

## The Ash Ceremony

Soon after I began reading Anthroposophy I came across an indication by Rudolf Steiner concerning human ashes, and I was struck by the totally new perspective this indication can give for life. It is that we live here in this world not only for ourselves, but that part of our task during our life's journey is to prepare ashes for the earth. Our activity and the earth's future are intimately intertwined. We live a whole lifetime to prepare a small amount of material for the sake of the earth's future. With this understanding, a wonderful, healthy, positive, selfless perspective can appear before the soul, and the heart can be fired in a new way. I have lived with this perspective for forty years.

The indication/quotes go as follows:

This is in consideration of the physical body that is given over to the earth, regardless of whether it is cremated or buried. By virtue of the fact that this body had a human form from the moment of birth, respectively prior to conception a soul-spiritual being descended out of the spiritual world and worked within it until death. When this physical body is committed to the earth what was the human form continues to work into the earth. Regardless of whether it is burned or buried, it continues to work on the earth. And so, the earth continuously receives that which it would not have if human bodies after death were not given over to it. This is really something vital for the earth: that after death human bodies are given over to it. Otherwise, the earth would have substances that are only earth-substances.

This human body was inhabited by a soul-spiritual being that, prior to birth, descended out of the soul-spiritual world, which gives the structure to human bodies. This structure remains an essential element in the dust that goes over the earth and into the atmosphere during cremation. And thus with this human corpse the earth receives that which has descended out of the spiritual world. This is not without significance. This is not merely an everyday fact. It also has a very very great significance for our earth, because our earth is not evolving and developing anymore. It has already been a long time since not even one human being, and possibly also no animals, could inhabit the earth if it did not continuously receive the soul-spiritual forces of rejuvenation through human corpses. That today the earth is still an inhabitable place for human beings is so only by virtue of the fact that human bodies are continuously given over to it. These human bodies refresh the forces of the earth again and again. Since the middle of the Atlantean time, the earth has been in the process of dying and of drying out; there are no more forces of ascent. These ascending forces were still active in the old Polarian, Lemurian, and into the Atlantean period, but since the middle of the Atlantean time, the earth has of itself only death forces. The earth is refreshed and receives further subsistence only by the formative forces that are given to it through human corpses, which continue to work on into the earth. Only these make the earth inhabitable for human beings.

As I said before, the human being has the inner forces of the planets active within him, forces of the atmosphere. But then (at death) he gives his soul-spiritual forces to the earth. He supplies and nourishes the earth with soul-spiritual forces. By being born, he carries the soul-spiritual forces out of the spiritual cosmos to the earth. He uses them so long as he needs to, until his death, and then gives them over as formative forces to the earth, and thus is the co-builder of the future earth....

... the human being recognizes himself as a citizen of the world who says to himself: "As I enter through birth into existence, I carry into this world something soul-spiritual. With it I build on the future existence of the earth, even after I have removed myself through death from this earth." By virtue of being a citizen of the world, the human being becomes truly conscious of how his existence is connected to earthly existence, how he is one being with the earth—a being that gives to the earth its spirituality.

... the earth would long ago have come to its end if it were not continuously supplied with the forces of human corpses, which are separated from their soul-spiritual at death. Through these forces, which are added to earth evolution, to earth development, by the human corpses, by the forces that are in the corpses, evolution is maintained. This brings about that the minerals still unfold the forces of crystallization today that would have long ago ceased to unfold without these forces. They would long ago have become brittle and fallen apart. They would have dissolved. Through these forces, plants still grow today; without them they would long ago have ceased to grow. It is similar with the lower animal forms. The human being gives over to the earth with his corpse, a ferment, a yeast, as it were, for the further development of the earth. For this reason it is not insignificant

whether or not a human being lives on the earth. It simply is not true that the earth development in relation to the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, and animal kingdom would still proceed if there were no human beings! The process of nature is a unified, a closed process in which the human being also belongs. The human being is understood correctly only if he himself, even with his death, is considered as standing within the cosmic process.

If you think this over, then you will hardly be surprised when I say the following: “The human being receives, as he descends from the spiritual world into the physical, the surroundings of his physical body. Naturally, the physical body is different when one receives it as a child then when one lays it off at some later age through death. Something happens with the physical body, and what happens with this body can happen only by virtue of the fact that this body has been permeated by the soul-spiritual forces of the human being. It is true, is it not, that essentially we eat the same substances that the animals eat; this means we transform the outer substances just as the animals transform them, but we transform them with the activity of something that the animals do not have, of something that has descended out of the spiritual world in order to unite itself with the human body. Thereby we do something different with the substances than animals or plants do with them. And those substances that are given over with the human corpse to the earth are transformed substances. They are something different from those the human being has received when he was born. Therefore we can say that the substances and forces which the human being received at birth, he re-news during his life and gives over in a transformed form to the earth process. These substances and forces that he gives over to the earth process at his death are not the same as those he received at his birth. Therewith he gives something over to the earth process that continuously flows through him out of the suprasensible world into the physical earth process. He carries with his birth something out of the suprasensible world that incorporates the substances and forces that during life compose his body, and these he gives over to the earth with his death. Thereby the human being mediates continuously the dropping down of the suprasensible to the physical. You can imagine something continuously raining down, as it were, out of the suprasensible into the sensible, and these drops would have to remain completely fruitless for the earth if the human being were not to receive them and give them over to the earth—these drops which the human being receives at birth and which he gives off with his death. These are a continuous fructification of the earth through suprasensible forces, and through these fructifying suprasensible forces the evolutionary process of the earth is maintained. Without human corpses, therefore, the earth would long since have been dead.”

*From: Soziales Verstandnis aus geistwissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis.*

*15 lectures given in Dornach, Oct, Nov. 1919. GA 191, 1972 edition, 10-5-19,*

After sixteen years experience with the dying and funerals here at the Fellowship Community, it seemed appropriate to attempt a more formal memorial service for burying the ashes of the departed. Thus, in 1982 the following was put together to be used as a memorial service in burying the ashes.

Usually, the community will gather on a Sunday afternoon for a memorial service. The first part of this memorial service may include a few words recollecting the life of the departed. Then, those gathered proceed to the garden, field, or woods, where the ashes are spread into the earth. Frequently the ashes are buried near a bush or a fruit tree.

Verses I and II are spoken out-of-doors at the burial site. Verse I addresses the heart of the human being—the hearts of those assembled. Verse II addresses the earth and sun through the seasons—the heart and soul of those cosmic bodies.

While all look on, a small, shallow, grave (the resting place) is dug into the earth for the ashes. Then, the ashes are held, and the soul of the departed is addressed with Verse III.

Next the ashes are strewn into the earth-grave, followed by Verse IV. The earth itself is addressed—and one can try to sense one’s own union with the earth as a part of the mighty cosmic chain. Then the ashes are covered with earth.

Verse V follows, which addresses the higher being of those on this side of the threshold as well as on the other side.

The memorial service is closed with words from the Mysteries of the past, the present, and the future.

Memorial Service for Burying Ashes — Paul W. Scharff

**Verse I**

*(Addressing the hearts of those assembled)*

*Meditation by Rudolf Steiner*

In the human heart  
lives a part of man  
which contains matter  
more spiritual than in any other organ;  
also a part of man  
of which the spiritual life is made more  
manifest in matter  
than that of any other organ.

Hence in the microcosm that is man,  
sun is the heart,  
and in his heart is man united  
most of all with the deepest fount —  
the fount of his true Being.

**Verse II**

*(Addressing the sun and earth)*

*Meditation by Rudolf Steiner*

In the year's course  
alternate ceaselessly  
summer's abounding growth  
and winter's earth-repose;  
so in the course of man's life,  
vigor of waking day  
and peaceful bounty of sleep.  
Yet does the spirit-filled soul live on —  
sleeping and waking.  
So in the spirit, the soul of the earth  
lives through the seasons changing —  
summer and winter.

**Verse III**

*(Addressing the departed) (editor – and speaking for the departed)*

Man and His Ash

*by Paul W. Scharff, M.D.*

From the life of mine these ashes come,  
so that the will of the world can be done.  
I (.....) have tended this body royal,  
and now give the remains to the earthly soil.  
From birth to death a work I have done,  
to transform the gift given at birth.  
By dint of joy, sadness and mirth,  
I now return this gift to you, good earth.

It is now that in ethereal spaces  
I wander among the planetary traces. (not wonder?)  
Now in this domain of my true home  
dearest earth receive what was of my bone.  
I cherish that this deed of mine  
will tend thy body-soul —  
that of the Divine.

**Verse IV**

*(Addressing the earth)*

The Earth and Human Ash  
*by Paul W. Scharff, M.D.*

Oh thou earth,  
thou art a body of the heavens.  
through Christ's deed  
thou shall remain.  
Yet it is through human ash  
that thou can suffer pain.  
In such wise,  
we all can know  
that thou will ever have a soul.  
The joy of thy rocks crumbling,  
the pain of thy plants torn from root,  
the glory of the flower cut for man,  
all this we preserve with human ash  
that thou good earth may remain  
within the warp and woof of the heavenly chain.

**Verse V**

*(Addressing the living and the dead)*

*Meditation by Rudolf Steiner*

More radiant than the sun  
Purer than snow  
Finer than the ether  
Is the Self  
The Spirit in my heart of hearts  
I am this Self  
This Self am I

**Verse VI**

*(Addressing the Godhead)*

In practice of Spirit-Recollection  
Ex Deo Nascimur

In practice of Spirit-Mindfulness  
In Christo Morimur

In practice of Spirit-Vision  
Per Spiritum Sanctum Reviviscimus