of Options**

Kenneth Gergen (2000) suggests that in our contemporary times we are inundated with options. We embrace many alternative images of who we should be and what we should want. Gergen describes a “saturated self” that finds it difficult to distinguish between these multiple realities and senses of self. He (Gergen, 2000, pp. 6-7) proposes that:

For everything we “know to be true” about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of self-conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an “authentic self” with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all.

The Saturated Self that Gergen identifies has broad social implications (Gergen, 2011). It seems that the multiple options available to us in contemporary society all come from responding to a series of temptations. They are attractive but often unrelated invitations in our Autumnal life— attractive but often not just unrelated but also destructive to our life and our society. As Gergen suggests, these diverse relationships pull us in “myriad directions” and we are left without a clear sense of our “authentic self.” As a result, our society itself doesn’t seem to be “authentic” – and we are left with a world of half-truths and lies that was described prophetically by Walt Anderson (1990, 1995) thirty years ago. It is a world that is all too abundant in contemporary societies.

A wise observer of contemporary life (and spirituality), Parker Palmer (1999, pp. 3-4, 8), wishes to join us in pursuing and savouring an active life that is filled with options, challenges and diversity:

I do not thrive on the monastic virtues of stability, centerness, balance. As much as I may need those qualities in my life, the words do not name those moments when I feel most alive and most able to share life with others. I value spontaneity more than predictability, exuberance more than order, inner freedom more than the guidance of a rule, eccentricity more than staying on dead center.

The core message of all the great spiritual traditions is “Be not afraid.” Rather, be confident that life is good and trustworthy. In this light, the great failure is not that of leading a full and vital

active life, with all the mistakes and suffering such a life will bring (along with its joys). Instead, the failure is to withdraw fearfully from the place to which one is called, to squander the most precious of all our birth rights—the experience of aliveness itself.

While none of us have given up Parker’s pursuit, some adversity has shifted our perspective a little—and the perspective of Autumnal women and men with whom we work and whom we serve. Many of our colleagues and mature people that we coach have made major changes in their life only after they were hit over the head by a major life intrusion: illness, loss of job, embarrassing situation, or divorce. They are tempted with wealth but decide to leave the marriage. Ms. Arianna Huffington (2020), for instance, left her marriage and a privileged life. She reprioritised her lifestyle—and recognized that this transformation would be stressful and potentially detrimental to her health. So, she placed a new emphasis on a healthy lifestyle: It was just in time. At age 57, Arianna fainted from overexertion and broke her cheekbone in 2007. After this health scare, she began advocating for sufficient sleep and other healthy practices.

Like Arianna Huffington, the father in Goethe’s *Erl King* was hit on the head. Unlike Arianna, he tried to ignore the message. He was readily distracted, as are each of us (and many of the Autumnal women and men we have coached and served as therapeutic clients). The three of us are not just writing this book, we are also working full time and trying to sustain a life of health and relationships. Like the father, we can easily be pulled away from the fundamental question regarding transformation. We can yield to temptations and fight the battle against those who seek to harm us (at least in our own minds - imagined lions).

*The Erl King* would seem to be a very contemporary poem, given our contemporary struggle regarding self and personal identity. Goethe was speaking from another time and place about the problems that confront all of us today. He seems to be writing about those of us living through the Autumnal years or preparing to enter the Autumnal years who face change as well as new temptations and enemies. The poem of the Erl King teaches us that all serious requests for change, such as those offered by the Erl King,

ultimately require a shift in allegiance: a new set of priorities, new sources of authority, new models, new paradigms. The Erl King is asking for the child's allegiance. He is asking the boy to abandon his father, in order to find a new father and acknowledge a new and more powerful masculine power.

What does the Erl King offer the child in exchange for his allegiance? First, the Erl King offers to play with the child. Maybe this isn't such a bad option after all. The father no longer plays with the son. He no longer wants to play the same old games. These games are childish or boring. The Erl King promises to play the games that the child wants to play. Play is always a powerful lure for our child. We are forever enamoured by the playful adventures of James Bond or Wonder Woman. Our hero or heroine is never killed. What a game! Eternal excitement and guaranteed victory! We long, as in Yeat's (1986) poem of *The Wandering Aengus*, to walk with a "beautiful, glimmering girl [or boy]," "among long dappled grass," "till time and times are done." We love the play of sports, of adventure, of love, of courtship of a spirited life. We are, in the words of Huizinger (1968), "homo ludens" (playing humans). The Erl King knows that our child longs to play and that, ultimately, as grown women and men we also long to be among those who play "till time and times are done."

The Erl King also offers a world of beauty. Once again, maybe we should not as easily dismiss the power of this temptation. He invites the child to look up and take in the bright flowers that are newly blooming on the shoreline. This is a wonderful offer. We do need to be more aware of the beauty around us as we move toward the work of our soul. We will focus on this domain in a later chapter as we address the need for a feminine guide in our journey to the soul. In this case, however, the Erl King is offering beauty as a diversion, as payment for the child's shifting allegiance:

"I'll give you beauty (a lovely home, a young attractive spouse, a great sports car, a fabulous vacation, the best view in this whole damn valley) if you will just keep working hard at what you've been doing for the last ten years; if you will just behave; if you will just leave your husband (or wife); if you will just become a good son

(daughter); if you will take this new job.”

Are we easily conned by the Erl King? Are we offered hopes and dreams rather than moments of true beauty and the time and place to savour this beauty? Many Autumnal women and men have been tempted by the Erl King: “If you will just keep scrambling for more money or more status or more power or more possessions, then I can give you the beauty that you desire. You’ll have fun and gain almost everything you want if you’ll just accept this one additional assignment.”

The third offer of the Erl King is a real dilly. He says that he will bring us his mother and promises that she will take care of the child and adorn the child with garments of gold. What a great gift. Maybe, we were too quick to dismiss this tempting offer. After all, it comes with a caring mother – the gift of a nurturing relationship along with something of tangible value. We would love to have someone take care of us. What person at midlife wouldn’t like to have a dutiful parent take care of him or her? Several men and women of our acquaintance have given up virtually everything in their life, including their self-respect, to be eligible for permanent full-time care. To get this care they have become alcoholic, depressed, out-of-work, useless, or confused. The Erl King provides us with a chance to make this choice. Should we thank him?

The Erl King does even more. He tells us that his mother will honour us as a blessed child and the wonderful golden garment is simply a ceremonial vestment showing the world that we are something special. We don’t even have to give up our self-respect. We walk around in our own 21<sup>st</sup> Century equivalent to the golden garments (maybe a high-priced watch or purse that we can afford with our pay raise). We are mothered, while remaining in a position of power and competence. Often this “mothering” occurs when we find a perfect administrative assistant who devotes her (or his) life to us. They become surrogate parents. They live for our praise and approval (Kanter, 1977). And they lavish praise on us in return. They also become indispensable. We become dependent on these assistants and often are buffered from our own painful life transformations by these caring



attendants. But what happens when we retire—we lose our surrogate parent. Maybe we shouldn't retire!

The Erl King doesn't stop here. By offering us the praise of his mother, the Erl King obliquely seems to be promising us that we are in line to be the next Erl King. The child is subtly led to believe that he will become the next king. Like Jesus, the child is tempted with the keys to the worldly kingdom. If this doesn't appeal to our ego then nothing will, especially if we have just been through the organizational wringer and long for just one more victory before hanging up our weapons and returning home. That last big job offer in our Fifties and early Sixties is often the toughest one to turn down, especially if it comes with all the perks and amenities (including a doting surrogate-parent assistant and a high-priced watch).

Though not explicitly mentioned, the Erl King offers a certain kind of 'true love', expressed as playfulness, motherly care and the appreciation of beauty. In our autumnal years, what more do we yearn for? This matches all the fantasies we had entertained for years and exposes all the gaps in our life we have not been able to fill. It seems like a one-time opportunity in our life. A wish comes true. Perhaps even a divine intervention. This offer of love elicits confidence in us, which we have not felt recently. It invites us to be hopeful again and start dreaming big.

The Erl King pulls us towards a future, which seems so exciting and compelling. In the legend of Ramayana, the Queen succumbed to her temptations. She dreamed of her son being wrapped in a golden garment—as a Royal leader. In short, we wanted her son to be the king and made plans behind the scenes (in clever ways), which the King could not reject. She was blinded by her own desire for fame and fortune (through her son)—and as a result disregarded the well-being of her husband, the king. And what happened when the temptation backfire? The world begins to burn and vengeance reigns supreme – as it often does in the real world.

### **The Presence of Temptations**

Play, beauty and mothering are all offers made by the Erl King to the child. Each of these requires feminine energy and the feminine presence in a

man's life. This is part of what George Vaillant found to be critical to successful living in the second half of life. As Vaillant (2012, p.40) mentions early in *Triumphs of Experience*, "it was the capacity for intimate relationships that predicted flourishing in all aspects of these men's lives." This does not necessarily mean engagement in sexual relationships, nor does it mean the loss of one's own individual identity. We believe that what lay behind Vaillant's notion of intimacy was the capacity of flourishing men in the Grant Study to engage both the masculine and feminine sides of themselves. To better understand what this form of intimacy means for those living through their Autumnal years, we turn again to the work of Carl Jung, the prominent Swiss psychoanalyst who offered many insights about the nature of maturity and intimacy.

As we already noted, the feminine energy and presence expressed itself within each of us through what Jung (1978) calls the "anima." The male presence expresses itself in women (and men) through what Jung called the "animus." Jung suggests that anima is characterized by the properties of Eros, which thrives on relationships and intimacy. Anima and Eros are best expressed through myth and dance, and through the daily life and ritual of a community. Anima, according to Jung, is closely affiliated with (but not identical to) soul. Intimacy, in turn, is about soulful work and soulful relationships. By contrast, Jung relates animus to Logos and its attendant emphasis on discrimination and rationality. Animus is closely related to spirit. Individual identity, in turn, is about the work of spirit.

While the animus and Logos functions are usually finely developed in men, they remain undeveloped in many women. Jung suggests that the opinionated attitudes of many women are examples of undeveloped animus. For men, the opposite is true. The underdeveloped anima in men is usually expressed in their moodiness, vanity and touchiness. The task of most Autumnal males is to come to a fuller and more intimate relationship with their feminine presence and anima energy. The task of most Autumnal females is to come to a fuller and more intimate relationship with their masculine presence and animus energy. Vaillant found this to be true in his own longitudinal studies and we have found this to be true in our own

life experiences and in our therapeutic, coaching and consulting experiences.

For the longest time in her life, Sera has always been known as compliant with occasional temper. She grew up with a tough childhood and marrying her husband was her way out of her family. However, it was simply from the pan into the fire. She bared it all, as she found herself pregnant soon after marriage and she was not confident she could rear her child by herself in those times without a formal education. Also, what would her family say, after all in her culture then, a married daughter belonged to her husband.

Sera definitely would have no support. Her tempers came when she had been holding in her voice too much. The tempers came and left. Sera always did her part in her life – a dutiful wife, a doting mother. As Sera got older, she felt the tempers were more intense and frequent, as if more of her mind is trying to get out. She tried to escape herself, but it did not ease. She found herself willing when an opportunity for therapy came before her and she began to speak up what was inside her. As she spoke, she acted, to live more authentically her. She changed what was no longer working for her. She was calmer the more she listened to the voice within her – her animus.

The third stanza of the Erl King poem is all about anima, whereas the second stanza concerned male or animus energy. We tend to be enamoured with both the male and female sources of energy within us. We are also frightened by both sources for quite different reasons and tend to deny that they both have an impact on us. Regarding male energy, we believe that we have overcome our old needs for recognition and advancement when we reach our Autumnal years: “I’m too old to have an ego problem!” Or we turn away from the reintroduction of the male energy by labelling it as female and therefore inappropriate: “That is just another emotional outburst.” Regarding female energy, we believe that we have overcome our old needs for being wanted and diligently serving other people when we reach our Autumnal years: “I’m too old to need praise and appreciation from other people!” Or we now turn away from the reintroduction of the female energy. We mislabel it as male and therefore inappropriate: “That is just me being a bitch (or bully)”

It is always easier to dismiss what we see if it can be assigned to the more infantile or feminine part of us:

“I don’t need to respond to that need, given that it comes from the old idealistic part of me and, after all, I am long since past the point of being suckered into another social cause or plea for justice!”  
“There I am, getting emotional again about a silly thing—my granddaughter’s first date. My grandson’s first recital. That’s something my partner would do (as the one of us with emotional IQ). It’s not really a part of me. I must be growing a bit senile!”

In mislabelling the feminine in us or in denying the importance and power of the masculine presence in us, we have given the female in us too much unacknowledged power. We fail to tap into our true masculine presence and animus. Similarly, we risk mislabelling the masculine in us. We deny the importance and power of the feminine presence in us. We give the male in us too much unacknowledged power and fail to tap into our true feminine presence and anima energy.

There is recognizing required in all three narratives. Kings and Queens must make decisions – and both feminine and masculine energy abound in the decision-making processes of each protagonist. Arrogant masculine energy dominates the psyche of Miaoshan’s father who demands that his daughter obey him. The King of the Ramayana story makes similar demands of family members. What about the conniving Queen in the Ramayana tale? Feminine energy saturates the behind-the-scenes and guilt-based strategies employed by this Ramayana queen to get her son the crown. We also find both masculine and feminine energy in later stanzas of both the Miaoshan and Ramayana tales. The vengeance and later the despair exhibited by both kings is pure masculine: a lot of action (and little thought) a big show about something that should be personal and intimate. The feminine energy is conveyed through the nurturing acts of Miaoshan toward her father – more than forgiveness, there is care.

A subtle form of feminine energy is depicted in the messages being delivered in dreams to the King of Ramayana – he speaks of comets falling during the day in his dreams and he wanted his son’s coronation to be done in a haste. In *The Dream and the Text*, Carol Schreier Rupprecht (1993) indicates that the falling of stars makes for powerful symbols of coming disaster to the rule of both Gilgamesh and Dasaratha over their kingdoms. These two legends indicate that the cosmic order has been profoundly and dangerously disrupted. Furthermore, Rupprecht suggests that it is in this type of reflection upon cosmic events that the feminine often comes to men. The feminine does not typically come through action. Sadly, as in the case of both tales, the reflection by men often comes after disastrous action.

It’s decision time as well for the father in our Erl King poem. He must decide what to do about the presence of the Erl King. He can choose to acknowledge that this male energy does exist and that the Erl King does threaten his son. He can deal with the Erl King’s presence directly or he can interpret it as female energy. He can deny that the Erl King is even present. In this case, the father declares that he doesn’t even see the Erl King. He has chosen denial. He further ensures that the Erl King will not bother him by assigning a very feminine attribute (“too much imagination”) to his son. Thus, the Erl King is seen only through the eyes of the son and the son’s observations are discounted and dismissed by the father.

As so often occurs in life, “a child shall lead us.” The Ramayana King reflects on his life after his son has been banished to the forest. Miaoshan teaches her father an important lesson in tending to his illness. The child in our Erl King poem is trying to teach his father something: we shouldn’t ignore the Erl King. But the children in all three tales are unsuccessful in teaching their fathers –at least when they are young. Their fathers resisted the pleas and actions of their children. Perhaps when they were young the three children didn’t have all the psychological and societal defences needed to guard against the powerful presence of their King.

The young boy (and girl) in us can’t ignore the needs of our society nor can he/she witness social injustice without at least commenting: “Why are they doing that to him, Dad/Mom?” The young child might even ask why we

are not doing anything to ameliorate the situation: “Can’t you help out Dad/Mom?” The young child in us doesn’t accept the excuse that we have too little time, that it is none of our business, or that we could get sued if we do the wrong thing. Our child asks the simple question: “Don’t you care?” This can be devastating, for it reintroduces the central issue of generativity: “About what do I genuinely care and when am I going to begin truly and tangibly caring for that about which I care?”

Mature women and men are often confused about the female presence within themselves. Many years ago, Gail Sheehy (1974) wrote about the “sexual diamond,” referring to the tendency of men in midlife to become more feminine and for women of the same age to become more masculine. We want to believe that we have grown past infatuation and have our hormones well in check: “That’s just me falling in love again with another one of those attractive young singers. I thought I had gotten past this foolish stage in my life.”

Yet, at another level, we know that we are deceiving ourselves. The child within us still falls in love with the beautiful or handsome singer. Our child falls for the singer because he/she does not yet know all of society’s rules. He/she doesn’t know that we should be romantically inclined toward no more than one person at a time. He/she hasn’t been taught that any hints of infatuation could get us in real trouble. A child has a hard time distinguishing between fantasy and reality in the realm of interpersonal relationships. For a child, the fantasy of falling in love with and spending one’s life with a beautiful singer is the same thing as actually meeting and committing to this special person.

The child is right. After all, we don’t have to actually break apart our marriage to fantasize about this special person. We need not take a chance on an entertainer who is probably a bit neurotic and difficult to live with when not on stage. All we are doing is savouring the singer’s beauty and voice. There is nothing wrong with this. We don’t have to move in with this entertainer—who would probably be an economic drain given that this person of fantasy undoubtedly doesn’t make much money as a singer. Our child says: “You don’t have to worry about this. You only went to see him

sing and paid a few dollars to participate for a moment in a wonderful fantasy. You don't have to go any further with your fantasy." Our child says: "Hey, ease off. You only need to pretend you're in love with him/her. That's as good as the real thing!"

The King in our Legend of Miaoshan was advised to reach for a different level (go to Mount Fragrant) and to seek help from another. If before, the king has been about sight of his surroundings, it seemed the time now is to see further, almost in a vision. His advisor, the wise man, was Miaoshan in disguise. Miaoshan symbolises the feminine voice within and the king is encouraged to be open to it. His pain and his physical health (and perhaps mental distress and loss) were resolved when he opened up to the feminine presence. The solution to his problem was to live and relate to ourself and other people without anger or hatred. This is often the feminine advice that we all need: to not judge ourselves with anger or hatred when we are reflecting on our life at mid-life. Spring is awakened when we can listen to this appreciative voice.

## **Our Fear of Transformation**

As autumnal women and men we are afraid of both the masculine and feminine presence. Delilah and her feminine (soulful) charms lured Samson away from his cause (spirit). Samson only reclaims his strength and faith after he loses his vision and spirit. He is left alone, abused and humiliated in prison. At this point he explores the soul, regains his strength and brings down the temple. In the great Arthurian legend, Merlin feared the compelling allure of Nimue, while that handsome young knight, Lancelot, lured Guinevere away from her devoted husband, Arthur, and the dream of chivalry (spirit)—leading to destruction of the round table and precipitating warfare among former friends.

The legendary siren, Lorelei, lured sailors on the Rhine River to the rocks and ultimate destruction. A more recent siren, the singer played by Marlene Dietrich in the German film, *Blue Angel*, brought the sedate life of the professor to a tragic end. Many a woman in film history has been portrayed as someone who has been "wronged" by the "man who got away." Our

poetry, legends and movies are filled with stories regarding women who have lured men to their ultimate demise and men who have had a similarly destructive impact on women.

As described in the poetics of all three tales, the feminine and masculine are intimate. These tales are about family members—not distant enemies. There is breathing in the ear; a sad, sighing and withered voice that draws out all of our emotions. There are dreams and winds that swirl around the grieving protagonist. There is close medical attention. These feminine and masculine forces bring out our passion, our despair, our rage, our need for companionship, our fear of engulfment and entrapment. A profound fear of the soul lies at the heart of the matter. We fear the loss of independence. We worry about regression to a totally dependent state.

We are afraid of the soul and the associated feminine and masculine presence because they draw us into a world that seems to be very old to us. It draws us to a womb-like place from which we seemingly broke away, individually and collectively, many years ago. When we are drawn into the feminine presence (the anima) or the masculine presence (the animus), we are pulled into a moist and intoxicating inner world. This new world seems to threaten our branding in the society and demolish the castles we have built in the preceding decades of our life through hard work and willpower. The intimate presence of both the masculine and feminine challenge the very sense of who I am.

We are pulled into a psychic swamp. George Lucas' *Star Wars* sage is instructive in this regard. Lucas' hero, Luke Skywalker, goes to the swamp (anima) from the dry plains and battlefields of the spirit. He leaves his spiritual leader, the great warrior, Obi Wan Kanobi. He turns instead, in the swamps, to a small, ugly mentor called "Yoda." Like most of us, Luke is not initially impressed with either the swamp or the little mentor. Luke would hate to admit that the swamp is terrifying. He gives Yoda no credibility, until he comes slowly to appreciate Yoda's power and perspective. As women and men of Autumn we usually don't initially appreciate soul-leadership.



The swamp is a particularly important location for us who are living in the Autumnal years. Robert Bly (1990) takes us into the swamp to discover the wild man called "Iron John." Those like Iron John who live in swamps are dirty, lonely and reclusive. They provide a soulful image that is inevitably wild and unpredictable (an anima-possessed male). A soulful woman is similarly mysterious and very powerful. We know this immediately when we meet such a woman. Whether serving in the mythic role of the witch or sorceress, these women are sometimes very wise as well as being mysterious and powerful.

When we are a bit moist and swampy in our own life, then we know that we are ready for the true transformation. When we meet the feminine or masculine in a moist and swampy environment, we know it is the real thing! We are pulled to an alternative reality.

Sea life stretches forth  
Before my ears and eyes.  
In depths of sea  
I gather threads and reeds.  
The sea knows  
The sea knows my heart.

Empty nets cast forth  
Filled full with empty eyes.  
Life so lifeless  
Under seafull skies.  
The sea knows  
The sea knows my heart.

In my net at night  
Tears still remain awake.

I lie naked still  
Fears form my only catch.  
The sea knows  
The sea knows my heart.

I'm like a wounded fish  
Forever trapped alone.  
I lie flayed and deathfull  
Hopelessly entombed.  
The sea knows  
The sea knows my heart.

We all want love  
That knows no bounds of sleep.  
We all leave gifts  
In hands we cannot keep.  
The sea knows  
The sea knows my heart.

Our palms sweat. Our heart bounds. We are awakened as in the blossoming after a Springtime storm. We pluck the purple blossoms and exchange our golden garments (or office wear) for a purple gown. It's not all bad.

## Chapter Seven

### Autumnal Reappraisal and the Soul

#### The Erl King

“Father, my father, can you not hear?  
Promises the Erl King has whispered in my ear?”  
“Be calm, stay calm my dearest child.  
Tis nothing but wind rustling leaves that are dead.”

#### Legend of Miaoshan

The King ordered her execution.  
She died but returned when Hades did not want to lose his paradise.

#### The Great King of the Ramayana

“You come in my dreams, I hear you in the wind  
A divine gift from heavens, born of my deep desire  
In every beat of my heart, every thought of my mind  
Like stars a million, twinkling in the night sky”

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This is a critical juncture in the poem of the Erl King. The child is in disbelief. He can't understand why his father has neither seen nor responded to the threat of the Erl King. The Erl King has drawn close to

the child. He whispers in the child's ear (a manifestation of the soul). He has offered the first temptation, this being the voice of the feminine.

The power of the Erl King's masculine energy is fully present in the poem. We described this power in Chapter Four. It builds on fear, tradition and the world of the spirit. We deny the presence of this power during our Autumnal years because we believe that we have moved beyond this point in our life. Yet, these old temptations still remain intact. We still desire power, recognition and achievement. Furthermore, we are easily lured into the world of sensuality, play and beauty. We still wish to be taken care of. We journey into the swamp and are intoxicated by the sights, sounds and smells of this foreign environment.

During our Autumnal years we must neither deny these powerful forces of the Erl King nor run away from the alluring voices; rather, both can lead mature women and men deeper into their own inner world. These forces and voices can encourage attention to our own child—in part because they threaten our child and in part because it is our own inner child that most clearly hears these voices and acknowledges that they have tempted this child. The child, in other words, becomes the vehicle for our internal journey.

### **Presence of the Spirit**

In this middle stanza of Goethe's poem, the spirit is fully present in several different forms. It is powerfully present in the Erl King. It is present, at least in the mind of the father, in the wind that blows sadly and in the dying leaves that are rustling in this sad wind. We will briefly focus on each of these sources of spirit.

The Erl King is a first source of spirit. He is a powerful force, as we have already seen. The father is in full denial regarding the Erl King's presence. He asks his child to be calm. Is this because he himself is becoming worried? He tells his son that his fanciful imagination is deceiving him. Given that his son is profoundly afraid, this isn't a very nurturing thing for the father to say. He may have been his son's caring protector at the start of this journey through the foreboding night; but he certainly is failing now. He is

no longer a sensitive and supportive father who tries to understand his son's fears.

Perhaps this is because he is deathly afraid of the Erl King. Does he fear the loss of his own energy and the accompanying entry and triumph of a new energy as represented by the Erl King? Does he fear the loss of his own son's allegiance? Perhaps the Erl King will replace him. Will his own long-awaited enlightenment concerning life priorities be swept away by a return to former temptations in his life? He could easily fall back into old patterns of behaviour and make life decisions based on old values and priorities. Or is he concerned that he might have to unlearn many lessons that has supported him in his life? Could it be that he is concerned even more broadly about going against "how it is supposed to be" in society? Is he fearful of swimming against the tides of tradition?

The father in each of us must ask difficult questions:

Will I really live up to my promise of spending more time with the family or will I go back to my old workaholism by inventing some new project? Will I really give up drinking or am I only kidding myself? Will I get around to redesigning the kitchen or have I been deceiving myself? Will I begin the meditation routine or just put it off until Spring? Was it foolish to buy this expensive wood working equipment and set up a shop in the basement? Will all this new equipment end up in a cardboard box like those reminders of previous hobbies: the empty stamp book, unused easel, cob webbed tennis racket?

These disturbing questions face each of us as we confront our own Erl King. Our old patterns of life now seem a little exhausted or out of date.

What about the wind as a second source of spirit in this stanza? The father interprets or, more accurately, transforms the Erl King's presence and energy into the sad wind that rustles the dying leaves. This is an interesting image. The wind often represents the spirit. The spirit in this case is stirring up something that is dying or dead. The wind itself is sad. This is not a triumphant "wind of change" that topples the old and ushers in the new.

This is instead a sad wind that can't even bring the leaves back to life. It only stirs them up. They will soon settle down again and continue to decompose. Eventually these leaves will become the soil that creates new life. But within the time perspective of this poem, the leaves are dying and the wind is sad. Nothing new is coming to life.

What does this stanza seem to be saying about this second source of energy and spirit? If the wind represents spirit, then the father seems to be saying to his son that the powerful energy of the Erl King is only an illusion. He seems to be saying that reality, at least as he sees it, is made up of nothing more than the depression of a dying spirit. Is it the father's hope that the spirit (the wind) is dying out in him? Does he prefer a dying spirit to a powerful, threatening force such as the Erl King? At this point in the poem the father seems to prefer death to the threat of new life and challenge. In terms offered by Erik Erikson, the father seems to prefer either stagnation (death of the spirit) or egotism (centering on self) to the challenge associated with generativity, new life and engagement with other people.

The father may not have the confidence to handle this wind, because he does not know how to address spirit-filled wind. He has not experienced it before, nor has he been prepared for it by his own parents, teachers or the society. It could be even worse, if he has been warned many times about this destructive sad wind that just rustles the leaves at night. The scary image of destruction and death triggers fear and panic in his mind, ushering him to flee clasping his son in his arms.

We would suggest that the father is convinced that he faces two choices—and only two choices. Both choices are untenable. On the one hand, he can choose to see with his child the threatening power of the Erl King. Alternatively, he can choose to see the non-threatening but dying power of the wind. If he chooses to see the Erl King, then he will be vulnerable to the temptations offered by the Erl King. He will return to the failed or exhausted ambitions and dreams of earlier years. Or his agitated mind might perceive it as being dragged to places he did not intent to go in the first place. If he sees the sad wind, then he will be vulnerable to the despair and depression of late midlife stagnation.

The father might be more prone to accept this second option—for he has seen it happening around him as a norm for those who have crossed over to autumn. However, the father is deceiving himself if he thinks he can find comfort in the second option, which is a life of stagnation. He underestimates the continuing power of the Erl King. His son is threatened and perhaps in serious danger. Yet, the father declares that it's only a fantasy. He sees only the dying gasp of personal dreams, aspirations and energy. He sees only images that served him well for many years, but now seem sadly irrelevant to the developmental tasks he faces during his Autumnal years.

## Presence of the Soul

The father fails to recognize a third option, represented by his own child. He can turn away from the world of the spirit and turn to the world of the soul. To turn to this third option, the father must face his own loss of energy and a shift in his own priorities and interests. He must pause for a moment and turn his gaze to the child inside him, so he can begin a new inward journey. He must make changes in his life.

Why is the father unable to acknowledge this third option? Why does he fail to attend to his own son or acknowledge that his son sees the Erl King but wants not to join the Erl King? Why is it so threatening for him to imagine that his own son is interested in something other than the temptations being offered by the Erl King? Why doesn't his son need to believe in the fantasies his father constructs to avoid the Erl King? Why does his son not buy into the alternative of a life of stagnation? The answers to all of these questions have to do with our fear of the soul. These answers have to do with the difficult internal work that is required of Autumnal women and men to better understand and live within the domain of the soul.

What is our fear about? First, we are afraid of being ordinary and living an ordinary life. Women and men in most societies are expected to lead exceptional lives if they are successful. They don't simply live from day to

day; rather they are adventurers, compassionate caretakers, entrepreneurs, stewards of a vision, risk-takers, visionaries, head of families, leaders of people and organizations. These activities take men and women well beyond the confines of their hearth and home. They take us to new lands. We have much to learn in these ventures outward and upward on the wings of our spirit.

By contrast, the domain of the soul is interwoven with the mundane and commonplace. This is the “vernacular” life of which Thomas Moore (1992, p. 120) writes: “the soul is always rooted, not necessarily in relevancy and application, but in the particulars of life and personality.” Moore further suggests that: “the soul is always vernacular, [meaning that] it is located in some place—in one person’s life, in a neighbourhood or a region, in a specific culture or community.” In the vernacular life, meaning is found in the mundane.

In a novel, such as *Like Water for Chocolate*, we find that a life story and the romance associated with this life are built around food and recipes. While romance for the spirit begins in and centers on the bedroom and the boardroom, romance for the soul begins in the kitchen or the garden, as in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. It begins in a particular place and time that is nothing “special” yet is unique: the daily life on a small farm, as in the many farm novels of Jane Smiley, or around about a fishing village, as in Anne Proulx’s *The Shipping News*.

The animus energy is always traveling; it is always in search of meaning and purpose. The anima energy is while we stay home. Anima energy provides what Jung calls the archetype of life. The prodigal son who travels is honoured. We do not honour the son who stays home. We fail to appreciate the vernacular that “will always be with us.” We take our home life for granted until it is gone. We fail to realize that soul provides the “wind beneath our wings.” We are slow to discover that hearth and home provide the support we need beneath our soaring, spirit-driven aspirations. We fail to recognise that home is the place to be if we are to appreciate places far away to which we can return (in fact or in fantasy) forever in the future.



Fear of the soul also comes from loss of control. Who would we become if we lose control? The world of soul is frightening for mature men and women because this world requires engagement and interaction within specific context. When we are enmeshed in a specific world, we can no longer command or alter the world to fit our preconceived and abstracted reality. We learn about and adjust to the power of the outside world rather than shape it around our own frame of reference. In other words, work of the soul concerns living inside a culture rather than observing the culture from afar. Work of the soul involves the underbelly of an experience rather than its highlights. Soul is about the dinner we ate and the people we met, not the new contracts we signed. Soul is about the headache or heartache, not the award that we received during our trip back to our hometown. In *Wild Strawberries*, we see soul manifest in Dr. Bork's journey. Spirit is manifest in the honorary degree Dr. Bork receives at the end of the journey.

David is a man of Autumn whom one of us has recently coached. He recently made a business trip to Taiwan. David observed that he served in a very outward, spirit-filled role during the day, making speeches at a large civic centre building. However, he played a much more Soulful role during the evening. David became passive and receptive to a profoundly different world. David also noted that he was particularly taken by his visit to an all-night market in Taipei (the city he was visiting). His experience in this market was a powerful intermingling of smells, noise, blood, potions, cobra snakes, profound poverty, crippled and abused children, and prostitution. These were venomous sights and sounds. David was nauseous and wanted to run back to his safe, air-conditioned room; yet he was also enthralled.

Yen has a similar experience when she was an Autumnal woman. In one therapy session, she reflected on how her life in the advertising corporate world was and how she had changed from it. She had been focused on her work, but relationships with colleagues were strained because she was more into driving the results. Yen remembered losing her mother when she was in her late 40s and she had not even known she was unwell and had not seen her mother in a long time. She went into depression and fell into gambling in the casino.

Yen eventually lost her job and her flat and went deeper into her depression. She went to stay in a home where she had art classes. Initially she felt it was a burden as she did not know what to do and she did not like having to go. She would rather spend her time to make money to repay her debts and to get her own place to stay. Yen tried to avoid the class. As more time went by, as she went each day, she found drawing was therapeutic. She began to feel grounded when she paints and could lose herself in it. Yen felt rejuvenated when she painted and went on to find more arts that she enjoyed. Her works became a part of her new home.

As Autumnal women and men we try to stay above the culture. The soul, however, does not allow us to remain disengaged. We are enmeshed and learn about ourselves in the midst of this enmeshment. We are also afraid of soul work because it requires collaboration and trust rather than competition and courage. In the world of the spirit, we win or lose debates and discussions, whereas in the world of the soul we engage in dialogue (Senge, 1994). We soulfully forge relationships and community (Tannen, 1990, 1994). During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the “bill of rights” for children was not yet in effect. As a result, we were forced by our parents to listen to adult conversations and politely converse with our boring aunt or bratty cousin. There was an emphasis on dialogue and sociability.

In many Western countries there were rooms called parlours, where people met to talk and there were front porches and Sunday afternoon visiting. In Asian cultures, there were temples of various faiths. Almost all of them had space for people to sit around and engage in extended dialogues. If we wish to enter the world of the soul, we must return to some of these old patterns of interaction and rebuild communities. We must again listen to other people as they talk about mundane matters; not to be polite, but to learn something about ourselves. And we should open our minds to other value systems, cultures and beliefs. We must venture beyond the ‘right and wrong’, as illustrated by Rumi:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing  
and right doing there is a field.

I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass  
the world is too full to talk about.

Finally, the work of the soul is frightening and difficult for men because it is unpredictable and of-the-moment. The work of the soul requires that we tend to something that is immediately important, such as caring for our inner child when threatened by the Erl King. The work of the spirit, by contrast, concerns prediction and planning. It emphasizes preparation for that which is known. The spirit anticipates and influences, while the soul attends to and cares for. That is why Eastern European men were in a spirit-based daze after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their ideology had been destroyed. By contrast, women of Eastern Europe kept doing what they had always done. They took care of the family in a soulful manner.

## **The Autumnal Search for Relationship and Community**

The fear of relatedness and community (especially among men) is at the heart of the late mid-life reappraisal. Relatedness and community are, in turn, the essence of soul. During our Autumnal years a newly emerging and initially vaguely felt need for relationship and communities begins to emerge. The soulful domain in which Autumnal women and men must journey is often found in relationships and community.

More than forty years ago, during the early years of the feminist movement, a psychotherapist, Nancy Chodorow (1974, 1978), offered an interesting comparative analysis of the childhoods experienced by males and females. Her insights subsequently influenced many authors who were writing during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century about differences between men and women—notably (among those we are citing in this book) Carol Gilligan (1982), Lillian Rubin (1990), Mary Belenky and Associates (1997), and Deborah Tannen (1990). Chodorow first noted what is obvious to all of us: women did most of the child rearing during infancy in most societies

at this point in time. Chodorow builds on this fundamental observation by suggesting that, in such a society, girls grow up learning how they are similar to their primary caregiver—both they and their mother being female. Boys, by contrast, learn how they are different from their primary caregiver, since they are male and their mother is female.

Chodorow suggests that as a result of this early childhood experience, males grow up focusing primarily on their differences from other people. We are told from very early in our life as males that we are “different” from our primary mothering figure. Our society conveys in many ways that we must break away from our mother. We must not be tied to her apron strings: there is something wrong if we remain too close to our mother. We even have a label for such a man: “Moma’s boy.” As young men we learn to value autonomy and competition. We want to stand out in a crowd and gain a sense of independence. We want to be known as independent young men who can “stand on our own two feet!”

Ajit grew up in a democratic secular society where girls and boys were separated after primary schools. They were not allowed to mingle freely. It would become a topic of conversation and discipline if anyone did. Parents were cautious and worked with the schoolteachers to make sure boys and girls didn't get ‘too close’. Public buses had separate sections for men and women. Even places of worship had different rules for male worshippers and female worshippers. Ajit worked hard in his midlife to uncover his own beliefs and values which were different from what he saw around him in the new country to which he migrated. Ajit was surprised to discover how much his beliefs have affected the way he made decisions in his corporate role and how he engaged people as a leader. It took his cross-cultural experiences to wake him up to the distinctive and important perspective he was taking in his life and work. It took his secular society another decade before “waking up” to gender biases and discrimination.

It is important for each of us to also “wake up” to the impact which gender-based differences in assumptions and practices have influenced our own distinctive development as men and women. In his description of human (primarily male) development, Erik Erikson suggests that we are unable as

adults to establish intimate relationships until we have gained a clear sense of our own individual and independent identity (Erikson, 1985). He suggests that true engagement with other people is the “result and the test of firm self-delineation.” (Erikson, 1985, p. 134) Erikson equates this process with “intimacy” and proposes that identity and individuality or self-delineation precede intimacy among men. His own gender-based biases were influencing his perspectives on development.

Carol Gilligan (1982) proposes a quite different developmental sequence for women. She suggests that intimacy and identity are interwoven in the lives of many women and some men. One does not precede the other. Rather intimacy and identity are merged in the enactment of interdependence and an ethic of mutual care. According to Gilligan, the primary task for young women is to learn how to relate to other people and foster interdependency. Young women learn how to form and describe complex interpersonal relationships because they were exposed during childhood primarily to mothering figures. Both the mother and female child have been traditionally identified first and foremost as females. In this regard, they are “alike.”

In the world described by Nancy Chodorow (1974, 1978), young women typically grow up focusing on relationships, whereas young men grow up focusing on autonomy. As young men we were smart about some things, such as sports trivia, but blissfully ignorant about other things, such as the nature of intimacy. Unfortunately, these “other things” were ultimately of much greater importance. We now speak with great reverence of something called “emotional intelligence” (EQ) (Goleman, 2006). Young men typically are challenged in this domain. As mature men we often never catch up to our female colleagues with regard to EQ.

Chodorow proposed that men come to recognize during mid-life that they are isolated in their autonomy. Mature men conclude that they need to learn much more about relationships and, even more broadly, about community. This emerging realization is a critical component of the late midlife transformation for most men. Chodorow suggested that women tend to move in exactly the opposite direction. Midlife women recognize

that they need to begin differentiating themselves from other people and finding their own independent identities. They look beyond their most prized and intimate relationships with spouses and children to a wider world of individual career achievement or dominance at home.

Mr and Mrs Lai had such an experience. They were living in quite different worlds. Mr Lai had been the breadwinner since they were married and till his retirement. He had grown bored of his work life and was never really connected with his family or his community. He spent much of his time away from work with his friends, drinking. Everything changed when he got into a bad fight for no good reason, with one of his friends when intoxicated. He decided he needed to manage his life differently. He was apprehensive about connecting with his larger community, as he had not tried that before. He did it taking baby steps with the patient support offered by community workers and his counsellor. Mr. Lai was now much happier, sharing his days with the larger community, volunteering time, going on day trips or learning new skills. Today, he advocates for others to participate more with their community.

Mrs Lai has made a complementary transition in her own life. She had served for many years as homemaker and devoted mother. Like her husband, Mrs. Lai had grown bored of her home life. Furthermore, her one child was now married. Mrs. Lai was not in despair regarding her “empty nest”. Rather, she decided that she no longer desired the role of homemaker with their only child married. She went back into the working world and attended part time courses to learn something new. While she is still devoted to her child, this devotion is now shared with Mr. Lai—and this devotion is no longer consuming her whole life. Each day when Mr and Mrs Lai come home, the stories they share with each other contrast with those offered earlier in their life together. They are sharing a new life of purple.

Mr. and Mrs. Lai exemplify a challenge being faced in different ways by Autumnal men and women. While men struggle with the “empty nest” (see Chapter Three), women struggle with the “empty self.” This being the case, then not only do men have much to learn from women—women also have

much to learn from men. Given Chodorow's scenario, Autumnal years are a wonderful time for men and women to serve as guides for one another. The key is to discover the true feminine voice and to find a woman who can be trusted as a caring and insightful guide. Mr. Lai could have (and probably did) learn from not just his counsellors but also his wife. Mrs. Lai could have learned (and probably did) from her husband about the world of work.

Is this gap in the world of men and women still as great – or was it ever that great? Were the differences between Mr. and Mrs. Lai unique to them (or even their own Asian culture)? Do men really live on one planet and women on another planet as John Gray (2012) has proposed? Don't young women now face many of the challenges that were traditionally in the domain of male upbringing and aren't men more likely to exhibit a modicum of emotional intelligence in their dealings at home and at work? We turn again to these matters in Chapter Eight as we consider the second temptation offered by the Erl King in his attempt to gain the allegiance of a frightened son.

## Chapter Eight

### Voices of the Female Guides

#### Poem of The Erl King

"My handsome boy, won't you come with me?  
My daughters will serve you well, with sisterly care.  
My daughters will dance round thee, all night in a ring.  
They'll cradle thee, and dance with thee and sing you to sleep."

#### Legend of Miaoshan

She decided to go to Mount Fragrant and stayed there  
Years passed by,  
Peacefully.

#### Story of the Great King of the Ramayana

You come in my dreams, I hear you in the wind  
A divine gift from heavens, born of my deep desire

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In every beat of my heart, every thought of my mind

Like stars a million, twinkling in the night sky"

In this chapter we want to speak specifically to the Autumnal men in the room; however, our female readers might want to stick around. This chapter is also about them. Women are being asked to be guides to the men in their life—and they might be of real value to these mid-Centurians (while



also serving as guides to other women). There is another reason for female readers to stick around, because this chapter has a companion chapter that is directed in particular toward women. Specifically, we turn in Chapter Nine to the male guide for women. What are the ways that men can be helpful to Autumnal women (and ways in which men also have male guides)?

We start, as we have done in previous chapters, with insights to be gained from Goethe's poetic narrative. The Erl King is very smart. First, he praises the boy, speaking directly to the boy's ego. There is nothing more beautiful than an admiring gaze. We look for the admiration of both men and women during our Autumnal years, especially when we fear our physical decline or decline in our social status (as we become "invisible" to many people). The Erl King delegates certain functions to women. Specifically, the Erl King backs up his statement of admiration for the boy by offering his daughters to the boy. What greater compliment can a man offer than to give another man his daughters? Many stories have been written about a father's offering of his daughter and there are references to the Vedic tradition where the ideal marriage is consummated when the father presents her daughter as an offering to a qualified person. In many societies, the right of the father to offer his daughter is never disputed. This offering serves as a token of the father's respect for the man who is receiving his daughter. Alternatively, this offer is a vehicle, like money, for the transfer of power, position or wealth from one male to another male. Women thus become the object, but not the recipient, of social rewards.

The Legend of Miaoshan offers us a quite different perspective on the role to be played by women as guides for both Autumnal men and women. While the women in the Erl King poem are enticers and are not really honest sources of wisdom, the Legend of Miaoshan offers us the image of a woman who is wise and reflective. She will be a credible source of guidance for those in mid-life. What is the source of and location for acquiring this wisdom? It is the journey to a high place (Mt. Fragrant) where one can gain a broad and clear perspective on life. It is a place of sanctuary where one can spend time reflecting. It is a sanctuary of peace. Does a

credible female guide in our life offer (or at least suggest) that we can find a sanctuary of peace—as she has found? Is there a place for us where (like our guide) we can slow down time and spend a few moments to engage in what the Nobel-prizing winning behavioural economist, Daniel Kahneman (2011) calls “slow thinking”?

The Story of Ramayana provides us with an additional insight regarding the feminine guide. The source of guidance is not only found out there in the world (an actual person); it is also found within each of us. It is found in every beat of one’s heart and in every thought in one’s mind. The female guidance is truly a twinkling of insights residing within each of us. Given this psychic direction provided by Ramayana, the major challenge becomes: how do I recognize this guiding wisdom and how do I access, honour and gain useful insight from this guidance? The feminine wisdom residing within each of us can make a difference in our life. How do we access it?

At an even deeper level, we must ask: how do I tell the difference between the female guidance that is enticing but not credible and the guidance that is based on peaceful, reflective wisdom? Daughters of the Erl King had an agenda placed on them (perhaps forced on them) by their father. They occupied a traditional role of woman as seductress—a role that requires very little reflection (what Kahneman called “fast thinking”). They serve in a role that certainly is not peaceful, a means to an end. How do we know that our feminine guide from out there in the world or from within our own heart and mind does not come with an agenda—especially an agenda that is not aligned with our best interests? What do we do with feminine guidance that arises from our own personal greed, passion or fear—given that we are most inclined to be seduced when we are needy or anxious? In this chapter, we offer a few ideas about how this important discernment process can take place. We begin with the search for a female guide.

## **Finding a Female Guide**

We begin this search by correcting the record. In his promise of “sisterly care”, the Erl King offers some wonderful gifts that we should take seriously, for these gifts can lead us on the “royal road” to our soul. The Erl

King's gifts are not all bad for us. His daughters will attend to our needs on a twenty-four hour basis. This means nights as well as daytime. On the one hand, this sounds like an offer of sex, which is not a very good idea. Rather, we should consider this an offer to serve us at times not only when we are at work and "on guard," but also at times when we are relaxed and "off guard."

The "sisterly care" may come in our dreams, in our recreational activities, and in our hobbies. It can even arrive through our everyday life while we are cooking, cleaning or grandparenting. This is often when and where a feminine guide is of greatest help to us. The guide never provides these services herself, thus she is unconsciously building dependency and further bondage. That would be returning to a very old feminine role model—that most of us abandoned in the 1970s. Instead, our female guides serve us by teaching us how and why to do these things ourselves. Women often teach within context (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky, et al, 1997), helping us to be more objective and detached, yet involved. In this instance, the context of everyday work is important.

In the 2008 movie, *Mamma Mia*, the 20 years old Sophie Sheridan brought three middle aged men out of their usual life and comfort zone to a Greek Island. They each discovered something new about themselves, one finding his one true love that he mistakenly thought he had lost 20 years ago, another found his true identity and orientation and came out as gay and another found his love here. Sophie was the female guide whose invitation to an exotic island brought them to rediscover themselves and redefine their lives.

The Erl King's daughters also offer to tend to us with dance and song. They will lull us to sleep with these wonderful ploys. Sleep represents the unconscious life. We need to be lulled to sleep more during our late mid-life, having lived most of our life in the rational, conscious world—especially if we are men raised with traditional role-expectations. Dance and song are pathways to the unconscious and to the soul. Women can inspire us and lead us to new insights about ourselves through song, dance and art.

Mature men and mature women should embrace both song and dance. We should sing and dance with other people—with women we love; with women who are our friends; and, in particular, with women who serve as our guides. There is also the matter of beauty. As the Legend of Miaoshan teaches us, the female guide in our life may lead us to a greater aesthetic appreciation. She can lead us to a beautiful perspective on our own Mt. Fragrant. She may introduce us to ballet or fine art—settings that are filled with the fragrance of movement and vision. She leads us to sunsets, forests and wildflowers—the fragrance of nature. She wakes us up to our own innocence, magnificence and sometimes to naivety – thus reinvigorating our aliveness.

Another major (and often critical) role can be played by our feminine guide. She may serve in the role of muse, inspiring our own creativity and artistic expressions. We know little about muses today, given that they are mythic figures from the past. Yet, we do encounter muses in our lives as mature men. A not-very-good Hollywood musical (more recently made into a Broadway musical), called *Xanadu* starred Gene Kelly as a middle-aged man whose creative juices were dried up. He was a stagnating Autumnal male until he bumped into a beautiful, young muse, played by Olivia Newton-John.

Inspired by her beauty and enthusiasm, Kelly comes alive again and dances with Newton-John in a whole new way for Gene Kelly, the accomplished hooper. They roller skate! This is a very romantic movie. Is any movie with Gene Kelly not romantic? Kelly and Newton-John, however, are never physically affectionate with one another. This would seem absurd to most people, given their age differences. Furthermore, lust and sexuality would have been a distraction. Their beautifully romantic encounter in the mythic world of *Xanadu* was poignant, precisely because it remained dreamy and elusive. Olivia Newton-John is not Kelly's lover. She is his guide.

There are even more eloquent and classic statements regarding the role that muses have played over the centuries. We find many great works of poetry, music and sculpture inspired by and dedicated to the feminine muses. If we can find time with our guide (as the Legend of Miaoshan suggests), there

are many other aesthetic vistas that are likely to open up for us as women and men of Autumn. Fragrance is to be found everywhere. These vistas may not initially seem to be particularly conducive to personal development.

For women, the vista (and the female guide) might be present for us in the form of a brief encounter with a “role model” or a short, but candid conversation with a female friend. Men often find the vista and guide in the chance encounter with a woman who asks us about our children or the brief but poignant encounter with a song sung by a woman that is asking us about our future (“what are you doing with the rest of your life?”). These moments of vista and guidance may seem initially to be more about temporary pleasure and social pleasantries than personal insight. Yet, they eventually can lead in the direction of the soul. In many cases, women out in the world, who serve as our guides, do not even realize that they are guides. They may simply want to share a moment of great aesthetic delight with us, or they may only be inviting us to meet them in a place of great beauty.

In seeking to address the question of discernment, we have read Goethe, listened to the Miaoshan and Ramayana narratives, danced to the songs of ABBA while Bill, Harry and Sam rediscover themselves and watched Olivia and Gene roller skates. There is yet another value source of insight about the selection of an appropriate feminine guide—this source is Dante’s *Inferno*. Dante was looking for a female guide when he “traveled.” There has been a long-standing tradition in many societies of travelers (especially women) being accompanied by a female companion when journeying to another land. In Dante’s case the journey was to Hell and back! Dante first selects a male compatriot to accompany him on the journey to Hell. He finds a perfect companion in Virgil, the esteemed poet of antiquity. Three women have sent Virgil to Dante. They are the Virgin Mary, St. Lucia and a woman named Beatrice. The third member of this impressive trio, Beatrice, is someone who Dante knows in real life. He has loved her from afar for many years. Virgil and all three women are concerned with Dante’s welfare. He has adequate support to balance off the enormous challenge of journeying to Hell.

As Dante has taught us, we should not forget the male role in the guidance process. Male companions are often of great value to us during our Autumnal years as we venture into unexplored aspects of our own lives. Virgil joins with Dante in his journey to a very personal inferno. We meet many of Dante's acquaintances in life during this journey. Some are friendly and others are malevolent. We also become acquainted with Dante's vices. At the depths of his personal inferno, Dante finds that Virgil can't always be very helpful. Virgil, like other males, is just as baffled and terrorized by this inner world as Dante.

As a male, we might find that our male friends are too much like us to be of much help when we enter the most soulful part of our inward journey. Just as women might find guidance from another woman who serves as a "role model", so Autumnal men might look up to male "role models"—other men who have been successful in business or have written a great book. As men, we are inclined to look to these "bigger" men as guides. We have grown up trying to distinguish ourselves and separate ourselves from our mothers and eventually from other people in our life. Our inner world is swampy and complex. As mature men, we may be able to get part of the way into our inner world "with a little help from our [male] friends"; however, neither we nor our male friends know much about how one navigates in this hellish inner world nor do we know much about how we get back home. Like Odysseus, we wander around a lot, getting distracted or lost.

In Dante's case, his old, unrequited love, Beatrice, helps him at critical points during his journey and eventually leads him up to the highest levels of the divine domain. This is a very important point. It is Beatrice, not Virgil, who leads Dante to new relationships with God and his heavenly domain. While Virgil represents masculine reason to Dante, Beatrice represents clarity and convergence, which are feminine characteristics. Beatrice comes from Dante's hometown, whereas Virgil comes from another time and place. Virgil represents the separation of rationality from irrationality. By contrast, Beatrice is a source of both physical and spiritual

passion, these two emotions being fused rather than differentiated in the feminine.

Both the feminine and masculine guides in Dante's life encourage him to look inward. Virgil provides companionship and a road map of the territory. In contemporary terms, one might say that Virgil offered a self-help book on exploring the unconscious life. He offers the kind of support and guidance that we are providing in this book. By contrast, Beatrice offers inspiration and comfort. Both guides are needed. Virgil helps Dante get started; however, without Beatrice, Dante could not find his way out of his inner life nor relate to his own divinity and soul. Virgil offers intelligence, rationality and tradition, while Beatrice offers eloquence, innocence and spirituality.

Beatrice is effective as a guide not only because she is a compelling figure in Dante's life, but also because she has never been Dante's lover. This is a critical point, for we are tempted as mature men to turn our guides into lovers. Goethe is teaching us this important lesson. If we allow ourselves to be seduced or if we initiate the seduction ourselves, then we will inevitably distract ourselves from looking at our own internal world. Rather than exploring our own inner world (soul), we direct all of our attention outward to foster a relationship with the woman we lust after (spirit).

This might be the reason why in some traditions, a clear separation of men from women has been practiced and reinforced, including rules of interaction and lifestyle disciplines. For those of us seeking expansion in the inner world, presence of women or men in our lives might be a serious distraction. It is easy to divert our attention from the hard spadework we are determined to embark upon. We are enticed by and perhaps even embrace a traditional role as attentive daughter or workaholic son. Our excited minds might be able to come up with justifications for the distractions and reversion to traditional role, based on our experiences in the past facilitated by our spirit—thus postponing the soul's work. On the other hand, the presence of guides may increase the possibility of accelerating our journey inwards—sometimes shocking is with an unexpected jolt. This is the challenge of discernment. When are we invited

to a distracting dance and when to an extended, reflective and eventually soulful ballet?

What is it that we find so seductive? Why do we choose the short dance (fast thinking) rather than the longer ballet (slow thinking)? We play out an old trick; rather than looking inward at those aspects of ourselves that are to be cherished and protected, we project these characteristics outward and fall in love with these characteristics as they exist in another person. We fall in love (or lust), as we have in the past, with our projection outward rather than with our internal self. We love the artistic orientation of that handsome and seemingly “sensitive” man we met at the office reception, rather than exploring our own artistic and sensitive self. Why our own self has been calling out for attention for a long time, we opt for the external source of inspiration.

We are absolutely enthralled with the firm, athletic body of our fifty-three year-old neighbour, and can thus avoid firming up our own body and rediscovering our own love for athletic activities. We are intrigued with the ethereal presence or youth of that teenage boy who is dating our granddaughter or that twenty-something woman who just joined our firm. This minor obsession (sometimes referred to, in an unsympathetic way, as the “dirty old man” or “dirty old woman” syndrome) enables us to escape from a soulful examination of those ethereal or youthful dreams and visions that still dwell in our own psyche—after years of being ignored or denigrated.

The Legend of Miaoshan reminds us to stand above our situation, away from distractions, to have a clearer vision. The queen of Ramayana trusted her female guide (her chamber maid) without really looking within herself. She could not face her own greed for power, longing for security and selfish love of her son. It was too late when the elderly king resonated with the voice of the female guide within him – the damage was done in exiling his dear son. The Ramayana Story teaches us that we don’t need to look out in the world for a source of love, inspiration and appreciation. We can find the twinkling stars in our own heart and mind.



## Spirituality and Feminine Guidance

The primary direction provided by Beatrice to Dante concerned spirituality and Dante's relationship with a divine reality. Spirituality and religious belief are often the focal point of contemporary guidance from women in our lives. Our interest in religion and spirituality, as Autumnal women and men, often are first heard as faint voices from other rooms in our psyche (a theme to which we return in a later chapter). The significant others in our lives and our co-workers typically greet these emerging interests with little enthusiasm. People we live and work with have grown accustomed to our tough-minded views of the world and often rely heavily on our practicality. Other employees or family members can be a bit flaky precisely because "good old reliable Mom" or "good old Boss" will always be there to provide the money, the common sense or the stabilizing influence. Suddenly, Mom or Boss is a little strange:

"He talks about going to church on Sunday. Is this the first sign of senility?"

"My boss wants to go on a one-week retreat to some spiritual center in Arizona. Is this a manifestation of some late midlife crisis?"

"My lover is spending her evenings reading about Buddhism. Is she trying to avoid me?"

"We planned for this sightseeing trip to Thailand for many months. The only thing my wife did when we got there was go to those old decaying temples. She spent all of her time sitting around meditating and bouncing those blocks of wood off the temple walls. She sure can be selfish and stubborn in her old age!"

Camilla was a strong woman throughout her career – she was 'the boss'. She grew the business from a small family operation to a reputed brand in the region. She was a role model for strength, power and no-nonsense. She was the role model for her son. He tried to imitate her. He spoke her

language, puffed up his body to claim his space and worked hard, even ignoring his health. Camilla went through some rough patches in her life and work during the past few years, as she was entering her autumnal years. That is when we met her in our office. She was anxious, fidgety and seriously ill. It seemed to her that what used to work for her, is no more effective. She seemed to have lost all her weapons. In her surrender, she started to become a different person to her son. She lay in bed after work. She began to talk about kindness and letting go. She takes a few days off from work – so unlike the mother that he had known and emulated (including the ill health). Her son could not believe the change in his mom. He wondered whether she was still alright mentally—or had she completely lost it! Now Camilla had to decide – for whom should I live my life?

We have a choice to make. Do we simply shut down this newly emerging part of our life or do we turn elsewhere for support and guidance? What if we decide to turn elsewhere? This is usually not as comfortable as it sounds. As in the case of Dante, we are often goaded or propelled by external events to begin the soulful journey into our inner life. A female guide miraculously appears before us, having been sent to us by some benevolent force in our life. She is ready to assist us in our journey. It seems there are always women waiting for us when we need them to serve as guides—whether we are a male or female. In many cases, they have always been there because they reside inside our heart and mind. They have been there all the time for us; we now realize as the women and men of Autumn that they are needed. We now truly open our eyes to them. Even if they come from inside us, as manifest in the twinkling lights of our heart and mind.

## **The Dimensions of Feminine Guidance**

We turn back to the poetic world of Goethe. The Erl King entices the boy with his daughters, though he makes a rather ambiguous offer. It is laced with sexual innuendo, yet nothing is stated explicitly. This makes the offer even more alluring. It is a “safe” relationship: “After all these are his daughters and he is offering ‘sisterly’ care, not sex!” Yet, our fantasy goes wild with all the possibilities. We must somehow figure how we can really receive sisterly care, rather than provoking or participating in a sensuous

love affair. The former is essential at this point in our life. The latter can lead to great difficulties—though it too can eventually yield some insights. We need to be particularly careful of any offers for feminine companionship offered by the Erl King that begins with a stroke of our ego and promise of so many rewards.

For many men, the first temptation is to have an affair with these women who are now serving as guides in our lives. This is much easier. This is more exciting and conveniently distracting. “My wife doesn’t understand me, but you do.” “I want to spend all my time with you, not with my family.” For once in our life, we might try to be wise and thoughtful regarding our sexual appetites. As autumnal men, we might even try to be mature in our relationship with this special woman. We chose not to have an affair. We spend time instead with this woman as a dear friend—much as many women can find their feminine guidance by befriending another woman and spending quality time with her.

We spend many hours talking, walking and reflecting on life values with this woman (whether we are a man or woman, and whether we are straight or gay). This is a wonderful setting in which to explore dreams, fears and memories of childhood. These are precious moments. It is important to remember, however, that these moments pull us away from significant, intimately-related people in our life—our spouse or life partner and other members of our family. We might feel selfish and a bit foolish—perhaps conflicted about our priorities. Yet, this is time that is well spent with our guide. It is critical to our inward journey and our soulful transformation.

A critical conversation must take place at this point in our journey. Somehow, we must help our family members understand the value and needs that are met by this new friendship. We must assure our loved ones that this new relationship is not threatening to the established family. However, it does take time and attention away from our family. Fortunately, in many instances, members of our family are preoccupied with their own life transitions. They can at least appreciate the time we want to spend with another person. If we are perfectly honest with ourselves, however, we must recognize that our feminine guide can pose a

threat to our life partner. This is often an excellent time to receive some outside support from a counsellor. At the very least, this is an important time to spend romantic and reflective time with our loved one. If we set aside other parts of our lives that no longer are as important to us, then we will find time for our life partner and family, as well as our guide.

There is an obvious solution to this struggle about priorities. Why not just give up the guide and devote quality time to our family? This may be yet another diversionary tactic that leads us away from our journey inward. Furthermore, if we do choose to give up our female guide and companion, then we are likely to resent our life partner and family. We will move into a stage of stagnation rather than generativity, ignoring critical voices in our lives. If we chose family over feminine guidance, we are likely to spend many years regretting the sacrifice we made. Conversely, if we abandon our family, we are even more likely to misuse our relationship with the female guide in our life and use the loss of the family to distract us from our inner work.

Neither option is viable. We must find a way to balance the time we spend with our guide and the time we spend with our family. We must place other parts of our lives on the back burner—such as career advancement, spending after-work hours at the local bar, or tending to the needs of those who are distantly related to us. We do this to make time for both our female guides and our family. This is the time we take risks—opening ourselves to vulnerability and love at the same time. Our dwelling in both of these domains (world of the soul and world of the household) is essential if we are to successfully journey inward.

It is also important to remember that our female guides often don't know that they are our guides. After all, we did not know until now that we are being guided to an inner journey. They may not have the ability to guide us professionally as much as we would like (and even expect) this to be the case. Sometimes we misunderstand someone as our guide and project our need for guidance—because we had been waiting for a very long time to find this guide. What if they are not standing on a firm ground, to guide us?

It might be a challenging ride which will get bumpy as we learn to turn inwards and develop our own discerning intellect to filter through our choices—without driving away our female guides. In a somewhat ironic way, the inner feminine guide we are accessing could begin to compete for attention with our external feminine guide (who often helped to precipitate our look inward). Frequently, we must first learn to befriend our inner self in a soulful way, so we can then expand and flourish, rather than cause sorrow and decline. Maybe we could refer to our inner guide as our primary anchor. With this befriending of the internal female guide, followed by the befriending of the external female guide, comes the potential of peaceful reflection and a twinkling, spring-like state of heart and mind. We can dance and drape ourself in purple.

## Chapter Nine

### Voices of the Male Guides

#### Legend of Miaoshan

Her Father fell ill with no cure.

A wise man (Miaoshan's disguise) told him,

Go up to Mount Fragrant,

#### Great King of the Ramayana

In a palace, full of comforts and three queens

Among the wisest of all the sages

Hopeless, confused and yearning for peace

Missing his dearest, first of four sons

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As an astute reader of this book, you will note something different about this chapter. There is no excerpt from the poem of the Erl King. It seems that our poet (Goethe) didn't envision any male source of guidance (or temptation). While the son, father and Erl King were all men, the forces that operated on the son (and father) were all natural or feminine (are these two forces actually the same?). We must turn to our second and third narratives to find some wisdom regarding the male presence in guiding us on our soulful journey.

We also don't get much help about male guides from the Legend of Miaoshan. This legend would seem to be telling us that we (men in particular) only look for a male guide when we are vulnerable and

threatened – perhaps even facing our own death. This seems to be a little late in the game. Furthermore, in this specific narrative, the guide only comes to us in disguise. This is actually a female guide (Miaoshan) decked out as a man. Apparently, we don't often look to an authentic male guide when journeying to the summit (where we can reflect on our life from a broad perspective). Even at the summit, are we just being full of spirit (feeling pretty good about ourselves and our prospects for the future) or are we preparing for a more downward journey that is quite soulful. Put simply, can an authentic male guide lead us on a soulful journey?

The Ramayana narrative isn't any more positive with regard to the impact of a helpful male guide, though there were male guidance to the king one way or the other (Rao, 2016). When the King listened to the queen's request, he heard his male guide from within, shouting and screaming. We know this because the elderly king knelt in front of his young queen pleading her not to demand Rama's exile. He agreed to hand over the throne to the queen's son, and begged that Rama be allowed to live with him.

In the following scenes, the elderly King's second Son Lakshmana, reacts with anger about the unfair decision, wears his battle gear, and pledges to destroy anyone who makes a move against his brother Rama. He exclaimed: "Fate! Only the weak take shelter in that word. The strong face their situation and boldly achieve their objective. This bow is not an ornament. This sword is not a stick, nor my arrows. I possess these weapons to crush our enemies. Crush them I will." (Iyengar, 2010) His words such as 'The king is to blame for his foolish indulgences and infatuation with the queen' had no impact on anyone in the family.

As the minister was sending Rama off in a chariot to the edge of the forest (along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, who insisted on joining Rama), the royal streets were filled with weeping men and women, requesting that the chariot be stopped. Apparently, animals like the elephant and horses were also troubled, so they trumpeted and kicked off dust. The elderly King weeping for the misfortune, was witness to the exile

standing in the balcony of the palace, and ‘fell like an uprooted tree’ suffering from grief (Blessings on the Net, 2020).

The young queen was immune to the male voice, including her sons. Though she orchestrated his coronation, he did not approve of the means. He rejected the power and position bestowed on him and stayed loyal to his elder brother. Yet the queen did not hear the male voice that came from within her, from her son and from the subjects of her kingdom. Like some other women (especially those who have witnessed and personally felt the stupidity of male privilege and power), the queen failed to look for the male pain and suffering that resided in her own mind and heart. She might have thought that the men were just as “stupid” as the trumpeting elephants and dust-kicking horses. They are all “beasts” that should never serve as guides!

In the following days, the despairing King resides in a place of denial. He is provided with a royal world that is full of comforts. He is accompanied by three queens – not a viable male guide anywhere in sight. The narrative indicates that the King is surrounded by sages, yet he doesn’t avail himself of their sagacity (Aravamudan, 2014). Did the sages lose their voice in the presence of power and tradition? Did the young queen shut their voices down, so that the king would not get their advice? Nothing is available but the distractions that lead the King away from greater personal insights.

We must ask a disturbing question: maybe the King did not want to dig deeper—even though the inner and outer signs were loud and clear. Perhaps the King needs to find his own Mount Fragrant without much outside help. This is the common appeal among men who wish to be independent and are always “doing it themselves.” They are not asking for direction either while driving a car or journeying to Mount Fragrant. It is one thing to be stubbornly independent about small matters (such as asking for directions). This might be part of the “brutish character” of men that directs to ignore male pleas. It is quite another thing when this independence is coupled with the power of royalty and with the arrogance and ignorance that often accompanies the decision to “go it alone.”



## The Male Guide and Limbic Attunement

Maybe the answer (or at least the escape from a non-productive discourse) resides in the act of looking in a new direction. Men might serve as guides not to despairing fathers and kings, but rather to women. What if we start talking about men as guides for women (and some men)? In shifting our focus, we need to turn to activities in which men might engage when interacting in a helpful, guiding way with women (and men) in their life.

We turn to action—because this is often the way in which men throughout the world express their emotions—especially their expression of caring and concern. While oxytocin might have been introduced into the women’s hormonal system as a way to keep her bonded to her offspring and staying at home to nurture and protect at close distance, it seems that the oxytocin injected into most men leads them to stride away from the home in order to gather food and protect in an anticipatory manner by fighting the foe on a distant battlefield. He shows the women in his life that he loves them by bringing in a slain deer or wood for the fire. In more contemporary times, the male expresses his love by offering a birthday gift, taking family photographs or offering advice (often a whole lot of advice whether requested or not).

What resides at the heart (and not the head) of this male engagement in action and advice-giving? It ultimately comes down to neurotransmitters and hormones – as it does for women. The outcomes achieved by men are much less important than the actions themselves. It seems that actions (and advice) help to create what social neurobiologists call “limbic attunement.” (Lewis, Amini and Lannon, (2000). This rather fancy term refers to the simultaneous activation in two interacting people of specific areas in both of their brains of the emotional center (amygdala) and memory center (hippocampus). [The limbic system constituting our mid-brain with the amygdala and hippocampus being major components of this system.] According to Lewis et al, our nervous system is not an independent unit by itself; rather it coexists with other nervous system of those closest to us.

Limbic attunement resides at the heart of all (or most) powerful (attractive) relationships. It is a bit like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers swinging and swaying together. It is as if one of the two people engaged in this compelling relationship takes up “temporary residence in another’s world.” (Lewis, Amini and Lannon, 2000, p. 178). With specific reference to the attraction of a male guide, the actions and advice of the male guide resonate with the person he is guiding. The recipient is grateful for the actions taken or advice given (even if the actions don’t have much of an effect or the advice is ignored),

This gratitude, in turn, triggers some “happy” chemicals as they enter the blood stream and neural system of the male guide. When the male “lights up” (with non-verbal signs of appreciation for the recipient’s gratitude), then the recipient similarly “lights up.” Both participants bask in the glow of shared appreciation. With this attunement in place, the role of male guide is in place: there is now a safe shelter (relationship) for the person being “guided” to journey inward toward their own soulful insights. Thus begins the journey to one’s own Mount Fragrant.

Xavier and Diane are from different cultures and have been married for 26 years. When they truly began to know each other better after the honeymoon phase of their new relationship, they found themselves often in conflicts with each other. At different times each had wanted to call the relationship quits. It took a long time and an even greater amount of effort for them to be positively “attuned” to each other. They know they are in sync when in their mind they could understand the other’s different point of view and whether they agree or disagree with the other’s opinion, they are acquainted to communicate and act meaningfully and acceptingly towards each other.

One of the things Diane shared with her husband was her challenge with certain colleagues at work. When Diane brought this up in the past, Xavier would advise her how to handle her colleagues and this would lead to quarrels between them. Diane simply does not do things the same way as her husband. Presently, when Diane shared this struggle, Xavier listened and then asked her what she would like to do and after hearing her out,

assured Diane to go ahead and do as she needed to and he would support her decision. When Xavier relapsed to alcohol after years of recovery, Diane was extremely disappointed, but she was able to empathise with her husband and gave him what he needed healthy and firm support to restart his recovery again.

With completion of this brief venture into social neurobiology and the limbic attunement process, we can turn to several of the specific ways in which men often serve as guides for women (and perhaps some men). These guiding roles are also, unfortunately, the ways in which men too often exert their power over women or try to seduce rather than assist. Unfortunately, limbic attunement can be engaged on behalf of both positive and negative ends.

## **The Male Guide as Mentor**

We start by describing the complex nature of mentoring as it relates to one way in which Autumnal men might assist the women in their lives. First, having gained considerable experience in an organization, in family life and/or in personal relationships, the male guide can serve as a mentor to someone else. This can occur, provided that there is limbic attunement between the two of them. The male mentor is filled with great ideas that he readily shares as advice with the person he is mentoring. We all light up a bit when providing advice to another person. That is why advice-giving is so attractive and even addictive: the real beneficiary of the advice-giving is the giver not the receiver!

Effective mentoring, however, is more than advice-giving. It is also about provision of support and even protection. This security can be tangible (stepping in to ensure that someone is physically safe). More often, it is psychological security. One of the steps to be taken in the mentoring process is often the provision of psychological safety—so that the recipient (often a woman), can take risks and open up more fully to new experiences (the journey to Mount Fragrant). In mentoring from the top of an organization, one can often provide protection and some valuable words of wisdom for the younger or less experienced women and men being

mentored. As the senior, Autumnal patriarch of a family system, the male mentor can serve not only as a guide, but also as a shield for the second and third generations of the family.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019, start-up technological businesses could rejoice. 53 years old Rajan Anandan decided to move from Google India where he had scaled the internet search operations to over USD\$1billion in revenues to join venture capital firm Sequoia India to provide investment advance and mentorship. In a letter he wrote to his staff, he said “There are two things that excite me more than anything else: the power of technology, and the power of ambitious entrepreneurs, to solve for humanity’s big problems.” “In this next phase of my life, I want to focus full-time on the latter – investing in promising early-stage technological start-ups across India and southeast Asia.”

It is important to note at this point that mentoring is not only about supporting (and in some ways protecting) a woman or man working in one’s organization or being members of one’s family. Mentoring is about supporting and encouraging ideas and forming partnerships. Mentoring concerns the nature of rewards a man receives from seeing other people (particularly women) be successful and acknowledged for their work. It is about expanding our perspective beyond self-based achievement. As one of our male colleagues recently noted, he is “motivated by the fun of seeing things happen as the result of the efforts of others and myself.” Why and how do Autumnal men become mentors? In many cases, they themselves were mentored and found powerful role models among the men (and women) they worked with when young: They, in turn, are "passing forward" this caring relationship. Limbic attunement is infective—it moves on from one special relationship to the next relationship.

## **Male Guidance and the Four Other M's**

Through our coaching and consulting experiencing in organizations and our therapeutic work with couples, we recognize that men can provide guidance in yet four other ways: mediating, monitoring, mobilizing and motivating.

*Mediator* has much to do with conflict. In a complex family or organizational setting, there is room for diverse and passionately held opinions about many issues. Leaders or senior family members who can mediate conflict and help mentor other people to become more effective and collaborative problem-solvers provide an invaluable service to their organization or family – and to other people with whom they relate. Mediation (and perhaps all five M roles) seems to require a strong dose of patience—complemented by a bit of limbic attunement.

The role of *Monitor* is aligned with the role of mentor. Monitors provide an oversight function that is observant rather than judgmental. They suggest that something isn't working right or that formal or informal rules are being violated. Monitors serve as referees and auditors, keeping things in line with fundamental values and desired outcomes. This is a tricky balance for any Autumnal male who wishes to be supportive, but also provide insights and expertise regarding other family members or the organization where he is serving as mentor. As monitor, he is particularly concerned about uninformed and unreflective decision-making on the part of the person being assisted. Patience must again be at play—alongside the limbic attunement (especially in a family setting). One can only seem to be non-judgemental if there is sufficient trust and a caring (limbically-attuned) relationship has been established.

How does one serve as mentor and observant monitor while facing a stressful crisis that is likely to precipitate *Ready, Fire, Aim* decision making? It seems that successful monitoring requires a balanced ego when helping to engage and resolve a conflict-filled issue. The monitor is doing hard work that often is not acknowledged or even appreciated by many people in the family or organization. Unlike the mediator, who is often recognized for the role he is playing, the monitor is likely to be less visible—and less often honoured by the women and men with whom he is affiliating or working.

As Autumnal men, our guidance is often invisible to the recipients of the guidance and to others around these men. As we have pointed out before and will revisit later in this book, the issue of invisibility is quite salient in the life of many Autumnal men (and some Autumnal women). It is hard

on the ego to be unseen by other important people in our life: we can wear purple . . . but is it important that anyone else notice that we are wearing purple?

*Mobilizer* is a guiding role that only operates successfully in a collaborative, mentoring manner. This exemplifies yet again the delicate balancing act in which effective Autumnal guides must engage—whether they be men or women: At the heart of the matter are actions and words that generate and maintain energy. Mobilizers are truly helpful if they activate the energy of women (and men) with whom they affiliate. They help to translate desire and vision into action (the traditional way in which masculine energy is engaged). We find this role being played, professionally, by men and women who serve in the role of executive or career coach.

If effective, these mobilizing coaches help their client find their “bliss” (to borrow from the mythologist, Joseph Campbell) and to act in accordance with this bliss. A blissful journey to Mount Fragrant is often an outcome of this coaching process. However, one doesn’t have to be a high-paid professional coach to be an effective mobilizer. As Campbell (1991) noted, mobilization is described and exemplified in many ways and in many different cultures through the medium of myth. We only have to learn from and internalize the lessons embedded in legends such as Miaoshan and Ramayana to become effective mobilizers.

*Motivator* is the fifth of the 5 “M’s”. It often seems to involve leading by example, as well as providing a compelling vision that excites other people in our family or work setting and leads them to collaboration: One of our motivationally oriented colleagues speaks about being a “cheerleader,” especially when the “going gets tough”: A final insight we offer brings us to the fundamental role played by appreciation in all guidance processes. We motivate by helping a family member or colleague at work focus on their own strengths and appreciate these strengths (and related accomplishments).

Perhaps it is the mobilizer and motivator roles that are being played by Miaoshan (in disguise). Maybe she isn’t really being a guide. Perhaps she is

being a goad—helping the King get moving toward the mountain. Other “M” roles we could consider are: Mirror (reflecting the other person through self, in addition to monitor) and Master (as ‘teacher’ or ‘consultant’ who has expertise to share or has achieved personal mastery). The King of Ramayana could see himself in the mirror, yet (like the queen) failed to notice the anguish of his subjects, including the domesticated animals kicking up dust, as his dear son was exiled. Rama is considered a master, accepting his exile with unflinching devotion to his father’s ‘dharma’. He maintained his calm composure in the face of the setback, mentored his angry family members and behaved with utmost mastery, responding to what is perceived as unfair, by most people. We leave it to you, the reader, to consider how these two M roles might play out in the process of guidance—and perhaps identify other M roles to be played by male (and female) guides.

### **Gentle Fierceness: The Quiet but Compelling Male Voice**

What does all this mean regarding the role of a male guide? We would reiterate that an effective male guide must be patient. During the Autumnal years of life, our turn to the soul is a gradual, transforming process. This gradual turn is a central ingredient, as Erik Erikson noted, in the developmental process of any maturing adult. In particular, we must be patient about giving voice to masculine insight and energy. This voice can be easily misunderstood and overplayed. Furthermore, it is more than being patient about offering our own voice as an Autumnal male to the women and men in our life with whom we have limbic attunement.

It means deserving this attunement. It means thoughtfully awaiting the achievements we hope to gain in collaboration with other people in our five (or more) generative M roles. It is often about being quiet. As one of our wise colleagues has noted: “I have tended to do things quietly. I live quietly and when I act, I act quietly. I like being in the background, working behind the scenes, rather than being up front.” Maybe, it is okay to be a bit

more invisible as Autumnal men and women. Perhaps, we are more effective when being less visible.

To be quiet is not to be mute, nor to stand by idly as bad decisions are being made. To be quiet is to step away from taking credit for everything. It is about letting other people speak. It concerns the acknowledgement that you might not be the custodian of all truth. It is not always about giving advice—hard for many men to endure (and women are not immune from the allure of advice-giving). It is not about abandoning male energy, but about engaging this energy in our work with women and men about whom we care (and to whom we offer care) in a more measured manner. This caring engagement might be termed *courageous patience*, as proposed by the noted Polish-born, American admiral Hyman Rickover: “Good ideas are not adopted automatically. They must be driven into practice with courageous patience.”

We don’t have to just listen to an American admiral. The wisdom offered from across the Pacific Ocean by Lao Tzu’s is just as significant in this context: “A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”. This ‘non-existence’ has all the power to create deep change. It operates like the space that exists and accommodates anything with no attachment to the objects in it. It is this presence without pretence that makes one a true guide. It is about guiding, yet not leading. Abiding in unknowing sometimes, yet without the anxiety of it. We can be inspiring by Rickover’s patience and Lao Tzu’s non-existence.

One of our wise colleagues describes this measured, patient, non-ego-based use of masculine energy as *gentle fierceness*. (Quehl and Bergquist, 2012). Courageous patience and gentle fierceness would seem to be appropriate terms to use in guiding our words and actions as Autumnal male guides. Embedded in these terms is gentle advice for those of us who wish to offer our masculine voice to women and men. Perhaps in the spacious and distracting environment of a Ramayana palace, there is the need for someone to be courageously patient and gently fierce. All the comfort and unused sagacity of the Palace might have to be shaken up with some of the



courage and fierceness that only a patient and gentle male warrior can provide. Maybe there is a place for men in our pantheon of guides. We could invite those who are willing to give their voice for those who are ready, knowing that there may be none prepared to listen. These residents of the Pantheon of Guides can act in one of the five (or more) M roles and can find in these roles the awakening of spring in their own Autumnal lives. There is abundant purple in the robes worn by mentors, mediators, monitors, mobilizers, and motivators.

## Chapter Ten

### Voices from Other Rooms

#### The Erl King

“My father, my father can you not see?

The Erl King’s daughters linger in that dark place?”

“My son, my son, I see it clearly.

It’s the aged willow that looks so grey.”

#### Legend of Miaoshan

Find the person with no anger or hatred

Ask for their arms and eyes to cure you.

#### The Great King of the Ramayana

Hopeless, confused and yearning for peace

Missing his dearest, first of four sons

Died the king, wishing he could

Re-live his life one more time,

Learning the lessons he needed to learn

With his son in his mind, wanting to see him one last time

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We are now at the heart of all three narratives. These are the elements in each tale that tugs at our heart. All three of the tales awaken our own sense

of morality (and mortality). We find sympathy (and perhaps some soul-searching empathy) for those who are blind to life's threats and challenges, for those who are wounded and in need of a cure for those who are hopeless, confused, and yearning for peace.

Let's turn to each of these moments of painful truth and insight. In the Erl King we find a son who knows that he is in trouble. The Erl King has offered his daughters. The son isn't sure he can hold off the temptation. As the men of Autumn (or frankly heterosexual men at any age), we often feel this way when relating to very attractive women. Help! Someone, please save me! There is a bit of paradox here. It is not only that we find someone else to be very attractive--the attraction is often reciprocal.

As mature women and men who are in trouble, we often become even more attractive to other people. They either want to help or seduce us. We catch the perverted attention of younger folk or those of our own age: "What a great conquest! Bringing a distinguished, worldly gentleman who has accomplished much in his life down to his knees. Make him fall desperately in love with me." The vision of *The Blue Angel* comes to mind. Alternatively: "What a great opportunity to be of real help to this hopeless human being - I get to nourish her back to health and be something of a hero-in-action.":

Our inner child is wise enough to know that we are in trouble. He recognizes the daughters for what they are: false voices of the feminine. They are daughters of darkness. They want only to conquer us, so that they might get even or add another powerful male to their list. Our inner child asks for help from his father. This isn't always a wise choice. After all, father is often the one who is infatuated. We might instead ask for help from other people in our life. We might turn to our friends or to a counsellor, coach or spiritual director. They can help us get out of trouble or even help us take full advantage of the opportunity to learn from a true feminine or masculine guide in our life. At the very least we might need their help in discriminating between our true guide and the false guides and seducers who are playing with our passions while expanding their own egos. It requires a view from the outside, for we might be caught up in

complimentary needs-fulfilment—believing (often falsely) that these needs seem to be fair, noble and even divine.

When we are “betrayed” by those who seek to assist us and bring us gifts and services for the wrong reasons, then the outcome is often that portrayed in the Ramayana narrative: we feel hopeless, confused and yearning for peace. Often times, this leads to a partial death. The hopelessness resides in our sense of the betrayal. Who can be trusted? This is especially poignant if we are not feeling confident about our own resources. We look outward for help and find ourselves vulnerable and subject to manipulation. The confusion resides in our inability to figure out what has actually occurred: it seemed like a good idea in turning to this other person for assistance and there did seem to be this reciprocal attraction (perhaps a bit of the limbic attunement we described in the previous chapter).

We are left with not just the failure to be cured, but also the failure to pick the right person for assistance. Ah yes, the yearning for peace. This is perhaps the most troubling outcome of our failure(s): even if we can't be healed, we hope to be at least a little less confused. Instead, we are left with the opposite: an intra-psychic war that pits our sense of self-confidence and psychic strength against our sense of personal ineptitude and vulnerability. There is no peace and the search for peace seems to be in vain. We wear the vestments of despair and death rather than those of purple. Autumn is truly a bleak season leading to winter and stagnation.

The Legend of Miaoshan reveals something about the real basis of the many needs we discover during our Autumnal years. The request is for someone who has no anger or hatred. This is the only one who can cure us. The authentic helper is someone who can lead us out of our despair and help us find peace. Daughters of the Erl King certainly don't qualify. They might not be outwardly angry or filled with hatred; yet, if they are willing to collude with their father in tempting the son, then they certainly have some axe to grind and must, at some level, be not too appreciative of males (at any age). Like the other temptresses (and tempters) we have mentioned and that we have all encountered in our life, some kind of anger and hatred must reside in their heart and soul. It might in some instances be a self-

hatred or anger about the situation in which they find themselves (an anger about having to “shill” for their father, in the case of the Erl King daughters).

The Legend of Miaoshan leaves us with an important question: does cure require an absence of anger and hatred? Is this absence itself part of the healing process—especially if our healing is primarily mental and soulful rather than physical? The noted psychologist and psychotherapist, Carl Rogers, wrote extensively about the power of “unconditional positive regard” as a healing process. He might have identified something important here—something that was acknowledged many centuries ago in the Chinese legend of Miaoshan.

The elderly king of Ramayana, living in abundance of wealth and wisdom, could not listen to the helpful voices. It was the same voices he heard that made some profound impact on some other family members. But not him. Was he caught up in his own prison – justifying the suffering in the name of fate or tradition? In fact, the sad fact is that he could not listen to himself. He could not tune in with complete presence to his own suffering. Maybe listening to ones’ own voices (that speak to one’s own needs) requires more courage than listening to voices from outside.

Tim had been hearing voices for almost twenty years and they often caused him frustration and poor sleep. One particularly haunting voice was elicited by his prescription sleeping medication. This voice was threatening to kill him if he continued to take the medication. Tim went with a knife to his medical consultation. He felt a need to protect himself from the voice. “Is this voice saying something you wish to tell yourself? Tim was asked. “Well, I don’t wish to take these medications. They make my mind unclear.” This voice, on behalf of his own welfare, was only able to gain Tim’s attention when threatening harm. Were Tim’s auditory hallucinations a projection of his own voice, meant for himself. It was perhaps really tough for him to hear his own self. So, the voice had to appear as a threatening source coming from outside his own psyche—a voice from another psychic space that was there to help (not harm) Tim.

Tim's voice might be not only teaching him, but also teaching all of us about those sources inside ourselves that are helpful and healing—and that we often ignore. When we consider these voices, an important question arises from our three narratives. Are we healed and do we escape from despair and stagnation by looking outside our self for assistance? In searching for someone with no anger and hatred, should we look no further than our own home – our own self? Are there elements of our self that can provide at least some of the cure? In our soulful journey, do we always need someone other than our self? Could the king of Ramayana, have returned 'home' if he took some time to disregard everything that he thought he already knew? Could he have just listened to his own self? Throughout this book, we are seeking to find both the external sources of help and hope and the internal sources. In this chapter, we look specifically at parts of our self (our psychic "rooms") that have long been partitioned off from other psychic rooms. The voices that emanate from these room inside our self might provide the "arms and eyes to cure [us]."

## Old Voices in New Settings

Even though the Erl King comes from within us and the temptations he offers us are temptations from within, the elfin prince appears to us to come from outside our psyche. But the elfin king does not project the temptations very far away from us. These are familiar temptations with which we are well acquainted. There is also the more positive side, as we have just mentioned: the curative arms and eyes of the Miaoshan legend might very well be our own arms and eyes. The way out of hopelessness and confusion and the path to peace might reside within each of us. We have the capacity for distracting and destructive temptations—and the capacity for self-nurturance and self-healing.

A metaphor that Truman Capote offered many years ago seems quite appropriate in helping us understand more about these internal forces (both good and bad). In one of his early novellas, Capote (1994) wrote about "voices from other rooms." These voices often seem to come from outside our self. As was the case with Tim, there are voices inside our psyche

that ask questions, suggest priorities, offer dreams and aspirations, and (as with Tim) provide cautious advice. Most importantly, these voices from other rooms were often created and first articulated long before our Autumnal years.

It seems that in our young adulthood many of us made choices about what was important to us, about what was practical and about what was suitable for a woman or man to do in life. In making these choices, we set aside certain prized activities and dreams. For instance, one of us has recently worked with Samuel, a man who knew as a young man that it would never be very practical for him to continue playing drums in a rock and roll band. Samuel decided to become an accountant. A woman we have coached is now a prominent physician. Dr. Jane, as her devoted patients now call her, loved to play basketball as a kid, but gave it up during medical school.

One of our clients, Maria, wanted to be in a helping profession, yet her family decided it was best for her to be an engineer as she was too empathetic and kind to face any pain or suffering. And she was good at math. A colleague, Ricardo, is now in his late Sixties. As a single man, Ricardo loved shopping each Saturday morning at the open market. He looked forward to cooking up a feast for his friends on Saturday night. Then Ricardo got married and knew in the mid-1970s that this was not what traditional men were intended to do. We must remember that he was married before liberation from traditional sex roles had taken hold in many societies. When Ricardo was a young husband, men were not supposed to like these domestic chores, especially in the Hispanic culture from which he came.

These activities and dreams never went away as we, Autumnals, were living through our Thirties and Forties. However, we stuck them in a room located at the back of our psychic home. They were only faintly heard. We filled the main psychic rooms in which we lived with many people, including our life partner, children, colleagues, friends, and business associates. Our living room, in particular, was rather noisy. We had little time to hear, let alone listen to, these faint voices emanating from other rooms. If we heard them at all, these voices often appeared to be “young

and foolish.” They seemed to come from another time and another place in our life.

These voices, however, never went away and now in late midlife our living room is not as crowded or as noisy. We have more time to hear these voices from other rooms and are less often distracted than we were during our Twenties, Thirties or Forties. Furthermore, many events are now occurring in our lives that repeatedly remind us of these faint voices from our past. Strange and unpredictable events seem to resonate with these past activities and dreams.

One of Samuel’s accounting clients is hosting a 60s rock, roll and remembrance party. His client asked him recently if he ever played in a rock and roll band. Samuel’s client is particularly in need of someone who has played drums. Dr Jane’s practice as a physician is successful, but her own family doctor has forcefully told her to get more exercise. Jane just moved to a community with an active adult recreation program. It features an “old girl’s” basketball league.

Maria now having travelled the world, experienced the voice of her ‘true calling’, ended up in a remote village where she founded a school and started enrolling students. The wife of Ricardo, our would-be shopper and chef, just received a promotion and will have to travel in her new job. She is in her mid-Sixties, but got started late in her career, so has no intentions of retiring in the near future—she wants to make up for “lost time.” She hesitantly asks Ricardo, who is now retired, if he wouldn’t mind doing more of the cooking for himself and perhaps even for both of them during the weekends. She asks him to do more cooking only two months after a new gourmet supermarket opened down at the local mall. It features a Saturday morning farmer’s market.

It all seems to be a remarkable coincidence. There is a controversial term that is sometimes used to label this coincidence: “synchronicity.” It seems appropriate in describing this type of coincidence. A group of scientists, called chaos theorists, have an alternative (and more “scientific”) name and explanation for this phenomenon. They use the term “strange attractor.”



Those doing research on chaotic systems note that there are many events in nature that seem to pull in energy from outside and establish powerful, compelling and repetitive patterns.

Chaos theorists suggest that most events occur in a random manner. One particular event, however, happens to have a slightly greater impact at a particular place and time than do other random events. Other random events then tend to orient around this slightly more prevalent event. They become aligned with the orienting event and a system is established. One spot in a roadway, for instance, is slightly more indented than any other spot. Water and gravel tend to collect in this spot. The water and gravel, in turn, are ground into the spot by passing cars and the spot becomes a small hole. This hole grows bigger, attracting more water and gravel. Soon we have a pothole. The pothole gets filled in, but the newly applied asphalt differs in composition or weight from the old asphalt. Furthermore, there is a tiny crack between the old and new asphalt. These conditions lead to the creation of a new spot and the re-emergence of the pothole.

This same process occurs in our own lives. Seemingly random events occur that hold no pattern. Then one event somehow touches upon old, faint voices in our back rooms that are now slightly louder or less often drowned out by the noise. As a result, we pay a little more attention to this event than we did in the past. Samuel, the “rock and roll” accountant, often had offers in the past to perform at parties and many of these offers were no doubt connected to something in which he was interested. Yet somehow this latest offer is particularly poignant since it triggers Samuel’s memories and rediscovered interest in rock and roll. Dr. Jane, the basketball playing physician, has always lived near a recreation centre; there have always been basketball leagues for older adults (though usually only for older men); and she has always known, as a physician, that she should periodically leave her office to seek out more exercise and recreation. Yet somehow the time is now ripe for Jane to take action—imagine a basketball league for older women!

Though professionally trained as an engineer, Maria had vivid memories of her school and the joyful environment her teachers created for them. She

had visited many villages in the past and contributed to community efforts in education. Yet the encounter with this remote village was so special that she dropped everything without a doubt to setup a school on her own – it was as if her spiritual teacher was speaking to her. The wife of Ricardo, our would-be shopper and chef, has undoubtedly asked him to help in many other ways in the past when her own work began to shift. Yet, somehow, Ricardo’s offer to do more shopping and cooking connected with Ricardo’s recent retirement and his dormant love of shopping and cooking. It also aroused Ricardo’s vague recollection of one particular advertisement and article about a nearby Saturday market.

### **Choosing Between Stagnation and Generativity**

Random events become strange attractors. They call to us and require our attention. We recall that such events have happened in the past, and we have not noticed the pattern until now. They form an alliance with our inner voices. Suddenly other events begin to organize around this attractor and form a constellation or psychic “pothole” of activities, interests and dreams. Samuel, the accountant, plays at the Rock, Roll and Remembrance party and has a great time. He talks with the four other “aging rockers” in this make-shift group. They decide to play together every Wednesday night “just for fun.” Dr. Jane joins the “old girls” basketball league, enjoys herself, and soon finds that she also enjoys playing “old girls” soccer and hanging out after a game with her new-found and “liberated” lady friends. She then begins to teach his granddaughter how to play soccer and soon becomes a coach for her granddaughter’s soccer team.

Chef Ricardo begins cooking more often, loves it and becomes a voracious reader of cookbooks. He decides to attend a cooking class offered at the mall. Leveraging her engineering expertise, Maria is now on the village committee, exploring sustainable means of constructing school buildings. It goes beyond this for Maria. She discovers a new passion for writing, having published her first book of poems specifically for children who live in remote locations. Her book is about how it is “wonderful” to be living this close to community and nature...

All of these Autumnals feel alive and vital. Erik Erikson would suggest that they have become “generative” and have forged new identities in their lives. Our narrative of Miaoshan would suggest that this generativity might have curative power—in part because the voices from other rooms tend to reduce our own self-resentment (our anger and hatred) about sacrifices we made earlier in our life. We find peace in our reconciliation of old dreams and new initiatives. We make healing choices when we listen once again to these voices from other rooms—for we were not naïve or too idealistic when we were young. Wisdom and self-understanding were embedded in these early adulthood dreams. This wisdom and self-understanding of Spring is still available to us during our Autumnal years.

Alternatively, we can set aside or close the doors to the rooms from which these voices emanate—choosing instead a psyche filled with temptation, war, disappointment and, ultimately, self-defeat. The elderly King of Ramayana failed to acknowledge such voices, leading to grief and his eventual death. Our four Autumnals could chose to ignore or discount these voices from other rooms. The accountant could have politely turned down the offer to play at the Rock and Roll party. Samuel could even have neglected to tell his colleague that he played drums as a teenager. Jane could continue to work hard as a medical professional. She would find little time for exercise or her granddaughter’s soccer team.

Maria could have waited for her next international posting, so that she could enjoy leading the global business—a powerful temptation. Our would-be chef, Ricardo, could curse the bad fortune that pushed him into the role of homemaker for his excessively ambitious wife. He could have been envious of his wife and could have decided to get even with his wife by cooking a horrible meal or inadvertently forgetting to pick up food at the local supermarket. Each of these women and men of Autumn could have chosen a life of stagnation rather than generativity. This is the choice that we all must make during the Autumnal decades of life. This is the choice that enables us to heal and proceed successfully on our soulful journey.

## The Demonic Voices of Denial and the Childlike Voices of Care

If mature women and men chose stagnation by not attending to these voices, then these voices can become quite destructive—even demonic. They can lead to the hopeless, confused and warring state identified in the Ramayana narrative. These demonic voices are part of us. They don't easily go away if we fail to attend to them. We know from many years of psychological investigation that when we consistently give little or no attention to specific aspects of our psyche, these aspects of self tend to express themselves indirectly. They express themselves through physical and mental illness; profound depression; or self-destructive activities such as substance abuse, self-defeating behaviour on the job, or suicide.

Geraldine initially sought treatment for her drinking (which was daily) but Geraldine did not have withdrawal when she did not drink. She looked for a drink to feel better. She dedicated her life to be a devoted wife and Mother, giving up her professional music career but her husband grew colder as the years go by and her children were getting older, with their own accomplishments and lives. She was encouraged by her therapist to go for couple therapy with her husband, but her husband dropped out of couple therapy and she too eventually dropped out of treatment. She continued to drink. A few years later, she went back to her therapist, when she caught her husband having an affair.

Geraldine may have been drowning the inner voice, she thought she could put aside her needs to be loved and cared for, to maintain a perfect family on the surface. When she attended to the inner voice of care, she recognised her authentic self, it helped her to stand up to her husband, reconnected with her friends and relooked at her life. Her drinking became manageable. She travelled out of her country alone for the first time and restarted teaching professional music, which she found herself revelling in both. She was initially unsure if she could travel on her own, dreading feeling lonely and sad looking at families.

Psychologists use the term “denial” in describing this defensive process of inattention. The extensive use of this primitive defence leads directly to many of the psychological maladies of our time, particularly among mature women and men. The denied voices will eventually gain our attention or be heard by the world around us. We must determine, during our Autumnal years, if these voices will be addressed in a constructive and generative manner or in a very destructive way.

A particularly persuasive description of the crippling effects of massive denial and repression on fifty year old men is offered by George Vaillant in *Adaptation to Life [1998]*—his first report based on his longitudinal study of Harvard graduates. They were in their Fifties at this point in the study (and were in their seventies when Vaillant reported on them in *Triumph of Experience*). This description is further reinforced and expanded in Vaillant’s second report, *Aging Well* (2003). Vaillant. In these later reports (2003 and 2012) we find that some of the Harvard men were able to move beyond the denial and make some major changes in their later life. Others were not able to do so and usually had passed away by the time Vaillant was conducting his last set of interviews for *Triumph of Experience*.

With this choice between recognition and denial in mind, let’s return to Goethe’s poem of the Erl King. The father is in massive denial. He claims to see the world accurately; yet he dismisses his son’s continuing plea with a rational analysis: “’tis the aged grey willows that deceive your sight.” The father’s analysis doesn’t make much sense. He has no good reason to believe this is an aged grey willow or a sad wind that rustles the dying leaves. Nothing is clear. He is in the Ramayana state of confusion. The father keeps changing his mind about what is out there in the night. He only knows that it’s not the Erl King. Yet, each of the alternative images he chooses is essentially the same. These images are always about the process of aging and dying. He turns away from the Erl King with massive denial; he substitutes images of death for an immediate threat; he chooses stagnation over direct confrontation of the Erl King’s powerful temptations.

The father is irrational in all his apparent rationality. He can’t even see what is immediately facing him and doesn’t recognize that the alternative

images are all about his own fear of aging and death. Our rational arguments often are senseless and the senses we do command are irrational when we are in massive denial. We say to ourselves that one illicit sexual affair really won't upset the apple cart; that we can fool around at the edge of sexual intercourse without engaging in the "real thing"; or that we can have intercourse with someone other than our life partner without really getting "involved." Perhaps it is something other than sex.

We wait for the next opportunity to explore our hobbies because we are busy now, we postpone our desire to start a business because the economy is recovering. We resist resigning from our job, because we want to apply what we have recently learned about the management of conflict. We are tempted by the prospects of finally doing our job better. We deceive ourselves. The King of Ramayana had years of traditional lineage and scriptural interpretations to justify his self-deception. Each of us can similarly find justification in our own traditions and selective advice offered by lifestyle "experts" (with whom we agree). "Bliss" comes in many forms – only some of which are actually authentic and generative.

Our inner child knows better. Our child is not deceived. The child clearly sees the Erl King and understands the full implications of the elfin king's offer. Perhaps the child knows the wisdom of Miaoshan: there can be no healing when there is anger and hatred. With this awareness and wisdom, our son pleads for assistance, turning to his father whom the child believes is free of anger and hatred (at least toward him, the beloved son). We need to pay attention to the child in us at this point. This child isn't the underdeveloped, infantile part of our psyche that cries out in fear when we hover around the decision to have an illicit affair.

Rather this is the wise, childlike part of us that is safeguarding our integrity and our sanity. This is not a repressive superego or the outmoded voices of a more "up-tight" era. Rather this is the sensible voice of our inner child who sees past our denial. Our inner child knows what is really going on and recognizes our fragility. Our inner child does care for our growth and recognises our deeper desire to realise our higher potential, Our inner child is without anger or hatred regarding our own personal welfare and offers

Miaoshan arms and eyes of compassion. Yet we sometimes, lose the power of discrimination and misinterprets the real as merely a shadow.

The boy needs attention. The father in Goethe's poem must respond to his child's needs before it is too late. Some of the great tragedies in contemporary literature concern the failure to recognize that someone we care about is in trouble or that someone we love dies before we mobilize assistance. John Cheever (2000) offers us the painful tale of a man who stands on a hill overlooking the valley where his home is located. The main character in Cheever's short story, *The Swimmer*, realizes that he can swim home via the swimming pools located on adjacent properties. As he traverses the various lots leading to his own home, the swimmer encounters people he has ignored or abused over the years. He slowly realizes that he has failed repeatedly in life to attend to the people about whom he truly cares. He arrives at his home ready to change his life and be a better husband and father—only to discover that his family had moved away and that he is left alone.

A similar dilemma confronts our protagonist in the poem of the Erl King. Will the father discover too late that he has ignored his son? Will he end up in despair, like our King of the Ramayana? However, attention is not the only issue here. The boy needs a particular kind of attention. He needs female attention. He needs to be given the life that can only be bestowed by a woman or by the feminine (anima) presence and energy within us. Men can protect, but only women can give birth. The Erl King can't offer birth or renewal of life. He can only threaten and tempt the father and son. The father must choose between the stagnation that alignment with the Erl King will precipitate and the generativity that comes with the courage to look inward at the true sources of both fear and hope.

### **The Time in Life to Listen to the Voices**

This choice between stagnation and generativity is not as easy as it may appear on the surface. We often chose stagnation and risk the wrath of an unacknowledged voice. If we take actions based on the voices from other rooms, then we are likely to be condemned by our family and friends—and

even condemned by our own psyche. The legendary King of Ramayana was probably well aware of this dilemma. The kingdom expected the king to be following traditions by staying true to his promises. What about the wrath of the ancestors and the living family members, if he broke his promise to his young queen? Wouldn't he be remembered as a dishonest king for generations to come?

A very insightful developmental psychologist, Bernice Neugarten (1969), suggests that we often experience a developmental crisis in life when the actions we take and decisions we make are bold and generative. These actions and decisions are often out of sync with expectations of the society in which we live. Crises in development occur when we do something at a time in our life that does not square with societal rules. Indeed, the King of Ramayana would have been caught between two choices – voice of his inner child versus the burden of societal expectations. This was not the “time” when he was supposed to fight against the traditions of his society and expectations regarding his royal role.

Sarah is an Autumnal woman whom one of us has coached. She co-owns and has served as president for nine years of a training institute that primarily serves mature men and women preparing for a second career. Sarah's timing was off in acquiring this institute for one half million dollars. She wasn't really at an appropriate age for taking on this high-risk, entrepreneurial venture. Sarah would have been better suited for this risky venture when she was 35 or 40. Sarah was 48 years old when she bought this institute and assumed a major five-year debt.

A younger person should have bought this institute. A younger man or woman would be expected by society to be sufficiently energetic and visionary to make a venture like this successful. A woman who is about to enter her Autumnal years is much too old for such a venture (especially as a woman!). What was our client thinking about, or was she thinking at all, when she assumed this large financial burden at this point in her life? The rest of the world was telling Sarah that she should be planning for her retirement and financial security. Was the rest of the world right?



Sarah often confronted herself with many disturbing questions and statements during our coaching sessions:

“What in the world was I was doing taking on the task of leading a training institute? My work at the institute is always exciting but also terrifying. Is something wrong with me? Was I foolish in taking this on? Was I too old? Was I kidding myself regarding my interest in and ability to take on this venture?”

The mature men and women that Sarah serves in her institute have no doubt often asked themselves the same kind of questions. Like the president of their training institute, these middle-aged men and women are inevitably in crisis, because they have chosen to return for a certificate or degree at a much later point in life than is usually the case. These are not your typical young women and men, fresh out of high school or college. They are experienced adults, who want to enrich and renew their understanding of the world, while also getting a certificate or credential. This interest is quite understandable and very commendable. Yet, families, friends and colleagues often do not understand why they went for further training: “Hasn’t she already had enough education?” “Why doesn’t he just settle down and take things a bit easier?” “What is she doing starting a second career this late in life?”

There are certain times in our lives that our society deems appropriate for us to explore alternative careers and personal identities. Erik Erikson (1980) describes these periods of time as “psycho-social moratoria.” Most of us are given a moratorium during our late teens and early twenties. Young men, in particular, are given the opportunity to explore new realities through the military if they are from the lower or lower-middle class or college if they are from the upper-middle or upper class.

Among young women, in most societies, only those from the middle and upper classes have been granted a moratorium. They become college students. Women from less secure financial backgrounds have typically never experienced a moratorium. They usually move directly from their family of origin to marriage. They immediately establish their own families

and assume major homemaking responsibilities, as well as often work at least part time to help with the family's precarious finances.

Other people in many societies are also denied a moratorium. They may have been assigned their identity early in their life. Perhaps their father and grandfather were doctors, so this young man or woman will also be a doctor. Alternatively, the young person has spent their entire life fighting for survival as the child of an unemployed or even homeless parent. This person will never experience a moratorium, but instead probably spend most of her life as an unemployed adult living in one of the world's slums. The exploration of alternative identities has been foreclosed for both the predestined physician and child of poverty.

In certain societies, there is a powerful (and painful) norm practised in many families. Who is more qualified to make a decision regarding the career of a 17-year-old son? Of course, the successful 45-year-old mature father who has 'seen it all'. When the job market is so promising, with possibilities in finance, why would you not prepare your son to be an accountant? When the family had a tradition of over 400 years of sending the older son to the military, how could this father break it? "Who do you think I built this business for-and from scratch? Of course, for you, my son!" "The daughter's 'duty' is looking after members of the in-law's family, so the earlier we marry her off, the better. Our society is not safe enough for a woman to work anyway."

There is often a dramatic intrusion of alternative identities later in life among those middle class and upper middle-class women and men whose identity was foreclosed early in life and among those who never experienced a moratorium during their adolescent years. These women and men often rebel as mature adults—if their society allows rebellion. Their inner voices assert themselves in strong and compelling ways. We see this played out in Jack Nicholson's film portrayal of an identity-foreclosed man in *Five Easy Pieces*. Nicholson's character rebels, having grown up in a musical family, without viable career options. He marries a woman without "culture" and takes a temporary job on an oil rig. Nicholson plays a man who faces a midlife crisis because he knows of no identity other than that of classical

musician. His only option is to assume what Erikson calls the “negative identity.” The Nicholson character will randomly assume any identity as long as it is unrelated to serious music, He can be a day labourer, a logger or even a piano player in a local dive. It only matters that he reacts against the identity assigned to him by his family and society.

In less dramatic form, we hear many stories of physicians or ministers who grew up with a parent who was also a doctor or minister. During her Autumnal years, the foreclosed physician or minister takes up a hobby or avocation that speaks to a suppressed identity. She joins a physician’s symphony or spends every free moment sailing a boat. By contrast, a man who has grown up in poverty will rebel by leaving his job (if he has one). “Take this job and shove it” is a recurring anthem for the foreclosed man from the lower middle class. Or he will leave his family, drink heavily and “take up” with a younger woman. If nothing else, he will allow himself to go a little mad as a sports fan and live vicariously off the alternative identities and successes of athletes on his favorite teams.

### **Retirement: A Second Moratorium?**

The issue doesn’t stop here. Many societies have given men (but not women) a second moratorium. As men living in most prosperous countries, we are allowed to explore alternative identities at the point we retire, provided we are not living in poverty or are not in ill health. Traditionally, the women living in most societies did not have it so good. They were expected to remain occupied as homemakers even after their husbands retire. Their work might even increase, given that they must now “look after” their husband who is suddenly “underfoot.” Their retired husband is often quite fortunate if he comes from the middle or upper-middle class. He can move in many new directions: taking up hobbies, spending time at home reading or playing games, engaging in sports and recreational activities such as golf, tennis or bowling.

The world of retirement in many societies has grown a bit more complicated in recent years. Men do not necessarily retire at 65. Women often have also been working all their life and do not necessarily want to

assume all the homemaking responsibilities. Even more salient to the present discussion is a question concerning what we do about the second moratorium when we are still in our Fifties and Sixties. The problem is complex. We are not yet ready for retirement. Even though our inner voices are suggesting that we shift our priorities and attend to other matters we still have to work, perhaps even into our Seventies. We don't have enough money saved for retirement, and our society expects us to still be active "breadwinners." This is quite a dilemma.

If we are fortunate enough to be living in a prospering society, then as Autumnals we have at least five options. Some of us choose the most obvious of these options. We defer our response to the inner voices by focusing on retirement and planning carefully for what we will do after age 70. Some of us choose a second option. We negotiate a compromise. Some of the voices receive our immediate attention. Others are deferred until after retirement, when society says it is appropriate for us to try something new. A third option is also available to those of us who have been financially successful in life or are particularly courageous. These fortunate or brave men and women decide during their Autumnal decades to alter their lifestyle so that they are doing what they want to do even before formal retirement.

The traditional distinction drawn between work and retirement begins to break down for these Autumnals who choose the third option. Their work becomes their avocation. Their hobby becomes that for which they are paid. At a conference on work and play one of us hosted almost thirty years ago, we invented the word "plork" to describe the full integration of work and play. Several of the people we coach have taken this path. They have left behind their administrative duties and settled into a life of "plork." Typically, they are occupied with writing, consulting, teaching, mentoring or coaching.

Unfortunately, for some who have chosen this third option, there are societal pressures to move back to a "real job." Some Autumnals are not able to earn as much as they did in the past, thus, they are subjected to self-doubt and the question posed around 'maximising one's potential'. For

many others, the family is disappointed with them, as they seem to have abandoned the 'title' too soon. Many of our "third-option" colleagues indicate during coaching sessions that they often feel guilty about not going to work each day or about staying home and working on their book or some other creative project. They report that they shop for groceries during the day to avoid the crowds; yet they look around and find only "old" folks. One of our colleagues, Creighton, has been wrestling with several fundamental doubts during his coaching sessions. He recently commented:

"I always seem to be the only man around [in the grocery store] who is still able to work. Why am I hanging around the supermarket instead of being a responsible breadwinner? I know that this is irrational. I still make a good income. I still work very hard. And I really enjoy my work. . . . for the first time in many years. I have more control over my time. I can work at home. However, something is wrong. I seem to be out of sync with the people around me. It's the wrong time or the wrong place or I am of the wrong gender?"

Creighton's life decisions don't match societal expectations, and this is very disconcerting for him. So, what should we as women and men of Autumn do about these voices? Which option should we choose? If we respond right away, then we must confront a mismatch with societal expectations. If we defer our response until, we retire, then these voices might become impatient. We might end up being destructive to ourselves and the people we love. If we compromise and respond to only some of our voices, we may pick the wrong ones and incur the disapproval of society and the vengeance of other unacknowledged voices. What should we do? It is no wonder that we often hope these silly or threatening voices will go away. It is no wonder some developmental psychologists assign a term to this life stage: the "mid-life crisis".

We have a fourth option as Autumnal women and men. We can fill our living rooms with activity again and hope that this activity will drown out the voices. Sadly, these activities never seem to be quite as enjoyable as they

were when we were much younger. Most of us choose yet another option, at least on a temporary basis. We choose the fifth option: denial. Like the father in Goethe's poem, we discount the meaning inherent in these seemingly random events.

It would be a bit odd to say that the offer Samuel received to play in a rock and roll band or Dr. Jane's opportunity to play in a basketball league come from sources of inner guidance and wisdom. Was the request by Ricardo's wife that he do more cooking somehow "meant to be"? The spiritual master who spoke to Maria through her intuition~ is this real? All this speculation sounds a bit spooky for most of us who are not true believers. To suggest that an event has inherent meaning and is somehow intended as a message to tell us something or guide us back to our earlier interests and dreams seems to be too much like the mumbo-jumbo of "new age" spirituality.

That is why we offer the scientific concept of "strange attractor." This concept comes from chaos scientists. They are neither pop psychologists nor new age spirituality buffs. Rather they are serious researchers who try to make sense of our physical world. In doing so they have discovered that there are "strange attractors" everywhere. There is good reason to believe that this same process operates in the lives of Autumnal women and men. Events have meaning in our life not so much because of some greater power in life, though this could also be the case. Rather, events have meaning and power because certain small events tend at a place and time to link with and trigger other events. They trigger memories, interests, dreams and eventually actions.

These "strange attractor" events form a constellation or pattern that is compelling and that can serve as a guide for our own continuing generativity and the re-invention of our life. A rabbi we know talks about the "assemblage" of small, meaningful events and decisions in our lives. Taken together these events and decisions comprise a person's "spiritual life." He suggests that spirituality is not some big, powerful, isolated event. Rather it is constituted from a whole cluster of small events.

What happens when we ignore these “strange attractor” and assume that they are only a rising mist, a wind that rustles dying leaves, or an aged willow that looks so grey? What happens when we choose massive denial and make the wrong decision? We face stagnation—a loss of spirit and an absence of soul. We grieve the loss of spirit, yet we fail to restore spirit or move into soul work. We withdraw from the world, but don’t turn inward toward soul. We become “mean spirited,” turning our spirit into a negative force.

The stagnant male is animus-dominated. He resents others of his own age when they remain engaged in the world. He resorts to sarcasm and resistance, having abandoned hope and ambition. He even resents the young men and women who are newly engaged in the world. Like Scrooge, the stagnant Autumnal male focuses on one thing at the expense of all other aspects of life. For Scrooge that one thing was money. The stagnant obsession for Scrooge-like men in real life may concern power, position, traditional family values, reputation or an old political cause. They strive toward goals such as the acquisition of wealth or power—but these incentives no longer have meaning for us when we are stagnant.

Meanwhile, the stagnant female is anima-dominated. She resents being cast into the role of servant to her demanding spouse and children. They are going out into the world to find their fame and fortune, while she is still at home or working in an under-paid and under-appreciated job in some barren organization. Typically, she is working for a male boss who lacks emotional intelligence, relying on her to do the “dirty work” (equivalent to cleaning up the baby’s back side). Why does she still do most of the cooking at home – and all of the cleaning? Like the stagnant male, this woman acts out of habit. She has reached a point in her life when activities should take on their own meaning and impetus—activities that were previously means to other ends (such as the approval of her life partner, the admiration of other women, the achievement of security).

For both the Autumnal woman and man, the original purpose is lost. We must either move in new directions in our life or invest new purpose in the activities we are already doing. Psychologists identify this second option as “secondary autonomy.” (Hartmann, 1958) It can serve as the foundation

for either psychic renewal or psychic stagnation. Our stagnant woman can find new purpose in her cooking (perhaps taking classes at the local culinary institute or community college). She can redecorate her home and add bright new colours to the walls in her living room. Or she can volunteer in a local service club and serve on the executive committee with other women and “evolved” men who take her seriously and appreciate her skill and hard work.

Our Scrooge-like man of Autumn can repurpose his existing work and move away from an orientation toward success. He can instead move to an orientation toward significance—finding ways for his work to be of tangible benefit to his society. He can find satisfaction in mentoring the young women and men with whom he works; he can teach in the business school at the local university. He can let go of his controls and serve the family, helping them explore and establish their own identities. Stagnation can turn to generativity even without a radical change in one’s career. Accumulated life experiences can be of great value. We don’t have to start all over again; but we do need to do what we are already doing in a more caring and life-giving manner.

There is another, very disturbing aspect of psychic stagnation. We chose stagnation when we desperately try to blunt our pain—when we feel hopeless and confused. This is probably what it was like for the Great King of the Ramayana, who has not forgotten the grief of the old couple, whose son he killed during a hunting trip. Like this King, we yearn for atonement and peace. We act out of an obsessive need to somehow heal the wound and eliminate the anxiety associated with midlife depression. David Morris (1991) has suggested that we live in a society that no longer can find any meaning in the experience of pain. This is largely because there is now the possibility of avoiding or eliminating pain through medical advancement and, in particular, “pain-killers.” We try to escape from that which is painful rather than finding meaning in this pain. We race away from our inner voices from other rooms and from the feminine and masculine voices because we hope to avoid pain and somehow find peace without suffering.



Unfortunately, we live in societies that not only approve of this avoidance, but also offer many antidotes to pain, both legal and illegal. We live in societies that are filled with middle-aged men and women who would rather escape pain than find any meaning or purpose in the pain or, for that matter, find meaning in any other aspects of life. In certain societies, people stop learning, growing and transforming the day they find their first job. Government jobs that are symbolically called ‘iron rice bowls’ are in demand, for they help one avoid the pain of unlearning and relearning. Life after retirement becomes even easier, as there is no need to think or work, while sitting on the pedestal of past achievements and glory. Pain and generativity are companions, so are stagnation and the avoidance of pain. Pain and generativity are the curative arms and eyes that attend to us without anger or hatred.

### **Discerning the True Voices**

In attending to voices from other rooms, we must make some important decisions regarding what we do with the messages we receive. In attending to these voices, we do not necessarily have to do what the voices suggest. We must listen, but don’t have to take the advice. During the Middle Ages in Europe and in many Asian spiritual traditions, mystics attend carefully to the voices they receive through meditation and contemplation. They remain open to various mystical experiences. However, these mystics realized that some of these messages might come from somewhere other than a divine source. The voices may come from their own personal ego, from other people, or even from some evil source. As a result, these mystics devised methods not only for contemplation and transcendent experience, but also for determining which messages come from God and which come from elsewhere. They called this process “discernment.”

As women and men in late midlife, we must discern the good voices from the bad voices. We must sort out the truth about our psyche from all the false claims that swirl around us. We have three options when it comes to discerning these voices. We can choose to ignore the voices. This is our first choice and seemingly the safest one. Our second choice is to listen to the wrong voices. Our third choice is to listen to the right voices. To be

successful in making this third choice, we must determine which of the voices seem to be responsive to our changing Autumnal needs, values and life purposes. We must determine which voices seem to keep us stagnant and stuck where we are right now, which distract us from new-found pathways, and which turn us toward pathways that are destructive to ourselves and the people we love.

These distinctions are not easily drawn. As women and men of Autumn, we usually know little about the process of discernment. We are accustomed to living in the external world, making decisions based on data that exists out there in reality. We are great at repeating the safe old patterns of thought and action. “How much money do we need to pay our bills this month?” “Which of these technical training programs is likely to prepare our daughter best for her future life?” “Where do we want to plant that new tree?” The process of discernment requires that we attend to internal data and make decisions based not on rational argument and analysis but on deep searching for inner truths related to our hopes and fears. This is not an easy task, when we live in a fast, noisy and demanding world.

We must ask difficult questions about our inner life, with courage. “Which emotions are elicited when I think about enacting this long-deferred dream?” “Of what am I most afraid when considering a positive response to this invitation from my inner voices?” “What is old, safe and stagnant in my current life?” “What is new, risky and generative in my emerging life?” “Who might be impacted in positive or negative ways, when I make this choice?” “Who can I speak to, for some advice?” “What rules might I be breaking, if I continue this way?” While several practical suggestions about discernment are offered later in this book, each of us must find our own way to discern what is right and wrong for us during our Autumnal years.

The first and most important step is to listen to the voices. Without this first step there is no need to discern anything, for we have chosen to remain deaf and blind to our inner world. We have chosen stagnation over generativity. Our child will die in our arms. We will wear garments of anger and hatred, living with hopelessness and confusion. Like the Ramayana King, we will be “missing [our] dearest” – in this instance, our own childlike

self, dreams we have abandoned, and voices we have ignored in the rooms of our early adulthood.

## Chapter Eleven

### Wounds, Covenants and Generativity

#### Poem of the Erl King

“I love thee.

Your beautiful form entices me!

And if you are unwilling, then I will use force.”

“My father, my father, he has taken hold of me.

The Erl King has done me great harm.”

#### Legend of Miaoshan

The king’s men fetched the arms and eyes from Mount Fragrant.

And the king was saved with the medicine

#### The Great King of the Ramayana

Died the king, wishing he could

Re-live his life one more time,

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The poem of the Erl King shifts in this stanza. A sequence of enticement, threat, betrayal and wounding is conveyed. First, the Erl King again appeals to the protagonist’s ego and vanity. In this instance, however, the Erl King changes his emphasis. His admiration of the son’s beauty leads him not to offer the services of his daughters, but rather to tell the boy that he wants him desperately. This is an act of enticement: compliments can be very

appealing, especially for those of us living in late midlife—who often have had their egos bruised or are being ignored in favour of those “younger folks.”

The threat of force also becomes quite apparent at this point in the poem. The Erl King is frustrated. He is willing to use force, if necessary, to attain the allegiance of the child. The King of the Ramayana narrative is faced with a different kind of force. He recognises that he came under the temptation to please his queen. He realised that her force overwhelmed him, blinding him for a moment. He wished he could rewrite the story. The child within him is crying out loud, wanting to reclaim his innocence. Unlike the King of the Miaoshan legend, he finds no healing in the women with whom he associates. Herein lies an important lesson to be learned by each of us: to whom do we turn when we are afraid and what do we do when our source of support might also be a major source of threat (which is often the case when we turn to the significant others in our life)?

For the women and men of Autumn the threat of force and harm is very real and the question regarding our source of support and threat is quite relevant. We are often wounded during this time in our life and may have even fallen from grace. We are punished for being too powerful or controlling. We are now often ignored because we no longer have power and no longer have much say in the life of other people in our life. We expose ourselves to failure-ridden experiences as we test out alternative roles and identities. We inflate our own ego as senior members of our organization or family, and soon come tumbling down, having been deflated by our own foolish behaviour. We pretend to be masterful all-knowing teachers, yet as we cross boundaries with good intention (the desire to explore the unknown), we sometimes hurt those around us.

All of this invites a wounding of our basic sense of self and requires a reconstruction of our self-esteem. Psychologists speak of this as a “narcissistic” wound and consider it to be one of the major pathologies facing contemporary middle-class men and women in many of our societies. Furthermore, with this wounding, we look for someone else to blame. Like the child in Goethe’s poem, we feel betrayed. Our father (spouse, friends,

children, mentor, boss) is not there to defend us or support our justifications. They may have grown tired of our childish narcissism and wish we would go back to being the more dependable and less self-inflated person we were earlier in our life.

The issue of wounding is portrayed and played out differently in our three narratives. While the Elr King poem portrays the move from enticement to threat and then to a sense of betrayal, the Legend of Miaosohan conveys a quite different sequence. It is a sequence that leads to healing. Commitment is portrayed in this narrative. It is the commitment of a loving child to the ultimate welfare (and life) of her father. Furthermore, the commitment translates into action. We would suggest that this is the essence of a covenant.

There is much more than just “talk” in a covenant. There is the translation of talk into sustained action (despite opposition, shifting circumstances, or personal doubts). An enacted covenant, in turn, leads to healing. The healing “medicine” might be a herb, a gentle touch or a word of support. Most importantly, it is a medicine given freely (without reservation or expectation of reciprocity) and consistently. It is a medicine that is delivered by someone who is realistic—unlike the father in Goethe’s poem who is in denial about his child’s plight. Our source of support knows full well that we are not perfect and that we are often filled with an inflated ego. They know of our narcissistic wound and are aware that they themselves might be a victim of our wounded blustering and blundering—yet, like Miaoshan, they still attend to us.

What then does our third narrative teach us about wounding and healing? The Ramayana narrative seems to bridge the gap between the wounding tale of the Erl King and the healing tale of Miaoshan. In the narrative of the Great King of Ramaya we see the outcome of a broken covenant—a failure of the King to take appropriate action based on caring, healing ideals. With the shattering of the covenant inherent in a parent/child relationship, there comes regret (a powerful motivator in our life). There is the wish to re-live life – a wish to somehow re-covenant. But this is never possible. The decisions that have been made and actions that have been

taken (or not taken) can't be undone. The King of the Ramayana is left with regret and sorrow. We would suggest that this might be the ultimate wound that any of us can experience—and regret continues to wound.

As we step away from our three narratives and the lessons that they offer us from the distant past and three different cultures, we turn to the implications of these lessons for men and women living through their Autumnal years. We focus, in particular, on the important role played by covenants in our lives and the relationship between covenants and the emergence of generativity (as opposed to stagnation) as a foundational element in the awakening of Spring during our Autumnal years.

## **Shattering the Covenant**

The threatening force of the Erl King or Women of the Ramayana Court among mature women and men is often very subtle, as are the wounds. The force is manifest in the constraints placed on those living through their Autumnal years who wish to explore alternative paths and values—that is among those men and women who wish to establish their own late midlife moratorium. The covenants that young people establish early in life play a central role in establishing these constraints. Young men and young women establish covenants with their families, the organizations where they work, the professions and career paths they pursue, and ultimately the communities in which they live. These covenants concern expectations about who these young people will be “when they grow up” and what they will do for the rest of their life. Covenants also concern what we, as young women and men, are willing to undergo and sacrifice in order to receive certain rewards from our family, organization, profession, career and community.

To explore alternative identities and choices during our Autumnal years and, in particular, to establish a moratorium for ourselves where we can explore these alternatives requires a shattering of the covenant. We are often forced, however, by salary, family obligations, health and other constraining factors to abandon this new path. We opt for a safer path (as

we noted in Chapter Nine). If we do shatter the covenant, the forces in our life (be they significant others, social conventions or our own sense of duty) will drag us back kicking and screaming to our old identities, roles and responsibilities.

The shattering of a covenant can be stressful and even life threatening. It may lead to alcoholism, drug use, depression and occasionally suicide. This stress, however, can also lead us directly to the domain of the soul. We can use these conditions as means of internal reflection and revitalization. We must each make a choice between generativity and stagnation. We need to make changes—yet are hindered by those people whom we most love and on whom we are often most dependent. As we have already noted, irony resides here: those whom we look to for support can also be the source of our wounding. As a result, we can easily feel betrayed (like the child in Goethe’s poem). Ultimately, we often redirect our attention from the outside to the inside. We must look to our own self as the primary source of our wounding and recognize our often-narcissistic rationalizations that lead us away from a soulful appraisal of our Autumnal life. What should we do?

## **Healing the Narcissistic Wound**

The challenge of narcissism is to be found in all three of our narratives. However, it is particularly poignant with regard to our second and third narratives, for both of these narratives involve men who possess considerable power. Narcissism and power are remarkable playmates. Kings (and queens) in real life not only are given the opportunity to make real changes; they also are likely to be praised by those seeking their approval (and rewards). Even if powerful people aren’t actually being successful or even well-intended, they are unlikely to receive any negative feedback from those who are beholding to them. This doesn’t mean that we should diminish the challenge of narcissism faced by our father In the Erl King poem. The elfin prince has offered his third and final temptation. This is the hardest one from which to abstain, for it contains both a threat and a narcissistic compliment that feels so right—and so timely. The temptation of the compliment is based in our inevitable late midlife narcissism and our



efforts to heal the accompanying wounds. We don't have to be powerful in late mid-life to succumb to a distorted and narcissistic self-appraisal or to fall into the trap of false compliments offered by other people in our Autumnal life.

Like the mythic figure, Narcissus, we are likely in our late mid-life to be proud of at least some of our achievements to date. We rightfully take pride in what we have produced and what we know about our family, our job, our organization, or the way our community or society runs. Younger people, in certain settings, will listen to us and respect certain aspects of our accumulated experience and wisdom. Our spirit is fully mature and expansive. Yet, this is also a time in our life when we must acknowledge our many failures: the dreams that we never fulfilled and the wisdom we never attained. We wish we could have had more support, information and guidance, so that we could have avoided those mistakes or become more efficient in pursuing those dreams. We wished we were a better human being.

We note the absence of genuine respect among our colleagues and co-workers in those areas where we should be honoured and where we are wise. No matter how mature we are, these public slights and our own personal insights are painful and wounding to our sense of self and our self-esteem. We deeply feel the narcissistic wound of our Autumnal years, whether or not we have been successful in life. We know we are "impostors" in life. We will soon be discovered and run out of town on a rail. We shudder as some of these scenarios begin to flash in our mind, as we lay in bed awaiting sleep or are in the middle of an interesting conversation with our loved ones. A soulful voice is heard.

The issue of success or failure at this point in our life is a quite subjective matter. Who is to say what amounts to success or failure after forty or fifty years of activities and achievements? Some of the success and failure has been under our control. We can take little credit or blame for other successes and failures. It is particularly hard to assess success, given the shift occurring in our own value system during these decades of our life. We ask

difficult and disturbing questions: “what after all really is a success? Are there really failures?”

At this point in our life, most mature women and men feel wounded to at least some extent, given unmet expectations and foolish decisions. We are each ashamed of specific actions we have taken in our life and wince when we reflect on some of the choices we have made. We know that we are only human—but wish that our humanness was not always so destructive to ourselves and obvious to other people. We often try to heal these wounds by seeking to undo or redo the past. We are often tempted to go back to old ways. We want to be given one more opportunity during our Autumnal years to accomplish our elusive dream. We are easily lured back to our original dream, which is still retained by our internal child, even if long forgotten by the adult in us. If we are given one last chance to succeed or re-succeed, then hopefully we can temporarily avoid a depression that comes with taking stock of the dreams we formed during early adulthood.

Autumnal men and women we have seen in therapy or have coached often struggle with old temptations during late midlife. They have thought about applying for another administrative position in another institution. They want to try one more time to get it right, having learned so much the last time around. Yet, for many of these women and men this makes no sense. Our mature clients might want to read the narratives about powerful Kings contained in our second and third narrative.

They might also want to read *The Last Hurrah* or rent the Spencer Tracy movie that is based on this novel. *The Last Hurrah* concerns a burned-out big city mayor who insists on one more campaign. As a barely disguised biographical sketch of Boston’s Mayor Curley, *The Last Hurrah*, as book and movie, speaks to us about Autumnal leaders who are tempted to stay with an old pattern of life. The mayor in *The Last Hurrah* should move on with his life instead of dragging himself and his friends, family and colleagues through a humiliating and destructive experience. Many of our clients must face similar decisions. Narcissistic wounds (especially among powerful men and women) are never healed, especially by new efforts at fulfilling old roles and realizing old dreams. Rather, narcissistic wounds push us to new

depths, to the work of the soul, to new insights about ourselves, and toward the next phase in our life.

## **Confronting Our Dreams and Covenants**

We establish a psychological covenant whenever we enter any profession or occupation, when we enter any enduring and intimate relationship, or when we join any organization. It is sometimes called a “psychological contract.” However, the term “covenant” is more appropriate, given that it is neither as rationally based as a contract nor subject to review, modification or revision, as happens with a contract. The psychological covenant more closely resembles the covenant of the Old Testament. It is based in a deep belief and set of expectations that often defy reason; furthermore, it can never be rescinded unilaterally by either party. Through this covenant we establish our own expectations regarding what other people being served by us will give us in return for the services we provide and what the organization we have joined will give us in exchange for our efforts and our loyalty to the organization.

Physicians, for instance, often establish a covenant, whereby they agree to sacrifice their Twenties by going to medical school and establishing their medical practice. They also agree to work long hours and abandon traditional boundaries between their personal and work life. They and their loved ones live with an ever-present communication device. Physicians also agree to keep up with new developments in their field and remain strong when the people they are working with are suffering or even dying. In exchange for these sacrifices, physicians expect the society they serve to respect them, pay them well and offer them job security. These hardworking medical professionals, like other professionals in our societies, also expect to retain substantial autonomy and to work in a warm and supportive setting with like-minded professional colleagues.

Unfortunately, a psychological covenant is rarely formally negotiated. The covenant often only exists in one’s mind. The organization in which one works, the person whom one marries or with whom one has made a life commitment, or the community that one serves. Our life partner, or

members of our organization or community may have no idea that we (as the negotiator of the covenant) are offering to make a certain set of sacrifices in exchange for certain benefits. As the person who has created these extensive expectations, we often do nothing to let other people know of these expectations. We assume that they already know about and agree with them. Alternatively, we say nothing because it feels a bit foolish about holding these expectations, since they are not grounded in reality.

Usually, there are few problems associated with the covenant. It provides an anchor for us throughout our career as well as serving as the foundation for our dreams and personal aspirations regarding family and work (Schein, 1978). Problems only begin to emerge when the field we are working in changes or when our own personal needs begin to shift in our domestic life. We are likely to conclude that our covenant has been violated when we begin looking for something else in our intimate relationships and these shifts are not acknowledged or honoured.

The betrayal often resides close to home. We are likely to feel betrayed when our children have grown up and seem unaware of or not responsive to our changing expectations about their relationship with us. If nothing else, shouldn't our kids stay in touch (maybe at least an email once a week)? Or maybe they should consider moving out of our home (the "failure to launch" phenomenon) or at least paying a bit for their room and board (even though they always seem to be somewhere else). What about when our vocation or professional is disrupted. We feel deeply betrayed. This is not just the abrogation of a contract. It is the shattering of a covenant. As in the Old Testament, this shattering is wrenching and very soulful.

Physicians in many countries, for instance, are now in deep trouble, personally and professionally, because the covenant that most of them have established is being constantly violated with the intrusion of new health care policies or priorities in their country. Even for men and women who are in relatively stable professions and occupations (if such a thing still exists), there is still an unsettling that tends to emerge during the Autumnal years. We fear that our covenant no longer makes much sense.

On the one hand, we may no longer need the status or even the income that comes with our profession or occupation. Furthermore, we might no longer be willing to put in the long hours or make the absolute commitments to our profession or occupation that we did when we were younger. We might need to make more money to pay off our mortgage, yet we don't find the energy to be out there selling our products and services. In other cases, like many of our colleagues in the medical field, we may conclude that our covenant has been violated.

Either our field is changing, or people treat us differently as we grow older. Other people (be they family members or colleagues at work) refuse to give us what we originally bargained for in our covenant either because they are unaware of this silent bargain or because they don't really care about or agree with the covenant. Retirement will often look attractive—though we are retiring with a “chip on our shoulders,” which isn't very healthy in the long run.

Several friends who work in high technology companies feel that they no longer hold the respect of their younger colleagues. They are in a field that seems to value youth and the latest invention. Thus, the expectation of long-term respect and stable income may not hold up. Similarly, several women whom we coach work in the banking industry. They talk about the job stability they expected when first entering the field of banking. These women also talk passionately about their sense of betrayal when they discover that younger employees are replacing them through a reduction in force. Do we retire or find another way to address this betrayal?

This violation or shattering of the covenant relates directly to the issue of identity formation. The covenant contains and conveys a major part of one's identity and one's sense of personal continuity in life. In our early adulthood we formulate our dream of what life will be as we grow older (Levinson, et. al., 1978). We establish our own sense of self as conveyed in the stories we tell about ourselves to other people and to ourselves. We also negotiate our covenant. We begin to interweave these dreams, stories of self, and covenants throughout our lifetime. The dream represents the ultimate reward for fulfilling our own part of the covenant. The story of

self describes the ways in which each of us engages the covenant, as well as the intermediate rewards we receive for fulfilling our half of the covenant obligation.

The dream one constructs during the early Twenties, for instance, might concern raising three gifted children in a respectable suburb, complete with loving spouse, secure job and free time to pursue an interest in history. One's story of self would contain sub-stories. One of our coaching clients, Dixon, identifies the following sub-stories:

How I met my wife. How I got my secure job in the bank located near my college. How I moved up through the bank to become a district manager. How I lived through the highs and lows of raising two children (one with emotional problems). My frequently failed attempts to set aside some time to read American history and do research on that obscure World War One General I admire.

The covenant Dixon establishes also contains several subparts. One part of the covenant is with his wife. It contains agreements regarding ways in which he and his wife express their love for each other, ways they divide the household responsibilities and ways they want their home to look. Much of this has never been discussed with his wife and may even be a source of disagreement and tension between them. She may have a different sense of the covenant or may want to change the covenant as she experiences shifts in her own life.

Dixon struggles with this issue during our coaching sessions. Other parts of Dixon's covenant concern his family, job, profession, organization and community. They similarly relate directly to his dream and life story. Given this intimate relationship between dream, story and covenant, it should not be surprising that when a covenant is violated or shattered, our dream and sense of self is threatened. No wonder we tend to react passionately and sometimes even violently when our life partner, children, organization or community betrays our covenant.

As we noted previously, there is identity foreclosure for those who have never had a dream and those who have never had an opportunity to explore alternative identities. There is also foreclosure of covenants. If we are poor, then we are more likely to have never had a covenant or to have established a covenant that was shattered early in life, just as our dream was probably never formed or was lost early in life. This foreclosure is also experienced among those young people who are the target of societal discrimination because of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or gender. They often live from day to day, like Robert Coles' black children in his award-winning *Children of Crisis* (Coles, 1967). They fight for survival. They trust no one in formal societal roles nor do they establish enduring, intimate relationships. Usually, they never dare dream of an alternative identity.

We also find the foreclosure of covenants, dreams and identity among young men and women who are forced to make premature career decisions because of pressure from their parents or early success experiences. Young children who are expected by their parents to become dentists or college professors fit into this category. The ballet dancers one of us worked with during the 1990s in San Francisco were doing nothing other than dance since they were four or five years old. They never had a chance to explore other career options, until forced to do so by injury or age. Typically, the covenant for these young people was established by their doting parents, not themselves.

Autumnals living in many Asian cultures have established strong covenants relating to family, parents and their society. The decisions to be made can be very big or quite superficial. How should I behave in the presence of family elders? What to wear and not to wear? As a woman, how long should be my hair? As a male, should I grow a moustache? To which god should I pray? The responsibilities of male and female members of the family are pre-determined, including the kind of profession one can and cannot choose. The type of families with which one should affiliate in marriage. The expectations of parents about their married children are unspoken, yet visible. In these cultures, covenants are foreclosed for many reasons.

Yet, the contemporary covenants of Asians are often being challenged, given their access to information about and entertainment from across the world. There are no longer closed cultural systems, given the wide-spread use of technology in communication and the willingness (even expectation) that young people (from the middle and upper classes) will travel to faraway lands to study.

Rising parental expectations must also be added to this challenging mix: we want our children to be successful in life and this means aligning with the emerging values of our society—yet these emerging values are often at odds with the culture in which we ourselves were raised. Our children are reluctant to follow traditional faith and traditions. Their new “faith” seems to be material prosperity. And they are driven in their pursuit of this prosperity. All of this leads to increased personal stress for Asians of all ages, as well as increasing rates of divorce and pervasive social unrest in many Asian communities. Old notions about covenant and commitment are being questioned and set aside. Narcissistic wounds abound in this world of shifting societal values.

Whether we examine the role played by covenants in Asian cultures or in cultures of the West, we find in most cases that there is little chance for young people to explore alternative covenants if they discover early in life that their covenant and identity have been foreclosed because of poverty, discrimination or parental expectations. Without an opportunity to explore and select alternative covenants, the challenges associated with later stages in life usually can't be adequately addressed (Erikson,1963). The people of poverty and discrimination who can find no alternatives in their life often face their Autumnal years in despair. This despair might be drowned out by alcohol or cut short by drugs or violence.

Even those who come from a higher socioeconomic level often find that they have been channelled into a career early in their life. They typically rebel later in their life. They feel compelled to explore alternative identities at some point in the middle of their life. Many women and men wait until late midlife for this moratorium. We coach many physicians, lawyers and dentists who explode during their Fifties or Sixties, breaking away from the



confines of their profession to explore new lives and new images of self. They can finally move beyond and bid farewell to the hindering expectations of their parents.

There is often the problem of declining physical prowess among men and women who have their dreams cut short early in life. If they are fortunate, they have been successful in athletics or some artistic career that requires physical strength or dexterity. More often, these are lower middle-class manual laborers (usually men) or domestic workers (usually women) who no longer have the strength to perform hard labour eight hours a day. As they enter the fourth decade of life or at the latest their fifth decade, these men and women are out of work and struggling for survival.

They are likely to have abandoned their dream long ago and have shifted to a vicarious living out of their dream through movies and television. If they are still connected to their families, they may be living vicariously through their own sons or daughters. Often, they have deadened the grieving process with alcohol and drugs (especially opioids if they have taken painkillers to address a work-related injury). Alternatively, these men and women are leading lives that require a carefree spirit and rely on good luck and chance. Often based in gambling or crime, these careers offer short-term dreams that are usually destructive to themselves and other people.

Typically, the higher the socioeconomic level, the more likely will be an identity moratorium early in one's adulthood. A dream of future accomplishments is also more likely to emerge from this moratorium. Among higher economic classes, there is also a longer delay in one's realization that the dream won't be fulfilled or that it's not what you thought it would be. Hence, among these men and women there is a delay in the grieving process. This book is written primarily for men and women from the middle class. Hence, it mostly concerns those who are grieving a lost or inadequate dream during their sixth or seventh decade rather than earlier in life.

## Returning to the Basic Issue: Generativity or Stagnation?

While we may be suffering from narcissistic wounds to our ego and the violation of our life covenant, we still, as women and men of Autumn, have a chance to turn toward new purposes. We can shift from the wounded leader to the generative teacher. We can be transformed from the woman who was left behind to the woman who is helping a new generation lead the way into the future. Though we may have lost the opportunity to play an active role as parent to our children, a second form of parenting is available in abundance for us during late midlife. We can be parents to our organizations, to people for whom we serve as mentors, and to young people in our community. We can savour the joys of caring for our grandchildren and can become valuable volunteers in non-profit organizations.

Some of us may even start a new business or a not-for-profit organization. These entrepreneurial ventures enable us to leverage our past experiences. Our leadership in a non-profit, often providing what is now called “social entrepreneurship” provides an opportunity for us to contribute to a cause about which we had always been passionate. Our social entrepreneurial dreams that have been lingering in another room, can now be invited into our living room, complete with the wisdom and clarity of values we have acquired during the years these dreams were unacknowledged. Just as life seems to take away opportunities for active leadership, public recognition and parenting during our Autumnal years, it offers a second opportunity for new forms of parenting and entrepreneurship.

There are many ways in which to be “parents” that are available to us in later midlife. We can be a parent not only to children and other people during our Fifties and Sixties, but also a “parent” to ideas, subordinates, people we mentor, institutions, communities and even cultures. Erik Erikson describes this expanding notion of generativity as “a vital strength of care [and as] a widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident; it overcomes the ambivalence arising from

irreversible obligation. Thus, [it] attends to the needs of all that has been generated.” (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, 1986, p. 37)

Our need for generativity essentially concerns two primary factors. First, generativity is about extending one’s own presence and influence with the next generation. We become gardeners who tend the garden. We want the flowers, the trees and the plants to live long after we do and to represent, in some important and tangible way, the manner in which we make an appearance on this earth. We want the garden to reassure us (and the world) that we made a difference. This point was tenderly and, yes, a bit melodramatically conveyed in both Lerner and Lowe’s *Camelot* and Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

We see King Arthur at the start and end of *Camelot* preparing for battle against Lancelot, his dearest friend. Arthur is reflecting on the state of his kingdom and, in particular, his round table and code of chivalry: “right makes might. Not might makes right!” It is only when a young boy is discovered by Arthur and displays his own knowledge of and fervent commitment to the roundtable and code that Arthur breaks out of his depression. Arthur commands the boy to return home: “run boy run.” He sends the boy away so that the tales of Camelot “might not be forgot.” The abundant garden that Arthur has tended shall now be restored by this representative of the next generation and other young men and women who witnessed this one, brief shining moment of glory “that was known as Camelot!”

In the case of Capra’s *Wonderful Life*, George had sacrificed a fulfilling life to serve his family and community. His covenant was violated. He never was given a chance to get out into the world. He wasn’t even sure if the other half of the covenant was fulfilled. George wondered if he had really made a difference in his family and community. As in the story of King Arthur and many other Capra movies such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Meet John Doe*, the principal character in *Wonderful Life* is a former idealist who is now burned out and disillusioned.

George was on the edge of becoming a grumpy, discontented human being who would have been of little value to anyone as a parent, spouse, business owner or community leader. Erikson would suggest that George was about to move toward the opposite pole. He was moving away from generativity and toward stagnation and despair. Clarence, the angel-in-training, rescued George at the last minute. Clarence showed George that he had made and continues to make a profound difference. The lives of people living around him in Bedford Falls would not be the same without his sacrifices.

There is a second primary factor. Generativity is about caring for that about which one truly cares. We can't attend equally to every flower in the garden as we grow older and become somewhat less energetic. We must determine which of the flowers we care about most and then devote deep, caring attention to these few flowers. So, in life, we must identify those things about which we truly care when we reach our Autumnal years. We must attend carefully to these few things. This is also a time to have the courage to say 'no' to those about which we care less – from the same space of deep caring. This is what generativity is all about: caring discernment. Like George in *A Wonderful Life*, we want to touch the important people in our lives and accomplish things, as women and men of Autumn, that leave a lasting impression. Like King Arthur we want to know that in some way we have secured our immortality. Like both George and Arthur, we must make choices. We don't want to reside in a world of despair, regret and stagnation, as we witness in the lives of our two Kings and in the probable life of our Goethian father (after he discovers that the son in his arms is dead).

### **Four Ways to Be Generative**

We express and experience generativity in many ways. We specifically focus on four different pathways. First, there is the generativity that we express as parents—even when our children are grown up and we are no longer the primary caretakers for our children. Our own caring about our children does not fade away as we grow older; rather, it takes on a new form and is accompanied by the delight that comes with seeing our children succeed in their own life and finding their own distinctive identity (that still echoes

some of our own identity). The expression of this first mode of generativity need not be limited to the care for children we have raised from birth. We all know of extraordinary men and women who have taken care of children via foster-care, adoption or serving as a nurturing uncle or grandparent. One of our dear friends joined with his gay partner to raise a boy from a broken home—a dramatic example of this first type of generativity.

Second, there is the pathway of generativity that comes with caring about and caring for young men and women who are not part of our immediate or extended family. This type of generativity often is engaged when we are older and in a position of some power or influence in an organization. We care about and care for the next generation of leaders or the next generation of craftsmen and artisan in our field. We often are generative in this second way, through our role as mentors. We run interference for younger people or for those who look up to us. We collaborate with them on projects. We serve as role models that new people in our company emulate regarding not only job performance, but also personal values and even lifestyle. We serve as mentors when we listen carefully to younger people talk about their problems and accomplishments. We serve as mentors when we encourage our protégés to take risks or to push on beyond their initial achievements. We sponsor younger people, inviting them into our world, our exclusive club or the inner group.

Some innovative and opportunistic college and university leaders in the United States appreciate this second way in which generativity is expressed. They bring in senior level executives who are retired or on leave from large corporations to teach for a term or two in their business school or liberal arts program. Many women and men in late midlife thrive in educational and training settings that allow them to reflect on and teach about accumulated learning over the years. Sadly, some full-time college and university professors are too burned out by the time they reach Fifty to be excited or effective as instructors during the Autumnal decades of their life (Bland and Bergquist, 1998).

Often the generative interests in collaboration and teaching are melded into a single plan. We co-teach with someone who is younger or less

experienced. We invite a younger colleague to join with us in consulting to another organization or within our own organization. These can be some of the most enjoyable and gratifying experiences that a man or woman of Autumn will experience. It doesn't matter if it's teaching about woodwork with a younger colleague at a local community centre, coaching boys and girls on a little league team, coordinating a technical training program for line supervisors in your company, or conducting weekly case conferences with new associates in your law firm. It's all about generativity.

In stagnation we tend to isolate this younger generation, often viewing young people as rivals and potential usurpers of the throne. In generativity we welcome in the younger generation and help to prepare them for new leadership. One of us is reminded of a trip to the French Quarter in New Orleans many years ago. He went to *Maison Bourbon* to hear Wallace Davenport, a legendary jazz musician. While Davenport was playing, the "racket" (hard rock music) across the street was invading the beautiful soulful sounds of Davenport and his quartet. We went up to Davenport after his set was finished and commented negatively about the quality of music coming from across the street. Davenport surprised us by declaring with considerable passion that this hard rock music was the future. He was glad it was there, across the street. Davenport could have resented the intrusion and competition. Instead, he chose to be generative and to embrace and support the new music. Much of the same attitude is to be found among the musicians portrayed in the remarkable post-Katrina TV series called *Treme*.

There is a third pathway by which generativity is expressed during the second half of life—especially among senior leaders in a community (Quehl and Bergquist, 2012). Autumnal women and men are generative in their care for the community in which they live. Unlike many older men and women who had retreated to their homes or (if they are from the upper middle-class) to gated retirement communities (often stagnating in these settings), the men and women who are "sage leaders" in their community find enormous gratification in their involvement with local arts councils, environmental action groups, hospitality organizations (welcoming new

residents to their community) and many other initiatives that enhance community development.

When we are generative in late midlife, we establish, support or help to expand networking in our community. We move beyond our own family and the organization(s) in which we have worked. We are particularly suited at this time in our life to such roles as teacher, trainer or coach to the leaders or managers of non-profit organizations or community action forums. In many cases, the role of community-based generativity is not to start something new, but rather to support and build on that which other people have begun—and it is contagious. As noted in the study of senior (sage) leadership conducted by Quehl and Bergquist (2012, p. 90):

. . . as part of their generativity, many senior sages report that their “job” in working as a volunteer is to build on the accomplishments of their predecessors. Rather than starting something new, which might bring personal recognition and ego-gratification, these dedicated seniors value continuity and honoring past contributions. Their passion is contagious, as is their appreciation for work already done. This enables them to generate new energy as well as re-kindled old passions. They re-interpret the existing vision of their organization so community members can see the often-unacknowledged value inherent in work already done and will continue to be done by the organization.

As Quehl and Bergquist concluded, these community-based generative services are not just about quiet leadership, they are also about voluntary community engagement (a key ingredient in any attempt to increase “social capital” or “community capital”). We would suggest that these services are often aligned with the social entrepreneurship we identified previously. In keeping with this spirit of generativity and social entrepreneurship, one of the study’s sage leaders noted, “we don’t retire, we just quit working for money”. George Vaillant (2012, p. 166) offered the same observation regarding his Harvard grads: “community-building is a career of its own—one of the really great ones.”

Generativity is often expressed through yet another (fourth) pathway. George Vaillant (2012, p. 155) identifies this pathway as guardianship: “guardians are caretakers. They take responsibility for the cultural values and riches from which we all benefit offering their concern beyond specific individuals to their culture as a whole; they engage a social radius that extends beyond their immediate personal surround.” Their domain of concern is no longer just their family, their organization or even their community. They now care about the more fundamental legacies in their life. They engage this caring through their own wisdom—and their own integration of soul and spirit.

While this fourth way to express generativity can be identified, as we noted earlier, as a form of resistance to change or as an overdose of nostalgia, it also can be considered the expression through action of a deep caring for that which remains valid in contemporary times—that which remains a source of wisdom regardless of its date of origin or the quaint way in which it is stated, painted or sung. In some of the Eastern traditions, this is often represented by the image of a recluse, who dedicates more and more time to exploring the inner world, learning from scriptures, practising and even teaching about these insights. It is stated that the presence of such people will bring progress to those living in the vicinity.

Insofar as we are serving in an active leadership role in an organization during our Fifties, Sixties and Seventies, we are likely to be more inclined than ever before in our life to exert authority in a generative, collaborative and nurturing manner. We are not only more inclined to teach and mentor, we are also more likely to delegate both responsibility and authority. As noted in the study of Sage leaders, generative women and men of Autumn usually are willing to take less credit and be less visible during these senior decades than during previous decades in their lives. They already have acquired whatever power they’re likely to get in their life. They have already had their “day in the sun.” These women and men now gain more gratification from watching their organizational or community or cultural “children” succeed than from succeeding themselves. This shift in orientation may be particularly appropriate and even welcomed in our



contemporary world, given the contextual and relational models of leadership that have come into vogue through the writings of Margaret Wheatley (2006), Peter Vaill (1989), William Bergquist, (1993) and Robert Greenleaf (1977).

This shift in leadership style involves much more than just generativity. We are likely to be amenable to this new, and frankly more feminine, model of leadership because of our own personal maturation. We have begun to come to terms finally with our own parents and, as a result, our siblings and other important people from our early life. This is what helps us be a bit less competitive in our workplace. There is a little less sibling rivalry or showing off in front of our Dad or Mom.

We have also begun to come to terms with our own family and our role as parent. We are less inclined to take out our frustrations as parents on our subordinates. We don't need that unruly assistant to "behave" as a substitute for demands that our own daughter should "behave.". We are learning to ask for help and to politely say 'no', even when we feel like saying 'yes'. We take a risk and let go, rather than control - which we know might cause us to be perceived as weak. Furthermore, we have begun to confront and find some resolution regarding our own successes and failures in life. As biological and organizational parents we are finally finding peace and clarity. This is a result of our own internal work. We find more time and space for this process of moving inward toward the work of the soul. We are finding our inner worth. The greatest gift bestowed on us is our self.

Our Autumnal choices at this critical point in life make all the difference. Do we choose generativity or stagnation? Do we take the risk of teaching and learning? Do we instead accept the status quo and refuse to take a risk? When we are stagnant rather than generative, we continue to do the same old thing. We settle for mediocrity, allowing our dreams and personal aspirations to wither away. We look down and the child in our arms is dead.

We come to resent and block the ideas and achievements of younger people. We dwell on the past, while abandoning the future. We take our

knowing for granted, as the only truth. We choose to see what is not working, rather than what is. We believe that learning is only for kids. Typically, stagnation sets in because we are afraid of change. We don't believe for some reason that we can keep up with the next generation. We have already enacted our dreams of early adulthood during our Forties and have found them to be insufficient. As a result, we take the seemingly easier way. We resist change. We have failed often to achieve these dreams and now have nothing with which to replace these dreams.

In our own work with the women and men of Autumn, we often speak of the personal fears associated with confiscated dreams of the future. Many Autumnals have spent their lives dwelling on plans for their future. We sacrifice so that we might realize our personal aspirations and to realize dreams regarding our family, our career and even our retirement. What happens during late midlife? We no longer have a future, for the future is right now. We have confiscated it and must now either savour the present day or create a new set of plans for the future. This is the process of generativity.

Alternatively, we live primarily in our past and with our old dreams. We consider retirement as almost the end of our work life. We protect, defend and hold on, rather than release, let go and loosen up. We are not the generative guardians that Vaillant identified; rather, we are regressive defenders of a past (that often never really existed) and we don't want the past to be incorporated into the present. We fear what we imagine to be the future, based on what we think we know about the future. It is a reality that signifies the end of our usefulness. It is a reality we do not desire. This is the process of stagnation.

Ironically, men and women of Autumn who have spent most of their life planning and saving for the future often find the creation of a new future to be quite terrifying. Yet, this creation of a new future is critical if we are to be generative—if we are to recreate ourselves for the final act(s) of our life. Late midlife need not be the end; it could well be a start: entrance to the next phase. Bill Bridges (1980, 2001) associates this time of rebuilding with his concept of the “neutral zone.” This zone is a state of limbo that

resides between the old realities and new possibilities. While this is a difficult zone in which to dwell, it is also a zone that is filled with special bonuses: mentors, spiritual guides, new loves, rediscovered old loves, new dreams, Furthermore, the new future is often joyfully and insightfully created in conjunction with the younger people we are mentoring or with whom we are collaborating, in conjunction with other members of our organization and community with whom we are building the new future, and in our own soulful appreciation for the old sources of wisdom that remain relevant and revealing.

### **Autumnal Grandparenting**

During our late midlife, we often not only serve in the quasi-parental role as mentors to younger members of our organization; we also sometimes serve as grandparents to our department, program or organization—especially if we are about to retire or have already retired. In many instances, as we have already noted, the Autumnal is no longer a “spark plug” or source of new ideas and innovations, even if this person has worked in an organization or community for many years. We may still have many bright ideas; however, the organization or community may look to younger and more energetic members.

The new generation will introduce or implement the new programs. These younger people will reform the operations of the department of which they are members or even leaders. Other members of the organization, at times, consider mature men and women to be barriers to change. Older employees are part of the organizational “remnant,” representing the old values and ways of doing things (Bergquist, 1993). They are now the ones who tell the stories about the “good old days,” and serve the role of historian and archivist. As George Vaillant observed, they are often generative guardians of the traditions, becoming collectors of old documents and memorabilia. They offer up memories and dust-off precedence during meetings. They preside over ceremonies and celebrations. They are figurehead potentates, rather than serving as functional CEOs or prime ministers.

While the role of Autumnal male and female as remnant and guardian is critical to the core values and continuity of our organizations, communities and culture, this role may not be fully appreciated by our younger colleagues. There is an honoured role in many traditional Asian cultures for the wise organizational grandparent. He or she often serves as chair of board or as chief advisor to the head of an organization with which this wise grandparent has worked for many years. In our roles as therapist, consultant and coach we have observed, in some cases, that these roles are obstacles to organizational growth and change: the guardians tend to defend the status quo and can't see (or refuse to see) possibilities that the future could bring to the organization.

It is not uncommon in Asian societies for the young members of the organization to feel powerless and helpless in managing the situation. They respect (and thus tacitly agree with) a set of values that are associated closely with age and seniority. It is assumed that wisdom comes with age and seniority, whether this wisdom is exhibited in politics, organizations, non-profits or families. In Asian cultures, a system will usually respond with a jolt if this wisdom is overturned by the knowledge and skills of the younger class. The status quo is disrupted, sometimes leading to turmoil.

Resolution is achieved in these cultures only if the change is widely accepted. The bold ideas of youth and new growth in the system must be framed as being in service of the whole. As Autumnal guardians, we must not only keep our eyes and ears focused on the opportunity for new growth; we must also ensure that our heart is wide open to the acknowledgement, acceptance and selectively incorporation of that which is generative. We must engage our capacity (and willingness) to engage in discernment. The power of discernment is perhaps the most important manifestation of wisdom we bring to the table as senior leaders of our organization, community or family.

Sadly, we find less opportunity for respected and discerning leadership when we leave Asia and travel to the Western world. This role is rarely supported in many Western societies - especially the United States. American organizations usually put their organizational grandparents "out

to pasture” or provide them with a titular role that is more of an embarrassment than an honour. Organizations in the United States do not often avail themselves of the wisdom to be found among their senior leaders; nor honour or engage the perspectives of Autumnal women and men regarding the enduring (or often disappearing) values and traditions of the organization.

In Chinese society there is also a complimentary value that eases the movement of mature men and women out of the organizational parenting role into the grand parenting role. Specifically, members of traditional Chinese society assume that someone in a leadership role should become more of a philosopher in their Fifties (and certainly in their Sixties and Seventies). They should leave behind their active role in the business or profession.

Traditionally, the successful Chinese leader should become a reflective person. He or she should no longer find an identity primarily as an actor on the life stage. This person is valued as a teacher, not as an entrepreneur, when growing older. If an Autumnal man or woman from a traditional Chinese culture remains actively involved on a daily basis in running their own business, then something is wrong. This person has not fully matured or has not yet been sufficiently successful in business to delegate authority or plan for his succession in a diligent manner.

We don't have a comparable social model in most Western cultures. We assume that Autumnal men and women will remain actively involved in the world and look with some suspicion on those who have moved into teaching or (God forbid) engage in philosophical pondering. We need to create such a model in contemporary Western organizations. We should provide opportunities for senior members of our organizations and retirees to engage in reflective processes. We should open the door for the personal growth and transformation of our senior leaders, preparing them for the changing organizational role they might play as sources of organizational wisdom and even spiritual insight in Western organizations.

In some instances, we may need to provide or at least encourage counselling and psychotherapy for these men and women as they confront shifts in their own role in the organization. At the very least, we should support their emerging interests in reflective matters of the soul—which will complement their enduring interest in the world of spirit and action. In their study of senior Sage leaders in California, Quehl and Bergquist (2012) found that there was a significant role to be played by these community “grandparents.” These men and women of Autumn benefited the communities in which they live—and benefited themselves as often-quiet leaders who are appreciated and valued for their current contributions, rather than just being honoured for past contributions and achievements.

## Being Honoured

If we are fortunate in our own organizations, we will be formally acknowledged and even honoured as mature women and men for our long-term contributions. Even if our contributions are not fully appreciated, we see the lingering impact of our work throughout the organization. A colleague one of us is coaching recently observed:

I can take quiet pleasure in knowing that I made a difference and my ideas did finally take root. I may be hurt to hear a young hot shot articulate that “brand new idea” that I suggested to him four months ago. It is frustrating to witness the celebration of a very successful project that I championed five years ago. And I wasn’t even invited to this celebration until the last minute! Was I that insensitive to my elders when I was their age?

Despite the insensitivity, we do find real joy and gratification during our Autumnal years in being grandparents to these new ideas and programs.

Sometimes we are formally acknowledged and honoured. We are given credit for being the founder of an organization. We serve in the “George Washington” role—or in Singapore the role played by Lee Kuan Yew. At other times, we are honoured for bringing the organization through a critical period. We play the role of “Abraham Lincoln.” Alternatively, we

are honoured for leading the organization to its current level of functioning, as we do when we honour our recent presidents.

In each case, we are being honoured more for our past work than for what we are now doing or potentially could do in the future. If we are accustomed as men of action to being praised for what we just did or can do in the near future, then we may find it difficult or even embarrassing to witness and accept the acknowledgment and gratitude of others for what we have accomplished in the past. We may even interpret these ceremonies as condescending efforts to get us out of the way or as public statements that we are “over the hill.”

We need to set aside these fears and negative assumptions and accept the accolades as genuine and well deserved. These ceremonies are meant to move us along to another role. We must acknowledge this motive in our co-workers. We are becoming grandparents and leaving the role of organizational parents. We are likely to have less direct impact on the organization and more indirect impact. Like King Arthur and George Bailey, it is time for us to reflect on the lingering impact of past decisions we made and actions we took in our organization or community. This is appropriate. We are now free to write our memoirs or at least share our stories with grandchildren and move on in our life.

One of our clients recollected his experience when he went to visit his former colleagues at the military organization where he served for many years in a senior role of command and authority. Without his uniform, as he spoke to his former staff, he was surprised to recognise a part of him that had become alien. Through the surprising encounters and conversations with his former colleagues, he found that there were new perspectives being shared—now based on friendliness rather than power. He was informed of his own attitude to his staff, his leadership style, the impact he had made – both positive and negative. He learned more about the way in which he showed up at work.

It was as if he was looking in a mirror, see images from the past, for the first time in his life. He was wondering why he did not get a chance to receive

this information while he was in service. That day, he personally benefitted from his detached presence in the organization—without the burden of having to look good or influence anyone else. He was gifted with enough information to attend finally to his inner child. The door of generativity was opening for him, as he gained new insights about his former self in relation to his current self. Not easy to acknowledge – but essential for new growth and generativity.

We can begin to attend to other matters as women and men of Autumn. We can focus on the issues and processes to which we turn in the remaining chapters of this book. Most importantly, we are given the opportunity to attend to our internal child—the child that is being called away by the Erl King. The child may be wounded or even killed during this encounter. It is painful to view our old self through a mirror—and perhaps even more challenging to view our current self. Narcissism is all about mirrors and reflections. As was the case with Don Quixote, our madness and self-delusions are made clear when we look in the mirror.

Yet, attending to our inner self at this moment in our life is critical. We should accept and nourish ourselves with the recognition we receive from our younger colleagues and from our former colleagues. We should allow our friends and cherished family members to hold up a mirror for our personal reflection and insight. This self-attention (rather than self-aggrandizement) will help sustain us through the new ventures in which we, as Autumnals, are about to engage. These are ventures that enable us to tend to our own internal child and journey into the unknown and transforming realm of the soul. Do we enter this realm wearing purple—or do we exist this realm having been rewarded with purple vestments? And when does Spring awaken in our soul? Stay tuned.



## Chapter Twelve

### Our Old Home Now Filled with Regrets

#### The Erl King

The father shudders.

He rides fast.

He holds the groaning child in his arms.

The father finally reaches home in toil and travail.

In his arms the child was dead.

#### Legend of Miaoshan

He went up to Mount Fragrant to give his thanks.

He realised it was his daughter who had sacrificed.

He begged her forgiveness.

#### The Great King of Ramayana

Learn the lessons he wished to learn

Relish the moment now, than never!

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We have come to the end of all three narratives. What have we learned? The father in Goethe's Erl King finally comes to realize that he and his son are both in trouble. What caused him to change his mind? Apparently, the Erl King took direct action in trying to grab the father's son. His son lies

groaning in his arms—and then dies. The father is now back home, but with only the memory of his son and a host of gnawing regrets. In the legend of Ramayana, the king meets his end worrying about his son and grieving for his family. He knew very well that the queen and he did not get it right. He might have found some solace in the belief that he is paying a price for what he has done or not done in the past. But this solace does not salve the regret. In the case of the king of Ramayan, there is recognize that he didn't learn what was critical at an earlier time in his life. He did not relish what was there right before his eyes. We find, once again, a profound, unrelenting, regret. We have learned in all three narratives something about regret. We have learned that a failure to recognize what is actually happening in our world and a failure to learn and correct our actions producing a state of remorse that never leaves our heart or soul.

We have also learned something about home and life purposes. We have learned from Goethe that “home” might no longer be a true home for us at a later point in our life. We are striving for the wrong thing—and may come to realize that this is the case too late in our life. Our child has died while we have been racing through the night trying to return to a home that will no longer include our precious child. For the king of the Miashan legend there is the begging for forgiveness—after a big (existential) mistake has been made. Once again, there is no return to a former state of affairs. The old home no longer can accommodate our life purpose and our relationships with significant other people in our life. We find a similar loss of home and purpose in our Ramayan narrative: we are racing to the wrong destination, for the wrong reason. There is a wishing for return to a former time and place. But this can never happen. In the words of the noted American author, Thomas Wolfe, “we can never go home again.”

How then do we learn and take actions during our Autumnal years in a manner that produces something other than regret? How do we find our true Autumnal home? It often takes a direct, irrefutable physical event to get our attention. We lose our job; our spouse leaves us; we survive a heart attack; we file for bankruptcy. To what extent do we set up conditions so that they reach a critical stage? Is this the way in which we finally pay

attention? Is this the only way to learn and discover our outdated or false home? Doesn't this reliance on a crisis to change our ways lead inevitably to regret?

Many of us have been accustomed to serving for many years as "crisis managers" and "fire-fighters" in our own family or in our organization. We sometimes collude in starting or at least fuelling the fire because we are great at (and in some ways get a charge out of) managing the crisis and putting out the fire. To what extent do we do the same thing in our own personal life? To what extent do we only pay attention when our house is on fire? To what extent do we get "charged up" by the crises in our personal lives, ignoring other issues until they reach crisis proportion? This chapter is all about the old and the new. It is about finding our Autumnal home and about coming to terms with our past actions and the resultant regret.

## Old Heroes and Old Battles

We begin this analysis by returning to the poem of the Erl King. It seems that the Erl King tries is trying something different, since he can't get the son to accept his temptations. He turns to the father and seeks to tempt the father rather than the son. To do so, the Erl King threatens force. The father must finally be aroused to the peril facing his child. However, he responds not by tending to the child, but rather by defending the child. This is a very heroic thing to do. This action, unfortunately, doesn't get us very far in understanding ourselves better during our Autumnal years.

This often happens in our lives. We don't attend to things in our lives until they reach crisis proportions. We keep denying that anything is wrong until it becomes critical. Often times, we look outward and try to address it from without, thus denying ourselves an opportunity to turn within. Then we leap in or march in. We try to solve the crisis in dramatic fashion, thereby becoming a hero. The King of Ramayana is no different. He is pushing forward with action to defend, protect and live by 'dharma'. Is he imitating the path taken by a 'role model' in his life or recommended by a tradition or ideas prescribed in a text? Is he falling back on his good old habits that have worked for him in the past?

So, what else do the fathers in our narratives do? They take further action. They race through their night, trying to return home~trying to find a safe haven. Is this the smart thing to do? Should our fathers stop where they are and attend to the immediate needs? Should they live with appreciate (even as the Ramayana tale tells us to “relish”) what exists here and now. Perhaps our Goethean father should fight off the Erl King rather than running away from him. Is the father afraid of the Erl King? Does he believe that he can't face him down? Perhaps that is why the father ignored the pleas of his son in the first place. Is the father afraid that he doesn't have anything of comparable value to offer his son? Yet, his son isn't asking for anything other than his father's attention.

We are inclined in the midst of our busy Autumnal years to give our sons, as well as our life partners, daughters, friends and colleagues, almost anything other than what they really want: our undivided attention. They are crying out loud for our mindful presence with them in the moment and our acceptance of who they are. Can we carefully attend to them, or must we wait until it is too late and then act? Racing through the night; acting like a super-hero; only to find that our son is dead and that we took action too late or took the wrong action in a moment of panic.

For many years as adults, we have played the roles of breadwinner, defender of corporate values and objectives, crusader for political causes (in word if not in deed), and irate father or protective mother. We have been warriors or guardians of the hearth. We have on occasion even been true heroes. We have relished these moments. We are late midlife centurions who hunger for one more battle. It's almost as if we lost an important role in life the day that we left the caves and no longer held the job of defending our families against predators. Instead, we began to pick fights with other clans, other states and other nations so that we might have a rousing good battle.

An anti-war movie, *The Americanization of Emily*, called it straight. Julie Andrews plays the role of a British woman who falls in love with an American soldier. In a moment of absolute frustration, she talks about how foolish war is and how much we aggrandize war by declaring soldiers to be

heroes and celebrate victories with grand parades. We love war heroes. We make successful generals into presidents and cloak ourselves in the flag of patriotism. Julie Andrews pleads in vain for a world that does not glorify war, but instead glorifies peace, love and home life.

Yet, peace won't sell, because it is nothing more than the absence of war. We must give peace some purpose and substance. We must somehow find a struggle that is just as exciting as war if we are to become a peaceful world. We long for war and are bored with peace. As late midlife centurion we are eager to take on anyone or anything when it threatens our child, though we are also scared to death. We want once again to become heroes in fighting against or even in escaping from the threatening entity. This is the most compelling of all the temptations being offered in our life. It evokes new dreams of battle and heroism.

We are reminded of the lessons to be learned from yet another movie. *Robin and Marion* provides a lovely depiction of Autumnal love and heroism. An aging Robin Hood, played by Sean Connery, is drawn back into battle with his old and aging nemesis, the Sheriff of Nottingham, played by Robert Shaw. They stagger out to the battlefield in rusty armour to fight one last time. Robin and the Sheriff are both too old for combat. Yet the battle begins. Within a few minutes they are both exhausted. Neither has the strength to pick up their heavy sword. Yet they somehow find the energy to renew their struggle and continue fighting to their death. Robin is victorious.

As Robin staggers off to recover once again from his war wounds, Maid Marion, now a nun, played by Audrey Hepburn, gives Robin and herself a poison so that they might die together after his triumph. The alternative would be for Robin to die alone in defeat some other day in the future. What greater joy can any man or woman experience than to die after a triumph? What greater joy for Marion than to die with the man she loves at this moment of triumph!

This greatest temptation is one of spirit. It directly appeals to the *animus* (masculine energy) inside each of us (whether male or female). The Erl King

has learned that he can't tempt the child in us. Instead, he turns to the father. He wounds the child, who calls out for help from his father. The father is drawn directly into action. He races through the night hoping it is not too late. If he can save his son, then he will feel vindicated. He has been a good father who protected his son when in peril. This is the role that many of us feel comfortable playing with our children. There is nothing more ferocious than the mother protecting her new-born or the father who has been confronted with a threat (economic or physical) to his family.

We are brave and ingenious protectors—it is built into our biological makeup. Otherwise, our species would never have survived life on the African Savannah. Yet, we are also often stupid and unexpectedly cowardice in actual protective actions. We don't really know how to communicate with those we are protecting. We can suggest to our discouraged wife that she need not find another job for “we can live off my income.” This doesn't seem to be of much use, since she wants to avoid relying on me. She wants to be more “liberated.”

We can help our children when they need some money. We can offer sage advice about finances, buying a new home or repairing a garage door. We sit down over a cup of coffee to talk with our harried daughter about how she might work best with their troubled teenage son. We offer assistance even when it is not needed and feel a little hurt when we are turned down. Our husband turns to us with a fear of growing old and we “assist” him by suggesting that he spend more time at the gym or begin taking some energy-boosting pills. That is not what he was looking for when sharing this very painful concern with us.

Our children and our spouse probably know us well enough as women and men of Autumn to sometimes ask us for advice or assistance simply because they know it will make us feel better. Sadly, they may ask for our advice only because they know of our limitations. They know that this is one of the only ways in which we feel comfortable communicating with them. Deborah Tannen (1990,1994) has suggested that communication with and between adults (especially men) is often instrumental in nature. According to Tannen, men often talk to get something done, whereas women often

talk to build relationships. Our children and spouse ask for our assistance in part because this is the way in which they can connect with us. Our child finally asks for help. We finally take notice. We finally agree to sit down with our wife or husband without the distraction of television, Internet or family chores. We carve out some “quality time” together.

Unfortunately, in our role as provider, defender and advisor, we don't learn much about ourselves, about our inner life, or about our inner child. We only get a bit of an ego boost and perhaps a few good minutes with our child or spouse. It is particularly tempting for women (it is not only Goethian fathers that are vulnerable to temptation). As autumnal women, we take on the role of the ‘man’ (animus energy) ~ instructing, directing and advising our younger family members, colleagues and friends.

Our words and actions of high intensity cause harm to others, as we are seemingly compensating for the opportunities lost in the past to control, manage and make things happen. We are perceived as insensitive, unloving and impulsive, yet we believe we are doing what is right for us, correcting the wrongs from the past. Unfortunately, the acts of heroism distract us, as late midlife women and men. They lead us outward toward our enemy and upward toward things of the spirit. These acts don't lead us downward or inward toward our feelings or toward our soul.

## **Feelings and Warfare**

There is an important observation to be made at this point: we don't know how we are feeling when we are waging war. When the aging Robin Hood was fighting the Sheriff of Nottingham, both men were living off their adrenaline. They were unaware of either their old debilitating war wounds or their exhaustion as men who were in no condition to fight. Like athletes who play through their injuries (and even concussions) during a particularly important game, Robin and the Sheriff were oblivious to their pain. Even at the end of battle we don't know how we feel. The joys of victory are often quite elusive. While we are fighting for victory, much of the excitement comes from the process of doing battle rather than from the outcome of victory. Even as observers rather than participants, we experience a

psychological let down at the end of an exciting sporting event. The game only makes sense, when viewed from the midst of the contest, when the outcome is still in suspense.

In his book *Behave*, Robert Sapolsky (2017, P. 44) conveys the core idea behind his research that “your heart does roughly the same thing whether you are in a murderous rage or having an orgasm.” He adds that the “opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference”. We now know why human beings are unable to recognise their emotions and differentiate between intense sorrow and joy during the battle. No wonder we feel let down after a game. No wonder we wish, at some level, that the battler would never be over. We will not be able to do our souls work during moments of intense sorrow, joy, love or hate. Ironically, there is an opportunity to turn inward when we are indifferent—or at least at peace with our self (the moment of “relish” identified in the Ramayan narrative).

As warriors we are particularly immune to pain and have a hard time identifying our true feelings. The German martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was by many accounts, one of the great heroes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He helped to lead the conspiracy against Adolph Hitler during the Holocaust. He wrote a poem about the confusion between joy and sorrow while waiting for his execution in a prison before the end of World War II. He notes that it is often hard to distinguish between intense heat and intense cold when we first touch a hot burner or piece of ice. Intensive joy and intense sorrow have similar properties when first experienced in the midst of struggle. We describe this same type of confusion in the following stanzas (based on Bonhoeffer’s poem):

Both joy and sorrow strike us now.  
They each can touch our soul.  
Feel joy and sorrow burn your heart.  
Like heat and frost’s first toll.



See joy and sorrow hurled from heights.

Past heaven's cosmic reach.

See feelings paint a flaming arc.

Their light at last will teach.

Compelling, strong, these feelings grow.

Past heaven's cosmic reach.

See feelings grasp our tender heart

Their touch at last will teach.

Both joy and sorrow strike us now.

They each can touch our soul.

Feel joy and sorrow burn your heart.

Like heat and frost's first toll.

Joy is enmeshed with fear.

And sorrow can be sweet.

These feelings often intertwine.

Their dance at last will teach.

Our feelings can teach at last. The interweaving dance of joy and sorrow is one of the most important lessons we can learn about ourselves. Recent neuroscience research suggests that the framework for both joy and sorrow is to be found in a subcortical area of the brain called the amygdala. This almond-shaped structure serves as a monitor for potentially powerful stimuli that might harm us or provide us with great joy. The key role played

by the amygdala in our emotional life was first persuasively presented by Joseph LeDoux (1996). Yet it is not in battle or in reading about the amygdala that we will learn these lessons. Bonhoeffer was only able to reflect on these feelings in prison, after he knew that the plot against Hitler had failed and that he soon would die. His circumstances plunged him deeply into soul work and, as a result, he wrote some of his most poignant and soul-wrenching prose and poetry while in prison.

When we are at war, it is hard to distinguish between joy and sorrow. This distinction is much easier to engage in the neuroscience research lab or in our daily, low-stress lives. These soaring feelings that arise in battle are matters of spirit rather than of soul. Our feelings are confused. In the swirl of events, we don't even know if we are wounded. Adrenaline courses through our veins and we do things we never thought possible – playing through our pain and overlooking our hurt and fears. We are truly heroes, but also learn little about what resides inside us—other than courage and determination. At the end of *Robin and Marion*, Robin understands Marion and fully appreciates her undying love for him. He finally realizes that his life holds meaning only in his struggle for justice. He dies happily knowing that his life ends with one final victory.

The rest of us might not be as fortunate as Robin. We might not have a Marion in our life to serve as our final guide. We might die without gaining much wisdom about our need for battle and victory. We will learn little about ourselves from battle and will probably only learn very much if we lose the battle or if we run away or refuse to fight. As warrior we lose consciousness (die) before moving past heroic stances. The woman that Robin loved fully understood that he was unlikely to ever move beyond this heroic point of consciousness until he faced his own death. Perhaps Marion also recognized that she would never be able to attend to Robin again after he had been wounded in battle. Was this her own “high point” – she leaves the convent in order to return to the real world and be with the man she loves one more time. Marion is filled with both joy and sorrow – as is Robin. So, they died in each other's arms.

What then are ways in which we learn about joy and sorrow? How do we become fully cognizant of the intertwining of these feelings and about all our other feelings and all the other dimensions of our inner life? Sadly, as happened with Robin (and perhaps Marian), it often requires a death (physical or psychological) to bring us to our inner feelings. We experience this in our midlife depression—a physical and emotional manifestation of regret. Or it might take an external event that crushes our ego and even the identity we have built over the years. We mourn the loss of something that is important to us. We have lost an old innocence and are moving with ambivalence to a new level of consciousness. We have lost our old home and must find a new one.

### Coming Home to Grieve

The father in Goethe's poem races for home. This is where he will find security and warmth. He looks forward to being with people who love him and will care for his son. Yet, in trying to reach home, he spends no time with his dying son. Those final moments that he shares with his dying son could be rich with meaning. Yet his son spends his last moments watching his father run madly for cover. His father returns to a home that is filled with regret. We can anticipate that this is a home now empty. It is saturated with sadness and self-loathing. And who else lives in this home: the father's wife and perhaps other children. What are they likely to think and feel about the failure of this man to protect his son? Are they angry? Do they feel vulnerable? We know from exhaustive and painful research, that families often are shattered following the death of a child. Divorce is common and the surviving children will always live with the ghost of their now deceased sibling. The old home is no longer safe—and it doesn't even exist anymore (having been replaced by a new, much less nurturing abode).

The widely read book of the 1960s, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is ostensibly about a father, Robert Persig (2009), who is searching for quality in his life. Persig's search on a motorcycle includes a son, who rides on the back of the bike. The father is seeking enlightenment, but his son sees nothing but his father's back while clinging to him on the motorcycle. Why can't the Zen-enlightened Persig see that he is depriving his son of his

own experiences in life? How can he be so eloquent about the world of abstraction, while being so blind to the needs of his own son? How could he be blind to the fact that the world he wanted to love includes his son too?

The son in the poem of the Erl King is dead. Death saturates the Miaoshan and Ramayana narratives. Persig's motorcycle odyssey through Western America leaves his son without direction or an attending father. How does either of these fathers make sense of the mistakes they have made in not attending to their sons? How does the father in the poem of the Erl King make sense of his son's death? How does he come to terms with culpability in his son's death? Does he blame the Erl King or himself? Who is to blame? How should the father grieve? How does he move on in his own life without his son? Is there any way to bring his son back to life? What could he have done differently? How should he now deal with his dead son's body and at the same time deal with Erl King, who is very much powerfully alive?

The King of Ramayana is dead – yet the events that would unfold is intensifying the sorrow in the family. His dearest son is grieving his father's death, unable to be united to the family because of his vow to remain in the forest according to his father's command. The queen mother who plotted the power play is utterly disappointed and pained, as her son blames her for being unfair, causing many unfortunate events including his father's death. What is going through the queen's mind? Did she ever wish she could turn the clock back? Did she know that she lost not only her husband, but her son too? Where is her old home? What dwells in her new home? Self-loathing? Anger? Regret?

Just as our wounded fathers and mothers grieve the loss of their children, so we must begin to grieve three kinds of losses within ourselves during the Autumnal decades. First, we must grieve the losses over which we have no control. We mourn the loss of friends, parents or a job. It is usually during our Fifties, Sixties and Seventies that we begin to face this first kind of loss. We must face the death of our parents and of people our own age who we know and love. We often grieve the loss of opportunities to say good-bye to them. In some sense, as we bid farewell to our colleagues (as well as our

parents and other people of their generation) we are saying good-bye to a part of ourselves (Freud, 1917). This type of loss often portends the grieving in which we must begin to engage as we start to bid farewell to parts of ourselves during our Autumnal years.

There is a second kind of loss. We grieve losses over which we do have control. We make tough choices between different life options. We must prune the garden of our life. This second type of loss requires a different kind of grieving. Our colleague, Bob Shukraft (personal communication) (who died at a much too early age) suggested that the primary developmental tasks in the first half of our life concern the expansion of our capabilities, whereas the developmental tasks of the second half of life generally concern the difficult choices we must make between different life options. To make room for our new dreams and our new voices, we must get rid of several outmoded parts of ourselves. We must weed our garden. We must create a new home for ourselves. We must create this new home in collaboration with those we love.

We find it hard to throw out old papers, computer files or memorabilia. We usually drag them from one organization to the next and from home to home. The so-called “object-relations” psychotherapists write about “transitional objects.” They suggest that we tend to carry something from our old home to our new home in order to provide some continuity between the old and new. Classic transitional objects include teddy bears, special blankets and a favourite doll. As adults, we also have our transitional objects. Our own teddy bears (be they our favourite books, photo albums or an old set of golf clubs) play an important (though often unacknowledged) role in our transition to a new home. They occupy valuable space and gather dust.

Yet some of these papers, files, playthings and memorabilia are treasures. We need to be careful about what we discard. This is what George Vaillant was referring to when he described the role played by generative guardians in our society. The ‘Delete File’ function on the computer that we use might ask: “Do you really want to eliminate this file?” We need to ask ourselves a similar question. Sometimes old projects link again (or for the

first time) to new-found or re-emerging interests. These items may move to the top of our list. When we throw out old files, we are also getting rid of old dreams that were never fulfilled or that received little attention. Many of us get stubborn during our Autumnal years: we don't want to give up something, even though it is no longer of interest to us or relevant to our career.

This is not limit to the realm of things and materials. Transitional objects can be relationships, expectations, practices and beliefs. Some of us hold on the past or present-knowing that it is not serving us. Yet the fear of creating space in our present, so that the 'new' can enter, is stopping us from the courageous act of letting go. Our storerooms, bookshelves, table drawers, calendars and minds are filled to the brim. It is time to take them out, sort through them and ask important questions—before making a choice to discard or preserve.

World expert on organisation, Marie Kondo suggests asking ourselves this question when trying to discern what to keep or discard: "Does this spark joy?" If not, then say thank you to it and gently let it go. She believes "The space in which we live should be for the person we are becoming now, not for the person we were in the past." The Soul's journey is more about subtraction than addition. At some point, we need to set aside our teddy bear (or give it lovingly to our grandchildren). The transition is now complete. Spring will never be reawakened if we don't find a new home in which to live while welcoming the Spring. We can't wear the old purple—but must find a new shade of purple—perhaps worn by us in a new way.

A third kind of loss must be addressed. As women and men of Autumn, we grieve the continuing loss of innocence as we learn about ourselves by following our anima and animus guides and acting upon voices from other rooms. This third loss requires a painful recognition that old conceptions, assumptions and even values may no longer be appropriate or valid. We often assume that by this point in our life we have no more major personal lessons to learn. This, however, is usually not the case, unless we choose stagnation over generativity. The new learning is often difficult because we now may have less energy than we did when we were younger.

In attending to these new lessons, we have to bid farewell to other more assuring and continuing aspects of our life. Parts of our self that are quite mature and that require little pain or new learning may no longer be primary. Thus, we must prune some parts of our overgrown garden that are particularly fragrant and beautiful. We must allow the seeds of other plants that may seem thornier and initially less beautiful to germinate. During our Autumnal years we must face shifting priorities, voices from other rooms, and reappraisal of dreams and aspirations that were dominant earlier in our life. All of this requires new learning, along with the loss of an old, secure sense of self. We leap into the storm. Like King Lear, we go a little mad, in hopes of eventually finding a new form of sanity.

### **Celebrating the Past and the Mundane**

Let's return to the puzzling term used in the Ramayan narrative. This term is *relish*. What does it really mean to relish and isn't this promotion of relishing simply a return to the old home? There is a bit of irony (and seeming contradiction) here. Midst the grieving for that which is lost during our Fifties and Sixties we should also appreciate (relish) and celebrate that which provides continuity from the past and the simple and instructive things which we chose to do during our Autumnal years. This appreciating, relishing and celebrating is the more mature version of the transitional teddy bear.

During our Autumnal years, we have the opportunity to acknowledge and assure continuation of that which remains good and relevant from our past, while preparing for that which is changing. In the midst of our Autumnal years, we must balance challenge with support. We can relish the rich moments in our live that remind us of that which is best and most distinctive in our past life. These relishing moments and simple actions and gradual progressions that follow are elements of a meditative process. Simple acts and gradual progressions in building a new home are just as much a vehicle to the soul as our more dramatic grieving of that which we have lost or abandoned.

What might these simple actions and gradual progressions from past to present and future look like. We might choose at times to do things in the old time-honoured way. We might choose to get rid of those shrubs that pose a fire hazard or block our view. Do we delegate tree pruning at our home to a professional in the field or do it our self? Do we pick up our grandchildren from day care in order to save our very busy daughter the hassle of completing one more chore? What about that meal that we want to cook for that neighbour who is now alone (after her husband passed away)? Should we still tend to the dishes in the sink, waiting to be washed?

None of this is a waste of time. These mundane activities may be the “royal road” to new insights and soul work. Grieving and rebirth take time and energy. They might best be done when we are trimming trees or chopping away the brush, picking up our grandchild and listening to their recounting of a day at school and after school care, cooking that simple dish our neighbour loves. For some of us, our soulful work might be done while we are playing house with our grandchildren; when we are washing the dishes; or when we sit by the fireplace with a loved one during a quiet winter eve or strolling along the beach.

Grieving is paradoxical. It is a source of joy as well as sorrow. We all know the bittersweet experience of reminiscence. We must honour (and grieve for) that which we have left behind-before we move on to something new. Bill Bridges (1980) describes the “neutral zone” as a place in our life through which we must pass during a major life transition. While living in this neutral zone we must honour what remains from the old, especially the common places where the soul lives. We must often look backward before we can be enthusiastic about new parts of our lives. This is a mature form of retaining a transitional object. Bridges strongly asserts that we will never leave the neutral zone until we have celebrated the past.

As mature women and men we often best appreciate our past and prepare for our future by doing simple things and finding new insights within the mundane. In this way, we are not over-attached to the past nor over-fear the future. This would seem to be what the Ramayana narrative is telling us from an ancient source: “relish the moment now, then never!” It is in this



present moment that Spring re-enters our Soul and refreshes our Spirit—so that we might don new garments of purple.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Listening to the Challenge and Finding the Support

We have learned much from research concerning the key factors that enable mature adults to successfully transform their lives and relationships. The most important factor appears to be a balance between challenges in our life and the support we receive from other people. First identified by Nevitt Sanford (1980), the moments in our life that are rich with new learning and growth are those that occur when the challenges we are facing are balanced off by the support we receive. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) similarly identifies moments in time (that he identified as thresholds) that reside between Boredom on the one hand (too much support) and Anxiety on the other hand (too much challenge). He later identifies this threshold experience as “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

We find challenges in many domains of our lives. We primarily find the support we need in relationships we have established with our loved one, friends, and colleagues. We also gain support from the organizations and communities with which we are affiliated. When there is too much challenge we don’t change. We don’t learn when we are overwhelmed by the obstacles we face. We are blocked when the changes that are needed determine whether or not we stay alive or preserve our sanity. We instead run away and hide, we feel powerless, or we deny that anything is wrong: As the ruler of our domain (Miashan), we escape from the reality of what we have done to our daughter: “I sent her away for her own good!” Or “It was her fault. She disobeyed me.”

Alternatively, as a parent (Ramayana), we feel that the fate of those we love is out of our hands—hence we are not responsible: “After all, it was just Karma. I couldn’t do anything about the welfare of my son.” In the case of our father in Goethe’s poem it was pure denial: “The child in my arms is just seeing things.” “There’s no Erl King out there.” In other instances, we

turn and attack the messenger who gave us the news that we need to change. The messenger is often our life partner, best friend, grown up child or even worst enemy. We often hurt the ones we love when we face challenge but find no support.

Conversely, if there is too much support and not enough challenge, we continue to operate in the way we always have. Those who nurture us often smother our ongoing development. They protect us so much that we never have to look after ourselves or confront our own changing needs and interests. We are addicted to a drug, a lifestyle, a lover, or our own overblown sense of self-importance (our narcissism). Everyone loves and praises us.

We end up sitting on the high pedestal. Hence, there is little need for change, even though we are no longer satisfied with the old way of living and relating to other people. We feel as if we are imprisoned, albeit in a fur-lined prison. It's like Elvis living in Graceland! We can't break away and take a risk without alienating everyone who cares about us and provides us the support. Ironically, the experience of having too much support feels a lot like having too little support. We can never be sure the support will be there if we venture out to try something new and risk transformation to a new way of life, including new values and relationships.

So, the key is balancing challenge and support. But how does this happen? We'll suggest four different sources of support and (in the thirteenth chapter) several sources of challenge. We encourage you to consider each of these, as well as add to the list from your own past experiences. You might then want to begin the exciting task of engaging these sources of challenge and support in a balanced and interactive manner.

## **1. Sharing Feelings and Ideas with People We Love**

As women and men living in the Twenty First Century we are socialized (at least in most prosperous societies) to think of ourselves as unique - and often different and separate from other people. Even in societies that have traditionally been more oriented to the collective identity, there is a strong pull toward making individual identity and success a high priority. This

suggests that 21<sup>st</sup> Century dwellers are particularly in need of strong, intimate relationships with other people, especially during our challenging years of Autumn.

Furthermore, it is important that we do not rely on just one person, be this person our life partner, best friend or devoted child. They are going through their own transitions. Usually, their own life is deeply impacted by the transformations through which we're going. These are not neutral observers. It is unfair to ask them to be dispassionate and objective in their outlook regarding the changes we are making or the feelings we are experiencing. In some instances, they may not have the skills to deal with the situation, which might cause more disappointment and frustration for us.

We need several different forms of support. First on the list is someone who can empathize with us: someone who will sit there and listen to us without giving us too much advice or take our problems on as their own burden. A human service professional (personal or executive coach, counsellor or therapist) can be very helpful in this regard. Also, a dear friend who simply sits there listen to us babble on. Then we sit there and listen to our friend for a while. Often, we are going through some similar issues, so we can learn from one another while serving in the listening and empathizing role.

A second type of support is provided by someone we love who can nurture and provide thoughtful gestures: a back rub, a special trip to a winery or museum, surprise tickets to a concert, a special book, or dinner cooked just for the two of us after a lousy week. This person is often our loved one.

Someone who has some answers for us provides a third type of support. It is unimportant whether these answers are right for us. They only have to be viable options that open new doors and keep us from feeling powerless or stuck in a corner. This third source of support often comes from an optimistic friend who is always filled with ideas and dreams. They come to us so that they might provide a bolt of energy and a dose of vision.

Finally, there is the gentle critic and questioner. This is the person who asks important and often difficult questions. Human service professionals often serve in this role as well as providing the two other forms of support. While this type of assistance seems to be more of a challenge than a support, it serves as a support because these are usually questions that we have wanted to ask ourselves. We have backed away from these questions in fear either of the answer or the inability of anyone else to appreciate the underlying issues(s). When another person we trust asks the tough question, we often feel a bit braver about trying to find an answer. Furthermore, the person providing support can often help us find the answer or at least appreciate our search for an answer.

There is another important issue associated with the support we receive. This issue concerns the ways in which we communicate with people who are providing support. We often assume in our media-dominated society that we must communicate through words. Many marital therapists and communication experts encourage their clients to talk more about their feelings. They often describe men (in particular) as unwilling or unable to communicate their problems and feelings (Rubin, 1990; Tannen, 1990; Tannen, 1994). Men don't talk freely about "personal stuff." One of our colleagues, Simon Neo, noted in his own research (conducted in Singapore) that the challenge for men talking about their feelings is particularly difficult in many Asian countries.

While it is important for all of us to talk more openly about our problems with other people, it is also important that we acknowledge and respect other ways in which we more readily express our feelings. In many non-Western cultures and during the earlier years of Western European and America culture, men were expected to express their hopes, dreams and feelings through ritual, symbols and gifts rather than words. Men sang, versified, shouted, danced, painted and carved great monuments as ways of expressing something about their inner world.

Words are a relatively recent invention regarding the expression of subtle and profound thoughts and emotions. Eva is a client whom one of us have been seen in therapy for several years. She came to a fuller realization of

this alternative mode of expression several years ago when she was in deep agony regarding her life. Eva's leadership role was being challenged and her marital relationship was strained. She doubted her dreams and her capacity to shift to a new way of being in the world.

Eva had grown up in a family that showed little outward emotion. She came from solid Chinese stock (with a strong dose of British restraint thrown in). During our therapy sessions, Eva often joked that she wouldn't know an emotion if it hit her on the head. She soon learned differently! For almost a year, Eva was hit repeatedly on her head by several emotionally laden challenges. She reported during one of her therapy sessions that she finally gained a clear sense that she was hurting. Eva acknowledged that she needed support from those people in her life whom she cherished and trusted. Like the father in Goethe's poem of the Erl King, Eva had run out of denial and resistance. She faced the full force of the Erl King and was fighting for the survival of her soul. Unlike the daughter of Miaozi, Eva was not reborn and did not engage in any act that led to some form of reconciliation.

How was Eva to express these emotions and needs? She had conducted many workshops herself about the emotional life of people in transition; but what about her own transitions? How would she convey these feelings directly and honestly to the most important people in her life? Eva decided to try something other than words. She decided to express her dreams, hopes and feelings through art forms. This was frightening for Eva, for she had never been an artist.

This woman of Autumn had never been able to draw anything other than stick figures. Yet, she had recently participated in and helped conduct several workshops where facemasks were prepared using gauze and plaster on the face. The workshop participants decorated these masks with paint and small objects such as feathers, beads and leaves. Eva thought her own mask wasn't very good. Other participants, however, were clearly touched by what Eva was expressing about herself through her mask. Eva concluded during a therapy session that she must have been doing something right.

Eva decided to spend a week living alone at a cottage near the sea. She bought some poster paints, several brushes, a couple of tablets of art and construction paper, and some other art supplies. Eva then put on some of her favourite music, sat down at a table that she had covered with newspapers and began to paint. She splashed paint on the paper and began swiping the paper with an arch of colour. Eva assumed that nothing was random. After she had painted for several hours, Eva wrote several poems. She went back and forth between these different media for three days.

Eva shared these productions with her husband when he came to the cottage. He was a critical source of support for Eva, but was a bit overwhelmed by her many works of art. We would advise others to prepare their family and friends for this new venture, rather than spring it on them as Eva did. Even though Eva's husband was taken aback, Eva felt pleased that she had been able to communicate something to her husband about herself that she had not been able to convey during their fifteen years of marriage. He has since told her how powerful this was for him, not only because this was a very personal gift, but also because of the insights he gained about Eva and the struggles she was going through.

Eva indicated that she felt rather childish and embarrassed about this explosion of art. She said: "In all honestly, I was probably just as worried about what my husband would think of my amateurish artistic abilities as about what I had expressed in my work." Yet, Eva went ahead with her work and had no regrets other than doing a better job of preparing her husband ahead of time for her "gifts." Perhaps, this was Eva's way of being reborn—like Miaoshan. Perhaps, this was the start of a new and improved relationship with her husband (a form of reconciliation).

This of course is only one story and one way of communicating about what is going on inside. We urge you to discover your own way. It could include spending more time in journaling, going for a walk with your loved one while engaging in a good conversation, writing letters of gratitude (even a letter to our self, to be read in a future stipulated date or to our younger self) and dreams, working with needle and thread, writing stories or learning something new like acting or dancing or a new musical

instrument. Some of us might consider working with a therapist or a counsellor for a brief period of time, so that we are assured of confidentiality and professional engagement. This brief foray into therapy or counselling might help us loosen up a bit and enable us to engage in an expression of our inner feelings with those around us.

It is, after all, a little late in life to be scared away by embarrassment and the judgments of other people. Too much is at stake regarding our own future and changes in our lives to draw back at this point. We find people with whom we can communicate—those who will provide us with support of many different kinds. We try to communicate with them in new ways. We speak to them without words. We take actions. We take risks. Most importantly, we try to be as honest as possible with ourselves and with the people from whom we seek support.

## **2. Parenting and Grandparenting**

We should look to our children for support during our Autumnal years. They have grown up. They know us now in new ways and have gained new empathy for the storm and stress of adult life. This is a good time to establish a new relationship that is more reciprocal and candid than in the past. This is a time, in particular, when we might share with our children the newly emerging dreams and voices in our lives. They can handle it. They need not be frightened by what they hear.

If we have not yet retired, we should take our children to work or at least share with them the opportunities and challenges we are facing in our work. It is never too late to break down the walls between our lives as someone who works and someone who loves. This may seem to be too late when we are near retirement or already retired. Furthermore, our children are now grown up. However, it is never too late. If we are still working, our adult children can still learn much about us by seeing us in our work site or listening to our work-related stories.

If we are retired, we can take them to our new “work-site” – the garden, the golf course, the volunteer board on which we now serve. They might even join us in our work in the garden or on the golf course. How about their



observations of and suggestions regarding our volunteer board work? With this direct experience, our children will be more knowledgeable and empathetic when we ask for their support. And they might invite us to join them at their work site or listen to their own work-related stories. We should enthusiastically accept if invited.

We should go to work with our sons and daughters so that they can become less alienated from us (realizing that “work” might be sitting at a computer). We should also encourage our children to take their own children to work. We should take our grandchildren to work. We should go to school with our grandchildren. This after all is their worksite. The separation of work and love does not have to continue.

This is also a time to engage in serious dialogue with our grownup children and even seek their advice in matters of work and love. They have seen the world, mastered the latest technology, read the most recent book and been to the most exotic place. This is a great opportunity to appreciate what they are doing, ask them some questions in a curious way, listen to their perspectives, request some feedback and seek a little advice. As the roles are reversed, our view of the world changes for us. Our inward journey is made easier because we see our children as light along the path rather than rocks that make the way a bit more challenging.

In learning how to express our feelings through means other than words, we can also turn to our new roles as grandparents. We can play with our grandchildren. We can be spontaneous and silly; act like a horse or become a tall tree. One of us has a beard and therefore makes a great Santa Claus for his grandchildren and little children he meets at a mall in Asia. What a wonderful opportunity to act out our false gruffness or our shyness.

### **3. Friends**

Many years ago, the eminent American psychiatrist, Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), wrote about the important role played by friends in our early development as human beings. He suggested that while we may learn about sexuality from the first person we date during our teenage years, we learn about intimacy from our chums or buddies, not the young person we are

dating. Now, as we enter our Autumnal years, it is not too late to learn again about intimacy from our friends. We are more likely to be open with them than at any previous time in our life. We will be less guarded and more emotional.

One of our colleagues participates in a “re-potting” group. This group consists of six friends who are undergoing major life changes (they are “re-potting” their lives). These successful men and women all recognize that support is especially important when they are in the midst of major life transition. Another of our colleagues spends a week each summer with a good friend. They go a little “mad” together; traveling to places that provide a bit of physical challenge intermixed with environmental beauty. They do a lot of talking and eat a lot of food. In your own way and at your own pace, we encourage you to spend time with friends.

You might want to link it initially to mutual work or a mutual hobby, such as fishing or visiting an historical site together. Make it much longer than an afternoon or evening. Most of us, during our Autumnal years, began to open up and express our hopes and fears only after spending a few days in close proximity. Typically, we show our emotions in a variety of ways and at various unguarded moments. We should have no agenda. An agenda would place us back into a traditional mould. An unstructured week of eating, working and wandering together pulls us in new directions. This is great for psychological support and for work of the soul.

#### **4. Honouring and Being Honoured**

As we have already mentioned, Autumnal women and men throughout the world will often feel more comfortable expressing themselves through modes of communication other than words. They also appreciate the role of ritual and gift giving in honouring and being honoured by other people. It is not foolish for mature men and women to want some habitual act in their life to remain unchanged. This is part of an emerging need in late midlife for ritual and continuity. We might like to cook and clean dishes, and look forward to quiet evenings, spend with our life partner in front of

the TV watching old movies or binge-watching a new series on British royalty.

These are special moments, not because they are unique, but rather because we often repeat them. As mature women and men, we are not just resisting change because we become creatures of habit. We also like the repetition because these patterns enable each of us, as well as the people we love, to quietly appreciate the continuity of life. This is an expression of the soul. The symbolic enactment of feelings that underlie these patterns and simple ceremonies may be the most important mode of communication we embrace as mature women and men.

Bob is a colleague that one of us coached several years ago. He told us a wonderful story that relates directly to this need for ritual and tradition. For more than seven years, Bob celebrated the pay down of a major debt that he and his wife, Judith, had assumed in acquiring a business. Once a month, after they made a payment on the debt, Bob and Judith went down to an isolated beach by their home. The two of them opened a bottle of champagne. Bob read the amount that went toward paying off the principle and the declining amount that was due on the loan. They would hug and kiss. Then one of them would throw the cork into the ocean. Even when they weren't at their home by the ocean, they would find a place to celebrate and throw the champagne cork up on a nearby rooftop. Bob and Judith looked forward to the day when the debt was paid off.

This payoff day eventually came. However, it was profoundly anticlimactic, as were the days that followed this payoff. Bob and Judith's marriage went through a horrible time. They grew apart from one another. There was grieving not celebrating. Bob and Judith didn't have anything to replace their debt reduction ceremony. It became clear to both of them, in part through Bob's coaching experience, that they were celebrating their marriage and their mutual accomplishment, not just payment on the debt.

At the time, Bob and Judith didn't recognize this need for a shared goal and accompanying ritual; hence the bottom dropped out when they retired the debt and quit celebrating. Bob and Judith have since created several

new ceremonies. They now honour the sunset and the day spent together when they are living at their ocean home. They are both very busy and wish to acknowledge the joy of finding a few minutes together. They also celebrate together on Sunday evenings, when they are preparing to return to the city. In his travels to Asia, Bob has collected teapots, Oolong tea, a brewing pot and teacups. Making use of these resources, Bob and Judith have created their own tea ceremony. These more mundane ceremonies help Bob and Judith affirm their relationship and mutual accomplishments.

During his coaching sessions, Bob reports that both he and Judith still miss the “big” ceremony down by the ocean. They need to create a new set of mutual goals that they can achieve together and for which they can celebrate each month. Bob indicates that he also needs to discover ceremonies that celebrate his individual achievements and Judith’s achievements, as both he and Judith address the difficult challenges of the Autumnal decades in both of their lives.

For some of us the rituals need to be invented or learned. We might not be accustomed to certain ways of expressing our love or celebrating our success. Our culture and our parents might have steered us away from common expressions of love and intimacy. Now is the time to explore various options and stretch ourselves to find out what works for us. Giving flowers, buying chocolates, cooking together, rewarding with a spa appointment, hugging and drinking wine are just some ways to acknowledge the love and celebrate life together.

Sitting together in quietness in the morning hours, reading a book to the other during teatime, sharing the best event from a busy day to celebrate a success during dinner time, occasionally making a bookmark or a handmade towel for the loved one, watching a documentary together every week, praying together daily as a family, shopping for healthy food and environment friendly products, sharing one’s dream with the other in the form of a poem. There are many other ways to celebrate quietly that are creative and fun. There are many ways in which we can honor one another that can be incorporated into our busy lives as a deliberate expression of

our love, connection and celebration. Each one of these can be counted as a support for us. Each can help us deal with the challenges we face in our autumnal years.

This is a lesson to be repeatedly learned: how do we balance life's challenges with sufficient support.

## **5. Continuously Realigning and Reappreciating Oneself**

As they embark on a journey of transformation, triggered by external events, Autumnal men and women should take some time out to focus on their own self and care deeply for the soft spots within. As the events in life unfold, we are called upon to re-examine our identity, and our sense of self. We rarely spent time early in life paying close attention to our true self. We are growing up and must address multiple priorities. There are numerous distractions. Often no compelling reason exists to seek the truth. We have numbed ourselves with the intent of being resilient, thus disowning our own inner guidance systems including bodily awareness and emotional indicators. We are living like an imposter as described vividly by Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries (2003) in *Leaders, Fools and Impostors: Essays on the Psychology of Leadership*.

During our youth, we tend to accept the first response to the question 'who am I'—and this response was conditioned by parents, society and the organizations we served. We have a name, a title and some identification in terms of our nationality, race, religion and so on. We identify ourselves with the year we are born, the place and the school we studied. We closely associate ourselves with the body and the mind including achievements in the material and intellectual arena. We have hardly taken time to closely introspect on other aspects of our identity. When there is more time at hand, more urgency and a compelling reason, we are more inclined to pay closer attention to the question regarding our true identity. During our Autumnal years, we begin to listen to voices from other rooms. This is the time when we journey to our own Mount Fragrant.

This is the time we start directing questions to ourselves that might reveal other sources of support—sources other than those from the outside such

as friends, family and society at large. We discover that we have strengths that are gifted to us naturally – which we can use at any time without effort. We discover that we have values that have motivated us to act in an inspiring way. We discover that we have had many past successes, because we held on to certain principles in life. We had beliefs that have served us at the time of difficulties. We had dreams and visions of the future that have propelled us powerfully to a distinctive destination. We have frameworks from religions and philosophies that have served us well. We have had role models who have inspired us during times of crisis. We have been gifted with spirit guides and inner voices that have provide us with clarity, when our thinking got muddier. These are our assets, that we can engage at any time we want—thus tapping into our inner source of support and power.

This exploration might lead us to further questions about our nature and unchanging core of who we are, if there is any, among our shifting identities. We might question our own values, beliefs and even purpose. Some of us might get a little unsettled and agitated. What is the purpose of asking these at this stage in life, when we have come more than halfway? One of us has worked with a very senior executive in a media company, who is perceived as highly successful. In our coaching conversations, he revealed that he is not open to such a deep dive, as he is already ‘good’ and enjoying a happy life. He made it clear that he does not want to be coached if it involves any personal development—unless it ties to an organizational goal. The conversations ended very soon—so we do not know what was going through his mind or heart at that point in time. It is possible that he is asking difficult questions to himself, yet he is not ready to have another person ask him the same questions face to face.

A coach or a good friend can facilitate this inner exploration, yet the willingness and commitment must be our own. At this point, we might take up more reading, listen to an audio course, engage in conversations or pray. All three of us have seen Autumnal males and females who have returned to their temple, church, or community centre, They are found doing volunteer work at a children home, dog shelter or at the ocean shore

(cleaning the beach or rescuing stranded seals or whales) . Though they did not seem to care about such institutions or volunteer services during the earlier years—the voices of commitment and care are now much stronger.

As Autumnal women and men, we develop an awareness that this is a journey for which we need to prepare ourselves, rather than this being a destination. We look for guidance to recreate an inner core of who we are. We open ourselves to intuition, multiple perspectives, and travel to a ‘field beyond right and wrong’. During this journey, we unpack the stories we consider real, leave behind baggage that we once thought was an inseparable part of us, let go of the medallions that distinguished us, and seek relief in the simple and ordinary. From this space we gain clarity, ease and courage. We smile more, we laugh at ourselves. We take our life less seriously, yet move forward with purpose, confidence and curiosity. Sometimes something clicks, leading to an Aha! We wear purple and dance with Spring awakened in our step. (More about this in the next chapter)

## Chapter Fourteen

### Seeking Out Challenge

Living in our contemporary, turbulent world and living through the complex times of the Autumnal decades may be enough challenge for anyone. We propose, however, that Autumnals need to seek out additional challenges that move us inward and downward on our soulful journey. As authors, in our own lives and our work as therapist, coach and consultant, we have discovered several ways in which we can challenge ourselves and our Autumnal clients so that the journey through this extended era in our life is richly textured and conducive to greater insight and new growth.

#### 1. Crossing the Border

By the time we reach late midlife there are clear borders and boundaries in our lives. We have a good sense of who we are and who we're not. Our organizational roles have been played out (and often completed) with some success. We are established members of our community. We usually get at least a modicum of respect from other people. We have learned how to fit in and know how to operate within certain roles and systems. With this "safe space" provided to us (in most instances), this is a wonderful time to shake things up and move into domains that are new to us, going "where no man/woman [at least no one like us] has gone before!" We can stick our nose into places where we have no business, opening doors where no "welcome" signs hang.

One of us was recently working with the senior, tenured professors at a major university. When we were first meeting, these men (and a few women) were offering quite timid statements about how they might help their university improve its delivery of service. Suddenly in a tone of great frustration, one of these senior faculty members declared: "if not now . . . then when." These professors were secure in their job, were making excellent wages, and were employed at a university that was in no danger of



closing (or even suffering from decline in funding or enrolment). Now was the time for them to be bold in their vision and execution. These men and women began to go to work on new ideas for their university to consider and implement. If not now . . . then when. This phrase and challenge might apply to many Autumnal women and men.

We gain alternative perspectives when we cross borders and boundaries. We discover that we have the skills and knowledge needed to live and even thrive in different environments. When we cross into the borderland we get shaken up and challenged. We may be fearful when first crossing the border. Do we have the skills or knowledge needed to survive in this new land? This is a legitimate concern. It is even more important, however, that we be careful about “de-skilling” ourselves in this new land. We are inclined to abandon what we already know. We assume that this knowledge and these skills are irrelevant in this foreign setting. In baseball terms, we begin to “aim” our pitches rather than pitching from instinct and experience. We begin to pitch from our head rather than from our body and are soon taken out of the game.

So, how do we stay in the game. How do we go about not only declaring to ourselves “if not now . . . then when” but also acting on this declaration in a successful manner? We propose two steps (and then several other steps after the border is crossed)

### **Step One: Consider Shifting to a New Environment**

We move across borders by working in other countries and collaborating with people who come from other cultures. There are many other ways of crossing the border. We can work and relate over an extended period of time with people from different socioeconomic, racial or ethnic backgrounds or with severely disabled children or adults. When we do this, we become learners. We work with these people not for their sake, which is very patronizing, but because we can learn from the challenging perspectives they offer. In his own work, Daniel Gilbert (2007) challenges us to think about what makes people happy (even when they are living under challenging conditions). We are shaken up when reading what

Gilbert has to say and can begin to learn about our own conditions of happiness.

We can also cross the age barrier by engaging in grandparenting or assisting a hard-pressed teacher. We can cross the border into a nursery school or elementary school. We might spend time with people who are very old, providing voluntary assistance in a retirement community, assisted living facility or nursing home. We can cross the border into a community centre, or even a prison or mental institution. While we are no longer living in the 1980s (when “a thousand points of light” was the coin of the realm in the USA), it would not hurt the world or the maturation of our own soul and spirit if we tried to light at least one candle of public service.

### **Step Two: Consider Engaging in New Activities**

Some mature women and men will cross the border by taking on new hobbies or avocations such as carpentry or gardening. We engage in a challenging sport such as water skiing or skating. We are inspired by a muse and begin composing poems or music. We write fiction or conduct interviews for a family history project. Perhaps we wander around the Internet or participate in local theatre.

Other women and men of Autumn cross borders by traveling extensively inside and outside their own country. It is important, however, to differentiate between superficial tourism and real engagement in the local culture and community. If we are just passing through, it is unlikely that another world will be challenging to our own current perspectives. John Dewey (1929) suggested that we only understand something when we engage it, interact with it or try to change it. We learn about another culture when we do more than just observe it. When we take risks rather than just follow the tourist guide or stay in standardized hotels.

Some of us may need to earn money to continue the support of our families in our early autumnal years. We may consider a shift in the type of work we do. We may start a new venture or join an existing online business network. As we start thinking about reducing travel, working from home, reducing client facing time and long-term projects, we may consider moving

sideways to new vistas of work. One of our colleagues took a long-term journey through uncertainty and confusion, to realise that he is going through another career transition in his early autumnal years. This might be the time we remember our true calling and experience a more intense pull towards that calling.

## **2. The Process of Self-Reflection and Action**

One need not travel anywhere to cross a border. Spending considerable time alone can be a border-crossing experience. We cross a border into our inner selves when we isolate ourselves from the swirl of external activities, especially if we are accustomed to an event-filled day. We empty our living room so that we can better hear the voices from other rooms.

This movement across internal borders invites us to a second type of challenge. This is the challenge of personal reflection that is followed by action. This process is of particular value for men and women of Autumn, for it enables them to hear the voices from other rooms more clearly and gain greater access to new dreams, new feelings, and a newly emerging sense of self. We begin to tend our internal child. Rather than dismiss the temptations of the Erl King as nothing but wind and imagination, we actively engage the elfin prince. In the court of our other two Kings, we invite dialogue and disagreement. We don't banish anyone from our psychic court. We welcome their alternative perspectives and even their challenging of our authority.

We invite the tempters into our psyche so that we might see them in the light of day. We listen to their argument and discover what is and is not true for us at this point in our life. We attend to ways in which they speak to our internal child. We also attend to the feminine and masculine voices that are to be found in our psychic court—the presence that cares for us, entertains us, provides us with garments of gold or with power and esteem, and provides guidance, inspiration and alternative perspectives. We look for those at our court that will help us replace the garments of gold with the garments of purple.

Here are several ideas about how we establish and conduct this psychic court.

### **Step One: Acknowledge and Listen to Other Voices**

We must first situate ourselves so that we can hear these other voices in the psychic court. This typically means setting time aside for our own internal explorations, our anima and animus guides, our close friends, and our loved ones. We might want to spend time with parents if they are still alive, as well as old friends and lovers. The process of reminiscence can often help us evoke and gain greater clarity regarding our inner voices.

Sometimes the best way to hear the other voices is simply to keep still. Several of our colleagues go on retreats or spend weekends at monasteries where they say nothing or very little to anyone. At times, we choose instead to amplify the voices from other rooms by filling our world with sights and sounds that have deep meaning for us or evoke strong emotions. It is important for Autumnals (and especially Autumnal men) to no longer be afraid of being emotional and sentimental. Songs, plays, movies, novels and poems that bring out emotions, will lead us inward to new voices and old, covered-over issues. Church services, visits to historical monuments, attending rituals from our own traditions and other traditions, walks in an ancient rain forest, or trips to museums seem to similarly touch many people of this age.

### **Step Two: Discern the Nature of the Other Voices**

There are obviously many ways to elicit rich images of our inner life and generate insights about ways in which we wish to live—in a psychic court we helped create. However, this process of evoking new images is insufficient, for we must discern which of these images and voices are working on our behalf and which seem to be working against our welfare. The temptations being described in our three narratives are frequently offered during our mature years. Unfortunately, they are often working against our ultimate welfare. If we follow their seductive plea, we will move to an old place in our life or remain in our current place. Alternatively, the siren calls of the tempter's proteges (such as adorning younger colleagues and mentees) will

distract us from our appropriate course and leave us stranded on a distant shore—far from the place where we should be locating our psychic court.

There is another way to frame this challenge of discernment. A friend of ours suggests that life is nothing but a series of invitations. Our life purpose, especially in late midlife, is to choose among these invitations. This is the process of discernment. How does this process work? First, it requires that we ask ourselves some difficult questions. A coach, trusted friend or family member might be invited to ask us those hard questions that we often are afraid to ask ourselves. You might want to call in a supportive friend at this point to help you articulate and address these very challenging questions of discernment.

We would propose that there are four difficult types of questions that one should ask in seeking to identify and act upon one's inner voices and preside over one's psychic court. The first type of question concerns our changing roles in life: "Which aspects of my life have contributed most to my sense of who I am right now in my life?" You may find that the answer to the Type One discernment question is a bit surprising if you are being honest with yourself. For example, you may be a workaholic or at least a career junky. Yet, at this point in time, you may identify more clearly and closely with a formerly less valued or honoured part of yourself—such as your role as spouse or parent. Those life domains that you valued five years ago and that defined who you were in the world may seem less important right now.

For more than a decade a colleague that one of us coaches identified very strongly with her role as president of a major human service agency. When she ceased to be president, Evelyn thought that she would lose some "authority," some status and much of what she was as a public figure. Evelyn recently asked herself: "who am I right now in my life." She was surprised to hear her own answer. Evelyn spoke affirmatively in her coaching sessions of being a community leader, having served on several non-profit boards. She also appreciated the roles she occupies as consultant, wife, mother, and grandmother. She added several newly emerging roles to

the list: writer, painter and gardener. The old role of president no longer seems to be important to Evelyn.

Many men and women of Autumn we know have similarly come to terms with the surprising absence of any regrets regarding the loss of some cherished position in an organization or community. If we're fortunate, we get a bronze plaque when we leave a position of authority in an organization. Often, we get nothing or are invited to a *pro forma* and inevitably disappointing lunch or dinner where our contributions are summarily recognized. Collective memory is often short. Parker Palmer (1990) speaks quite poetically of organizational memory as being like placing one's hand in a cistern of water. We create a splash or at least a ripple when we place our hand in the water. Yet, when we withdraw our hand, the water has no memory of our intrusion. The water goes back to its original form and shape. This is one of our greatest fears in life.

We somehow want an impression of our splash or ripple to remain. This is one of our greatest hopes in life. A colleague of ours recently noted that when the water is located in a lake rather than cistern, there is a lasting memory of our impact. This memory exists not in the water, but on the shoreline. The rivulets on the sand record our influence, many feet, miles or years away from our initial impact and active involvement in the institution. Unfortunately, this encouraging perspective will rarely quell the fear of lost institutional memories. We must still come to terms with the temporary impact we have had on our world. We may find some solace in the words of Lao Tzu as quoted in an article by Michael Shinagel recognized as the longest-serving dean in Harvard history: "A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves."

Arthur Brooks, a successful leader and retired president of a Washington D.C. think tank (The American Enterprise Institute) has recently addressed this challenge in an article published in *The Atlantic* called "Your Professional Decline is Coming (Much) Sooner Than You Think." (Brooks, 2019). He identified something he calls "the Principle of Psychoprofessional Gravitation" and applies it himself and other successful

Autumnals as they face their own career decline and their own need to re-examine priorities. Brooks states that: “the agony of professional oblivion is directly related to the height of professional prestige previously achieved, and to one’s emotional attachment to that prestige.” (Brooks, 2019, p. 69). In response to this challenge, Brooks suggests that we need a “reverse bucket” list whereby we begin to discard things, obligations and relationships” that no longer serve our revised priorities. Brooks summarizes his formula for successfully meeting the challenge of professional decline with the following words (that provide guidance for him personally and perhaps for other Autumnals):

The secret to bearing my decline—to enjoying it—is to become more conscious of the roots linking me to others. If I have properly developed the bonds of love among my family and friends, my own withering will be more than offset by blooming in others. (Brooks, 2019, p. 76)

The second type of question in the discernment process shifts us from the outer world to our inner world: “What is a central question in my life right now?” If this question doesn’t provide focus for us, then we can ask an alternative question: “What is most puzzling or elusive in my life right now?” There is a third version: “What is a question that addresses a central need in my life right now?” These Type Two discernment questions provide focus and help us sort out the voice and images that are distracting from those that relate directly to our current concerns. We can also look outside ourselves for guidance regarding our inner life. We might wish to ask ourselves: “What do other people or other events tell me about what the central question is in my life right now?”

Each of us needs to consider what we are being pulled toward in our life. Earlier in this book, we introduced the strange attractor phenomenon. The process of discernment relates directly to this phenomenon. We must listen to our own experiences. They are not random. We notice things that we didn’t when our inner voices were not as dominant—when our psychic court wasn’t in session. Therefore, things seem to be happening to us that speak to these re-emerging inner voices. We seem to attract a certain type of relationship or a circle of friends of certain quality. We seem to end up

with the same situation time and again, like the protagonist (Bill Murray) in the movie, *Groundhog Day*.

Other people see these patterns and what has changed in our perspective, even before we do. Sometimes, they are supportive and encourage these changes. At other times, they get very angry with us for following new voices that we don't even yet acknowledge. We should take these concerns seriously, for our loved ones might be quite accurate. Rather than denying the accusation or assuring our loved one that we will not listen to these new voices, we might want to spend a few hours (or days) alone, reflecting on what is there and how we really feel about it. We are open to alternative perspectives while presiding over our psychic court.

A third type of discernment question concerns our fears and sources of denial. Like the protagonists operating in our three narratives, we want these other voices to go away. We want to banish them from our psychic court. Thus, we must ask ourselves: "What kind of question frightens me most right now?" Will Schutz (1995) provides us with an intriguing strategy concerning the way in which we might confront our denial. He suggests that we ask: "What do I 'know' is not the central question in my life right now?" Often, we should attend to this absurd and highly unlikely concern in our life. We may be lured away to other concerns by denying what is really happening in our life. We want to believe that these "not central questions" are just figments of our imagination: wind rustling the dried leaves, an aged grey willow, a vague figure in the mist, an unruly child, a disloyal supplicant in our psychic court. Are we sure of this? Type Three questions encourage us to sort out imagination from tough reality.

Finally, there are questions that move us deeply to our core beliefs and values. This fourth type of discerning question requires that we push further than we have in answering the first set of questions. If you are embarrassed about the questions that you have asked or about the questions someone else has asked of you then these probably are engaged in Type Four discernment. Typically, these are questions that challenge our espoused theories and beliefs. They force us to look at discrepancies between what we say we are going to do or have always done in our life and



what we are really doing. They are often inquiries about the values and beliefs that truly underlie the decisions and choices we have made in our life.

In their work on organizational learning, Peter Senge (1994) and his colleagues suggest that we ask “why” five times when trying to get to the heart of a problem. Similarly, Type Four discernment can consist of nothing more than repetitions of the “Why” question:

“Why is it important for me to work every weekend on this project?”

“Because it will help me be successful in my career.”

“Why is it important to be successful in my career?”

“Because it will bring financial stability to my wife and me.”

“Why is financial stability so important to the two of us?”

“Because we have always been afraid that we would have nothing to live on when we retire.”

“Why is it important that I retire and built financial reserves by the time I retire?”

“Because neither my wife nor I are confident that our marriage is strong enough to overcome financial adversity when we are older.”

“Why is it important for you to come to this conclusion?”

“ Because . . . “ And so on.

This is the process of Type Four discernment in full operation. It pushes us deeper so that we might differentiate between those inner voices and images that will lead us to our newly emerging sense of self and those that keep us where we are now, lead us backwards, or lure us toward an inappropriate place.

### **Step Three: Act on Behalf of Other Voices**

At this point we move from a reflective mode to one of action. We ask

ourselves hard, activist questions:

“So what?”

“What should I do now, given these insights?”

Your response to these questions requires some life planning. You should consider changes in the amount of time you spend doing various things in your life. As many time-management gurus suggest, the effective management of time is primarily a matter of setting priorities. You must decide what is truly important to you and devote more time to this. There are no more than 24 hours in a day. Therefore, you must choose not to do something when you decide to devote more time to something else. You must weed your garden—or at least prune some bushes and trees.

As we noted earlier, the primary developmental tasks during the second half of life concern shifts in the priorities we assign to activities in which we chose to engage. We must truly care about that which is most worth caring about. By contrast, the primary developmental tasks during the first half of life concern expansion of our capabilities and talents. We start to leave the sheltered, narcissistic life of childhood and expand our zone of generativity and deep caring (Bergquist and Quehl, 2019) During our early adult years, we are empowered to participate in an increasingly wide range of activities. This resides at the heart of early life development.

By contrast, we have limited time and energy during our Autumnal years. We must determine priorities:

“Do I want to spend more time with my new-found (or rediscovered) hobbies? What about devoting more time to public service? Do I want to look for a new job? Do I want to change or renew an important relationship in my life?”

We can wear purple—but we must decide when to put on this garment. What warrants the special occasion for this spring-awakening outfit?

### **3. Finding Sanctuary**

Virtually all of us in our complex and unpredictable world yearn for a place and time of sanctuary in their lives (Bergquist, 1993). During the Autumnal

decades, both men and women are particularly inclined to seek out sanctuary, given the turbulence that swirls around in their inner life as well as in the outer world. The sanctuary that women and men of maturity look for comes in many different forms: a special room in our home (often a den or library), a spot in a nearby national forest, a cottage by the beach, a corner seat in our nearby library, a meditation centre in a monastery or a temple/church hall. Even an automobile can serve as a sanctuary as we drive to and from work—provided the cell phone is turned off.

We also find sanctuary in our shower or bathtub. We locate sanctuary at our kitchen table, accompanied by a cup of coffee or tea, at the end of a busy day. Sanctuary can be created in the exercises we perform at a health spa or gym, or in the more sedentary act of watching a televised football game on a Sunday afternoon. Whatever form it takes, an authentic sanctuary always takes us away from and often above the fray of everyday life. It provides a moment for us to recuperate, reflect and renew our energy and commitments in the world. Sanctuaries also provide an important pathway to our inner life. They create the opportunity for balance between challenge and support.

### **Step One: Identify Authentic Sanctuaries**

The incorporation of both challenge and support in a sanctuary is crucial. While we may seek out sanctuary as a means of escape from the stresses and perils of daily life, this is not what authentic sanctuary is all about. Sanctuaries of escape are inauthentic. They seduce us and drug us. An inauthentic sanctuary might be the gambling casino we enter or the lottery ticket we buy for the temporary high of expecting (or at least hoping for) a jackpot. It might be the pill or shot of whiskey we take just before going to bed as a “sleep-aide.” Perhaps this inauthentic sanctuary is our proclivity to watch “escapist” television or do extensive Internet browsing.

These inauthentic sanctuaries might provide temporary relief, but they leave us in the same state that we entered them, thereby building an addiction. It is very understandable that we might be tempted by the prospect of returning to an inauthentic sanctuary—because we continue to

find the world out there overwhelming and devoid of either meaning or satisfaction. These temporary sanctuaries are fine – for temporary relief. An authentic sanctuary, however, provides encouragement rather than escape. It provides enlightenment rather than diversion. It is a safe place that promotes change rather than being a regressive environment that leads people away from truth.

### **Step Two: Acknowledge and Participate in the Dynamic Aspects of Sanctuary**

Let's step back for a moment and examine what lies behind the power and purpose of sanctuaries. We have introduced chaos theory several times in this book, primarily to make some sense of the voices that serve as strange attractors in our lives. We return to this theoretical perspective in order to identify the power and purpose of sanctuary. Specifically, chaos theorists describe the complex nature of fluid systems in the world. They suggest that the world behaves more like disorderly fire and turbulent streams than it does like orderly pendulums or precision machines (Prigogine, 1984; Bergquist, 1993).

We see several different patterns of change when we look at these wild and unpredictable systems of nature. First, there are sectors of the flame or stream that are burning strong or flowing rapidly. Other sectors are moving in particular patterns (steady flickers, whirlpools); yet others are completely unpredictable and chaotic (the edge of the flame, the white water). Finally, if we look very carefully, we find another sector of the flame or stream that is barely flowing. This sector is very quiet (even stagnant, in a stream). These quiet pools of energy are the sanctuaries inherent in all complex, nonlinear systems—such as the life of human beings. Biologists suggest that the nutrients in the stream are often to be found in these quiet and calm places.

Most of us are living in complex, turbulent systems. Fortunately, there are sanctuaries all around us. They are integral to any dynamic system. We can't spend all our time in intensively burning flames, in the main flow of the stream, or in white water. We must move to the quieter parts of the flame or stream. If we don't find sanctuary, we risk burning up or drowning in

the turbulent sectors of our world. Yet even the sector of authentic sanctuary is not as quiet or as serene as it may initially seem.

We tend to deny the more dynamic parts of a sanctuary when we first enter it. We long for rest. However, if we look closely at an authentic sanctuary, it is neither quiet nor stagnant. We find deep currents in the seemingly stagnant pools of the stream and patterns in the seemingly quiet sector of the flame. The currents often pull us downward in the stream. The quiet sectors of the flame often provide deep, enduring warmth. Yet in these sectors of authentic sanctuary, we also find personal challenges. We are drawn to deeper matters, while recuperating from our more superficial fatigue and wounds. We find warmth and solace in sanctuary that enables us not only to recover from our battles, but also tell stories about and learn from our struggles in the external world.

### **Step Three: Preserve and Display Symbols of Achievement and Insight [Sanctuaries of the Spirit]**

Sanctuaries are not indifferent to matters of the spirit. Rather, some sanctuaries encourage us to engage in critical review of the work of the spirit. We can also use sanctuary to reflect on related matters of vocation and career, as we do in the coaching sessions and life planning workshops we conduct. When sanctuaries serve as places of the spirit, they often provide not only a safe haven but also external symbols of internal achievements.

They may be sites where we display our memorabilia from past journeys, past accomplishments and past productions. Several years ago, we saw this exhibited in a lovely and honest manner by a Taiwanese colleague. He proudly escorted one of us through his beautifully appointed home in a small village located outside a major Taiwanese city. His home was a source of pride not only for himself, but also for the other people living in his village. The villagers freely wandered in and out of his home, and just as enthusiastically showed me his possessions. Our colleague was particularly proud of the rooms in which his mother had lived and those possessions that honoured her memory. A worship room was devoted exclusively to the

memory of his mother. One of our other Asian colleagues has an attic in his parental home, where all the traditional family possessions are neatly arranged. Many of them have collected dust and rusted, yet the space provides a sanctuary for him to reconnect with the past.

In some Asian families, it is common to have a place outside their home to light a lamp for the ancestors twice a day. This lamp may be located under the shade of an old tree surrounded by bushes. It might be accompanied by a small structure that looks like a shrine-where we find some symbols that represent the great family traditions. The sights engaged in and fragrance emanating from this age-old place are maintained in this natural setting by umpteen numbers of generations. They provide those of us now living with a space that is sacred and away from the demands of the daily life. We find authentic sanctuary for at least a few minutes each day.

Those living in the Western world might not be overt in their display of prized possessions; however, they often display their cherished artefacts on vertical structures in their homes: a tall bookcase or entertainment centre located in their living room; a wall covered with pictures of their family. Men and women from both Eastern and Western cultures often offer similar displays in their office, Vertical bookcases and walls are filled with memorabilia, awards and certifications of degrees awarded or programs completed. Several experts on nonverbal communications (Ruesch and Kees, 1969) once suggested that these vertical displays serve as modern day equivalents to the altars of past eras. As altars they honour our past. These altars are places where we display things of personal value. They often occupy a central place in our sanctuary. If you are looking around for a place that is now or soon could be your own personal sanctuary, then you might wish to begin by looking for vertical structures and altars in your home or place of work.

There is yet another way to identify and begin more fully appreciating our sanctuaries of the spirit. These sanctuaries in our lives may be located at a height or they may be prized locations to which we strive. In our homes, sanctuaries may be lofts, perches or penthouses. They are often sites that look out over society or nature: a city landscape, a waterfront, a view across

the bay or river on which our city is situated. Our spiritual sanctuary might instead look out over a natural scene: a lake, an ocean, a mountain, or a large valley.

Spiritual sanctuaries may serve as “grail castles” for the women—and especially the men—of Autumn. (Johnson, 1974) Grail castles (and many other spiritual sanctuaries) are often those places to which we aspire rather than places in which we dwell. They are often worlds in which we would like to live but can only dream about in our current life. We save money for this type of spiritual sanctuary. We see it as representing all the central values in our lives: Our Shangri-La. The Valhalla of our long-term dreams. The Avalon of King Arthur. The sailboat for long weekends. The beautiful garden to be tended once we retire. The hunting lodge to be built after we have saved enough money. The work room in the garage or the pantry in the kitchen to be constructed just as soon as there are some free time and extra money. The den that we will outfit with the best in audio-video equipment once we get that sales bonus.

Sadly, in many instances, we set aside sanctuaries that are to be found everywhere about us while obsessively working for and saving the money we need for our ultimate grail castle. We work hard so that we’re ready for retirement and positioned to spend the rest of our lives in our sanctuary. In doing so we bum out; we sacrifice that which is really important. We discover too late that life is short. We slowly learn that we can’t wait for sanctuaries—but must instead reach out for them today and integrate them into our daily life right now! Little sanctuaries now. Bigger and better sanctuaries later. Perhaps.

#### **Step Four: Identify and Preserve Places of Safety and Reflection [Sanctuaries of the Soul]**

Sanctuaries serve not only as places of the spirit but also as places of the soul. (Vaill, 1989; Moore, 1992) Soulful sanctuaries are particularly important to us during our Autumnal years. We are already likely to have a sanctuary of the spirit by the time we reach Fifty, at least if we have been successful enough in life to earn a little free time, some space of our own,

or some money to travel to a special location. Even if we have not been successful in our career, we have usually found a sanctuary of the spirit out in the world: a pew in our local church, a favourite bench in the public park near our apartment, a spot on the beach, or clearing in a forest located several miles away. In populated cities (especially in Asia), this could even be a chair on the balcony of a high-rise apartment facing the highway. We sit down and sip a cup of tea in the relative quietness of the wee hours of the morning before the heavy traffic begins. If we have never found or taken time to find a sanctuary of the spirit, then we may have to devote time to identifying sanctuaries of both the spirit and soul. For most of us, however, the search for a soulful sanctuary will be sufficient.

Where do we find a sanctuary of the soul and of what value is it? This type of sanctuary usually exists in smaller, confined spaces: a kitchen, an intimate den or work area in our garage. There is that old cottage in the woods or that chapel located by the ocean. We find this type of sanctuary while snuggling under a favourite comforter on the living room couch. Under an old quilt in our bedroom that we throw over us during a short nap after lunch. We find a sanctuary of the soul while reading a book or listening to music (with a little nodding off during the second movement of the symphony or third track of the jazz CD). For other mature men and women of Autumn, this type of sanctuary is attained while sitting in a hot tub, sauna or sweat lodge; or it is to be found at a fraternal lodge or favourite neighbourhood restaurant.

In a sanctuary of the soul, we tend first to regress to a more primitive state. We relax, take a deep breath, and shrug off our burdens. But we don't stay regressed. Authentic sanctuaries are not an escape from the world; rather, our regression sets the stage for our turning inward, downward and backward in time. We heal the wounds so that we can concentrate on voices of insight rather than cries of pain. In a relaxed state we confide in other people about our fears. We listen to and observe our guides. We might thoroughly enjoy helping our life partner baby-sit our grandchildren. In this setting, we often feel freer to talk about personal matters of deep meaning.



Mundane life can be a wonderful sanctuary of the soul for many mature women and men.

These sanctuaries of the soul can be intentional, just as we can be purposeful about sanctuaries of the spirit. We can go to workshops that will help us improve interpersonal or leadership skills. These workshops are sanctuaries of the spirit. It helps us be more effective in the outer world. We can instead attend a weekend program during which we do nothing more than write in our journal or talk with other people about our personal dreams and aspirations. Many of us probably feel most comfortable over the years attending the first kind of workshop (those of the spirit). Now, in our Autumnal years, there is often the need for the second kind of workshop.

Ultimately, each of us must seek out our own unique sources of challenge and support and find or create our own sanctuaries. Without these sanctuaries, we are ill equipped to address the profound threats and challenges offered by the complex, unpredictable and turbulent (white water) world in which we live. It is hard to wear purple during a storm of chaos. It is hard to awaken Spring when we are faced with the profound challenges of Autumn. It is in the sanctuaries we have found or constructed that there is some shelter from the storm. These sanctuaries provide us with resources (both internal and external) that help us generate Spring-like insights and energy for the Spirited honouring of our personal and inherited achievements. Most importantly, it is in authentic sanctuaries that we find Spring-like guidance for our soulful inward journey. It is in Sanctuary that we find the convergence of Spirit and Soul—draped in Purple.

## Chapter Fifteen

### From Divergence to Engagement

Throughout this book we have encouraged the women and men of Autumn to look for guides in their journey into new realms of inner life. We wish to turn in the next two chapters to just such a guide, Marilyn Taylor. She offers all of us sage counsel in our journey inward. Marilyn focuses on the processes of adult learning and the relationship between these processes and the processes associated with loss and grieving. We wish to personally thank Marilyn for providing us with several informal notes and other articles that build on this model. Her own work expanded and was articulated in *Emergent Learners for Wisdom* (Taylor, 2011). A similar model is offered by Frederick Hudson (1999) in *The Adult Years*.

Grieving is not just something we do when we know that we are dying or someone we care about is dying. It is a process that occurs whenever we bid farewell to an old self and begin fashioning a new one. Marilyn Taylor has been particularly insightful in drawing a connection between the processes of grieving that were first described by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1975) and the processes of significant learning and personal change that occur among mature men and women in our society.

Taylor suggests that there are four phases in the process of significant adult learning and transformation. She identified these as: (1) divergence, (2) engagement, (3) convergence and (4) consolidation. She also identified ten steps that are taken, each step being part of one of these four phases. We will briefly describe each phase and each step, indicating how each relates to the transformational journey we have described, with the help of Goethe, throughout this book.

Taylor indicates that the initial phase (divergence) involves three steps. First, there is the disconfirmation of long-standing expectations and perceptions. Second, we experience disorientation, confusion and ambivalence. Third, we tend to become defensive, denying or escaping from the new challenges that face us in our life.

## 1. Disconfirming Expectations and Perceptions

Mature and accomplished, most Autumnal women and men of the middle-class hold a set of comfortable (and comforting) assumptions concerning themselves as well as the world around them. These assumptions have served most of us well and we look forward to remaining entrenched in these assumptions for many years to come. According to Bertrand Russell: “every man, wherever he goes, is encompassed by a cloud of comforting convictions, which move with him like flies on a summer day.” Then something happens. Marilyn Taylor suggests that certain experiences in our life inevitably diverge from these assumptions and ultimately call them into question. We must regroup and reassess who we are and what the purposes of our life really are. We are being prepared by our world for significant new learning, profound change and personal transformation.

In this book we have identified several sources that typically disconfirm our established expectations and perceptions as mature men. We focused in particular on two culprits: the feminine and masculine voices and voices from other rooms. Both of these have been present throughout our lives. Yet they were often dormant or ignored, only to become more fully present during our Autumnal years. Change is always a difficult process. It involves the loss of things that are precious and well known. It involves believing in something new that is not yet well known. We must commit to something that is not demonstrably better than what we already have. Something has to disturb our current state of affairs to make the old less desirable and the new more attractive.

The German psychologist, Kurt Lewin, describes this disruption as “unfreezing.” Like Marilyn Taylor, Lewin believes that significant learning only takes place after this unfreezing of our existing concepts takes place. Lewin was one of the first psychologists to identify the critical stages in any process of change. His insights are still quite relevant as we explore our own personal change processes. One of the best expositions of Kurt Lewin model of change is to be found in a book written by three of his colleagues, Ronald Lippitt, Jeanne Watson and Bruce Westley (1958), Lewin offers another important (and often overlooked) insight: the unfreezing of our

current perceptions of ourselves is essential for real change and learning to occur. Central aspects of ourselves that have been settled for a long time in our life must be stirred up if we are going to act and make some real changes. It is particularly important that our frequently complacent self-esteem be challenged.

In most cases, this unfreezing involves the disconfirmation of beliefs about ourself. These are beliefs that we are competent in doing some specific task, that we are in control of our life, or that we are people who are sensitive and skilful in our relationships with other people. Earlier in this book we described the “narcissistic wound” that shatters our complacent sense of being skilful and accomplished men in the prime of our lives. We discover, as Autumnal females and males, that we are not so skilful, at least in doing things that are newly important in our lives. Alternatively, we fail at being able to do something that we always knew was important, such as communicating with our daughter or taking care of our ailing father.

Some of us instead discover that our accomplishments are short-lived. We achieve them, but at great cost to other things that are central to us, such as family, sanity or personal integrity. We acknowledge, grudgingly, that many of the activities in our life which have long occupied most of our attention are really not of much value after all when considered in the great scheme of things. Our business fails. We are kicked out of our job. Our son is struggling to find a job and still lives at home. We are asked (or forced) to retire. We no longer have the energy or inclination to fight another corporate battle. We grow weary of struggling one more time to make our marriage work. We discover that our parents care more about their needs than ours and we paid a heavy price in not recognising it early enough. Something has to change.

## **2. Disorientation/Confusion/Ambivalence**

When our pet assumptions have been challenged, we are likely to feel anxious and fearful. We then withdraw and seek isolation. Often, we feel depressed and experience an overall sense of helplessness. This depression and resultant helplessness are often centred in anger directed against our

own self or against other people. Clearly, at this point in our Autumnal life, the balance between challenge and support heavily favours challenge.

At the heart of the matter is a new sense of reality. Our assumptions are being shattered because we are in touch with an aspect of reality that is foreign to us. We have crossed a border and can never return as quite the same person. Many years ago, the Nobel-prize winning scientist, Michael Polanyi, was asked at the end of a public address how he knew that he was in touch with something that is real—Polanyi being known as someone who emphasized the relativity of all knowledge. Polanyi pondered on this question for several moments and suggested that he knows something is real when it surprises him; when he is caught off guard; when the world strikes him and appears to be very frightening and even awesome.

A member of the audience suggested that this was like the Hebrew notion of Yahweh. The Old Testament describes the experience of Yahweh as being surprising, frightening and awe-full. Polanyi was taken aback by this observation, acknowledging that he had left behind his own Jewish heritage after being driven out of Eastern Europe during the holocaust. He had never noted the residue of his own heritage in his notions about reality. At this moment, Polanyi recognized his own personal insight. He was in touch with something real about himself. The connection to Yahweh was itself surprising, striking and, it would seem, very “real” for Michael Polanyi.

So, it is with the women and men of Autumn. We are embarking on a new journey that will lead us to surprising and frightening revelations about our own true selves. Parts of ourself that we might not realize existed in us or parts that we had forgotten about. Like the Jews, in confronting the awfulness of Yahweh, we must be courageous and committed to our journey into matters of the soul. Only in this way will we touch on our own personal reality and find our own promised land.

### **3. Psychological Defences**

We are inevitably defensive when we learn something important and new about ourselves. There is nothing unusual or inherently wrong in being defensive. It is a natural protection. Reflect on your past life. Remember a

time when you learned something important about yourself. Were you at all defensive during this time period? We are only gracious and open when it is something that we already knew about ourselves, when it is something trivial, or when it is complimentary.

When it is hard, disconfirming evidence then we will initially try to avoid hearing the full story, deny the accuracy or validity of this evidence, or escape the serious consideration of its implications for us. Even when we get past this initial stage of avoidance, denial or escape, we are likely to try out some other defensive routines. We might exhibit “anti-social” behaviour, by acting out and compounding the problem: “By God, if I’m a drunk then I’ll be a raging drunk!” “If they think I can no longer do this job, then the hell with them. I’ll take off for a couple of weeks and let them find out how valuable I really am.” Sometimes we shift to self-blame, condemning everything we do and everything we are. We begin to view ourselves as worthless human beings. We feel hopeless, powerless and depressed. Hence, we have no reason to even try to understand what these new insights mean or how we can use them to improve our life. It is, after all, hopeless anyway.

The next three steps actively engage us in the process of learning new things about our own psyche and the problems we face. Taylor identifies these three steps: (4) naming the problem, (5) relaxing with the unsolved problem and (6) withdrawing from others for renewal.

#### **4. Naming the Problem**

In moving beyond our inevitable defensiveness and into the heart of our personal transformation, we must begin by naming the problem we face. This name will change over time, as we become familiar with this new sense of self and with the more soulful aspects of our self. The initial name, however, is a good starting point. We need to provide the name, first, as a way of admitting to ourselves—even as experienced and successful women and men of Autumn—that we don’t have our entire life together and that we need to change what’s happening to us. By naming the problem, we can get a little distance from it. We can approach it without excessive self-blame.

It is a problem. Other people also face problems—and they somehow survive! Furthermore, the problem we have named can also afford us an opportunity. It can serve as a gateway to new aspects of our selves that hitherto have gone unexplored.

Second, we name the problem to get a new perspective on it. In naming the problem we are required to establish a frame of reference. Yahweh is no longer a burning tree or the wind sweeping down from Mt. Sinai. Yahweh now has boundaries and specific properties that can be understood and addressed. Only in naming the problem do we directly confront and resolve its elusive nature. As we noted earlier in this book, Will Schutz suggests that we first identify what we know is not the problem. In this way, we bypass the resistance. What we know is absolutely not the problem, of course, often ends up being at the heart of that to which we must give serious consideration.

Thus, we often begin the process of naming the problem by giving it every label we can imagine—every label, that is, except the correct one. We declare that we are working too hard rather than that we have lost interest in our work. We identify our marriage as the problem, when the real problem is that we don't know how we really feel about anyone important in our life. We talk about needing a stronger sleeping pill, when we should acknowledge that we have a drug problem. We complain about life being boring, when in fact we don't feel connected deeply with our partner.

Fortunately, while we are always tempted to place old frames and antiquated names on these new experiences, the world inside us and outside us doesn't cooperate. We are forced to adopt new frames of reference and, in doing so, begin the process of new learning and transformation. Our voices from other rooms, our internal guides, our own failures will not allow us to accept the wrong name for the problem. The father in the Erl King poem, for instance, was quite confident initially that he knew the nature of his son's problem: an over-active imagination. He was certain that the Erl King didn't really exist and that his presence was not the problem his son faced. By framing the problem in this manner, the

father could rest easy, knowing that nothing “really” bad could happen to his son. He could assign the problem to his son.

If the Erl King really existed, then the father and his son would both be facing a serious problem. Initially, it was quite easy for the father. He readily named the problem. Like other young people, reasoned the father, his son couldn’t differentiate between the real world and the world of fantasy. If the father had a bit more psychological sophistication, he might have identified the problem as a lingering childhood malady. Perhaps his son was fearful about something in his life or was trying to get his father’s attention by making up a story. One thing was certain. No elfin king was threatening his son. Being a solid citizen and realistic father, he denied the experiences of his son. This made sense the first time around, and even the second time when his son cried for help. Yet, when his son persisted, why didn’t the father stop racing through the night so that he might determine what was really happening with his son?

Similarly, each of us will inevitably begin our journey into new insights and transformation by going through a period of denial and escape. We must move past this phase, however, if we are to be successful in our journey to the soul. We will eventually find the right name if we listen to our voices and late midlife experiences—and if we allow ourselves to learn from them. We are more likely to listen to these voices and experiences if we seek out support from other people. This is the third reason for naming the problem.

We need to name the problem so that we can begin communicating about it to other people. Taylor writes about successful adult learners who make affirming contact with significant others and do this through the process of naming. Participants in Alcoholics Anonymous know of the power that comes with naming their problem (“My name is. . . and I am an alcoholic”). They realize that they will only gain a sense of self-acceptance as well as support from other people with similar issues in their life if they name the problem. As therapists and executive coaches, we have similarly witnessed the power of naming a key problem in our client’s life.



Our masculine and feminine guide can often help us in naming our problem at this point in the process. Our guide can help us put words to our feelings while also acknowledging the many other ways in which we express our feelings. It is at this point in the process that the overwhelming challenge of the first phase of the learning process begins to be balanced by the support of other people. Without the support of our guide, our coach or other significant people in our life, we will turn away from the inward journey at the first possible moment. Without the support, we feel alone, unappreciated, and unacknowledged for the struggle we face. We will try to return to our old way of life, often finding that this is no longer possible. With a heavy dose of denial and escape, that is often fuelled by alcohol, drugs or sex, we return to old behaviours and outmoded ways of living. We lose the opportunity for new growth and further maturation, turning instead to stagnation and resentment.

## **5. Relaxing with the Unresolved Problem**

We must not only look outside for support. We must also turn to our own internal resources. We must loosen our grip and let go of some control for one of the first times in our lives of Autumn. We should be guided more by intuition than by external data. We should be oriented more toward the present and less to either the past or future. This is a wonderful time to savour the moment and extract insights from the common place.

In our work with other people, we can be more relaxed, and become less goal driven. We can share food and entertain, as well as problems and tribulations, with the people we love and turn to for support. This is a good time to collaborate with rather than run away from people who are confronting similar or complementary challenges. Other mature women and men can be of particular value. Together we can celebrate the opportunities inherent in this new journey, as well as gather insights and confidence from one another for this journey.

This stage is the beginning of our Autumnal acceptance of a journey to the soul. We learn to live in the life of the soul. We will live for a while in Bill Bridges' (1980) neutral zone. As intra-psychic travellers we should bring

along a psychic travel kit filled with our favourite (usually unfinished) novels and poems, our oft-played CDs and MP3s, and memories from all stages of our life. We also should acquire a road map to our favourite sanctuary, whether it is located inside our head or somewhere in the world. To accomplish this journey, we must set aside a little time for ourselves. We are entering a phase in our life when we need to be alone and more reflective than at any earlier point in our life—we are in the midst of our Autumnal years.

## 6. Withdrawal and Renewal

Anyone can reach a saturation point when they are overloaded with new information, challenges, and disconfirmation of their existing assumptions. They are riding a roller coaster of emotions. We get “unfrozen” to such an extent that we feel like a puddle of water. We become the limp sponge that we brought in to clean up the mess the unfreezing left in our once sedate life. As women and men of Autumn, we are inclined to long for haven from the storm or at least for diminution of the stress and changes in our life.

Marilyn Taylor suggests that this is not only a common experience but also a very appropriate reaction. We should pause when we reach a point of saturation and overload. Typically, this means that we withdraw a bit from the world. We see fewer people for a while in a social setting. We stop attending those monthly meetings. We unsubscribe from numerous blogs and advertising portals. We cut back on our work. We disable our social media accounts. We spend more time alone or at our favourite spot in the woods or by the seashore. We hide out at our old fishing cabin or at the local state park.

As we suggested in our discussion of sanctuary (Chapter Thirteen) this is a time for renewal not retreat. Authentic sanctuaries are intended for escape. Rather they are places for gentle movement and deep transformation. Ironically, in withdrawing from our regular life and from our central problem as it directly faces us, we may be moving to a deeper level. We may be journeying to the real problem and the real issues of personal transformation. In our withdrawal, we are beginning the movement to a

more soulful world. In Marilyn Taylor's terms, we have begun the process of convergence, a transformational phase to which we turn in the next chapter of this book.

## Chapter Sixteen

### From Convergence to Consolidation

The next three stages identified by Taylor represent the culmination of the transformational process for mature men and women: (7) reflecting, (8) forming major insights and new understanding, and (9) contacting significant others to share new discoveries and perspectives. According to Kurt Lewin, after the “unfreezing” of old assumptions and habits have taken place, we are ready for new learning. This is what Taylor identifies as the process of convergence. Lewin suggests that we then must “refreeze” the new learning. This is Taylor’s process of consolidation.

#### 7. Period of Reflection

As we journey inward by withdrawing from some of our daily preoccupation, we, as Autumnals, are likely to hear more clearly the voices from other rooms and from other aspects of our self. This is the stage of introspection and reflection back on the nature of the problem we have experienced. We look back to times in our past when we have either avoided or successfully addressed this type of problem: “Why wasn’t I able to avoid it this time?” “Why can’t I successfully address this problem in the same old way? The answers to these questions may be of greater importance to us over the long run than is the solution to the problem. These answers often push us back one or two additional steps, to discover the real problem and the real question that underlies our current struggles and challenges.

In Chapter Thirteen, we identified several ways of looking inward. We described the process of discernment and suggested several ways in which we might select among various competing voices. We also suggested several questions that provoke deeper inquiry into our inner life as Autumnal females and males. Regardless of the approach taken, it is critical at this stage that we turn back from action to reflection. The usual reaction of those of us who are hard driving is to do something right now about our

problem. As men and women of Autumn we should instead spend a bit of time pondering about its nature and pattern, and about what the problem can teach us about ourselves and about the changes now occurring in our lives.

## **8. Major Insight and New Understanding**

It is at this critical juncture in the process of learning and change that we are likely to gain major insights about our inner life. These insights may not seem dramatic or awe-inspiring. They may not hit us like a bolt of lightning, though sometimes they are sensational. The New Testament describes the profound conversion of Saul to Paul and his assumption of leadership in the early Christian church. This transformation was swift and dramatic. It involved a major physical trauma, the loss of sight (spirit) but was preceded by many events that set up Saul for the radical restructuring of his sense of life purposes and values (soul). Many Autumnal women and men we know as friends, have coached, or have treated in therapy, similarly describe a precipitating event that came uninvited and in an intrusive manner to elicit new insights and understanding.

David's wife told him that she would leave if he didn't get a grip on himself. Susan's job is reorganized. Kathleen's father died. These three Autumnals hold one thing in common with Saul: the intrusive event itself contains the insight. Saul is not just struck blind. He is given a message from God. David's wife doesn't just tell him to shape up; she offers a remarkably truthful and accurate description of a particular pattern of behaviour he, as a 71 year old male, exhibits whenever he is under stress. Her comments not only motivate David—they also provide him with a new frame of reference. She may have threatened to leave many times before and may have offered this observation on countless occasions in the past, but David wasn't ready to hear her. He was too tightly defended or too preoccupied with other things in his life to listen carefully to what she said. Maybe she finally found a way to say what she needed to say in a manner that is more appreciative and not so hurtful or vindictive. Perhaps she is going through her own late

midlife transformation and is now ready to communicate with her husband in a way that is respectful and even loving.

Similarly, the threat of job loss that 57 years old Susan experienced is a source of insight and understanding only if it is accompanied by something that is particularly instructive for her. The proposed reorganization may tell Susan something about how she has been of value to her organization. Perhaps the job that Susan held was reassigned to three other people. It now takes three people to do what she once did by herself. The reorganization could also demonstrate that Susan places too much trust in an impersonal organization rather than in her family or friends. Her boss might provide some exceptional insights about Susan's strengths and weaknesses as he tries to justify the reorganization. A colleague offered an informal observation about Susan's role in the reorganization. This casual comment initially seemed absurd. Susan told one of us during a coaching that this definitely "was not the problem!" Later on, after some reflection, she discovered that this observation contained a kernel of profound (and painful) truth about her own psychological covenant and her assumptions about organizational life and so-called "life-long" employment.

The death of his father may teach 64 years old Kathleen about what her Dad meant in her life and about what she inherited from previous generations. As each of us grieves the death of a parent we may begin to understand what we took for granted in our life. Kathleen's father had always run interference whenever Kathleen attempted to be creative. He also helped Kathleen when she tried to be a successful entrepreneur. Kathleen now realizes that she must create on her own. She must build her life after retirement without relying on her father. We bid farewell to a loving father and grieve the loss of this remarkable man.

For many other Autumnal women and men, new insights come in a more gradual and subtle manner. We may come to a personal insight while taking a shower or running through a rainstorm. In many instances, a new approach to doing something accompanies the new insight. We begin to garden by tending to the process of weeding rather than spending our time mowing the grass with our riding mower. As we sit down by the bed of

flowers and begin pulling weeds, we gain new insights about the way in which we usually approach problems. We come to realize the extent to which we always rely on the big technological solution. Why not careful and patient caring for the people who have the problem? We start reading self-help books or novels about late midlife and gradually come to a new appreciation of our own journey.

Whether there is intense excitement or a quieter inner glow about our new insights, there is always a surge of confidence and often an accompanied sense of relief. Perhaps we finally will be coming to the end of Bill Bridges' neutral zone. Maybe we now are in the midst of our soul work and have gained a new-found comfort in living in this inner world: we have crossed the border and survived (even thrived) in this foreign environment.

Integration and internalization tend to occur during this eighth stage. Past learning tends to connect with new learning. We see new patterns in our life and often gain a new sense of self:

"I thought I was an extrovert. I've been living outside myself for forty years. Now I'm coming back home to myself." "This is really interesting. I have always been competitive, but when I'm not under stress, my competitiveness is directed toward worthy causes." "Problems of this community, not the other men and women I work with, are my adversaries. I must remember this, as I take on this new job."

Internalization occurs at the point when we know that we need not write down the new insights. We don't really have to do anything about them. We don't have to make any New Year's resolutions. Rather we understand ourselves in a new way and this influences everything we do. We need not make much of a conscious effort. The new insight has become an anchor point and part of our new frame of reference. If we can't live comfortably with the new insight and if we have to keep reminding ourselves of what we have learned, then the learning process has not yet reached the eighth stage. We are probably deceiving ourselves by prematurely moving past our

own defensiveness and pretending that we are “finishing” the difficult process of learning something new about ourselves as men of Autumn. We need to push deeper. We need to name our problem once again and reframe the problem in a way that is more provocative.

If we can't readily integrate the solution, perhaps we should find more support in our lives. We are scared to death of the question we face; hence we pretend to hold the answer. Rather than beating on ourselves, we might want to marshal more support. We could acknowledge that there is too much challenge and not enough support. Perhaps this is itself part of the deeper problem: we are going it alone when we should be asking for help.

## **9. Contacting Significant Others**

This is the most troubling step for many of us in gaining new insights about ourselves during our Autumnal years. How do we share our new discovery and perspective with someone we care about deeply? We are often afraid that they will not understand or appreciate what we have learned. We may appear foolish and perhaps even a bit childish in what we have to offer. We may fear that the significant people in our lives will suggest: “It’s about time you found this out.” Or: “I’ve been telling you this for years. Why did you have to learn about it from [guide, friend, son or daughter]?” Or: “Is this all you have to show for all those months you spent gazing at your navel?”

We are reminded of all the painful stories told by men and women in the late 1960s after they returned from personal growth workshops and encounter group weekends. They told their wives, husbands, lovers, sons, daughter, parents, or roommates all about the wonderful insights they gained. They were often laughed out of the house or treated with indifference. Worse yet they were told about the sacrifices that were made so that they could have this rather selfish and foolish experience. We were even criticized as a society for these narcissistic endeavours by various social critics of the late 1970s (Lasch, 1979).

Yet the alternative is not to remain withdrawn and non-communicative. We must return to the world and gain the acceptance and appreciation of important people in our life. The crucial questions are: “How do I convey



what I have gone through and what I have learned?” “How do I tell them about potential implications for them given these transformations?” As Autumnal women and men we must somehow provide answers to these questions in a way that is accurate yet not too threatening.

We have offered several exercises and pieces of advice that seem to help this difficult transition back to the world. These have been provided in the workshops and coaching sessions that we have conducted over the years with Autumnal women and men. Hopefully, they have yielded some new insights for the participants, First, we have the participants fantasize what they are going to say. We ask them to relax and imagine themselves in a setting that is comforting: a favourite room in their home, a beautiful ocean beach where they sit or walk.

We then encourage them to imagine that the person they want to talk to about these new insights comes into this special setting. We ask them to relax even further, taking deep breaths or engaging in progressive muscle relaxation exercises. They then begin telling their tale. After fantasizing this conversation, our Autumnal colleagues talk with one another or us about their experience. They usually focus on their feelings while telling their tale and on ways they failed to say exactly what they wanted to say. We typically suggest that they rehearse what they are going to say with someone else at the workshop or with us as their coach.

This exercise can be done even if there is no workshop or coaching session to attend. After finding a place in which to relax, try fantasizing the conversation you might have with a significant person in your life regarding your transformational journey. Then talk to an Autumnal friend who is going through some of the same changes. Tell her that this is a dress rehearsal and she’s going to be the audience. Hopefully, she knows the person or persons for whom you are rehearsing. She can often give you a good sense about how you’re doing. Try it out in several different ways and determine which is best.

If nothing else, the dress rehearsal probably will reduce some of your stage fright when actually performing with your significant other. More likely,

you will get some good ideas from your friend about how your words can be misinterpreted and about the manner in which you can best present your insights. You are more likely to enter this important conversation with your significant other possessing a quiet sense of confidence. You are less likely to be overly defensive. You are more likely to be open to dialogue, rather than just offering an uninterrupted monologue.

Obviously, even with careful preparation, the presentation of our new self-insights will rarely be accepted easily or openly by significant people in our lives. Inevitably, what we have to say will impact on them. They must relate to us in new ways. They are likely to be frightened or at least concerned about what we now feel and say, even if they are simultaneously delighted about our increasing expression of feelings and personal needs. We should not be surprised, nor disappointed, if our initial dialogue is a bit rough and filled with misunderstandings and apprehension on the part of both parties. Anxiety is contagious. We are both likely to end up being on edge and rather emotional if we are anxious or the other party becomes anxious. That's to be expected. It is not a sign of failure.

Keep trying. Meet together a second time. Let the other person start the conversation. They might first describe their own initial reactions to what you have already said. Encourage and allow them to express their own fears as well as their hopes. Encourage them to ask questions. Don't just repeat what you said the first time. State it in a new way. Offer a story about what happened when you were alone. Let them into your life since they probably felt a bit excluded by you during the sixth and seventh stages. See if there is any way in which you can both find some humour in what has happened. Allow yourselves to laugh at the pain you both feel. Share and cherish stories about how both of you have been "damned fools" at times during this difficult period. Remember Steven Sondheim's clowns. One is up on the tightrope. The other is down on the ground. Celebrate your achievement in gentle ways: a lovely and loving dinner together that you prepare, a weekend at a romantic bed-and-breakfast, a walk in the woods, a visit together to an elderly parent, some baby-sitting with the grandchildren. Find gentle and quiet times together.

## 10. Consolidation/Refinement/Application

After the wrenching experiences of divergence and engagement and exhilaration associated with a process of convergence, Taylor suggests that we move to a final phase of detachment. During this phase we engage in the final step of consolidation, refinement and application of our new learning. Kurt Lewin described this as the stage of “refreezing.” During this phase we establish new patterns of behaviour that are aligned with our new insights and personal understandings. These new patterns of behaviour relate directly to our shifting relationships with other people in our world—people who must contend with these shifts in our sense of self.

Our new insights as Autumnal women and men have become integral to us. If they haven’t (as we have already noted) then we have to question whether these really are new insights. Even if our work at previous phases is done, we still have a final challenge to face. There is still the need to solidify the new understanding or approach. We must integrate the new frame of reference with previous frames and even with the internalization of our new sense of self.

For instance, we may have to learn new skills or acquire new knowledge in order to operate in this new way. We decide to spend more time sailing our boat out in the harbour—but have to take sailing lessons to be successful. We may have to save up money to buy the boat. This is all part of the solidification process. We have decided to spend more time with our husband; yet, only with a little therapy or a couple’s enrichment weekend, will we know how to begin talking with each other. This is solidification. We accept a new job under the reorganization plan and have to learn some new skills to do this job. This is solidification.

The process of solidification often focuses in particular on our relationships with other people. They must make adjustments—considering their new Autumnal sense of self and their own preconceived notions of our viewpoints, purposes and values. Other people in our lives are accustomed to relating to us as we were before the shift occurred. Everyone must adjust to the transformation, whether they be children, co-workers, friends or

lovers. Whether or not they liked who we were before, these acquaintances had at least adjusted to this “old self” and often benefit at least secondarily from this old self. Even if they always complained about who we were, they could avoid addressing their own complicity or their own failures. Now they have no one else to blame. They must look inward. They must be honest with themselves. This could trigger a learning and change cycle for them, which they might not fully appreciate.

The tendency will be for people around us to draw us back into old patterns of behaviour, old perspectives and old priorities. It is easy to fall back into the habit of the workaholic, the bowling night junky, the insensitive wife, or the indifferent father. As women and men of Autumn we must struggle to avoid falling back. If this does occur, we will feel profoundly disappointed, for the old habits don't fit very well with our new sense of self. We will feel inauthentic and a stranger in both the old and new lands. What do we do about this?

First, we can try communicating with the people around us about what has happened to us. We have already talked with the significant others in our life. This second round of communication should be a bit easier, since the stakes are not as high for our colleagues or friends. Even our children typically are easier to talk with. They usually now live away from home. Hence, our transformation is likely to have less of an impact on them than it does on our wife or lover.

Second, we can make use of our support group. Ask people who helped you through your change. They can talk to our colleagues, friends or children about what has happened to us. Take the advice of members of your support group. They might suggest ways in which you can better convince people around you of the changes you have made. They might also offer some ideas about changes these acquaintances should make in adjusting to (and supporting) your own changes.

Finally, if everything else fails, you should consider a change in settings. Alcoholics are often encouraged not only to stay out of bars, but also to stay out of restaurants, away from parties, or away from friends and relatives

that may lead them to begin drinking again. Similarly, during our Autumnal years we may need to change colleagues, jobs, friends or the place in which we live if everything and everyone seem to be colluding against our new self. In the case of family members, we may have to stay away from them for a while, regardless of how painful this feels, in order to more firmly establish our new way of being in the world. Addicts are often advised to stay away from “toxic” or co-dependent relationships until they feel strong. The same advice makes sense for those of us as Autumnal males and females who are undergoing other changes of potentially just as great a magnitude, even if they are not as dramatic.

We wish to make one final point. The culmination of our own internal journey during August often precipitates the start of a shared cycle of divergence, engagement and convergence with one or more of the significant people in our life. When we change, our relationships also change. We need to anticipate this new journey. We now know that we can survive and even thrive in this process, having just gone through it personally. This next time, we don’t have to do it alone, but rather hand-in-hand with someone we love. Not so bad is it.

## Chapter Seventeen

### On Loving a Woman or Man of Autumn

In preparing this book on Autumnal transformations, we came to appreciate the opportunities and challenges inherent in this journey to the soul – and came to appreciate the important role played by our loved ones in supporting this journey. We have chosen to end this book by offering a set of statements that might guide a loved one in providing this support to a woman or man of Autumn.

#### A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN FEELS LOVE WHEN

- Appreciated for their wisdom: the rich experiences upon which they reflect during the years of Autumn.
- Appreciated and loved for their romanticism: their newly found interest in spontaneous, unbridled expressions of love, physical affection and joy.

#### A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN EXPRESSES LOVE BY

- Sharing things with people they love: stories, newfound aesthetic experiences, insights regarding their self and life's meaning.
- Enacting ritual: cooking a meal for people they loves, going dancing every Friday evening, playing that old love song for the umpteenth time.

#### A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN KNOWS THERE IS LOVE WHEN

- Still loved despite their growing years and aging facade.
- Still loved despite the changes that are occurring in their life.
- Still loved despite insecurities and fears regarding a newly found life.

### **A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN MOST CARES ABOUT LOVE WHEN**

- Fearful of being considered “old,” “dated,” “no longer appealing,” “out of practice” or “out to pasture.”
- Fearful of becoming a bit unusual because of the different things they are doing in their life and the ways in which they are re-thinking life priorities.
- Worried that their eccentricity is a symptom of premature senility.

### **A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN FEELS THAT THEY HAVE LOST SOMEONE’S LOVE WHEN**

- Their lover fails to recognize the life changes that have occurred, or when their lover runs away in fear of changes that they both have witnessed.
- Their lover tries to deny the changes in their own life and fails to recognize the “voices from other rooms” that now occupy their own attention.

### **A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN MOST APPRECIATES**

- Moments when they can savour the rich complexities of the world they face anew “in the immediate moment”— no longer lives only in the dreams of their future.
- Moments when they can be spontaneous, passionate and expressive; when they can focus on one person and one feeling; when they can begin to dream new dreams that are now more often about interpersonal relationships and personal fulfilment rather than about personal accomplishments and are more often about significance in the world rather than personal success.

### **YOU CAN BEST EXPRESS YOUR LOVE FOR A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN WHEN**

- You tell them that you love them in their newly emerging sense of self and look forward to even more intimate moments with them in this new-found self.
- Through your actions and your passion, you show them that they are still very appealing.

### **YOU WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE LOVED BY A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN WHEN THEY**

- Shares some special aspect of their self—a part of themselves that may still seem very young and undeveloped: a painting, a song or a sunset that you have tried to get them to see for many years!
- Is not afraid to let you know that they are vulnerable—yet are a special person who is worth the effort of mutual rediscovery.

### **YOU WILL KNOW THAT A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN WILL MOST NEED YOUR LOVE WHEN**

- They are frightened regarding the changes that are occurring in their own life.
- They are suddenly thinking of the “here-and-now” rather than “what could be.”
- They are not sure if their new thoughtfulness about spirituality is foolish or perhaps even desperate, or a sign of emerging wisdom and seniority—hoping that it is the latter, but fearful that it is the former.
- They recognize that they most want a companion who understands, who loves, and who can be intimate with them. Sexuality is not the critical factor. It is part of what they wish to savour in the “here and now”—but sometimes is sought only because sexuality reconfirms that they are still alive. There are other ways of confirming that they are still alive. You can provide



many modes of confirmation that may be even more satisfying for both of you than sexuality.

- They are being brave-taking a risk. Struggling with basic issues in life. They would like to have a companion—especially you—at this turning point in their life.
- They have made a ‘mistake’—out of their inability to discern, out of their curiosity, or out of their lack of skills when dealing with a situation

### **YOU WILL RECEIVE THE LOVE OF A WOMAN OR MAN OF AUTUMN WHEN YOU**

- Acknowledge their complexity, the wisdom that they have accrued through the pain, the unanticipated changes and the adjustments they have made over many years of life.
- Are present, with your own issues and your own life transitions, knowing that these issues and transitions somehow will interplay with those of the person you love.
- Discover and celebrate the hope as well as the fear inherent in the transformational journey of the person you love. Ultimately, all the things that you are going through together have been created and are being tended by a watchful and benevolent force for both love and compassion in our world.

## Epilogue

### Voices of the Individual Authors

While this book has been very much a collaborative effort, with ideas and experiences from each author being intimately interwoven with the diverse ideas and experiences of the other two authors, there were also distinct reactions to and lessons learned from this collaboration for each author—based in part on their differences in age, gender and culture. Here are concluding reflections offered by each author.

#### Eliza

For over a decade, I have been working with mostly adults, sometimes youth who come to me voluntarily or involuntarily for the problems that bring them to the door of a professional counsellor. My specialization is in addictions but oftentimes, my work goes beyond that, to families, to relationships, to other self-improvements.

Is it possible for life to be more positive and better as we get older? This is a question in my head as I work with clients who are in their middle adulthood. They are trying to make sense about their experiences, while I am slowly edging to my 40<sup>th</sup> year in this wonderful life. This phase has also popularly been associated with the “midlife crisis.” It is assumed that the crisis during this phase sometimes elicits seemingly drastic changes in people. I wondered: must this phase be a crisis that sounds so gloomy and fearsome? This is the time when we might find ourselves asking existential questions about ourselves and our lives. How we respond in this phase can lead us to find meaning for our life and expand ourselves further-beyond our current definition of self—towards the larger world. Alternatively, we might be led to disconnectedness and possibly a downward spiral.

#### The Life of Midlifers

Several things while working on this book impressed me greatly and one was how current midlifers might find themselves at a loss about what to do

or expect. Retirement may not exist for the generation before them—for they usually worked to their last breath. People are generally living longer now. Yet appropriate role models who have lived in the recent past are scarce. There are not many older people who have emulated the life we want to live. Living longer for those from this previous generation meant they would have a longer duration of retirement. Some members of this generation are stumped by what retirement meant for them. Some have decided to continue to work till the end of their life.

Listening to the clients' stories we had in this book and reflecting on them, I could begin to see the common themes. There is validation. Reading the literature and comparing my notes with those of my two colleagues, tells me these stories are not just for the midlife adults in Singapore. I was struck by their global relevance. I felt there were many lessons there that could be shared with a wider audience. I have discovered that there are many role models for the next generation—role models that this previous generation of midlifers did not have. We might prepare ourselves even before we get there to have a quality midlife. This recognition was wonderful in itself.

### **The Life of My Parents and Grandparents**

This book is also personal for me. I witnessed my maternal grandparents going through the later part of their midlife. They both had focused on bringing up their family. My grandfather worked and my grandmother was a homemaker, always in the kitchen. Besides work, his leisure time was spent only watching television. She was always at home, cleaning and cooking. They had good neighbors with whom they would chat and support one another. As grandpa got older, he grew weaker physically and then he was diagnosed with Parkinson and Alzheimer's. My grandmother had no one else but him and when he passed on, she felt alone.

There is more to my story. I saw my parents through their midlife and they were almost similar to my maternal grandparents in terms of how they live their lives. Both of them worked and their leisure time was spent watching television and engaging in some light reading. They both have few

friendships and they do not feel they need to chat or meet very often with the friends they do have.

Both have faced chronic health issues. One difference between my grandparents and my parents is that my mother chose to earn a diploma in marketing in her 50s. This was just for herself. She still signs up for courses to keep learning new things which she enjoys. My mother also had to care for her mother, as one of the “sandwich” generation. As her only daughter, I related similarly to my mother in some ways.

Without realizing it, I was living a life that is similar to that being lived by my mother. I view this similarity as quite positive when it comes to getting more education and learning while taking care of the home and the family. The similarity is not so positive, however, when it comes to health. So I have to consider my habits, which I have carried with me as I grow older. I know that we must set up a firm foundation of health-with healthy habits and a health-oriented mindset. With this foundation in place, I believe, that each of us, as beautiful woman or man, can navigate this time in life with grace.

### **My Own Life**

I began to try to prepare myself – I reflected on my lifestyle habits first. I did a system of trial and error and am still refining my habits. From doing meal preparations to eating freshly cooked food. I have learned about traditional Chinese medicine and healthy habits that are highly recommended for a healthy digestive system. I have found that a healthy digestive system can have a major influence on the rest of our body and mind.

There is also the fitness component – trying different programs to find what is sustainable for me. Enjoying the activities in which I now engage. Saving for the future. Opening myself up to more experiences and people. Most important is the nurturing of my mind-set – I found and regularly read a blog called the Daily Stoic (along with other blogs and books). I have

engaged more in mindfulness practices. Another vital aspect for me is engaging with a wide diversity of people with whom I can sound off my thoughts. It is a matter of reflection and support. I am particularly fortunate to have one person who is closest to me – my husband.

Most significantly, I have tried to share the knowledge we gained through working on this book, with my clients, to validate them or help them prepare for midlife. However, I realize we are not all able to be responsible for our lives in a way that we wish could be the case. For example, proper nutrition is a huge challenge for those with limited income. Healthier food such as fruits cost more than just rice or instant noodles. Taking time for leisure is a major luxury for those struggling to earn enough money to survive. They may be working two to three jobs, more than twelve hours per day to make ends meet. It is not their fault. They need understanding and help.

I can better appreciate the challenges the people around me - clients, friends, colleagues, family – face in their midlife. I do my best to be patient and kind. I will now ask more about them to understand them and judge them less. I will empathize with them and listen to them more.

Delving into the topic and themes of this book, I found myself inadvertently asking myself the questions I heard from midlifers. I had a sneak preview of my midlife reflection. I thought about the significant memories I had and the people who played a role in my life. I began to wonder how they went about living their life and what role I would play as I move on in this circle of life. What worthy legacy could I possibly leave behind? While it felt as if I had not lived enough to afford a full reflection, some qualities felt undeniable. One of them is Love. Love in its many aspects and forms would be one of the deeds I hope to frequently engage during the rest of my life—leading to a legacy of quality that I hope to leave behind.

## **The Life of this Book**

Writing this book is a process for me that goes beyond the writing itself. Each time as I go through the book, new thoughts come. Sometimes they felt overwhelming. I had thoughts of if I am writing enough. Then it moves on to, if I had done enough in my life. Perhaps because of the busyness of life, I feel I don't have enough time to reflect on the second kind of questions. The questions that I feel I would eventually face in a few more years. I feel a kind of relief that I do not need to consider it yet, as there are so much here and now things running in the present time. But getting ready when I get there is something I try to do now. The reflection is coming, I definitely felt it more as I got older, but now I get to gently nudge it aside, "not yet now, my dear".

I am still pondering and reflecting, still preparing myself for different aspects of my middle adulthood. While I am prepared for some physical weakness, I feel confident I will have wonderful memories when my time comes. I do look forward to being more positive as I get into my midlife and to finding new meaning in the life that I might seek.

It would be wonderful to be able to prepare ourselves through our lifestyle for our midlife. It would also be a blessing to have good prenatal care that would help prepare children we might have for their own life. This would be a blessing—for some of us are restricted regarding ways in which to be successful parents.

Ultimately, I believe that the next best thing to do is to take life as it comes, to do the best we can one day at a time and be okay with it—also to be gentle and compassionate to everyone around me, regardless the phase of life they are in, as everyone is doing their best, even if it is different from mine. Midlife can have its concerns in terms of certain natural degeneration. We can still make it as positive and wonderful as we can—if we are willing to be open to new perspectives. It is important for people who are living around midlifers to demonstrate understanding and acceptance of them as they are. This is a gift we give them—understanding and acceptance is a great way

to show them that we care for and love them. After all, this is how we would like to be cared for and loved by other important people in our life.

Working on this book was an amazing journey for me. With the co-authors, we had talked and shared various ideas from various perspectives. We gave a voice to the stories we heard or experienced. We have talked and listened very much, as this book took a few years to come to this page. It reminded me of many years ago when two of my ex-colleagues traversed the Gobi Desert and how vital it was that they did it together. It would have been impossible to walk 1500 kilometres alone. Besides the physical exhaustion, blisters, thirst, high altitudes; there were the mental fatigue, drop in motivation, negativity and self-doubts. Both had wanted to give up at different points on that journey and would have, if the other had not supported the other to keep going. This book was such a journey too and it was with the support, understanding and guidance that the co-authors had for one another that we arrive at the completion of our joint work. Isn't this like life and (it would seem) like mid-life? It is an arduous journey that can go well or not so well. It depends on how and with whom we choose to travel.

## Jayan

I was always confused, about living itself. Everyone seemed to know what living is all about and what they are doing. I did not for some reason feel convinced about it or rather my convictions changed as time went, which often left me lost. Hence many times I found myself struggling to fit in. I pretended to know for a while, but that did not last long. Growing, dying and living thereafter (?) seemed to be a mystery and I was curious to find the secret if there is one. Working with my co-authors was a great step in satisfying my curiosity – revealing the foolishness of the search for a secret formula for a successful life. The stories we shared, and my personal reflections revealed the suffering emerging from seeking the ideal life and the futility of the human search for the utopian dream.

Living in autumn is not just about 'aging'. It is not even about 'graceful aging'. It is also not just about life-long learning as advocated by many

governments and organizations. My thinking has evolved from aging as a challenge to be mitigated. It has evolved to aging as a celebration of life. This has not been sufficient. I have always known intuitively that aging has no relevance separate from the whole of life. This thinking has been clarified and reinforced as I worked with my co-authors. We have articulated and built on each other's ideas. Their years of work and diversity in culture, gender and perspectives my co-authors have opened my eyes to new ways of thinking. I am letting go of certain 'truths' that I held on to as I entered my own autumn years. The gesture to include me on the team—and to help shape this work—was transformational for me. This might not have been readily apparent to my team members and to a casual onlooker—but the collaboration had a significant impact. I realised for myself that growth and maturation is a process of letting go, rather than accumulating.

### **Openness**

As I worked on the book and with myself, I experienced a renewed openness to other's ideas and behaviours, even those I would have resisted some time back. I also got a sense that surprises are the norm of life and control is an illusion. This attitude provided me a sense of relief as the roller coaster seemed to pick up speed and turbulence – even now with the Covid-19 stopping us on our tracks. I became less dependent on a hope for the future, based on an outcome that I could achieve. Yet there was enough excitement based on what is happening and what might appear spontaneously for me to feel fully alive. This shift was seen to precipitate as events in the external world as well. The unexpected developments seemed to be something that I desired-or something of which I am afraid. Either way, my 'wish' has been fulfilled.

This was fully in line with the narratives we co-authors identified and developed while writing this book. The central characters such as the father in Goethe's poem, the King of Ramayana, Miaoshan and all the people in their lives – each of them encountered incidents that were unexpected. All of them reacted very differently to the situations. Their deepest fears or desires were manifest in their reactions. Yet for an onlooker, there was a perfection from the bigger point of view. It may not be perceived by many—



while they are caught up in their own world—yet the perfection will reveal itself in time, as a step back. This is the real transformation, to which everyone is invited yet cannot be forced to engage.

When everything seems to be ‘normal’, something happens that upsets the applecart. In my case, it was my parents’ ill-health followed by many others and now Covid-19. When I was open enough, I was called into a situation that was clearly capable of changing my life—including the life of my family. I was facing the prospect of closing my business, relocating to my hometown in another country, and selling our property. I entered a new world where I stepped into my own autumn years, while my parents were maturing in theirs. As in the book, I was faced with the father who was trying to protect his son and the son who really wanted to break free and explore life. I was faced with the King, the queen, the banished son and the courageous daughter. They danced around me and within me – poetically speaking. What a great opportunity life has brought me, nudging me to graduate through first-hand experiences. I am in my grateful recognition of the wholeness of the universe and the perfection of what is – including the fear, uncertainty, and peace. They are all packaged together.

## **Paradox**

During the last few months, much has happened and yet nothing really has happened. The paradox of life baffled me and initially drove me nuts; yet I am finding more peace with what is present. Resisting it, explaining it, defending it and finally wishing it was different – this is the human dream with which most of us live until we wake up.

I am grateful to my co-authors who have become facilitators and guides in my path. Indirectly, without recognising their impact, they played their role effectively and pried open the tight lids of my protective container, expanding the reach and capacity of my core.

My reflections on the stories were acts of courage as I seemed to be breaking some traditions and killing some sacred cows that were residing in myself. I needed courage that the father in Goethe’s poem did not have. I recognised the curiosity and playfulness of the child in the same poem. I

was clear like Miaoshan—who took some courageous steps leading to a transformation for her father.

Thus, through their writing my co-authors nudged me to the next step in my thoughts and actions in real time. The nudging probably led to some sort of ‘passage’ ritual into my autumn. It seemed to me that I was going through the stages of transformation as articulated in the book (Adapted from Marilyn Taylor). I recognised the vulnerability of being an Autumnal. The vulnerability of being perceived as not standing on solid ground to lead—because of the inconsistent responses to life situations as autumnals (including me) are going through the stages. I recognised that only a very few of us might be able to wholeheartedly support the transformations in which our loved ones are engaged. It is easy for most of us to sidestep the sensitivity that is required. It is tempting to label the transformations as symptoms of aging or ‘losing one’s marbles’. Personally, stepping into autumn is more like stepping into the light – the first step of a long journey.

I became more aware of the meaningful coincidences in my life as I started working on this book. These coincidences seemed to be aligned with the theme of the book itself. In a series of YouTube videos, Dr. Peter Fenwick summarised his many years of research about the experiences of death. He identified many phenomena that seem to happen for people, based on many interviews he conducted. What was fascinating for me is his idea of a complete giving up that happens right before one’s death. From his research, he recommends that each one of us learn to give ourselves up little by little in our daily life, as preparation for a graceful exit from this physical realm. He considers the practice of giving up in daily life, to be a wonderful way of preparing for the final exit. I discovered that as I give up my dependence on hope, expectations and the promise of a bright future, I am able to be more present, more grateful and more at ease.

A medical doctor, teacher and author, Jean Klein, has used the following words in his teachings: “giving oneself up is what happens when one transcends the limitations of the illusory self”. It seems in a way that our book is centred around three narratives each of which has elements of giving up—in some instances resisting the process and in other instances

embracing it. As I am living an unfolding life, I am learning to give up more and more. I am sure if I ask my co-authors, they might also have been going through a process of giving up, though our stories might be very different on the surface.

### **The Three Stories**

The first narrative by Goethe is about the father who is desperately trying to save his son. He is in the midst of gripping his son tighter in his arms as he is running away from the power that seemingly is trying to snatch his son away. Goethe's wisdom and his insights into the human psyche does not need any introduction, as revealed in the following two quotes among many others. The first one is : "A person hears only what they understand". The father in the poem only understands the sound of the rustling wind and not the vibrations in the psyche of his son. The second quote resonates with me so much: "I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather...". Notice the words used, frightening conclusion. It is frightening because, combined with the first insight, we recognise the futility of our attempts to change the climate.

An external environment that includes people we love, our own circumstances in life and the world in general is not readily modified. In many ways we are powerless to influence others. On the other hand, tremendous power is ever present in each one of us. This recognition—that calls for real giving up—is frightening for anyone. This fear is even more intense for those of us who dwell in autumn. I face this terror within me as I find myself giving up any expectations, demands or even hope. Living in the moment, giving up the memories of the past and fantasies of the future, leads me to genuine renewal. It is not easy, for many times I am tempted to behave like the father who clutches his son in an effort to save him. Holding on tightly to my images of the past and dreams of a future might seem to be the best option. It is certainly a typical pattern with which I am so familiar. Yet, it is a pattern that has not helped me.

The second narrative centred around Miaoshan. It is about pursuing the only worthy goal in life – the calling from the heart. It is, in other words, about the gateway to everlasting happiness. It is also the story of unconditional compassion and perseverance while following one’s heart. Her pursuit served her and the wider world including her father in his transformation into the spring. The theory in Authentic Happiness is that happiness can be analyzed into three different elements that we choose for their own sake: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. The king in his autumn years, finally discovered his way to Authentic Happiness. Like the king, we sometimes do not know the path to this happiness until we encounter the situations in life that turn us upside down. A teacher appears in time, as if born out of our desire to relieve ourselves from the suffering. Connecting happens when we look back.

In our autumn as we described in the book, we go through multiple stages of transformation on our way to true renewal. The giving up that I have described is impossible to forcefully achieve. It has to happen in time. It happened to Miaoshan much earlier in her life, but much later for the king. During the reflective moments of my writing time, sometimes I felt like reliving the life of Miaoshan. She was so willing to reach out in compassion to those who suffer with no expectation of anything in return.

At times, I was the king who really wants to punish those who do not align with my wishes or stand in the way of my happiness. As I walk into the light, I am facilitating my transformation, with the initially implicit goal of relieving myself from the suffering of being a witness to challenges in old age. I can safely assume that my parents are going through their own transformation, giving up much of what they considered to be the pillars of their happiness including independence, mobility, and memory. I am discovering both the power of giving up so that I might be completely vulnerable and the temptation of holding on.

The third narrative describes the maturing of a king, closer to his exit from the physical realm. Probably the king was preparing for his final giving up. Perhaps, instead, nature provided a sequence of events that led the king to prepare for death. The king had to let go of his very dear son and the young

queen too – totally unexpected. The king made some painful decisions. He acted in accordance with important traditions, ethics and personal values. He might have given these up during his final exit. From the description in the poetry, it is clear that he initially reacted out of strong negative emotions—yet may have eventually been reconciled with the nature of life.

Many events unfolded to my surprise and shock as I was writing this book with my co-authors. Like Goethe's child in the arms of his father, I experienced temptations to race on to a better life and suffered intense fear from the unfolding events. Like Miaoshan, I was very clear beyond any doubt, what I wanted eventually. Beyond the seemingly 'life-taking' situations, it seemed to me that there is a life-giving force that is orchestrating everything that is unfolding. And this force gets everything right. The wisdom shared in the book helped me tremendously in making sense of what is apparent in my own narrative. I have come to recognise where I am in the process and what might be appearing next. I am ready to welcome my own renewal.

## **The Book**

I cherish the learning from discussions with my co-authors and their writing—in addition to my own reflections about life. The insights I received are currently very practical and lived by me day to day. These insights help me engage a world faced with the havoc caused by a one celled organism. For the past many months, it has been like jumping into the unknown, having nothing real on which to hold. This has been spiritually enriching and enlightening. In a way, I am being helped to let go of all that I once thought to be important in my life and to focus on areas that I now know are truly important. What a great opportunity to revisit the self-importance and invincibility of anything that is valued.

During the last few years since I have started working on this book, my life has turned out to be lighter and less serious. It is filled with synchronistic events and experiences that seem to help me cut through the illusory nature of a seemingly solid world. My co-authors have presented concepts that have helped me open my mind to ideas that were previously hidden in

other rooms. They have showed me how smooth and effortless a creative endeavour can be – without fixed expectations around timelines, outcomes and returns. This book effort itself fits the big picture and informs us about the deep mystery that can never be figured out. A mystery that always seem to make sense when looking back.

## **Bill**

I am the oldest of the three co-authors of this book and the last to prepare my epilogue. I marvel at the rich insights offered by my co-authors not only in the preparation of this book, but also what they have written in their own personal epilogues. It has been a real pleasure – and indeed an honor—to be working with my two colleagues. The diverse perspectives they offer coming from different two different age groups and two different cultures brings new light and understanding to the first version of this book that I wrote during my own Autumnal years.

### **Racing Through the Night**

Now I have moved beyond my mid-life. I am about to celebrate my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and am therefore in the midst of my Winter (rather than my Autumn). Like the father in Goethe’s poem, I spent many years racing through the night, often not attending sufficiently to the child in my arms. I squandered opportunities to enrich my own inner life and often did not attend sufficiently to the voices in other rooms. I used to joke about negotiating with God that if I wrote about something, I would not have to experience it myself. And I always concluded that “God” welched on the deal—for I have lived with all the pain, confusion and distress that I write about in many books I have written and published. Yet, on occasion, I have also followed my own advice. I have spent time alone (my soul work). With my wife, Kathleen, I celebrate every evening on our deck (when it is not too cold).

I have been fortunate to have two wonderful children, Jason and Kate. I have enjoyed the opportunity to spend quality time with these “real” children as well as my five grandchildren. They all live very near Kathleen and me in the State of Maine. I struggle at times, however, to know how

best to show my love for these central people in my life. I fear that my own Scandinavian and British roots have not prepared me well to be the father and grandfather I would like to be. I must keep reminding myself, as I think back to my own childhood and my relationship with my often-distant Scandinavian father, that I always knew I was loved by him. Like me, he had a hard time expressing this love.

In the song, *Leader of the Band*, Dan Fogelberg sings about the strong but often remote presence of his own father: “His heart was known to none.” Like me, Fogelberg was thankful for his father’s care (especially at critical times), even if this care was not always obvious: “I thank you for your kindness and the times when you got tough.” Like Fogelberg, I always felt that my father was there, even if he seemed at times to be emotionally absent—as I sometimes feel with my own loved ones. In alignment with Fogelberg, I have come to more fully appreciate my fathers’ presence and influence over the years: “His gentle means of sculpting souls took me years to understand.”

### **Being an Imperfect King**

Our book is about Kings as well as a father racing through the night. The two tales in our book resonates with me, because I have been a king in my life. I have served for almost forty years as president of a graduate educational institution (of which both co-authors are graduates). Mature men and women, like Eliza and Jayan, from throughout the world have been great blessings for me. I have been privileged to engage in life work that seems to have made a difference in the lives of other people—and, in turn, has made a difference in my own life. Yet, like the Kings that Eliza and Jayan have brought to this book (and to my life), I have suffered from vanity. I was described as a “pompous blow-hard” by one anonymous respondent to a survey conducted many years ago at my institution. While many people have indicated that this is not an accurate assessment, I know that this respondent was accurate: he (or she) rightfully declared that “the emperor is naked!”

I find that it is quite tempting to override other people (speaking before they have finished sharing their own thoughts). It is also quite easy for me to believe that mistakes I have made as president can be attributed to other people both inside and outside my institution. Right now, I am in the midst of writing about the arrogance and ignorance displayed by leaders of the educational sector in American society. Deep in my heart, I know that I can add my name to this list, having often been arrogant and at times ignorant of what was happening inside my graduate school and outside in the postsecondary world where we operated. I could have done a better job of guiding my own institution through complex and turbulent times in the world of postsecondary education.

I have wonderful colleagues in my life. Like the Kings' daughters, they have offered wisdom and sacrificed on my behalf. I have not always listened to them, accepted their support, or let them know how much I appreciate their collegueship. I know that I have wounded some of them at times by literally spending too little time with them or inviting them to join me in trying to realize a dream that could never be fully realized. I often am involved in too many projects and am not successful in enacting and completing all of them. The failure to complete a project or realize a dream is typically not a problem for me, given that I always have another project waiting and another dream ready to be engaged. I might be doing fine; however, this failure is often wounding to my colleague for whom this is a major priority in their life. They don't have another project or dream waiting in the other room.

I don't want to beat myself up too much about this failure to always be there for my colleagues, given that I have often been successful in bringing projects to fruition and have been genuinely "generative" with many people in my life. Yet, in writing this book with Jayan and Eliza, I have come to greater realization that my sons (and daughters) have too often been casualties in my race through the night. I should have paid more attention to their interests and passions. I should have spent less time convincing them that my interests and passions should be their own. This book and the legends we explored have taught me that true "generativity" is about



nurturing the soul and spirit of other people in my life, rather than just my own soul and spirit.

I know that I have been an imperfect King—but am fortunate (and honored) to have been given the chance to play this role for part of my adult life. I have always been touched by the last scenes in the musical, *The King and I* (about the King of Siam and Anna, a British teacher). The King's first wife speaks of him as not being a perfect king—but being a King that at least tried to do his best job and sometimes did something “wonderful.” I would hope that the same might be said (or song) about my “reign.”

If nothing else, I know that reflections on my own life in a leadership position have helped me come to a greater, and highly personal, appreciation of my own father's life as a leader who often succeeded and at times failed. At times I know he was “wonderful” in his work. My exceptional mother was always there in support of him (much as is the case with the Siam King's first wife). Their relationship was quiet (replicating the behavior of my father) but loving. Earlier in this book, we turned to the wisdom of Erik Erikson regarding reflections on our parents during the later years of our life. Erikson suggested that one of the major developmental tasks to be addressed during our later adulthood is coming to a place of appreciation for our own parents (and coming to forgiveness for any other their failures). Maybe, as Erikson suggests, with this appreciation and forgiveness, we can finally fully appreciate our own life and forgive our self for our failures.

### **Awakening the Spring in My Own Winter**

In co-authoring this book, I am led to new questions regarding my years of Winter. Perhaps this is the start of a new book about what it means to be an older adult. This would be a book about those people, like me, who hopefully will remain alive through more years of Winter and will go through additional life changes in response to new life challenges. As George Vaillant (2012) mentioned in his book on growing older, there might be a whole new set of stages operating during our Winter years. This will especially be the case as we live longer and remain active and healthy

for many more years than did our own parents (and grandparents). What then are these emerging questions and how will I be addressing them or at least exploring ways in which to respond to challenges inherent in these questions.

*Savoring and Sanctuary:* In the early evening (when it is not cold here in Maine) I am often sitting on my deck looking out over the ocean. I am listening to the sounds of the water lapping on our shores and the sounds of many birds reasserting their territory. It is like being in the “wilderness” – yet from the comfort on my deck. I wonder, is it enough at this point in my life to savor these moments? Should I still be racing through the night (perhaps at a slower pace)? I also wonder if I am searching for a place in my life where there is Sanctuary from the race. At this moment in my life – and in the life of my community, my nation, and my world—there may be a need for a safe place for both renewal and reflection. Is my deck and my life at home with my wife a time and place of Sanctuary?

After a life in which I have been racing around and have tried to be an adequate (and hopefully sometime successful) King, perhaps I am entitled to or at least can justify the search for sanctuary. I am reminded of a book that was made during the 1930s into a movie directed by Frank Capra. Called *Lost Horizons*, the book and script concerned a world-weary traveler (played by Ronald Colman) seeking to escape from a war-torn world. After a mysterious plane crash, Colman (and others) stumbled onto a hidden village called *Shangri La* where he discovers rest, renewal (and love). Am I finding Shangri Lai at my home with my wife—or like Ronald Colman must I return to and reengage the outside world? At the end of the movie, Colman returns to Shangri la. Is it alright for me, during my years of Winter, to linger in my own Shangri Lai? Can I remain on my deck, with my wife, while all hell is breaking loose elsewhere in the world?

*Remembrance:* I not only love old movies (like *Lost Horizon*), but also Broadway and Hollywood musicals. One of my favorites is *Gigi* (by Lerner and Lowe). There is a song in this musical that involves two old lovers (played by Hermione Gingold and Maurice Chevalier). They are reflecting on their own romantic affair that occurred many years ago. Maurice’s

memory is somewhat selective and distorted. Hermione sometimes corrects him—but allows him (in a loving manner) to remember that he was once a “a prince of love in every way.” I often reflect on my own life—and especially women with whom I spent time in my early adulthood. “Ah, yes, I remember it well” (much as Chevalier declares). I wonder, however, if my memories are as distorted and selective as those of Maurice. I am particularly inclined to remember a beautiful moonlit moment spent strolling on a California beach with a lovely young lady. Whatever happened to this young woman? If we had such a wonderful evening walking on the beach, why am I not married to this woman? I don’t remember what happened to our relationship. I also am aware that this late-night walk on the beach was probably a dangerous thing to do given the potential for attack from someone wanting our money or worse.

And what about that wonderful evening spent with another lovely young woman whom I took to see *My Fair Lady*, or that wonderful dance I had with a fellow student during my Senior year in College? I am now married to a wonderful woman (Kathleen), but sometimes wonder why the evening at the theater or moment of sublime dancing didn’t end up as a long term, intimate relationship. What was not right about this relationship? How did I end up being very fortunate in finding Kathleen in my life? Were the Gods of Love on Olympus looking after my welfare and steering me in the right direction? If so, then I thank *Eros*. I also thank his mother, *Aphrodite*, for the fine upbringing of her caring son. And who do I thank for my selective memory of these moments of love and romance? Is there a Greek God of distorted but endearing memory?

*Forgiveness:* While I remember the wonderful moments of relatedness, I also remember the all too painful moments when I acted inappropriately or without sufficient forethought regarding how I might have hurt someone. As I noted above, is it appropriate for me to forgive myself at this point in my life? Is Winter a time for reconciliation of my better self with the self that was arrogant and ignorant? Were many moments of love and work in my life filled with my vanity, indifference and search for easy solutions. Did

my less evolved self often win the day? How do I best come to terms with these matters?

Do I somehow find the people I have wounded and tell them I am sorry? What if they have already passed away or have no interest in helping me reconcile my good and bad selves? As I have already noted, the wisdom offered by Erik Erikson might be particularly important. Perhaps, the forgiveness of ourselves is a critical developmental issue during our Winter years. How does one best engage this difficult process? When is it self-serving to seek out self-forgiveness? Maybe we are meant to live with our “sins”. This might be part of what it means to do work of the soul during our Winter (as well as Autumnal) years.

*Generativity*: Forgiveness resided painfully at the heart of one question that I am asking myself as someone dwelling in Winter. An equally as important and existential set of questions are coming to the fore: Have I make a difference in my life? Where is the difference most important: raising of my children, loving my wife, providing education to people around the world? Some of my pondering about these questions has been aided by work with my friend and colleague, Gary Quehl. Over a period of several years, I co-authored a set of digital essays with Gary that were published in the *Library of Professional Coaching*. We titled this series, *Deep Caring*, and we continue to prepare documents that focus on four types of deep caring—which we call *Generativity* (using a term employed by Erik Erikson). These four types can be engaged at any time, though each of them tends to be prevalent at a specific time in our adult life.

The first type (Generativity One) concerns our raising of children, or initiating and leading a major, long-term project. A second type (Generativity Two) is most closely aligned with what Erikson describes as generativity (and many others allude to when writing about generativity). This is the mentoring of other people (usually younger or less experienced). The third type (Generativity Three) is most likely to be engaged during our senior years. It involves being a guardian of traditions and initiator of (or at least participant in) events (such as parades and memorials) that honor past heroes and important events. Finally, with Generative Four we find a

deep concern for community and outreach beyond our local community. While Generativity Three is about extending in time (to be a guardian of the past), the fourth type of generativity is about extending in space—we are concerned about and caring of people beyond our immediate family or workplace. We become stewards (usually during our senior years) of a much larger community – perhaps extending eventually to our nation or the entire world.

As Gary and I prepared these essays, I began to wonder about my own generativity. Was I writing about something that wasn't relevant to my own life? Have I cared deeply in any of these four areas—and have I made any difference? The first type of generativity confronts me when I think about the difference I have made in the life of my children (and perhaps even my grandchildren). Is there really anything more important than being a good parent? While racing through the night and playing the kingly role, did I forget to attend to the children in my life and in my realm? Did I set a model of how you might parent that influenced the way in which my two children are engaged in their own parenting? I know that my children are doing a wonderful job in raising their own children—but is this because of my success as a parent or in spite of my failures as a parent? My son and I sometimes reference the Harry Chapin song, *Cats in the Cradle*, when talking about our own role as busy parent. Are he and I simply appreciating the song or are we reflecting critically on our own parenting? Is son like father? Is this one of the things for which I can ask forgiveness during my Winter years?

I think I have done a pretty good job with Generativity Two, especially since I have had the privilege of serving as president of a graduate school that provides education (and mentoring) to mature learners throughout the world. Most other people don't have this wonderful opportunity—so I should be thankful. I realize that for many people in the world, the issue of making a difference and mentoring the next generation (Generativity Two) is not at the top of their mind (or heart) during their years of Winter. They are simply trying to survive—being challenged every day with poverty, poor health, or the threat of violence.

I am blessed in being able to mentor and education other people and being given the opportunity to find a sanctuary on my deck in Maine where I can contemplate this existential matter of making a difference. The Gods on Olympus have been kind to me in this regard. Who do I thank? Perhaps it is *Plutus*—the God who was assigned the job of choosing who deserves good fortune. I might have been in luck, because Zeus blinded Plutus so that this judge of good fortune would not be biased in making the choice about each of us on this planet. That would mean that Plutus was blind to my stupid and self-serving acts, allowing me to dwell during my years of Winter on a deck looking out over the ocean, contemplating the legacy I have or have not left.

The big unknown might be about Generative Three and Four in my life. Perhaps my deep caring in these two areas should be added to my Wintertime “bucket list”. I do know that I have been something of a guardian (Generativity Three) in several history-based essays I have written. I acknowledge and honor some thought leaders whose work has been forgotten or has never been properly acknowledged. I would point, specifically, to my preparation of a series of essays that will become a book called *The New Johari Window*. These essays and the book are meant to set the record straight regarding the author of the widely used Johari Window. The author is Joe Luft (the “Jo” in “Johari”). Sadly, Joe passed away several years ago and never witnessed my guardianship. I suspect that I am not alone in serving too late as a guardian. All too often, we point to contributions that have been made by those who have passed away.

The fourth mode of generativity is the one to which I have given least attention. I am not very closely connected to my own local community (though have attempted unsuccessfully to initiate a program that would benefit my town). In many ways, I am more of a global citizen than a loyal local citizen. Most of the people I work with and communities I care about are located many miles from where I live. Is the status of global citizen a good thing or a cop out? Should I follow the advice of Peter Seeger and act locally (while thinking globally)? I wonder if this will become a pressing issue in the near future for many occupants of Winter, like me, who have

made their living working (in-person or virtually) primarily in distant communities. The question might become: how stretched out in distance can be the Generative Four caring we provide in our life?

*Spirituality:* One of my colleagues has received extensive training as a psychic. While I am personally not a believer in the power and credibility of psychic reading, I trust (and greatly admire) my colleague's ability to acquire insights about the inner life of her clients. She is gifted in providing rich metaphors regarding what she has "read" in her client's "psyche." Several years ago, she conducted a session with me. One of the outcomes of this session was her "reading" of my *Chakras* (vividly colored bands or points of energy that surround our body). One of these, the Crown Chakra, is purple and concerns one's spiritual life. Apparently, my Crown Chakra is a particularly vivid purple (suggesting that this is a very important domain in my life). Yet, my Crown Chakra is not moving. It is frozen. My colleague gently suggested (at least metaphorically) that I'm not doing much with this domain. I think she is right.

At the time of the reading, I was (and still am) wrestling with my own spirituality. Or perhaps I am not doing much wrestling. I might instead be running away from my spiritual domain. There are many wonderful ways to turn elsewhere or turn numb about spiritual matters. I know them all. Will this be one of the tasks in which I should engage during my Winter years? In our book, Eliza, Jayan and I have written about the turning to spirituality during our Autumnal years. Eliza and Jayan have also written about this domain of life in their own epilogues. Am I ignoring what we have written about in this book and my two co-authors have pointed out in their own epilogues? I thought that God promised me I wouldn't have to follow the advice I offer in my own books. Am I a little late in coming to the consideration of and reflection on my own spirituality? How do I get my purple Crown Chakra moving? Perhaps, I can find a way to get my purple moving by turning to a closely related concern—that being reflection on my own ultimate concern. Is this the work of the Soul in which I should engage during my years of Winter?

*The Ultimate Concern*: I spent a couple of remarkable years at Harvard Divinity School studying theology. One of my heroes was Paul Tillich. He was one of the reasons I was at Harvard. Unfortunately, he had left Harvard by the time I arrived, though fortunately he occasionally returned to deliver a sermon or lecture. These were some of the last years of his life. One of his books concerned identification of the *Ultimate Concern* in one's life (Tillich, 1951). Ultimately, what is of greatest importance and concern in our life? is it actually important to know whether or not I have made a difference in any of the four domains of generativity? Perhaps generativity (in all of its forms) is not important.

Given our capacity to contemplate life in a massive universe that is indifferent to our fate, we must wonder what it really means to consider whether or not we are leaving a legacy. I linger on the thoughts of Nicholai Berdyaev (1965)—another of the theologians I studied during my two years at Divinity School. He wrote about the existential emptiness of life and the nature of “non-being” in the vast expanse of time and space. Yet, his most famous quote is: “Every single human soul has more meaning and value than the whole of history.” So, does it make a difference to have made a difference—despite the absurdity of making a difference in a universe that is eternal in time and space? Is making a difference an appropriate and timely topic to ponder during our Winter years?

So, I am back on my deck, reflecting on what Paul Tillich wrote and preached. I am asking: does it ultimately make a difference if we have really made a difference? Perhaps this is a silly or at least non-productive question to ask. During our years in Winter, it might be best to thank Plutus (if this God has granted us good fortune) and spend time on our deck listening to the water lapping on the shore and the birds singing their distinctive songs. Or should we use our good fortune to do good work and learn from (and perhaps teach about) the ways we have made a difference. I remember back to Paul Tillich delivering a sermon at the Harvard Chapel. He declared that one must live a life of devotion and commitment—a life that is aligned with one's ultimate concern. So making a difference might be related to



identifying and engaging one's ultimate concerns—be they about family, proteges, history or community.

Plutus granted me an additional favor. I was fortunate while in college to hear Karl Barth, another remarkable theologian, deliver a speech/sermon at the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. As in the case of Tillich's sermon at Harvard, Barth was making one of his final public appearances. As a man of Winter, Barth spoke in his broken English of the need for finding transcendent meaning in an eternal universe that insists there is only absurdity. It is a universe that screams out for indifference. He has written that "religion is the possibility of the removal of every ground of confidence except confidence in God alone." While I might not identify with the God of whom Barth speaks, I can identify with the God defined by Tillich as one's ultimate concern. I can see this concern being the ground of confidence for me (and perhaps many other people living in Winter). Ultimately, it might be most important to reflect on one's ultimate concern while dwelling in Winter. I'm not sure—but it is worth the effort to struggle with this existential question.

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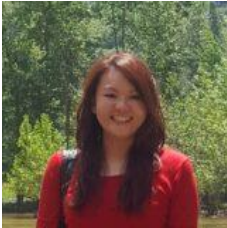
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