



OLDER, MANDATORY: WISER, OPTIONAL

I never thought of myself as 78 years old; but recently, I turned 78. I still feel like 55. I do notice the obvious physical changes but it is not so easy to identify and understand the mental and spiritual changes. I found the following thoughts in Richard Rohr's book "Falling Upward" helpful. If you are a "youngin" remember, "Who you are going to be at 75 you are now becoming."

There is a seriousness in the second half of life, but it is now held up by a much deeper lightness, or "okayness." Our mature years are characterized by a kind of bright sadness and a sober happiness, if that makes any sense. I am just grabbing for words to describe many wonderful older people I have met. If you have met them, you know for yourself, and will find your own words. There is still darkness in the second half of life-in fact maybe even more, but there is now a changed capacity to hold it creatively and with less anxiety.

In the second half of life, one has less and less need or interest in eliminating the negative or fearful, making again those old rash judgments, holding on to old hurts, or feeling any need to punish other people. Your superiority complexes have gradually departed in all directions. You do not fight these things anymore: they have just

shown themselves to be useless,

Just watch and enjoy true elders sitting in any circle of conversation; they are often defining the center, depth, and circumference of the dialogue just by being there! Most participants do not even know it is happening. When elders speak, they need very few words to make their point. Too many words, the use of which I am certainly guilty, are not needed by true elders. True maturity has its own kind of brightness and clarity, but much of it is expressed without words, and words are used only when really needed. If you talk too much or too loudly, you are probably not an elder.



Mature societies or institutions are meant to be led by elders, seniors, saints and "the initiated". They alone are in a position to be true leaders in a society or certainly in a spiritual organization. Without them, "the blind lead the blind". Those who are not true leaders or elders will just affirm people at their immature level, and of course, immature people will love

them and elect them for being equally immature. (Do you hear Hollywood and politicians here?) You can fill in the names of your own political, institutional disaster story.

If we know anything at this stage of life, we know that we are all in this together and that we are all equally naked underneath our clothes. Which doesn't feel like a lot of knowing, but even this little bit of honesty gives us a strange and restful consolation. To be comfortable in your own skin at each stage of growth you have to fully accept the spirit of the age you are. If you are 65 you have to accept the spirit of being 65.

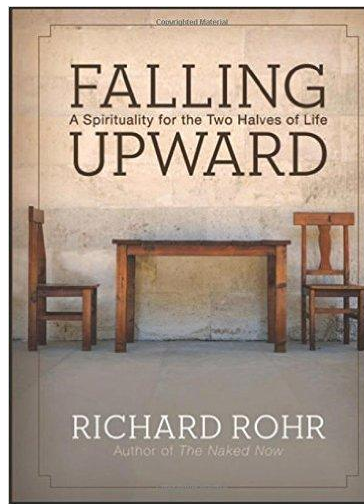
When you are young, you define yourself by differentiating yourself; now you look for the things we all share in common. You find happiness in likeness, which has become much more obvious to you now, and you do not need to dwell on the differences between people or exaggerate problems. Creating dramas has become boring.

At this stage, I no longer have to prove that I or my group is the best, that my ethnicity is superior, that my religion is the only one God loves, or that my role and place in society deserve superior treatment.

The inner and outer life have become more one. You can trust your inner life more now, because even God has allowed it, used it, received it, and refined it. As St.

Augustine dramatically put it in his "Confessions", "You were within, but I was without. You were with me, but I was not with you. So you called, you shouted, you broke through my deafness, you flared, blazed, and banished my blindness, you lavished your fragrance, and I gasped." Oh, to become old and wise which, of course, is to be holy.

If this wisdom speaks to your heart, treat yourself and get a copy of Richard Rohr's "Falling Upward". You will thank me. And read it over and over.



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A Drop of Rain... A Bit of Sun...

ROSE

Stories like the following keep me from getting stuck in the mud. They light a fire under my laziness, my complacency. Vibrant older folk like the late Pope John XXXIII, Mother Teresa and Billy Graham light my fire, even when the wood is wet. Enjoy!

The first day of class our professor introduced himself and challenged us to get to know someone we didn't already know. I stood up to look around when a gentle hand touched my shoulder. I turned around to find a wrinkled, little old lady beaming up at me with a smile that lit up her entire being. She said, "Hi handsome. My name is Rose. I'm 87 years old. Can I, give you a hug?" I laughed and enthusiastically responded, "Of course you may!" And she gave me a giant squeeze.



"Why are you in college at such a young, innocent age?" I asked. She jokingly replied, "I'm here to meet a rich husband, get married, have a couple of children, and then retire and travel." "No seriously," I asked. I was curious what may have motivated her to be taking on this challenge at her age. "I always dreamed of having a college education and now I'm getting one!"

After class we walked to the student union building and shared a chocolate milkshake. We became instant friends. Every day, for the next three months we would leave class together and talk nonstop. I was always mesmerized listening to this "time-machine" as she shared her wisdom and experience with me.

Over the course of the year, Rose became a campus icon and she easily made friends wherever she went. She loved to dress up and she reveled in the attention bestowed upon her from the other students. She was living life fully.

At the end of the semester we invited Rose to speak at our football banquet. I'll never forget what she taught us. She was introduced and stepped up to the podium. As she began to deliver her prepared speech, she dropped all of her 3 x 5 note cards. Frustrated and a little embarrassed she leaned into the microphone and simply said, "I'm sorry, I'm so jittery. I gave up beer for Lent and this whiskey is killing me! I'll never get my speech back in order, so let me just tell you what I know."

As we laughed she cleared her throat and began, "We do not stop playing because we are old; we grow old because we stop playing. There are only four secrets to staying young, being happy and achieving success. You have to laugh and find humor every day. You have to pray each day and you've got to have a dream. When you lose your dreams, you die. We have so many people walking around who are dead and don't even know it! There is a huge difference between growing

older and growing up. If you are 19 years old and lie in bed for one full year and don't do one productive thing, you will turn 20 years old. If I am 87 years old and stay in bed for a year and never do anything I will turn 88. Anybody can grow older. That doesn't take any talent or ability. The idea is to grow up by always finding the opportunity in change. Have no regrets. The elderly rarely have regrets for the things they did, but rather for the things they did not do. The only people who fear death are those with regrets. Regrets over their children, their spouses, their God. Don't be embarrassed to tell people that you pray.

She concluded her speech by courageously singing "the Rose ". She challenged each of us to study the lyrics.

At the year's end Rose got her college degree. One week after graduation, Rose died peacefully in her sleep. Over 2,000 college students attended her funeral in tribute to the wonderful woman who taught by example that it's never too late to be all you can possibly be. Remember, growing older is mandatory, growing up and wiser is optional.

The Rose Lyrics - Bette Midler Song

Some say love, it is a river that drowns the tender reed. Some say love, it is a razor that leaves your soul to bleed. Some say love, it is a hunger, an endless aching need. I say love, it is a flower, and you, it's only seed. It's the heart, afraid of breaking that never learns to dance. It's the dream, afraid of waking, that never takes the chance. It's the one who won't be taken, who cannot seem to give. And the soul, afraid of dying, that never learns to live. When the night has been too lonely, and the road has been too long. And you think that love is only for the lucky and the strong. Just remember in the winter far beneath the bitter snow lies the seed that with the sun's love, in the spring becomes the rose.

Vision and Reality

THE MIRACLE OF LANCIANO

In about the year 700, in a monastery, a priest of the order of St. Basil was celebrating the Eucharist. He was suffering from constant doubt about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. That is, whether the bread and wine truly became the Body and Blood of Christ after the words of consecration. This particular priest spoke the words of consecration and the host was suddenly changed into a circle of flesh and the wine transformed into blood.

Many repetitions of this miracle have happened over the past 1200 years, but the most convincing was in November of 1970. This time the miracle underwent scientific investigation and the conclusions were presented on March 4, 1971.

The microscopic studies documented these facts: The flesh was identified as striated muscular tissue of the myocardium (heart wall) having no trace whatsoever of materials or agents used to preserve the flesh from decay. Both the flesh and the blood were found to be of human origin. The flesh and blood were found to belong to the same blood type, AB. The relics can be seen today in the church of St. Francis, Lanciano, Italy.

The Eucharist: What an ingenious way to be remembered!! Not by leaving a library, museum, university or airport but by leaving oneself behind as living food. Such intimacy, such power! The Last Supper NOW! "One communion well received could make you a saint." - *St. Theresa of Avila*. I have celebrated or participated in the Eucharist over 7000 times in my lifetime and I ask myself, "Why have I not become a saint?" How about you? One time, well done, could do it!

NATIONAL DEBT - It is now 18.3 trillion dollars. Einstein once said, and the inability of our leaders to handle our debt and economy is certainly a classic example of it, "No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused it in the first place." If this is true then we are in serious trouble. Just take a quick look at Greece. Spend, spend, spend, borrow, borrow, borrow, interest, interest, interest. It is immoral. Mortal sin. If you and I did this we would be in jail. Now there's an idea! We are now planting the trees under which our children will one day sit and doing a terrible job! Please, pray for national wisdom.

Speaking Softly

ENJOYING PEACE ALL DAY!

How can you extend the peace and wholeness –all of the effects- of your prayer time into your daily life? We pray, and then back to daily life, and in minutes the good effects of our prayer seem to disappear. The monk, Thomas Keating, in a book I've been reading and re-reading for ten years offers ten suggestions. Here are two.



The first is to practice **guard of the heart**. Guard of the heart is the practice of releasing upsetting emotions into the present moment. This can be done in one of three **ways**: doing what you are actually doing, turning your attention to some other occupation, or giving the feeling to the Lord.

The guard of the heart requires the **prompt letting go of personal likes or dislikes**. When something arises independently of our plans, we spontaneously try to modify it. Our first reaction, however, should be **openness to what is actually happening** so that **if our plans are upset, we are not upset**. The fruit of guard of the heart is the **habitual willingness to change our plans at a moment's notice**. It disposes us to accept painful situations as they arise. Then we can decide what to do with them, modifying, correcting or improving them. In this way the ordinary events of daily life become our practice. The path to holiness lies in the routine of daily life. Prayer is aimed at transforming daily life with its never-ending round of ordinary activities. Remember, **“If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy!”**

The second practice is the **unconditional acceptance of others**. This is especially powerful in handling fear and anger. By accepting people unconditionally, you discipline the emotions that want to get even with others or to get away from them. You allow people to be who they are with all their idiosyncrasies and with the particular behavior that is disturbing you. The situation gets more complicated when you feel an obligation to correct someone. **If you correct someone when you are upset, you are certain to get nowhere**. This arouses the defenses of others and gives them a handle for blaming the situation on you. Wait till you have calmed down and then offer correction out of genuine concern for them. Good stuff but not easy!

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