

Mario Fantoni

May 12, 1959 – June 1, 2022

Memorial Service
Minister: Graylin Ross

June 25, 2022

Minister's Introduction:

Welcome friends.

We have come together today to honor the life of our beloved friend, Mario Fantoni. We are here to hold Mario in our hearts for this brief period, and then release him, together transforming our sorrow into presence.

At the death of a friend, we can see their play as a whole. And we can see it—as we cannot yet fully see our own—as a perfect, complete, and realized destiny. Now we more clearly understand the payment and contribution that Mario made, and we are grateful for his vigorous support of the aims of the school, and his honest and practical approach to the work.

Now let us stand and remember Mario in silent presence.

(Silence)

Thank you.

The physical body is designed to produce presence and being, and then to be laid aside. Walt Whitman said, “The best of me then, when no longer visible, for toward that I have been incessantly striving.” Mario takes with him the presence that he has gained in this lifetime, and his connection with Influence C. Our teacher has said, “That is all we can take with us, but it is more than enough.”

[Reading: From Rumi]
(Reader: Alex Ayuli)

This we have now is not imagination.
This is not grief or joy.
Not a judging state, or an elation, or sadness.
Those come and go
This is the presence that doesn't.

[Music: Camille Saint-Saëns, "The Swan"]
(Musicians: Justin McKay, piano; Stephen Rice, cello)

[Eulogy: Cristina Bernstein]

Mario Alejandro Fantoni was born on May 12, 1959, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He was the oldest of three children, with a brother, Pablo, and a sister, Virginia. His grandparents on both sides came from Italy, and his parents met in Buenos Aires. He grew up Catholic, and was often reprimanded by his parents for his mischievous ways, especially his teasing of his younger sister.

When he was 14 his father was offered a job in Brazil and the family moved to Sao Paulo. Mario studied engineering at the University of Sao Paulo, and later worked as a consultant in many different places around the world.

Mario met Regina Kodama in 1984 when they were both attending the university in Sao Paulo. Mario played rugby and ice hockey, and they met at the rugby fields. Regina had been a rugby enthusiast since her teenage years. In 1987, Mario's father brought home a few books by Gurdjieff and the three of them (Mario, his father, and Regina) began attending the Gurdjieff Institute meetings. Mario's soul searching had begun, and he tried Tai Chi Chuan and meditation before he finally found and joined the school in early 1988. Regina did not join the school at that time, and after a few months they separated.

A student remembers when Mario joined: "In Sao Paulo I was responsible for many years for prospective student meetings. I have a very clear memory of Mario's meetings. Maybe because I felt from the beginning that he was already in the school. When we ended his first meeting, he would not leave. We were in a pizza place in Sao Paulo, and he wouldn't leave. He was quiet but very emotional; I still remember the look in his eyes!"

Finding the Fellowship was life-changing for Mario. He left his parents' house and began serving the school. After less than a year, he moved to Rio de Janeiro to open a center there. In later years he directed the Sao Paulo Center and lived in the teaching house, where he organized breakfasts every Sunday for newer students, and also organized regional gatherings. In the 1990s he began helping the Fellowship Council support the Spanish-speaking centers and promote the school to attract new students, which he did for more than ten years.

A student from Brazil shared with us a sweet story from the time when she and Mario were co-directing the center. She said, “He asked me to translate Robert’s book *Self-Remembering* into Portuguese. I said my English wasn’t fluent like his. He replied, ‘My Portuguese is not fluent like yours.’” In this way, she learned of the importance of valuing each person’s abilities.

When he moved to Apollo in 1998, he worked at the winery for several years. Speaking of this period, a friend said, “In the 1990s, he was just moving to Apollo, and we traveled together a little in California. Once we arrived late in Calaveras State Park and he said, well, let’s camp by the trees. And I had some fear and I said, ‘No, Mario, this is not going to work.’ And he said, ‘No, let’s stay under the trees.’ In the middle of the night, we were awakened by a park ranger who said, ‘You cannot stay here!’ But Mario remained very positive; he had this playful essence. When you would talk with him you never knew if he was a little bit serious or sarcastic; there was a mix of these things. But he was always very kind. He was always very supportive.”

Mario returned briefly to Sao Paulo, where he met Ana Maria Amorim, and they were married. Soon after, they moved to Portugal to open the Lisbon Center with Karen Johnston and Ana Maria Cardoso. Robert was then traveling frequently to Europe, and they shared precious moments with him in Lisbon and Spain. Mario later got a job in Milan, and he and Ana Maria moved there for a year. Then they decided to move closer to Apollo, and left Europe for good. While they were living at Apollo, their marriage ended.

Mario was passionate about music and the theater, and at Apollo he enjoyed participating in plays and operas, such as *Rigoletto* and *Timon of Athens*. Though mostly shy and opting to play the role of a loyal supporter, he left a lasting impression while doing an Argentinian folk dance with a red handkerchief in a center event. A friend remembers, “He was always a gentleman, a good listener, and a keen observer. He was also insightful about the system knowledge, and humorous about his own weaknesses while sharing his struggles with his psychological challenges.”

Eighteen years after Mario and Regina separated in Sao Paulo, they ran into each other by chance in Las Vegas: Regina was there for her work and Mario was visiting a client. The spark was re-ignited, and they were married about six weeks later. Regina joined the school two days before they got married. She told him, firmly, “I won’t let you go this time!” For his part, Mario considered changing his name from Fantoni to Kodama (Regina’s last name). They were married for 16 happy years.

Mario was entrepreneurial and began several businesses, including an Italian restaurant he opened together with Gianfranco Maffezoni in Grass Valley, Trattoria Milano. He then became interested in Bitcoin, and he worked during his last years advocating for the new technology.

“Mario was always a cheerful soul,” a friend noted. “His practical approach to his work and willingness to help other students and gather people are what I remember.”

Another friend agreed, saying, “He had this happy energy, positive, quick. That’s what I recall the most, his positivity, his willingness to lend a helping hand, and how sharp he was in the Work. He gave practical advice.”

A friend of thirty years said, “Mario never took anything at face value. This was one of his great strengths. He would always want to investigate subjects, go deeper, ask questions. He had a deeply playful intellect, that offset his sometimes strong, sharp opinions. When he gave angles, they were always pragmatic, honest, and objective. He looked at both sides of what he was saying, as he was saying it.”

Some years ago, Mario left the school. His years away from the Fellowship increased his valuation, and last October, he and Regina re-joined because they realized that there is no better place to *Be*. They were warmly welcomed by the students of the Sacramento Center and Apollo. When he was asked, “How was it for you to be out of the School?” he responded: “Like being in a desert all by yourself.” And to another friend he said, “There’s nothing out there.”

During the last few years, Mario was able to positively turn his life around. He put his financial, business, and personal affairs in order, and was living a fulfilled life. In the last months of his life, he was totally at peace, and he and Regina were leading a simple life, attending meetings and events at the Sacramento Center, as well as events at Apollo. A student in Sacramento remembers: “He always came prepared with a quote to end the meetings, and he always made me think more deeply about things I had not thought so much about before.”

A dear friend from Brazil sent this tribute:

“Mario and I nurtured a lifelong friendship that began when we first met. A few months ago, we had an amazing conversation, comparing notes from our exploration of years in life, and then, returning to the School—both of us humbled by the experience and so grateful to be back.

“I remember his saying that the Teacher was the main reason for his return. I also remember, quite distinctly, the maturity of his voice, the quiet beholding of the pauses in his speech, a phone conversation that was full of Divine Presence.

“Oh! Mario, my heart is with you. The journey goes on, step by step, a little longer we go, now parted, but with so many dear moments of friendship and love all around, gracing our moments, gracing our lives. A quiet beholding, gratitude.”

Abraham Lincoln said: “Surely God would not have created such a being as man, with an ability to grasp the infinite, to exist only for a day! No, no, man was made for immortality.”

[Music: Gabriel Fauré, “Après un rêve (After a Dream)”]
(Musicians: Justin Mckay, piano; Stephen Rice, cello)

[Reading: Rilke, “A Parting Song”]
(Reader: Ana Maria Goncharuk)

“A Parting Song”

Since all things pass,
let us make a fleeting song;
a quenching one
would be too strong.
Let us sing with love and with art
to the ones that depart
let us be ...
faster than that rapid departure

Minister's Conclusion:

The death of a friend reminds us that we each inhabit a fragile and temporary vessel, from which presence emerges and connects us.

May Mario's practical approach to the work remind us to strive to apply our own understanding in each moment;

May his active support of the school and of his friends encourage us in our own efforts, and

May the valuation and humility that led him to embrace the school anew help us also to value the great gift we have received.

Dearest Mario, we thank thee.

Minister:

The task of this lifetime has been fulfilled. The role of Mario is complete. The shell of the body falls away, and the soul that inhabited that body is released to continue its divine journey.

Candle Ceremony

Minister: Please stand.

Guests leave and move to the terrace for the reception.

Toast: Sasha Shalapanov

Plato: "It is established that those who have taken the first steps on the celestial highway shall no more return to the dark."

As we raise our glasses let us savor those precious moments of joyful friendship and presence that we've shared with Mario and remember that they are always with us and forever.