

## **Imaginal Practices with Our Ancestors and Departed Friends**

Over the course of my spiritual guidance work one of the common themes is whether the death of a family member or friend closes the door to sharing. There has tended to be a taboo, or at least uneasiness, around communication with the dead for those who are raised in some Christian religious traditions. However, in catholic Christian tradition we have the doctrine of the “communion of saints” where the living and the dead are both held in communion through God’s grace and love; and in the epistle to the Hebrews 12:1 we have the image of being surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses” that support and encourage us in our life of faith. In the Episcopal church we are encouraged to pray for those who have died “because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God’s presence those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is.” (1979 BCP, 862)

When we still have things that we feel the need to convey to those who died there are various ways we can do this. These are some possible practices that you might do by yourself or with a trusted assistant. I encourage asking God to guide whatever practice we choose to do and bless our continuing love and communion with our loved ones.

### **Prayer to God/Christ**

A simple way for some to express a message is by offering a prayer addressed to God (Christ, Spirit) asking that the message will be passed on to the person who has died.

### **Converse in the Heartspace**

Visualize the presence of the beloved one continuing to live on in your “heart” spiritual dimension. Let this be a place where you can be in continuing dialogue.

### **Letter Sent to Loved One**

Write a letter to the departed loved one that expresses what you desire that one to know. This is a useful concrete ceremonial act if the death left unexpressed things you wished to say. After writing the letter pray that it will be received by the departed one and send it to the other side by solemnly burning it.

### **Journaling Dialogue**

Write a dialogue like a playscript. First write down a statement to the deceased one and then intuitively write what the other has to say to you. Just let the dialogue flow rather than critically examine intuited responses. You can look at the dialogue critically afterwards. Some people use their dominant hand to write their portion of the dialogue while using their nondominant hand for intuited responses (or holding the nondominant hand in the air while writing the intuited responses with your dominant hand).

### **Imagery Meditation – Father’s House**

The Rev. Carolyn Stahl Bohler, Ph.D. wrote the book *Opening to God: Guided Imagery Meditation on Scripture* in 1977 and revised in 1996. In a meditation based on John 14:1-4 (“in my Father’s house are many dwelling places...”) the meditator envisions walking up a path and

coming to a dwelling with a sign on the doorway that reads, "In God's House are Many Dwelling Places." Upon entering the house, the meditator browses through some rooms and comes to the room where the one that is sought dwells. An interaction ensues, and perhaps a gift is received. When the time comes, goodbyes are expressed, and the meditator leaves the dwelling and walks down the path to end the meditation.

### **Waiting Area Meditation**

A shorter version of the previous meditation is for you to envision locating yourself in a waiting area in a large house. When you feel ready you can go to the door of the room where the one you seek to visit lives. Knock on the door and enter when you are offered admittance. Engage the loved one and when the time comes to leave simply say your goodbyes and go back out of the room, returning to your ordinary reality.

### **The Living Room**

My favorite imaginal meditation for visiting a departed friend or loved one is like Bohler's meditation. In my "inner sacred village" I walk up a path to the Mansion which has many rooms. The Host (who I see as a large and compassionate sphere of light) takes me to the Living Room, which is spacious and comfortably furnished. It is in the Living Room that I meet my departed one, or a group of departed ones.

### **Shamanic Journey to a Loved One**

Those trained in shamanic journeys may ask a wise and compassionate helping spirit to take you to visit a deceased relative or friend or saint. You are taken to the place where the person you seek is and then interact with them.

### **Imaginal Meeting with Ancestors**

Inspired by a book by Daniel Foor, Ph.D., *Ancestral Medicine*, you might envision being in a large outdoors scene with trusted helping spirits such as Jesus, Mary, a fully well and vibrant ancestor, or others. Ask your helping spirits to encompass you in a protective dome that is transparent for you but makes you invisible to those looking at you from the outside (except for your helping spirits). In the distance you can see your ancestors gathered together in a large group. Some are very healthy and vibrant, but others may still need to grow in health and wellness, while perhaps some are currently very unwell or troubled. You might offer prayer for your ancestors (such as the prayer below) that they all will grow into the fullness and vibrancy of life that God intends for them. You may ask one of your helping spirits to go to the group of ancestors and ask if the one or ones you desire to meet will come to visit you. The helping spirit may escort those you wish to visit, if they are willing, up to and through the protective transparent dome to meet with you. When you are finished with the meeting, ask the helping spirit to escort the visiting ancestors back to their group. When you have completed your meeting, thank your helping spirits and return to ordinary reality.

### **A Prayer for Family Healing**

May all my ancestors be happy and at peace.  
May all my living family be happy and at peace.

May I be happy and at peace.

May all future generations of my family receive only blessings  
and love from our ancestors.

May my ancestors guide me on my path of destiny and purpose,  
and may I embody their love and wisdom for the benefit  
of all my relations.

May all my ancestors and all my family be happy and at peace.

(Daniel Foor, Ph.D. *Ancestral Medicine: Rituals for Personal and Family Healing*, 174)

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