

## Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

### Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

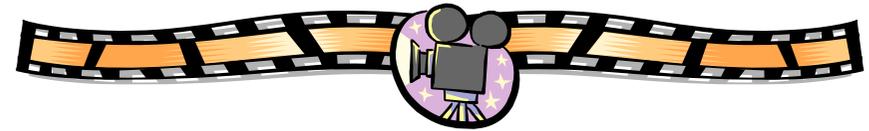
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

### Some facts about the film

- The film won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2009, beating the widely tipped "Waltz with Bashir".
- The Japanese title "Okuribito" means "the sending [away/off] people" (as in: people who send) - but this word is not normally used in Japanese.
- "Okuribito" is loosely based on Aoki Shinmon's autobiographical book "Nkanfu Nikki" (1993), published in English as "Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician" (2004). The book was adapted for the film by Japanese screenwriter Kundo Koyama.
- Masahiro Motoki, who plays Daigo, spent months learning to play the cello and rehearsing funeral rites until he could perform like a professional. Yōjirō Takita, the director, attended funeral ceremonies in order to understand the feelings of bereaved families.
- While death is the subject of great ceremony, as portrayed in this film, it is also a strongly taboo subject in Japan, so the director was worried about the film's reception and did not anticipate commercial success.
- The initial idea for the film came from Motoki and took 10 years to reach fruition, becoming a labour of love for cast and staff.



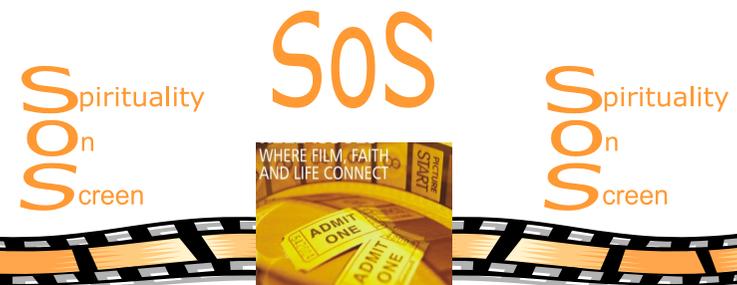
**A chance to watch films together.  
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.  
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

**7th Nov The Reader**  
**5th Dec Heaven**  
**9th Jan Toy Story 3 (2.30pm with FEATURES @ Tackley)**  
**6th Feb Departures**  
**6th Mar Heavens Above!**  
**3rd Apr He who must die**

**Films start at 5:30pm  
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road  
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)  
Email: [info@spiritualityonscreen.org.uk](mailto:info@spiritualityonscreen.org.uk)  
Web: [www.spiritualityonscreen.org.uk](http://www.spiritualityonscreen.org.uk)**



## Departures

Daigo Kobayashi is a cellist in an orchestra that has just been dissolved. With no work, Daigo decides to move back home with his wife and look for a new job. He answers an advert entitled "Departures" thinking it is for a travel agency only to discover that the job is actually for a "Nokanshi" or "encoffineer," a funeral professional who prepares deceased bodies for burial. While his wife and others despise the job, Daigo takes a certain pride in his work and begins to perfect the art of "Nokanshi," acting as a gentle gatekeeper between life and death, between the departed and the family of the departed. The film follows his profound and sometimes comical journey with death as he uncovers the wonder, joy and meaning of life and living.

### **Saying goodbye**

This film is a fascinating glimpse into the expression of grief in a culture which is not known for its emotional openness. The elaborate ritual Daigo learns might seem strange to outside eyes, but it is a way of acknowledging that life matters and affirming the significance of the departed. Such rituals attempt to bring dignity and peace into what might otherwise be a frightening reality.

How did you react to the Japanese rituals? What about our rituals? What do you think of how we handle death and dead bodies? What rituals can we offer as a church, both to those of faith and those of none? At one time, it would have been common to have the body in the house, on display the night before the funeral. Today we have tended to push such things away. What do you think we have lost in the process?

### **Death as a taboo**

In Japan death, and all things related to it, remain very much a taboo subject, despite it being something that everyone will one day go through. In our culture, too, we try, at best, to sanitise death and, at worse, to ignore it altogether. We buy our meat washed clean of blood and hygienically sealed in plastic. We spend millions on surgery and cosmetics to delay or conceal the ageing process. The elderly and dying are pushed to the margins. Without a sense that there is hope beyond this life, death becomes a deeply unwelcome reminder that whatever we have will one day be taken from us, and whatever we have achieved will one day crumble. What is your approach to death? Are you able to talk about it, or do you try not to think about it? How can we recapture death as simply part of life?

### **Valuing people**

There is much about reconciliation in the film. We see a whole variety of broken relationships—between father and son, between friends, between husband and wife—yet all of them ultimately find some resolution. They often arise through a misunderstanding of the other person: through not seeing them as they really are, for not valuing them for who they are. Are there people in your life who you struggle to understand? How can you heal those relationships before it is too late?

### **Pride in what we do**

It is one of the lowliest jobs in Japanese society, but Daigo takes pride in his work and turns it into a spiritual journey for himself as well as for the departed and the family of the departed. Are you able to take pride in what you do? If not, why not? If we do something well and to the best of our ability, does it matter what others think?

## Memorable Quotes

- Daigo** "The world's cities will be our home. Come, tour with me." That's how I proposed. But reality was harsh. I should have realised the limits to my talent.
- Daigo** This ad: "No age restriction, good salary, short working hours, full-time employee."
- Mika** "NK Agent"—what is that?
- Daigo** "Working with departures." A travel agency, maybe?
- Mika** A tour guide?
- Daigo** "No experience necessary." I'll give them a call.
- Ikuei** You were born to do this.
- Daigo** That's fine for you to say.
- Daigo** One grown cold restored to beauty for all eternity. This was done with a calmness, a precision and above all a gentle affection. At the final parting, sending the dead on their way, everything done peacefully and beautifully.
- Mika** So, this was your Dad's coffee shop.
- Daigo** Don't remind me. I don't even remember his face.
- Mika** Would you like to see him?
- Daigo** No. But if I did ... I'd hit him.
- Yamashita** People are talking.
- Daigo** About what?
- Yamashita** Get yourself a proper job.
- Mika** Why didn't you say?
- Daigo** You'd say no.
- Mika** Of course. Aren't you ashamed having a job like that?
- Daigo** What's to be ashamed of? Touching dead people?
- Mika** Just get a normal job.
- Daigo** Normal? Everyone dies. I'll die, and so will you. Death is normal.
- Old man** Working here all these years, I've often thought that maybe death is like a gateway. Dying doesn't mean the end. You go through it and onto the next thing. It's a gate, and as the gatekeeper I've sent so many on their way. Telling them: "Off you go. We'll meet again."
- Mika** So that's your father.
- Daigo** I hate to say it but I don't remember his face. I wouldn't know him to see him.
- Mika** My husband is a professional.
- Daigo** Dad ...