

Robert Taylor

*June 29, 1942 – December 10, 2022*

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Funeral Service  
Minister: Dorian

January 7, 2023

### Minister's Introduction:

This is the ceremony of existence: of birth, of light, and life. Thank you for coming here, braving the weather, the cold, so we can be together. This is also a global event. So many more are connected and part of this event and what connects us is something extraordinary. Think of all the kindnesses, all the gestures of love that each one of us has made in our life so far. Put all of those together, and yet what we share here together, this moment, is greater than all of that. What is it? When a friend dies, it opens up an extraordinary space. A landscape that we are for the most part unfamiliar with, and yet, here we are, right now. For those of us who have watches, and I know not many of you do, both here in the room and in the centers, I invite you to take off your watch. Because in this state time cannot enter. The state we share now we live in; thoughts do not enter. When emotions are exhausted, then this space opens up. This is the most extraordinary thing about it, that when death appears, finally, and touches us, then what opens is an extraordinary place that we have been looking for all our lives..

It tears down all our habits and usual thoughts and emotions

What is left behind is freedom, the freedom to breath, and to exist. Ultimately, what death produces has nothing to do with dying. It has to do with being born. It's nothing dark. It's full of light, in fact. And even though death produces considerable sadness and anguish, those emotions do not enter into this place. And yet it's not a cold place; it is full of color and existence flows from here. We are closer to each other than ever. We can see more than ever and feel more than ever. In fact, it's more alive than anything we have experienced outside of this place.

The last thing, before walking here, I saw a mother with a child in her womb walk into the room. This is not a metaphor. Because C influence is telling us that what is happening here, what death has given us, is our own birth, our own existence. And that is why we call this the ceremony of existence. It's not a ceremony of death. Again, we take all the gestures of kindness that we have done, and all the help we have given one another, which is already immense and invaluable. And yet all those do not compare to this ultimate gift that each one of us will give to one another, our own death, or shall we say, our own final birth.

It is very brave act, both for Robert Taylor—and he has gone through the door of light—and also for us to be able to embrace this moment and live in it and breath it. To be able to go beyond sadness, beyond all sorts of emotions, and reach the place that is the source of existence. This is what we share now.

It is greater than any of us individually. And that is why it's so powerful: we can place our entire existence in this state and yet still, there is infinitely more space. We are connected to everyone in the school, and every soul on the earth that has ever existed.

This is one thing we have in common; we are all very different, and yet when we meet in this place, all differences disappear.

And so each time one of us encounters death and has to go through the door, this gift is renewed and is being shared once more. It has happened many times and it will continue to happen, and each time we draw together in this place, because it is a powerful shock and we learn each time to step in more eagerly, or with more grace, perhaps.

This is the freedom we were always looking for. From birth and from before birth perhaps. And yet at times it becomes so obvious and it is so powerful that we cannot deny it. We cannot call it something else; we cannot cover it up.

Robert Taylor was very brave to go through this and to offer us this ultimate gift and now it is our turn perhaps to be equally brave, perhaps, and not turn away from it

The air we breathe is alive.

**[Reading: “Little Gidding” from “The Four Quartets” by T. S. Eliot]**

**(Reader: Conrad)**

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half heard, in the stillness  
Between the two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always--  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of things shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

**[Eulogy: Rowena]**

“He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.”

*Hamlet*, Shakespeare

Robert was conceived in London following the terror of the Blitz in World War II. His father was a gunner in the war; his mother was a laundress. His father was Scots, from a family of coalminers; during the Great Depression he walked all the way from Glasgow to London to find work. Robert had a memory of being sent away to the country during the worst of the bombing of 1944, when he was two. He remembered playing in the bombed-out ruins of St. Paul’s Cathedral. He lived in the East End, a Cockney boy who liked to climb on roofs and once jumped off, thinking he could fly. “There’s something wrong with your boy,” the neighbors told his mother.

He left school at fifteen. His grandfather gave him his first musical instrument, a mandolin; by 1960 Robert had a band, playing guitar in the clubs of Soho. He studied method acting at the Actor’s Workshop and met his first wife Myra there; they were the two stars of their class. Their daughter Rebecca was born in 1971.

Robert worked with Laurence Olivier at the new National Theater of Great Britain in the early 1970s. Peter Brook cast Robert in the role of Chorus Leader for his production of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, and once, during rehearsal, asked Robert, “What do you *want*?” At the time, Robert did not know how to answer.

In 1977, Robert encountered the London School of Economic Science, a group formed by Ouspensky’s pupil, Dr. Francis Roles, and briefly attended their meetings. He met Peter Bishop at the Fellowship’s Hall Farm outside London a year later, and joined, wearing jeans and a silver-studded denim shirt. A year later, on a train with students and our teacher, he asked about some very high states he was having, like seeing trees wither and die in minutes as he gazed out. “It’s your king of clubs,” the teacher said. Later he was called over; he thought he would be asked to leave the school. But Robert was asking him to start the Munich center, to co-direct it with Guinevere. Robert Taylor said yes.

He moved to California after Germany, in 1982. A year later he married Rowena, and began leading the theater at Apollo, at our teacher’s request, directing and acting in plays such as *The Tempest*, *The Misanthrope*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Moving to London in 1986, he took up the third of his many roles in working with new and prospective students. In 1988, he returned to California to

direct the San Francisco center, teaching drama and voice for some years at San Francisco State University and Chico State, later for master's programs at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Delaware.

In 1992 Rowena visited the new small Moscow center, and on her return, he said, "I knew that we had to go there." The following summer they moved to Moscow, and welcomed over a hundred new students over the next two years. He particularly spent time with new students to help them taste what it is to be truly present.

He used the quotation from the English 18th-century priest William Law to close the prospective student meetings he gave: "Begin to search, and dig in thine own field for this pearl of eternity that lies hidden in it. It cannot cost thee too much, nor canst thou buy it too dear, for it is all—And once thou hast it, one wilt know that all which thou hast sold or given away for it is as mere a nothing as a bubble on the water."

Robert traveled across Russia and former Soviet lands, opening centers in Vilnius, Bucharest, Nijny Novgorod, and Penza, while directing in Moscow. He worked with actors at the Moscow Art Theater and gave acting workshops in many cities that gathered new students to our school. Returning to Apollo to build a home in 1996, he directed *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It* at the new Fellowship amphitheater. For the next two decades he traveled to give open meetings in Russia, India, Europe, Lebanon, Greece, Turkey, for prospective students, sometimes framed as acting workshops.

A friend upon his death wrote this understanding of Robert's life in theater:

"He was the one who actually understood what theater could be in the Fourth Way, while never losing sight of what is truly important. He never fell into the trap of losing scale, because he had already seen that life is meaningless. Acting was a beautiful, and occasionally sacred, tool, but not the end itself. Robert will always be an inspiration for single-minded focus on the one thing that makes everything worthwhile."

At a meeting Robert led in early 2022, he was asked, how can one accept aging graciously? He answered, "One is constantly in a state of grace, because of what has been given." He added, "When I joined the school, I had suffering: losing one's life up to that time, losing the illusion of being someone, just being shattered like a mirror into a thousand pieces. Some people are scarred by this—when the semblance of 'being someone' is shattered. You realize you are living in hell. And you do not know how to find a way out. This is the plight of every man and woman on earth. Sometimes, very

rarely, one is given an extraordinary gift—of a journey rarely made outside the school—you can say that this journey is the intelligence of the heart. A landscape opens up that wasn't there before. A possibility, a fragrance, a flower one cannot see. And one takes a breath for three seconds—one breath—with the feeling one is outside and inside oneself at the same time. The steps of the sequence, if followed, begin to bring about something extraordinary... This work allows us to achieve a new relationship to love. Love always remains a possibility in a world of madness. One is actually preparing to die—the machine's troubles, interests, they are meaningless. We are trying to build something that will not die. The experience of being outside and inside at the same time on the merry-go-round will help one survive death.”

During his penultimate illness, Robert spoke with me and said,  
“I have boundless energy for simply being present. In the most simple way. But all the things I used to do, I can't anymore. I don't wish to sound morbid. But I can be simply present... Look around you. At what has been given to you in this life. We take it for granted. But we must see it—with the intelligence of the ladder of the heart.

“I am quite content here. And there's this aspect of presence. One cannot bargain with these things. It is C influence. None of this suffering is unbearable or acute. ...I find the work at this time strangely closer than ever. Something is there all the time now and it's closer than ever.”

When our teacher learned of his increasing frailty, he said, “Thank you for all you have done for our school. Thank you for bringing dignity to our school. I will build upon it. It's more of a new beginning than an ending. ‘All things end in Yes’ for us.”

We will remember him. His second line of work; how quickly he moved to support others when he saw the need. His inner discipline; his kindness. His utter loyalty to his teacher, his friends, and his school. His ability to transform deep suffering in the last years and months of his life. Diagnosed with leukemia in 2012, he “never complained and never explained.” We shall not see his like again.

**[Music: Elgar, “Nimrod” from “The Enigma Variations”]**  
(Musicians: Stephen Rice, cello; Justin McKay, piano)

**[Reading: From Robert Taylor's Notes]**

(Reader: Rebecca G.)

The heart opened becomes a landscape. The space itself longs for a birth. Don't die. Don't die. Stand. Breathe yourself into existence. Time is bent. A fragrance is held. Another body stands before you and speaks a new language only few have heard. We work in this world of the fragrance, the sound of the wind, the sea, a world quite separate from the world of the physical body. The trees cannot hold the wind. We go beyond everything that is not the miraculous. I believe in the miraculous, the world of miracles. It is the only thing that makes sense. When the body dies, what is left? The great mystery. The whole of the history of the earth is about what happens at the moment of death. At that moment, out of nowhere, the greatest achievement of a man's life is what happens. To produce a will, a unity: all work is to this end. You will not taste death. I have been sent, once again, to find, through my own death, you, who is me in another... I would like to say world, but it is not that at all. Everything is so surprising. I did not think it would be this way. You were there all the time.

### Minister's Conclusion:

Robert Taylor started as an actor, with the vision one could become a conscious actor. But then, very quickly, it becomes obvious that the actor cannot awaken, because it is bound to the visible and the audible. The actor ultimately is just there to play a part. But there is something else the actor can give birth to. And this something else has nothing to do with the actor himself, the lines he is given, or the play being enacted. This is what awakens and this is what is here right now. the actor can create a space in which awakening can blossom and we live in that space. Right now. But alas, we are not ready to live there permanently. We can enjoy it now, knowing that this too, shall pass, like everything else. At the door as we walk out, the emotions, thoughts, and habits wait for us. Here, we are free. And the moment we walk out, they will come back again. But now, we are free. And we walk out those doors, we are different. We are not the same people as we were ten minutes ago, even five minutes ago, even one breath ago. Because what we share here is extraordinary, something very rare and precious. The death of our friend opened up a space and we were touched by it, so deeply that we were able to live inside this space and it has changed us forever. And each time we return to this place, we know a little more about it. We become more pure, more eager, more awake. Each time, there is more gratitude for both the payment that has been made, but also, equally important, gratitude for the time we have together. For it is not long. And so the play moves on.

### Candle Ceremony

Minister signals urn bearer (John K.).

Funeral party leaves.