

The transition into adult maturity, which includes for many a move from the outer to the inner life and a shift from unconscious existence to conscious living, can be uncomfortable and fraught with personal upheaval. In many Americans, it manifests as a life crisis. But in some cultures, it's not a *crisis*; it's a natural progression in human development.

"In ancient traditions, there was always an elder or healer who understood and carried you through the transition and supported you," said Herb Stevenson, a Cleveland-based executive development consultant and creator of the Medicine of Men male initiation program. "We don't have that anymore. Western society decided they didn't want to do anything that was similar to what the indigenous cultures did in the past. Christianity moved the elders into a position of being useless. The elders used to be the ones that helped those behind them through the transition."

Stevenson recounts a client who turned 70 and was "waiting to die. I told him this was the greatest waste of 70 years and that he should be sharing his story and experiences with his grandchildren, giving them knowledge and guidance. It changed his life" giving him enthusiasm and purpose.

All the indigenous cultures still use rituals and ceremonies to carry a person from one side to another, Stevenson said. "To me, that's what midlife is: an initiation into mature adulthood." To better understand what's going on at midlife, Stevenson encourages people to do some research, especially if they are in the throws of a life crisis. Simply typing in the words "midlife crisis" in a search engine on the Internet yields a wealth of books and articles on the topic.

Dr. Ashok Bedi, M.D., a psychiatrist, Jungian analyst and author of the book, *Path to the Soul*, believes the transition is so awkward because there is not a structure in our society to guide people through this initiation or that allows the space for people to transform. He offers some suggestions on how to address this:

- Create a "community of elders" in the corporate world. "Professionals need to be allowed to move out of being competitive with their younger colleagues and move into a mentoring role," he stated. "There's no permission in the corporate world to step aside from the competition and be part of a community of elders. We need to provide infrastructure for that space."
- Provide outlets for spiritual retreats or "spiritual sabbaticals." "The [life crisis] needs to be seen as a normal process, a move to the spiritual aspect," Bedi said. "We don't have ashrams here where it's acceptable for people to go hang out for a year or two and still maintain some modicum of life." Bedi pointed out that some people use therapy as their spiritual sabbatical.
- Train a new breed of professionals to appropriately guide people through the transition. "We need a hybrid of minister, medical doctor, psychiatrist, shaman, healer that comes together in a mandala of expertise and mindset to attend to these issues" he explained.
- Make inner work a priority. "Seekers have the responsibility to make space and time for this work," Bedi said.

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