



### Ghosts

The belief in manifestations of the spirits of the dead is wide spread, dating back to animism or ancestor worship in pre-literate cultures.

The notion of transcendent, supernatural entities like ghosts, demons or deities is a cultural universal. Generally we want the dead to stay removed from our realm. Relatives of the dead were expected to make offerings of food or drink to the dead to appease their envy of the living and ease their conditions. If not the ghosts could exact retribution on the living. Thought to be created or liberated from the corporeal body at the time of death, the spirit is expected to transition to the next realm and not remain on earth to interact with the living. So it is un-natural or super- natural, and undesirable to encounter a ghost. Something is amiss. The restless spirit may seek vengeance for some wrong, or be imprisoned on earth for bad things committed during life. They may be a harbinger of death, like the banshee, or the echo, the psychic reenactment of a former violent and tragic event, like a murder or suicide. They may occupy a specific haunted site as a heedless seemingly sleep-walking apparition, indifferent to the living, or they may alternatively, be actively interacting, from harmless and playful noises and object shifting poltergeists to violent terrorizing and serious, personal injury, attacks by an implacable entity.



What shall we mere mortals do? What are the traditions?

Closing the eyes of the deceased shuts the window from the living world to the spirit world. Covering the face with a sheet comes from the belief that the spirit of the dead, the “pneuma”, escapes through the mouth. Coins were placed on the eyes to pay Charon, the boatman who ferries the dead across the rivers Styx and Acheron, dividing the world of the living from the world of the dead. Bodies were carried out of the house feet first in order to prevent the spirit from looking back into the house and beckoning another member of the family to follow.

Mirrors were covered with black crepe so the soul would not get trapped and not be able to pass to the other side. Family photos were turned face down to prevent possession by the spirit of the dead. Some homes were opened to help the spirit exit while others were burnt to prevent its return.

Binding the dead or amputating the feet so the corpse was unable to walk, or even decapitation was performed to keep the dead occupied searching for the head so it wouldn't bother the living; placing a heavy tombstone on the burial site to hold the departed down: All these were methods employed to keep the dead away. Familiar ringing bells, incense, talismans, gargoyles and cemetery gates, incantations, sacred texts, amulets, clergy, rituals and exorcisms: keep the dead safely away.

We invoke the traditional Scottish prayer:

From ghoulies and ghosties  
And long-legged beasties  
And things that go bump in the night,  
Good Lord, deliver us!



Seems like an ironic appeal to the spirit realm to protect us from the spirit realm. Go Figure!

