

God Is Bringing Us Home

Richard Rohr Newsletter week May 6th 2024

We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

The first going out from home we can say is the creation of the ego. While this is a necessary creating, it is also the creating of a separation. It's taking myself as central. We probably need to do that, at least until we reach middle age. But then we need to allow what we've created to be uncreated. Maybe I was a great basketball player, but that's gone now. Or maybe I was good-looking, but that's gone now.

When we can say "yes" to that *uncreation* and still be happy, we've done our work. My True Self is in God and not in what I've created. My self-created self gave me a nice trail to walk on, and something to do each day, but it isn't really me. It might be my career or my vocation; yet as good as it is, it isn't my True Self.

In the metaphor of life as a journey, I think it's finally about coming back home to where we started. As I approach death, I'm thinking about that a lot, because I think the best way to describe what's coming next is not "I'm dying," but "I'm finally going home." I don't know what it's like yet, but in my older age I can really trust that it is *home*. I don't know where that trust comes from or even what home is like, but I know I'm not going to someplace new. I'm going to all the places I've known deeply. They're pointing me to the big deep, the Big Real. I do think homecoming is what it's

all about.¹

Well, I have to say, I don't fully know how to live there. I'm used to living for 80 years out of building an education, a persona, a reputation, a career. When we've worked at those things for so long, on a very real level we don't know how to live without them. But thank God, they're taken away from us. God slows us down, I think necessarily, or we won't fall into the True Self.

My understanding of the second half of life is mostly homesickness for the True Self. I want to learn to be who God *really* created me to be. And I think all God wants me to be is *who I really am*.²

Here Richard names some of the obstacles that keep us from our true spiritual home:

We are created with an *inner drive and necessity* that sends all of us looking for our True Self, our true home, whether we know it or not. This journey is a spiral and never a straight line. There is a God-size hole in all of us, waiting to be filled. God creates the very dissatisfaction that only grace and finally divine love can satisfy.

We dare not try to fill our souls and minds with numbing addictions, diversionary tactics, or mindless distractions. The disguise of evil is much more *superficiality* and willful ignorance than the usually listed "hot sins." God hides, and is found, precisely in the *depths* of everything, even and maybe especially in the deep fathoming of our fallings and failures. Sin is to stay on the *surface* of even holy things, like the Bible, sacraments, or church.

If we go to the depths of anything, we'll begin to knock upon something substantial, "real," and with a timeless quality. We'll move from the starter kit of "belief" to an actual inner *knowing*. This is most especially true if we have ever loved deeply,

¹ Adapted from Mike Petrow, Paul Swanson, and Richard Rohr, "Tips for the Road," *Everything Belongs*, season introduction, ep. 5 (Albuquerque, NM: Center for Action and Contemplation, 2023), podcast

² Adapted from Mike Petrow, Paul Swanson, and Richard Rohr, "The Two Halves of Life with Brené Brown," *Everything Belongs*, season 1, ep. 1 (Albuquerque, NM: Center for Action and Contemplation, 2024), podcast.

accompanied someone through the mystery of dying, or stood in genuine life-changing awe before mystery, time, or beauty. This “something real” is what all the world religions were pointing to when they spoke of heaven, home, nirvana, bliss, or enlightenment. They were not wrong at all; their only mistake was that they pushed it off into the next world. *If heaven is later, it is because it is first of all now.*

These experiences of homecoming and depth become the pledge, guarantee, hint, and promise of an eternal something. Once we touch upon the Real, there is an inner insistence that the Real, if it is the Real, has to be forever. We could call it wishful thinking, but this insistence has been a constant intuition since the beginnings of humanity. Jesus made it into a promise, as when he tells the Samaritan woman that the spring within her “will well up unto eternal life” (John 4:14). In other words, heaven/union/love/home now emerge from within us, much more than from a mere belief system or any belonging system, which largely remain on the outside of the self.

Like Odysseus, we leave from Ithaca and we come back to Ithaca, but now it is fully home because all is included and nothing wasted or hated: even the dark parts are used in our favor. All is forgiven. What else could homecoming be?

Poet C. P. Cavafy (1863–1933) expressed this understanding most beautifully in his famous poem “Ithaca”:³

Ithaca has now given you the beautiful voyage.
Without her, you would never have taken the road.
With the great wisdom you have gained on your voyage,
with so much of your own experience now,
you must finally know what Ithaca really means.

³ *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, trans. Rae Dalven (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 36–37. Paraphrased by Richard Rohr.