Richard Rohr has spoken frequently about the difference between the "two halves of life" and how our spiritual needs change as we move from one to the other. He has been deeply influenced by, amongst others, the work of Carl Jung and Thomas Merton. Jung first coined the phrase "two halves of life" when describing how our main task in life is to fulfil our deep inner potential by making the journey of transformation between what Merton came to call the 'false' and 'true' self. In this book, Fr Richard builds on their work and makes accessible a decade's worth of his own teaching on the subject by inviting us 'to a further journey.'

He notes that both halves are necessary, but they are distinct. The first half is a container where we need secure boundaries within which to build our identities and master self control (but where we tend to measure our success and define ourselves by what we do). He calls this part of the journey the 'path of ascent'. The second half is where, with wisdom and discernment, we move on to the 'path of descent'. Here we are willing to 'lose' or 'let go' of control and power as we seek out and implement within our lives the contents that the container was meant to hold: the Gospel message of compassion, love, inclusion, forgiveness, justice and mercy, as well as our interconnectedness with the natural world and with people of all faiths and none.

Fr Richard notes that most institutional religion is concerned with the tasks of the first half of life - being a container - and ignores what tends to be far more challenging: addressing the contents. He suggests that much confusion, both personally and within the church, could be avoided by acknowledging the clear distinctions between the tasks of the two halves of life and the type of spiritual leadership and companionship which is required to nurture and then move us on from one half into the other. Part of the Franciscan charism is about being willing to "die to self"; this book enables us, not only to more fully understand the process and the implications for our own lives, but also how we can then more helpfully accompany others on their spiritual journeys.

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