

## The Tale of Two Monks: Will and Surrender

### Introduction

[Richard Rohr](#) began his life as a Franciscan monk at the age of 19 in 1961. Brother Ishtananda entered the SRF monastic order when he was probably in his early 20s and he may be around 70 now. (There is no biographical information on Brother Isthtananda).

They both currently are active monks in their monastic orders and they actively engage with the public. Richard has written many books, conducts seminars and gives church services. Brother Ishtananda is in charge of one of the SRF ashrams, regularly gives services at the San Diego temple and counsels lay people.

In 2011 at the age of 68 Richard Rohr wrote a book entitled [Falling Upward](#). He wrote that he could not understand what was written in his book until he was over sixty years old. The premise of the book is that there are two halves of spiritual life. In the first half, our will is primarily used. In the second half, surrender takes a greater and greater prominence in a person's life.

Brother Ishtananda, especially during the last two years, has been addressing this same topic in his San Diego temple services. Brother Ishtananda's message has been that Paramahansa Yogananda did not create this work just for people to be good devotees. He created this work for people to realize and live as Consciousness; as One with God.

I'll be using Richard's framework throughout this article since he has written about this in detail. Brother Ishtananda may not use the same words as Richard, though, in my opinion, both of these men are saying the same thing.

### The First Half Of Spiritual Life

Both monks say that it's essential to use will to develop the habit of spiritual practice, and to develop these practices very well. The practices can include spiritual study, meditation, being of service to our church, going to church services and following the do's and don'ts of spiritual living. (In the Catholic tradition this would be following the [ten commandments](#). In the Hindu tradition it would be following the [yamas](#) and [niyamas](#)).

Richard writes that it's vital to 'build a strong container;' to develop spiritually. He goes on to say that using our will and building ourselves into a more developed spiritual person can take us to the point of crossing over into the second half of spiritual life, and using our will cannot bring us to the point of living in Christ Consciousness.

Richard writes that most people never enter into the second half of spiritual life; the life of surrender and the life of following Divine Guidance. He writes that the Catholic Church's current teaching is about keeping people aligned to the first half of spiritual life and to live as 'good Christians.' This is a strong criticism that he's allowed to write and publish.

Brother Ishtananda commends devotees who have used their will and who have developed spiritually. This is a necessary step. He also has addresses that people need to give up the identity of being a good devotee; and of continuing to primarily use their will. He commends that this has made them a better person, and he reminds people that Paramahansa Yogananda's teachings are to become One with God; not to only be a good devotee. He has found resistance in some people because they are so identified with what has brought them to this point, and they're unwilling to alter what has served them to this point.

### **The Second Half Of Spiritual Life**

The second half of spiritual life begins when we realize that all of our efforts are not sufficient to realize that we are One with God; and to live from this realization. Christ's example was to follow the commandants of God and also, most importantly, to surrender to God.

In Luke 22:42-44 Jesus says: "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from Heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat began like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.'

Christ came to this point of surrender (thy Will, not my will) and prayed in agony to God. This realization that our efforts are not enough can be both discouraging and also the gateway to the second half of spiritual life. To truly live by 'Thy will, not my will' is the second half of spiritual life that Richard and Brother Ishtananda are pointing at. They can only point the way. It's up to us to live 'Thy will, not my will;' to live in surrender.

In this second half of spiritual life we'll continue the spiritual practices of meditation, spiritual study, service and devotion. These practices do serve us well. This continuation of our spiritual practices though will not be to 'get something' or 'to develop.' Our spiritual practices in the second half of our spiritual life are to give us positive practices that will support our continuing and deepening surrender.

### **Surrender: 'I' give up**

We can give up, surrender. We can pray for help; just as Jesus 'being in agony he was praying very fervently.' To say and feel that 'I' surrender, that I give up, is the first necessary step to enter the second half of spiritual life.

The title of Richard's book is Falling Upward. He writes that every time that he has fallen, it has always resulted in him going upward (toward a deeper union with God). By falling, he's referring to a crisis point in his life where he has seemingly failed and feels that he's a failure. It's at these times of seeming failure that we can stay in victim or have the possibility of rising.

Richard has experienced humility from failure time and time again, and he's received Grace to lift him; for him to fall upward. From humility, Grace can fill us much easier. 'I' cannot live a life of surrender. It's only in God's Grace that we can live a life of surrender.

### **A Monk Living In The Second Half Of Spiritual Life**

A senior SRF monk recently told me that the first decades of his monastic years were primarily involved with using his will to follow the teachings and to follow the spiritual practices. He also developed devotion during those years.

He went on to say that a major part of his current spiritual life and spiritual practice is to know when to use his will and when to surrender. He said that, more and more, his spiritual life is a life of surrender.

He also said that in the later years of Paramahansa Yogananda's life that Paramahansaji was in complete surrender. There is a famous quote by Paramahansa Yogananda. He said: 'I killed Yogananda long ago. No one dwells in this temple (body) now but God.'

The monk implied that being in complete surrender was a pointer for him, though he was not currently in a place of complete surrender. He said there are times currently when his will is needed; like when he's reluctant to do something that's appropriate to do.

### **How We Can Live In The Second Half Of Spiritual Life**

We can only live in the second half of spiritual life if we experience a deep disappointment in our spiritual life. This deep disappointment can lead to depression, resignation, anger, fear or be the crisis that cracks us open to receive God's Help and Grace to a much greater degree.

Most people reading this article have crossed into living in the second half of spiritual life; of finding deep disappointment and opening more to a life of surrender.

We have many avenues to deepen our second half of spiritual life. We can practice loving kindness; first toward ourselves and to others. We can unburden our minds from false concepts, judgements and beliefs about ourselves, about others, about life and about God. We can also continue in our spiritual practices. These practices can bring us into more intimate connection with Consciousness.

We need to get to a crisis point where Christ's words 'Thy will, not my will' is our mantra. Each of us can find how to open to 'the still small voice' (Kings 19:12). One tool is to feel within: what voice is talking to us, advising us, commenting on our life? Is it the still small voice of God or is it some other voice? There is a recently written article entitled: [What Part Of Me?](#) that may help in finding what inner voice is talking.

May all beings find their way Home.