



## Insane for the Light, A Spirituality for Our Wisdom Years, by Ronald Rolheiser

Week 3- Chapter 2: Some Anthropologies of Aging

**Check in Question:** What non-material gifts have you given—or hope to give—to your children, grandchildren, or friends?

### Opening Prayer

*A powerful and widely used Hindu prayer for life is the Asatoma Manta from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which asks for guidance from untruth to truth, darkness to light, and death to immortality. It is often recited to seek spiritual guidance, inner strength, and peace.*

Oh Lord, lead us from the unreal to the real.

Oh Lord, lead us from darkness to light.

Oh Lord, lead us from death to immortality/life.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace

### Reflection questions:

*As you read through the following questions, select one or two that speak to you and be ready to share your reflection.*

### Chapter 2

1. In this chapter, Fr. Rolheiser explores a variety of perspectives on aging and the second half of life.

Which of these views resonates most with your own experience or current stage of life? Why?

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#### a. James Hillman

Hillman suggests that our earlier years focus on achieving and accomplishing, while our later years invite us to reflect on what we have done—and how we have lived. “Aging is intended to mellow the soul and bring out our character.”

→ *What does it mean to you to “mellow your soul”?*

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#### b. The Hindu Stages of Life

In Hindu tradition, life unfolds in four stages: Student, Householder, Forest

Dweller, and Sannyasin. In Western culture, we often miss the “Forest Dweller” stage—a time not simply of retirement, but of intentional prayer, study, mentoring, and inner work in preparation for one’s final years.

→ *How might you embrace this “Forest Dweller” stage in your own life?*

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**c. Germaine Greer (on women’s development)**

Greer reflects on the transition women face after motherhood, particularly at menopause. She suggests that society often leaves women unprepared for this stage, where they may feel invisible—yet it can also be a time of renewed generativity and transformation, almost like a “second puberty.”

→ *Where do you see opportunities for new life or purpose in this stage?*

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**d. Richard Rohr**

Rohr challenges us to consider the kind of elder we are becoming:

- a *pathetic old fool* (clinging to youth),
- an *angry old fool* (living in past glory), or
- a *holy old fool* (at peace and grounded in wisdom).

→ *Which of these tendencies do you recognize in yourself? Which do you hope to become?*

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**e. Alice Miller – The Sensitive Child**

Miller speaks of those who tend to carry deep emotional wounds from childhood. In later years, there is an invitation to grieve past injustices and move toward forgiveness and healing.

→ *What might you still need to grieve, release, or forgive as you grow older?*

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**f. David Brooks – The Second Mountain**

Brooks describes life as two “mountains”:

- The first focuses on achievement and identity.
- The second centers on meaning, service, and self-gift.

He outlines a path:

- from suffering → wisdom → service
- from letting go of the old self → embracing emptiness → discovering new life
- from the valley → through the desert → to the mountaintop

→ *Where do you see yourself on this journey? What might your “second mountain” look like?*

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### **g. Kathleen Dowling Singh - and the Journey of Letting Go**

Singh reflects on human development as a gradual awakening—from self-awareness in infancy to a deeper spiritual awareness later in life. Fr. Rolheiser connects this to the process of dying described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, by adding these three stages of Kübler-Ross' work

- a descent into darkness,
- a deep resignation,
- and finally, a breakthrough into peace or even joy.

Aging and dying, then, can accomplish what a lifetime of prayer seeks to do: soften our ego and open us fully to the life of the Spirit.

→ *How have you experienced “letting go” in your life? Where might God be inviting you deeper into trust?*

2. What kind of elder do you hope to become? What steps can you take now to grow into that vision?

### **Closing Prayer**

For whom and what shall we pray...

Lord of all our days and seasons,  
You walk with us from youth into wisdom.  
Teach us to release what no longer gives life,  
And to receive each new stage as Your gift.  
Heal the wounds we carry into our later years,  
And soften our hearts with compassion and peace.  
Make our lives a quiet blessing to others,  
And lead us gently into the fullness of Your light.  
We ask this in your holy name.  
Amen.

### **Overview of our meetings**

Week 4- Chapter 3: The Challenge in Aging

Week 5- Chapter 4: Passivity as Generativity and Leaving Behind a Nurturing Spirit

Week 6- Chapter 5: The Modality and Darkness of Faith and Its Deeper Stages of Maturing

Week 7- Chapter 6: Forest Dwelling and Preparing to Find Our Beggars Hut

Week 8- Chapter 7: Finding Beggar's Hut and Giving our Deaths Away

Week 9- Chapter 8: Thoughts on the Afterlife

Week 10- Chapter 9: A Paradigm from a Christian Mystic