

Awakening to Those Who Have Died
and
The Possibilities for Transforming Grief



Readings and Thoughts

Compiled by

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Cover painting - *Love* - by Deborah Docherty

This selection of readings and thoughts was created for an experiential workshop at the Canberra Christian Community for their *2009 Festival to Remember Those Who Have Died*.

It was inspired by Love, created with Love - in the spirit of that Love - which surrounded me and filled my being at the time of the death of my son, Simon. This Love and Simon's love have continued to be with me since that time. It has been the greatest journey of my life – to find a new way of living, finding connection across the threshold and coming to a knowing with such certainty that those who have died are with us, and that their world and ours are one.

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March 2010

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Saturday

O Christ, I remember with love and thankfulness
Those I have known
Who have passed through the gate of death.
I know that some of these have looked on my soul
From the realm in which their souls dwell.
I thank Thee for all I have received from them;
For Thou hast brought our lives to meet.
May my thoughts and feelings reach unto them,
through Thee;
May they add warmth and purpose
To my earthly life.
And may my meeting again with them
Be blessed by Thee.

Adam Bittleston – Meditative Prayers for Today



We must learn to see the dead not as deceased but living
among us, human beings who share our life and work.

Rudolf Steiner, July 19, 1915



Know the spiritual world! Then, among the many other blessings that humanity
will gain will be this: that the living and the dead will be able to form a unity.

Rudolf Steiner, November 17, 1916



Where have they gone?

When I was a child, death was spoken of as though it was the end of the show. A person lived a long or a short, an adventurous or a dull life, then died; people cried, and that was that. Once one of my grandmothers spoke of death as "passing over to the other side". I puzzled over the term for some time. I sensed death to be the other side of life but couldn't figure out where the edge was that separated the two. My childish imagination liked to picture people going to heaven, up in the sky, when they died. But heaven and sky, for me, were not "the other side." I could, after all, see the sky. "The other side" for me meant China, or whatever you might come to if you started digging from this side down. So exactly how and what did one "pass over"?

I was thinking in very literal terms without being able to connect my wonderings with things that happened. For I'd had experiences that did not support the idea that death automatically means either the end of the show or separation involving a great distance.

Claire Blatchford – Friend of My Heart



This is what it comes down to: that we learn to experience that those who have passed through the gate of death have only assumed another form.

Having died, they stand before our feelings like those who, through life circumstances, have traveled to distant lands, whither we can follow them only later. We have therefore nothing to bear but a time of separation.

Rudolf Steiner, June 17, 1915



Two Views – from here and “there”

birthday

in the stillness
of meditation
we celebrate
together
on opposite shores
the days
of your birth

father to son

when i saw you
come into the world
it seemed that no
greater miracle
had ever occurred

you were the first
child ever born
Adam

when i watched you
leave this world
no greater tragedy
had ever been

with you the world ended
and all that remained
was darkness

Jeffrey Kane

son to father

on the day of my death
the world was born
how could it have been
that i so unaware
i know peace
i know joy
i know love
i know light

you walk in darkness
where many wander
lost for a lifetime
but there is a path through
to the world that you
barely remember
even with my death

darkness means nothing
your task is to listen
and you will find
your way

Gabriel Kane



What is required of us?

These are some pointers for developing soul capacities necessary for being present for those who have died:

- ❖ Cultivate an attitude of gratitude
- ❖ Trust the process of life
- ❖ Appreciate every moment
- ❖ Be present in all that one does (“*Present Moment Living*”)
- ❖ Feel into each experience or activity in which one is engaged
- ❖ Look for the sacred in all
- ❖ Be in the silence of ones own being
- ❖ Enliven ones thinking – spiritualise ones thinking
- ❖ Speak to those who have died with love and reverence as if they were here
- ❖ Be open to their needs
- ❖ Develop an imagination for the spiritual world
- ❖ Come to an inner knowing that those who have died are here even if one can’t see or hear them
- ❖ Read texts which meet the heart, enrich the soul and meet us spiritually – being aware that this is for them as well as for oneself
- ❖ Become aware of the thoughts that come to us – we live in a weaving web of thoughts

Becoming aware of their presence

The dead are all around us as much our neighbors as the family next door, the tree at the corner, the birds at the feeder. We need not be on speaking terms with all our neighbors, but the recognition of their presence, if only in a form of a nod, a smile, or a thought of appreciation and thanks, can go a long way. When we acknowledge each other we affirm and quicken life in each other. Though we may not be able to see the dead outwardly or inwardly, openness to their presence means a great deal to them

Claire Blatchford - Experiences with the Dying and the Dead



Live with joy

*Though I am dead
Grieve not for me with tears
Think not of death
With sorrowing and fears;
I am so near that
Every tear you shed
Touches me although
You think me dead
But when you laugh
And sing in glad delight,
My soul is lifted
Upwards to the light
Laugh and be glad
For all that life is giving,
And I, though dead,
Will share your joy in living.*

Anon



An attitude of gratitude

Every experience enriches our life, raises the soul, including all the hurtful and unpleasant experiences as well as the happy and harmonious ones. Every disappointment and failure is received as an enriching gift and calls forth a fine feeling of thankfulness. The attitude that welcomes and is grateful for all experiences as registered in the supraconsciousness, must be drawn into our consciousness in this age of light and of the development of the consciousness soul, so that we no longer hold grudges, nurse resentments, feel bitter, or are hurt by harmful acts of speech of others or by blows of destiny. Then we have gratitude for every event and for the gift of life itself, given by the entire universe. Feelings of unity with all beings and things, and the constant upwelling of gratitude in the soul, create an atmosphere that connects the so-called living with the so-called dead. Whether we are aware or unaware of the fact, we are always connected with the spiritual world and with discarnate souls who were related to us by the forces of destiny. But the discarnate cannot relate to us if we wish they were still in the flesh. To mourn because we have them no more is an ungrateful feeling. We should rather be thankful we did have them with us, and be grateful that they enriched our life. To entertain a feeling that we have lost them weighs them down. In lectures on *Earthly Death and Cosmic Life*, Rudolf Steiner makes clear: "If we have lost someone we love, we must be able to raise ourselves to a feeling of thankfulness that we have had them with us; we must be able to think selflessly of what they were to us until their death, and not upon what we feel, now they are no longer with us. The better we feel what they were to us during life, the sooner will it be possible for them "to speak" to us, to speak to us by means of the common air of gratitude." There is rejoicing in all worlds when souls on earth change their attitude from grief to gratitude.

*John and Beredene Jocelyn
Thanksgiving, 1948*



“If they wish to speak to us, it is necessary that we take into our consciousness something of the feeling of gratitude for all that reveals itself to us. If there is none of this feeling within us, if we are not able to thank the world for enabling us to live, for enriching our life continually with new impressions, if we cannot deepen our soul by often realizing that our entire life is a gift, then the dead will not find a common air with us, for they can speak with us only through this feeling of gratitude. Otherwise there is a wall between us and them.”

“We should not cling to the idea that we have them no more, for that is an ungrateful feeling in the wider sense of life. If we clearly understand that the feeling of having lost our dead weighs them down, we will keep in mind the whole import of this.”

Rudolf Steiner, March 19, 1918





*Gratitude is priceless.
It cannot be bought or sold.
It is the doorway into the spirit.
Too often you want to "get through" things.
To what?
Attempt to give thanks for where you are
IN THIS VERY MOMENT.
It will help recollect you,
open you to little things you are missing.
It will be food for those on the other side,
many of whom suffer because they rushed
through their earthly lives.
When you do what they did not do,
it is balm for them.*

Claire Blatchford – Words heard from within



Trust

Underlying the soul qualities we have already uncovered - universal gratitude for the experiences of life and a sense of community with the world around us - there is an even more basic factor. This other aspect is universal trust, which might also be called faith, or confidence in life. This is the rock-bottom, fundamental conviction that life, no matter what, is always good and always has something to give us. Such basic trust leads us to the spirit. Opening to trust, we open to perceptions of the spiritual world weaving in this world. Underlying gratitude, solidarity with all existence, and so forth, this trust in all life and in humanity and the earth provides the basic medium whereby the dead can communicate with us. Such trust, in fact, forms the basis in the soul of all spiritual cognition, while at the same time renewing the soul, making it healthy and in love with life, full of hope and expectation.

Christopher Bamford



“The feeling I refer to may be called a universal trust, faith, or confidence in the life that flows through and past us - trust in life! From a materialistic standpoint, this mood of trust in life is very difficult to find. It resembles gratitude for life, but is a different feeling; it exists alongside gratitude. It consists in an unshakable mood in the soul that life, however it may approach us, has under all circumstances something to give us, so that we can never fall into thinking that life could have nothing more to give us. True, we pass through difficult, painful experiences, but in the wider context of life these experiences appear as precisely those that do the most to enrich and strengthen us for life.”

“When we have confidence in life, faith in it, we are able to bring the soul into a condition such that inspirations - which are thoughts sent to us by the dead - can appear. Gratitude for life and trust in life belong together in a certain way.”

“We need to call forth freshly renewed trust or confidence in *one who can no longer inspire that trust through physical presence*. To do this we must, as it were, ray out into the world something that has nothing to do with physical things. The all-embracing trust, confidence, and faith in life that I described have nothing to do with physical things.”

“Ultimately the feeling I refer to - the feeling of never, never losing hope in life - is the feeling that enables us to experience a right relationship between the living and the so-called dead.”

Rudolf Steiner, March 26, 1918

How do they perceive?

This has to do with the special way in which the dead perceive. ... For instance, suppose you have before you a small vessel containing salt. You can see that. The salt looks like a white substance, a white powder. The fact that you see the salt as a white powder depends upon your eyes. Your spirit cannot see the salt as a white powder; but if you put a little salt on your tongue and taste its special taste, then the spirit can begin to become aware of it. Every spirit can perceive the taste of salt in you. In fact, everything that takes place in human beings through the outer world can be perceived by every spirit, including human souls who have passed through the gate of death. Within us, the sense world extends to our tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing and so forth; the world of the dead also reaches down into what we hear, see, and taste. The dead can experience with us what we experience in the physical world. This is because these experiences belong not only to our world but also to theirs. Our experiences belong to their world when we thoroughly spiritualize what we experience in the outer world with spiritual ideas. Otherwise, what we experience as the effects of matter remains dark and incomprehensible to the dead. To the dead, a soul devoid of spirit is a dark soul. This is why the dead have become estranged from earthly life. We must overcome this estrangement. The so-called dead and the so-called living must learn again to live together inwardly....

Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmic and Human Metamorphoses*



Communication with The Dead

... the Friend of the heart has indicated we **can** offer help when others pass over, regardless of whether the death experience has been abrupt, prolonged, or somewhere in between. At the same time, he has indicated that those who have passed over can in turn help us, who remain on this side, in ways yet to be discovered.

*A whole new dimension of communication between the
spiritual worlds
and your physical world is waiting to open up.
It IS opening.
It MUST open.
The so-called dead are waiting,
as are the angels and the soldiers of light.
You have no idea how great their eagerness is,
how great their need and longing.
Your heart senses this.
Open to it.
Turn to the spirit worlds, so close, so near,
Open and ask.*

Claire Blatchford – Friend of My Heart



To communicate with the dead, we need a common language - a living language, not a dead language of old thoughts, unconscious habits, and mechanical emotions. Thoughts sent to the dead must be in a language they can understand; what we think must have meaning for them. Thus it must have meaning for us, too. To communicate with the dead therefore requires freshness, spontaneity, creative intention, and truly felt feelings. The first approach to this must include the understanding that the language must be "spiritual", not "material". The dead cannot understand dead, materialistic thoughts, but only living, spiritual thoughts. Spiritual thoughts are those that we make our own. First, we think them afresh and try to raise them to their highest meaning for us. Then, emptying ourselves, we offer that experience to the spiritual world. Once thoughts can become a living reality for us in this way, they are able to cross the abyss between the living and the dead. The dead can share in such thoughts and learn from them; they can even act within them and take them further. In fact, without such thoughts we are not present for our loved ones who have died. They look in vain for us. They depend upon us but cannot find us. More than that, they are constrained, even fettered, by our absence. We do not provide a medium within which they can live and continue to participate in the earthly stream that is their karma. When our souls are filled with materialistic thinking, we are like a void to them: nothing. Nowadays, many souls are cut off in this way! Therefore, spiritual reading-what is called lectio divina - the meditative reading of spiritual literature to the dead be a great comfort to them. At the same time, through this process and through the process of living thinking and living feeling, the dead can also communicate with us. After all, they continue to care and still have a great deal to offer. To establish relationships with the dead, however, requires effort. This effort is part of the greater work of overcoming materialism and spiritualizing human life on earth. Since this work is an aspect of cosmic evolution as a whole, it involves the entire spiritual world and all the beings in it.

Christopher Bamford





The quality of our thoughts, feelings, and actions are as important for the dead as they are for the living. Moreover. It is usually through *our* thoughts, feelings, and actions that the dead express themselves. Since they are no longer able to respond to us through a physical body, they have to use other ways. If we had a strong sense of their essence, apart from their bodily appearance during their life on earth, it is much easier for the connection to be made. This is not to say bodily appearance is not important.

To help clarify the point: I mentioned that I sometimes have known the presence of the deceased through inwardly sensing their smiles or other facial expressions. We all know what a smile is, but every smile is unique. Through the smile we not only gather something about the condition of a person in that moment (happy, amused, sad, mischievous, etc.) but we can also connect with the essence of the person. The spirit of the individual makes the smile unique. It is this spirit of the deceased, this essence, that comes to us in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. If you have unexpectedly found yourself growing warm with pleasure at the thought that someone you know who has died would like the poem you are reading, that person may be right there enjoying the poem through your reading! The reading does not have to be out loud. The dead person can participate directly in the inner activity of thought and feeling called up by the poem.

I believe this point is essential. We are bound to be disappointed if we assume everything has to happen the way we know it happens in the physical world with people and events approaching us from outside. This point can help assuage the grief, the overwhelming sense of loss one may feel when a dear one goes on. We have obviously lost physical contact with our loved one, but what we most truly love in him or her - the spiritual essence, the very "gist" of that person - can now be with and in us. As he once reassured me:

You never lose those you love.

(Those who have died.)

They are within you.

You know that.

Claire Blatchford – *Friend of My Heart*



Advice on meditation - Rudolf Steiner

When loved ones pass over into the other worlds, it is vitally important that we send them our thoughts and feelings, without allowing the thought to arise that we wish to have them back. The latter makes existence in the sphere into which they must pass more difficult for the departed. We should send the *love* that we give them - and not the *pain* that we feel - into the worlds where they are. Do not misunderstand me; we should not become hardened or indifferent. Yet it ought to be possible for us to view the dead with the thought, "*May my love go with you! You are surrounded by it.*" To my knowledge, a feeling such as this is like a winged garment that carries loved ones upward, whereas the feelings of many people when they mourn-which we may express as "Ah, if only you were still with us" - become an obstacle to them.

The above is a *general* indication of how we should compose our feelings when a loved one has left us.

Meditations by Rudolf Steiner

My eyes be unto you, beloved soul, as windows
that through them you may see the earthly beauty
My ears be unto you, beloved soul, as doorways,
that through them in hearing you may enter Ether's weaving realm,
When you behold through my eyes the earthly beings
through you I listen upward to the starry ways
When you through my listening enter into the weaving Ether light
then I behold, through the mirror of your soul
with mine inner eye the realm of angels
And the here and the yonder,
Find themselves in loving harmony
If the sun is in the middle
If the flame of love glows full of sacrifice.



I was united with you.
Stay now united in me.
So shall we speak together
In the language of eternal Being.
So shall we work together
Where deeds find their fulfilment.
So shall we weave in the Spirit
Where human thoughts are woven
In the Word of eternal thought.



Upward to thee strive the love of my soul,
Upward to thee flow the stream of my love!
 May they sustain thee,
 May they enfold thee
 In heights of Hope,
 In spheres of Love.



Selected poems

I AM THERE

*Look for me when the tide is high
And the gulls are wheeling overhead
When the autumn wind sweeps the cloudy sky
And one by one the leaves are shed
Look for me when the trees are bare
And the stars are bright in the frosty sky
When the morning mist hangs on the air
And shorter darker days pass by.*

*I am there, where the river flows
And salmon leap in the silver Lune
Where the insects hum and the tall grass grows
And sunlight warms the afternoon
I am there in the busy street
I take your hand in the city square
In the market place where the people meet
In your quiet room – I am there.*

*I am the love you cannot see
And all I ask is – look for me.*

Iris Hesselden



IF I BE THE FIRST OF US TO DIE

*If I be the first of us to die,
Let grief not blacken long your sky.
Be bold yet modest in your grieving.
There is a change but not a leaving.
For just as death is part of life,
The dead live on forever in the living.
And all the gathered riches of our journey,
The moments shared, the mysteries explored,
The steady layering of intimacy stored,
The things that made us laugh or weep or sing,
The joy of sunlit snow or first unfurling of the spring,
The wordless language of look and touch,
The knowing,
Each giving and each taking,
These are not flowers that fade,
Nor trees that fall and crumble,
Nor are they stone,
For even stone cannot the wind and rain withstand
And mighty mountain peaks in time reduce to sand.
What we were, we are.
What we had, we have.
A conjoined past imperishably present.
So when you walk the woods where once we walked together
And scan in vain the dappled bank beside you for my shadow,
Or pause where we always did upon the hill to gaze across the land,
And spotting something, reach by habit for my hand,
And finding none, feel sorrow start to steal upon you,
Be still.
Close your eyes,
Breathe.
Listen for my footfall in your heart.
I am not gone but merely walk within you.*

Anon



We must regain the understanding that we are not on earth just to build things in the physical universe during our physical existence. We must understand that during our whole existence we are connected to the whole world. Those who have passed through the gates of death want to work with us on the physical world. This working together only appears to be a physical collaboration, for everything physical is only an outer expression of spirit. Materialism has alienated human beings from the world of the dead. Spiritual science must help us make friends again with that world. The time must come when we no longer alienate ourselves from the dead for it is our alienation that prevents them from spiritualizing the physical world. The dead cannot grasp things in the physical world with their hands or do physical work. To believe that would be superstition. The dead can, however, work in a spiritual way. To do so they need tools placed at their disposal; they need the spirit to live here in the physical world. We are not just human beings, we are also tools - instruments for the spirits who have passed through the gate of death. While incarnated in a physical body we use a pen, or a hammer, or an axe; but once we are no longer physically incarnate, the tools we use are human souls themselves.

Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmic and Human Metamorphoses*



Above all, we learn that we do not live - or love or experience - for ourselves alone. All our experience feeds the universe. We are the books the dead read. Our thoughts and feelings are the works of art that brighten and instruct their lives. When we meditate (or pray) and do our spiritual practice, when we organize our lives to serve and make manifest the good, the true, and the beautiful, then we are doing so not only for ourselves but for all beings in all worlds. Truly, we are called to serve: to offer up our experience for the sake of the world's evolution. Not only do we take it all with us, we must also give it all away. When we do so, we live together with world evolution. We cannot do it alone, but only in and through and with those we love - in and through and with love. For the work of the earth is love: that the substance of the earth become love. And work with the dead, as Rudolf Steiner shows, is an important part of this task.

Christopher Bamford





...from the far side of the western horizon
"All the world is sacred, and life on the earth is a sacred gift."

Gabriel Kane



the light of death

your body
gone
the world
stands naked

the sacred
in everything
now
is all i see

Jeffrey Kane



Main Reference Material

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I encourage you to explore and learn more about the books which can be purchased on-line.

Experiences with the Dying and the Dead – Claire Blatchford

Friend of My Heart – Claire Blatchford

life as a novice – Jeffrey Kane

Staying Connected – Selected Talks and Meditations – Rudolf Steiner
(edited and introduced by Christopher Bamford)

