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A COMPANION JOURNAL

FALLING UPWARD

A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life



RICHARD ROHR

Best-Selling Author of *The Naked Now*



FALLING UPWARD

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*Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves
of Life*

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FALLING UPWARD

A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life

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Richard Rohr

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INTRODUCTION

I can only assume that the continued and engaged response to *Falling Upward*, a book about the spirituality of the two halves of life, reveals that it has named something real. I now meet people who tell me they have read it three times and keep marking it up in new places. But why?

It is surely not a credit to my writing style or my wonderful opinion. Rather, I think the book reveals something with huge pastoral, practical, and therapeutic implications—for individuals, for education, for spiritual growth, and for understanding the development of groups and institutions through two distinct stages: *building our container and finding its contents*. Knowing the difference keeps us from beating our head against the wall and forever asking, “Why is my life not working?” It keeps us from trying to pound round pegs in square holes—or calling other people’s pegs wrong.

Others much wiser and broader than I will take this material to other levels of spirituality and psychology, but I think the foundational insight of two major tasks to life and growth—and a necessary crossover point—will hold. That insight is strongly validated by Scripture (law versus Spirit), cultural traditions



(education and initiation theories), and now validated by our newly found courage to trust our own experience, even though we might still be afraid to do so. We needed to say it forthrightly, to name what we now realize is obvious. We must start by building our life container, *but it must and will fall apart* (and that is good but also the rub!), and only then do we find the real contents and depths of our own lives.

Knowing about this dynamic also helps us to partly understand the endless conservative-liberal divide in most groups and how both are preserving essential values—though sometimes in the wrong sequence and for too long. You can be a very healthy conservative and also a very unhealthy one, or a very healthy liberal and a very unhealthy one. Both sides need critique and both sides need validation—and at the right time. *Seeming “liberalism” in the young and immature is usually an ego and spiritual disaster; seeming “conservatism” in old folks is often nothing but cognitive rigidity and love of their own status quo and privilege.*

Just as the great spiritual teachers have consistently taught, things are usually not what they seem; and what looks like one thing is often something else entirely. Wisdom lies in knowing the difference, and wisdom is often revealed only in time (Matthew 11:19), as Jesus says.



So more than anything else, I hope the original book, *Falling Upward*, and now its journal can be an exercise in spiritual discernment. This is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Paul briefly lists in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and is similar to the winnowing fork that is central to Odysseus's transformation, and that John the Baptist symbolically puts in the hands of Jesus (Matthew 3:12).

Much of religion has remained stuck and immature because it has not developed this gift of *winnowing* reality, which is what we mean by wisdom: separating essentials from nonessentials, and discerning with subtlety instead of just imposing one-size-fits-all laws. Religion, I am afraid, is notorious for this. Discernment (or *awakening*, as some might call it) is part of what Buddhism focuses on in its own Eight-Fold Path of *wisdom*: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. True "rightness" demands a lot more than just obeying laws and following local, recent customs, which tend to pad and affirm the mere ego self.

Paul was trying to get to the same truth when he dedicated two entire letters, Romans and Galatians, to illustrate the clear difference and necessary tension between law and grace, or tradition and Spirit.



One might say that these were Paul's *two most unfortunately unsuccessful letters* in terms of their impact in history. They could have defined Christianity in a truly revolutionary way, but they did not have that effect. Why? Because most Christians were never allowed to know or even were told about the second half of their own lives. They read Paul's letters from a first-half-of-life perspective, with its preoccupation with the concerns of the ego, or from an institutional, clerical perspective, which is finally a waste of time on the full journey.

The same was true for the response to Jesus' sixfold successive listing of, "*It was said . . . and now I say!*" (Matthew 5:21–43). Jesus was pointing to second-half-of-life truths in his Sermon on the Mount, but also summed up the necessary tension at the very beginning: "I have come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to complete them" (5:17), and in the next verse, "The law must not disappear until its very purpose is achieved" (5:18). But once its purpose is achieved and the spiritual values are internalized, law has served its function. You know the rules well enough to know how to break them properly, as the Dalai Lama succinctly puts it. Once the values are built in place, you can let go of the scaffolding.



We now know from schematas like Spiral Dynamics and Integral Theory that it is next to impossible for institutions *as institutions* to operate in a second-half-of-life mode. The best they can do is to protect individuals who are maturing inside of them, which should ideally be the role of wise church leadership: to protect and foster growth toward God even if it means that individuals move beyond or outside their own group. A rare phenomenon, it seems to me, but have you ever noticed how often Jesus tells people to “*Stand up, and go on your way*” (Luke 17:19)? He is into discipleship much more than group belonging. He is into journey more than mere stability. Few have had that kind of maturity or authority, because most of history up to now has been at the tribal and group level of consciousness.

The movement outward as part of maturity is no new pattern. It started with Jesus himself moving to the edge of Judaism; Paul moving to the edge of the new apostolic establishment in Jerusalem; the desert fathers and mothers in the fourth century moving to Egypt, Syria, and Palestine away from the Roman Empire; the nonstop recurrence of religious orders, hermits, anchorites, mystics, reform movements, Protestantism itself, service groups, charismatic movements, and in our time what some call the parachurch phenomenon of “emerging Christianity.”



Eventually, like all healthy children, you do have to leave home.

So I welcome you to your own little building project, your own parachurch experiment—not in opposition to anything, or against any idea, or anybody else, but just *doing what you have to do to keep “growing in wisdom, age, and grace”* (Luke 2:40), as Jesus did.

For some sad reason, to keep growing is a threat to an awful lot of people, as the people of Al-Anon have sadly discovered in families suffering from addiction; so we will try to make *growth and journey* a free invitation here, and I hope you can do the same to your friends—not by preaching, but by going the distance yourself—and paying the price yourself!

About the Companion Journal

This Companion Journal grew out of the remarkable interest and enthusiasm for the message of *Falling Upward*, and our desire at the Center for Action and Contemplation to respond to requests from many readers for a resource to help them deepen their experience of the book. A group of over one hundred people in southwest Florida stepped forward to help us create this resource. Two kind members of the



facilitation team, Pat Kaufman and Jean Esposito, were instrumental in providing questions, scouting the text for quotations, and creating much of what is in this book. Phil Robers, a leader of the group, and dear friends of the Center for Action and Contemplation also contributed in creating responses to the rich content of *Falling Upward*.

How to Use This Book

This Companion Journal is meant to be used either individually or in groups. We envision that readers will use the quotes, journaling questions, and experiential exercises for reflection, discussion, and journaling.

Although you may certainly dip in and out of chapters or work chronologically through the whole Companion Journal, here are some suggestions for using its elements:

- *Journaling questions:* Writing in response to these questions in each chapter is meant to help you dig deeper into the concepts in the book. We suggest you write the full two pages given for each question in your response so that you explore them fully. (If you want to write more or if there isn't sufficient space in the Companion Journal



for your responses, feel free to write in another journal.) You can also use the questions to open discussion in groups.

- *Experiential exercises:* Since spiritual practice is an important part of growth and insight, the experiential exercises at the end of each chapter are designed to help you take your writing and discussions further and integrate them into your life. If you are studying in a group, you can bring stories of your experiences back to the group for discussion and learning together.
- *Quotations for reflection:* Read the quotations scattered throughout each chapter and sit with them. Let their meaning spur thoughts about your experiences or feelings. You can argue with them, question them, and see how they are true for you. In groups, they (and your reflections about them) are great conversation starters.


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NOVEMBER 2012

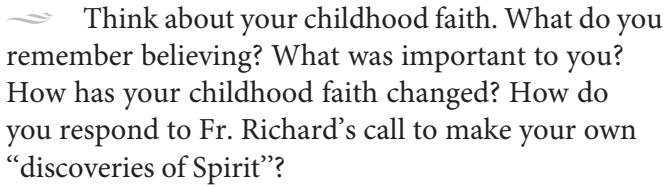


FALLING UPWARD



The Two Halves of Life

 *The task of the first half of life is to create a proper container for one's life and answer the first essential questions: "What makes me significant?" "How can I support myself?" and "Who will go with me?" (p. 1)*

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“The task of the first half of life is to create a proper container for one’s life and answer the first essential questions: ‘What makes me significant?’ ‘How can I support myself?’ and ‘Who will go with me?’” (p. 1)