

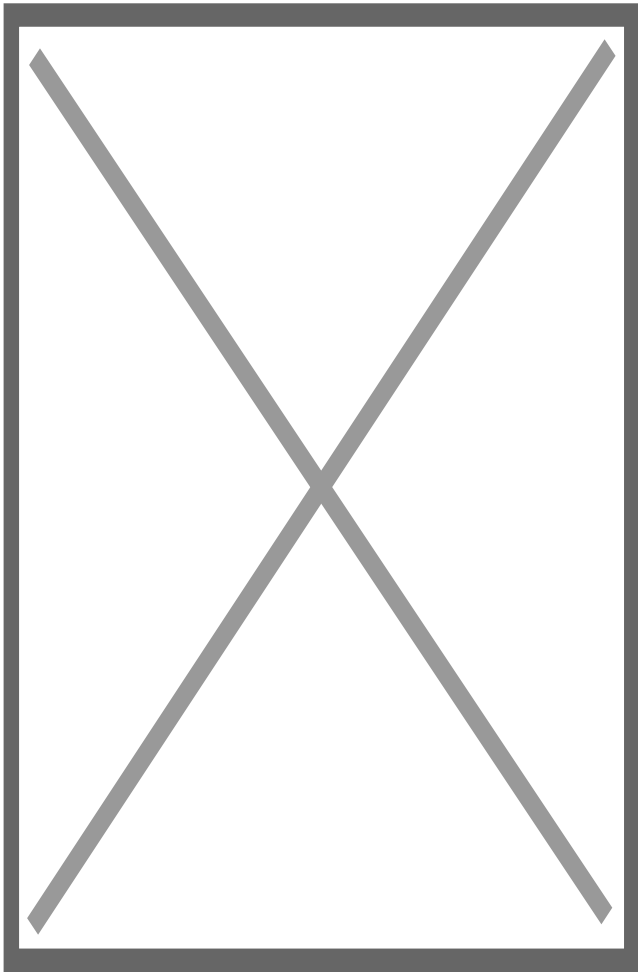
Weeping with the prophets

Richard Rohr begs readers to journey from anger to sadness to compassionate love.

by [Jen Pollock Michel](#) in the [November 2025](#) issue

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In Review



The Tears of Things

Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage

By Richard Rohr

Convergent Books

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RW-REPLACE-TOKEN

I spend a lot of time with women in their 80s and 90s. Most weeks, my mother, her two close friends, and I make our way to the coffee lounge at their senior living community. Sometimes other women stroll in, many of them pushing walkers, and join us at the table in the corner, especially on days when I've brought yeasty doughnuts from the local bakery. I'm always awed by those who continue to find miraculous plenty amid life's tragedies, who become stooped but not brittle.

Franciscan friar Richard Rohr, who is now in his 80s, understands the "inherent sadness and tragedy in almost all situations: in our relationships, our mistakes, our failures large and small, and even our victories." In *The Tears of Things*, Rohr bravely reveals his vulnerability and sadness over a world that constantly wounds. "The older I get, the more it feels like I must forgive almost everything for not being perfect, or as I first wanted or needed it to be," he writes. Rohr seeks a positive vision for the earth and its people, one that inspires rather than blames. If outrage is killing us, weeping will heal us.

The surprise is not Rohr's diagnosis of our collective anger or even the disclosure of his own tears. It's the choice of biblical texts with which he remains in long, animated conversation. The book begs readers to journey from anger to sadness to compassionate love alongside the biblical prophets. The New Testament is a passing consideration; instead, Rohr engages some of the most difficult texts of the Hebrew Scriptures, discovering in them what he calls a "necessary" truth.

It's clear that Rohr hopes readers will read these texts with seriousness and care, but he does not argue that every word a prophet utters should be taken as a holy pronouncement of God's own desire. The prophets can get it wrong, he insists, and only as we travel the arc of their maturing perspective can we discover a more reliable, enduring truth. *Maturity, growth, progress, and evolution* are the key terms here—both for the prophets and for their readers: "All of us, prophets included, usually must do it wrong, or partly wrong, many times before we can do it right." In Rohr's estimation, it's only as we leave behind the childish framework of punishment and reward that we can begin to trust the voices of those "radical traditionalists and reformers" who prophetically call us to see ourselves and God more honestly.

The challenge, Rohr proposes, is to read and reread these prophetic texts, noting that they move in a predictable way: from "response of threat, rage, and retribution" to "passages of inner conflict and early awareness" to the "'suffered-through-to' response" from God in which the transformative possibilities of suffering become clear. This is a "journey of refining the real message, fire by fire, until we reach a final state of joy and hopefulness." In other words, to take these texts as fiery jeremiads is to replicate the prophets' problem: we want God to be angry for us. We wish to feel vindicated by our own rightness.

"God does not need to carry out our judgments," Rohr writes, warning us against the danger of anthropomorphizing God. God does not carry out our partisan agendas or fight our political enemies. God may not even defend institutional religion. God's agenda (if it can even be called that) is to stun the world with the pronouncement of God's love.

And this is a love that defies all expectations. The biblical story proves divine preference for "the barren wife, the forgotten son, the enslaved Israelites"—and, as the prophet Amos emphasizes, God embraces a "bias toward the bottom." This may threaten the security we try to find outside the divine economy, but for Rohr, grace always has the last word: "I am not the primary 'doer' in the world of love. It is being done unto me."

I sometimes wonder who I might be at 80, if I am blessed to live that long. After enduring eight decades of life's hardships, what regrets might I harbor—and what anger? How might I tell my own story? Perhaps by then I will have learned to travel the emotional arc of the prophets, as Rohr suggests I should, little by little gaining a forgetfulness of having sinned and been sinned against. Or maybe I will finally have mastered the paradoxical

response suggested in the book's epigraphic poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer:

I want a word that means
 okay and not okay,
 more than that: a word that means
devastated and stunned with joy.
I want the word that says
 I feel it all all at once.