

## Reflection for All Hallows Day

All Hallows is the day on which the quick and the departed meet. I use the ancient word *quick* for the living and the word *departed* for those who have gone before, as I know not which of the two has a broader consciousness.

On this day we commemorate those who have died — cherished ones (both close and unknown) to whom we owe gratitude, as well as some to whom we owe forgiveness. The veil between the quick and the dead thins out during the foggy time of year when the sun diminishes and many suffer from November blues. In some cultures flowers are brought to the graves; the Celts even invite the souls of their forebears to share their meal.

I have heard it said by an old Swiss farmer that the souls “up there” are out of work because we make no demands on them. Feeling them suffer from unemployment, he intuits that many want to partake of our lives but we do not ask them. Nor do we notice the assistance they give us at times. We glibly presume they may be in paradise, in nirvana, in Abraham’s bosom or nonexistent, when in fact they may well be next to us, reading our minds, measuring our heartbeats, questioning our motives, observing our follies, giving us an invisible hand and sometimes just asking for remembrance or for release from some chains of the past.

A friend of mine said: the souls must be weeping a lot when they see what we do to each other, we mortals who, striving to make our marks in the world, ride roughshod over rivals in order to attain our goals. I replied: they must also be cheered by those simple heroes and saints, whose works of compassion are ignored by the media because tales of goodness are not spicy enough for professional scandalmongers. Devils were always more interesting than saints as they titillate our disruptively fertile imagination.

The news are replete with reports of torture, civil wars, poisoned gas, corrupt officials, death of bees and urban trees, sexual violence, extreme temperature swings, crass injustice, homicide, rampant debt explosion, forest fires, polar meltdowns and the latest mischief of celebrities. We lap up our daily allotments of “ain’t it awful” reports and suppress a yawn at testimonies of deep devotion and self-sacrifice, that are far less spectacular. Let us ponder the possibility that the souls that dwell in other time and space dimensions may have a less negative way of viewing reality and therefore focus more than we on the sower’s grain that, fallen on good earth and not unto arid rocks, thorn bushes or into the beaks of crows, grows to a hundredfold harvest.

Induced by observation and experience rather than belief to presume that our consciousness survives our physical state, I would be encouraged at All Hallows to converse in heart and thought with the souls that come to mind. Some seek comfort for having to depart with unfinished business, some may seek reconciliation, some seek acknowledgement for having sacrificed for others their life and ambitions in the flower of youth, others may want to shake off faulty preconceptions or shackles of addiction, while others just long to be remembered and cherished.

If what I suggest be true, and even if it is not, the thoughts that engage us in doing the office of friendship beyond the grave are so much more worthy than the chaos of flighty banalities our brains concoct, congeal and dissolve when not focused on a task. For by attending to possible yearnings of those who have died, we close the circle between them and the living.

As pious Jews on the Sabbath used to set an extra plate at their table for the Prophet Elias, and as people in Nippon light little lamps during the summer festival to summon the souls of their dead, let us periodically hold discourse with those who have undergone mortality and, in so doing, make ourselves worthy of their blessing.

Perhaps you cannot connect with such thoughts and are inclined to say: "I have no contact with the dead. Why not just let them go? If the souls really exist, they probably have other cares". It may be so, for I admit there are some kindred souls that never knock on my door though their memories dwell in me. Then you may all the more complete a task that does them honor, laboring on their behalf rather than seeking communion.