



Things Learned While Recuperating

—Richard Rohr, OFM

I wish I were less serious and more of a comedian because so much that has happened to me in recent months could be seen as both humiliating and humorous, which are often the same thing. But, like all of us, “I am what I am,” for good and for ill. As you probably know, I always need to see everything in a serious and seemingly profound way. Forgive me. I get tired of it myself. Recently, however, the “ill” part invaded my life and introduced me to some little deaths; only *now*, on the “other side,” can I say that these little deaths were the best teachers.

As some of you know, I was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent a complete prostatectomy in mid-October. The wisdom lessons that God offered me before, during, and after the surgery were pretty much constant, as any of you who have undergone a major health concern or surgery probably understand. The experiences were initially disempowering, sometimes scary in their immediacy, and only in hindsight were they in any way empowering. Prayer was both constant and completely impossible for much of this period.

About ten days after the surgery, during my attempt at some spiritual reading, I opened the Bible to that obscure passage in the Book of Exodus, where Moses asks Yahweh to “Show me your glory” (33:18), and Yahweh shows it in a most unusual way. “I shall place you in the cleft of the rock and shield you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I shall take my hand away, and you will see my backside, but my face will not be seen” (33:22–23). In several sermons, I have used that verse to teach that our knowledge of God is indirect at best, and none of our knowledge of God is fully face-to-face. God is always and forever Mystery. All we see is the “backside” of God.

This time, it was not the indirectness that hit me in this passage, but the *afterward-ness*! My best spiritual knowing almost always occurs after the fact, in the remembering—not seen “until [God has] passed by.” I realized that in the moments of

diagnosis, doctor’s warnings, waiting, delays, and the surgery itself, I was as fragile, scared, and insecure as anybody would be, but if I could stay with *the full narrative*, all the way through, it was afterward that I could invariably see, trust, and enjoy the wonderful works of God (*mirabilia Dei*)—the seeing which Moses seemed to experience as *the very glory* of God.

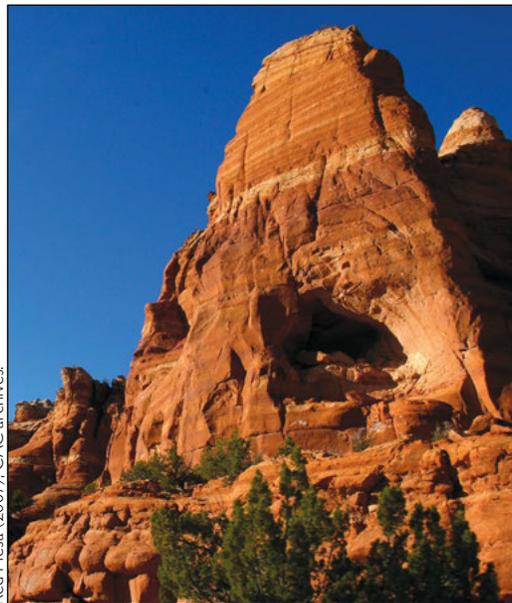
The foundation of Jewish faith is the ability of the Jewish people to look at their entire salvation history and *then trust that this pattern would never—could never—change!* It was largely *after the fact* that the Jewish faith was formed—and gloriously transmuted into hope for the future. Only *after* the fact can you see

that you were being held and led *during* the fact. During the fact, you do not enjoy or trust your own strength at all; in fact, quite the opposite. That is when God, for some wonderful reason, is able to fill the gap—like a loving friend secretly depositing much-needed money in your empty bank account.

Because we do not stay with the full narrative of our lives, I am afraid we do not see the *mirabilia Dei*, the wonderful faithfulness and presence of God. However, the older we get and the longer the narrative unfolds, it becomes easier to believe, to trust, and to have confidence in the process. (I am speaking here not just about protection from disasters, but of the ability to endure and profit from disasters.) The pattern becomes clearer and more compelling: Someone Else is the doer, and it is even that Someone Else who helps you to connect the dots.

After you take your place in the cleft of the rock, allow God to temporarily shield your sight, and get a glimpse of the divine design “after the fact,” it is then much easier to know—*really know*—the patterns of divine love and faithfulness. This is surely why the Jewish people remind us of the importance of remembering. Until we look back and recollect for ourselves the disparate moments of our lives, so often taken for granted, faith

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Red Mesa (2007). CAC archives.

“I shall place you in the cleft of the rock and shield you with my hand....”



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The question for us is always "how can we turn information into transformation?" How can we use the sacred texts, tradition, and experience to lead people into new places with God, with life, with themselves? — Richard Rohr, OFM

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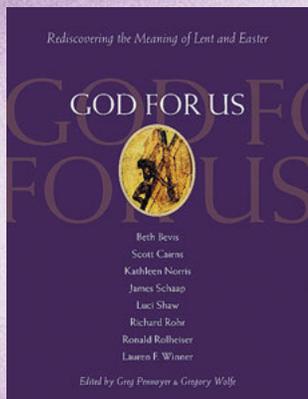
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Getting to Know Our Donors: *The Gift of Ten Percent*

I was a child when my parents gave me a gift that I've held onto through all the years since. It has offered me a unique vantage point that helped broaden my thinking. The gift is, simply, the concept of "Ten Percent."

When my brothers and I earned money by doing extra chores, or we received a gift of money on a holiday or other special occasion, our dad would act as the bank and save it for us. If we earned a dollar, Dad's "bank" allocated twenty-five percent to savings and an additional ten percent to a giving fund. Once the giving fund reached a reasonable amount, Dad would offer us options for giving that amount to a person or a cause. Because of this ten percent concept, I came to understand the value of money: that it was not all mine to spend as I pleased. As a young child, I went along with the program, without question. Then came my teenage years and, to be quite honest, the "Dad bank" lost its allure.

But a funny thing happened by the time I was in college. The ten percent practice was so ingrained in who I was that it came naturally to me to give. I really didn't even think of that ten percent as my own. If I was lucky enough to be able to earn money, then it was my responsibility—and also my joy—to share the ten percent with someone who needed it more than I did. And because I had been taught to look for that need all around me, I noticed it wherever I went. As Richard Rohr teaches us in the Living School for Action and Contemplation, "Often we only notice what we are told to notice."

At the Living School, much of the instruction is centered on contemplative practice. This practice has reprogrammed my hard drive and taught me the profound truth first articulated by Albert Einstein: "No problem can be solved with the same consciousness that caused it." As the Center for Action and Contemplation's name implies, we are a community striving to become compassionate people through contemplation. We act on what comes to us in those contemplative moments. For me, I felt called to action by sharing this idea of the gift of



ten percent; it's about living what I'm learning. I realize that the incarnate God in me is using me as Her hands to lessen the suffering of the world. As a co-creator with God during my lifetime, how can I listen to what makes my heart sing and put it into action?

My husband and I have taught our three boys the practice of ten percent, but I'm always wondering how I can magnify the message. As Richard has taught us, "We don't think our way into a new way of living; we live ourselves into a new way of thinking." For me, living my new

way of thinking has been to spread the gift of ten percent.

That's why I started a micro-philanthropy movement called the Butterfly Effect, named after the idea that a single occurrence—no matter how small—can change the course of the universe. The Butterfly Effect involves others in the act of giving, and the very action changes us by opening our eyes to what God has put in our hearts. I ask each participant in our program, "What makes you come alive, or what breaks your heart?" Then I add, "Let's give to that."

We are each uniquely and wonderfully made and all have different causes we want to support. As we actively give to those unique callings, our hearts grow bigger. Our story becomes less about who we are and more about who we might help. We become the eyes and the hands of Jesus. Our meager ten percent is the beginning of expanding our hearts to include the larger story.

—Tasha Wahl

Tasha Wahl, a student in the 2016 cohort of the Living School for Action and Contemplation, is the founder and creator of the Butterfly Effect (<http://www.butterflyeffectbethexchange.com>), which advocates that, "By making small changes in our communities, we will set into motion a vast and unexpected movement toward a better world." Tasha and her husband, Erik, are founders of the Wahl Foundation. They are committed to producing positive change in order to create a better world. Together, they helm The Wahl Group (www.theheartofvision.com), which challenges corporate America to shift business-as-usual thinking to a more dynamic paradigm of holding the tension between success and significance.

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AFTER GOD "opened her heart" (Acts 16:14), Lydia, a merchant in Philippi, shared her house and hospitality with Paul and his companions. Lydia trusted that something larger was working within and through her. Lydia's inclusive generosity toward a group of outsiders planted seeds of transformation in many lives.

In this spirit, we invite you to become a benefactor of the Lydia Fund. The Lydia Fund provides scholarships to those in the Living School and other CAC programs who otherwise could not afford to participate.

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You may also send a check, payable to CAC, to PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195. Please note "Lydia Fund" in the memo. If you wish your donation to be applied *only* to Living School students, please note "Living School Scholarships" in the memo.

Reflection on the Living School Student Symposium

I accepted the offer to work with the CAC's Living School for Action and Contemplation because I needed a job but, ultimately and more importantly, I accepted it because, having done similar work elsewhere, I knew something about supporting and nurturing transformation through attending to logistics and details. Tending to inner transformation in that particular way was my role at this year's Living School symposium and the perspective from which I write about an event that was not only a first for me but marked some firsts for the Living School as well: three classes met, at three different stages in the curriculum, and one class finished the two-year program.

The completion certificate given to Living School students of the 2015 cohort contained words of blessing, sending, and praying—and blessing, sending, and praying best describe what I observed and how I experienced the Living School symposium. After these students received their stoles during the sending ceremony, the core faculty blessed them, and they then turned and raised their hands, blessing the other two cohorts.

In doing so, they stepped through a portal, becoming separate, no longer immersed in the Living School experience, yet still continuously connected to the Living School, both as alumni and in the realm of oneness, of contemplation. The sentence that stood out for me in the sending certificate was "We send you into the University of the Great Unknowing." The students stepped through this portal, which opened into unknowing—but they had already done so in applying to the Living School and attending the symposium.

The staff and faculty are also learners in this University. Speaking for myself, as a brand-new staff member, there was



much I did not know as I tended to the many moving parts involved in serving the needs of the faculty and over 500 students. Staying present in the unknowing and being empty of the need to know is a key Living School practice for all of us—faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

This practice of staying present in the unknowing informed our prayer. For me, prayer is ultimately about relationship—relationship with God, with others, with ourselves, with the animate and inanimate in our world, with the universe. Prayer at the symposium was ongoing, from students reuniting with others they hadn't seen in a year and new students beginning relationships with faculty to staff deepening their relationships with students and each other. Each day began with a meditation and ended with vespers. Even the sending ceremony stoles (made by the women of the Centro Santa Catalina co-op in Juarez, Mexico, with whom the CAC has a long relationship) and the leather pins (created by a prisoner with whom one of the students has a relationship) served as prayer. In witnessing these interconnecting relationships, I felt privileged to play a part in this circle of blessing, sending, and praying.

—Gigi Ross

Gigi Ross, Administrative Coordinator of Education for the Living School for Action and Contemplation, moved to Albuquerque from Washington, DC, where she spent ten years working at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. Between leaving Shalem and joining the Center for Action and Contemplation, Gigi spent six years learning about trust while living in poverty and being dependent on others for housing. Gigi provides administrative support for the Living School and the on-line education programs.

Things Learned While Recuperating

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remains largely a theory, a memorized Bible quote or a line from a sermon, a speculative hope that does not yet grip our very soul. At that stage we are not personally engaged, but only mentally obedient. However, these are probably necessary starting places, so do not dismiss them as unimportant.

It only gets better! This experienced faithfulness can quickly morph into love for all others who might be elderly, infirm, suffering chronic pain, powerless, or even dying at this very moment. And there is still more: The circle soon widens to include all those who care for them—for me—along the way: friends, nurses, doctors, family, friars, and the wonderful people who so tenderly and unselfishly left messages for me on CaringBridge. Right now, my awareness of, and my empathy for, all human suffering has

increased tenfold; I hope it lasts. I know how much it hurts to hurt, how sad it is to be sad. At moments, it became even conscious solidarity with the undeserved pain of all others. In fact, whenever I wanted to feel sorry for myself, the image of Syrian refugees, mothers and children, flooded into my mind and heart. My tiny bit of discomfort became a huge gift and opportunity—because it offered me a way to experience and to love my communion with the fate and the state of all humanity. I wonder if there is any other way to learn such things.

P.S. Recent blood work revealed my PSA number for cancer is "undetectable"; this means the surgery was a success! Doctors will continue monitoring my health, given my elevated risk, but for now I am grateful for health.

Mystic Calling and a Hurting World

I recently had a friend say that everyone should be able to summarize their calling in six words. The less-succinct me would reply to that: "Impossible!"

However, the longer I follow the sacred calling in my heart; bypass fear and external opposition; move forward in faith as God is calling me, whatever I do, wherever I go; when I distill it down to six words, the essence is the same: I help birth healing and contemplation.

I walk into a hurting but transforming world, guided by gut and fire. Increasingly, like the volume being turned up on a once-indistinguishable sound, I am called forth into the space of midwifing healing and contemplative experience for a hungry, yearning, and beckoning world.

I am a writer, therapist, trauma survivor, and contemplative-activist. I have worked with people who battled war, and those who battled within due to hurt from the world. I became part of the Progressive Christian dialogue by bringing my contemplative and healing toolkit to hurting people of faith, and into hurting faith communities.

At each step, God beckoned me forward in the voice of



the hurting and spiritually hungry. I went into mainline churches and activist retreat centers, onto Progressive Evangelical couches (rather than pews), into universities, and beyond.

Now I write to help guide people out of pain. I speak to give them direction—offering practices and rituals, liturgy and sacred circles. The words and the methods always come, not from me, but from the deeper well of my mystic and healer ancestors. I continue to be beckoned by the fire in my gut and the fire in my heart.

I go because She/He beckons. I go because I asked for it. I go because sometimes we are given the answer to our prayers, and God's reply is always "More."

—Teresa B. Pasquale

Teresa B. Pasquale is an author, contemplative teacher, and trauma specialist who speaks, preaches, teaches, and offers healing workshops and retreats to people who are suffering from trauma, grief, loss, and addiction. She is the author of Mending Broken and Sacred Wounds: A Path to Healing from Spiritual Trauma. Teresa is a 2015 alumna of the Living School for Action and Contemplation. To learn more about her visit www.teresabpasquale.com or contact her directly at tbpasquale@gmail.com.

A Reflection on the Living School Five-Day Intensive

Reflecting upon my Living School intensive brings to mind my days in seminary when my professor mentioned the possibility of universal salvation. He said that even after we die we can still choose the Good and, seeing the Good as it is, we cannot help but choose it. I remember well how his brief presentation sparked my interest and sounded so hopeful, honest, and positive. That was more than thirty-five years ago; to have that possibility reaffirmed and held again in my heart during my intensive brought a smile to my face and warmth to my soul. I have never given up on this ancient, but seldom-spoken, belief called *apocatastasis* (Greek for "restoration to the original condition"). I just had not heard it mentioned in a long time.

During my intensive, this graceful teaching resurfaced in a new way: Instead of choosing the Good, i.e. salvation, in the afterlife, we can choose it now. Fr. Richard, referring to the popular question, "Are you saved?" replaced it with, "When will you be saved?" This invites an interior reflection, surfacing questions such as: "When will I allow God to work in my life? When will I be less defensive? When will I forgive? When will I be open to change? When will I accept life as it is? When will I notice the beauty of God who is always around me? When will I love myself as God loves me?" The question, "When will I be saved?" alters the focus, makes being saved more imminent and intimate to *here* (in this space) and *now*



(at this time) instead of *then* (sometime in the future) and *there* (heaven) which is the traditional understanding of the question, "Are you saved?"

My Living School intensive has invited me to recognize the free gift of salvation, in this present moment, as I am embodied in this time and space. This deep appreciation of salvation has also helped in ministry, especially with the incarcerated men and women I visit, who can very easily, as they serve their sentences, look toward their future release date or their death as though that would be the day of salvation, and

not recognize the salvation that is always available to them in the now of their incarceration.

God, who is the *Good*, is universally present in the now of life: waiting to be recognized, chosen, and celebrated so all may be saved. It's just a matter of when.

"Behold, now is a very acceptable time; now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2).

—Leo Hodges

Leo Hodges was ordained in 1986 as a priest for the Diocese of Orlando and is currently pastor of St. Andrew Catholic Church and School. For thirty-four years, Leo has been involved with Kairos Prison Ministry, which is an international prison ministry program of which his father was a founding member. He is a student in the 2016 cohort of the Living School for Action and Contemplation.

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Mary Weiss—*in memory of Don Weiss*
Pete West—*in honor of Annie Barnett*
Elodie Winger—*in honor of Chris Sternberg*
Luba Zakharov—*in honor of Jon Wallace*
& *in memory of Frances Jmaev*



January 2016

Dear Friends,

Last year was a time of deep listening for the Center for Action and Contemplation. We reached out to many of you through surveys, focus groups, and conversations. We wanted to know what matters most to you and how CAC can better support your human, spiritual journey.

While we are still processing all we learned—integrating your feedback in our day-to-day work and strategic planning—we are glad to know that what we do is making a difference. We've heard from so many people that Richard Rohr and CAC have:

Awakened me to an understanding of non-dual thinking.

Helped me see and experience the unconditional love of God more deeply.

Moved me toward a sense of oneness with all things.

Challenged me to view and treat others in a more loving, inclusive way.

Helped me view obstacles and sources of suffering in my life as opportunities for growth in union with God.

With all this change often comes loneliness. Sometimes our families, friends, and faith communities aren't ready to share our experience. We frequently hear that one of CAC's greatest gifts is bringing together like minds and hearts so that pilgrims don't feel so alone and can join a conspiracy of hope. We also hear that CAC could do even more to facilitate connection.

As the religious landscape continues to shift toward "spiritual but not religious" and "unaffiliated," people need safe places to face their doubts and fears, to find meaning and purpose, to explore new forms of church and community.

We're on the brink of a major evolutionary stage, The Great Turning, as Joanna Macy has called it. In a recent meditation, Fr. Richard wrote: "The universe is ever-changing, with the possibility—through our participation—of evolving toward greater love and wholeness." We can't guarantee our species will take the next, necessary steps toward maturity, but by our daily intentions and actions we can add momentum to the positive energy already surging.

I hope you'll consider supporting CAC in this work. Your donations allow CAC to create inclusive spaces, virtual and physical, where people at various stages of the spiritual journey can find the courage and resources to take the next step, and the next . . . toward a peaceful, healed world.

There is a growing awareness that our interconnectedness requires compassionate engagement from everyone on this planet. The CAC is committed to participating in this evolution, and we hope you will join us.

Peace and Every Good,

Michael Poffenberger
CAC Executive Director

P.S. Please consider making a donation! Gifts of any size are gratefully accepted. You may use the enclosed remittance form and envelope or donate securely online at cac.org/support-cac.

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Join Father Richard Rohr and friends—Christena Cleveland, James Alison, and Mirabai Starr—as they explore the ecumenical breadth of our conspiracy:

EVERYTHING BELONGS.

NO ONE NEEDS TO BE PUNISHED, SCAPEGOATED, OR EXCLUDED.

WE CANNOT DIRECTLY FIGHT OR SEPARATE OURSELVES FROM EVIL AND UNTRUTH.

DARKNESS BECOMES APPARENT WHEN EXPOSED TO LIGHT.

RICHARD ROHR invites us to receive great love and suffering as our truest teachers. Through contemplation, we bring darkness into light, holding everything within God's loving presence.

CHRISTENA CLEVELAND guides us on a holistic, head-heart-hands path to unity and reconciliation. She challenges us to see and love our neighbor—regardless of color or culture—as ourselves.

JAMES ALISON brings to focus the recurring pattern of scapegoating. With greater awareness of self and others, we can form real communities of inclusivity and generosity.

MIRABAI STARR offers hope from her own experience and from the writings of the mystics. When we welcome all—the good and the bad, joy and pain—we can experience transformation at the deepest levels.

Conspire. Breathe together. Conspire for the healing and whole-ing of our world. Join the conspiracy in person—in Albuquerque, New Mexico—or participate online via webcast. Learn more at cac.org.

The in-person conference fills up quickly! Register and reserve your hotel room right away. Webcast registration includes access to the streaming video until August 21, 2016. Scholarships are available for both in-person and webcast attendance.

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