

Daily Meditation 09/15/2022

Reflections on the Queen's Passing: Otto Rank & Ben Okri

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we offer some reflections on the Queen's passing from two distinct individuals: Otto Rank, the 20th-century psychologist called the father of humanistic psychology, who died young in 1939 and was an original follower of Freud in his inner circle, and so forth.

And Ben Okri, the prize-winning novelist and poet from Nigeria, so two quite different people.

Otto Rank, of course, was not part of Queen Elizabeth's domain or even of that of her father. But he does make this important point that there needs to be a role for the irrational in culture and in the psyche. And when there isn't, then some very negative irrational will emerge.

So in that regard, I'm saying that I think Queen Elizabeth offered in her irrational medicine and mythical role as a queen, and part of a monarchy, even in the 21st century: she offered positive values that people could identify with. And they did. And there was a deep attachment, and deep appreciation knowing she was there. And of course, there's a deep loss upon her death, because it's more than her death. It is the death of a symbol, a myth that keeps people together.

And God knows, we can use efforts to keep us together in this time of bifurcating and fighting each other, even within national boundaries and political parties and all the rest: that humanity is being particularly pugnacious at this time.

Even in the midst of common foes, like climate change, that is how it is and that's what Otto Rank is teaching us: don't underestimate the power of the irrational, but ultimately, he says, life is irrational. And we should take sustenance from that. And the irrational includes music and play, and humor, and sarcasm, and mythologies, they are part of what humanity requires to exist.

So we turn to a novelist and a poet and artist, Ben Okri, from Nigeria, but part of the Commonwealth of the Queen's inherited world, bigger world. And he has a lot to say about how Queen Elizabeth was part of our psyche and the "our" includes people in Nigeria like himself, and he himself had some sit-downs with the Queen and was very impressed by her. And especially by her sense of humor, he tells us, but that she "penetrated the subconscious of the land," and of many lands, he says, even his own land of Nigeria.

She had a magical effect on people and that she was especially successful at her job. And that part of it, he believes was that she brought a feminine presence, being a mother and a grandmother and a wife and a woman, into her work world of 70 long years. That brought, he felt some balance to the excessive masculinity of the 20th century as expressed in the wars and so forth.

And he gives us, as a poet does, a well chosen word, the phrase "the inner porousness," that there's a porousness in people in our time; things are collapsing all around us. And that she filled the vacuum, in a positive way again, because she did have values. She was grounded in her Christian faith tradition as the head of the Anglican Church. and so forth. And she called on that value system for herself personally to persevere. But that came through in her pronouncements from time to time, and her actions.

So I think in all of this, there is much to thank Queen Elizabeth for at this particularly porous time in history. And we don't want the porousness to be filled with the negative, because that is what QAnon and crazy movements are doing today. They are attracting people because they are filling this hole in the soul, this porousness that interestingly Okri names as a sign of our times.

Let's fill the emptiness with good things and good values.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.