

A Street Filled With Spirits of the Long-Term Dead

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It's morning rush in the spirit-filled streets of Seoul, at the corner of overpriced hotel and shoe repair guy. In the corner coffee shop the cup is held close in both hands, fingers of hot, steamed aroma gently massage my face. I pause to solemnize the moment before taking the first sip. No other taste of coffee the rest of that day will be its equal. My early-hour grogginess and that very first slurp run toward each other in slow motion across a meadow, jump into each other's arms and tumble as one into the waving wheat as the violins reach a crescendo.

People who want to live to be a hundred and ten never eat chocolate-filled croissants, but I heard on the bedside radio that today is National Self-Sabotage Day. I'm always good for a holiday. People have written whole chapters in cookbooks about the natural harmony of coffee and chocolate. You would instantly trust the intentions of a country that had a steaming cup of hot coffee and a chocolate-filled croissant on its national flag. That would be a nation that knows peace.



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At a back table of the coffee shop by the window, my attention is drawn to something unusual outside and I briefly touch the glass because I want to assure myself that at least something, the window, is tangible and real. I am watching spirits plod along. Spirits usually know they have died when they naturally cross over. These folks I am watching may not have gotten the memo. They appear to be earthbound spirits, marooned between here and there, and for about twenty seconds I can see them. There are hundreds of them walking along, still going to work, as they must have done for decades during their lives.

They look less distinct to me than the living. They are dull and slightly faded. The living walking past the window, and the dead, pass among and through each other without noticing. As a group, the spirits look less hopeful or expectant than the living commuters. The spirits look as though they have exhausted their to-do lists. There is nothing new to accomplish, no new appointments or meetings, no calls left to return. Not a one of them looks content. A few are obviously anxious. Perhaps they know something is amiss, but what?

None of them conform to my image of Marley's ghost. They don't rattle chains or make scary faces, maybe they don't know this is expected of them. Just above them, about ten feet off the ground, I see a second layer of spirit pedestrians. They look very much like the ones on the ground, faces creased with worry lines. The two groups don't appear to notice each other and they don't look much different to me. When someone tells you, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired," the person is describing the deep funk malaise in which my ethereal pedestrian friends look like they're mired. Spotting this second layer, I thought, Oh yeah, for sure those are spirits. But aside from that one minor incongruity of appearing to float in the air, everyone looks more or less normal, although with less distinct colors and lines. I wonder

what they're thinking? I imagine it's something like, Why does it seem like I've been walking along this street forever? Why do I have so much time on my hands? How come nobody responds when I speak? I'm out of smokes.

It's my assumption that we, the currently living, more or less know we carry our own spirit body around inside us. It's the essence of spirit we're seeing when we look into a person's eyes. As we move through life we seek out kindred spirits and glance into their eyes even while talking about ordinary things. It's our nature to want to find those who think and act the way we do. Once found, we make them into friends. We bond with them, we grow together, we marry them. Looking into someone's eyes is not a surefire way to separate the saints from the criminals. We can all be fooled by a false heart, or by our own hopes for what we want another person to be. I read somewhere that spiritually sensitive people who regularly visit the spirit world find it easy to distinguish heavenly spirits from hellish ones there. But I have also been told by such a person that Lucifer himself is quite beautiful, gentle in manner and smooth if he wants to be perceived that way. Haven't had the pleasure myself, regarding Lucifer (that I know of), but I can tell you none of the folks trudging past the coffee shop window looked particularly charming. They just looked defeated, worn-out, weary to the bone.

It may turn out that the differences between existing in the physical world and existing in the spiritual world are ridiculously minor. Transitioning from the former to the latter, via so-called "death" may be nothing more than a metaphysical grand plié, a vast sweeping vertical gesture of your entire being that moves you up and out in one fluid motion. But then there's also shooting through that highly-publicized tunnel with the light at the end, spoken of in many near-death experiences. Either way, what's left behind is your body; what goes with you into the spirit world is your character, how you love in the form of altruistic caring, as well as your ability to manage your self-serving hungers. This info is courtesy of religious writings, various spiritual people and my own experience and intuition.

So it seems life goes on, quite literally. To the extent love determined our actions in life, or didn't, we are likewise compelled after we go incorporeal.

My grandmother told me, "Your character is all the things you do when no one's looking." In other words random acts of kindness as well as hogging the entire pint of rocky ripple. For some there are much stronger, darker desires, hatreds and compulsions to self-serve that can hold a person down in the spirit world, as though nailed to the floor of a dungeon.

For example, an earthbound spirit, formerly a thief, is stuck in the hardware store shoplifting the same crescent wrench over and over again. A man and woman, who lived high on the social ladder, are dressed for a night on the town in 1928. They remain forever standing in front of the Waldorf, wearing the implacable faces of the gentry class, still waiting for the limo that no longer exists. Their Rolls-Royce Phantom has long since been crushed into a tiny cube, melted and used to make a battleship that itself has sat at the bottom of the Atlantic for seventy years.

Spirits stand a hundred-deep around the doors of every strip joint titty bar in the city. You don't know it, but you walk right through them to get in, and a dozen or so grab ahold and ride in with you to savor whatever you savor and feel penetrating pulsations courtesy of you.

A fantastical digression here: There was a time, pre-history, when I began every Tuesday lining up dates for Friday and Saturday night. I could not imagine a weekend evening spent alone, solely taking stock of myself. I went to great lengths to avoid introspection, fearing solitude the way a jackrabbit jumps away from a hawk's shadow. Life was "dates." I date; therefore I am; also therefore, I am desirable and worthy. A date amounted to taking Suzy Earthmother to go hear Greezy Wheels at Armadillo World Headquarters in Austin. We had social media back then, but we called it conversation. Had I not had an awakening and relocated to my inner Walden Pond at some point in my life, the dating treadmill could have been the hunger that defined me for all eternity.

Or maybe I would have pursued wealth as my drug of choice. It is ironic that material wealth does not quench one's hungers but rather increases them. Regarding both money and empty-calorie love, the more you have of these, the more you need. Had it been my lot to be filthy rich instead of an obscure, early twenty-first century essayist, I'm afraid I would not have been a noble exception to the rule. I am not special. I likely would have been a robber baron like the rest of them, shooting buffalo from the window of my private railroad car.

Such images, whether they ever inspired me at all, certainly do not now hold even the slightest appeal. I don't want to rule a financial empire; I only want to rule myself. I very much want to be utterly engaged in an existence that transcends time and space, my arms and mind stretched from my childhood tree house to tomorrow's colonies on Mars.

It's natural to want this because we human beings want to be in the fray, intensely involved. It's encoded into our software. Unfortunately the low quality of intensity that swirls through the general population is

manifested in a brew of sex, booze and dope, money and domination of the innocent helpless. For the dead and faded grays in the aftermath, intensity is exactly what is missing in the spirit-filled streets. Without their physical bodies, stuck at street-level, self-absorbed, do they miss savory? Do they long for the touch of hot and salty skin? Absolutely. Nobody ever tells the barista, "Make my coffee tepid." But these earthbound spirits are trapped in tepid. Their voices are like whispers drowned out by the wind, their colors muted in the low-contrast ambient light. They're out of weed and their hands pass right though the shot glass without affecting it. The body language of the street's culture is hunched shoulders and resentful mumbling. No one makes eye-contact. Everything is someone else's fault.



They would tell you with a straight face that being dead isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Where do these walking wounded go from here? What's the endgame for them? I'm unsure, but it's an article of faith with me that every person desires to improve their lot, whether in this world or the next, and will seek to do so if they can.

Can we, the living, get through to them and help? I want to think so and therefore will give an enthusiastic yes. We traditionally communicate with the other side via some kind of focused thought such as prayer and meditation. Whatever name you want to give this focused thought, it must be driven by sincere intent, an earnestness that can be perceived in the spiritual realms. Prayer, as an example, is not mumbled words; it's passion. I think what one utters in prayer is not nearly as important as the emotional power conveyed. A blood-curdling scream can be a prayer. Most religions teach that prayer is the best way we can help "the long-term dead" as I think of them. Know this: there really and truly is life after so-called "death," I guarantee, or your money back. But there can also be death after death, and that's somewhat the situation of these ethereal, listless coffee shop passersby. Mr. and Ms. Nowhere Man.

In my struggle to be sincere, I have seen there is something special about heartfelt tears that are way more important than laughter. A group of friends can spend an evening joking and laughing our asses off. It becomes a good memory for everyone. But if you cry with another person, holding each other, mixing tears and snot, you will remember it meaningfully and deeply for the rest of your life. It is exceedingly rare for earthbound spirits to shed tears for another person. I would even say never, because if they had this level of concern for others, they would not be stuck on the ground, or even hovering a mere ten feet above it. In the spirit world, cries of anguish for others, emptied out from the gut, come from the highest realms, and most especially from God. When Heaven cries, the effect transcends both worlds. I think of tears as being spirit-soluble, liquid gold in that tears overlap the physical and the incorporeal, dissolving the self-centered crust enveloping this world and the next.

Wait, what?! God cries? Well... you tell me. Think about it. If you were the parent of a lot of children whom you loved more than life itself, and most of them were exploiting, murdering, raping and torturing one another in the cruelest ways imaginable — exactly how merry would your life be?

Looking out through the steamy window, I'm neither repenting for the earthbound spirits, nor shedding tears, nor even praying. I'm actually kind of stunned, aware this is a very unusual thing going on, and not wanting to breathe, lest I shatter the moment. I just get real quiet and watch patiently, and ask nobody in particular, How many layers up you have to go to reach Heaven? No response, of course. Silence. The only answer was a lone piece of paper trash, a solid, physical-world hamburger wrapper blowing down the street. With that, I knew the vision had subsided. I looked up and saw only empty air and low clouds. The people on the sidewalk were your average Kim and Choi walking to work.

I spent the rest of the day trying to sort out this brief tableau. The takeaway for me was that I realized more profoundly the reality of a post-earthly existence. I understood that I need to pray more often, more deeply and about a wider spectrum of things. I knew that if I were to unpack that nameless horde of people shuffling along, if I were to spread them out and look at them closely, one by one — each one would have a story as passionate and interesting as my own.

I wanted to go back into the vision, step in front of each one and stop them. I wanted to say or be something that would be meaningful to them — that would make them look up at me, and then look around. And then together we could maybe call for assistance from whatever angels or whoever is in charge of helping people advance in the spiritual world.

But there was no going back. I could pray for them on their behalf, which I did, and will. But I want the personal relationships, as well. I want us to matter in each other's lives. But they have left this life and their situation may be best handled over there.

Most productive I figure would be to apply my energies to the people living right now, especially the young adults around me. This is their moment to carve out great destinies for themselves, to catch a spark, seize it and pursue their dreams. These younger versions of me should not wait until their sixth or seventh decade to find out their destiny is eternal, and is not limited to only their earthly life.

At the end of that day, just before dinnertime in the early evening, I was still out on the busy streets of Seoul. I had one of those ongoing prayer conversations as I walked around, bending God's ear.

"Hello, God," I said. "Thank you so much for this morning. I think I'm starting to figure it out. Those gray folks actually helped me a lot. I'll go ahead and write this all down, but you know... nobody's going to believe it."

As often happens, I felt God's presence and reply coming through the still, small voice within: "Larry, as you sometimes say in our little talks, 'screw that.' There are a lot more people out there like you than you think. And I mean a lot. Go find them for me."

Everything in Larry Moffitt's account is true, and is adapted from his book, Searching for SanViejo: Notes to My Younger Self, available on Amazon.

Graphic at top: *Photomontage of a Seoul street by Larry Moffitt.*