

Crossing the Threshold

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'A Book of the Dead' by Gerhard Reisch

Working with 'A Book of the Dead' by Gerhard Reisch, as translator, I have encountered a great deal of material on the process of 'crossing the threshold' of death that has been new to me, and it has been very helpful in coming to terms with the loss of friends during the year just past. The pictures and the verses bring comfort and support, but also open great vistas of inner worlds, cosmic worlds, which require one to stretch the imagination in new ways. There are three particular themes in the book, however, which speak really strongly to me personally, and perhaps to all of us, in these unsettling times.

The first of these is the need to wake up in what Gerhard Reisch calls the 'I'. The 'I', as I understand and experience it, is that part of me which stands above and beyond everyday life, beyond ego and the emotional self, and can observe, guide and monitor my actions and responses. It is perhaps what we often call the 'Higher Self'. In Gerhard Reisch's verses, this 'cultivation' as he calls it, of the 'I', is shown to be of enormous significance to us. In our lifetime on the Earth, the 'I' is that part of us which can distinguish between the illusions of the material world and the spiritual reality which lies behind it:

*Thus, O human being,
use your time on earth
to create your 'I',
the godly gift.
Give it substance
which will continue to exist in the cosmos,
Do not let yourself be dazzled
by earthly illusion.
Imbue it with the power of your 'I'.*

Furthermore, once we have crossed the threshold of death, the 'I' enables us to awaken as we journey through the higher planes of existence. After reviewing our past life, says Reisch, we begin to feel our way through the 'cosmic expanses', but the body, which was our anchor on Earth, is no longer there. This is when the work we have done on our "I" consciousness allows us to be aware:

*Here the body bestows the light of consciousness.
There, the light of consciousness can
shine only by its own power.*

Then with that 'strong power' which keeps us awake, we can enter into the 'spheres of spirit'. Our 'being becomes wide as the whole cosmos/ and the whole universe becomes its field of operation...

By the very fact of being on the Earth, and whatever our spiritual path (even if we have none) we are all strengthening our 'I', and gaining greater or lesser experience in keeping awake. This is the whole point of Earth existence. For some it is much more difficult than for others and then it may be harder to remain conscious once they have crossed over. There are souls, as we know, who need help on the other side and who may be, in Gerhard Reisch's terms, in more of a sleeping state, needing to be carried by their angel. Consciousness is light, however, and as Gerhard clearly expresses in his opening dedicatory verse, the more we become awake in our 'I' during our lifetime, in other words the more we have become 'light bearers', the greater the possibility that we can bring help to those who may be, as it were, stuck in a sleep state.

*Dear souls of friends,
you who were united with me in earthly life,
you will I seek
when, freed from the body,
I am living in the realms of spirit.
And I will help you,
I will bring you the light of understanding.*

As human beings begin, like stars, to shine with their own light they become free and need no longer be supported by their angels. The angels therefore, are intensely interested in our progress during our earthly lives.

The second theme concerns our *relationship* with those who have died. It was a real revelation to me to come upon the following words about them: *'They long for your deeds/ and wish to continue working/ through you/ on initiatives/ which in their earthly lives they did not fulfil.'* In the tasks we set ourselves and also when we are in distress, we have a support we never suspected, if only we can become aware of the possibility and call for it. Those who have died are with us during our daily activity, if we think of them. What a wonderful thought, to be working together from both sides of the threshold! Some of my own small beginnings in this have centred around the translation of the book. When I sat down to work I would light a candle and address Gerhard asking for his help, especially when I was stuck or unable to choose between different English words or phrases. I then waited for what arose in my mind and really felt the response. In a similar way, knowing that I needed to write a new song to perform for the launch of the book, I called not only on Gerhard but also on other dear friends who passed over last year. The song that emerged took its beginning from one of Gerhard Reisch's verses:

*'O do not seek me here.
You will find me within yourself,
in the warmth of being,
in the beat of heart and lung.../*

*Hear my being
by listening inwards
in the stillness of existence.'*

The inspiration flowed abundantly and the song became a deeply moving and comforting message to the bereaved from the point of view of one who has died.

This is the chorus:

*'I did not leave. I have come inside.
I have not gone. I am still near.
Listen inwards, in the silence,
To your beating heart, for I am there.'*

The third theme concerns the affect our work on ourselves has on the Earth. When we die our bodies eventually become dust, whether they be buried or cremated. But *'this dust, it is mysterious'*. Because the human 'I' has been at work within it, its whole nature has fundamentally changed:

*'As the human body decays into dust,
O look and behold,
from it there frees itself
a body made of light !*

*O earth
so will you too one day
become a body of light,
when your darkness
sinks into the void;
a body of light,
a single human body*

... the resurrection body.

We are part of a vast movement towards awakening for the whole Earth.

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