

LETTER OF THE DAY

The moral cost of celebrating death

There was a time — within living memory — when death in our communities did not ask who you voted for. When it came, it found us all equal. The drum would sound, and people would gather — not as opponents or strangers, but as human beings. Quarrels paused and voices softened. Even those who disagreed stood together, because grief was sacred and the dead were owed dignity.

That understanding was built over generations. Our people learned that death is not only about the one who has gone. A body may lie still, without feeling, without thought — earth returning to earth — but the meaning of that life does not vanish. The dead leave behind memory, relationship, and the living.

So we learned to treat the dead with care, not because the corpse can feel, but because the living can. Because a mother grieves, a child remembers and a family must carry that loss. To mock the dead is to wound the living. To celebrate death is to deepen sorrow where healing is needed.

By our tradition, we understand that death is not an end but a crossing. Those who leave us do not disappear; they join the world of those who came before. The ancestors are not distant — they remain part of the moral and spiritual fabric of the community. They are remembered, invoked, and respected.

That is why burial was never casual. Why rites mattered. Why the body was washed, wrapped, and laid to rest with intention. Why families gathered, sometimes from far, to ensure no one was buried alone or forgotten. These acts maintained balance between the living and the unseen, ensuring that death settled into peace rather than unrest. To disturb that dignity was

to risk breaking the harmony that holds a people together.

And yet today, we weigh death against our anger. We turn it into commentary. We measure it as loss or gain depending on who has fallen. In doing so, we forget the wisdom of our traditions and the responsibility of our humanity.

When death becomes a victory, something else has died with it. We lose the ability to see one another as human. We reduce lives to symbols and treat grief as conditional. A society that learns to laugh at death becomes harder, colder, and less capable of compassion.

But let us be honest about what has brought us here. There is deep, unresolved pain in this country. There are those who feel crushed by systems they cannot fight — who speak of arrests, disappearances, violence,

torture, courts that do not listen, and institutions that seem distant or aligned against them. There are those who feel powerless before the machinery of the State, who watch suffering repeat itself, and who begin, quietly, to hope that time itself will remove those they believe are responsible.

And on the other side, there are those who feel attacked, misrepresented, or threatened — who respond with equal hardness, who dismiss the pain of others, and who, too, sometimes find themselves laughing where they should be mourning. Pain has met pain, and instead of healing, it has multiplied.

But pain, no matter how justified, does not give birth to cruelty without consequence. When we say “one oppressor down,” we must ask: Who exactly has fallen?

A policymaker? Or a wife, a husband, a mother, a father? When we celebrate, we rarely strike the system we oppose. We strike the human being connected to it — often someone who never held the power we are angry at. And in that moment, we become what we claim to resist.

The question is not whether the dead deserve respect. It is what becomes of us when we refuse to give it. For one day, each of us will depend on the mercy and dignity of the living. Let us not turn graves into battlegrounds. Let us remain, even now, what we have always known ourselves to be: human.

Denis Yub,
Human rights activist &
sociopolitical commentator

