

Casper the Friendly Ghost, Danny Phantom, and Scooby-Doo, Ghost Whisperer, Medium, Supernatural, The Ghost and Mrs. Muir, Ghostbusters, A Haunting, Ghost Adventures, Ghost Hunters, Ghost Hunters International, Ghost Lab, and Most Haunted.

Ghosts have fascinated us for centuries. From ghost tours to paranormal investigations, people are always looking for a way to encounter the supernatural. Even in early texts, excerpts about apparitions and spirits can be found. But throughout all of the reports of ghosts, one thing remains the same: for most adults there is an inability to see them with the naked eye (except perhaps for mediums and children). The first ghost story account written in the **first century A.D.** by the Roman author Pliny the Younger, who wrote his story after experiencing a horrifying haunting wherein an elderly man with a long beard, with chains hanging from his arms and ankles, haunted his home. Hundreds of years later, in **856 A.D.**, a report in Germany detailed the first known poltergeist activity that took place in a farmhouse where a family experienced torment at the hand of an unseen force that threw rocks, started fires and caused endless chaos - is the earliest account of a violent spirit. While ghost stories are often explicitly meant to be scary, they have been written to serve all sorts of purposes, from comedy to morality tales. Ghosts often appear in the narrative as sentinels or prophets of things to come. Belief in ghosts is found in all cultures around the world, thus ghost stories may be passed down orally or in written form.

In the Christian faith (and in the Western World and although the belief that the dead could return to earth on All Soul's Day persisted), it changed as the Christian vision of the afterlife became increasingly popular and ghosts came to be linked with demons and the devil. Ghosts are mentioned in the Bible in passages of Matthew 14:25-27, Mark 6:48-50, and Luke 24:37-39. Among the most famous passages referring to a ghost is I Samuel 28: 7-20 in which King Saul goes to the Witch of Endor and asks her to conjure the ghost of Samuel, his former advisor and a prophet of God. Saul is afterwards cut off from God's favor for choosing to consult a spirit about what he should do instead of trusting in God for his future.

To people of the ancient world, there was no doubt that the soul of a human survived bodily death. Culturally they were brought up with the understanding that the dead lived on in another form in an afterlife that was dictated by what kind of life they had lived on earth, how their remains were disposed of at their death and how they were remembered by the living.

Influenced by British and German examples, American writers began to produce their own ghost stories – one of the most famous being Washington Irving's short story *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820), based on an earlier German folktale. Edgar Allan Poe wrote some stories which contain ghosts such as the *Masque of the Red Death* and *Morella*.

Yet, the belief in ghosts is found in all cultures, and there are similarities: **Mesopotamia** - death was the final act of life from which there was no return. Known by many names the realm beneath the earth was where the souls of the dead lived in dreary darkness, fed off dirt, and sipped from mud puddles. This existence was the final end for all the living, no matter how great or poor a life they had lived but ghosts could appear to

people on earth to right some kind of wrong. **Egypt** – The return of a ghost was a very serious matter and if harassed by a ghost the haunted would plead their case directly to the returned spirit in hopes of a reasonable response. Egyptians believed that, at death, the soul traveled to the Hall of Truth where it was judged by Osiris and the 42 Judges by having its heart weighed in balance with the white feather of truth; if the heart was found lighter than the feather, the soul proceeded on to the afterlife, while if it was heavier, it was thrown to the floor where it was eaten by a monster and the soul would cease to exist. **Rome/Greece** - Ghosts in ancient Rome appeared in certain predictable ways and, usually, at certain times of the night. In ancient Greece, the afterlife consisted of 3 distinct realms. Upon death a coin would be placed in one's mouth to pay Charon the Ferryman to take the soul across the river Styx. The greater the value of the coin, the better seat the soul got in Charon's boat. On the other side, one would pass by the 3-headed dog Cerberus and then stand before the 3 judges to give an account of the life one had lived. After story was told, judges conferred and the soul given a cup of water from the River Lethe, the waters of forgetfulness, and would forget one's former life on earth. The judges would then assign the soul a location. **Chinese** - after life was thought of as a journey in which the soul had to cross a bridge over an abyss where it was judged. If the soul was found worthy, it continued on, paused at a pavilion to look back on the land of the living one last time, and then drank a cup of a brew called Mengpo Soup causing one to forget one's former life entirely. Here ghost culture diverges as to what happens to the soul next; in some context the soul goes on to heaven, while in other contexts, it is reincarnated; but If found unworthy it slips down into hell where it remains. **India** - In ancient (and modern) India ghosts were known as Bhoots and would materialize when the person dies before their ordained time on earth. Bhoots appeared as humans but with backward feet who could change their appearance without warning. The feet are thought to appear backwards to symbolize that something has gone wrong, that the spirit is in an unnatural state. Since they were unable to enjoy the fullness of their lives, they return to earth in the hope of possessing the body of some living person. **MesoAmerica** – Maya - lingering ghosts were intolerable and needed to be kept at bay through charms and amulets or driven back to the underworld through the intercession of a Shaman. The underworld was a dark and terrible place, where numerous Lords of the Dead could trick the soul of the deceased as it sought its way toward paradise. Once the soul descended into this underworld, it was on a journey from which there was no turning back. The spirit would leave the body and be conducted across a great expanse of water by a spirit dog who would then help the soul navigate through the various trips and traps of the Lords of Xibalba to reach the Tree of Life which the soul then had to climb up to paradise. Aztecs held that the afterlife was a gloomy place of no return and preferred to believe that the dead who were not at perfect rest could return in the form of plants that were either beneficial or should be avoided. **Celtic** - the Catholic church's policy of "Christianizing" existing pagan festivals was also observed in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Known as Samhain (pronounced sou-when). The pagans of these regions saw life as cyclical, not linear, and the year revolved like a wheel. Samhain was the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next (usually beginning October 31st) and it was thought that, at this time, the veil between the living and the dead grew thin and the dead could walk again in life.

