



*Harvesting Wisdom*  
Aging as Opportunity

# **The Inner Journey: Finding Meaning in Life after 50**

Ronnie Dunetz

**Welcome to "Harvesting Wisdom: Aging as Opportunity"**



## The Inner Journey: Meaning in Life After 50

June 1, 2003. It's two days before my 44th birthday. I'm sitting in my car, one of many backed up at a junction in the north of Israel. It was the days of the Second Intifada. The Israeli population was enduring terrible terrorist attacks on a weekly, and at times, even daily basis.

I had mastered sitting in traffic. The journey from my home in central Israel to my place of work in the north had become second nature. Three times a week I wasted three hours a day in the commute. Was it worth the long haul? Financially and professionally, no doubt. I had to go along with it to survive. Internally and spiritually, however, it left me feeling hollow, restless, and unfulfilled. Suddenly, goosebumps ran up my arms. A pain filled my stomach. In two days... I would be 44 years old.

"You really blew it, Ronnie," I thought to myself. "The train has long left the station and you weren't on it." Was it true?

Soon, I would be "too old" for the world of technology, and I had never wanted to be there to begin with. I had stayed on as a voluntary prisoner in the "Golden Cage" of hi-tech and biotechnology for a long time- much too long- in a type of perpetual motion, for reasons of good and steady income and prestige. I had not chosen this path and it had not really chosen me either. Now, enough was enough.

"Is this the life I wanted?" I asked myself. "What would happen if, God forbid, I became a victim of the next terrorist attack? What will they write on my tombstone?"

"Ronnie Dunetz, he really knew how to look for his next job."

This is something I had learned to do quite well- looking for something new. Did I really find value and peace of mind in doing so?

No, not at all. That was when I knew something had to change. So, at the age of 44, I found the courage to embark on a new path.

I left my career in biotechnology and decided to study coaching, a field that in those days was still in its infancy. In March, 2004, I completed my training and launched a fair share of pilot coaching projects with new clients. Next, I opened my coaching and facilitation practice. I discovered a whole new journey waiting for me, not an external one, but an internal one. New insights and lessons began appearing to me in ways I never could have dreamed of.

Now, more than 16 years after that gridlocked traffic jam, I can say I have gone to work each and every day with great love and passion. I've logged more than 6,000 coaching hours with hundreds of individuals and have found meaning and purpose in my professional life that was totally absent before that point.

I had no idea the power hiding inside those critical questions I had asked myself, sitting in my car, two days before my 44th birthday. "Is this the kind of life that I wanted? What will they write on my tombstone?" How absurd of me to think that 44 was "over the hill!" Like everyone around me, I was a prisoner of my own ageist stereotypes. Today, at age 61, I know that there is no such thing as "too old." My Inner Journey taught me that if we learn how to observe, every age can provide us fresh and unique perspectives. There are secrets that ONLY our later years can unlock.

Now, I embark on yet another adventure. After traveling for so many years on that Internal Journey I started at 50, I want to share how you can unlock those secrets for yourself. So, I've written out my insights into the very pages you see before. As you read on, remember that you can begin living the life you want to at any age. The most amazing lessons are yet to come.



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**“The greatest potential for growth and self-realization exists in the second half of life.”**

**C.G. Jung**

Congratulations!! You have received the gift of 20 to 30 years in additional life!

No, this is not "fake news." There is no marketing hype about it. We are living in an age of great progress in medical innovations, public hygiene, overall awareness, and many other factors. Many, if not most, of us will live longer than any generation did in the history of mankind. A hundred years ago, each of us would have had about a 15% chance of living to the age of 65. Today, 80th birthday parties are commonplace, and if you look around a bit, you will easily find a neighbor well into their 90s.

This rapid growth in longevity has opened a huge gap between the "chronological age" and the "functional age" of people. It has created new definitions, perspectives, and opportunities we could have never imagined, and one of the most amazing new experiences is the concept known as "Second Adulthood."

While there is no exact window for the age of **Second Adulthood** and people can enter it at many different ages, we generally include people between the ages 55 of 75. Today, a very high percentage of people in this demographic enjoy good health, a high level of capability and talent, abundant life experience, and a strong motivation to contribute and play an active role in society.

The renowned psychoanalyst Carl Jung, a giant in the creation of modern psychological theory, called this period "the afternoon of life." He viewed it as a transition period of growth for the individual.

Similarly, Erik Erikson, among the most influential developmental psychologists of our time, says that in this period, whether or not we realize it, we begin to integrate the totality of our life experiences. If we can look back positively at our achievements in life, we will find satisfaction and pride in our journey. By completing this process, we contribute to the growth of genuine wisdom.

Thus, it is clear that Second Adulthood represents a great opportunity. However, how many of us actually see our old age that way? The answer is likely not that many. As a society, we lack suitable models to encourage people in this stage of life to discover, identify, and benefit from the vast opportunities that await them. Whether physically or spiritually, Second Adulthood is an opportunity to do all the things we did not do during our "first round." However, to do so, we need to learn how to view and understand things from a new perspective. It is not enough to just "grow older." We must acquire a "new set of glasses" to view the world and our place within it.



## Chapter 2: The Journey to the New Me



### I am no longer what I used to be, but I am not yet what I will be. So, who am I?

When we reflect on our lives from a bird's eye view, we often see that what we think of as our single life is readily divided into a number of periods and stages. Each stage is comprised of many developments; think of them as windy roads. Some roads were unique to a specific period, while others were traveled time and again.

The "First Half of Life," usually thought of everything before 50, is often characterized by a mentality of competition and action, i.e. the drive to achieve, establish and succeed. Challenges and opportunities in this portion of life include school, higher learning, social relationships, life partnerships, family, parenting, economic success, the creation of durable assets such as home ownership, and on and on. The motto of this life stage could be: "Get out there and make something of yourself!"

During the next stage of life, usually between the age 50 of 60 on average, something interesting happens. Material pursuits are still active, but it may take a slightly different form, as emotional, psychological, and spiritual factors increasingly come into play. Goals and plans tend to be influenced by factors stemming from one's "being," there may be a renewed search for the "authentic," a revisiting and researching of values, roots, personal history, among others.

Increasingly at this stage one may find oneself exploring meaningful relationships, multi-generational family contacts, a desire to give more to community and others, a zest for delving into areas of interest, all things that may not have been so prominent in the past. The question of "What legacy will I be leaving for others?" which once may have been seen as "philosophical" and appropriate only "years from now" suddenly appears more relevant and up close.

Many of us reach this point around age 50. Others will find this change of perspective only as they near retirement, but we all will crash into it sooner or later. It is not just a pull towards "life review" in the way of nostalgia or a topic of friendly social conversation around the meaning of life. We are talking about very deep, personal challenges and questions: who will I be when I am already grown up?

This question concerned me when I was approaching my 50th birthday, eleven years ago. Most of my closer friends at that time chose to mark this symbolic "round birthday" with big parties, friends, and acquaintances from all the various social and professional circles. This approach did not interest me at all. In fact, what beckoned me was the total opposite.

I marked my 50th birthday alone, in the woodlands of South England, isolated, and without food, participating in one of the more unusual and challenging experiences in my life. For my 50th birthday I went on a Vision Quest, an ancient Native-American rite of passage, to mark my own transition into the Second Half of Life. The Vision Quest was originally designed as a tribal rite of passage for adolescents, with a very clear principal in mind: the youthful boy would leave his home and enter the wilderness for the purpose of finding his vision, his path, his internal power and character, his purpose. The boy would depart with only his clothes on his back, with the explicit encouragement to survive the hardship, uncertainty and fear, on his own.

This Native American tradition found its way into the experimental culture of the West in the 1960's. It is a deep and transformational experience for those seeking to clearly review and observe their lives and decision-making processes around milestones and aspired turning points. Before going into the wild on his/her own, the individual undergoes 2 days of preparation. After returning from the wild and the fasting, once again there are 23 days of de-briefing and processing.

All in all, these nine days of Vision Quest were unlike any other days in my first 50 years of life! The insights that came to me around my life I had lived till then would not have come about were it not for the isolation and the fast that I had undertaken. There are things that you can learn about yourself only in such circumstances in which you leave behind the safe, secure and routine aspects of material culture, the "comfort zone" of life, if you will.

In retrospect, I now know that I was feeling very threatened by having reached the age of 50. **I did not know then, as I know now, that age is not a limitation. On the contrary: it is an opportunity!** Around 50 we are all on some journey of discovery, which could not have happened during the First Half of Life. And if we wait too long, those insights might not be possible, for reasons beyond our control. We are at a wonderful juncture, where the horizon is open before us, the tools are with us, and the choice is in the hands of each and every one of us.



## Chapter 3: The World Belongs to the Young? Says Who?

A change in consciousness about age is on the way.



It's time to admit it: Western society despises old age!

By and large, Western society views old age as being weak and unproductive. Elderly folks are seen as outdated, archaic, and not very "useful" to society.

Sadly, these prejudices have trained our collective and personal consciousness to associate old age with death—that greatest of fears. Gray hair, baldness, sagging body parts, wrinkles—Western society views all these as part and parcel of the "cruel process" known as aging. Instead of celebrating our body's natural process, we are taught to do everything possible to avoid and deny it.

This inherent and ubiquitous ageism has spawned the multi-billion dollar "anti-aging" industry which has been booming for years. Look, the "anti-aging" prejudice is right there in the title! And how successful it has become. Swarms of young people in their thirties now find it completely commonplace to perform hair transplants, facelifts, and acid injections of all kinds into their skin. Their deeply internalized ageism is clear: the fountain of youth will bring success, and natural aging will bring failure.

In 2007, a 23-year-old **Mark Zuckerberg**, founder of Facebook, summed his ageism up clearly, "**Young people are just smarter.**" He apologized, of course. He said his words were "taken out of context." But once words have been said, they have a way of sticking inside our minds and hearts.

Many highly admired, high-tech workers confess that around 40 years old they begin to feel uneasy in their coveted positions. In Israel, leading high-tech firms and innovative start-ups pursue recent graduates of elite military intelligence units. They bang on the doors of these young people, offering huge salaries and global opportunities. Without a doubt, the aura of youth is married to technological prowess and promise, and this fantasy molds our paradigms and perceptions around age.

Of course, the phenomenon extends beyond beauty and technology. In Hollywood, only in the last few years have studios begun to cast older actors to star in their major films. Before that, older people were usually only seen on the big screen in the context of illness or dysfunction. What caused this change? It's very simple: Superstars such as Meryl Streep, Robert De Niro, Clint Eastwood, Al Pacino, Judi Dench, and others became older. That's it. No essential transformation of paradigm occurred. The big studios simply didn't want to lose the profit potential of their biggest stars. Unfortunately, aside from this exception for the superstars, rampant ageism still exists in this highly visible industry.

So, what should we do with our own internalized anti-aging prejudices? How can we stop this cycle from repeating in our own lives? Well, when it comes to growing older, there are three kinds of people one tends to meet:

**Deniers** -These people do their utmost to avoid any mention of the idea or the word "age." They ignore aging, hide from aging, and do their best to avoid any sign of aging. When we look around, this group leads the pack in size. Some Deniers are hyper vigilant against the aging process. Others are passively anxious. However, all dread the idea of growing old.

**Still-able:** The "Still-able" folks do not ignore or hide from signs of aging, but instead, they continue to stress how active they remain in all areas of life. These energetic folks continue to work at all costs, run marathons, and stay at the cutting-edge of nutrition. You can see them traveling the world, maintaining busy schedules, and challenging themselves outside the comfort zone whenever possible. While I really like this approach and find myself in these ranks at times, the inner fear of old age still exists inside these Still-able. Thus, they remain at a high risk of becoming Deniers the moment their bodies fail to meet some of those challenges. So, while it might be fun for a while to live in the Still-able group, we must find another solution.

**Seekers of Meaning in Age:** At last, this group, a new player in the aging field, sees aging as an opportunity to look to the past in order to strengthen the present and create the future. Seekers of Meaning do not settle for "I'm still able." Rather, they seek self-discovery and the cultivation of wisdom through a variety of tools and processes. This Conscious Aging approach sees age as an opportunity to go deeper, to find meaning, and to create a legacy. Indeed, they understand how old age is a "once in a lifetime" opportunity.

**Now the question is: Which of these three groups do you most connect with and why?**

### Inner Journey Questions:

Take a pen and notebook and set aside three minutes. Write continuously, without stopping your flow of writing. Jot down all the associations that come up for you with the term "old age." After having done that, reflect on whether these are positive or negative associations in your mind.



## Chapter 4: Anti-Age-ing out, Sage-ing® In



Most people go through life following the path of existing paradigms and thinking. A minority of us will choose to take exception to these rules of society and travel a bit differently. However, it is only the rare "change-makers" who will observe life and build a totally different way of living.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi, also known as Reb Zalman, was one such change-maker. In this chapter, I want to share with you the life of Reb Zalman and how he became one of the most innovative minds in understanding the need for a new model for conscious aging.

Reb Zalman was born in Poland in 1924. Raised in Vienna, he narrowly escaped the Nazis' grasp by fleeing to Belgium. From there, he departed Europe altogether to embark on a remarkable life in the United States.

In the US Jewish community of the 1960s, Zalman, along with the gifted musician, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, managed to shock even the most liberal members of the Orthodox Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement of which they were members. Chabad saw the potential of Zalman and Carlebach to reach out to young, mostly secularized, Jews at universities around the country and bring them the Chabad message of Judaism. Thus, Zalman was sent out to US campuses with this mission to communicate with young people. However, while he was successful in spreading the Chabad approach to some extent, the influence of the counterculture generation on Zalman was even more profound.

Zalman's curiosity brought him to experiment and explore in his own life. He experimented openly with LSD and studied what he saw as its "spiritual connections." Later, he went on to deepen his spiritual search through mystical Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, and Shamanism. In other words, Reb Zalman spread his wings beyond the narrow confines of Judaism, with an unusual ability to synthesize belief systems.

Later, Zalman completed his university degrees, became a professor of Jewish mysticism and the psychology of religion, and led a reframing of how Judaism could be linked to other traditions without losing its own identity. As a creator of the Jewish Renewal Movement,

he broke down barriers between religions, mystical traditions, and ways of life. Depending on whom you ask, Reb Zalman could be seen as both a genius revolutionary and a breakthrough social entrepreneur, or as a misguided, renegade, Orthodox Jewish Rabbi who lost his way.

However, one particularly difficult mystery that Zalman encountered was the concept of aging.

In an interview he gave to American television while in his 60s, Reb Zalman shared his own angst about growing older:

*I was getting close to my 60th birthday and a feeling of futility had invaded my soul, plunging me into a state of depression that no amount of busyness or diversion could dispel...In every way I tried to deny that it had anything to do with growing older...I felt somehow hidden behind some veil in order to keep myself from knowing what I now desperately needed to know[...]*

Reb Zalman went on to describe that he needed a "script" or "model" for how to grow old with meaning. We have models for everything from being a toddler all the way up to being a working adult. Where, asked Zalman, were the models for growing old in our world of extended longevity?

Zalman was familiar with the ancient practices of the East. For example, the Hindu Sanyasi model includes an age at which one abandons his material commitments in the physical world, including assets and family, and begins to wander in order to deepen self-spiritual knowledge. Zalman saw this model as completely foreign to Western civilization. In the spirit of Tibetan Buddhism, he undertook a 40-day retreat in the desert as a way to search inside himself. During this period of isolation, he conceived the basic core of his idea of conscious aging, which he called "spiritual elderring." From these ideas, he wrote extensively in his trailblazing book, [From Age-ing to Sage-ing](#).

In his book, Zalman made new use of the word "sage," creating a verb called "sage-ing®." Today, this concept is led by an organization he founded called [Sage-ing International](#). Sage-ing® is a new paradigm for viewing aging as an opportunity for consciousness development. As a person ages, he/she can choose to harvest the wisdom of age or fall into the "declinist view" of aging. Reb Zalman urged us to take up the "inner path" of sage-ing®, not only for the benefit of the individual but for society on the whole and for the future of the world. In a world that worships youth, focuses on materialistic attainment, and is plagued by greed and violent conflict, there is a dire need for Elder Wisdom to take its place in healing the world and bringing about a new consciousness for the future of mankind.



Conscious aging in general and Sage-ing® in particular are not dreamy, idealistic notions of an unreal world, but essential components of what it means to harvest one's wisdom in life. The journey is for those who choose to walk the "inner path," to turn the second half of life into an unparalleled period of personal development, spiritual growth, and deep meaning into what life can really be about.

Reb Zalman lived to nearly ninety years old and made such a meaningful imprint in his fields of interest precisely because he was not afraid to blaze new trails. He ventured far out of his comfort zone and what he found and created there has left a legacy for us all.

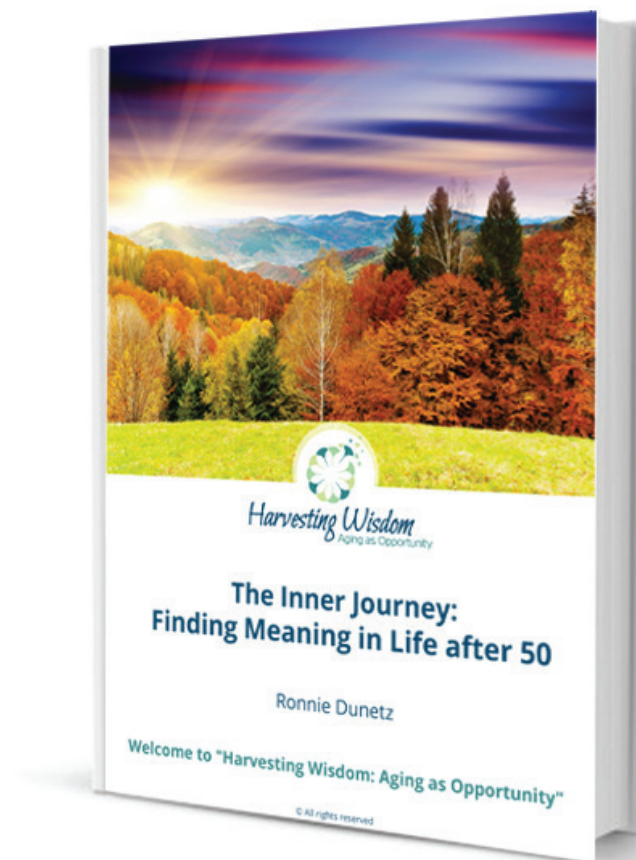
### Inner Journey Questions:

1. Can you write down 5 insights about life that you have had from the rich knowledge and experience that you have garnered over the years?
2. As you look back on your life, can you name one achievement that you are especially proud of? Write it down.
3. Imagine that decades from now, some person in the coming generations of your family will find a notebook in which you wrote "My Insights on Life." What is the key insight you have written down that you would like for future generations to know and internalize?

My book "Inner Journey: Finding Meaning in Life after 50" aims to present and discuss a number of fascinating points that will contribute to the positive message of aging for a new generation. My book is for those who are looking for a new way to experience the second half of life. It is for those who wish to experience this current phase of life as a particularly meaningful one, and who desire to live it guided by curiosity, self-discovery and spiritual development.

Amongst the chapters you will find perspectives that emanate from Eastern philosophies and cultures; research from psychological studies performed around the world; exercises to encourage the "inner journey" for reflection, and much more. Above all, you will find many insights and knowledge that support a truth that few people are really aware of: that the **second half of life is one of life's greatest opportunities offered to us.**

Now it remains to be seen whether you will be among those who make good on this opportunity...





**It has been my pleasure to offer you these first four chapters of my digital book, "The Inner Journey: Finding Meaning in Life after 50." You are warmly invited to purchase the entire, 23-chapter book which is due out by August 2020. The content that awaits you in the full edition includes:**

1. **Wisdom:** What is it and how can it be cultivated and harvested in the second half of life?
2. **Our Life Story:** Why is it so important to learn how to tell our life stories? What are some ways this can be done?
3. **Dreams:** Do you have an old dream tucked away in the "closet"? Consider how you can fulfill it during the second half of life!
4. **Careers and work:** How do you view career and work as you learn to harvest the wisdom of your life?
5. **Volunteering:** The secret magic of volunteering and the great opportunity it brings.
6. **Family:** How do you balance the importance of family and the life you wish to lead?
7. **Hobbies:** It's time to revive them!
8. **The Social Circle:** Friends are so important. Are we doing what we can to keep them?
9. **Lifelong Learning:** The key ingredient in keeping mind, body, and spirit at their peak
10. **Creativity:** We can all be bloomers, early or late!
11. **Life Teachers:** The good and the bad, the severe and the kind
12. **Forgiveness:** How can it set us free?
13. **Regret and the Wisdom of Aging:** Letting go of the past, learning from it for the future
14. **Legacy:** What do we really leave behind?
15. **Time is our most valuable resource.** How do we manage it at this time in our lives?
16. **Personal Vision:** No less important with age
17. **Death:** How can we engage with it now to make a better life?
18. **Gratitude:** A proven way to happiness



### About Ronnie Dunetz

I was born in the US to two immigrants from different countries: my father a Holocaust survivor from Poland, and my mother a 9th generation Israeli. I learned early on how to move between languages, cultures, and traditions. Even at an early age, I recall always being excited by the act of searching. I was eager for life exploration. At age 21, I immigrated to Israel. Later, I left for East Asia where I spent close to 5 years, immersing myself in the languages, martial arts, and philosophical/psychological teachings in those traditions. Much of this guides me today as well.

After completing my International MBA from the Thunderbird School of global management in 1989, I worked for 15 years in international marketing in the hi-tech and bio-tech industries. From there, I transitioned into what has been a most meaningful professional capacity for me as a life, career, and business coach, which I have been practicing since 2004. It has been a labor of love, much more love than labor, as I cannot imagine anything more fulfilling than helping others make good on their potential in life.

Over the years, I have been privileged to train, obtain, and apply skills in the worlds of mastermind group facilitation, storytelling, entrepreneurship, and freelance writing. The last few years have seen me arrive at what I feel is the most challenging pursuit for me going forward: experiencing, teaching, mentoring, and guiding others to discover the vast potential that aging has to offer.

I never cease to be inspired by the saying of the writer, **George Eliot: "It's never too late to be what you might have been."**

**Please contact me if you are interested in purchasing the full version of the book, I will gladly inform you as soon as it will be released. Thank-you!**

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