

# The Soft Road

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## WE ALL FALL DOWN

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Sooner or later we all fall down, and often many times across a lifetime.

Everyone has his or her own particular version of “falling down”; it is at the heart of the human condition. What brings us down is unique and personal to our own circumstances, our state of being, and experience of life. It could be as literal as an accident, a physical trauma, or ill health. Sometimes it accompanies bereavement, the breakdown of a relationship, loss of work, or increasingly, the cumulative overload and overwhelm of simply living our very full lives.

Whatever the catalyst, this is how falling always works. We never intend or foresee it. One day we seem to be doing okay, then we aren't. With hindsight, all the signs are there to be read, yet we pacify the symptoms in a piecemeal fashion, ignoring the subtle decline or the precipitous stumble, whilst busy doing other things!

Years of travel, multiple re-locations and creating a new business—all positive and rich experiences—caught up to me in exactly this way. For me, the feeling of falling down from exhaustion and near burn-out, both crept up on me over time and also came as a surprise

Now, fully recovered, I still recall the feelings of shame and embarrassment that I, as a master of meditation, would fall in this way, and that I didn't know better. That all I teach and practice did not “save” me. Save me from what, though—from being human?

This is, of course, the golden nugget, the gift: that this experience is not mine alone. We all fall down. Vulnerability and frailty are essential elements of our humanity and it serves us to value and acknowledge this, instead of wishing it were not so—or— behaving as if we're doing fine, because we fear the consequences of admitting, to ourselves or to others, that we are not.

What I do know is that the way we work through a response to falling down can be much changed when we have an inner practice of any kind.

I hope that some of these steps that I share, through personal practice, may accelerate or provide a more meaningful way through discomfort and repair for others. Here I offer some insights from the process of getting back up:

1. When we fall down, let go of the rope, cease the struggle and let there be a softening, a surrender to fall.
2. Don't skip the step of feeling how it is to land, at the lowest point, the turning point.
3. Ask for help.

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4. Accept help.
5. Read the last two again, and again. Asking for help, and accepting help, is all but disappearing from our relating and connecting, one with the other. And it's likely contributing to many instances of falling down. I recognise it did for me.
6. Make no judgments—of falling, of asking for help, of needing help, of vulnerability, and of not being able to keep on, keeping on. This is so easy to write, and so challenging to put into practice.

Almost everyone knows the feelings of vulnerability and, often, shame and self-blame, that come with being less than our capable best. Negative thoughts do not serve us, yet come they will, and when they do, notice them yet do not cultivate them.

7. Take a longer-term view to re-building; loving self-care and compassion are so important. Whatever the cause, or effect, of falling down, there are stages, layers, of healing and rebuilding to be done. Some are physical, some psychological—always it's worth a look at our lifestyle habits and patterns and rarely do we fully restore without behavioural change.
8. When the overall aim is holistic wellness, it really helps to create goals and milestones along the way, to celebrate and mark our progress, and keep motivated for the long term.

Approached in this way, those times when we fall down present us with genuine opportunities for rebuilding and for progression. Things happen for *all* reasons. We are invited to examine what serves us now, what we need to stop, what we need to start, what we need more of, and what we need less of.

Let's remember that evolution is all there is, so *everything* is evolutionary— life happening for us, not to us, always.

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