

Immortal Diamond

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Q&A with Robert Rohr, author of Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self

Q. What do you mean by False Self and True Self?

A. When I use the term False Self, I mean that it is the self we manufacture and adopt to find our identity in the world--our jobs, our occupations, our religion, our culture, our sources of status. False doesn't mean that it's bad; it simply means that it's external, passing, that it changes. Everyone has a False Self--you need it to function in the world. True Self is who you are objectively in God. Most religious and spiritual traditions would call it the soul, although it is also mysteriously more than that. You do not create True Self by your own personality or choices or, or experiences. It's nothing that you manufacture or do. It's your innermost, essential being.

Q. How do the concepts of True Self and False Self relate to the questions you explored in Falling Upward?

A. In my book Falling Upward, I try to talk about the journey, the transitioning from the first half of life, the necessary suffering in the middle of life, and the liberation of the second half of life. In talking about True Self/False Self in Immortal Diamond, I'm trying to actually explain what it is we're finding in the second half of life--our True Self. If you don't find or recover your True Self, you remain in the first half of life forever, as many people do. They think they are their occupation, their family, their culture, their religion; without the falling apart of what Thomas Merton called our "private salvation project," without that falling there is no upward. In Immortal Diamond I'm calling the upward the True Self and I'm trying to explain what the True Self is.

Q. Why is finding True Self so important to the spiritual journey?

A. In many ways this quest for the True Self is the foundational issue. Your True Self is the only part of you that really has access to the big questions, things like love, suffering, death, God. Your False Self just entertains itself. But once you make contact with your True Self, there's a natural correspondence between who you are and who God is. Let me put it this way. When you discover your True Self, it's very easy to recognize the presence of God. When you're living out of your False Self, you tend to be more attracted to externals--external beliefs, external rituals--but you are never really touched at any deep level because it's not really YOU that's making contact. It's your temperament, your personality, your culture, all of which are okay, but your True Self is that part of you that already knows God, already loves God at some unconscious level. When you can connect with your True Self, the whole spiritual life opens up.

Q. What is the connection between finding True Self and facing death?

A. The phrase "you must die before you die" in one form or another is found in most of the world religions. Jesus would say, "Unless the grain of wheat die it remains just a single grain." This means that this concocted False Self, this manufactured identity that is who we all think we are, has to go. That's what the language of being "born again" really means. It's

not some kind of magical transaction that takes place between you and God, but the death of the passing self, the one you have created for yourself. That's what has to die. Until that False Self dies you don't really know who you are. Once you let go of your passing self, as St. Francis said, "The second death can do you no harm." In other words, once you have experienced the little losses and failings or falling upwards, you know at a deep level that you've been there before and none of it is going to kill you. You've already learned how to die. If you don't learn how to die early, ahead of time, you spend your life avoiding all failure, humiliation, loss, and you're not ready for the last death. Your True Self, your soul knows spiritual things, and knows God. So if you don't awaken it, you really don't know God. You can be religious, but you don't encounter God at any depth. It's just spinning the necessary prayer wheels, whatever your tradition tells you is the appropriate prayer wheel. It isn't really transformative religion.

Q. How can we make contact with our True Self?

A. It is hard work to remain in contact with your True Self. That's why daily prayer is important. Somehow we have to reestablish our foundational ground over and over because we lose it every day. I surely do. I get caught up in letters, emails, what people want of me, what I need to be, the little dance I have to do today for this person or that person. It may be necessary, but if you are living in that world, that revolving hall of mirrors, you so get enchanted with these reflections of what everybody thinks you are or wants you to be that you forget or you never discover who you really are before you did anything right or anything wrong, before you had your name, your reputation, your education, your family, your culture. That's how we get caught up in what some call our "survival dance." Finding True Self is about finding your sacred dance, who you are forever and who you always will be. That's the self that can go to Heaven, if you want to put it that way, because it's already in Heaven. It's already there. So you're returning home.

Q. Where did the title, Immortal Diamond, come from?

A. The metaphor immortal diamond came from a poem by the Jesuit Englishman, Gerard Manley Hopkins. The last lines of this beautiful poem say, "I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and/ This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond./ Is immortal diamond." When I first wanted to clarify this notion of True Self/False Self, I immediately said that's going to be the, the metaphor. I think it names what I'm talking about, something that's strong, true, clear, but hidden within us.

"I promise you that the discovery of your True Self will feel like a thousand pounds of weight have fallen from your back. You will no longer have to build, protect, or promote any idealized self image. Living in the True Self is quite simply a much happier existence ..."

-From Chapter One

In his bestselling book *Falling Upward* (and in many of his other teachings), Franciscan priest Father Richard Rohr talked at length about ego (part of the False Self) and how it gets in the way of spiritual maturity, especially if its preoccupations continue into the second half of life.

But if there's a False Self, is there also a True Self? What is it? How is it found? Why does it

matter? And what does it have to do with the spiritual journey?

In *Immortal Diamond*, Father Rohr likens True Self to a diamond, buried deep within us, formed under the intense pressure of our lives, that must be searched for, uncovered, and separated from all the debris of ego that surrounds it. In a sense True Self must, like Jesus, be resurrected, and that process is not resuscitation but transformation.

Immortal Diamond (whose title is taken from a line in a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem) explores the deepest questions of identity, spirituality, and meaning. In Richard Rohr's inimitable style, the book brings to light the mysteries of grace, death, and resurrection.

Other Books

Between Heaven and Charing Cross, Martin Warner sets out to explore the enterprise of being a Christian. As a guide for this exploration Warner boldly uses the prayers said by the celebrant of the Eucharist while putting on the priestly vestments. These prayers focus attention on aspects of life that are common to us all: hands, mind, fashion, commitment and celebration. What we discover here is an extended meditation on faith in Jesus Christ. It is an account that directs our attention unflinchingly to the reality of life without losing sight of heaven as our destiny.

☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ . But God's fashioning of the human race is, by God, redeemed in Christ: since he was what I am, and This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, is immortal diamond. .1 This vision of redemption as the outcome of ..."