

COMMUNICATING WITH OUR BELOVED DEAD

Introduction

Rudolf Steiner describes, in the lecture, *The Dead Are Always With Us (Nuremberg, February 10, 1918)*, two ways to build a bridge between the spiritual world and the physical world. One is to follow a path of self-development as outlined in Steiner's basic writings. The other is to cultivate direct dialogue with spiritual beings, including the dead. Indeed, developing the consciousness of our belonging together with, living with the souls of the dead, is a central task of anthroposophy.

I was propelled into this work almost twenty years ago when my daughter, Nina Dietzel, and her friend Kirsten Bergh were killed in a car accident. Up to that point in my study of anthroposophy, I hadn't taken particular note of the teachings about death, but the notion of reading to the dead seeped in somewhere, coming to my consciousness little over a month after they died, on New Year's Eve of 1996 going into 1997, when I voiced to some friends, "Maybe we should start a reading to the dead group."

I will be speaking mostly out of this experience of reading for the dead in a group that met weekly for five years, and of continuing on my own since then. I will also mention some other practices for communicating with our beloved dead, but I want to clarify that what is meant by this. It is not channeling with a disembodied spirit through a medium in the sense of modern "spiritualism." It is a process using our clear day consciousness that can be followed by anyone. Steiner was very clear that our attempts to dialogue with individuals across the threshold must be done with "scrupulous vigilance;" they must be accompanied with our earnest striving to purify our willing, feeling and thinking.

Practices

The first practice I want to mention is a way to invite our beloved dead to experience the sense world through us. We can be "the eyes and the ears of the soul" for them when we send upwards to them a visual or auditory experience we are having— for example, when we see a beautiful sunset, or hear a beautiful concert. We can then actually share these experiences in spirit, indeed in a way that we could not when limited by our physical bodies when they were with us. This is an especially helpful practice for those grieving someone who died young, both for alleviating their own pain at being separated, but also that of the young person who died and would fain still be here! This practice is described in the book, *Where Are You? The Death of My Child*, by Karin v. Schilling.

A very basic practice of communicating with our beloved departed is to honor the nightly communion we have with the spiritual world, including the dead. The spiritual thoughts we bring into sleep provides the substance by which the departed soul can live. If the souls of human beings become barren, then the dead experience this as barren soil and we deprive them of the nourishment they need from the earth.

Anticipating this nightly dialogue, we can pay attention to how we go to sleep by practicing the Retrospection or nightly review of our day in reverse order. This takes us back to the moment we woke up, when we were at the threshold we are now facing again in the evening. This puts us in the right mood of soul for contemplating something of a spiritual nature or posing our questions for the dead. Upon awakening, we can practice having a slow re-entry into the world of the senses, lingering at the threshold and paying attention to the intimate indications that may come. This is when the dead communicate with us.

There is an alchemy to the question and answer process. First, we must unite our life of feeling with our thoughts and ideas, and address the person who has died with warmth of heart, reminding

ourselves of the love we had for the person when alive. Second, there must be a reversal in our communications. When we put a question to the dead, what we say comes from the dead person, and when the one who has died answers us, it comes out of our own soul. “In order to establish communication with those who have died, we must adapt ourselves to hear from them what we ourselves say, and to receive from our own soul what they answer.” This is described in detail in the above-mentioned lecture, which can be found in the book, *Staying Connected*.

Dennis Klocek gives another practice for cultivating a relationship to one who has crossed the threshold: through the moods of nature. It is a rather detailed process with many fine points to pay attention to, but the effort has been fruitful for me. When I have practiced it intensely for a period of time it has brought a subtle feeling of closeness and gentle joy in perceiving a new perspective of my beloved. Here I will give a only a general description.

In this exercise, you imagine yourself becoming the beloved through characteristic gestures, through the tone and cadence of their voice or laugh, and through distinctive physical features, and then dissolving these images into silence in reverse order.

In continuing this practice for a period of time, you can then develop a composite or distillation of these images in a fast forward manner, becoming aware of the essential character of the flow, and then recognizing in it a similarity with the mood of a natural event. When you have identified a similarity, you can make drawings or poems of the inner images and put them in a journal, or you can observe the phenomenon and then learn all that you can about it in an intellectual way to support what you observe. These images become a vocabulary that you can have in common with the departed soul.

If you wish to practice this exercise, you can find the details online by googling Staying Connected Dennis Klocek or going to <http://www.spiritworking.info/features/staying-connected/>.

Reading to the Dead

Reading to the Dead is a gift of love. It means making a regular practice of reading something of a spiritual nature to our beloved across the threshold. It is different from simply reading or studying anthroposophical or other texts during the course of our week. The thoughts we have during this kind of study will pass over to the dead when we sleep, as well. But reading with the **intention** to send the thoughts to particular souls across the threshold means reading in a different way. It means reading SLOWLY, emphasizing the verbs and enlivening the thoughts we are reading about. I find that as I have continued reading over the years, I do not try to cover as much ground as I might have before. I don't necessarily read a whole chapter of a book, but stop reading when I feel that some train of thought is completed. I pause often as I read, and reform the thought in my mind so that I have made it my own. Then, I find that I can live with these enlivened thoughts throughout the day or the next days.

Creating a form or ritual to follow each time you read is also helpful for establishing a recognizable practice. From the beginning of our group formed in 1997, we followed, and I have continued following, a mirroring form, which reflects the arc of life between death and rebirth. We began with the verse for the dead which accompanies this initiative (“May love of hearts.....”) followed by a period of silence in which we each inwardly named the dead we wished to direct the reading to. We then began to read out loud, with each person taking a turn. When I practice this alone, I read to myself (not out loud). When the reading is finished we mirror the period of silence, followed by speaking the same verse to close.

Finding a regular time for reading is helpful, be it daily, weekly or monthly. I like to do my weekly reading when I first wake up in the morning so that my intention does not get waylaid by life intruding, but this is not a problem if you are reading in a group and set a regular time to meet. Ideally, I read on Saturday, which in its Saturn nature is the perfect day to look back and remember.

Some people read to just one departed soul. I read to a whole litany of souls that is continually being adjusted as people I know cross the threshold. From the beginning, I felt it important to include my father, grandparents, and other family members who crossed the threshold early in my life out of gratitude for my ancestral stream. My list can easily become too long, so I sometimes have to eliminate consciously naming certain souls as they recede in immediacy for me. Perhaps someone else can suggest a way of coping with the growing lists of people across the threshold.

How you “name” the souls you read for is key to being of service to them. The names must be accompanied by vibrant memory pictures infused with heartfelt thoughts of love for them. These memory pictures enhance the world of the dead, just as works of art enhance our world, transcending the everyday course of existence. They are a source of beauty that streams to the dead.

Ever-again bringing forth the memory-love images of our dead when we read to them creates a community of the dead that is there waiting for us when we begin. This is a blessing for us.

In the early years of losing my daughter, the weekly reading for the dead was my lifeline to sanity, to feeling supported by others, and to feeling like I still had a way of caring for my child. I wanted more than anything to bring beauty to her, to nurture her in the world in which she now was dwelling. Over the years my practice has evolved to one of continuing my relationship with her as a spiritual being, with the same intensity of love and need to actively do this.

Reading to the Dead has also been an impetus for me to keep studying in a deep, not superficial way, which I otherwise might not do with as much discipline. I am grateful to those across the threshold for this guidance and the richness it brings to my life. Reading to the Dead is a gift of love for them, and for us as well.