

Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of My Early Life and Influences

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This tape is intended for the Convention.

The big fact of this past year has been the passing of Gertrude. She left us on the 28th of May 1978, and thereby precipitated a complex psychical condition of well-nigh monumental proportions. This blow has affected me in the profoundest degree. It involves much more than the usual experience of a husband losing a wife. It affects, indeed, the possibility of all further continuation of this work in so far as I am connected with it. There have been two competent analysts who have evaluated the situation and both have determined that much more than a personal loss has been experienced, but something even of collective importance has been involved. For this reason, I am dealing with this subject matter at this Convention, for Gertrude's loss is more than a private loss.

At midnight on December 21, 1928, Sherifa and I founded The Assembly of Man. From that time forward, there were many lecture trips consummated and many workings with individual *sadhakas*. Sherifa was the head of the organization, and I maintained the greater part of the lecture activity primarily oriented to the esoteric philosophy. In connection with this activity, we began the effort for the building of an *ashram* up in Tuttle Creek Canyon in the midst of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and met during summer for vacation periods when the students were able to come to render help, built a building out of rock in the form of a balanced cross. The symbolism of this was the emphasis of the principle of balance or equilibrium. This effort continued through most of the years up until 1950, which was the last year that Sherifa was sufficiently strong to come to the summer activities. After that, she declined. We continued activity in our home in San Fernando, where I continued to lecture, and a certain number of people came out to attend the lectures. But by 1956 Sherifa had deteriorated further so that these activities were discontinued, and having sold a portion of our land, we moved to Santa Barbara, near the sea, where Sherifa wanted to be. She, however, had very little enjoyment of activity in this area before she became bedbound; and her body deteriorated until on February 23, 1959, she passed away from us.

In those days, I strove to support her in every way that I could. One individual who was a clairvoyant and a practitioner of hypnotherapy said that I was keeping her alive even though she wanted to withdraw. But I saw no other course, for personally she seemed always to want to live, and I told her we would support her as long as we could. Toward the end, she developed gangrene, and that I recognized as an impossible situation. So I deliberately withdrew the support and she passed in within twenty-four hours.

Now, we had her lying in state for twenty-four hours so that there would be time for the complete withdrawal of the inner entity. Then we had the funeral at which I

officiated, both in the funeral room and at graveside. And then we withdrew and her relatives left and I entered into an experience of desolation. I found myself seemingly bleeding subtle blood. I have been told since that this was an actual bleeding of the life-force itself. I could not stop it by any act of will. But I found that when near a very few feminine entities, the bleeding stopped. I faced this decision, or question: the bleeding seemed to indicate for me the end of life if it was not staunched. I asked this: shall I let myself pass in and discontinue the work, or shall I seek someone who will be able, by something that she is or has, to staunch that bleeding? I decided to continue the work, and I sought a companion that would render this work possible. That companion proved to be Gertrude. When I became associated with her, the bleeding stopped and I was in control of my faculties. We were associated for nineteen years in which we continued the work. I produced probably more material upon tapes than all I had produced before in those nineteen years, thereby implying that this combination with Gertrude was productive. And let it be remembered that if these tapes have any value for you, give credit to her who rendered them possible.

The relationship between Gertrude and myself was never a biological relationship, but it was a productive combination of the masculine and feminine principles on the level of the work which was originally founded by Sherifa and myself in 1928. It was a working relationship, and it was a relationship of extraordinary felicity and effective productiveness—never a quarrel between us, never a cross word. Now she has departed and I find myself unable, at least at present, to produce in the terms that I formerly produced. I have gone through a well-nigh monumental experience of psychological processes that produce an effect well-nigh like a tornado so that I cannot, at the present time, reach into philosophic calm that leads to the kind of production that I developed.

At present I seem to wish to speak only of her and of the implications with respect to my own processes and the implications also that may affect future effort. Will there be anything more produced for this effort in The Assembly of Man that began on the 21st of December, 1928? I am told that the capstone has not yet been finished, that there is further work to do, and that the withdrawal of Gertrude was necessary to render this final production possible. Two men with analytic capacity have analyzed the situation and a “great dream” that I had on the order of fifty years ago which they both determined as pointing to the events of the present hour. I’ll sketch this dream into the tape so that it will be immediately available for us.

The dream was located in a theater which was empty except for those who participated in the action. The theater was arranged with a stage a little above the floor of the orchestra with a means of access to the aisles—one on the right and one on the left—that went back in the room so that the performers were able to move from the stage to the aisles. Over the right aisle there was a box in which sat a figure with a beard who carried numinous value. On the stage, there was a bed, and a young woman in a state of extremity was resting upon it. I, in my own proper person, seemed to be fused with the Sage-like figure in the box who was seated just above the right aisle. Before the beginning of the drama, the Sage apparently had said something to someone to his right in the box, but I did not see this someone. I do not know whether it was male or female. And the Sage had remarked that the drama that was about to take place concerned this

one and that he should go to the stage, which he did. My impression was that it might have been the “shadow” in the Jungian system of archetypes.

The scene on the stage opened with the entrance of Mephisto, who began a dance of heroic proportions and of more than human precision. As the dance developed, it seemed to arouse a magnetic condition that lifted the young woman out of her bed so that she took part in the dance. The dance increased in fury. The steps were totally beyond the possibility of a mere human being. It grew in fury until it could be no longer contained by the stage. Then the young woman, followed by Mephisto, proceeded to continue the dance down the right aisle, around in back, and then up the left aisle to the stage again, and made a series of circlings. But presently it became evident that the young woman was failing to maintain herself, that she was in danger of being absorbed by the powerful Mephisto. And then, and only then, the Sage intervened. It seemed that the power of Mephisto was almost equal to that of the Sage. But in one respect, the Sage could overcome him; it was by directing the forces of love and hate in rapid alternation. It seemed that either force by itself could not have controlled Mephisto. He could have brushed aside the force of love or hate itself, but the rapid alteration from one to the other threw him off his balance. And as he came down the right aisle from the stage, he looked up at the Sage, and I saw anger in his eyes. He shot at the Sage a force which came in the appearance of bullets which the Sage caught in his mouth and spewed back to him. And then I awoke with a sense of victory. I felt this sense of victory for several days afterwards in a kind of glow, and it was my impression that if this outcome had not been victorious there never would have been the events of 1936 when the Realization broke through.

Two analysts, just last month, submitted these dreams to analysis. These analysts were Dr. Brugh Joy and Robert Johnson. They both agree in affirming that the working out of this dream, though it took place nearly fifty years ago, is at the present time. They both agree that the dream has more than a personal significance, that indeed it has a collective significance, that though I am the dreamer and am personally intimately involved, yet what I may do with it carries a meaning and value beyond myself to others. It is even suggested that what I have had to work through will in time be worked through by others at some level of consciousness. This implies, therefore, that I have more than a personal responsibility here, but that I have indeed a collective responsibility, that I have a duty to perform. Now, they further agree that Mephisto represents the intellect, or *Buddhi*, that the young woman represents the anima, namely, the feminine elements in a masculine entity, namely myself, and the Sage is a superordinate power that looks down from above, not interfering until emergency is immanent. Now, the implication on which they both agree is that the development of intellectual capacity within myself had become so far along and so extreme that it had absorbed the energy of the woman in the man, or in other words, the anima, that she was brought near to exhaustion, that she had never developed because the energy of development had all been absorbed by the intellectual side, that disaster had been averted by the intervention of the Sage. Now, there are facts in my personal life that tend to confirm this and I shall briefly refer to them.

I was the son of a Methodist clergyman, and the influence of my early years that remain significant was the influence of the home, the church, and the school. As I look back at the thinking of the days before adolescence, that thought was not my own, but

reflected the influence about me. But when I became a teenager and adolescence broke out, which was the year of 1900, I began to think for myself. I accepted the ethical discipline of the church, which was a modified form of Puritanism, however, I began reflecting upon the religious doctrines. In those days I often paced the streets in the pitch dark, for there was no illumination then, thinking, thinking on theological problems and ultimately rejected much of theological jargon.

I felt the awakening of the interest in the girl and of the boy's interest in sport, but this became largely repressed and thought took all the interest. Thought continued to do so as I grew and indeed has dominated my life up to the present. The capacity of that mind won Phi Beta Kappa at the end of four years in college, and at the end of the fifth, a scholarship to Harvard offered to one student of the University of Stanford or the University at Berkeley by the Harvard Club of San Francisco. At Stanford I majored in the mathematics department, namely, the pure mathematics department, for the two departments, applied and pure, were separate. At Harvard I entered the graduate school of philosophy. I do not remember that I ever failed a single problem in those years. At the end of my fourth year, one of the professors in the mathematics department suggested that he would put a course in the curriculum on the foundations of geometry which was along the lines of Hilbert's work if I cared to take the course, and I said I would. A professor in the philosophy department likewise said he would put a course into the curriculum on the *Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant if I wished to take it, and I said I would. And I went through both courses in my fifth year as the only student and passed them fully.

Meanwhile, I was not courting the girls as is characteristic of most young men. I even, to a degree, was courted by one of them, but that never developed to an effective conclusion. My orientation was to the masculine mind, and I did not have too high an opinion of the feminine mind. It is true that I oriented strongly to thought and to the masculine consciousness throughout those years, and I reached the point where I regarded no problem as lying beyond the potential of thought research. And I did not hesitate to penetrate into that zone which men consider generally to be a sacred zone beyond the range of thought. This all implies that there are facts to back up the evidence that Mephisto was a predominant power and that the development of the feminine side in the man was weak and backward.

Meanwhile, another influence entered into my life. One day when I was in the post office of Palo Alto, I saw a sign of meetings of a Theosophical group. My curiosity was piqued. I heard my father once speak disparagingly of Theosophy, and I was immediately interested. So, I undertook to go to a meeting of this group. I found it to be a branch of what was known as the Temple of the People, a Theosophical organization that had sprung up after the death of HPB and W. Q. Judge. They were under, or seemed to be under, the administration of one of the Brothers known as Hilarion. Instructions were given by him through one of the heads of the group by the means of *tulku*.

In my experience in this group, I received three personal communications from this source. In the course of events, I had arrived at Halcyon, where the headquarters of this group was located in 1915. I decided to take the course of vegetarian diet, not for dietetic reasons but for ethical reasons, because the eating of meat implied the killing of creatures and that seemed to me ethically objectionable. I followed this vegetarian diet

for a year and a half and developed chronic indigestion, and then received a message from the one called Hilarion telling me to desist, and I did; and I've not been interested in vegetarian diet since. It took ten years to correct the tendency to indigestion.

On another occasion, while at Harvard, I had become interested in Indian sources, namely, East Indian sources, and I laid my plans to get to India. I succeeded in getting an offer of a teaching position in a missionary school in the field of mathematics. But I wrote to headquarters at Halcyon and received another message to the effect, "The Child of the East will find his call to action in the West wind. It would seem that if you return to India, you may be taken up by Indian quietism." I interpreted this to mean that I should not so return.

And also, in the days when the First World War broke out, I had the strong orientation to the position of the conscientious objector, and it was a crisis in my life at that time. I received a third instruction to the effect that, "A greater than I has said, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but render unto God the things that are God's. God's law says thou shalt not kill. If there is a contradiction between Caesar's law and God's law it would seem that God's law should prevail." I interpreted this as meaning that I should continue with the demands of Caesar insofar as it did not involve actual killing, although I had the discomfort of realizing that whatever I did helped that end. I served the Army and received an honorable discharge.

But let us return to that fateful day in 1909 when I first walked over to the residence on Waverly Street in Palo Alto. I entered in through the door and found people seated in a square—later I learned that officers of the group sat in the four corners—and I listened to the reading of instructions that were very strange to me and later readings in Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*. Here was a way of thinking and valuing totally different from that which I found in the university. Nonetheless, I was intrigued, and so I returned again and became even more interested and ultimately a regular attendant. A relationship grew up between me and those who dwelt in that house which became, ultimately, very warm; and I was finally told to enter at will without knocking. But I was not satisfied with the soundness of the thinking, and the result was that for three years I disputed the soundness of his position with the leader of the group; meanwhile, feeling that yet there was something here. It was a kind of thinking that was totally foreign with respect to that which I had found in the university. I knew the scientific soundness of university teaching. I knew mathematics and philosophy, or was experiencing it at that time, and yet here was something that seemed to make an appeal to another possibility. Ultimately, I was sufficiently interested to make a tentative association with the entity known as the Temple of the People. I became a member and attended its convention in 1912, just before I went for the year at Harvard. But I was not yet fully convinced that here was a door to truth. It was an intriguing possibility, but there were many elements that were not satisfactory.

Actually, what I had here contacted was a group of people in whom the intuitive function was very substantially developed, and their way of thinking involved something strange as compared to the rationally disciplined and organized thinking of a logical sort characteristic of university teaching. Ultimately, I became so much acquainted with the intuitive type that I learned both its strength and its weakness. At its best, when it is on beam, it reaches into possibilities that are not available by other means; but, just as there

is in the field of rational thought a distinction between true logical thinking and sophistry—the problem that arose at the time of Plato and his predecessors—so there is in the action of the intuitive type a positive and a negative side. When the intuitive is on beam, he may reach into relatively impossible knowledge. When he is off beam, he may jump to most ridiculous conclusions that are not at all tenable. One has to use discrimination in dealing with the matter brought forth by the intuitive type. Intuition when sufficiently balanced by thinking can be corrected in this respect, but intuitives who are not sufficiently balanced by trained thinking do produce some propositions that are incredibly ridiculous. I've learned to differentiate, in the course of time, between these two aspects of the intuitive type.

The result was that for three years I disputed this position with the leader of the group. Every night after meeting I would dispute with him, perhaps out in the street or the sidewalk or in his house, but meanwhile becoming convinced that there was something here that deserved serious attention. Meanwhile, I had become a friend of the family and of the associates in the group, and a time came when I was told not to knock when I came to the house but to enter in as though I belonged to it. We have spent many trips out in the hills to the west of Palo Alto and in many ways those were happy days.

But in due course the time to go to Harvard approached and I went there, matriculated in the Graduate School of Philosophy, and took a series of courses which included: Symbolic Logic, the work under *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, a course in the Philosophy of Religion, and two seminars—one in epistemology and one in metaphysics. The thing that was decisive here was a certain discussion that took place in the metaphysics seminar which was administered under the direction of Dr. Bakewell—a professor at Yale, and the same one who was a professor under which Northrop had been a student and later a colleague, the same Northrop that wrote the very suggestive book called *The Meeting of East and West*. One student in the seminar in metaphysics presented a paper when his time came around which was a formulation in terms of a certain modification of the Vedantic type of thought. This was fairly close to the Theosophical thought that I had heard in the Temple meetings. I heard him and saw him defend himself successfully against the critics. He was a Scotsman, a very brilliant man, who was completing his fourth year of graduate study with a PhD that year.¹ This impressed me. Here I heard for the first time a successful critical defense of a position that I had been tentatively entertaining but had not yet reached to a decisive conclusion.

At the end of the year, sometime during the summer, I received an invitation to return to Stanford to teach certain courses that were normally taught by Dr. Blichfeldt, but who was now due for his sabbatical year. For financial reasons, I decided to accept this offer and did return to Stanford and taught mathematics for that academic year.

Meanwhile, I had been meditating and thinking about this other way of thought and of light. So, I faced this situation. If this other way is indeed true, if there is another way of cognition that is not recognized in the academy at that time, then the kind of knowledge rendered available by that other way of cognition, if it exists, is so important that no philosophic statement could be adequate which neglects its existence. So I came

¹ See the audio recording, "On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement," for a reference to this student by the name of Mr. Rattray.

to the decision to make a search to verify whether this way of cognition existed and was valid. It resulted in my withdrawing from the university world, and in effect that was the sacrificial offering made preliminary to the search. I had been developing to the point where I would have had an academic career either in the field of mathematics or the field of philosophy, and it was the line of activity to which I was most devoted. In effect, that became the sacrificial offering, for the move that I made was a move I later found was incompatible with continuing in the academic world.

When I completed my year of teaching mathematics at Stanford in 1914, I began the search by proceeding southward into the Santa Lucia Mountains south of Carmel, California, for the purpose of establishing a sort of group in there in that area for taking part in this search. We did acquire a government claim and we did do some work, but the plan proved to be impractical and in due course failed. I then went briefly back to my home area in San Fernando where I had lived throughout my childhood and worked with my father for a time on his orchard, and then returned to Halcyon. This was around 1914 or '15.

It was at Halcyon that I met the woman who later became my wife. She was Sarah A. Merrell-Briggs—a married woman at the time. She had contributed funds for the publishing of a book of certain of the messages given out at Halcyon and the book was called *From the Mountain Top*.² She was assigned to the office of Chief of Propaganda for the association and I became her helper. In this way, I continued to function until I was finally drafted into the First World War of 1917. We had become rather close in our association in the work. After I was drafted and was employed in the army, she was divorced, and I returned back in 1919 about January or February. We continued more or less the association and, finally, on the 25th day of June 1920 were married. And that was the beginning of a close association that lasted until her death in 1959.

² F. La Due and W. H. Dower, *From the Mountain Top* (Halcyon, Calif.: Halcyon Book Concern, 1915).