

On the Memento Mori

By Mary Stewart Adams



In the last year of his life, Rudolf Steiner delivered an astonishing set of lectures on karmic relationships, from which it is possible to get a powerful sense of urgency. And yet, reading the lectures also gives one the sense that this information was not merely plucked out of time because time was running out, but that the contents of these lectures was placed within time, of necessity, to awaken our sense of repeated earthly lives, and to restore the relationship with loved ones who have died in a way that was commensurate with this age.

During this series of lectures, Rudolf Steiner described the “Forces of Karmic Preparation in the Cosmos”, in which he resurrected ancient initiation wisdom with the exhortation that we are to “Accompany the Dead in their further Destinies!” He included here a keen description of the soul’s experiences with the several hierarchies between death and rebirth, specifically as a “succession of spiritual facts infinitely sublime and significant for our present age”:

*In the weaving of the ether,
The human being’s web of destiny
Is received by Angels, Archangels, Archai.*

*Into the astral world,
The just consequences of a human being’s earthly life
Die into Exousiai, Dynameis, Kyriotetes.*

*In the essence of their deeds
The honest creations of a human being’s earthly life
Are resurrected in Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim.*

Twelve years earlier, for the first publication of the *Calendar of the Soul* for the year 1912-1913, Rudolf Steiner had prepared 52 weekly verses that were intended to awaken awareness within the human being of the soul’s experience of the cycle of the year. These weekly verses were joined with feast and festival days, name days, and the new images of the Sun and Moon zodiacs, the latter as prepared by Imma von Eckardstein. The intent was that the *Calendar* would bring the user to an experience of the waking and sleeping of particular spiritual beings throughout the year, thereby supporting the forces for life.

During the season of the Autumn Cross Quarter, which falls halfway between Autumn Equinox and Winter Solstice, we arrive at the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls (November 1 & 2), which inaugurate the season for honoring loved ones who have died, or the *spiritually living*. In the *Calendar of the Soul* we then come to the following verses 32, 33, and 34:

v. 32

*I feel my own force, bearing fruit
And gaining strength to give me to the world.
My inmost being I feel charged with power
To turn with clearer insight
Toward the weaving of life's destiny.*

v. 33

*I feel at last the world's reality
Which, lacking the communion of my soul,
Would in itself be frosty, empty life,
And showing itself powerless
To recreate itself in souls,
Would in itself find only death.*

v. 34

*In secret inwardly to feel
How all that I've preserved of old
Is quickened by new-risen sense of self:
This shall, awakening, pour forth cosmic forces
Into the outer actions of my life
And growing, mould me into true existence.*

Placing the stanzas of the *Memento Mori* prayer side-by-side with the verses of *Calendar of the Soul* that were given for the season of honoring the dead creates a powerful sense of our work in the threshold during this Cross Quarter season, which can be imagined as the human being, upright, moving through an encounter with the forces of destiny, the karmic consequences of one's actions, and the honest creations of our earthly striving, both individually, and as companion to loved ones who have died.

Verse 32 in the *Calendar of the Soul* calls forth the image of the weaving of life's destiny, which in the first stanza of the *Memento Mori* is described as a *web of destiny, received by the third hierarchy of Angels, Archangels, and Archai*.

Similarly, verse 33 addresses the karmic consequences in a world that *lacks the communion of my soul*, which would result only in *frosty, empty life, and death*. The second stanza of the *Moment Mori* describes how these karmic or *just consequences* die into the second hierarchy of Exusiai, Dynameis, Kyriotetes.

And finally, verse 34 brings a sense of how my outer actions, informed by my karmic destiny (*all that I've preserved of old*), will be *quickened by a new-risen sense of self*, thereby *moulding me into true existence*. These *honest creations* of my earthly life are new-risen or *resurrected* by the first hierarchy of Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim in the time between death and rebirth.

In earthly life, the human being strives toward conscious weaving within the forces of destiny, recognizing that where one fails to find communion with the world there one finds death, and that which is born truly out of this earthly striving is substance that can be resurrected. This striving is met after death in the beings of the hierarchies, and the words of the prayer reveal how our weaving in the web of destiny is our activity within the realm of Angels, Archangels and Archai; how communion with the world is our activity within the realm of Exusiai, Dynameis, and Kyriotetes; and how the new-risen sense of self that derives from the honest creations of our lives take us into the the realm of Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim.

While preparing a presentation about the Mercury Transit of 11 November, 2019, over 20 years after first realizing the connection between the *Momento Mori* and these few *Calendar of the Soul* verses, an idea came to me that the correspondence between the prayer and the corresponding calendar verses could be undertaken as a ceremony. After all, as psychopompos, Mercury is escort of souls across the threshold, and the planet's rare transit on such a significant date historically and numerically offered a unique opportunity for engaging with the prayer and verses as a way to honor the movement across the threshold.

I share here a seed, inspired by Mercury, with the hope that it may blossom into creative experience for working with the dead, with the note that when the *Calendar* verses are contemplated and experienced together with the stanzas of the prayer, it increases the opportunity for mutual and reciprocal engagement across the threshold that is healing and fortifying for both the living and the so-called dead. In other words, this ceremony is not only for the dead, it is also for the living, making us more aware of what the dead can bring to us in life when we follow them in their further destinies.

SUPPLIES:

Calendar of the Soul verses 32, 33, 34 on separate sheets of paper
Memento Mori stanzas, also on separate sheets of paper
Flowers (at least one per participant, if not more)
appropriate elements of ceremony

ACTIVITY:

Ideally this would be done in a group, where there will be three individuals reading the *Calendar of the Soul* verses lined up opposite three who read the *Memento Mori* stanzas.

I imagine this can also be done with just a few people, where one reads all of the *Calendar* verses, and another reads all the *Memento Mori* stanzas, while those not reading precess between them.

Once the readers are lined up, the one precessing walks between them, one step at a time, while first the *Calendar of the Soul* verse is read (v 32), followed by the corresponding *Memento Mori* stanza, which is its echo in the spiritual world. The next step is taken, where *Calendar* verse 33 is read, followed by the second stanza of the *Memento Mori*. And finally, the third step, in which verse 34 and the third stanza are sounded.

It helps to be mindful of the direction in which you are precessing, not because a particular direction is required, but because something may present itself as you consider your set up. Also, it is nice to have a bucket or vase of flowers on the stem at the end of the precession, toward which the participants walk, so that after passing through the experiences of spoken verses and stanzas, they can gather a stem for offering to the altar or earth or sacred site where they honor the loved one whom they carried in their heart as they precessed. *Also note, in classical mythology, Mercury falls in love with the flower nymph, Chloris, which suggests to me that the way to engage the messenger god in communicating your love to those who have died is with flowers.*



End Note: I first encountered the words of this *Memento Mori* in the 1990s through a study intensive with Eve Hardie in Southfield, Michigan. We were immersed in an every-three-weeks study of the interior layers of the earth, during which we read this prayer to open and close our shared striving. Eve assigned us the task of finding a minimum of three translations for the prayer, which was no easy task in the days before personal computers and the worldwide web. In my quest to fulfill Eve's assignment, I found not various translations, but this deep correspondence between the three stanzas of the prayer with the three verses from the Calendar of the Soul that correspond to the weeks following All Saints and All Souls.

Over 20 years later, and in preparation for the Mercury Transit of 11.11.19, and in anticipation of crafting ceremony to engage the celestial phenomenon, I brought the verses to a presentation in Ann Arbor, and to a small group with whom I was studying the Chemical Wedding of Christian Rozenkreutz, where we inaugurated the ceremony which I now share here, as an attempt to answer Rudolf Steiner's directive that ours is the task to accompany the dead in their further destinies.

For Eve.

We must no take too comfortably the task of making this knowledge our own.



