

INTIMATIONS IN THE NIGHT: THE JOURNEY TOWARD NEW MEANING IN AGING¹

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For some of us, the calling to the second half of life comes quietly and the transition toward development of a new internal meaning is a gentle process. For others, it may be a more troubled and turbulent time. A first intimation of this process often happens when we are alone at night. Is the night a reminder that the days have now grown shorter and there is less time to accomplish all that we have hoped to do in this life? There is also a beauty and solitude that one finds in the dark. Often we find a sense of peace in the silence, when the traffic and commerce of the day have ended and homes and lives are illuminated by the glow of a gentle light. Then, too, there is the silence that allows internal voices which we may have drowned out during the day to now be heard. What questions might they be asking? What are we now called to do? Is it to reflect on our past experiences? Consider and work through missed opportunities? Or are we now being called to develop a sense of wonder and a spiritual approach to life?

In this silence, we find an intimation of another way of life, where we face our innermost thoughts, hopes, fears, and desires without illusion or distractions. We can then ask our heart and soul if this has been a good life and what we can do to deepen our relationship to psyche and Self. Our questions about this life may now be different from before, asking, for instance, if we cultivated a great love, great friends, and found a passion for life? Have we made a contribution to the human condition? Have we done what we needed to do? And, in these nocturnal moments, the time of *veritas*, we have to ask

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if we have the courage to live into our destiny. Facing these questions and answers, we are prepared to embark on a journey of transcendence that may lead us to new meaning and a new direction for our autumn and winter years.

Awakening to the Transcendent

A core concept in the Jungian perspective on the second half of life is transcendence. This is a sense of wonder, an intimation of a grand design to our life, and an awareness of and striving to embrace what is truly spiritual. Throughout his writings, Jung speaks of transcendence as a relationship to the sacred and to that which is beyond ego and consciousness. It is this reaching beyond our self, into the domain of the ineffable, that allows for a relationship to the transcendent. This point is captured by Jung when he writes that “I do not for a moment deny that the deep emotion of a true prayer may reach transcendence.”² Prayer, as an intentional alignment with the archetypal, is a direct call for a relationship to the transpersonal and speaks directly to this domain of the transcendent.

To live only amid the daily busyness of life is to miss an important aspect of spiritual life. While there is a beauty to finding those delicious tomatoes for the evening’s meal, it is the awareness that, in the preparation and partaking of this meal, we have entered what Rabbi Heschel refers to as a sense of the sacred in time. He writes that “the highest goal of spiritual living is . . . to face sacred moments . . . a grandeur of what is eternal in time.”³ He then adds that “God is not in things in space, but in time” and continues this theme of time and sacredness by saying that “Shabbat comes with its own holiness, we enter not simply a day but an atmosphere . . . we are within the Sabbath, rather than the Sabbath being within us.”⁴

In this sacred time, this experience of transcendence, we enter a domain where we are beyond space and time and have now entered a liminal world. This is the world of archetypes, of archetypal fields where, beyond space-time constraints and behind the limitations of material form, we sense the formless and experience the world of the archaic soul. Be it the midlife journey so often beautifully written about by James Hollis or the harvest of the older years, we enter a preformed realm of the psyche, whose rites of passage and initiatives suddenly grip us and shape our life.⁵

2 C. G. Jung, “Letter to Pere Lachat,” in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 18, ed. and trans. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), § 1536.

3 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 4.

4 *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

5 James Hollis, *The Middle Passage From Misery to Meaning in Midlife* (Toronto: Inner

As we age, we are compelled to learn profound lessons about life, one of which is to understand what is within our reach while having the courage to accept what is no longer graspable. Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* poignantly captures the pull on the aging man (and woman) to linger in the glow of past accomplishments. Here, to linger means to lose the transcendence, because rather than facing the necessary surrender to this greater domain, one desperately clings to the past, to the known. Experiences of transcendence come to us through experiences of wonder, of awe, and allow us to see and feel parts of life and psyche that are excluded when we are tied to the Procrustean bed of conventionality.

For Jungians, aging means approaching a threshold. This threshold is perhaps even more meaningful than others we have traversed earlier in life because we now come face to face with the reality of life as we know it. This sense of finality may be the wake-up call needed to rouse us from the slumber of ambivalence, of complacency, and from a weddedness to outdated and nongenerative complexes. What is needed more than anything else is a turning toward interiority and toward the Self which, for many of us, has been excluded and minimized in our lives.

Now that we are coupled with a greater sense of the meaning and significance of our own life and destiny, we can more fully meet the challenges of time and potential disability with a new, internal spirituality and an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning that rests on that spiritual understanding. No longer are there external standards to meet, but only the values, morality, and ethics of the Self which now beckon. Questions about a new direction for personal meaning, of our values for the second half of life, of spirituality and its meaning for us now, are the focus of our thoughts, and so much of this hangs on the understanding and coming to terms with the lived life and the options for moving forward. The task is to shift from the perspective of society (the first half of life) to a more internal orientation toward life and toward one's deepest Self.

We tend to enter our later years still responsive to those mandates that carried us to this point. There is always the need for more money, more opportunities, and more days to do more things. How do we begin to work with these interior voices and begin to silence those attitudes that linger on in outdated discussions about career, finances, success, and status? So, too, we have to acknowledge that our tendency is to brush aside any irritant slowing us down from these consciously derived, desired goals. A dramatic change is called for, and here we begin to turn toward the Self.

City Books, 1993); James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005); James Hollis, *What Matters Most* (New York: Gotham Books, 2009).

The Union of Opposites

Life and death may be the ultimate image of the union of opposites. An example of this union is Philemon and Baucis, whose deepest prayer was an expression of their love and desire to never be separated, even in death. With inspiration and expiration comes a profound understanding of an underlying order of life that no one escapes. Marie-Louise von Franz, echoing the words of the great sages and dreamers who came before us, reminds us that to truly know life, we must know death.⁶ It may seem a bit counterintuitive, but it portends a life which, if embraced, is truly spiritual.

Consider those moments of greatest trust and love in one's own life. When my wife and I brought our newborn child home for the first time and placed him in the bassinet next to our bed, I would watch with awe, fascination, and terror the rapid beating of his little heart. This was my child, and with each beat of his heart emerged yet another dream of our life together. So, too, with each of these rapid heartbeats, I dreaded what could be his final heartbeat, fearing that this tiny heart, which was now preparing for the life it would provide, would just eventually beat so fast that it would either fly out of his body or stop from exhaustion. I was terrified; he whom I loved with all my heart, who entered my life ever so quickly, could just as quickly vanish. This was the terror I lived with until a friend and colleague, Dr. Manisha Roy, explained that these fears expressed a profound archetypal reality which spoke to the fact that now I was experiencing a love unlike any other; that it was this hunger for life, for love, for my son, that was inexorably connected to dread and losing what I most loved. Hers was a wisdom of the ages, an understanding about the psyche and soul. These eternal twins of life and death remain united, forever. Each demands their price and their due and will not be denied. The imperative to understand and live with these twins of life and death is especially demanding as we age. Here, the cost of denial, of stagnation, will at some point exact its toll from the individual.

To fully enter the realm of the harvest of life, we need to become a time traveler and make the daily journey between past, present, and future with the clarity brought on by the new morning. When the air is clear, we can only hope that our ability to reckon with what has been while making plans for a rich and meaningful current and future life may occur. Here, the twins of past and future find a third, an archetypal triptych, which offers the promise of a wonderfully rich life. So how do we make the best of a life, become who we are meant to be, and develop that new spiritual direction and meaning for the second half of life? This is a perennial, archetypal question. And when we deal with spiritual questions, we need spiritual insights to inform us about what humanity has learned of this life process.

⁶ M.-L. von Franz, *Puer Aeternus* (Salem, MA: Sigo Press, 1970), 161.

Speaking of this shift in awareness from the temporal to the eternal, Jung at age eighty-two wrote that:

old age is only half as funny as one is inclined to think. It is at all events the gradual breaking down of the bodily machine, with which foolishness identifies as ourselves. It is indeed a major effort—the magnum opus in fact—to escape in time from the narrowness of its embrace and to liberate our mind to the vision of the immensity of the world, of which we form an infinitesimal part. In spite of the enormity of our scientific cognition we are yet hardly at the bottom of the ladder, but we are at least so far that we are able to recognize the smallness of our knowledge. The older I grow the more impressed I am by the frailty and uncertainty of our understanding, and all the more I take recourse to the simplicity of immediate experience so as not to lose contact with the essentials, namely the dominants which rule human existence throughout the millenniums.⁷

With aging comes the implicit need to see our life for what it is, for what it could have been, and for what we have done with the gifts and challenges we have been given. Now we must seek an honest and meaningful reflection on these questions from the waters of eternity. With reflections come the memories of this life and, so too, from memories of what has been, begins the shaping of a future. Our hope is that this future will be shaped by all that has come before, and yet will take us to a new vista, to a new opportunity, to a way of life that brings us into contact with Self and soul.

As we age, memories become more frequent guests in our home. We may see these guests showing up as the aging man and woman sitting by the window looking at family pictures. It is this absence of what once was, of the people, of the family dinners, of a future that is now but a shadow, that is comforted even just a bit by these memories. But the images and pictures which often accompany these memories are never of the future. Perhaps the absence of precedents allows for this future, allows us the freedom to create and to engage in life in new ways. Our hope is that this future is never a static iteration of what had come before, but a creative response to what is still possible.

Clearly there is so much more to this world of memories than we have ever considered. More than a system of storage and retrieval, they have the ability to transport us to another domain, where the emotions are as fresh and stirring as the original event. And from these memories we often see the contours of a future. Memories and experiences of childhood influence

⁷ C. G. Jung, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 1951–1961 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 580.

our choice of career, marriage partner, and our way of being in the world. Memory works by collapsing the space-time continuum, showing us that past, present, and future are all embedded within a moment, a singular moment, perhaps of a life that is seeking to move toward a destined goal.

From the worlds of biology and physics, we find proof of a future shaping the current life. In biology we have only to think of the concept and experience of entelechy, where the future shape of a plant is already present in the beginning stages of growth. That delicate little seed which turns into a slender seedling is guided by the form it will eventually assume. So, too, in physics we find examples of a preformed state shaping current behavior in the direction of what is to come. Whitmont address this when speaking about the chemical element cobalt (Co), which is often used for pigmentation in jewelry. He explains that:

cobalt is aware of a future different from its past and it uses this fact in making a spatial distinction between its right and left. It is capable of making a choice between the two directions In preferring left to right, the cobalt is proving that there exists a . . . well-defined future state. The physicists do not like to admit in forming their description of nature such a “wave of the future” in the direction of the present, for this would amount to saying that a future state can in some way intervene to guide phenomena situated in the present But nevertheless, in spite of this independence, each element coordinates its activities perfectly with those of others, in such a way that the overall effect is harmonious and permits convergence toward an advanced state.⁸

Jung also sees the future as a dynamic shaper of current life and adds that:

the symbols of wholeness frequently occur at the beginning of the individuation process This observation says much for the a priori existence of potential wholeness . . . it looks, paradoxically enough, as if something already existent were being put together.⁹

Adolf Portmann, the Swiss zoologist and a longtime collaborator of Jung, brought the concept of self-representation into the field of biology when stressing that each and every organism has the essential mandate to express what is unique about it. Diverging from the current biological

⁸ E. C. Whitmont, “The Destiny Concept in Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice* 9, no. 1 (2007): 8–9.

⁹ C. G. Jung, “The Psychology of the Child Archetype,” in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 9/1, ed. and trans. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), § 278.

thinking of his time, which viewed form, design, and ornamentation as strengthening one's survival advantage, Portmann spoke of these as allowing the soul and innate nature of the flower or animal to be expressed. Realizing that the future state of what was to be was already existing as a preformed potentiality, Portmann also stressed the importance of the future in shaping the current form of a life.¹⁰

It was Jung who spoke of "the secret workshop of the daemon which shapes our fate" and who encourages us to look toward this future as potentiality waiting in abeyance for us to move into it.¹¹

Memory Weaves Our Past, Present, and Future into the Tapestry of a Life

Memories can feed our illusions as well as provide a meaningful and truthful commentary on the life we are living. It is our task, perhaps one of the greatest existential and archetypal challenges of our life, to navigate the waters between Scylla and Charybdis while not being lured by the songs of the sirens into an illusion about our life. And then there are moments of utter clarity when we may finally be able to respond to what may be the most profound and vexing question of our life, namely, have we made this a good life? Can we say that the old immigrant couple who raised eleven children and was loved by family and friends lived a good life? And what of the men or women who leave their spouses and children to pursue what they believe is their greatest dream? Ultimately, the final arbiter of truth is one's own psyche and soul, and it is this profound reflection which quiets all of our opinions and beliefs about the life we have lived.

A ninety-seven-year-old relative is struggling with near crippling pain yet wants to go on living. Each day, he religiously does his prescribed exercises, undergoes many painful medical procedures, and despite it all his hope allows him to endure and move into an uncertain, yet desired future. It is his desire for life that protects that oh-so-fragile flicker of light coming from that one remaining candle that maintains a vigilance against the breath of extinction, protecting this life, this light against the wind, against anything that will bring this final darkness. There is something he still lives for. Is it a hope, a dream of redemption, wanting to make up for all the earlier transgressions? Perhaps a giant resounding yes to all of these and, most important, a yes to life itself. There must be some life force,

10 Adolf Portmann, *New Paths in Biology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); and A. Portmann, "Metamorphosis in Animals: The Transformation of the Individual and the Type," in *Man and Transformation: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

11 Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," § 278.

some reason for him to endure, some gossamer dream that provides this strength to go on amid all the pain, memories, doubts, and hopes. This is all part of this grand mystery of life.

The Old Man and the Sea

Self Will Not Tread Where Ego Presides

Clearly there are many wonderful things about the aging process, one of which is the allowing for a life held in abeyance for far too long to now be freed and allowed expression. With aging come concessions, reminding us of those activities that were once part of our life and now are slowly drifting into the realm of memories. To these we can accede gracefully or cling to outdated memories of prior strengths. This issue is poignantly described in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, which represents humanity's quintessential journey into the world of aging and is a stirring telling of our relationship to those contents of the depths which we can and cannot bring to fruition.

The story focuses on Santiago, an old fisherman, who for the past eighty-four days has not been able to catch fish. The symbol of the fisherman is well-known from the Bible, myths, and fairytales. It represents one whose work is to access contents from the depths. We too become fisherman as we seek to make contact with those contents of the Self and psyche residing in the deep unconscious. We drop our lines into the sea, hoping to make connection with that which will move us even further into the life we are meant to live. Our hope is to find where these fish are and then bring them to the table. It is here that the coniunctio between the conscious and the deep unconscious occurs, reminding us of the meal humanity has sought and participated in since the beginning of time, involving the assimilation of these archetypal spiritual aspects of life.

The villagers believe that Santiago is too old to fish. His nets are bare and Manolin, the young boy who had often accompanied Santiago, is now forbidden by his parents to fish with this old man. It was Hemingway's genius to name this boy Manolin, the diminutive of Manuel and Spanish for the Redeemer, to reflect that even though the boy (the redeemer) could no longer physically journey with the old man, he continued to love and care for him despite his challenges as an aging fisherman.

While Santiago's body is ravaged by age and his heart aches over these disappointments, he is not ready to give up and he decides to journey even farther out to sea in search of the great fish. Fishing alone in these remote areas, he feels a tug unlike any other on his line. This fish is different from all the others, and it refuses his attempts to pull it to the surface. Santiago realizes that he has hooked something great.

For days and nights, this great fish pulls Santiago and his little boat even farther out into the sea. This time, it was the fisherman who was at the whim of this magnificent fish, which, if it chose to, could end this battle in a moment. Santiago holds fast to this fish, to the dream, to his pride, and to the promise of regaining his acclaim as a great man, worthy of being called a fisherman. However, the sheer size and power of this fish pushes the old man's hopes and illusions to their limits.

Through hours of struggle and feeling the toll of working such a great fish, Santiago grows to deeply respect and, perhaps, even to love this fish. Despite the cuts on his hands from the fishing rope and the pressure of the line ripping into his back, he holds on. Neither opponent will give up. In this battle to the death, somehow each knows that there can be only one victor, and neither wants to concede. This was the ego's struggle with and relationship to content from the depth which may have just been beyond the old man's capacity to comprehend or "reel in." Perhaps this fish, this aspect of Self, needs to be set free, as its sheer size and strength requires more of the fisherman than he is able to handle at this point in his life.

After days of struggle, the fish gives up its epic battle. When the fish comes to the surface, the old man marvels at not only the size, but also the utter beauty of this great creature. Realizing that while catching this fish was a tremendous achievement, his work as a fisherman is only half completed, as he still has to bring this great fish to port. Now tied to the side of the boat, the fish, this aspect of Self, begins to pour its blood into the sea. A carpet of brilliant crimson, which once served as the life force for this fish, is now its final insult as it becomes an invitation to all the denizens of the depths to feed.

Santiago is indeed a wise old fisherman and knows what is to come. Knowing that he would have only to await the arrival of the great predators of the sea, Santiago grows reflective, and his once victorious mood quickly changes to a sad lament. We now hear his soul, that voice of evening truth, forcing him to admit that "you did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food . . . You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after."¹² Santiago then concedes that he cannot talk to the fish anymore because the fish has been ruined, and in this touching story, we hear him say, "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both."¹³

The sharks, those aspects of the psyche that strive to keep unconscious contents within the domain of the unconscious, found an easy path to their prey. The once and magnificent fish, and this once and great fisherman, were now coupled in an embrace of helpless resignation, knowing that

12 Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 13.

13 Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 115.

there was nothing they could do to protect and preserve what was most precious. This was a painful moment of truth.

Santiago and the fish, or the fish and Santiago, finally return to port. While his hope had been to sell the meat from this treasured catch, the sharks left him with only the skeletal remains of this fish. No fish to sell, no food to eat, he is left with the reality that while he had successfully fought and landed this great fish, there is now nothing for him or the villagers to do but admire the remains. His work as a great fisherman, as an individual who worked in the depths, was yet again frustrated. But this has been different from all the other days and other experiences. Like so many of us in the aging process, he now has to admit that there are aspects of life and psyche that we know of, can see and even touch, but cannot bring to fruition. Perhaps this is one of our greatest challenges. To walk in the brilliantly clear light of these autumn days knowing what could have been, and what exists as potential, while realizing that there is a piece of life, an aspect of psyche, that will not be ours. Kaufmann speaks to this when writing that “the Greeks . . . knew that the essence of being human is living with limitations. Which only the Gods and sometimes not even they, could overcome. We have to bow to certain inevitability.”¹⁴

Santiago now realizes this only too well. He returns to his home, feeling an exhaustion he has never before known so fully and takes a much needed rest. However, his young friend Manolin, who had been terribly worried about the old man since he left the village days before, now sees his tiny boat in the port and runs to see him. He loves Santiago and allows him to rest and prepares a meal to nurture his body and soul once he awakes. Manolin, the young boy, the redeemer, never stopped loving the old man and never cared if he brought this great fish to the village. His is a love reserved for those sacred moments and relationships. It is the love of a parent for his or her child, for a spouse, for a god, for a redeemer who never fails to reach out a hand to us, reminding us that despite it all, we are loved and that redemption remains more than a possibility. Perhaps if Hemingway had understood this aspect of aging and redemption, he would not have taken his own life and could have continued to see himself as a great man, even with the limitations of aging and recognizing that certain aspects of life would not be brought to fruition. Perhaps it was this challenge facing Santiago that proved too much for Hemingway, and for many of us going through this process, to accept.

14 Yoram Kaufmann, *The Way of the Image: The Orientational Approach to the Psyche* (New York: Zahav Books, 2009), 21.

Aged Wine or Simply a Wine That Is Old?

While we may want to see aging men and women as wise, this is often far from the truth. As in the case with wine, some age gracefully and deliciously like a robust and full-bodied Barolo, while others simply become foul tasting. How has this old man of the sea fared in the process? Contrast his actions with the appearance of the wise old man or wise old woman in myths and fairy tales. Jung addresses this issue:

The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea—in other words, a spiritual function . . . of some kind can extricate him Often the old man induces self-reflection and mobilizing the moral forces.¹⁵

Jung then adds that “the intervention of the old man—the spontaneous objectivation of the archetype—would seem to be equally indispensable, since the conscious will by itself is hardly ever capable of uniting the personality to the point where it acquires the extraordinary power to succeed.”¹⁶

With the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1951, Hemingway’s brilliance as a writer was once again recognized, and he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. However, amid this success, something deeply troubling remained in his heart and soul. This book was his last piece of fiction to be published; in 1961, Hemingway took his own life. His battle with greatness, with fatigue, with obscurity, and with life came to an end. Santiago, like Hemingway, returned home from his epic battle depleted and with the awareness of having participated in the loss of something truly magnificent.

Even before knowing the timing of Hemingway’s death, I sensed that this story was a foreshadowing of his eventual suicide. Through this story, he tells what it must be like to connect to such powerful content within the depths and the consequences of not being able to know one’s limitations. Santiago/Hemingway needed to set this creature free, to allow it to live once again as a vital and dynamic aspect of Self and psyche. But he could not let go and admit that this process was bigger than him and that he was unable to bring these contents to fruition as a conscious aspect of his life and destiny. Some aspect of potential magnificence was now wasted and, in some intrinsic way, he knew it.

15 Jung, “The Psychology of the Child Archetype,” § 404.

16 Ibid.

This is as much humanity's story as it is Hemingway's, because it speaks to our individual and collective struggles with aging, letting go, and sacrificing breadth for depth. The call to be Santiago is present at every corner and experienced as we desperately cling to outdated behaviors and attitudes. As sanctity and spirituality are eclipsed by the promise of temporal gains, we share in Santiago's long and fruitless journey home.

No one wants to see the decline in his or her ability to function in the world. However, this too is a universal reality and inevitability. So what is to be done to make life as meaningful and rich as possible as we age? Perhaps we can ask the seventy-three-year-old woman what it was like to dream of finding so many dried up and ruined tomatoes still on the vine. Or we can ask the newly retired professional what he now sees as the life unfolding within and around him when he dreams of having found a cache of wood that has been curing for more than fifty years underwater and is now ready to be brought to the surface.

This gift of a life may be likened to a richly grained piece of wood. Left untreated and unattended, the beauty of its grains and depth of color remains in potentia, unseen by all around it. However, it is the working with the wood, of sanding it with ever finer grades of material and then using the finest of oils, that allows for its innate nature and beauty to emerge. What was existing as potential has now burst forth with a vibrancy of texture and depth. So, too, does a life well lived bring out the richness of one's nature and soul, and this vibrancy and twinkle in the eye is an expression of a life lived in accord with one's destiny.

Somehow this journey of life and aging all boils down to a relationship to Eros and destiny. The creative muse and daemon allows us to cultivate a rich and deeply satisfying career. Here, our talents find a place to flourish and contribute to our personal development and to the collective. With Eros, we come to know something of love and tenderness, and one hopes and prays that as the sun sets ever earlier in the evening sky, we have truly known love. In its absence, one struggles, as did Tantalus, seeing that which is most desired remaining just out of reach. So, too, without the kiss of Eros, one joins in Orpheus's lamentation over the loss of his beloved Eurydice.

With a meaningful relationship to psyche, Eros, and the muses, one approaches the aging process with a sense of purpose, peace, hope, and acceptance. With an awareness that life is more than good enough, we can begin to accept all that comes with aging. While not inviting infirmity or death to the table, we understand that one day, and hopefully many days from now, this journey will come to an end.

We all falter, yet there is a benevolence within the psyche that continues to welcome home its prodigal sons and daughters. There is an honesty and compassion for a life that has gone astray, and often we are given yet

another opportunity to do some of what we were meant to do and have some of what we were meant to have in this life. Then, if there is grace, we will return home to welcoming arms and embraces. There is a sense of urgency and permanence to this homecoming, because this time, we are facing the final act of going home. We nod to the elders, those wise ones who came before us, who realized something profound not just about life but also how one could live a spiritual life. If we put our ear to the ground and listen carefully, we may just hear Rabbi Heschel's gentle homage to spirit when he wrote: "Never once in my life did I ask God for success or wisdom of power or fame. I asked for wonder and he gave it to me."¹⁷

Perhaps this is the spiritual attitude we need in order to make this journey into the later stages of life and, ultimately, an attitude that is needed to take us home.

¹⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder*, ed. Samuel Dresner (New York: Crossroad, 2001), ii.