
Letting go meditation

Waving is one of the first gestures that babies learn, and the first game we play with them is peek-a-boo'. Both are ways of helping them to say good-bye, to let go or sit a bit more lightly to the absence of someone or something to which they are attached. When my grandchildren have to leave a playground, some human or animal friends, or to tidy away their beloved toys before bed, I am in the habit of saying 'Goodbye, train, goodbye ducks; see you another day.', a phrase I used with my own children. I suppose I want to help them to let go of these things secure in the fact that they are not lost to them forever.

Waving communicates both dignity and confidence – confidence in a universe where loved ones eventually return and confidence in our ability to inhabit the aching grief that may go with their loss. When we can no longer hear and only barely see the departing person a distant wave on their part reassures us that they still exist, still have us in mind; and even after we have lost sight of them we may keep on waving. Waving is a way of shrinking distance, of bridging a gap, of asserting 'I am here!'

We wave goodbye to other people; ultimately we will have to wave good-bye to our own life on this earth. But the whole of life can be thought of as a series of 'hellos' and 'goodbyes'. We wave goodbye to youthful bodies and reluctantly welcome added pounds and wrinkles; goodbye to cherished dreams that are just not going to materialise; to adorable babies as they become gangly and truculent adolescents; to an old job and familiar colleagues as we set out on a new exciting venture; to habits and conventions that have had their day; to identity-giving roles and

responsibilities as retirement looms; to the family home as we move somewhere more suitable to our changing needs.

All of these goodbyes offer us the opportunity to review our priorities and, in the light of eternity, to ask ourselves, 'Are they really so important after all?' They invite us to remember that 'you can't take it with you', much as you would like to; and, as Job puts it:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Letting go is part of the life of faith. It's central to Jesus' teaching when he insists that anyone who wants to follow him needs to let go of all that is getting in the way; to sit light to money, status, popularity, even to the point of letting go of life itself. These things are not inherently bad; it is our tendency to grasp them to us that can be destructive and distracting. We need to learn to make good and gracious endings as we move through life, to say our good-byes well, remembering that 'Good-bye' is a shortened form of 'God be with you.'

In that space between two people who wave to each other stands God, always present, holding all things together. We might then perhaps think of waving as a form of blessing.

But it's also a mark of faith; of the belief that one day we will wave to say hello to more than we can ever imagine.