

Running Commentary Following Gertrude's Death

Part 1 of 53

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I feel the urge to produce a running commentary on the more or less tragic events that were initiated on the 28th day of last May. This has proved to be a crisis which from the evidence presented in the earlier parts of this tape¹ is of more than personal importance. It seems to involve something that has a collective value and is actually of major importance.

As a parenthetical statement, I'll refer to what happened last night. In falling to sleep, I awakened with a sense of suffocation, of inadequate ventilation. I did that repeatedly and then finally got up, turned on the lights, and ran that portion of the preceding tape which contains the interpretation given by Robert Johnson. Meanwhile, I found that the pulse was irregular—beats were, in many cases, eliminated, and there was a kind of depressed feeling in the chest. After listening to the tape, I found the pulse had become regular again. Leaving the lights on, I returned to bed and raised my head by a higher cushion, and I ultimately became relaxed and fell asleep. Later, awakening, I turned off the lights and I got some rest before morning. But this action in the pulse and the behavior of the heart, I sense as carrying a serious threat. It did happen at the time of Jim Briggs' death and was ultimately worked out with the help of Dr. Brugh Joy, but in this case, I feel the threat is more profound because the relationship was more intimate.

End of the parenthesis.

Substantially, the interpretation of the dream offered by Robert Johnson seems to ring true to my ears. Only in one detail would I suggest a certain difference in that interpretation. I would say that the dance of Mephisto is not so much the dance of life as the dance of thought. But apart from that, I would agree that what he says rings true to my ears. But, there is implied here, and in the earlier statement by Dr. Brugh Joy, the implication that what I am dealing with is not a matter of exclusively personal importance; but rather, that I am dealing with something bearing a collective responsibility. If this were only a matter of personal importance, I must confess that I would be inclined to welcome death, the sooner the better. But if I do have a collective responsibility, then it would seem to be a duty to continue in effort, if at all possible.

If I chose death, it would not be a matter of deliberate suicide, it would only be this: that I would withdraw the conscious will to live, which I have maintained as supplementing the autonomous will to live for more than 35 years, and then welcome that which would come—to open myself to the withdrawal, and accept it without resistance.

¹ This is a reference to the earlier part of the reel-to-reel tape of which this recording is a part. See the audio recordings, "Discussion After Gertrude's Death," "Memorial Service for Gertrude," and "Report of Major Dreams."

But with a collective responsibility, I am not free to do this. To be sure, the way of death would be the easier way. To live, when I do not at all want to live, to put forth effort when it is a strain to do so, this stands as an appalling prospect lying before me.

There is another way, as pointed out by Dr. Brugh Joy and Robert Johnson, in the earlier portions of this tape. It is the way of the desert. I crossed the desert once before.

Footnote here:

Read the poem in *Pathways* entitled “The Supreme Adventure.”²

End of the footnote.

I have known that journey when I was in the prime of life and I sunk down to despair within it: the burning heat, the dryness and the absence of aught to quench the thirst, the endless barrenness, and the goal become invisible in the desert haze, with only the will to drive one on and no wish to put forth further effort; and she who lies exhausted in the bed, as represented in the dream, is more exhausted now. The sands of life seem to be running low. Is the crossing possible, and is it worth doing? That is the dilemma.

Each day a problem worked through by the conscious will; each night another problem where the conscious will must be withdrawn, else there is no sleep. And as I sink down towards sleep, the searing stabs of memory strike deep. And I scarce can breathe. And I must awaken to continue. And there is so often not enough sleep possible. This is the journey expected of me.

² See the audio recording, “Abstract of the Philosophy,” part 12, for a reading of the poem in *Pathways Through to Space* entitled “The Supreme Adventure.”