Columns
Spirituality



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August 15, 2022

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Several weeks ago, I was listening to a podcast. At the end of this podcast was a meditation by Pir Zia Inayat Khan that caught my attention. I looked on the internet to get more information about him. He is a Sufism scholar. I found his words inspiring and relevant to my life right now. This is what he said:

> We have a certain number of days left on earth. We don't know how many.
>
> We have a certain number of encounters, meetings, experiences, ordeals. We don't know how many.
>
> But this we know. We are in service; nothing can change this.
>
> We have been brought forth out of emptiness to serve.
>
> Earth has churned out these bodies, that with these hands we may serve.
>
> We will serve and then we will disappear.
>
> We will slip back into the earth, and this body will be soil again, and water and birds and fish.
>
> And this spirit within will fly back to its source with news from the frontier.
>
> What news shall we bring? The story of our heart.

This meditation took me back to those nagging life questions. "Why am I here?" "What is the meaning of life?"

It's *the story of our hearts*. The stories of the deeply personal things that we hold close to our heart. The happenings that have changed us. This is the energy and liveliness that we carry in our spirit even into death.

This meditation is a good way to initiate our journey to this sacred place by reminding us that our time on earth is limited. That this time will be filled with a certain number of interactions. We will collect these memories, with others on this life journey with us. These happenings are the creation of our heart's memories.

This is not the usual way we write our life story. This meditation presents an alternative value, that is, the service of our hands. This is a new ordering of events for me that leads me to a new appreciation of my caring for others.

So many of our religious traditions proclaim this as well. The Gospel of John read on Holy Thursday has Jesus washing the feet of the disciples with the command, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:5-17).

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The simple use of our hands to perform a needed action of comfort can help lighten the load of others on this journey. These intimate acts of service help us express the worth and dignity of the other.

My understanding of this passage from the Gospel of John is that foot washing was done by the lowest class of people. Jesus says we are to serve each other not because of rank, wealth or prestige but because we have been given hands to serve. With these hands we can share the gifts and burdens of life with each other.

"We will serve and then we will disappear." Oh, how abrupt and so true.

We are not immortal; we have to contend with the confounding fact that our life on earth does end. We can't escape it.



(Unsplash/Alex Wigan)

There is a beauty in the image of slipping "back into the earth." The evolution of life continues. These bodies are transformed again in another ways.

However, it's the image of our spirit flying "back to its source" that captured my imagination. What a beautiful image of our journey home to God. We don't just go back to our source, we fly back — with great speed and desire, with the news of our heart.

What will we say? We will remember these "encounters, meetings, experiences, ordeals" of our life and how they have changed us into who we have become. We know this experience by the stories and memories we tell after a death of a friend. We tell each other of the moments we have shared with them. Their gifts, humor, generosity and particular quirks.

These people whose hands have touched us and shared our load of life, we carry with us. They form the packages of love, joy and pain in our heart. These packages

of memories hold the news we will tell. We will express the loveliness of the memories of the stories of our heart.