There is a further journey into the second half of life that follows upon the first half of life concerns of establishing identity, security, and significant projects and people (vii). It is a journey toward True Self, and in Christian theology, participation in the divine life of the Trinity (xi).

There are at least two major tasks to human life: First, to build a strong container or identity; the second, to find the contents that the container was meant to hold. The second task is more encountered, discovered, or given than sought or planned and prepared for. In the first half of life our concern is to survive successfully. In the second half of life “the task within the task” is to discover “What we are really doing when we are doing what we are doing.” Are we living out of a life energy (Eros) or holding a negative energy (thanatos)? Eros always draws, creates, and connects things (xiv-xv).

We are led by Mystery, which religious people call grace, into spiritual maturity. Most of us have to be cajoled or seduced into it, or we fall into it by some kind of “transgression”. The way up is the way down. Some kind of “falling” which Rohr calls “necessary suffering” is programmed into the journey (xx). Losing, failing, falling, sin, and the suffering that comes from those experiences – all of this is a necessary and even good part of the human journey (xx). The counterintuitive message of the Gospel (and most of the world’s religions) is that we grow spiritually much more by doing it wrong than doing it right. (xxii). Jesus’ axiom, the “last” really do have a head start on this compared to the “first”, is an expression of this wisdom. (xxiii). The human ego prefers just about anything to falling or changing or dying, for it attaches to past and present, and fears the future. Some call this principle of going down to go up the “way of the wound” or a “spirituality of imperfection” (xxiv).

Rohr writes that we will never know this to be true until we have gone through the “down” side and come out on the other side in larger form. Jesus praised faith and trust even more than love. It takes a foundational trust to fall or to fail – and not to fall apart. Faith alone holds you while you wait and hope and trust, and then, and only then, can love happen. This is why we speak of “falling in love”. Rohr thinks it is the only way to get there, for no one would go freely, if we knew ahead of time what love is going to ask of us (xxvi). “Great love is always a discovery, a revelation, a wonderful surprise, a falling into “something” much bigger and deeper that is literally beyond us and larger than us.” (xxviii).

The whole story of this journey from the first half of life to spiritual maturity in the second half of life is set in the matrix of seeking to find home and then to return there, and thus refining and defining what home really is –a metaphor for the soul. (xxxvii-xxviii).

The task of the second half of life is to find the actual contents that this container was meant to hold and deliver. As Mary Oliver puts it, “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”p.2. Only when you have begun to live in the second half can you see the difference between the first and the second. Yet the two halves are cumulative and sequential and both are very necessary. You can’t read your way into the second half; grace must and will edge you forward. p. 3. Higher stages always empathetically include the lower, or they are not higher stages! P. 4

We need boundaries, identity, safety, and some degree of order and consistency to get started personally and culturally and we all need some successes and positive response early in life or we will spend the rest of our lives demanding it or bemoaning the lack of it. You first have to have an ego structure to then let go of and move beyond it, pp. 4-5. If we get mirrored well early in life, we do not have to spend the rest
of our lives begging for the attention of others. We have already been attended to and now feel basically good and always will. Your identity just is and is more than enough, p. 5.

In the first half of life, success, security, and containment – “looking good” to ourselves and to others are the main questions, p. 7. Carl Jung first popularized the phrase “the two halves of life”. You can only see and understand the earlier stages from the wider perspective of the later stages. You can only stretch yourself to comprehend people just a bit beyond yourself. P. 8-10

Theologically we are already in union with God, but in the first half of life we have no container for this awesome content. Authentic God experience always “burns” you yet does not destroy you, it consoles our True Self only after it has devastated our false self. Early-stage religion is preparing you for the gift of this burning, this inner experience of God. Religious people are doing heir own kind of survival dance, because no one has told them about their sacred dance.

In Joseph Campbell’s “monomyth of the hero” the hero or heroine “falls through” what is merely his or her life situation to discover his or her Real Lie, which is always a much deeper river, hidden beneath the appearances. Most people confuse their life situation with their actual life, which is an underlying flow beneath the everyday events. The deeper discovery is largely what religious people mean by “finding their soul.” P 19. The hero or heroine returns to where he or she started, but now with a gift or “boon” for his people. In AA the 12th step is passing the lessons learned on to others, or there has been no real gift at all. If it is authentically life energy, it is always experienced as a surplus or an abundance of life, and the hero or heroine is now by definition a “generative” person – concerned about the next generation and not just himself or herself. P 20

The question is now, what are you going to do with your now resurrected life? P 21.

The First Half of Life
You need a very strong container to hold he contents and contradictions that arrive later in life. You need ironically a very strong ego structure to let go of your ego. P 26

People who have never allowed themselves to fall are actually off balance, while not realizing it at all. You learn how to recover from falling by falling! P 28

Law and tradition seem to be necessary in any spiritual system both to reveal and to limit our basic egocentricity, and to make at least some community, marriage, and family possible. P 29

Jesus seems to often find love in people who might not have received much love themselves. Perhaps their deep longing for it became their capacity to both receive it and give it. P 35

There must be a creative tension between law and freedom. P 35

When some have not been able to do the task of the first half of life well, they go back and try to do it again – and then often overdo it. P40

In men’s work there is (from Bill Plotkin) a ritual of ‘discharging your loyal soldier”, which is a rite of passage for all the “elder sons” in the parable of the prodigal son. The voice of our loyal soldier gets us through the first half of life safely, as it is the voice of inner authority figures. But it is not the voice of God, and they are often confused, pp.43-45. The first battles of life solidify the ego and create a stalwart loyal soldier; the second battles defeat the ego because God always wins. The ego hates losing, even to God. P47

There is a deeper voice of God that can be heard and obeyed in the second half of life. Psychological wholeness and spiritual holiness never exclude the problem from the solution. If it is wholeness, then it is
always paradoxical, and holds both the dark and light sides of things. Wholeness and holiness always stretch us beyond our small comfort zone. P 48

The threshold days of inner transformation we call liminal space. St. John of the Cross taught that God has to work in the soul in secret and in darkness, because if we fully knew what was happening, and what Mystery/transformation/God/grace will eventually ask of us, we would either try to take charge or stop the whole process. No one oversees his or her own demise willingly, even when it is the false self that is dying, pp. 50-51.

St. Gregory of Nyssa said in the 4th century, “Sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing.” P 51

The Tragic Sense of Life

“In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters down, if you drop with them farther over the world’s rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power of evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned.” Annie Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk

(Einstein’s term, “unified field” describes the single world of elementary forces, principles, and particles that he assumed held together the entire universe of space-time).

Jesus did not seem to teach that one size fits all, but instead that his God adjusts to the vagaries and failures of the moment. The tragic sense of life is resolved in the mercy and grace of God. This ability to adjust to human disorder and failure is named God’s providence or compassion. God’s own rules do not matter as much as the relationship that God wants to create with us. P56-57

The Gospel was able to accept that life is tragic, but then graciously added that we can survive and even grow from tragedy. The Judeo-Christian salvation history is an integrating, using, and forgiving of this tragic sense of life – the biblical revelation does not deny the dark side of things, but integrates failing to accomplish wholeness (p. 59). Jesus found and named the unified field beneath all the contradictions, “our complex and inexplicable caring for each other” or what Buddhists call the Great Compassion. If we do not find that unified field there is no healing to life’s inconsistencies and contradictions (p. 59).

“God seems to be about ‘turning’ our loves around (in Greek, meta-noia), and using them toward the Great Love that is their true object.” P 61 We should not get rid of our sin until we have learned what it has to teach us. P. 61

The tragic sense of life is ironically not ultimately tragic. Living in such deep time, connected to past and future, prepares us for necessary suffering, keeps us from despair about our own failure and loss, and ironically offers us a way through it all.

Stumbling Over the Stumbling Stone

The way that Life-Fate-God-Grace-Mystery gets you to change, to let go of your egocentric preoccupations is to bring you to the edge of your own private resources as you “lose” at something, as your narcissistic bubble is burst (p. 65).

God comes to you disguised as your life (Paula D’Arcy). We must stumble and fall. In the end we do not so much reclaim what we have lost as discover a significantly new self in and through the process. Until we are led to the limits of our present game plan, and find it to be insufficient, we will not search out or find the real source, the deep well, or the constantly flowing stream of living water. There will and must be at least one situation in our lives that we cannot fix, control, explain, change, or even understand (pp. 67-68).
Christians made the cross into a substitutionary atonement theory – wanting some kind of order and reason – when actually the cross simply reflects our universal human pattern of scapegoating and sacrificing others. He “bore our sins on the cross” because we displaced them there to avoid our own responsibility. But even that could not keep life down. P 69

**Necessary Suffering**

Carl Jung said that so much unnecessary suffering comes into the world because people will not accept the ‘legitimate suffering’ that comes from being human, and that neurotic behavior is usually the result of refusing that legitimate suffering. Ironically, this refusal brings more suffering in the long run. P 73

*Before the truth sets you free, it tends to make you miserable.*

When Jesus says you must “hate” your home base, he is saying we must all leave home to find the real and larger home. It takes most of us years and much psychotherapy to leave home and reestablish appropriate boundaries from wounding parents, and to heal the inappropriate shame of our woundedness.

The necessary suffering that cannot be avoided, which Jesus calls “losing your life”, and what may be called the “false self” – the role, title, and personal image that is largely a creation of your own mind and attachments – will and must die in exact correlation to how much you want the Real. How much false self are you willing to shed to find your True Self? P. 85

The surrendering of our false self, which we have usually taken for our absolute identity, yet is merely relative identity, is the necessary suffering needed to find the ‘pearl of great price’ that is always hidden inside this lovely but passing shell.

**Home and Homesickness**

The archetypal idea of “home” points in two directions at once: backward toward the original experience of union, starting in the body of our mother, and forward, urging us toward the realization of union with the One Great Mystery. We have this implanted “homing” device, some call it the indwelling Holy Spirit, and we are sent and drawn by the same Force, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. Pp. 88-89. This Spirit is always “given” not earned. *Home is another word for the Spirit that we are, our True Self in God. The same moment that we find God in ourselves, we also find ourselves inside God, and this is the full homecoming, guided by the Holy Spirit, our Advocate (pp. 90-91).*

Richard Rohr summarizes:

- We are created with an inner drive and necessity that sends all of us looking for our True Self, whether we know it or not. This journey is a spiral and never a straight line.
- We are created with an inner restlessness and call that urges us on to the risks and promises of a second half of life. God creates the very dissatisfaction that only grace and finally divine love can satisfy.
- God hides, and is found, in the depths of everything, even and maybe especially in the deep fathoming of our fallings and failures. Sin is to stay on the surface.
- If we go to the depths of anything, we will move from “belief” to an actual inner knowing, especially if we have ever loved deeply, accompanied someone through the mystery of dying, or stood in genuine life-changing awe before mystery, time or beauty.
- This “something real” is what the world religions are pointing to – but it is now, rather than later.
- There is an inner insistence in this Something Real that it is forever, as Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the spring within her will well up unto eternal life (pp. 94-96).

**Amnesia and the Big Picture**

We forget or deny things that are just too good to be true. The ego prefers an economy of merit, where we can divide the world into winners and losers, to any economy of grace, where merit or worthiness lose all meaning. The healing of our amnesia, and any entry into heaven-consciousness, is the discovery of the
still-enchanted world of a happy child, but now includes the maturing experiences of love unique life journeys all you relations, and enough failures to keep us honest and grounded. P 104

**A Second Simplicity**

Paul Ricoeur’s “second naïveté” and Ken Wilbur’s possibility of the transrational are ways to describe the simplicity of higher levels of union with the divine. To hold the full mystery of life is always to endure its anxiety and doubt. P110-11. Rohr describes his own journey, in which he now doesn’t need to push the river as much, or own the river, or get everybody in his precise river, nor do others have to name the river the same way he does. It took a lot of drowning in his own tiny river to get to this big and good place. Simple meaning now suffices and that becomes in itself a much deeper happiness. P113

This new coherence, a unified field inclusive of the paradoxes, is what characterizes a second-half-of-life person. It is like a return to simplicity after having learned from all the complexity. “Everything belongs”, even the sad, absurd, and futile parts of life. The great irony is that we must go through a necessary complexity (perhaps another word for necessary suffering) to return to any second simplicity. P 115

**A Bright Sadness**

There is a gravitas in the second half of life, but it is now held up by a much deeper lightness or “okayness”, says Rohr. It is what St. John of the Cross called “luminous darkness.” P 117

By the second half of life we learn ever so slowly, and with much resistance that most frontal attacks on evil just produce another kind of evil in oneself. Now the Eight Beatitudes speak to us more than the Ten Commandments. Life is much more spacious now, the boundaries of the container having been enlarged by the constant addition of new experiences and relationships. P119 Life is more participatory than assertive, and there is no need for strong or further self-definition. At this stage, one is a “generative person” (Erik Erikson’s term), eager and able to generate life from his or her own abundance and for the benefit of following generations. Because such people have built a good container, they are able to “contain” more and more truth, more and more neighbors, more and broader vision, more and more of others’ pain and suffering, and more of a mysterious and outpouring God. P 121

In the second half of life, we do not have strong and final opinions about everything, as much as we allow things and people to delight us, sadden us, and truly influence us. We no longer need to change or adjust other people to be happy ourselves. Your concern is not so much to have what you love anymore, but to love what you have – right now (pp.123-24). Strangely, all of life’s problems, dilemmas, and difficulties are now resolved not by negativity, attack, criticism, force or logical resolution, but always by falling into a larger “brightness” (Gerard Manley Hopkins called it “the dearest freshness deep down things.” This is the falling upward, falling into the good, the true, and the beautiful. P124

**The Shadowlands**

Your shadow is what you refuse to see about yourself, and what you do not want others to see. The more you have cultivated and protected a chosen persona, the more shadow work you will need to do (pp. 128-29). It is humiliating work, but properly so. If you do not experience and take in such humiliations regularly, and make friends with all those who reveal to you and convict you of your own denied faults, you will remain in the first half of life forever. You do come to expect various forms of half-heartedness, deceit, vanity, or illusions from yourself. But now you see through them, which destroys most of their power. P 131

The closer you get to the Light, the more of your shadow you see. Truly holy people are always humble people. P 132 Invariably when something upsets you, and you have a strong emotional reaction to it, your shadow self has just been exposed. P. 133

Holy sadness, once called compunction, is the price your soul pays for opening to the new and unknown in yourself and in the world. A certain degree of necessary sadness is important to feel, accept, and face. The only way men can get to the bottom of their anger is to face the ocean of sadness underneath it. P 135
But shadow work is almost another name for falling upward. Lady Julian: “First there is the fall, and then we recover from the fall. Both are the mercy of God.” P 136

**New Problems and New Directions**

If you are on course at all, your world should grow much larger in the second half of life, but paradoxically your circle of truly close friends and real confidants will grow smaller. Not everyone is willing and open to the second half of life journey, p137

The bottom line of the Gospel is that most of us have to hit some kind of bottom before we even start the real spiritual journey. Up to that point it is mostly religion. The question becomes, “How can I honor the legitimate needs of the first half of life, while creating space, vision, time, and grace for the second?” The holding of this tension is the very shape of wisdom. P 138

In your second half of life, you can actually bless others in what they feel they must do, allow them to do what they must do, challenge them if they are hurting themselves or others – but you can no longer join them in the first half of life (p 141) because now you are a “multiplier”, a “contemplative”, or a “change agent”.

There is a real loneliness if you say yes and all your old friends are saying no. One of the great surprises at this point is that you find that the cure for your loneliness is actually solitude! P143

There is a kind of double – triple or more belonging at this stage because no one group or institution meets all one’s needs, desires, and visions. P145

The dualistic mind of the first half of life compares, competes, conflicts, conspires, condemns, cancels out any contrary evidence and crucifies with impunity. P 147 Jesus was an early nondualistic thinker, inclusive and integrative in his teachings. P 149 Whole people see and create wholeness wherever they go. Split people see and create splits in everything and everybody. Wholeness is integration and integrity. Yet we get to the whole by falling down into the messy parts. This is the only and lasting meaning of up. P 151

**Falling Upward**

The difference between transformed and nontransformed people is that great people come to serve, not to be served. In the AA path, until and unless you give your life away to others, you do not seem to have it yourself at any deep level.

The only love that really can redeem us is mirroring love that loves us for who we really are with all our faults and flaws and failures. If you have at least one true mirror yourself, one loving, honest friend to ground you, you can be your True Self. Mature spirituality has invariably insisted on soul friends, gurus, confessors, mentors, masters and spiritual directors (pp. 156-57). When we have been mirrored truthfully, we can mirror others with freedom, truth, and compassion.

The genius of the Gospel is that it includes the problem inside the solution. The falling became the standing. The stumbling became the finding. The dying became the rising. Like any true mirror, the gaze of the Divine One receives us exactly as we are, without judgment, distortion, subtraction or addition. This perfect receiving is what transforms us. P 159

Your second journey is all yours to walk or to avoid. Some falling apart of the first journey is necessary for this to happen, so do not waste energy lamenting poor parenting, lost jobs, failed relationships, physical handicaps, gender identity, economic poverty, or even the tragedies of abuse. Pain is part of the deal. If you don’t walk into the second half of your own life, it is you who do not want it. All the emptying out is only for the sake of a great Outpouring. P. 160