



Welcome to the Third Age!

Third Age can be a time of both opportunity and challenge for us. It is a time that usually begins around our mid-40s to mid-50s and for you as for so many people of our era and culture it might be signaled by unease, change (or a desire for change) and a search for new or greater meaning and purpose. This is especially true in times of great social, economic, and environmental challenge, when we look to the second half of our lives to give meaning to the whole of our lives. For those of us who enjoy an extended life expectancy—a “30 year bonus” so to speak from those living in the last centuries—it can be a time of new growth and vitality, a time that challenges us to enter into a process of transformation leading to renewal and greater fulfillment. Our *opportunity* lies in choosing to see our lives as full of possibility, as a process of continual and surprising unfolding and regeneration. Furthermore, we have the opportunity and “response-ability” to contribute our gifts, talents, experience and wisdom to address the significant needs that our society and our world are experiencing. Our *challenge* lies in making the intentional choices that will help us co-create, along with the people and circumstances of our life situation, the kind of life we want to claim for ourselves in the second half of life.

As we journey on in this time of life maturity we do so knowing that we do not have to “throw in the towel” and merely survive the aging process but that we can *THRIVE* within it. Like aging wine or ripening fruit, we grow into the fullness of life’s promise for us. Therefore this Grower’s Guide on Thriving in Third Age gives you the opportunity to think of this next new period of your life in a creative way: to ask questions of yourself, to build on your past, to envision your future, to live more fully in the present and to talk with your family and friends about *what it is you want to be and do with this time in your life!* We’ve been given a gift of these added middle years. How will we use it?

First of all, it’s important to get a brief rundown on what we mean by the Four Ages of Life. Each of these “ages” is roughly about 20-25 years in a given life span and has the particular focus outlined here. For those with less longevity the Ages may be greatly compressed but usually each stage is included in some fashion.



First Age: The Age of Preparation. We develop the skills and knowledge needed to support the maturity and independence that Second Age requires. This is a time of growth and development within our family and community of origin. It contains periods of formalized learning and skills practice and time for discerning what we are attracted to in terms of work/career. We may feel an initial sense of “vocation” or calling to a particular life style or type of work.

Second Age: The Age of Achievement. We strive to earn a place in the adult world of responsibility and typically seek to enjoy the security, status and other external markers of our achievements, however modest. This is a time of establishing our own family and the social interests, activities and ties that form community. Through our varied accomplishments we gain a sense of and recognition for “success” in our chosen realm.

Third Age: The Age of Fulfillment. With our roles in our family changing, and through a shifting career or work focus, we can look more deeply within ourselves to find what gives us a sense of meaning, purpose and passion. This is a time when from the vantage point of long and varied experience we can take particular note of what is really important to us and how we want to “spend” the time remaining to us. During this period we can revisit/reclaim some of what we neglected along the way, clear out unwanted baggage, heal old wounds and see where we want to grow to become more balanced and whole—both as individuals and as integral parts of the immense web of life. As we do this work, involving mind, heart, body and spirit, we are able to make more intentional choices about how we want to live and how we want to contribute in order to make a difference as we mature into the fullness of our potential.

Fourth Age: The Age of Completion. This last stage of Earthly life allows us to review and revel in the fullness of our lives with “no regrets” and to prepare for whatever we believe comes next. This time of ever more heightened awareness and growing acceptance of our mortality can lead us to the peace and joy of surrender. All of our life is in one sense a preparation and prelude for this stage. Therefore growing to our full potential



and living fully in Third Age allows us to enter even more completely and wholly into this stage of completion.

Even though we have periods of preparation, achievement, fulfillment and completion at many times throughout our lives, each of the four ages is distinguished by its distinct overall focus. Third Age, then, as a major life phase actually begins whenever the opinions and achievements of the external world become less important to you and you begin to ask questions about what it all means, what really matters to you and how you want to be more mindful and intentional about how you choose to live and work. It is a major shift for many of us from living according to the expectations of others to living even more authentically, from the inside out.

So, if this is where you are now, what are you going to do with this opportunity and challenge? Can you muster up the courage to ask yourself questions like “What are my passions and how can I let them lead me into my future?” “How might I change my work into doing what I enjoy with people I care about?” “Where can I make my most meaningful contribution?” “How can I celebrate and enjoy living?” and “How can I make the most of my Third Age so that my Fourth Age is truly a completion of my fulfilling and meaningful life?” To paraphrase Thoreau, an examined life is a life worth living. And choices that arise from that exploration can lead us to much more richness than surviving each day. This can bring us into that field or garden where we thrive in accordance with our true nature.