

## SURPRISING EXPERIENCES

It was about this time that my wife's father died. A short time after, I had a curious experience such as I had never had before. I felt a kind of "inner" contact with him. I remember it began very gently and unobtrusively: there was a sort of "jump" inside myself (I honestly can't describe it any other way!) I suddenly felt excited and intrigued; something new was happening to me. I then became aware (I am not sure how) of his presence. It was as if I just knew he was there! Then came a flood of thoughts and feelings which were quite "impersonal" to me! I was interested in them as if "someone else" was actually saying them to me and I was just listening!

First, came a strong feeling of real happiness with an idea that I had never come across before: *to die at the right time is a good and very happy thing*. I thought of all the sadness associated with death, with his death, in fact (especially for my wife) and this seemed quite an opposite, even shocking point of view. It seemed that he, himself, was incredibly happy about it! Then I realised that his death had also put an end to the indignity that had befallen him at the last part of his life and he was glad of that. Yes, I could see the truth of this: he had been a man who had been proud of his job as entertainment manager of one of our big out-of-London theatres. Unfortunately, he had lost his job, or left it for some reason, and I knew that he spent his last years on a much-reduced income and, worse for the kind of man he was, a much reduced status. I knew him well enough to know how hard that would have been for him.

It was as if death had taken him back to the happiest time of his life. I saw that what was happening to him now reminded him of his navy years which had been very happy years for him. In fact, he now felt as if he was getting ready to join a new ship again: it was as exciting as those times had been for him. Yes, he felt as young, independent and as excited as he had done then! Next, came a feeling that he had absolutely NO sympathy for anyone's grief here. He knew he was alive and well; he was so excited and happy he simply could not find any place for "grief", especially with people who had, in fact, had very little contact with him in the latter part of his life. It was as if they had not thought much about him then so he had little thought for them now. His family seemed to be "just reacting as expected." He did have one exception to this: he was, it seemed, surprised at my wife's reaction to his death. (It occurred to me at this point that this might be the reason why this was happening?) He had thought

that their relationship had been more “emotionally free” than this. It seemed that he understood things differently with her now and I had the strong feeling that he would now be able to help her. I did not know specifically how but I felt quite certain that he would now be somehow closer and more involved in her life than before. I have to say that it was not going to be long before she was going to need all the support- from whatever source- that she could get: her life and mine were going to go through a huge trauma in the coming months...Finally, I felt his happiness again and a sense that he was eager now to get on with his “new voyage.”

Well, I was quite taken aback by all of this. Of course, I related all of this to my wife but I have, unfortunately, no idea whether it was of any help to her. Uncharacteristically, she listened and said...nothing!

## 2

It was not long before a similar experience occurred again. This time it did not involve a family member but instead an elderly couple who lived nearby. They were the sort of people who “kept very much to themselves” ie they were quiet and not particularly sociable. He was a minister of one of the local churches and, after serving for many years in the Far East, he and his wife had ended up in our little village. I often saw them out walking in the fields that were all around us here. I used to smile when I saw them out and about because usually he would walk in front, following their dog, and his wife would be a few yards behind: all three of them seen in the distance in a line at the edge of the fields rather than, as other couples usually walked, side by side! You knew who they were even if they were a mile or two away because no-one else hereabouts walked like that. They were generally well-respected and obviously fond of each other. I do not think any of us knew much about them: they just seemed an ordinary, quiet couple who seemed to have very few visitors. Well, he was to die first and sometime soon after, just as before, I felt a kind of jump inside myself and quite unexpectedly I felt his presence!

This was particularly surprising to me because I hardly knew the man and had barely said more than the occasional “Hello” to him, although I was as keen on walking as he and his wife were and often passed them on our many walks. Strange to say, I was actually going to get to know more about him in the next few moments than I did in all the time we had lived on the same little estate. Again, I felt an initial sense of his happiness: death had, it seemed, also brought

him an unusual joy. Then I felt that here was a lovely, gentle, modest and considerate man whom it was very easy to underestimate. He was obviously quite content to keep his “light hidden” and, as I already knew, it was very easy for the rest of us to ignore him, almost completely. At this point, my heart went out to the man as being a noble and, I guess, something of a rare, character in our, more often than not, superficial, materialistic and aggressive society. He was clearly none of those things and I liked him immensely in these moments. I saw that he would knowingly never hurt anyone or anything. Then I saw one reason for his joy now was that he had “so much to do!” Clearly, he had felt underused in his recent life and it was, of course, easy for me to see how this could so easily have been true because he had been minister here to a very small “flock” whom, I would guess, were not much of a challenge to such a man. Now it was as if he had been given a new lease of “life!” I felt he was a genuinely good man with the sincere wish to actively and energetically help people. No sitting about with harps for him then!

I felt again that his modesty and unassuming nature had helped to keep his considerable talents hidden. I saw he was a sincere Christian who had genuine and real spiritual aspirations and that prayer was an essential part of his life. I saw that this had brought him a real happiness in life. He seemed to be impressing on me that I should not dismiss the reality and power of Christianity as people like himself had experienced it (I think at this time I did; I hope I do not now) One thing it had helped him to do was die well! Wow, this impressed me! I saw how bravely this man had borne the suffering that came with the end of his life. His faith had really given him strength so that he carried on with his church duties in great pain and largely without other people being aware of it even. I then got a quick flash of memory I had of that time, before I knew he was ill, when I had seen him, at the end of a service, obviously one of his last. He was standing, shaking hands with a much longer line of people than usual (It was a special service- a Harvest Festival, I think) and I remember feeling how patient with everyone this man was being. I now saw that not only was he being patient but also extremely brave because, I realised now, he was also in a lot of pain at that time. I saw how strong his religion had made him. I was extremely impressed by the man and his religion.

I then asked mentally if there was anything he could give me that would be helpful, or more personal, to my life. Immediately, I got a picture in my mind of “an old pair of socks!” Now this made me really sit up (as well as laugh!)

because the socks I saw were what I called my “latihan socks.” Because it is the practice in Subud to remove one’s shoes before the latihan, a lot of us had taken to wearing a second pair of socks over our usual socks. This kept our ordinary socks clean (some of our latihan floors were not that clean) and our feet warm (some of our halls were very draughty) Not only did I feel that I was getting to know this man in a way I had not done before but it seemed to me that he was showing me that he knew something about me that I would not have expected him to know: it looked as if he knew about my Subud interest without my telling him! This was very surprising because at that time only a handful of people knew about this interest of mine and I knew he hadn’t! Intriguingly, the image of the socks carried a sense of warning about it. Oh dear, he was warning me about Subud! I wondered if that was because he felt that Christianity should come first for me as it did for him? I understood this easily enough: Christianity had worked for him and, perhaps, also, he felt it really was “the only way”? I did not argue but accepted the warning. As the years have gone by, I have come to wonder if the warning was simply to prepare me for some of the many difficulties I was to have with Subud later? I could hardly have seen this at the time and this could have been some sort of preparatory warning! More of this later...

After this, there came a sense that this man was very concerned for his wife. Now this was to be expected, I suppose, but it led to an interesting little happening afterwards. I got the feeling he was wanting me to do something for her. He seemed to know how difficult it would be: I had never had a conversation with his wife and she, too, had a very retiring nature. He seemed to be impressing on me that it would be enough to make some sort of gesture of help to her and, although it was only a little-albeit difficult - thing to do, it was nonetheless very important. Well, I felt that he really wanted to get this across to me and so I was left wondering what on earth it was I could do. I did not have to wait long. One early evening I decided to go for one of my walks and just as I got to this woman’s bungalow she came out of her back door with a tray of ashes to empty from her fire. She seemed to look straight at me and, unusually, held my gaze. If this had happened in the past, we would simply have acknowledged each other and quickly carried on with our business. Because of what had happened with her husband, this time I started up a conversation with her in a way I would not normally have done. It was what I can only describe as a real and genuine conversation in which we told each other things about ourselves that I know we would not have done under normal circumstances.

Anyway, the conversation ended with her agreeing that if she needed any help at all, or any companionship at all, she would not hesitate to call on us. At this point her face visibly brightened in front of me and although she never took up the offer I am sure it that it gave her a little peace of mind to know that she was not completely on her own and that there was somebody close at hand ready to help if needed. At the very least I like to feel that the offer of help was a bit comforting and, I am sure, I would not have thought of it without the previous prompt from her husband. Most convincing for me was how I felt afterwards- really happy at having had this conversation! A few weeks later, she moved off to a retirement home and I never saw her (or heard from her husband!) again.

### 3

At this time I was also having some little, although very interesting, experiences with “dead” people in a much more personal way- in a way that was simply to do with me and my life and not much to do with anyone else around me. I think future events were going to show that these were much more relevant experiences than I was to think at the time.

It began with an insistent, though inexplicable, feeling that I had some “inner friends.” Later, when I made one or two friends who were spiritualists, they were to refer to them as “spirit friends” and I came to think that was a good way to describe them. At this time, I had no idea what they looked like; I simply felt that they were there. I could NOT prove that was so- not even to myself. The feeling was so strong that I was interested in seeing where it might lead, however. At first, “they” seemed to be urging me to be more compassionate towards the people around me; to be willing to share more of myself with these people; to always show them as much respect as possible; and, most important, to be sure NOT to interfere in their lives at all. It also seemed very important that I make time for “little acts of kindness” and I understood that sometimes words were not enough: the old adage that “actions speak louder than words” was fully upheld here. I could see nothing to argue with in all this but what I was soon to learn was how difficult it was for me to do these little things! But, I learnt, that the difficulty was not the important thing- doing *some* kind things for others, however small, was.

Then there followed another interesting development: I wanted to deepen this contact with my inner friends and I began to think about how I might do this. Immediately I received a warning: I felt that I should not do anything other than

simply be willing to sit quietly and do “nothing in particular”. Any more than this felt clearly wrong! It was as if I had to leave everything else to them: they were wiser, stronger, more experienced and, most important, more loving than me. If I was to do anything it was to do my best to develop strength of character in the world, social confidence, the capacity for more effort with the ordinary things of life and be more prepared to follow advice. Yes, I could not argue with that; I could even follow advice if I could see it to be good advice: I would definitely not do so otherwise! There was a real sense of chastisement here which once again found apt expression in an image of myself as a holiday camp comedian! I walked out on stage and then realised I knew no jokes and was completely out of place! The point was graphically made that I should not put myself forward in this way! My role was simply to be very much in the background.

Next, I was surprised by feeling the closeness of an aunt of mine who had died some years previously! I had not even thought of her for years and now suddenly I found myself thinking of her and seeing her in my “mind’s eye.” What was most surprising was that she was no longer the overweight, rather tired-seeming lady I had known. Here she was much slimmer, younger and full of life- and yet unmistakably her. Instead of being a rather self-preoccupied person, as I remembered her, she now seemed both lively and good fun to be with. Whenever I was to feel that she was “around” now, I always felt uplifted by the sense of life and energy she brought with her. On this first occasion, I felt she brought with her a real sense of the closeness I had with all my mother’s family, both those alive and dead. This I had never felt so much before. If anything, I had felt a bit of an outsider in the family. I now had no contact with my father’s side of the family and, up until this moment, I did not have any sense of deep connection with my mother’s family: I had felt a bit like the “black sheep of the family,” in fact. Now I realise, through this experience of my aunt, that I was strongly connected to them and somehow I felt a much “bigger person” for it. I felt my aunt was in some way supporting me and showing me that I was not just on my own. I learnt here that one’s family bonds were incredibly strong, much stronger than I had ever realised. Moreover, it was quite something to feel that these bonds stretched back through so many years and forward into the unforeseen future. What a sense of continuity and significance my little life seemed to have suddenly. I had never really thought of this before and I could not help but think: what a strange way to learn this.

Soon after this, I felt an equally surprising link with my father in what was to be a very similar way. I knew very little about my father and had only one or two memories of him before he died. I had long got used to his not being around and really hardly ever thought about it. Then, quite suddenly, and at first unexcitedly, one day there was the simple but strong feeling that he was there! There was simply a feeling of his closeness and a sense that he was looking with love on his grandchildren! And that was it: a rather low-key meeting that left me intrigued. Was he really there? I just did not know: it just felt so strongly as if he was. It was all over in a little while – there was no time for some big emotional meeting. I could see no reason for this happening at all: I had not been thinking previously about him or even anything related to him at all. After this it began to feel as if there was a real sense of his inner support with me more and more often, so much so it began to worry me. I began to ask myself: what could I be needing his support and the strong sense of my family behind me for? It was not long before it all made perfect sense and one of the most positive things that was to come out of it all was to deepen this type of inner experience. The feeling that my father, although dead, was very much back in my life was going to be shown to be absolutely true...That was to happen just a little later and was going to involve all my family...

Meanwhile, I was still living with a strong sense of dissatisfaction in my marriage and it later became clear that the breakdown of my marriage was to bring me the biggest test of my life to date. It was a test so severe that I was going to need all the support (unearthly as well as earthly) that I could get simply to survive it. Yet still, at this time, I did not see it. I still- so stupidly!- thought that, although things between my wife and myself were obviously not as either of us would want, things would eventually sort themselves out for the better. Well, they did but certainly not in any way that I expected.

I believe now that much of what was happening in my life at this time was preparing me for what was coming with the break- up of my little family. I certainly think that is why my aunt and my father were impressing me with their presence and support, especially as more of it was to come in a little while now and just when it was to be most needed...