

# the Mendicant

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

◀ EMBRACING THE PAST, WELCOMING THE FUTURE ▶

## The Tree of Life

AVIDEH SHASHAANI

Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been,  
I have great faith in a seed.

Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.<sup>1</sup>

—Henry D. Thoreau

In every age, the tree of life is blessed with illumined beings—the emissaries of love and peace to the human plane.

These blessed ones don't have a conscious memory about their mission at the start of their journey but are inherently submitted to the invisible hand of the Divine that nurtures them and is with them through all the phases of their life—the hardships, inspirations, ecstasies, and, above all, their service to humanity.

Richard Rohr has been a beacon of hope, love, and peace for so many throughout his years of service to humanity. A life such as his is filled with challenges to overcome—the transformation of earthly attributes into transcendent ones.

This is a challenge we all face, at least those of us who aspire to be included in the transformation process. To attain this goal, we need role models that we can witness, those who guide us in undergoing this transcendent process with humility, grace, love, and service.

Through his unwavering example, Fr. Richard has modeled how such a life can come to fruition. His expansive heart has reached out to people from all walks of life and has impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of people around our globe.

His luminous spirit has comforted us in times of upheaval, guided us, and encouraged us to look within to find the source of strength, love, and peace in our own hearts.

Just as his life began with that luminous seed, planted in his heart and nurtured each step of the way by the invisible



hand of the Divine, Fr. Richard has planted the seed of faith, trust, and hope in the hearts of those who've come to him to grow and be sustained in the garden of Divine guidance.

A gardener has faith that the seed they have planted by their own hand in fertile ground will be able to survive the hardships that it will face. The seed, in turn, has one goal—to grow roots, overcome all obstacles in the darkness of the earth, and give rise to that sapling which shoots up into the light and is tended by the loving hands of the gardener.

Those seeds that have come to fruition in the garden of Divine guidance have deep, interconnected roots that transcend the boundaries of time and space. They will continue Fr. Richard's transcendent legacy—planting more seeds and expecting more wonders!

Richard Rohr leaves a legacy whose impact will be seen in our world for generations to come.

Light steps into the world—a promise made, a promise kept, a life lived up to its pre-eternity covenant!

<sup>1</sup> Henry D. Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993), xvii.

*Avidesh Shashaani, president of the Fund for the Future of Our Children, is the sixth annual recipient of the Waging Peace Award instituted by President Jimmy Carter. A published poet, she is author of Little Garlic: Enchanted Tales for All Ages (winner of the national INDIE Excellence Awards), and editor of Something Deeper Happened: Young Voices and the 2008 US Election. Avidesh Shashaani has a PhD in Sufi Studies.*

# The Pool Table

I once submitted a cartoon to the *New Yorker* that pictured Jesus shopping for Father’s Day. He was holding socks in one hand, a necktie in the other, and asking himself, “What do you get the man who *made* everything?”

It’s a stupid joke, and I don’t stand by it. The magazine was completely right in not buying it. But there is one thing I like about it: It sums up how I feel about trying to give a gift to my spiritual father, Richard Rohr.

What do you get the man who has given you so much? All the attributes I admire about Richard—his humility, his meekness, his forgiveness of reality—make brightening his day with anything you can put in a box very, very difficult—and I’ve tried.

I’ve bought Richard books. I’ve paid for meals. I even told him that if my wife and I ever have a son, we are going to name him Rohr. But still: Richard has always and only ever loved me the same—having opened his heart, recognized the Christ in all of us, and seen the world from the eyes of his True Self. What a monumental pain in the tail.



“As much as his books and his talks have changed me, watching him interact with strangers and waitresses and groundskeepers changed me even more.”

But recently, I got a glimmer of hope. I learned that Richard *does* quietly enjoy knowing he’s made a difference in people’s lives with his work. So, in my latest attempt to return some love to this man who has so guided my transformation, I will share how Richard’s love and wisdom have softened my heart and changed my seeing.

In my experience, when you ask Richard for a cup of milk, he will give you the entire cow. This comes across in his writing, of course, but I was fortunate to experience Richard in the wild—at gas stations and restaurants and inside a Honda CRV—when he invited me to visit and drive together across the state of New Mexico. All I wanted was

a twenty-minute Zoom, but next thing I knew, I was driving his car—carefully, in the same manner I drove home my newborn baby—from Albuquerque to Santa Fe to Taos and back.

It was here that I most aptly felt Richard’s transmission. As much as his books and his talks have changed me, watching him interact with strangers and waitresses and groundskeepers changed me even more. “Look at you,” he’d say earnestly to the hotel manager. “Always here, always with a smile, ready and willing to help.” He’d *name* people—and with such kindness. He’d call them out for doing the good things they were supposed to be doing, even if all they were doing was showing you to the elevator. And to someone like me, whose sensitivity to “phonies” puts Holden Caulfield to shame, the utter sincerity of his remarks passed any test my cynical heart could imagine.

I watched how he gave love to everyone and took note. When I returned home to LA, my wife’s hairdresser asked about my trip, and I told them about his expressions of ordinary/extraordinary love. The friend didn’t know Richard or his work, didn’t care about Christology or the Enneagram, but when I did the impression of Richard to them—“Look at you, always bright and smiling, devoting your time and skills to making other people look and feel better, sharing your gift”—they started to cry. It started as a joke, but it turns out that even an impression of how Richard loves is enough to touch people’s hearts. And he makes it look so easy—maybe because it is.

Yet I know Richard won’t have us making him into some symbol of perfection, with candles emblazoned with his image. Here’s a favorite memory from when we were staying in Taos. I had always wanted to “Sit” with Richard and suggested we meet in the morning to do so. He graciously accepted, although I got the feeling he would’ve been just as happy if I had suggested we go to the movies. We met in a common room on the hotel’s third floor, adorned with bookshelves and a very old pool table. “This pool table belonged to a famous blues musician,” Richard said to me as we entered, ever the tour guide (and one of the best). “But I can’t remember who.”

We sat down, set a timer for twenty minutes, and closed our eyes. Richard led us in the usual “Be still and know that I am God” prompt, and then we were quiet. Of course, I was hoping for some osmosis juju to come

[continued on page 3]

# A Sense of Wonder in the Digital World

The Digital Product Team at the CAC operates from a deep sense of curiosity. We sit with questions each day on the best solutions to technology problems. How can we make this easier for our end users? How can we create ease for those interacting with our digital platform?

This means that often we don't have the answer, so we must be curious. It's commonplace to hear a member of our team say, "Thank you for sharing this with me. I don't know the answer but let me sit with it and see what I can come up with."



“I’m grateful for both Fr. Richard’s work and the opportunity to put this wisdom to practice every day for the Center for Action and Contemplation team.”

It’s these pauses that power our team to effectively partner with the CAC programs. Digital Product Team members take the time to “not know” and find a better solution for everyone in the end.

My own experience of this stems from a line in Richard Rohr’s teaching in *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the*

*Mystics See*: “We moved from wondering to answering, which has not served us well at all.”<sup>1</sup>

This wisdom led me away from the pattern of always needing to have the right answer and solution. In my work life, it transformed the way I approached everything and everyone.

A problem with a coworker? I went from always being ready with a defense to being curious about their experience on the other end. A technology glitch? I felt the flurry of reaction but have learned to practice a pause and move forward with a solution serving a larger purpose. As Fr. Richard writes,

In short, good leaders must have a certain capacity for non-polarity thinking and full-access knowing (*prayer*), a tolerance for ambiguity (*faith*), an ability to hold creative tensions (*hope*), and an ability to care (*love*) beyond their own personal advantage.<sup>2</sup>

These are the principles we utilize every day as we approach our work. I’m grateful for both Fr. Richard’s work and the opportunity to put this wisdom to practice every day for the Center for Action and Contemplation team.

1 Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 47.

2 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 158.

*Jessie Jones joined the CAC in 2020 as the Web Product Manager. She lives in Albuquerque with her partner and two children. You can find her hiking, mountain climbing, camping, or any other activity to get outside and enjoy the beauty of New Mexico.*

## The Pool Table [continued from page 2]

off this great man and take me to higher heights than I had ever dreamed. I do remember it being quite “deep” and feeling nice, but what I remember most was what happened afterward. I had been assuming that Richard was off somewhere, touching the face of God, but when the timer went off and we opened our eyes, Richard broke the silence by saying quite loudly and excitedly, “Fats Domino!” He had remembered the blues musician who owned the

pool table. This was his holy revelation. “And that gives you an idea of how deep my meditation was,” he added. No phony-Holy to be seen.

God, I love this man.

*Pete Holmes is a comedian, writer, and actor who hosts the podcast You Made It Weird.*

# Transformative Beginnings

**M**y spiritual director, Jennifer Steil, introduced me to Richard Rohr in 2005. She had listened to many of his CDs and loved his message. I was in a situation where I was miserable and felt like I was dying inside. I couldn't understand why I was feeling so miserable if I was supposed to be a new creation.

I knew I needed to get out of fundamentalist Christianity. It wasn't feeding my soul. Instead, it was depleting it, keeping me chained to a set of laws and rules. Grace was calling me out, and I was full of trepidation as I began to consider what was next.

At this same time, I had an interview with the Director of Heartpaths Spirituality Center in Oklahoma City about attending their classes. I ended up starting the next year, receiving training to become a spiritual director and graduating in 2008. This school and Fr. Richard's teachings began to help me see God in a totally different way—as one who loved and cherished me for just who I was, no matter what I had done. It was a new start on my journey to wholeness and freedom.

For the past seventeen years, I have been blessed, challenged, totally confused, experienced dark nights, and, most importantly, found grace abounding through everything I have been blessed to learn and am still learning. I was asked to let go of who I thought I was, and I began to see reality and how I fit into it in a totally different way.

I still have a long way to go. Following graduation, I facilitated prayer-style gatherings and the Ignatian Retreat. The CAC's faculty books, classes, and subsequent teachings

introduced me to new and powerful insights that led to many new awakenings. I began to see the world, people, creation, and the universe with a new set of eyes that brought great healing to my mind and body. Fr. Richard's honesty, integrity, laughter, and simplicity have been enlightening and a wonderful example to follow.

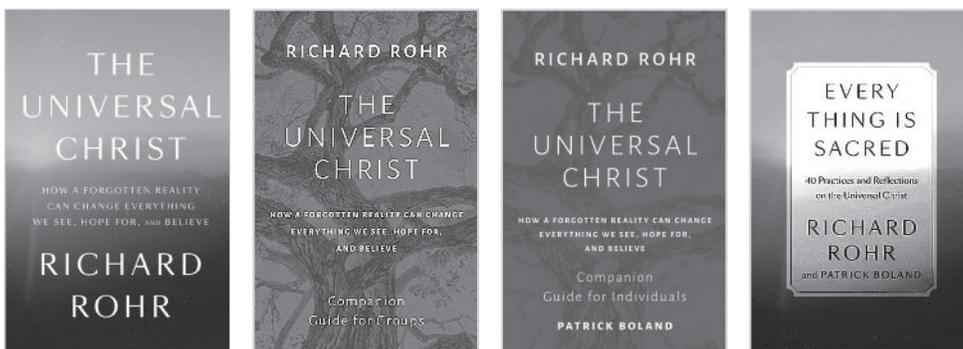


I have been blessed, challenged, totally confused, experienced dark nights, and, most importantly, found grace abounding through everything I have been blessed to learn.

Words really can't say how I feel about Fr. Richard or CAC and all they have done in my life because it is so much more than that. I will forever hold Fr. Richard and CAC dear to my heart and cherish where God has taken me through them. Thank you, Fr. Richard, for your gracious gifts and many sacrifices and for expanding my ability to see the world as enchanted and full of grace.

*Jill McCarley was born and raised in Oklahoma and now lives in Texas with her husband Luke. They have two sons and four grandchildren.*

## Recommended Readings for Lent



available at [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org)

**D**RAWING ON SCRIPTURE, HISTORY, and spiritual practice, Richard Rohr articulates a transformative view of Jesus Christ as a portrait of God's constant, unfolding work in the world. "God loves things by becoming them," he writes, "and Jesus' life was meant to declare that humanity has never been separate from God" except by its own negative choice. When we recover this fundamental truth, faith becomes less about proving Jesus was God and more about learning to recognize the Creator's presence all around us and in everyone we meet.

# Optician for the Heart

**K**ahlil Gibran (1883–1931) thought parenting is synonymous with bending. In his mystical writing *The Prophet*, Gibran described God as the archer, children as God’s “living arrows,” and parents as bows. The Prophet tells parents, “Let your bending in the archer’s hand be for gladness.”<sup>1</sup>

When my children were younger, I was always bending—bending to buckle car seats, bending to pick up Cheerios, bending to scrub cute, dirty feet. I generally bent with groans, not gladness.

Outside tender moments, my focus was to raise adults for success in the real world: how to do laundry, save money, and cook Ramen noodles.



“In June 2019, I heard Oprah interview a Franciscan named Richard Rohr. It was love at first listen. I devoured his writings.”

But I ached. I wanted to teach them about the spiritual rhythm of life. Having God-talks at the kitchen table wasn’t cutting it. One child said he’d like to be Jesus. Another said he’d like to be God. Not what I hoped for.

In June 2019, I heard Oprah interview a Franciscan named Richard Rohr. It was love at first listen. I devoured his writings. I started with *The Universal Christ*. Then my credit card sparked with orders to the CAC. I consumed more books, online classes, and podcasts.

In my fervor, one line from *The Universal Christ* spoke right to my heart: “All people must learn to draw from their own Implanted Spirit which is the only thing that will help them in the long run anyway.”<sup>2</sup>

I knew this. When I lost a beloved to suicide, my college degree didn’t sustain me. When I grieved with a beloved in trauma, my bank account didn’t nurture me.

My children are twelve, thirteen, and fifteen years old. The long run is the hidden place beyond the microcosm of our home. It’s that unknown time when, inevitably, suffering will infiltrate and wring them dry.

An optician is one who makes lenses that focus light rays to clarify an image. Fr. Richard is an optician for my heart. His teachings shifted my focus from the outer to the inner life of my children. I now see them spirit to spirit. I seek to guide them through quiet soul work, not just life’s busy work. After all, there’s only so much wisdom they can gain from knowing how to load a dishwasher.

Fr. Richard gave me language to talk to the kids about their own implanted spirit. When sacred opportunities come, I pull them close and whisper with them about their spirit—how it sustained them in their sadness and rejoiced with them in their joy.

When bending now, I feel more gladness. There are fewer groans and four-letter words. Fr. Richard has revealed the reverence in bending too. It’s akin to bowing, spirit to spirit, to the awe of it all.

Maybe that’s the archer’s plan for the long run.

1 Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 18.  
2 Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (New York: Convergent, 2018), 76.

*Sara Kathryn Hill, who studied with Jesuits at Spring Hill College, is an attorney who advocates for disabled veterans. She is a mother to three Hillians, a spouse to a brilliant and funny man, and a pushover for her dog, Honey.*

## A New Release of a Modern Classic!

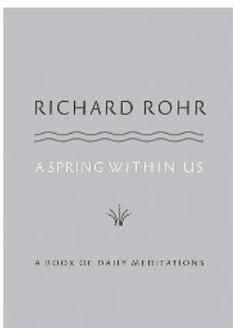
*With his great Franciscan heart wide open to the heart of the world, Richard Rohr seems to have a sixth sense about what’s emerging into consciousness and where he is needed next. . . . What awaits you here is the integrated wisdom that emerges out of a life courageously and vulnerably lived.*

—Cynthia Bourgeault, from the Foreword

**A Spring Within Us: A Book of Daily Meditations**

available at [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org)

In these daily reflections, Richard Rohr reminds us of our inherent belovedness and invites us to rediscover the spring hidden inside us: God’s indwelling presence. Remembering our True Self is a lifelong journey, and Fr. Richard offers insights to ease the process that leads us back to our Source.

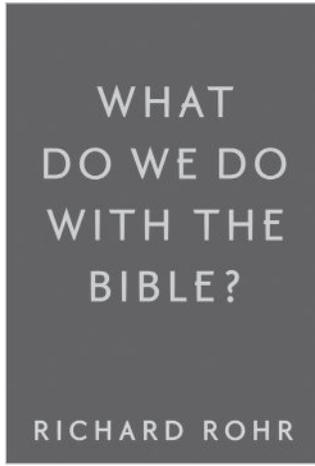




Center for  
Action and  
Contemplation

PO Box 12464 • Albuquerque, NM 87195  
cac.org

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE **PAID**  
ALBUQUERQUE, NM  
PERMIT NO. 568



Fr. Richard focuses on  
Jesus' own method  
of using his Hebrew  
Scriptures.

To order, visit <https://store.cac.org>

## SUPPORT THE WORK

The Center for Action and Contemplation is a nonprofit educational organization. Please consider supporting our work by donating securely online at [cac.org/support-cac](https://cac.org/support-cac) or by sending a check, payable to CAC, to PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195.

We also invite you to remember CAC in your estate plan. For more information about making a charitable contribution, including stock transfers and bequests, please email [development@cac.org](mailto:development@cac.org).

## CONNECT WITH CAC

- Visit us online at [cac.org](https://cac.org) to learn more about CAC's educational programs and resources
- Sign up to receive monthly news and daily or weekly meditations by email: [cac.org/sign-up](https://cac.org/sign-up)
- Follow @CACRadicalGrace on Twitter and Instagram and "Like" Center for Action and Contemplation on Facebook
- Write to us at [support@cac.org](mailto:support@cac.org) or CAC, PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195

The newest issue of *Oneing* features essays and reflections that weave powerful stories of nonviolent social resistance with stirring visions of the future.

## NONVIOLENCE

VOL. 10, NO. 2

The choice of the Nonviolence theme for the Fall 2022 issue of *Oneing* arose following a conversation with the Rev. John Dear, one of today's great social activists for peace and justice. John Dear is a Roman Catholic priest, activist, lecturer, author, and longtime friend of Fr. Richard Rohr. With Fr. Richard's blessing, he wrote the Introduction to the issue, which includes contributions from peace and social justice activists and other critical thinkers from various faith and cultural backgrounds.

—Vanessa Guerin  
Director of Publications

available at [store.cac.org](https://store.cac.org)

