

Chapter 1: It's a Wholesale Change

Life is a process. We are a process. The universe is a process.

~Anne Wilson Schaef

At somewhere around the age of 45, give or take a few years, many women find themselves in crisis. They feel lost, exhausted, frustrated, overworked, bored, depressed, in pain, isolated and shut down. Their work no longer holds the motivation or creativity it once had; their relationships feel strained, oppressive or just plain dead. They've forgotten what passionate sex felt like, and, quite frankly, feel it would take too much effort to get it back to even bother. It's been so long since they had a great night's sleep that they don't even remember what it felt like to wake up feeling rested and excited to start the day. They long for a different life experience, but have no idea how to get out of where they are or create something different. And they feel that deep down somewhere inside them, there has to be something more fulfilling—some more meaningful role to play in life—but they are completely at a loss nor have the energy to figure out how to discover that.

The process of the midlife rebirth for a woman is truly a change at the cellular level. Every aspect of her being is undergoing a metamorphosis. Driven by her hormones and biological clock, her body is transforming right before her eyes.

Probably the most obvious are the physical changes. With the changes in a woman's hormone balances, periods can become irregular, coming more or less frequently and in greater or lesser intensity. The skin starts to lose its firmness; wrinkles begin to appear. Hair begins to grey and can also start to thin. As the hormones go through their shifts, brain chemistry changes. This can lead to being more irritable, anxious and emotionally volatile as a woman is less tolerant of stress and frustrating situations that she feels powerless to change. Sleep becomes more easily disrupted, making it challenging to get a deep, restful night's sleep, further aggravating emotional and mental stability. Energy levels fluctuate, and it can take longer to recover from long workdays or hard exercise. Hot flashes can start erupting out of nowhere—those experiences of rising inner warmth that bring almost a suffocating prickly heat from within bringing extreme perspiration.

My own hot flash experiences were of furnace-level eruptions that coursed through my body in just seconds, leaving me with perspiration dripping down my temples at, of course, the most inopportune moments! There were nights where I would wake literally in a pool of my own sweat necessitating changing pajamas and sometimes even the sheets.

Metabolism changes frequently lead to weight accumulating in new and undesirable places, typically around the belly. It can be harder to stay fit and keep the pounds off. Digestive fires start to wane, and foods that were tolerable become hard to metabolize. Even alcohol tolerance diminishes and many find they can't handle it as before.

As an endurance athlete, I noticed that I needed more time to recover from hard workouts as well as injuries. I wasn't bouncing back as I had even just a few years earlier, and constant fatigue settled in during my training seasons. It didn't help that my I developed hypothyroid, which is also common for women during the midlife passage.

Hormonally induced emotional instability creates tenderness and fragility. It doesn't take much to set off raging frustration at someone cutting in front on the freeway or when things go wrong or progress feels blocked. I recall being shocked at the instantaneous rage that burst forth when something didn't go my way, leading me to on more than one occasion throwing my cell phone across the room.

Feeling tense, short, frazzled and chronically stressed adds to frustration over what used to be rare overwhelming mood swings. One day there is excitement about life and the next hopelessness sets in. Moods seem to change at the slightest trigger. Sex drive wanes, and the desire to be with others, even dear friends can diminish.

Mental abilities become challenged, and memory seems to take a vacation without notice. Seemingly overnight, names, experiences, commitments are a struggle to recall. Without warning, remembering intentions, threads of thinking vanish, leaving confusion, blank minds and sometimes embarrassing situations. Frequently not remembering from one room to the next the intention for entering the new room starts occurring; losing or misplacing keys, glasses, handbags or even children can become common.

In addition to the symptoms mentioned, my specific challenge was a reduced ability to think clearly or solve problems that were effortless before. I would, on occasion, be in the middle of a sentence and forget the point I was trying to make.

These are the most common symptoms, and you may be experiencing some or all of these, to a greater or lesser degree. Just know that it is all part of the midlife rebirthing process. You are not alone or crazy, even though I know you can feel that way. I did until I started reaching out for help.

Spiritually a deeper calling emerges as you search for more meaning to your life. Deep questions rise to your awareness about the meaning of your life. Is this all there is? What is my life about now that my children are leaving? Who am I now? What has been the value of my life? Why I am not fulfilled with all that I have achieved? Why am I so restless and uninspired? How did I get here?

Dreams from your youth return, and a longing to revisit those unfulfilled visions of what your life could have been surface could add to your confusion and lack of fulfillment in the current expression of your life. You can begin to question your beliefs wondering if they are still valid. Life just doesn't feel like it fits any longer, leaving you feeling isolated and even like a foreigner in your own life.

I was only mildly aware that a bunch of things were happening to me. I was not allowing them to arise in my consciousness even though they were happening in my body. In reality I was experiencing pretty significant symptoms over a short period of time. I was having semi-regular periods where my skin would become really, really itchy but there was no rash and there was no apparent reason for this. I was having increased difficulty sleeping, and I was getting extremely more irritable than I have ever been in my life. I was becoming more emotionally volatile and finding it much more difficult to remain calm. I was having phenomenal disagreements with people that I had worked with for many years, which were also contributing to my sense of being out of sorts.

All of a sudden, I hit a day where all of these things came crashing to the surface together. I had a sort of massive episode of panic like I couldn't stand to live in my own life anymore. And luckily, I've had episodes of panic before so I recognized what was happening as a panic attack, and I took myself to a doctor. However, the doctor didn't really know what to do with me except give me an anti-depressant.

Fortunately a very close friend in my life actually printed out a list of 35 symptoms that a woman might be experiencing when in menopause or perimenopause. She had checked off all the ones that she thought I was experiencing. When I looked down at the list I could identify that I had experienced 30 out of the 35 symptoms in the past 3 months. It was really completely eye-opening to me. – Claudia (CEO)



At this powerful and challenging time you can find yourself being drawn inward, wanting—craving—to step out of your life and take time out. This is the natural process of the midlife transition. In our culture, there is little support for the midlife passage, particularly for driven women in high-level positions with a lot of responsibility and regularly have stressful and over-packed days. You are typically striving for some sense of balance, but when midlife hits you can find it impossible to achieve.

As a boomer woman, you are facing a unique time in the history of women. A career woman, and in most cases also a mother, you are entering midlife with more education, more economic wealth, more roles, and as a result more responsibilities than your mother. This creates a special challenge as the natural pull

to move inward and take the time to answer the deeper questions about meaning and fulfillment are met with the realities of a demanding outer life.

This conflict amplifies the challenge of the midlife passage, when the soul—the deeper essence that transcends the ego personality—is calling you to reexamine your life and to “individuate”—your soul’s journey to live a life of meaning and individual expression. While the midlife passage has a huge physiological component, the deeper transition at midlife is the psychological and spiritual awakening that your soul is calling you to embrace—to release your ego’s limiting beliefs and unconscious conditioning and recreate it into a more fulfilling expression of your soul’s unique potential.

It is a time when, as the Jungian analyst James Hollis says in his book *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, the ego personality is finally developed enough to endure the unraveling and deconstructing of the early programming and conditioning that is buried in the unconscious. It is an opportunity for you to finally free yourself from the chronic unfulfilling behaviors, emotional wounds, and limiting and negative beliefs that keep you from being the fully empowered, compassionate and soul-directed wise woman that you are meant to be.

Midlife brings the opportunity with all the shifts unfolding to look at who you have been, harvest the wisdom of your life, release that which no longer serves you and consciously recreate who you wish to be going forward into your wise woman years. It is truly a rebirthing process on all levels if you choose to embark consciously on the journey.

You can liken it to cleaning out your closet. You take everything out, spread it on the floor, carefully choose what you want to put back and then discard the rest. The deconstruction of your old life, the one that no longer holds fulfillment, is a similar process. You pull out all that you've been, review each piece, explore whether it still has life for your journey ahead. If it does, you keep it or revise it. If it doesn't, you let it go. That could mean the end of a career, a relationship or a role you've been playing that is no longer fulfilling. Sometimes it means you'll revise or take a different direction in your career or relationship. For example, if you have children who are leaving or have left for college your role as mother will need to change.

This journey is not for the faint of heart, but the rewards are worth the journey. The possibility of living a meaningful, fulfilling and abundant life, truly free to speak your truth and choose how you want to live can fuel and provide the motivation to embark on the journey. The crisis of midlife can propel you to begin the journey to your true liberation. The discomfort, frustration, aggravation and boredom are the wakeup call from your soul to begin the journey—to undertake the deconstruction of who you have been and cultivate a new expression of who you are, one that is a true expression of your soul—the essence of your unique spirit.

It's a refocusing on what's really important—what really matters. Being defined by my job didn't do it. Work didn't do it. I had to find other ways—what made my heart sing, and my day feeling bright, sunny and happy even when it's raining outside. For me, I learned that it's helping people, helping animals. It's about helping whomever I come into contact with, and whatever I can do to foster that. – JinEd (CIO)

To do this work requires a “stepping out” of your outer life to create space for the transition.

In my own midlife transition, losing both my parents, the ending of my engagement, the loss of my contact for new clients and being diagnosed with Hashimoto's thyroiditis, all in eighteen months forced me to take time out. I couldn't function well, and I had no energy or emotional stability to sustain my consulting practice. I made a decision to take a several months off and only continue with a very few of my client commitments. It meant cutting way back, but I was ready. The pain and utter exhaustion I was experiencing was so strong that I was willing to do what it took to find relief. I just wanted out of my life so I could find joy again. My heart was deeply wounded from all the loss and the physiological changes. I knew I needed find a way to support my healing process.

During those months, I spent time in Nature as often as I could, hiking, camping and backpacking in the wilderness and mountains. Nature holds a special place in my heart and has always been a deeply nourishing environment for me. As my health improved, I began to take more rigorous trips, and I ended that year with a month-long visit to Nepal where I trekked the Annapurna Circuit, a 180 mile trek around the Annapurna massif, something I had longed to do for many years. It was a truly life-changing pilgrimage; I cried healing tears on many days as the massive mountains with their ancient Buddhist temples tucked high in that rarefied space infused their compassionate and healing energy into the deepest part of my being.



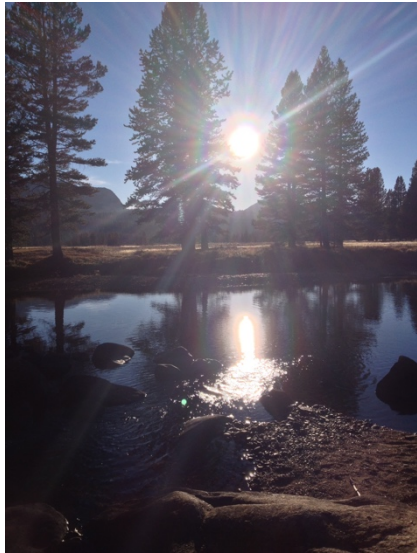
I worked with a holistic health professional to address my ailing thyroid and balance my hormones. Once my health and energy returned and I could reliably function again, I started working with a spiritual coach who supported me developing a clearer relationship with my soul so that I could identify its whisperings. I worked with psychological and energetic healers who helped me release many of the emotional wounds that had been plaguing my relationships.

I read books on menopause. I journaled. I meditated. I ate well. I exercised at a pace my body could sustain. I realized that I had to let go of how I had lived my life as the pace that I used to keep was not sustainable during this transition time.

I started working with my dreams, which were frightening as they were consistently filled with grizzly death! Fortunately, during my spiritual guidance training I was taught how to understand my dreams as metaphors and symbolic messages from my soul to provide guidance for my deeper journey. My spiritual coach was instrumental in helping me find the deeper meaning and guidance, which accurately identified where I was in the transition process and gave me direction on how to move through the challenging moments.

At some point in my healing and transition, I started to feel the energy to explore new avenues for work. I gave myself permission to try new things. I studied holistic nutrition, something I had always wanted to do, to better understand the role of nutrition in supporting my health during my midlife rebirth. I expanded my life coaching skills by attending training in relationship coaching. I added Tantric counselor training, a training program that focused on sexual healing and cultivating deep intimacy and ecstatic union in relationship, using love-making as a path of spiritual awakening.

The new avenues I explored expanded my sense of self and opened new aspects of my personality. Through each of the trainings I had the opportunity to review and recast parts of me that didn't fit with the new person that was slowly starting to take shape within me.



The journey of the midlife passage is truly an opportunity to rebirth yourself if you choose to make space and time for the inner transformation process to unfold. It is a wholesale change that happens at every level: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. If you choose to consciously embark on this mysterious and unpredictable journey of rebirthing you into a freer, more joyful, more meaningful expression of yourself, your wise women years will be rich and immensely rewarding. The good news is that it is an opportunity to change at every level and consciously rebirth yourself into the woman you have deeply longed to be and who you know in your soul you were meant to be.

As with any deep transformation, it is immensely helpful to have a support system. Creating a safe container for each of the four phases of this process is essential for your safe passage through your rebirth. A trusted friend, a wise woman that you admire who has already successfully navigated her rebirth, or an experienced professional is extremely important to support your journey. Just as an embryo needs a womb to grow into a baby before birthing, your soul and ego need an appropriate “womb” in which to transform, grow and rebirth.

The first step, as with any change, is recognizing where you are in the process. Awareness is the essential ingredient in any change process, and it is critical to successfully navigate your midlife rebirth. Fortunately, as outlined earlier in this chapter, there are many recognizable clues to where you are in the journey. Having the intention to recognize, understand and listen to what is happening in your being is the first step to embracing this challenging but incredibly exciting time of rebirth. As you read through this book, you will learn more about the process of midlife rebirth. You will understand each of the four phases of your rebirth, how to embrace them and how to successfully and powerfully navigate them. If you embrace and complete the suggested exercises and activities at the end of each chapter, you will find that you are moving through your rebirth process more consciously, confidently and compassionately.

If this chapter speaks to you, and you would like to understand further what is unfolding and how to support yourself through your midlife rebirth, I offer you a complimentary Soul Clarity session. In this one-hour session, I will help you get clear on:

- ◆ what is unfolding deep within you
- ◆ how your soul is speaking to you
- ◆ what you can do to support your rebirth process

Click on this link below to request your complimentary Soul Clarity session with me. I would be honored to speak with you!

www.nancylynnmonson.com/contact-us

Checklist: Are you in your midlife rebirth?

Check one of the boxes for each item below that most closely describes your experience over the past six months.

Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	
☐	☐	☐	I wake up feeling exhausted and have to will myself out of bed.
☐	☐	☐	I find it difficult to stay motivated by my work or other activities in my life.
☐	☐	☐	The things that used to bring me joy feel like they drag me down.
☐	☐	☐	When I get up to go do something, by the time I get there, I've forgotten what I was going to do.
☐	☐	☐	I have trouble maintaining mental focus and thinking things through.
☐	☐	☐	I "fly off the handle" easily and get upset over anything.
☐	☐	☐	I work out and eat well, but the weight just doesn't seem to come off like it used to.
☐	☐	☐	My periods are irregular, both in frequency and in intensity.
☐	☐	☐	I don't eat well and find myself using food (or alcohol) to comfort my pain.
☐	☐	☐	My life feels flat and I feel bored most of the time. My life is not exciting.
☐	☐	☐	I am not recovering from my workouts like I used to.
☐	☐	☐	I am experiencing hot flashes and night sweats.
☐	☐	☐	I find myself frustrated with my partner.
☐	☐	☐	I feel lost in my life and unclear about where I'm going.
☐	☐	☐	My work is not rewarding for me, and I am not sure how to make a change.
☐	☐	☐	I cry over the simplest things.
☐	☐	☐	I am having dreams of getting lost traveling, losing things or death.
☐	☐	☐	One minute I'm happy and then next I'm angry or sad, and I don't know why.
☐	☐	☐	I think there has to be more meaning in my life, but I don't know what it is.
☐	☐	☐	I don't sleep through the night, frequently waking up and struggling to return to sleep.
☐	☐	☐	My relationship(s) feels constraining and sometimes even suffocating.
☐	☐	☐	I yearn to be alone and dream of escaping to a cabin in the woods (or by the ocean).
☐	☐	☐	I find myself wanting to do things I longed to do as a teen or young adult.
☐	☐	☐	I don't feel like having sex.
☐	☐	☐	And when I do have sex, it is uncomfortable and/or unfulfilling.
☐	☐	☐	I feel restless with my life but don't know what to do about it.

TOTAL BOXES CHECKED

— — — Total up the number of the checked boxes in each column.

If you checked *most of the boxes in the left column*, you are likely in the midst your midlife transition. Keep reading! This book gives you a map to more consciously navigate your midlife rebirth.

If you checked about *equal numbers in the first two columns*, you are likely either beginning your transition or on the verge of entering. Keep reading! This book will help you make your coming rebirth more consciously and confidently.

If you checked *most of the boxes in the right column*, what motivated you to read this book?