

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 5, Episode 1

An Introduction to The Cosmic Egg

Brie Stoner: So, Swanson, we're going to talk about the cosmic egg. We're going to lay the cosmic egg, if you will. See what I did there?

Paul Swanson: I love what you did there. I love the idea of laying a cosmic egg.

Brie Stoner: No small feat, but in all seriousness, Richard has this very helpful frame that we wanted to explore within the guise of kind of like a final exploration of talking about the Universal Christ. He lays out the cosmic egg as this nested, My Story within Our Story within The Story.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's a very useful frame that he's used over the years and really kind of emerged into something central that he's working with as a teaching tool in his latest book, *The Wisdom Pattern*. And it was fun to hear the ways that he is teasing this out, not only through kind of the larger context of the Christian contemplative tradition, but also with the lens of our time right now in these strange and confusing times that we find ourselves in within the pandemic.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. The Twilight Zone that has been 2020 and still 2021. And I think, you know, it's okay to name that many of those who are listening—and it's certainly myself—had a little bit of an allergic reaction to like, “oh no, another frame; oh no, another map.” And who, and what exactly is The Story? And who's determining The Story and what's, you know, and shouldn't we be a little bit suspicious of dominant Our Stories and especially within the context of a lot of the racial reckoning that's happening in our country. So, I want to say that it was really fun to talk about the cosmic egg and in more of a fluid, unfolding, reciprocal terminology. You know? I mentioned that I found it easier to think of the cosmic egg as music, as if My Story, Our Story, and The Story are being layered, and are harmonizing and unfolding as if in a song.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I love that too. And I appreciate the way you named that. As three historically privileged people, that we're being transparent about the work that we're doing, and the maps that we have at our disposal, and the way that we are acknowledging that and also continue to do the work, to see the blind spots with how we engage in these maps, but fully recognize the dynamic, hugeness of reality, and how we step into that. And I think this episode dips into that as we talk about the overall arching cosmic egg and meaning...

Brie Stoner: Oh, for sure. I mean, you know, we're in a time of great unknowing in so many different ways, and especially for those of us who are white: we are necessarily in a time of unknowing, and unlearning, and unsaying. And so, for all of us, I think that this frame of the cosmic egg can be a helpful tool for us to make sense out of the many complex and dynamic unfoldings and topplings that are happening in our time. So, with that, we hope that you'll enjoy this episode on Season Five of *Another Name for Every Thing*.

Paul Swanson: Richard and Brie, it's so good to be with you again for our final season of *Another Name for Every Thing*.

Brie Stoner: The hermitage looks a little different, but outside of that...

Paul Swanson: Our virtual hermitage, here on Zoom. It's nice to concoct it for us. We're excited to explore this theme of the Cosmic Egg of Meaning with you, Richard. And it's been something that

you've shared before, particularly around the CAC over the years that I've been here. And it's also been included in a couple of your books, and most recently *The Wisdom Pattern*, and we thought this would be a ripe theme for us to explore for this final season, but also knowing that this is probably a theme and a map that's new to a lot of folks. So, if someone were hearing this idea of the Cosmic Egg of Meaning, which I'm sure conjures up some fun images, how would you paint a picture of what you mean by the Cosmic Egg of Meaning?

Richard Rohr: Okay. I'll try. I learned it years ago from a scholar whose name you might be familiar with, Joseph Chilton Pearce. And he wrote a book, *The Crack of the Cosmic Egg*, introducing an image of wholeness in the cosmic egg and yet admitting that in our time, it was all cracked, that it was not holding together. So, you have to start with the whole image, which is the cosmic egg, and then recognize that we live in a time where this wholeness no longer stands—for most people. And I think that's true, but it gives us...it's a pedagogical tool like so many things I teach: they're just tools. If they're not helpful to you forget them, but this one seems to have reoccurred in a helpful way for a lot of people.

So, picture an egg, the center yoke, is [what] we're going to call My Story; my individual journey; my individual identity; my individual woundings: what I have gone through by reason of living in this culture, this religion, with these parents, in this century—all of the My statements. And Socrates, the father of Greek philosophy, is supposed to have written over his door: "Know thyself."

There it is. That's the foundation of philosophy: self-knowledge. And that's what the cosmic egg is saying too. If you try to jump over self-knowledge and know your own biases, your own woundedness, your own shadow as we say now, you won't know how to interpret the other levels, or you'll misinterpret them— probably better said. So, hold onto the little inner yoke of self-knowledge.

Now, a lot of people, especially in our age of, where we enjoy the gift of psychology, and therapy, and things like the Enneagram, and spiritual direction, and so forth, this world has become so exciting; so, filled with good ideas that are very satisfying, especially when you're young, because they... "Oh, I finally got an identity. I finally got a name." That a lot of people, if they go there at all, but if they do, they spend the first thirty years of life just inside of My Story.

Now thankfully, the great wisdom traditions would surround the inner yolk with—I guess we're moving into the white of the egg with Our Story—let's try first of all, text inside of context. So, you write the text with your own life, your own agenda, your own temperament, your own personality, your own history. Well, maybe history is moving into Our Story, but you can't understand it without situating it. When I was studying moral theology in the sixties, we spoke

Richard Rohr: of situation ethics: that to name an action pure or perfect, or wrong and sinful outside of situations, usually it wasn't a very accurate reading. Now at that time, most traditionalist folks just hated the very word situation ethics, but, you know, in morning prayer today, we read the Gospel of Jesus justifying his own disciples for picking corn on the Sabbath. I mean, the Sabbath rule is very clear and yet Jesus said, my guys are hungry; it's okay. I'm afraid that situation ethics, that he refused to condemn his own men who are picking corn, doing work

on the Sabbath because they were hungry.

So, the genius, and I mean this sincerely, of the Bible—even though it's so boring for a lot of us when we first study the Bible—is the amount of books that are Jewish history, Jewish Kings and overthrowing of Kings, and droughts, and wars, and adulteries, and attacks, and betrayals. And you just have to say, why do we need to know all this? Well, you don't have to, but if you do know why Jeremiah is saying what he's saying, in what century of Jewish history he's talking, it sure helps you understand Jeremiah. And for us as Christians, it finally situates Jesus inside of a context of Judaism. And we didn't situate him; we just acted as if Jesus was walking around in the middle of everywhere, making immediate dogmatic proclamations. And if they didn't grab you, or influence you, or change you, that might be much of the reason we have My Story and my woundedness, but how the word of God applied or didn't apply to my situation wasn't made clear. Forgive me that I'm taking a bit of time on this, but if you can start picturing it, it'll clarify as we go through.

Now, the third circle of the cosmic egg, the outer, not the shell so much—we're still in the white of the egg, I guess, to carry through the metaphor—we come to what we would call The Story, the patterns that are always true, that which is always the case. I don't care what country you live in, what religion you live in, whether you're handicapped, or gay, or straight, or you're unhappy. The example I easily use is forgiveness. Forgiveness is always healing and always true. And there's no place that doesn't help. There's no place that doesn't work. So, I think the failure of all of the world religions is that we didn't move enough to The Story. In short, what we usually did was call things in Our Story, The Story finally. Because the Jewish people beautifully had the notion in this case of the Jewish Sabbath, we made it a universal absolute truth. There sure is spiritual wisdom in keeping holy one-seventh of your life; works very well, but don't tie it too much to Saturday, and don't get legalistic about it. So, you see how it takes wisdom to unpackage the cosmic egg. Now, I'll draw it together with this: what Joseph Chilton Pearce said, that in our time, especially after the dualistic fights of the Reformation and the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which sent us into five hundred years of argument, that the cosmic egg for most people in the West is utterly cracked.

Very few people have access to all three simultaneously: My Story, Our Story, and The Story. And so, what they usually do is take refuge in one, and I'll stop on this, but let me explain it. They become overly individualistic. Everything is my therapy, my dreams, my temperament, my Enneagram number, all of that, you know, which is a great starting point, know yourself, know your own lens, other

Richard Rohr: people. And we call this in America today, identity politics. It's tearing us apart. It's usually people who don't have a lot of self-knowledge, who haven't spent much time with the yoke, who will throw all of their eggs. Now the metaphor is getting confused in Our Story. And you have to do that, you really do, but if that's your only circle of meaning, if you overstate the second, you usually avoid and miss out on the first and the third. Well, you might use the third, but it won't have much depth to it.

Now this is the final point. If you run too quickly, you try to make what I always call

a nonstop flight to The Story. We call that today or many call that spiritual bypassing, where you allow no talk of personality, or self- knowledge; you say, as many fundamentalists do, that's mere psychology, that's mere babble. And it's because they haven't moved around in that, they're not familiar with the language or the clarifying of the issue of race today that America necessarily must go through until we begin to heal it. It's denied as even an issue; it's just utterly denied. No, we will not let you talk about race. We will not let you talk about gender. You must talk about Jesus outside of any context, any critical thinking, any holistic thinking. So, the cosmic egg is a marvelous image of healing, of wholeness, of wholeness of the nested eggs are layers of meaning in which a whole person is able to live. So, what we're doing in the work of healing is helping people to retrieve the one or the other layer, My Story, or Our Story, or the faults jump to The Story that maybe they are involved in. There it is in a very oversimplified, but I hope very helpful way. Now you helped me unpackage it.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, no, thanks Richard. It is incredibly helpful, and I think it's so meaningful to be able to process it together over a few episodes because I think in today's society, there's a natural kind of allergic reaction to, you know, well, who's determining Our Story or The Story? Whose dominant voice is declaring what The Story even is?

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: And, also, what is the healthy role of reclaiming My Story, especially for those who have been silenced or oppressed? So, this is going to be a really rich conversation, but to unpack the egg a little bit more, Paul and I, as we were preparing for this recording, realized that there was a common experience in what we talked about: the experience of maps and map makers. And it might be helpful to hear The Story because it might help us unpack the cosmic egg, not as a map, but as a fluid, reciprocal, nested reality as you described.

So, the story goes something like this. Paul and I are, we were prepping and we're having a conversation and I said, you know, I mean, I think there's this experience that we share where we're all being, you know, we're wandering around and somebody comes down and tells us about a wardrobe, a magical wardrobe. And they lead us up the stairs, and we go up the stairs to an attic, and we find...this is the religious kind of journey, right? Or the journey of the self. We journey up the stairs with this other person and we find a group of

Brie Stoner: people who are camped out in front of the wardrobe. And there's lots of groups of people camped out in front of the wardrobe, and they're all there to worship the wardrobe. And they all have maps about the wardrobe, how to get to the wardrobe. Do you take the backstairs or the front stairs? Does the wardrobe have three hinges or four? Is it painted or is it not? And we turn—and this would be maybe equivalent to the Our Story—we turn the wardrobe into a wardrobe-ism, a religion of the wardrobe. And at some point, either a mystic comes through the wardrobe or we ourselves work up the courage to go into the wardrobe. And then the maps are useless. They got us there; but once you're in the wardrobe, you're in Narnia, and you have to trust your own experience, and walk in that kind of trusting faith or unknowing or embrace of the mysterious. And so, as we were reflecting on the cosmic

egg and mapmaking, you know, we were wanting to illustrate that this is a fluid system; it's a dynamic system. We're not going to be discussing the cosmic egg as the next map of wardrobe-ism that you need to worship. But, you know, Paul, you also talked about a DeMello story involving maps that you thought was helpful.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Richard, you probably know this story. It was one of my favorites from Anthony DeMello, where he tells the story about this adventurer who lives in this kind of secluded town and leaves town and goes and explores places that no one has ever been. And he's gone for years; people think that he's dead, and he comes back, and he's so alive. And the townspeople are smitten by his stories of adventure, and the things that he's experienced, and kind of the depth and quality of his character and his energy. And they start saying, they start asking, you know, "Can you draw us a map to all the places that you went?" And he says, "No, no, no, go, go explore, go out there," and, "You've got to experience it for yourself because that's the true way to really experience this wildness and this terrain."

And they keep pestering him. And eventually he concedes and says "okay, okay, I'll draw you a map." And he draws the map to all the places he's been, and they immediately frame it and put it on the wall and start to worship the map instead of explore where the map actually will take them, to the terrain of the soul. And I love that story because it holds up the mirror for me about how I'm using maps and how I'm exploring the wild terrain of God's invitation, the unknown. Exactly.

Brie Stoner: And I think, you know, full disclosure, as we were looking at the cosmic egg, I was like, oh, I'm struggling so much with looking at maps these days because of that tendency that we have as human beings to make something into the blueprint. But I found I could make it more dynamic to think of My Story, Our Story, and The Story as being layered almost like music, as harmonizing, and most importantly, not entirely finished; they're still unfolding. The My Story is unfolding within the context of the Our and whatever the mysterious The Story is, because obviously it's not completely knowable what The Story is and is becoming. But I did find it helpful to think of it in terms of music and as an unfolding process.

Richard Rohr: Very helpful what both of you said. Yeah, gee that's good. Because we don't want this to become the new answer, but we do want to offer it to you as a tool again. Basically, you create critical thinking so you can critique your own story so you can critique your own culture, so you can critique your own religion. And how do you do that? By integrating it with the other two. It's always the same pattern. So yeah, thank you for offering those further metaphors. I find them very helpful. Go ahead; keep leading me.

Brie Stoner: [laughing] You're so generous with us, Richard. I think, you know, as I was reflecting on my own tendency to want to turn things into maps, what I realized is: it's just the unknown, and unknowing, and the terror of becoming that makes me want to grab on to things, and make them orthodoxy, and something I can hang on to. And, you know, in some ways I think culturally, we're observing a certain healthy critique of the map-making process. You know, Paul and I are both big fans of Bayo Akomolafe's book, *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences*, and in it, Charles Eisenstein writes this beautiful Foreword and he says, "it wasn't just that society offered us the wrong map. It was the whole formula for making and following a map that was wrong."

And I find that so stunning and helpful to make sense out of, you know, my own process. And I think the need to make a map or the need to cling to a map comes from often the terror of surrendering to not knowing, to having to have faith, but also is a tendency that we have to . . . , you know, that we've inherited to dominate and subdue the unknown. And often that tends to result in map makers intellectually, or those of us who cling to maps, as intellectually proving our understanding while being entirely disconnected from the moral and just responsibility of embodiment and relation to all bodies, like we've been discussing on The Cosmic Christ. And you know, another helpful lens that may help folks— is perhaps what we need as we explore these topics over the next couple of episodes—isn't the lens of a map maker, but the lens of an artist.

Brie Stoner: And you can think of it this way: for those of you who are artistically inclined like me to be those who are willing to make the middle, the process, the end goal, rather than the beginning and an end because sometimes we're trying to get from here to there; we're trying to arrive. And if instead, we raise an altar to beauty, to mystery, to the present moment that's unfolding, I think that might help us in this conversation about My Story, its relationship to Our Story, and whatever the beautiful mystery of The Story is.

Richard Rohr: Well put. My goodness. Thank you both.

Paul Swanson: That's beautiful.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Why do we do this? We make the last word out of what was just intended to be the first word. Yeah. Well, keep going; unpackage it; you're already doing well.

Paul Swanson: I have a question for you along these lines. You know, I love the way you said it just a few moments ago about the text within the context, within the pattern of reality. And then as Brie is saying, you know, have, let the middle, let the becoming be the place to put yourself in to participate in that becoming. So, part of the way that I understand is—as you've portrayed the cosmic egg—that particular groups or segments of people, they approach just one aspect of the, of this egg, whether it's the My Story, or the Our Story, or bypassing to The Story. Why do you think that certain folks are drawn to just hold on to just one segment? Is it a failure of religion to see the whole, that invitation to see the whole of the layered egg, the lack of understanding of the middle of the becoming being the thrust of it.? What's your sense of that? Why do some folks only really want to hang out in one part of the egg?

Richard Rohr: Well, I'll never know the perfect answer to that, but I just look at my own life: how it took so many years to honor all three equally. And I do mean equally; honoring My as much as The but needing The more because it holds the whole together. My Story cannot hold the whole together. So, I guess it's where we're first led. If we're first led into dealing with our own family difficulties or whatever, we want to get out of that box as soon as we can, and we spend much of our life in therapy or analyzing and looking at ourselves.

Let me throw in right at this point, and I'm not trying to be a Christian preacher or Jewish preacher in saying this, I want you to keep reflecting as we go through this, that the Bible really incorporates all three. And it's why we Catholics found the Bible so boring because we weren't interested [laughter] in Jewish history. We weren't interested in context. We weren't

interested in Jeroboam and all these other characters. Now, you good Protestants tried to be interested in Jeroboam. I don't know how you succeeded at it...

Brie Stoner: It was very genuine, Richard. It's a deep love of Jeroboam. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: ...but then you seem to me to put so much time in the memorizing Our Story, much of which was context outside of text, and it didn't help you enter into the real world, or the real self, or real religion. Then, those who got a religious answer too early, too quickly, they were given answers before they were struggling for the right question. And I bet that was the case with all three of us. I was learning Catholic catechism answers in the first grade at six, which did hold me together but in a very naive way; but that's all the little six-year-old psyche needs. And the trouble was there wasn't enough adult education, adult spirituality, adult journey-making. And I guess that's why we're offering this: this is an adult religion, which you only come to as an adult. You have to have gone in and out of My, in and out of Our, and in and out of The, and that takes seventy years or eighty if we are strong, to just quote the Bible, the Psalm, you know. So, it's nobody's fault; not that you're trying to attribute fault, but you are asking a good question. Why do most people spend their whole lives in one of these boxes? In short, liberals today stay in the center box because it's a new discovery or the yolk, as I called it; conservatives who don't spend much time on self-knowledge, spend the time on the inner white of the egg. And that's good,

Richard Rohr: but without self-knowledge, our God knowledge, it's not great stuff. It really isn't. It always makes you self-preoccupied or fact-preoccupied. You know, I have the right information.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It also makes us obsessed with proving how other people don't have it right.

Richard Rohr: That's right. Other people don't know about Jeroboam. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: For example. That wasn't quite the example I was thinking of, but yeah, it works. But even, you know, just thinking about the situation we find ourselves in right now politically in the U.S., and globally as well in different ways in Western countries, but the echo chambers that we find ourselves in of whatever the Our or My Story is, it's really nauseating because we're losing touch with that sense of wholeness and interconnection that allows us to transcend and see the bigger picture, so that we don't allow the smaller echoes to become the whole reality, which is precisely what's seems to be happening. I'm so glad we're having this conversation. So, shall we dive in to talking about My Story? Does that sound good?

Richard Rohr: Yes. Let me just make one more connection.

Brie Stoner: Do it!

Richard Rohr: The President of the United States who will remain unnamed, who is now going out of office, and the President coming in, who will also remain unnamed, they're both our Jeroboam story. Do you understand? Don't absolutize either one of them, and that's what gets you trapped in political thinking and political infighting about he's just, there's just one king in the history of kings of Judah or kings of Israel. So, I hope that does give us a way to apply this. [music]

Paul Swanson: And that's it for today's episode of Another Name for Every Thing with Richard Rohr. This

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