



a guide for Spiritual Directors
by **Richard Rohr, OFM**

One of the more important breakthroughs in understanding why some people seem to “get it”, whatever “it” is, and many do not get it, and some even oppose it, or completely distort it, has now come to be recognized by teachers as broad and diverse as Piaget, Kohlberg, Maslow, Fowler, Clare Graves, Ken Wilber, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and even Thomas Aquinas, who took it as axiomatic that “Whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver”.

In simple terms, whatever you teach or receive, will be heard on at least eight to ten different levels, according to the inner, psychological, and spiritual maturity of the listener. Level 1 people will misuse the Bible, the Sacraments, the priesthood, spiritual direction, the Enneagram, or anything else that is presented to them. Levels 7-9 people will make lemonade out of even sour or unripe lemons (although not without price!).

It does little good to just assert doctrines or Scriptures, and because people assent to them, to assume that they have any existential knowledge of what they are talking about. You can perfectly assent to the Catholic belief in the REAL PRESENCE, for example, and be totally incapable of presence yourself—so there will be no inner experience and no transformation of the self. One will manipulate or use the very doctrine for ego enhancement purposes and “control”. This is likely what Jesus is referring to when he quotes Isaiah 29:13 in his Sermon on the Mount:

“This people has all the right words, but no change of heart. It is all just a lesson memorized, a human commandment.”

My own attempt to correlate the various schemas of development that I have studied would have me put it this way. We move from level one to level nine, in my experience (merely a teaching tool, real life is much more subtle).

1. **My body and self image is who I am.** Leads to a dominance of Security, Safety, and Defense Needs. Dualistic/polarity thinking.
2. **My external behavior is who I am.** Needs to look good outside, and to hide or disguise the contrary evidence from others; one becomes so practiced at this game, that it is eventually hidden from the self too (Emergence of the shadow). Very common among conservatives.
3. **My Thoughts/Feelings are who I am.** Development of intellect and will to have better thoughts and feelings and also control them so others do not know, and finally I do not see their self serving and shadowy character myself. Education as a substitute for transformation. Very common among liberals and the educated.

NORMALLY A MAJOR DEFEAT, SHOCK, or HUMILIATION MUST BE SUFFERED AND PASSED THROUGH TO GO BEYOND.

4. **My deeper intuitions and felt knowledge in my body is who I am.** This is such a breakthrough and so informative and helpful that many become stymied at this level. Leads to individualism, self absorption, inner work as a substitute for any real encounter with OTHERNESS.



5. **My Shadow self is who I am.** The dark night. My weakness comes to overwhelm me, as I face myself in my raw, unvarnished, uncivilized state. Without guidance, grace and prayer, most go running back to previous identities. Time is of the essence here.
6. **I am empty and powerless.** “God’s Waiting Room”. Almost any attempt to save the self by any superior behavior, technique, morality, positive role, or religious devotion, will lead to regression. All you can do is wait and ask and trust. Here is where you learn faith, and darkness as the much better teacher. God is about to become real.
7. **I am much more than who I thought I was.** Death of the false self, and birth of the True Self! But because you are not at home here yet, it will first of all feel like a VOID, even if a wonderful void. “Luminous darkness” as John of the Cross would call it.
8. **“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).** Henceforth there is only God, or as Teresa says, “One knows God in oneself, and knows oneself in God”. All else is seen as a passing ego possession, and I do not need to protect it, promote it, or prove it--to anyone.
9. **I am who I am,** “just me”, warts and all, enough to be human, no window dressing necessary, the most radical critique of religion possible, because now you know religion is just a finger pointing to the moon, but not the moon itself. No need to appear to be anything but who I really am. Fully detached from self image and living in God’s image of you--which includes and loves both the good and the bad. The serenity and freedom of the saints. Total Nonduality.

The goal is to keep people moving deeper into faith, knowing they will receive any and all information and experience AT THEIR LEVEL.



Center for Action and Contemplation

P.O. Box 12464 Albuquerque, NM 87195-2464 • (505)242-9588
info@cac.org www.cac.org