

First Meditation – Richard Rohr

Let us pray

“God is both sanctuary… and stumbling stone.

Yahweh is a rock that brings Israel down.

The Lord is a trap… and snare for the people.” Amen

(Isaiah 8:14)

In his book *Falling Upward* Roman Catholic Monk and priest Richard Rohr quotes W.H. Auden as saying…

“We would rather be ruined…than changed.

We would rather…die in our dread…than climb the cross of the present…and let our illusions die.”

I’m not sure if I would allow myself to go to such depths as ruin but I do know that making changes within my character within my soul have been and still are the most difficult moments I have ever been up against in life.

It always seems to be those times when we are **“broken open”** in life that somehow **allows us to move** beyond ourselves and the situation to a more clear understanding of our purpose in this world.

As Jesus was making His way up to His death carrying the very weapon that would change all our lives… He stumbled.

He fell. It was too much for him to carry on his own.

In his humility he allowed another to step in, possibly even relieve, but most definitely participate in the pain and suffering he was experiencing.

He allowed both himself…and another…to be human.

Even in his last moments he was teaching us the burden of change. The character of humility. The way of the cross.

Fr. Rohr speaks to this very spiritual transition in the soul process necessary in life in his chapter titled…

STUMBLING OVER THE STUMBLING STONE

Sooner or later, if you are on any classic “spiritual schedule,” some event, person, death, idea, or relationship will enter your life that you simply cannot deal with, using your present skill set, your acquired knowledge, or your strong willpower.

Spiritually speaking, you will be, **you must be**, led to the edge of your own private resources. At that point you will stumble over a necessary stumbling stone, as Isaiah calls it; or to state it in our language today, you will and you must “lose” at something.

This is the only way that Life-Fate-God-Mystery can get you to change, let go of your egocentric preoccupations, and go on the further and larger journey. I wish I could say this was not true, but it is darn near absolute in the spiritual literature of the world.

There is no practical or compelling reason to leave one's present comfort zone in life. Why should you or would you? Frankly, none of us do unless and until we have to. The invitation probably has to be unexpected and unsought.

If we seek spiritual heroism ourselves, the old ego is just... back in control... under a new name. There would not really be any change at all... but only disguise.

Just bogus... “self-improvement” ... on our own terms.

Any attempt to engineer... or plan your own enlightenment.. is doomed to failure because it will be ego driven. You will see only what you have already decided... to look for... and you cannot see what you are not ready... or told to... look for.

So failure and humiliation... force you to look where you never would otherwise. ***What an enigma!*** Self-help courses of any type... including this one if it is one... will help you only if they ***teach you to pay attention to life itself.***

“God comes to you disguised as your life,” as my friend Paula D’Archy so wisely says.

So we must stumble… and fall, I am sorry to say. And that does not mean reading…or just hearing about falling, as you are doing here.

We must actually be… **out of the driver’s seat for a while.**

Or we will never learn how to give up control to the Real Guide. It is the necessary pattern.

This kind of falling is what I mean by necessary suffering. It is well dramatized by Paul’s fall on the Damascus Road, where he hears the voice **“Why are you hunting yourself by kicking against the goad?”** (Acts 26:14). The goad or cattle prod… is the symbol of both the encouragement forward and our needless resistance to…that which only wounds us further.

It seems that in the spiritual world… we do not really find something until we first lose it, ignore it, miss it, long for it, choose it, and personally find it again - but now on a new level.

Three of the parables of Jesus are about losing something, searching for it anew with some effort, finding it, and in each case throwing a big party afterwards. A sheep, a coin, a son are all lost and found in Luke 15, followed by the kind of inner celebration that comes with any new “realization”. When something has become *real* for you.

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.

Alcoholics Anonymous calls it the Higher Power. Jesus calls this Ultimate Source the “living water” at the bottom of the well, (to the woman who keeps filling and refilling her own little bucket) (John 4:10-14).

Sometimes it seems that half of the fairy tales of the world are some form of Cinderella, ugly duckling, or poor boy story, telling of the little person who has no power or possessions who ends up being king or queen, prince or princess. We write it off as wishful dreaming, when it is actually the foundational pattern of disguise or amnesia, loss, and recovery.

Every Beauty is sleeping, it seems, before it can meet its Prince. The duckling must be “ugly,” or there will be no story. The knight errant must be wounded, or he will never even know what the Holy Grail is, much less find it. Jesus must be crucified, or there can be no resurrection. Amen