

# Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of My Experience (Part 1)

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I have a rather strong impression that I should give at this time something of the account of the feminine side of my experience. Part of this will in the normal course of events be handled in my other main tape, but I have felt of late a need to say something now. This will involve again something of autobiographical material.

The relationship between man and woman is not only a matter of importance in the natural world, but it also has been a matter of considerable emphasis in the field of basic religiosity. There has been a general practice of separating men from women in the religious field when it is carried out intensively. The men function as monks and the women as nuns, and sometimes in certain churches the two sexes are separated during religious services. It is said that Buddha never intended, originally, to impose a monastic discipline upon the feminine sex, that his group of monks with their discipline were intended only to be male. But it is said in certain of the *sutras* that certain woman came to him, including the one whom he had married, and asked that an order of nuns should be founded. Because of the request, he did so reluctantly. Apparently he did not think well of monastic discipline for women, but he met their request; though for some reason it is reported that he said that the impulse which he put forth would last for only half as long as would otherwise have been the case. This I have not found explained anywhere.

As I go back in memory to the years of adolescence, the time when young men usually become interested in members of the other sex, I found that I too had a certain awakened interest; but another line of interest also was awakened at the same time, and this was in the field of thought. I began to think for myself. My thought-life, as it was before this time, on analysis proves to have been more a reflection of the influences around me than an expression of what I really thought for myself. It was the influence of the family, of the school, of the church, for in as much as my father was a clergyman, I willy-nilly attended church. But at the point of adolescence, I began to think for myself. I remember walking the streets at night in the pitch-dark; this was in the days before electric illumination. I walked and thought mainly upon ecclesiastical questions, for, in as much as my father was a clergyman and I had always automatically attended church and Sunday school, these questions were the ones that most readily arose in my mind. I began to find contradictions. I began to see that there were problems and things that needed to be cleared up. I walked night after night—thinking, thinking, thinking; and I finally evolved a question.

It so happened that the clergyman at that time in our church, which was not one where my father was officiating, held to the conception of the literal resurrection of the gross physical body. I knew that these bodies ultimately decayed. I knew that the matter of which they were composed could be taken up in plants and, either directly or indirectly, assimilated by animals. So I saw this possibility: that when someone had died,

part of the matter of his plant<sup>1</sup> could be taken up in plants and become the part of another creature or of an edible plant, and that they could be taken into the body of other human beings; and thus it could happen that when some other human being who had part of the matter of the first human being in his constitution were to perish, then there would be the question, to which individual did these atoms and molecules belong in the resurrection? I took the problem to our clergyman and his answer was, "Leave it to the Lord my son." At that moment the church lost me. Never since then have I been able to endure traditional Christian religiosity. Oh, I had no trouble with the well-meaning of the people and so forth, but here was mutilation of truth, and I could no longer go that way.

Long since have I learned that nothing is true merely because it is printed in a book, even though that book is venerated. The test of truth is far more complex than this. Oh yes, I respect that which men have honored and that which men have tried to live by, but the examination for truth determination is much more profound than that. Ultimately, truth became the object of my greatest interest, and the truth which we know with greatest assurance is the truth that is found in mathematics; and so, ultimately, mathematics, in its pure form, became my central interest.

One might bring up the question that this might be truth that is not relevant to the immediate problem before one in his feeling life, and that is true enough. But the important point, as seen by me, was truth that could be relied upon, that could be trusted, whatever it might be. It wasn't so essential that it happened to bear upon or did not bear upon an emotional need that I felt at this moment. The important consideration was that it was something reliable; and of all the knowledge which man has garnered to this day, the truth found in pure mathematics is the most reliable that he knows. In my academic days, I majored in mathematics just because I loved the subject. This proved to be a very happy period. I took all that was offered in the curriculum and even an extra course or two.

That deals with that part of the subject. But during all the time of my academic life, I virtually left untouched the domain of the feminine side. I remember one trip to see a young woman and no more than that. So it was during the days when I was a student. Later, when I was teaching mathematics for a season, I also attended a Theosophical group, as I have pointed out elsewhere, and at that group there was a young woman who seemed to linger until I requested her to let me walk her home. She accepted and that became a custom. I did grow in a feeling of affection for her over the months. But ultimately there came a time when she became interested in a younger man, and in the end I lost her to this other one; and I sent them away together with my blessing though it hurt deeply. Time passed and once she was taken into the hospital having taken a drink of muriatic acid. The doctors tried to save her, but she put up no effort and passed away. This also hurt. I did not know, but perhaps she had concluded that she had made a mistake. This did indeed hurt.

Beyond this, later when I moved to Halcyon there I met the woman who ultimately became my wife. I arrived there perhaps in 1914 or 1915. She was made the head of the propaganda department of the Temple of the People, and I became her assistant. We worked together for a couple of years, and then I was drafted in 1917 for

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<sup>1</sup> Wolff clearly misspoke here and meant to say, "... part of the matter of his body. . ."

the first war with Germany.<sup>2</sup> During the period that I functioned as a soldier, she had become divorced, and when I returned early in 1919 to Halcyon, we were free to be together; and, ultimately, on the 25th of June 1920, we were married.

This was my first marriage, the one with Sherifa. And we, between us, founded The Assembly of Man. We gave instructions to it. She provided most of the discipline. I provided most of the lectures. We even began and largely constructed an *ashram* located in the Sierra Nevada not far from the tallest mountain in the range. We worked on this for many years, and also gave instructions. She and I were opposite types. Actually, our birth dates were almost exactly 180 degrees apart. We were complementary; and it is not easy for persons who are opposite in type—and particularly where the man is substantially younger than the woman—for the life to be lived through. But we managed to do so, and at one time received hard earned compliments from higher up beyond; for, it was said that it had long been desired to have together two who were opposites to function in a certain work, and this we managed to do. It was not easy, but it was well worthwhile.

She was eleven and a half years older than I was, and there ultimately came the time when she began to fade away. It would prove to be a long period of fading. She first became unable to return to the mountains; and then we worked at our home, which is in the area of Los Angeles, but not in the city. Ultimately, we sold property and she expressed a wish to live near the sea, so we were able to move to Santa Barbara on June 21, 1956. But her health deteriorated. At first she had some enjoyment of life near the sea, for it was visible from our home; but her strength deteriorated, and she could only with difficulty take trips with me within the car. I remember well the last meal we ate together in a restaurant. I remember the day of the parade, for Santa Barbara has one of the three parades that are repeated annually in this country. It's a parade bearing upon old Spanish days, for in the early history of California the Spanish were the first to organize life here. Once, we left such a parade—and this is amusing—many were leaving. The street was jammed—cars on each side of me, ahead of me, and behind—and it was unpleasant; and she cried out, “Franklin, get out of here.” There was only one way, straight up in the air. However, patience ultimately won and we got away.

The day finally came when she could no longer leave her bed and nurses had to be provided. We took care of her as best we could. I had the night shift, a practical nurse, the day shift, and one of our students, the period between. She had to be upon oxygen at all times. We had two tanks, when one was empty, it was replaced and we drew upon the other. She was dependent upon oxygen. The doctor who attended her did not know how she managed to live, for it was contrary to general medical information. But I supported her as best I could. I was told by one who was a clairvoyant and who had become a friend of the family that I was keeping her alive. It is possible that that was so; at any rate, I was trying to do what she seemed to want to have done. Everything indicated she wanted to live, and I gave her such support as I could.

Finally, a day came when the nurse found upon her right thigh a dark spot suggesting gangrene. This was verified by the doctor when he came. I went with him, as he left, to the door and asked, “This is impossible is it not?” And his only answer was,

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<sup>2</sup> See the audio recording, “Lectures to University Students,” part 5, for a more detailed description of Wolff’s service during World War I as a conscientious objector to violent military action.

“We have had many impossibilities in this case.” I knew that the treatment for gangrene was amputation and that with her as weak as she was, this was out of the question. So I withdrew my support, and she passed in within twenty-four hours. I had arranged to keep her body in a state of quietness in her bed for the first twenty-four hours where it could remain undisturbed and the withdrawal could be completed. Later, her body was withdrawn and held in refrigeration until we could have the final service. For this I had already made arrangements. We finally held the service in an area north of San Fernando Valley, not too far from the place that had once been our home. I gave the final service and also the service at graveside, and then we withdrew. Our good friend, the hypnotherapist, went with me. We went to one of our associate’s homes in San Fernando Valley. He tried to get me drunk, but I refused. I continued to maintain myself as best I could. Her son and daughter-in-law remained for a couple of days and then withdrew; and at last I was alone, and there was nothing I craved more than death, also that it should come to me.