

Tell Everyone on the Train I Love Them
Rev. Linda Simmons
June 11, 2017

These days seems so busy to me. Do they to you too? I suppose it depends on what season of your life you are in and therefore what kind of busyness you are engaged in. Are you grieving the loss of a loved one, are you in the middle of trying to make ends meet, are you yourself facing an illness, are you retired and have found a way to be less busy with paid work and somehow find yourself more busy with other projects?

In my work as a chaplain, I learn a lot about busyness and its toll on all of us, mostly how it keeps us from the heart of our lives and from being with the heart of our loved ones. It creates regret. It is its great cost. And it keeps us from confronting our own sorrow and fear. It ultimately keeps us truly from being with death, our own and others, which also keeps us from love.

Of course, Who wants to be with the thought of death? It seems worthy of avoiding at all costs! And yet, and yet, what gifts it can offer us, what an incredible capacity to live it can bestow! And what is living truly if it is not the capacity to love. Now what love is, that is a true question that sends me round and round again.

Stephen Levine was an American poet, author and teacher and is best known for his work on death and dying. In his book [A Year to Live](#),¹ he writes that if we only let ourselves touch our own deaths and be touched by them, we can at last live our lives to their fullest, the way they were meant to be lived, the way we always meant to live them if we only took the time. He writes about the love that we meant to give all the way through life if only we had the heart for it, the will for it, and could risk the vulnerability to make it happen.

Socrates recommended that we should “always be occupied in the practice of dying.” So did the Dalai Lama. When someone asked the Dalai Lama what he would like to do next when he was 58 years old, he said he felt it was time to complete preparations for his death.²

As the Buddha says, “It doesn’t matter how long you have forgotten, only how soon you remember.”³

What have we forgotten? What conversations are we putting off? When is the last time you leaned into someone you love and told them what they mean to you? We think we will all be here forever and ever, but we will not be! Time passes, and we all die.

¹ Stephen Levine, [A Year to Live, How to Live This Year as if it Were Your Last](#) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

² Levine, 8.

³ Ibid.

And when we are suddenly struck with illness, it gets too late to say what we have meant to say for so long, to give the love and generosity and kindness and gratitude that we hold back because we are afraid that if we give it fully we will somehow disappear into it and not be able to go on into our daily lives again.

And in all of this, I must take a moment and speak of the appropriate boundaries that become necessary in life and in love too. And I know boundaries can be painful and keep us sometimes from loving how we want to love.

Yet in their own way, they too save lives or at the very least, give the lives of those we love the chance to move into more loving patterns especially when those we love suffer from addiction and/or mental illness or when we ourselves suffer from addiction and mental illness. In those places, love can feel dangerous and hard.

Love is not safe.

Levine, who accompanied many people to the doorstep of their deaths, wrote about one person who received a report of a terminal illness who said, "As what the doctor said really sank in I could feel something very heavy begin to lift.

I felt as though I was free to live my life at last. Bizarrely, life never felt so safe. Maybe I'm crazy, but I felt more freedom and love than I had in some time. In fact, I felt not as though my life was being taken away but as though it had been given back to me. I was going to die and my life was completely my own."⁴

Freedom and love opened up suddenly as a terminal diagnosis was given and he felt safe to give them. What would you do if faced with a terminal diagnosis? What might you feel free to do that you have never before? I asked this of someone recently and she said, "I think the answer for me would be to live my life without fear that I was not enough. I do not think my life would look much different, it would just feel so much different."

I know that feeling. Do you? To live as if we were enough, as if what we had to give was enough, as if our love and our gifts and our way of giving them measured up no matter what the results were, no matter the outcomes we got: the nice house, the full bank account, the easy relationships, the big numbers whatever big numbers we count in our worlds... to live as if the love we have to give is good enough. The gift of that is surrendering to life. And to surrender to life, at long last, is to be capable of love itself, the kind of love that tears us open and asks us to be accountable, whole, present, fully alive.

Levine tells us that coming to terms with our "death is another opportunity to enter life wholeheartedly."⁵

⁴ Levine, 9.

⁵ Levine, 15.

But why wait for a life threatening diagnosis to open up to the potential of life, the potential “grace and wonder of this living moment?”⁶ Why indeed?

Because we refuse to accept that we will die and we imagine there is so much time to play this game of walking around living as if it will not end, as if we have time to do it all on purpose one day. There is not so much time. Living is now. Which means loving, this kind of whole hearted loving, has to be now too.

I have been a chaplain now in one form or another for about 11 years. I have sat with so many who are dying: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, Agnostic, spiritual, Buddhist. Without exception, everyone asks in one form or another, “Am I worthy of love?” And right before or after this question, “Did I love enough?” And if there is time, if the diagnosis received allows them time, they go about the business of loving. Whatever else they feel they have to do, they go about the business of the kind of loving that tells the truth, the holds others accountable, that is compassionate, that seeks peace, that gives more than it takes, that risks something in the giving.

There is no doubt in my mind. When one recognizes death, one surrenders to life. And when one surrenders to life; one surrenders to love. I’ll say this one more time because it took me 11 years of accompanying the dying to learn it and I still lose it every day. When one recognizes death, one surrenders to life. And when one surrenders to life; one surrenders to love.

This all brings me to Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche, 23 years old, who said as he lay dying from stab wounds that would kill him, “Tell everyone on the train I love them.”⁷ Taliesin Meche, Ricky John Best, Micah David-Cole Fletcher all intervened aboard a train in Portland Oregon where two teens were attacked with anti-Muslim hate speech by Jeremy Joseph Christian.

These men tried to calm Christian down and asked him to “please get off the train.”⁸ They also formed a barrier between him and the 2 teenage girls he was attacking. It cost Taliesin Meche and Ricky Best their lives. Micah Fletcher is expected to survive the stabbings.

Tell everyone on the train I love them.

I was so struck when I heard that those were the last words of Taliesin Meche as he lay dying. How was it that fear did not fill those words? I thought, this is a man who had come to terms with his death long ago, who had surrendered to life, and who knew what it is to love.

⁶ Levine, 17.

⁷ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2017/05/30/portland-hero-purported-last-words-tell-everyone-this-train-love-them/YnHFko4mbb45GSJUQFDduO/story.html>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Portland_train_attack

Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche, named after a 6th century Welsh bard, graduated from Reed College with a degree in Economics and studied Islam along the way with his teacher Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri. Bassiri said of him:

“Unlike many students who take my introductory courses on Islam...[Taliesin] persevered and struggled to learn how he could apply the critical study of religion to better understand the Islamic tradition in all its rich diversity and on its own terms. He wrote in the conclusion of his paper on the Race Talks event that the "event affirmed what I have learned throughout the semester... Islam, like all religions, is riddled with complexity. Dispelling ignorance about Islam will not come about through a two-hour panel... Rather, it will come about only when enough people pledge themselves to researching the deeper intricacies of Islamic history and the motley nature of the various cultures that have adopted Islam as their religion.

“I sensed then, and I know now, that Taliesin's motivation for learning about Islam was not to reinforce what I assumed were his own naive preconceptions that all humans and all religions are essentially good. He was motivated to learn about Islam because his ethics of love required him to be informed about other cultures and religions in every day life so that -- rather than acting out of ignorance -- he could act justly out of an informed love for others”⁹

To act justly out of an informed love for others is something we can do when we learn we are safe enough to love, that life is frail, that death is right around the corner for all of us, that there is only this moment and this one too.

We are safe enough to love because life is the only place love can live. There is no other place to love.

Love asks of us to stand in the face of hatred, love asks of us to speak in the face of violence, love asks us find some way to tell the truth in the face of suffering, ours and others.

Love asks us to notice who shows up beside us: in this church, on these streets, on the train and in our lives.

Love is showing up and doing the next right thing to the best of our ability and accepting the consequences knowing it is safe enough to go on because there is no other choice. Because life asks to be lived.

Tell everyone on the train I love them. Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche knew how to love, because he had surrendered to life.

⁹ http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2017/06/the_meaning_in_my_studenttalie.html

Steve Levine wrote in A Year to Live that “[d]iscovering our true nature is called “finding our lotus” by some. The lotus is not difficult to find if we know where to look. Lotus proliferate in the wild, given their natural environment of compassionate service and nonattachment to the fruits of their labors...[t]he lotus represents that which rises above fetid waters to share its unexpected beauty.

“It is a symbol of liberation from painful attachment to that through which our life must pass in order to reach its original light...We watch our lotus rise through murky waters..(knowing that) the root from which it grows is as eternal as our play in time.....Just as some horticulturists “push” flowers, forcing them to bloom by placing them temporarily in darkness, so the contemplation of death can “push” the blossoming of our lotus.”¹⁰

May we blossom my dear friends, lotus to lotus, life to life, death to death, for as much blessed time as we have here together. How blessed we are to be here together. I love you all. Amen.

¹⁰ Levine, 149, 150.