

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week Twenty-seven

Wisdom in Times of Crisis

Change Is Inevitable

Sunday, July 5, 2020

The word *change* normally refers to new beginnings. But the mystery of transformation more often *happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart*. The pain of something old falling apart—chaos—invites the soul to listen at a deeper level, and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place. Most of us would never go to new places in any other way. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: fire, dark night, death, emptiness, abandonment, trial, the Evil One. Whatever it is, it does not feel good and it does not feel like God.

We will normally do *anything* to keep the old thing from falling apart, yet this is when we need patience and guidance, and the *freedom to let go* instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Perhaps Jesus is describing just this phenomenon when he says, “It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow road right after teaching the Golden Rule. He knows how much letting go it takes to “treat others as you would like them to treat you” (Matthew 7:12).

While change can force a transformation, spiritual transformation always includes a disconcerting reorientation. It can either help people to find new meaning or it can force people to close down and slowly turn bitter. The difference is determined precisely by the quality of our inner life, our practices, and our spirituality. Change happens, but transformation is always a process of letting go, living in the confusing, shadowy space for a while. Eventually, we are spit up on a new and unexpected shore. You can see why

Jonah in the belly of the whale is such an important symbol for many Jews and Christians.

In moments of insecurity and crisis, *shoulds* and *oughts* don't really help. They just increase the shame, guilt, pressure, and likelihood of backsliding into unhealthy patterns. It's the deep *yeses* that carry us through to the other side. It's that deeper something we are strongly *for*—*such as equality and dignity for all*—that allows us to wait it out. It's someone in whom we absolutely believe and to whom we commit. In plain language, love wins out over guilt any day.

At the Center for Action and Contemplation, we are blessed with a core faculty that comes from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. We are from northern and southern States, the Midwest and the coasts, celibate and married, male and female, Black and white, Protestant and Catholic. Each of us speaks out of our commitment to practices of spiritual transformation drawn from the Christian contemplative tradition. This week I want to share some wisdom for times of crisis from these friends and teaching colleagues: Cynthia Bourgeault, James Finley, Barbara Holmes, and Brian McLaren. I hope they can serve as guides to your own internal *yes* to love.

Gateway to Action & Contemplation:

What word or phrase resonates with or challenges me? What sensations do I notice in my body? What is mine to do?

Prayer for Our Community:

O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our world. [Please add your own intentions.] . . . Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, amen.

[Listen to Fr. Richard read the prayer.](#)

Story from Our Community:

I hear sirens constantly [where I live], ambulances transporting more and more

people suffering from COVID-19. Inspired by a recent podcast episode of Another Name for Every Thing, I started to pray, “Lord, have mercy” every time I heard [an ambulance]. Over the weeks, I’ve added onto it: “Lord, have mercy. Give them the breath they need, both oxygen and the life-sustaining breath of the Holy Spirit. Grant them comfort and peace.” —Elizabeth G.

[Share your own story with us.](#)

Adapted from Richard Rohr, [The Wisdom Pattern](#) (Franciscan Media: 2020), 84–85.

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