



The Vibrant Years - Soul Time in the Human Life Span

Geraldine Schwartz

Our youth-oriented culture undervalues life as years pass. Nature images abound: we are a seed... a bud... a flower... a wilted blossom... dry petals crumbling... dust to dust. We are compared to seasons: born in spring, flourish in summer at our prime, fade in autumn, die in winter, what an oversimplification! We are not plants, concerned only to survive and propagate the next generation. We are born. We grow. We grow and grow. Some of us decline at an early time; others continue to grow and learn and make a contribution to the next generation over a lifetime. Milton Erikson, who identified the stages of human life almost a half century ago, called the stage of life I am about to describe the age of "generativity," the time when concern moves from focus on personal gain to the larger issues of life, to see the long view, the fuller picture, to contribute to the growth of the next generation. It is this time of life I would like to call "the age of the soul." It is in these years that we enter soul time.

Unlike our physical maturity, we do not enter this time within a particular chronological age range, as one enters puberty or menopause. Nor is it certain everyone will reach this time. In fact, some young people live a good portion of their lives in soul time, while some very old people retreat from their prime to such self concern that their childish behaviour defeats even their most generous caregivers. We can enter this "prime time of our lives" at any age, and we can stay vibrant and vigorous so long as we continue to engage the soul wisdom, sometimes called intuition, to know the right thing to do. Here is where human consciousness, which is ageless, makes us so different from the plants of my first metaphor.

At any time of our life we can choose to act with the vigour of youth, tempered with the wisdom of soul to participate in right acting, sometimes in a leadership role, but also comfortable in followership. As we act in cooperation with others, in concert, in coherence, our mind and spirit engages the body's immune systems to pour the neurochemical messengers of strength, power and good health into the part of our body that is ageless, the inner spirit that is truly us. We are continuously renewed and refreshed with a vibrancy that lights our way and shines out to light the paths of others.

Welcome the Mensch and the Old Soul

Various names have been given to people of any age observed to be living in soul time. One of these is the Jewish concept of "a mensch," a decent person who sees human higher possibility in all people, who can be counted on to do the right thing, regardless of personal cost. A mensch is a person who sees the mensch in others, soul to soul. Another name is "old soul," a person who acts in a way that displays human nobility, sometimes even in the face of treachery. I have seen

such behaviour in a five year-old, concerned about "Mummy's feelings" when he was in personal danger. I have seen it in a young woman working selflessly to save our country, and in a seventy-two year-old person willing to share his life to save the planet. The criterion is not the chronological age, but the maturity and the wisdom that underlies the person's value system.

But it is more than a value system. The age in which we live is too dangerous, and the matters at hand too urgent for the luxury of armchair philosophising. Values need to be expressed in action. Such action must be outward looking, embracing the larger, longer perspective about the critical issues of our time peace, the environment, and the new learning and thinking we will need if civilisation is to flourish in a new century full of discontinuities.

Action in the face of urgency and danger takes courage. Here we come again to the issue of a person's age. It is not that years of living are required to act the mensch, but that many of us use our years of experience to become less fearful. We learn how to exercise our powerful minds and spirits more readily.

This phenomenon has a practical outcome for each of us. Unlike the plants of earlier reference that exist the same in millions of copies, we are unique. Our learning, our life experience and hard won successes mean that the contribution of each of us is a specialised piece or thread of an eternal tapestry. Woven together, the fabric creates a mighty and awesome picture. This has an important lesson for leaders. Wherever we can collaborate, cross-fertilise, work as part of a team, we can maximise the effect of our effort. Working together creates "emergences" of higher order. All over the world we see the truth of this. The peace process in the Middle East and Northern Ireland inches forward as ancient enemies learn to work together. The environment benefits as groups on both sides of the issues cooperate. Businesses flourish as they harmonise their efforts to serve the needs of their clients.

Thus, to live vibrantly every day of our lives, to live in soul time, we need to engage the ageless wisdom of our highest and noblest selves, and we need to do this in the company of like-minded others. Such a cohort of leaders will evolve the consciousness of our species and create a legacy of hope for the next millennium.

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