

## Seven Year Cycles of Life <sup>1</sup>

Birth - 7	“Infancy & early childhood
8 – 14	Puberty arrives
15 - 21	Awakening of sexuality and the transition into adolescence
22 - 28	On verge of first adulthood
29 - 35	Cleaning up the emotional and intellectual debris that you have acquired from parents, educators, and friends in building an adult personality.
36 - 42	Most people have settled into a career and family life.
43 - 49	Established social identity...we have ‘arrived’...[developed] responsibility, of mastery of institutions, and of leadership.
50 - 56	Contacting our inner selves...we begin <i>individuating</i> , becoming and expressing the unique selves that we are. We grow beyond our drive for personal power, a full, deeper humanity emerges. Now we are concerned with the custodianship of the institutions themselves.
57 - 63	Coming into the fullness of our power. We cling to the unrealistic dreams of our youth culture and recoil from the door marked ‘elderhood’ looming before us.
64 – 70	Time for harvesting arrives. This involves reflecting on our achievements, feeling pride in our contributions to family and society, and ultimately finding our place in the cosmos. [Growing into] elderhood...Oh, my soul, you are growing something special and good inside me. How can I give it the proper sunshine and nourishment to ensure that it grows to health and vigor? Unfortunately, we have no model of elderhood to encourage such harvesting. So, we either fall into disuse through retirement, or else we strive valiantly but foolishly to compete with younger men and women.
71 - 77	Continued elderhood and time for harvesting...gathering in the fruits of a lifetime’s experience and enjoying them in old age...we sense that our lives have meaning, that we have contribute to others; and that we are worthwhile human beings...reflecting, feeling pride, finding our place, and elderhood...engaged in creative activity that benefits society.
78 – 84 and beyond	Continued elderhood...increased health care needs...as Eugene Bianchi points out, death gradually educates the person who faces it with sincerity. In confronting and rehearsing our own death we acquire a new orientation in life. Purged of excessive self-concern, we awaken to the splendors of the moment. We delight in the little things in life: children’s laughter, birdsong in the morning, intimate conversations with friends over tea.”

<sup>1</sup> Schachter-Shalomi and Miller, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, (pps. 22,23, 53, 76, 91, 272)

Storytelling in small groups or personal reflection. One by one, each person shares their answer to the first prompt below. Then go to the next question and so forth. A person can pass.

- 1. Pick one of seven-year cycles and share “what were the significant moments and events during that cycle of your life?”**<sup>1</sup> (if time permits, or through personal reflection/journaling, share about each of the cycles)
- 2. Share about “Who were the people who guided and influenced you during” one of the cycles in your life?**<sup>1</sup>
- 3. Share any insights and/or emotions you experienced as you have shared, or through other people’s sharing, about one, or more, of the seven-year cycles of life (of aging).**

**Additional Quotations *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*:**

“All of us experience dramatic changes as we move through childhood, adolescence, first maturity, middle age, and elderhood. However, grasping the larger pattern that unites these diverse stages of life often eludes us... [Looking at this] helps us to perceive the patterns that connects by partitioning the continuum of our lives into seven-year cycles in an attempt to discover how the parts are related to the whole. In general, memory becomes sharper and clearer when it's associated with partitioned time. Telling someone to remember the past in general terms usually does not yield good results; Targeting a specific period of time works far better...”

Once we have assembled the raw data of our experience, we can graph the overarching pattern that was struggling to express itself through the ups and downs, the successes and failures that make up the rich texture of our lives. Seeing which experiences remain incomplete, we can take measures to express the un-lived life that beckons from within. Perceiving larger patterns of our lives, we can gain insight into how to harvest our lives and bring them to completion. Besides showing us directions for future growth, this exercise can help us cultivate an appreciation for all that we have had enjoyed, even if our means were only modest by the world standards. We can say, I experienced friendship, a home and family, a useful career, and I grew in maturity over my lifespan. If we encountered sorrow and suffering, we can affirm ‘By bearing these burdens, I grew an inner strength. I did something heroic.’”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> - Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*. (Warner Books, New York, 1995), pp. 271-272. Available for purchase at Amazon and other booksellers.

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