



EVERYTHING BELONGS

The Contemplative Laboratory

Paul Swanson: There is a distinctly intuitive way that Richard Rohr teaches. It has captivated secrets for years through his word and pen. Through conversations with Richard and years of study, we are playing with a simple distillation of Richard's teaching philosophy into three animating questions. What do we want to know? How do we want to grow? How do we want to show up in our lives and in the world? The intent is that we at the CAC take these questions seriously as foundational for furthering Richard's teachings in the world. There's a permissive empowerment for folks to experiment with and uniquely live out these teachings from their own context, conditions, and communities. It is incarnational mysticism and service to the world. In our conversation today, we are back sitting in Richard's living room. Mike walks through these three questions with Richard and together we hover over the nuances of good theology, apophatic knowing and the metaphorical alchemical language of transformation. Corey shows us all up by his ability to locate scripture references first.

Mike Petrow: From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petro.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs. Richard, as always, it's great to see you again. Thank you for welcoming us back to The Hermitage. Look forward to having a little more conversation today.

Richard Rohr: It's always exciting. You guys make such good observations and they're so ordinary, so let's hear it again. What are you going to say?

Mike Petrow: Well, it's our great joy in life and the goal we strive for to be as ordinary as possible.

Richard Rohr: Hear, hear.

Mike Petrow: So it was fun. In one of our previous conversations, we were talking about you as a teacher, and Paul and I shared that drawing from your teaching, we've come up with three guiding questions that we take into all the coursework and the programs that we do at the Center for Action and Contemplation.

Richard Rohr: I can't wait to hear them.

Mike Petrow: They're very ordinary, very simple.

Richard Rohr: All right, good.

Mike Petrow: The three questions that we think about-

Richard Rohr: Are what?

Mike Petrow: What do we want people to know? How do we want people to grow or transform, and how do we want people to show up in the world as a result?

Richard Rohr: That's lovely, and you two figured that out. So the best truths are so simple, they go beneath the radar of observation. Wow. Okay, proceed.

Mike Petrow: All right. So just for fun, Richard, let's talk about the three questions. What do you think?

What do we really want people to know in the teaching that continues coming out of the center and carrying on your legacy? I love that you teach practice and you teach action, but you still give people such profound transformative knowledge. What do you think people really need to know nowadays?

Richard Rohr: Our first thought, mine too, would be that whoever this being is, we call God, our assumption should be, we got to be convinced that this God is good. Not neutral, certainly not wrathful and bad, but the way that goodness is experienced is God is active and caring and involved in your life. That's what people have yet to be convinced of. God is an abstract formula that we have to believe in and he needs praise. He is a he. All of that has to be cleared away. Is it possible for me to believe that God is a caring involved presence in my life? That's the only God you're going to fall in love with.

Mike Petrow: That's profound and it leaves me sitting with the challenge of what it really means to know that. We want people, not to think that, but to know it. I think about that famous story of Carl Young where they asked him, do you believe in God? And he said, I don't have to believe. I know.

Richard Rohr: I know.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: So then if we move into the second question, how do we want people to grow? If people really knew that God, or whatever this is, is benevolent, how would that challenge people to grow or transfer?

Richard Rohr: Not just benevolent because even that could remain abstract.

Mike Petrow: Yes.

Richard Rohr: It has to be benevolently engaged, knowing me more than I know myself, caring about me more than I even know how to care for myself. That is only experienced if you go on an inner journey with this presence. If you give God a chance to act in your life, to forgive, to care. If you don't experience God forgiving you, I know you did all those asinine things, Richard, that's not really what I'm concentrating on. You have to know that personally, immediately, actively, experientially. Then the spiritual life begins and then you cannot help but grow because you live in a safe universe, an active universe where there's an engagement. That's what most people don't seem to enjoy. The people who do can talk about it very personally, very warmly, very immediately. I hate to say this to a room with three men in it, but it's usually women who come to that first because they understand life relationally more than men do. Men have to work to get into a relational universe. Seems to me we have to work at it. Now when we do and it happens, it becomes very dear.

Mike Petrow: It's interesting too. I feel like, in moving from knowing something to really sort of transforming into it, sort of living the teaching, there seems that there has to be some pushback or wrestling or interrogating ideas with lived experience. This podcast is called Everything Belongs named after one of your most popular books, and you and I have had

many conversations where I've said, I know everything belongs, but why does it have to hurt so bad? It seems that sort of wrestling and pushing back, is that a part of that transformation?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it's the overcoming of the resistance that is the relationship. If you don't have some resistance to pass through, to step over, it's not believable. So now resistance. I'm calling it holy disorder in my new book. People who just glibly say, God loves me at the kindergarten level because they've been trained to say it, but you don't take them that seriously. But people who you know, their intelligence, their sinfulness, their imperfection has forced them to overcome those barriers, has allowed them, has called them. Those believers you, okay, I might just take him seriously, or her seriously. Yeah.

So the transformed sinner is much more attractive than the natural saint. Someone who knows they're full of shit and still believes in the loving presence, who's engaging me, who's forgiving me, who's accepting me, who's still empowering me in my imperfection. That's what changes the world. We don't need more canonized Catholic saints. The one I've made fun, of course he's a Jesuit, the Saint Aloysius you good Protestant boys would know nothing about, but there was always a statute of Saint Aloysius in every seminary chapel because, get ready, he died in his late twenties. He never looked upon the face of a woman.

Mike Petrow: Wow. Way to go St. Aloysius..

Richard Rohr: Except his mother, his mother, and he must've been quite good person. He dealt with the plague people. That's what he died from. But why do we create these myths that he never gazed at the face of a woman his whole life? So we had his statue there looking beautiful Aloysius. Oh, come on, come on, canonized. The word for that is, Hey, geography, the life of a saint. It developed a whole canonical practice and we loved virgins who never fell. That did a huge disservice to the gospel. It really did.

Mike Petrow: I would've assumed St. Aloysius would've died from a head wound walking into something because he was always looking at the ground.

Richard Rohr: Not looking at the face of ... how was that supposed to be inspiring? All of us had already, when we heard the story of his life, we had already failed because we had looked at faces of women or men. It doesn't matter.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Well, we've said this previously, I love that your teaching has never been about avoiding sin or avoiding wrongdoing or avoiding mistakes. It's been about transformation. This idea that we come to God by doing it wrong instead of doing it right.

Richard Rohr: By doing it wrong. You first have to do it wrong and experience forgiveness. Isn't that what the story the prodigal son teaches us? He does it wrong, but he comes back to the father. It's such a perfect story. And the other one does it right. The older son would be St. Aloysius. Don't worry, you'll never hear about him.

Mike Petrow: Well, and I love that, and that's where it seems like the growth and the transformation

takes place is in the doing it wrong, which again, I think was what really drew me to your teaching. So we then add this third question into the equation, which we also take from studying everything you've offered us, which is just how do we want people to show up in the world? Because our transformation should lead us to want to help transform the world.

Richard Rohr: A servant leader, which when God has, as it were, gotten down on his knees and forgiven us and exalted us, then the only thing that makes sense of your life is to do the same as your lover. That's how you know you've had a divine lover, that you want to serve other people. You're not looking for a role, you're not looking for a title, you're not looking for a costume. You want to do for others what was done to your soul. That's the giveaway servant leadership.

When you see the heart of a servant in another person, they want to help you. They want to heal you. Most of the stories in the New Testament are healing. Why didn't that blow us away? We thought to be a good Catholic was not to need healing because you hadn't sinned. Oh, what a disservice. When Pope Francis said recently that Catholic ... the Pope said this, so don't hate me, Catholic sexual theology is still in diapers. He said that. Still in diapers. That is just brilliant. He's a Jesuit too. So I said a bad thing about Aloysius, but a good thing about Pope Francis.

Mike Petrow: I appreciate that. One of the earliest parts of your teaching I heard that really landed deeply with me was when you said Christianity as a religion is still growing up. I forget how you said it.

Richard Rohr: It's still infantile.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's still in his infancy.

Richard Rohr: It's still in the infant. It's at best teenage spirituality waiting for infatuation.

Mike Petrow: It gives me hope though.

Richard Rohr: Yes, it does.

Mike Petrow: Room for growth, huh?

Richard Rohr: Gives me hope too.

Mike Petrow: So Richard, using these three questions in living your teachings forward and carrying legacy on, how do you think people should be putting their transformation in the service of the world? How do you think people need to show up and the world going forward?

Richard Rohr: First, let me say what it's not.

Mike Petrow: Okay.

Richard Rohr: It's not because we've all been infected by this attending services. Life as attending. We clergy needing to create a job for ourself created services at which the people of

God had to attend. That just distorted. Why is a Sunday morning is about working with hospice or Habitat for Humanity? Why wouldn't that please God more than ... why would God get off on people gathering in rows and singing songs to him? Is God that much of a narcissist that I need to be worshiped, I need to be praised.

Mike Petrow: It's a funny play on words to think about a Sunday service and what service means. Interesting.

Richard Rohr: Oh, what service really means? Yeah, very good. How do we use that word service? It isn't really service, but people have always had a need for family, for community, and they still do. I wouldn't begrudge them or take that away if you really need to join your community every Sunday. But at least in the Catholic world, those Sunday gatherings are highly anonymous.

Mike Petrow: So if that's what it's not.

Richard Rohr: Oh yeah, okay. It's not attending. It's relational, and relational in a servant way. How can I help the world? Let's call it helping rather than service. It is service, but-

Paul Swanson: It's a way of participation too.

Richard Rohr: You've heard me talk about the cult of innocence.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Have I talked about that on this tape?

Mike Petrow: Not on this.

Paul Swanson: You've talked about with Brian on his podcast.

Richard Rohr: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: And that was what? That was something that came from Brian that came from Nadia Bolz Weber, this idea of the cult of innocence, just trying to constantly put myself in the camp and let myself off the hook, I'm the innocent person?

Richard Rohr: Christianity became, for many people the way to prove that I'm not a sinner. The way we project all of our shadow onto sinners, the assumption is we're not. Whereas could it be that Christianity is really solidarity with the marginalized, the sinners, the outsiders, the immigrants. We haven't achieved that because we don't want to prove we're not outsiders. We're loyal, bonafide church members who believe the gospel. I don't know what good it is. Forgive me for being so strong, but I would see you coming to work together with your community, but always for the sake of solidarity with whoever has been pushed out of the community. I don't think this is radical anymore. It's just the only thing that makes sense.

Mike Petrow: I could see where the cult of innocence would keep us from that because we don't want to be in solidarity with even what's been pushed out in ourselves. What you were saying earlier, it seems like that's sort of where alchemy of transformation takes place is with the raw material of our mistakes and our errors and our disappointments.

Richard Rohr: How do we get in this situation? Christians being against transgender people? How did that happen? Why is it you think God doesn't like transgender people? Because they're not like you who think you're normal.

Paul Swanson: It seems like the cult of innocence naturally breeds these types of purity culture.

Richard Rohr: Purity culture on some criteria. I don't gamble. I don't play cards. It got that silly. I don't dance.

Paul Swanson: Right. Church becomes a gated community that protects everything that you think is outside of the law.

Richard Rohr: What good is it?

Mike Petrow: One of the highlights of my guest bathroom is I have a tiny little book sitting next to the toilet that says *Is the Devil in Modern Amusements?* It's from the fifties and it talks about how the devil's in card playing, dancing, theater, cinema, newspapers, wine. Pretty much anything that's fun.

Richard Rohr: Anything fun displeases God. Do you realize what you're saying when you say that? People don't. So God is basically a, what's the word we used for spoil sport?

Mike Petrow: Killjoy.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Buzzkill. God's a buzzkill.

Richard Rohr: Buzzkill. See, that's your generation's word. We never had that word. A buzz kill. Why would you like such a God?

Paul Swanson: That's a great question. It's a great question.

Richard Rohr: You've all seen movies where someone's having sex and they put down the picture of their mother.

Mike Petrow: Accurate, yeah. That's great.

Richard Rohr: Mother could not like this that I'm having sex. How silly. But people don't reflect on what does this say about God? Now that's our job as preachers. If that's the moral agenda of God, what does this say about who God is and why we need good theology? I don't think it's the majority position is good theology.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Mike Petrow: No.

Richard Rohr: At all. That convicts the Orthodox, the Catholics and the evangelicals.

Mike Petrow: That's why there's still important things we need people ... we want people to know. That

conversation.

Richard Rohr: Yeah

Paul Swanson: And Mike, you brought up a great phrase of spiritual alchemy and thinking about-

Richard Rohr: I'm using that in my new book.

Paul Swanson: Oh, you are?

Mike Petrow: Really?

Paul Swanson: Excellent. Excellent. Mike and I talked ... oh, go ahead.

Richard Rohr: The alchemy of, oh, I don't know what I'm saying, but it's in the new book.

Paul Swanson: Okay.

Richard Rohr: Alchemy. Well, of course you Jungians love it.

Mike Petrow: We do love alchemy.

Richard Rohr: That was what he got.

Paul Swanson: We've been musing on this language of alchemy to consider how we learn. So there's the raw materials that come into it. There's the fire, there's the crucible, and it's the transformation process into something new.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Paul Swanson: How do you see this process of, what do we want people to know? How do we want people to grow and how do we want them to show up in the world? How does alchemy ... does it feel like an appropriate metaphor? Because all the ways it contains these raw materials, these ingredients, this crucible that can hold the fire so that transformation can happen. How do you see that as potentially a helpful metaphor for how one might approach their own spiritual life and language to kind of point to like I'm in the crucible right now, or this fire is getting hot, or how do I keep the edges hot so that gold may come out of this experience?

Richard Rohr: Wonderful, wonderful. You guys are doing your work. Where is that lion? You good evangelicals? God is like a refiner's fire. Is that apocalypse?

Mike Petrow: I feel like it's Isaiah, but give me two seconds.

Richard Rohr: Check it.

Mike Petrow: I have a tiny device in my pocket that can answer this question.

Paul Swanson: It's saying the same thing, right?

Richard Rohr: Of course. A refiner's fire is alchemy.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Corey Wayne: Malachi 3:2.

Richard Rohr: Look at that. He's the real Protestant.

Mike Petrow: Corey's the truest evangelical.

Richard Rohr: Malachi. Well, Malachi isn't much longer than three chapters. It must be at the very end of the Old Testament. Is that your last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, or is that a Catholic bible?

Corey Wayne: Oh, I just Googled, Richard. I should out myself.

Paul Swanson: I don't recall that because I've been hanging out with too many Catholics.

Richard Rohr: No, the last verse is, turn the hearts of fathers to their sons and sons toward their father. I use that in men's work. Where is it?

Mike Petrow: No, there's a verse in Isaiah that talks about purifying us the way that metal is purified.

Richard Rohr: Well, there,

Mike Petrow: That's that kind of alchemy.

Richard Rohr: What chapter?

Mike Petrow: That's Isaiah. That's right at the beginning.

Richard Rohr: First Isaiah.

Mike Petrow: It's the calling of Isaiah.

Richard Rohr: In the new book. I say first Isaiah is really the classic prophet, his religious experience, his anger, and eventually his lamentation one to 39. Well I'll respond to what you just said, Paul. Alchemy presumes many ingredients to something. It's not just doing it right or it's the mixture, like a good cook. It makes the spiritual journey a little more complex than obeying laws. It's an alchemical solution. Jung did so many good things and he just introduced you that word alchemy was one of his good things.

Paul Swanson: I think one thing I appreciate about the way we're talking about this is there's the very three direct questions, but then it doesn't mean that they're linear in that way, that they're going to all be melted in this way where-

Richard Rohr: Melted.

Paul Swanson: You have to be attentive to the way certain questions are showing up. It doesn't mean that you'll go from knowing something or learning on that learning process that way in the

context of your life. That all may be present at once. But we are talking about it in a way to put a spotlight so that we can see the distinction before we can see the union of them all.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, and I would clarify that with that first question. It's interesting. If the question is what do we want people to know? It's this communicating out of information. But if the question is what do we want to know, then what it does is it centralizes the importance of curiosity and all of us learning together. I wonder, Richard, is there something alchemical about curiosity in the spiritual life that keeps us all going?

Richard Rohr: See, you forced me to think new things. Yes. Curiosity presumes the apophatic tradition that I do not yet know. When we called a beginner's mind, I used to give that in the first talk at the male initiation rights. We all need to go back to beginner's mind. Those are the only people who are teachable. Everybody else knows everything already. Unless we can again honor the apophatic half of the journey. Protestantism just emphasized the cataphatic, knowing and knowing certainly. Now most of Catholicism did too. I don't mean ... but we had this subtext of darkness theology, and that saved us a lot of times.

Pope Francis is a natural at it. He doesn't need to just walk around his pope saying certain things. Whenever you have a patience with uncertainty, with not knowing, with metaphor, all languages metaphorical, you're into the apophatic tradition. Unless you're a bit apophatic, I know that's a big word, but we're just trying to show we do know the tradition, and this isn't just my 21st century idea. It's really happened, happening in American culture now with seeing that the very people who claim such certitude are the big fans of a certain former president who tells demonstrable lies one after the other, that this supposed love of the truth has led you to tolerate total lies. The whole thing's being exposed right now. Am I responding to what you just said?

Mike Petrow: Yeah, no-

Richard Rohr: I don't know if I ... forgive me if I'm not.

Mike Petrow: I'm lost in thought on what you've been thinking for sure.

Richard Rohr: Just horrible, the state of American politics now. Horrible.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, no.

Richard Rohr: Just childish. A bunch of kids just making truth whatever they want truth to be, and too many of them carry the badge Christian. This is what your Christianity gave you. You love the truth so much. A total non love of truth, but just love of personal advantage. So you see that the ego was in charge, not the gospel.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, and that confident certainty that shuts out curiosity and the possibility of unknowing.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I feel like the landscape of our culture is inviting us into the humility of that curiosity.

Richard Rohr: Good, well put.

Paul Swanson: In an apophatic openness. We do not know. There's so much we do not know.

Richard Rohr: How could we possibly know?

Paul Swanson: Climate crisis, the ways in which we are just beginning to understand the cosmos and how interrelated and interconnected we are in our actions and the effect they have on our planet. Then as the web telescope shows us so much more than we could ever imagine seeing. I feel so small in that I'm so grateful for that.

Richard Rohr: It's still moving and still showing what we never knew. We didn't know about this galaxy. We didn't know about this galaxy. Why don't people make those connections? This is the shape of the universe. That the space outdoes the planets by far. Oh my. We're getting there, but it is forcing us to respect for science, which is no ability, but no ability proceeding by experiment, experiments with truth. Wasn't that Gandhi's phrase, experiments with truth? Is this true? We need to train Christians in is this true? Is God Trinitarian? Don't just decide to hate it. Don't just decide to love it. Experiment with it. Is there a way that God comes at you from three angles at least?

Paul Swanson: That's what it feels like this season of the CAC in this approach is experiments with truth and trying to look at it from multiple angles.

Richard Rohr: Yes. It's nice to end on that.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Mike Petrow: Everything belongs we'll continue in a moment.

Paul Swanson: The impact of Richard's story career as a spiritual teacher flows outward into his global student body, inspiring their fuller participation in the cosmic dance and the general dance of our lives. In this spirit, next, you'll hear Mike and I sitting together on the CAC campus to talk about how the questing nature of these questions invites us to explore the expanding communal wisdom of our CAC faculty, the contemplative lineages and the curriculum of our lives. Mike and I call this our contemplative laboratory.

Mike, we had this wonderful conversation with Richard in his house talking about three questions that really drive and animate the way we think about learning at the CAC, and we're trying to embed those in every program that we do here. It's fun to be in this conversation with you now because you're so much of the architect of that. So much of your training helps shine a light on some of the ways that one can learn in the Christian contemplative traditions.

Mike Petrow: Thanks, Paul. What a rich and fantastic conversation that was. I just am so filled with gratitude and appreciation that we get to do this, that we get to sit with Richard at this stage in his life where he's integrated these teachings so deeply and that we get to sort of tease these ideas out with him. I can tell you right off the bat, I learned something in the middle of our conversation when we were talking through the three questions. I had a massive light bulb that went off for me or perhaps I should say went on. That might be the better use of

the metaphor. I had a light bulb that went on for me that was really, really, really profound. If you want to just jump right into it.

It was wild when we were talking to Richard. So we have these three questions. What do we want to know? How do we want to grow? How do we want to show up in the world? We were talking about the first question and I found myself saying, what do we want people to know? I called it out towards the end where I realized that, gosh, that's not the question. It's not what do we want people to know? It's what do we want to know? The temptation for us is so strong in working with these amazing teachers to think that they have this great vault of wisdom that we are walking back into with them and bringing out for our listeners and our readers and our students.

But in reality, the question, what do we want to know is a question for all of us, including our teachers. We are all exploring this together and we're all kind of on the same quest, which is wild, which is really, really wild. I love that all of our teachers sort of embody that. And Richard too. They're just sort of taking us along on their adventure. I think about my great teacher origin who talks about how this is about dialogue, not definition. It's about exploration, not explanation. The real quest is the questions. That's what I love about Richard is his willingness. God, if I had a dollar for every time I watched him interact with a student and say, you're teaching me. His curiosity seems endless. I don't know. How did that feel for you?

Paul Swanson: Well, you're hitting the nail on the head. That shift from people to we, it adds the communal element, which has always been there, at least to the depths that I've studied the contemplative traditions. That community helps form knowledge and practice and activism in the world. The prophetic prophets will stand up, teachers will stand up, but as always with the community in mind, and service the community through love. I think that nuance helps show us that Richard is a profound and gifted teacher. In a lot of ways, he will shine a light forward on something that we should all learn.

There's other teachers, there's other people who do that in different ways. So that's where the communal aspect I feel like comes in where there's expertise that Richard does not have, that he cannot have because of his own lived experience, his own training. So to have these other reflections of light that can offer guidance, that can offer insight, that can offer wisdom, that are not his to do, it helps extrapolate the beauty and the joy of what a communal learning environment can do. That requires humility to be like one teacher, one person, or even one community doesn't have all the wisdom.

Mike Petrow: Well, and it also requires, I think infinite curiosity. That's one of the things I love working with Richard and our core faculty and now sort of our invited faculty is watching Richard get excited about what different faculty bring. One of my fondest memories is when Dr. B joined us and Dr. B was giving us these profound teachings on Howard Thurman and I showed up at Richard's house one day and there was a big Howard Thurman quote on the wall. I was like, that's new. And he was going on and on about the brilliance of Howard Thurman. He said, I don't remember if this is an Augustine quote or not, but he said, it's like late in life have I come to thee? He said, "Howard Thurman is such a profound genius and I can't believe I'm only discovering his wisdom now."

It's wild, but Richard's like that with so many things. He just keeps on learning and he's passionate about things that other teachers are passionate about. It makes me think about curiosity as a core part of the spiritual life. You know this. My great teacher's origin of Alexandria and one of my favorite quotes from him is this praising of curiosity as a gift from God. Check this out. He says, "An eager longing for the reality of things is natural to us and implanted in our soul by the divine, much more and beyond all comparison does the mind burn with unspeakable longing to learn the design of things just as ..." oh, pause. Corey, we got to pause that one. Hang on a second. I buggered it up. I'm so sorry.

Paul Swanson: It's okay.

Mike Petrow: Hang on, hang on.

Paul Swanson: This is why we edit.

Mike Petrow: Try that again. "An eager longing for the reality of things is natural to us and implanted in our soul by the divine, much more and beyond all comparison does the mind burn with unspeakable longing to learn the desire of things." In that language, the mind might actually also be described as the heart. He says, "This longing, this love has been implanted in us by God. Just as the eye naturally desires light and sight, and our body by its nature, desires food and drink, so our soul cherishes a natural and appropriate longing to know God's truth and learn the causes of things."

What I love about this quote is this is erotic language burning, loving, longing, desiring, cherishing. It makes it sound like curiosity is a contemplative language for being in love with reality. Of course that makes sense to me. When we love something or someone, we want to know more about them or that just as we ourselves want to know or be known. Paul talks about knowing and being known as part of love, but I also love that origin says it's natural. Here's what I wonder, Paul, you're a dad. How natural when you look at your kids is curiosity as part of their reality.

Paul Swanson: Gosh, it just permeates to everything that they do. I was thinking as you read that quote about, I think it was Abraham Joshua Heschel who prays for wonder. I think that children are born with this kind of natural curiosity and wonder and the questions that get asked or the pushback to things that have become so muted by their mundanity of how they show up that I don't question them anymore, and then they ask the question that pierces a long held delusion that helps me just cope with getting through another day. Why do you do this? Why do we go here? There's this image that just flashed over my eyes of ... We were recently traveling and my 4-year-old son looked at a cemetery full of headstones and he said, "Why is there a chess game in that field?"

Mike Petrow: Oh my God, I love that.

Paul Swanson: I just sat with that and it just opened up things for me thinking about life as a game. Here's all these chess pieces not moving. The game is over. And yet his question was him trying to take the things that he knows about reality and putting them squarely with the confusion about these chess pieces.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Paul Swanson: So many parents say that, right? Where my children are my teachers. What has really helped me ... I say that all the time too, but it also helps me look at everyone as a potential teacher because of the way that we, in our own lived experiences, bring our own lens of curiosity. Sometimes it's prophetic, sometimes it's a balm. Sometimes it introduces me to a new teacher that I didn't know before or a new reading or a new tradition. Like your story about Richard and Howard Thurman, that's exactly it. This is why I think we need teachers to help us open doors to other deep teachings that can rejuvenate our soul or draw us into deeper connection through the practice of curiosity and the practice of wonder in all that we do.

Mike Petrow: Wow, that's a mic drop moment, Paul. I am never going to look at a chess board the same way again. That is amazing. It's extraordinary how the wonder of a child and that infinite curiosity can take something so familiar and completely spin it on its axis. I love the notion of thinking about that as an intrinsic aspect of contemplation. If contemplation is a long loving look at the real something that Richard says a lot. Curiosity is a part of our falling into that loving aspect and looking afresh again, falling in love with reality by sort of seeing it again for the first time. Just the way that the eyes of a child say, oh, that looks like a chess board, and you go, oh my God, it does. I love where that inspired you to think about life as a game. It helps me when you talk about our children being our teachers, it again takes me back to every one of those moments I've watched Richard interact with a student and say, you are teaching me, and realize he's not being placating or polite. He genuinely means it.

Every one of us, all of our voices together create that collective conversational universe. I love to joke with you about CAC sort of being a contemplative laboratory where we're studying all these different contemplative practices and trying to figure out what actually works for ordinary people in their day-to-day lives. We joke and say, it's like any laboratory. Sometimes you try something and it doesn't work and it explodes in your face and you go, all right, back to the drawing board. But I don't know, I don't want to push the metaphor too far, but I love that we're all sort of scientists together. There's not a single person who's wrestling with this who their curiosity and their questions and the sort of transformation that they undergo in doing that doesn't contribute to the rest of the collective conversation in the, I would say the body of Christ, using Christian language.

Paul Swanson: I love that you brought that metaphor, the contemplative laboratory because it's a fun visual, but it also paints a picture of so much of what we are trying to do in the work that we do at the CAC, and how its origin is love. So I love how you also brought in the sensuality of language through that origin quote and just prayer in general, longing, hunger, the ways in which that is the erotic sensual drive at the core of how love expresses us into the laboratory, and that it's the service of love sparked by these strong desires for deeper union with God and one another in this planet. I just think that the more we can experiment in these directions, the more we can understand how that love is inflamed and can spread and catch fire elsewhere.

Mike Petrow: Man, I love that. I just want to take a second with that. I think what's interesting is in a lot of Christian mystical literature, a phrase that comes up over and over again, we don't have time to explore it here, is the wound of love. It makes me think of Richard's insight that great love and great suffering are our greatest teachers.

Paul Swanson: Nice.

Mike Petrow: So what's intriguing is to recognize that when we come to learn, when we bring our curiosity, we are shaped each one of us individually by our own great loves and by our own great suffering. Our wounds also shape our unique wondering and the questions we ask. Our wounds shape our unique wandering and the path that our life takes. Origin talks about our wounds becoming health bestowing wounds, our wounds shape our unique wisdom. I feel like that takes us so naturally into that next question of how do we want to grow?

Because in the end of the day, Richard says this all the time, contemplative learning is about transformation, not information. And at the end of the day, our curiosity brings us to sort of learning things, but then wrestling with them and kind of getting into this question of how does this actually hit my lived reality? In theory, in the second season of this podcast, we're going to talk about falling upward, one of Richard's greatest books. There'll be so many opportunities for so many different voices to say, okay, when we talk about the first half of life and second half of life, what does that really mean for me? I think it's that wrestling with reality and lived experience that brings about growth, but it's not easy and it does bring some of our suffering and our wounds into the experience. What do you think?

Paul Swanson: Well, I think, again, that's brilliant. I think it's bringing the fullness of our own life in conversation with the text. Since this podcast is taking Richard's teachings and asking the question, how do we live these forward? And going through these three kind of driving questions of what do we want to know? How do we want to grow and how do we want to show up? We're taking these texts at these kind of foundational places, and then we're putting them in conversation with us, with Richard, with guests that we're going to have on, with other staff members, with the CAC in general, with the world, the conversation, the ripples of that are endless. I think that's the exciting thing about what we're seeking to do in this podcast is taking this question of wrestling and not just ... we know that there's wisdom, there's practice, there's truth in these books, and how do we put that in deep conversation with my suffering and your suffering and your experiences, my experiences and our guest's experiences.

Those folks who are living in contexts that I am learning about, that I'm on the edge of my own curiosity and discovery with. The opportunity for dropping into depth while having a hand on the contemplative traditions that are speaking through the entire world, but particularly the way that those mystics and teachers that we touch from ancient days to here and now, and then we could have those conversations with folks, teachers from ... I lost my train of thought. We could to have these conversations that are going to really allow the wrestling to take center stage without having to feel like we've arrived at perfect answers. I'm trying to show our work in that way,

Mike Petrow: Yeah, and I think that's so valuable to keep in mind is that we don't arrive at perfect answers. So one of our coworkers here at the Center for Action and Contemplation is Barb Lopez and she is a student. What I love about her is that she has academic level understanding, but also a great personal love for learning theory. Barb, if you hear this and I get it wrong, please forgive me, but she talks a lot about, if I say this correct, transformational learning theory. One of the things that brings us into a deep learning experience is what's called a disorienting dilemma, right? So discerning listeners may now pick up on the fact that our three questions are a little bit tied to Richard's notion of construction, deconstruction, reconstruction. What is it? Order disorder reorder.

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Mike Petrow: That's the wisdom pattern. We don't need to get into that. That's another season of the podcast. But recognizing that it is sometimes a disorienting dilemma, a deep wrestling. Origin talks about being scandalized, that invites us ironically and paradoxically into the opportunities to learn something new because it shakes up our sensibilities. It causes us to question our certainties, and it opens us in a lot of ways, even if it's a little bit terrifying, and it feels like the ground's been pulled out from underneath us. That's all well and good to talk about questions driving a podcast or a learning theory. But I think it's lived experience for most of us. I think it's also what brings a lot of us to Richard and the CAC's material is that we want to be able to have real spiritual conversations about the fact that life can be terrifying and disorienting sometimes.

Paul Swanson: I think you're so good at reminding us of this point. I feel like that is one of the ways that you bring your own sense of scholarship, your own understanding of this work and live it forward is by bringing into and how does this affect the suffering of the world, my suffering, collective suffering. Where does that drive for you come into this? How does that pull you? How do you pull those questions into your life and share them with that level of generativity?

Mike Petrow: Well, I think you're being overly generous, so thank you. I think what it is is our teachers are really good at that. I think I get to sit at the feet of some really, really brilliant guides here, but what I see in all our teachers is that they've integrated this material through lived experience and through their own great love and great suffering, and they've not shied away from the hard questions that asks you. This has come up a bunch. We've talked about this a bunch. This has come up in other podcasts. For me, one of the paradoxically most painful gifts of my life was that when I was sort of studying this theory, I also went through one of the most profound experiences of personal suffering in my life, in losing my mom, losing my brother, losing some other things, going through a massive rebuilding of what it meant for me to be a spiritual person and a person of faith.

And paradoxically, that made me really, really curious about how other people navigate that and experience it. It's a curiosity that I think will never end. I think it's a curiosity that I share with you and our teachers, and it's not an abstract curiosity, it's a compassionate curiosity. It's that curiosity talking about earlier, which is a form of love, which is really, at the end of the day, ideas are fine and they're fun. We love ideas, but what really matters is what does this actually feel like in the heart of a person who's living it? What does it feel like to be a person who suddenly feels estranged from their God image, from an idea about reality and people that has given them comfort for a huge portion of their life and suddenly it's gone or it's been taken away, or it just doesn't work anymore.

What does that feel like? Do the great contemplative teachers of our tradition actually offer helpful wisdom? Origin talks about life as a classroom, but he also says it's a hospital. Is there medicine here of value? I don't know, man. I'm curious for you, how's that been in your lived experience?

Paul Swanson: I just want to say first, I so appreciate the way that you just shared that and the trustworthiness that comes through lived experience and integrating ideas into action, into

manifesting the love through relationships and creativity and contributions to the world. I think the easiest thing for me to think about right now in relationship to integrate into lived experience is in family life because it's so present to me right now and the ways in which the suffering of my children, the beeps of email, the ways in which the experiences of my family has decent me from what I thought of myself as the central figure in my life.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Paul Swanson: Then that is disorientating. How does one relate to family, not as a reflection of who I want to be, but as this gracious vehicle for the love of God to flow through and in a relationship. Many parents will say this, right? When one of their kids gets hurt, they feel the pain almost more acutely than the child does.

This doesn't happen very often, but it's been five days since I've seen my family. They're driving back from the Midwest. This morning, I was listening to a song about family, and it just broke me and it helped explain for me why that disorientation this past week has been so present. It's like there's this love that I'm so used to experiencing through the mundane life of family relationships and not being a part of that and not being conscious that how integral that is to my happenings in my day-to-day, it just flooded me. Then tears came and I was just like, oh, this is why I've been such a soggy mess this week. I don't have those touchstones of that great love in my physical happenstance. So that's the canvas I feel like of my days right now is family life where I experience, I wouldn't say great suffering at this moment, but great love as that doorway.

Mike Petrow: Man, that is powerful. Wow. I love that. It's so bittersweet and so beautiful and so real. I'm going to guess something a lot of our listeners can relate to because at the end of the day, man, that's the whole point of the contemplative laboratory is how does this actually show up in the everyday beats of our heart and breath and relationships and realities that we interact with?

Paul Swanson: Right.

Mike Petrow: I love how that so naturally brings us to that third question, how do we want to show up in the world? Because at the end of the day, getting in touch with our great love and our great suffering and letting these teachings help us do that. I think it's all an avenue to this long loving look at the real, this falling in love with reality again and again and again. You can't love something and not want to make it better or help it be the best that it can be.

So when we fall in love with ourselves, with the people around us and with the world, it asks something of us. What's great is it doesn't ask something of us in a moralistic, dogmatic way. It inspires us to want to show up to make the world a better place. That's what I think. That's what I love about working for the Center for Action and Contemplation. How is this asking us to make the world a better place and ourselves a better place and our families a better place, and really, really, really love. How do I want to say this? Live love into reality, and how do these teachings support us and sustain us in that?

Paul Swanson: Geez, that's so good. I think this is going to be really interesting to bear witness to how this question shows up in the podcast because all three of these questions, they're very nuanced to one's own lived experience and this one because of where one lives in the world, one's

giftings, one's own time, and other commitments and responsibilities, it shows up in all those places. But this is where I think comparison is unhelpful and competition is unhelpful. But to go back to that imagery that you shared of the mystical body of Christ, where we see ourselves as these different aspects so that when we show up, I might be showing up with the pinky, but I can trust that someone else has shown up with the neck and that we can all celebrate the diversity of the body.

Hopefully this connects because I led our practice this morning and I read this poem by St. John of the Cross. It landed for me because when you ask this question, this third question, it came up for me that it circles back to the other two questions too. There's this sense of unknowing. So when you show up, you're not necessarily going to show up with results in mind or that you'll even ever see the results of the seeds that you've planted. There's this brief poem by Saint John of the Cross that I think cuts the heart of humility that runs through all three of these questions. I'm going to read it.

Mike Petrow: Please.

Paul Swanson: It's from the ascent of Mount Carmel.

"They'll be thinking it was all rather special and that God had spoken, and it'll have been little more than nothing or nothing or less than nothing because, if God does not give birth to humility and love and dying to self and godly simplicity and silence, what can it be?" For me, this strikes me with that level of curiosity that these questions are embedded and imprinted on our soul that sparked this longing to not only learn more, not only to grow more, but how do I show up with the fervor of the love seated at the base of each of these questions? I'm excited to see how listeners will take this and integrate into their lives and how they show up in their own context. How is this striking you as far as how this third question might be showing up in your life and in this podcast?

Mike Petrow: Well, I think one of the things that I love, I love what you were saying, you were using the metaphor of the body of Christ, where it's like we're all a different piece, but we're all one body. This idea of unity is not uniformity. For me, I don't want to get too lost in the abstract here, but this idea that it takes all the different journeys that we're all on to do the big journey of the healing of the world. So we all have some different ... I used to have this old Irish Pentecostal preacher who I still love, and he was a mentor. He always used to say to me, the pain that you can feel is the pain that you can heal. That's our great love and our great suffering. So again, I talked about losing my mom and my brother, but what's more interesting, I grew up in this family. We were all pastors and we all sort of deconstructed at the same time, and we went in completely different directions.

Paul Swanson: Interesting.

Mike Petrow: My dad went deeper and he went back to fundamentalism. My brother couldn't do the deconstruction, and I lost him to depression. I literally lost him in the cloud. My mom deconstructed and then reconstructed in this beautiful sort of path, but then passed away before she was able to walk deeper into it. Then I'm now walking my own path, and I have this great love for people who are going through deconstruction and disorientation because it just so deeply hits the ... yeah, I'm actually a little bit emotional talking about it.

Oh my God, what a painful and beautiful and real human experience for us to pass through that. So for me, my unique passion is helping people navigate that well and helping people recognize when they're going through that painful wrestling that it's not a failure of the spiritual life. It's actually stepping deeper into it, and it's finding your truest self, and it's actually guiding you towards your own depth and reality and ability to fall in love with the real reality for you, and then towards your own path. That's my story. But I am passionate about my little part to play to help folks in their journey. Then I'm surrounded by all these amazing people here at the center and on our faculty and in our listeners and in our students. Everyone has their own unique passion, and everyone has their own unique mission.

So I've got friends who are doing work at the border, and that's their part of healing the world. I have other friends who are doing really, really intense mental health work, and that's their part of healing the world. Well, jump in, even on our staff, I see so many different people, and it's recognizing I do my tiny, tiny little contribution, and you do your tiny, tiny little contribution. As we all come together, we really, really are stepping into the love of reality that wants to heal reality and contribute to making this a more loving world. I don't know, that's a little bit of a rambling response. I'm having an emotional reaction, but I love it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, thank you for that vulnerability. It allows all of us, I think, to try to approach this conversation and this podcast with that same level of vulnerability. This is what it's all about. This is more than just a podcast. This is the expression of a life steeped in love and trying to expand that love. Something that you had just shared reminded me of that quote from Tessa Bielecki of our dear friend who she says, contemplatives aren't unique, and everyone's a unique type of contemplative, and that fits in with the same piece of the body of Christ that we're talking about.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Every listener is going to find their own way to integrate and become their own type of contemplative, and that there's such a rich history within the traditions that one can find a teacher of the past and that practices of the past, but there's also new technologies in the way that we live this contemplative life as engaged contemplatives in the world, trying to live these teachings forwards in our own home communities in our own lives. I think what you just shared, you offered up how you are doing that just by sharing what you shared. So thank you for modeling how we're trying to step into the work that is ours to do alone and together.

Mike Petrow: Well, and I can't help but think about these amazing teachers that we get to work with. I really do mean this too. If anyone's listening, and it sounds like I'm doing a lot of fan service and glow up, I really do. I think about Jim's memoir that was just published, James Finley, who's another one of our teachers, his memoir of the Healing Path, and where he just talks about his own experience as a survivor of abuse in an abusive childhood in a religious institution, which was equal parts profoundly transformative and profoundly abusive. He talks about how that wounding really was in the service of his wisdom and his own calling to then be a teacher and a therapist. God, wherever we live on the spectrum between activist contemplative, wherever our curiosity and our compassion takes us, what an invitation and

a gift to sort of find our own unique path and trust that that's in the service of healing the entire world. That's extraordinary to me.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, well said. I know you would agree with this. When we bring up teachers and offer their gifts and their insights and wisdom, we know that they're fully human. We are not sending roses all the way without acknowledging the thorns. What I appreciate hearing about Jim is like the trauma that he went through and the work that he had to go through to bring the teaching out of those wounds is so hard and hard won. I think about that for each of us in our own context. So it's recognizing the total humanity of our teachers and the gifts that they have, the work that they have done, and the life steeped in the mystery that is continuing to heal and unfold for all of us. So I appreciate you bringing up Jim's memoir in that light.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I think Paul, what you're leading me to realize, and I'll let you get the final word, but this will be my final word, is just this beautiful invitation to recognize that every one of us, every listener, every reader, every staff person, every teacher, every single good person out there doing their work to contribute to the healing of the world. We're all students, we're all teachers, we're all healing, we're all healers, we're all workers, and we're all works in progress. What a glorious invitation for us all to be in this together, right?

Paul Swanson: That's it, man. I think you nailed it. That leaves us in a place with this conversation continue to jump off to what these future seasons are going to look like. Taking this work, knowing that we're trying to approach it with a humble curiosity and desire to grow into it and show up more fully in our own lives, and express love in the unique way that we have been created, the unique context and relationships that we find ourselves in. And to celebrate the gift and the celebration of that gift does not turn an eye away from the suffering of the world, suffering our own life, and how can we be of service in this? That's our deep desire for this podcast is to live these teaching forwards in our lives and together as a community of listeners.

Like all great conversations, this one is unfinished and will linger on. It does so because these three identified animating questions, what do we want to know? Do we want to grow? How do we want to show up in our lives in the world, our continually held in curiosity and lived out in our great loves, great sufferings, as well as the shrugging mundanity of our ordinary lives. These questions play well off one another as we experiment with them in day-to-day reality. This is life in the Contemplative Laboratory.

If you're listening to this and exploring this in your own life, you are a part of it. And for that, we are grateful. For we hope that in this ever expanding movement of living the teachings forward, we find ourselves supporting one another's transformation and inspiring loving action. Each season, we'll move through one seminal work of Richard Rohr through the lens of these three animating questions. The next episode of Everything Belongs, we'll give a glimpse of how the format of the show will take shape and feature seasons.

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Mike Petrow: Mike Petro.

Paul Swanson: Paul Swanson.

Talitha Baker: Talifa Baker.

McEl Chevier: McEl Chevier.

Izzy Spitz: Izzy Spitz.

Megan Hare: Megan Hare.

Sara Palmer: Sarah Palmer.

Barb Lopez: Barb Lopez.

Brandon Strange: Brandon Strange.

Corey Wayne: And me, Corey Wayne. The music you hear is composed and provided by our friends, Hammock. We'd also like to thank Sound on studios for all of their work in post-production. From the High Desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.