

STAYING CONNECTED

*How to Continue Your Relationships
with Those Who Have Died*

Introduction by Christopher Bamford

We must regain the understanding that we are not on earth just to build things in the physical universe during our physical existence. We must understand that during our whole existence we are connected to the whole world. Those who have passed through the gates of death want to work with us on the physical world. This working together only appears to be a physical collaboration, for everything physical is only an outer expression of spirit. Materialism has alienated human beings from the world of the dead. Spiritual science must help us make friends again with that world. The time must come when we no longer alienate ourselves from the dead, for it is our alienation that prevents them from spiritualizing the physical world. The dead cannot grasp things in the physical world with their hands or do physical work. To believe that would be superstition. The dead can, however, work in a spiritual way. To do so they need tools placed at their disposal; they need the spirit to live here in the physical world. We are not just human beings, we are also tools—instruments for the spirits who have passed through the gate of death. While incarnated in a physical body we use a pen, or a hammer, or an axe; but once we are no longer physically incarnate, the tools we use are human souls themselves. This has to do with the special way in which the dead perceive. . . .

For instance, suppose you have before you a small vessel containing salt. You can see that. The salt looks like a white substance, a white powder. The fact that you see the salt as a white powder depends upon your eyes. Your spirit cannot see the salt as a white powder; but if you put a little salt on your tongue and taste its special taste, then the spirit can begin to become

aware of it. Every spirit can perceive the taste of salt in you. In fact, everything that takes place in human beings through the outer world can be perceived by every spirit, including human souls who have passed through the gate of death. Within us, the sense world extends to our tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing, and so forth; the world of the dead also reaches down into what we hear, see, and taste. The dead can experience with us what we experience in the physical world. This is because these experiences belong not only to our world but also to theirs. Our experiences belong to their world when we thoroughly spiritualize what we experience in the outer world with spiritual ideas. Otherwise, what we experience as the effects of matter remains dark and incomprehensible to the dead. To the dead, a soul devoid of spirit is a dark soul. This is why the dead have become estranged from earthly life. We must overcome this estrangement. The so-called dead and the so-called living must learn again to live together inwardly. . . .

—Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmic and Human Metamorphoses*

Dying touches us all deeply. We all die and so, in our ordinary lives, in the midst of the joys and sorrows we experience, in our work and play, the relations we form, and the children we have, we are continually accompanied—if not consciously then unconsciously—by our own mortality. We are reminded of this daily by loved ones we lose, friends and acquaintances who die, as well as by the myriad anonymous deaths that fill the newspapers, films, and television.

Dying is part of living. Yet, during the last few centuries, we have preferred to deny death by making it an end so final that it is unthinkable—a void, absolute negation. We thought we did so because we loved life. In fact, we did so because in our obsession with material things occupying space, we lost the ability to understand that life extends far beyond the limits of our five senses. We lost the sense that the visible world is merely the tip

of an unquantifiable, qualitative, invisible reality. That is to say, we “lost” the spiritual world and, having lost it, can no longer imagine that life can take forms other than the purely physical form we have made supreme: the only reality. This was brought home to me with great intensity when, after my wife died, a friend received a spiritual vision in which my wife, living in luminous form, looked down upon the earth and said, “Love me, and live with me in the great life.”

Truly, there is a great life. Life is boundless; it is greater than our wildest dreams. And we are part of it—forever. What a puny notion it is to believe that meaning and love in the universe are restricted to what we can achieve with our brain and brawn during the few brief years allotted each lifetime on earth!

On the contrary, life goes on, life continues, life is endless. We live it now. We live it every moment. This means that all life is always here, now, and that the dead, as well as the unborn—and the hierarchies of angels and Jesus Christ and Mary and all the divine beings—are always with us, seeking our participation and help in the ongoing work of God in the universe.

The implications of this are staggering. It implies that the earth we inhabit is a center of the universe and that what we do makes a profound difference in multitudes of worlds. As the cabalists say, “Every time I move my finger, an angel awakens.” More startling still is the message that it sends *us*: “Wake up! Get real! More than your own personal enlightenment or pleasure is at stake. More depends on you than you know.”

In ancient times, when humanity was less physicalized than it is today, everything spoke and every human being was a prophet, able to hear and interpret the words of the gods sounding through all phenomena. Not so much distinction was made as now between interior and exterior, subjective and objective. Heaven and earth were one world and everything was alive with meaning and calling for response. Human beings were still heavenly beings and felt themselves woven into and part of a great symphonic stream. The world, the cosmos, was

music; and music was the world, the cosmos. Every plant and tree and rock, the sunlight on the water, the shape of the clouds, the dew, the wind, the flame, all feeling and intention, every smile and tear and burst of laughter, the dance of the synapses and the tremors of the inner organs—everything sang. And in this singing the voices were those of the gods and the ancestors and the elemental beings who help sustain the earth.

Gradually, we lost this sense of floating between worlds—between heaven and earth—in harmonies and rhythms. We came down to earth, to solidity, density—to body consciousness where we could unfold a consciousness of our “I” in action.

For a long time we still knew of our heavenly origin. Then we began to forget, and needed to be reminded.

Rudolf Steiner is a twentieth-century representative of a long line of what the Koran calls “warners,” who remind us of our divine destiny in the language and manner appropriate to our time.

His message is that we are twofold creatures, children of heaven and earth: visible beings embodied in space and time, and invisible beings of soul and spirit. We live and work and have being in both realms. In both, we are at home. Yet these two—heaven and earth—are in a sense not really two but one: a single reality in two forms. After all, they interpenetrate and reflect each other so perfectly point for point that there is nothing “There” that is not also “Here.” Therefore our lives and our work are continuous, and the relationships and connections we form Here continue There, as does our activity and participation in the divine-spiritual-human cosmic process we call the universe.

This radical spiritual and social teaching that Rudolf Steiner brings has a history. Having forgotten, we have had to struggle to remember. The great gift evolution has bequeathed us—our “I”—has also given us our great temptation: our ego. The struggle has always been, and is, the struggle to overcome our egotism. For this, the great religious teachers—Abraham, Moses,

Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed, to mention only a few—worked. For this, Christ, too, came to earth. Here, too, however, we shall overcome.

Orpheus, the legendary prophet, divine poet, musician, and culture-bringer of ancient Greece was perhaps the first to preach this message in the new way, twelve to fifteen hundred years before Christ. He brought the good news of the “Orphic way of life”—a way of conscious effort, sacrifice, and suffering—and made it open to all. He universalized the Mysteries, freeing them from the sacred geography of the Mystery Centers. At the same time, he broke down the elitism of the Temple initiations of the previous epoch. In doing so, he created a free community of seekers, bound not by ties of blood or place, but by karma and by the shared pursuit of a common goal by common means: nonviolence, kinship with all life, continual recollection, purity, and belief in both life after death and reincarnation.

A fragment from an “Orphic Book of the Dead,” found at Petelia in Greece and now in the British Museum, vividly illustrates this Orphic point of view:

To the left of the House of Hades you will find a spring.
 And, beside it, a white cypress.
 Do not approach it.
 But you will find another spring, from the Lake of Memory,
 Cold water flowing from it, guardians before it.
 Say: “*I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven;*
But my race is of heaven. You know this.
 I am parched with thirst. Quickly, give me
 Cool water flowing forth from the Lake of Memory.”¹

Pythagoras and Plato took up this Orphic teaching, each amending it in his own way and fitting it to the times which, as

1. Orphic tablet (Petelia tablet], British Museum.

the millennium unfolded, became increasingly materialistic. Plotinus, the Neoplatonic philosopher, expresses it well:

Before we had our becoming Here, we existed There, human beings other than now, some of us gods; we were pure souls, Intelligence inbound with the entire of reality, members of the Intellectual, not fenced off, not cut away, integral to that ALL. Even now, it is true, we are not put apart; but upon that Primal Human Being there has intruded another, a human being seeking to come into being and finding us there, for we were not outside the universe. The other has wound itself about us, foisting itself upon the Human being that each of us was at first. Then, it was as if one voice sounded, one word was uttered, and from every side an ear attended and received and there was effective hearing, possessed through and through by what was present and active upon it: now we have lost that first simplicity; we are become the dual thing, sometimes indeed no more than that later foisting, with the primal nature dormant and, in a sense, no longer present.²

Nevertheless, before Orpheus—and even after him, and after Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus, and even after God had dwelled in a human body, in Christ Jesus, and had died and resurrected—many still believed, as they do today, that it is “better,” as Homer put it, “to be a beggar on earth than a shade in Hades” or—as a late post-Christian Latin inscription has it *non fui, fui, non sum, non curo*, (“I was not, I was, I am not, I don’t care”).

But Orpheus and his followers knew otherwise. They understood that there is a perfect correspondence between heaven and earth, macrocosm and microcosm, and that these two are

2. Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV, 4, 14.

our one home and that we are immortal. *We are at home in the universe.* The task was to connect heaven and earth—within and through humanity. Socrates taught that this was done by a process of soul purification that he called “dying”—dying to the visible so that the invisible could be all in all.³ With connections made and the soul purified, Socrates believed, death was overcome; the world was one, single, and invisible.

But Socrates was only a precursor. The incarnation of Christ and his unconditional “overcoming” of death had not yet affirmed the centrality of earthly existence. Earthly, visible life was still seen as secondary to heavenly life; redemption lay in escaping it. The earth was still a prison; the body, a tomb. The supreme sanctity of human, earthly embodiment had not yet been announced. Yet when the announcement came on the Mount of Golgotha, the full import of Christ’s deed of “overcoming death” was not recognized immediately. Nor is it fully understood even today.

The early Christians struggled to understand, caught as they were between the two realities of the Orphic announcement of the continuity of life and the radical good news of the resurrection. Nevertheless, they understood that, as Christians, they died “into Christ”—who is eternal life in whom spiritual reality resides.

The primitive church therefore saw the central act of preparing for death as the Eucharist. Receiving and participating in Christ on earth would ensure reception by him in heaven. Just as angels bore witness and rejoiced to witness Christ’s cosmic sacrifice, so too angels would descend rejoicing to accompany the soul to God. There might be an interim state of dormancy, but death would not be final. God, the giver of life, was also the recreator, the resurrector. Thus, the dead person, identified

3. Rainer Maria Rilke, the supreme Orphic poet of the twentieth century, spoke of human beings as “bees of the invisible.” For him, angels were those who had already made the world invisible. He writes in his *Duino Elegies*: “Earth, is not this what you want/To rise in us *invisibly*.”

with Christ, both through the Eucharist and through deathbed readings of the Passion, would rise again. To die was to enter into the light.

A prayer still in use today expresses this feeling beautifully:

We seem to give them back to you O God who gave them to us. Yet as you did not lose them in giving, so we do not lose them by their return. Not as the world gives, do you give, O Lover of souls. What you give you do not give away, for what is yours is ours also if we are yours. And life is eternal and love immortal, and death is only an horizon, and an horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight. Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we may see farther; cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly; draw us closer to yourself that we may know ourselves to be nearer to our loved ones who are with you. And while you prepare a place for us, prepare us also for that happy place, that where you are we may also be for evermore.⁴

Through the early Middle Ages, the emphasis changes. More attention begins to be paid to the transitional period. At first, this took the form of increased penance as the means of avoiding the fires of hell. Increasingly, however, and with greater frequency, prayers to accompany the dead on their path and masses for the dead came to play a more important role. There was a growing sense that those on earth could truly aid the dead and help them in their passage. At the same time, through the spreading influence of the Celtic Church in Ireland, the reality of the resurrection, death actually overcome—that is, the true spiritual continuity of life—began to take stronger hold. The whole Mystery of the Passion—still preeminently in the Eucharist—became recognized as true medicine

4. *St. Benedict's Prayer Book*, Ampleforth: Ampleforth Abbey Press, Ampleforth Abbey, 1994.

for body and soul. This did not mean, however, that the conviction that the dead needed the living lost any of its power. On the contrary, the realization of the real power of the living to aid the dead through prayers and votive masses only increased, and voluntary confraternities were formed of those who prayed for the dead.⁵

The first movement of the relation between the living and the dead culminated around the turn of the first millennium with two symptomatic gestures: the introduction of the Feast of All Souls in 997/ 998 by Abbot Odilo of Cluny and, as a corollary to that, the gradual rediscovery or invention of purgatory.⁶ Together, these two focused the attention of the later Middle Ages on the interdependency of the living and the dead. Theologically, this expressed the idea that the whole Church (and ultimately the whole of humanity) was a single, reciprocating, interconnected, interdependent body, the Body of Christ, perpetually dying, perpetually resurrected. Some may be on earth, some in heaven, some in purgatory, but all, though scattered, are one, mutually implicated and responsible each for all.

Thus the reality arose that we could suffer, pray, and live for each other across the great threshold of death. Women, above all, took up this work—the only priestly work allowed them. Most of the great mystics of the period—Mechtild of Hackeborn, Hildegard of Bingen, Elizabeth of Schonau, Christian Mirabilis—became such “apostles to the dead,” working closely with souls in purgatory. At the same time, the primitive notion of the “Communion of Saints”—risen human beings, companions and coworkers with the heavenly hierarchies—began to take on a

5. For this condensed history, I am indebted to Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

6. See Jacques le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984. And Barbara Newman, “On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women,” Chapter 4 in *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

stronger presence. Not only could we work with the dead, the dead could also work with us.

With the scientific revolution and the rise of materialistic modernism, everything changed. Death became the end. In a world constituted of matter and space—a spatialized world—there was no place for a spiritual world, nor any way to understand the spiritual beings who lived there, including human beings who had died. Death ruled.

Then, in the mid-nineteenth century (1848), things began to change. The story becomes stranger. Spiritualism was born in the village of Hydesville in upstate New York.

It may seem tawdry to mention spiritualism in such august company. It is true that spiritualism led to fantastic excesses and materialistic delusions of all kinds and that the spiritualist movement had more than its fair share of hustlers of every complexion—charlatans, con artists, illusionists, fakes of every kind. Nevertheless, for all its errors—the most grievous of which was “mediumship”—spiritualism accomplished two great feats: it made the idea of a spiritual world thinkable again in a contemporary, nonsectarian way, and it did so thoroughly democratically, that is, it was open to all, thus making it anathema not only to the atheist but also to the esotericists who then, as to a certain extent still today, were mostly elitist.

The first phenomena—various noises, displacements of objects, and so forth—were produced in December, 1847, in the home of the Fox family. As René Guénon points out, there was nothing new in these.⁷ They were the familiar trappings of “haunted houses.” What was new was the interpretation, the use to which they were put. For, after several months, someone had the idea of “posing questions” to whatever it was that was rapping, questions to which the rapper responded correctly. At first, these questions were simply arithmetical computations.

7. René Guénon, *The Spiritist Fallacy*, Harlemville, New York: Sophia Perennis, 1999.

Then, one Isaac Post had the genial intuition of mentioning the letters of the alphabet, inviting the spirit to designate with knocks the letters spelling out what he or she wished to say. The “spirit” declared that he was a certain Charles B. Rosna, a peddler, who had been murdered in the Fox house and buried in the cellar—where, in fact, skeletal remains were later found. Thus the *spiritual telegraph* was invented.

That is one side of the story. The other side is that it was gradually noticed that the phenomena occurred more frequently and successfully in the presence of the Fox *sisters*. “Mediumship” thereby came into being and swept across the country. Among the multitudes that came to witness these events, many, mostly women, believed that they had the same powers and that they, too, were “mediums.” This gave feminism an enormous boost; women were able to declare themselves independent of the male ecclesiastical hierarchy. They became, in a sense, a new kind of priestess. “Spiritual circles” quickly began to form around these mediums, and everywhere regular relations began to be established between “this world” and the “next.” Naturally, as the spiritualist movement proliferated, the means of communication between the worlds was continuously improved. Table tapping led to alphabetical dials, pencils attached to mobile boards, and so forth. “Scientific” research into apparitions, manifestations, and different orders of psychic and spiritual phenomena proliferated. Famous figures like Benjamin Franklin began to appear. Building on great precursors like Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, and Emmanuel Swedenborg, spiritualist, visionary philosophies like that of the seer of Poughkeepsie, Andrew Jackson Davis, began to be written. The impact of all this was enormous. By mid-century, sixty percent of Americans claimed “spiritualism” was their religion.⁸ Meanwhile, esoterically,

8. Anne Brande, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in America*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

many occult groups began to form and come into the open, above all, H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophical Society.

With regard to this, C. G. Harrison tells a bizarre behind-the-scenes story:

About the year 1840 the nations of modern Europe touched a certain point in their evolutionary cycle called the "*point of physical intellectuality*." One of those crises had arrived which necessitated immediate action of *some* kind on the part of those who keep watch over the signs of the times.... At the period of which I am speaking, the spiritual evolution was proceeding at its minimum rate, and the intellectual at its maximum rate, and a strong current had set in toward materialism in all departments of human activity. Now the great danger of materialism is the adoption of a utilitarian standard of goodness; and intellectual *evolution*, under these conditions, is spiritual *involution*, or death.

It became, therefore, a serious question with occultists (1) how far they were justified in concealing longer the fact that there is an unseen world around us as real as the world of sense, and (2) how this could be revealed with safety. In other words, how could a safe course be steered between Scylla and Charybdis.

It was admitted on all hands that something must be done, but the party of secrecy were averse to a straightforward policy of tentative elementary instruction. "Let us proceed cautiously," they said in effect, "and endeavor to ascertain indirectly how far the public is disposed to receive such instruction." Accordingly experiments were made, first in America, then in France, and afterward in England, with certain individuals of a peculiar psychical organization, since called mediums. But the whole thing was a failure. The mediums, one and all, declared that they were controlled by spirits who had departed from the earth. "It was just what might have been expected," said those who are always wise after the event, but, in

point of fact, no one had expected it. I can only account for this strange oversight by the fact that “the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” The occultists were like the man in the fable who was so absorbed in the contemplation of the stars that he walked into the ditch at his feet.

As, under the circumstances, the “Spiritualists” could not be undeceived as to the source of their inspirations, there was no alternative but to withdraw from the experiment. But the mischief was done. The door had been opened to extramundane influences, and could not be reclosed. Spiritualism was a Frankenstein monster, and a Proteus into the bargain. Mediumship (especially in America) became a profession, and mediums, subject to every kind of psychic influence, were largely exploited by “Brothers of the Left” for their own purposes. The party of secrecy were almost wholly employed in endeavoring to counteract these influences, with the assistance of many who called themselves “Liberals” (quite a new name by the way), when an event occurred which united both parties in defense against a common danger. A person who was known to exist, but who had not been discovered, suddenly appeared in Paris, presented herself at an occult lodge, and demanded admission into the brotherhood on terms which could not be entertained for a moment. She then disappeared, and the next thing that was heard was that a certain Madame Blavatsky had been expelled from an American brotherhood for an offense against the Constitution of the United States, and had gone to British India in order to carry out a certain threat which it would seem there was a fair prospect of her putting into execution....⁹

9. C. G. Harrison, *The Transcendental Universe*, Hudson, New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1994.

In other words, without entering into details of esoteric history, the suggestion (confirmed by Rudolf Steiner¹⁰) is that spiritualism was “created” by adepts of the time to combat materialism.

Whatever interpretation one puts on these facts, however, several things remain clear. Spiritualism, out of which Theosophy arose, and thereby in a certain sense also Anthroposophy, as well as Jungian psychology¹¹ and most modern Western spiritual movements, was an enormously significant cultural impulse. Regardless of how foolish, materialistic, fantasist, and plain deluded many aspects of spiritualism were, it nevertheless affirmed the presence of an invisible, spiritual world permeating this one: a world waiting only for the physical world to wake up to it.

Spiritualism had its errors—it was both materialistic and atavistic. It was foolish (and epistemological nonsense) to believe that the spiritual world—and the dead—used physical, material means to communicate. As Rudolf Steiner says in the opening quotation, speaking of those who have died and wish to continue working with us on the earth, “This working together only *appears* to be a physical collaboration, for everything physical is only an outer expression of spirit.” That is, the spiritual world lives with us in soul and spirit; “matter” is our fantasy alone. “Mediumship,” the other great fallacy, is likewise quite easily disposed of. We need only realize that we are surrounded by the spiritual worlds and need only awaken our own organs of perception to perceive these consciously. This is another aspect of the great democratization effected by spiritualism. We can *all* communicate with the dead and the spiritual worlds. They are always around and with us and it does not take priests, mediums, or otherwise specially chosen people to enter into the

10. Rudolf Steiner, *The Occult Movement in the Nineteenth Century, and its Relation to Modern Culture*, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1973. And for another perspective: Rudolf Steiner, *The History of Spiritism, Hypnotism, and Somnambulism*, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1943.

11. See Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ*.

working relationship that is a true collaboration between heaven and earth.

What is most interesting in the present context is that the means chosen by spiritualism to reopen humanity to this spiritual world was to demonstrate the reality of the continued existence—the continuing life, work, and love—of those who had died. In other words, the living, active presence of the dead in earthly life was presented as the door to the exploration of a whole spiritual world.

It is still so today. The phenomenon of death, as that of life itself, still defeats materialistic explanations of the world and demonstrates, if not their fundamental error, then at least their narrow limits. Anyone who has accompanied another across the threshold knows that once the fact of death's imminence is certain, medical science must bow out: it can do nothing, it knows nothing. It can only deny. At the same time, many of those who have witnessed someone "dying" know that a person does not die in any absolute sense but is always in transition—leaving the visible world, he or she becomes only more invisibly and immediately present. It is one of the best kept secrets of the late twentieth century that multitudes of ordinary people know from their own experience that no one dies in the sense of disappearing forever. The bestselling books on the subject of communication with the dead are only the most sensationalist heralds of an enormous and growing social reality—the fact that, although we pay lip service to materialism and hedonistically consume its fruits (all too easily becoming addicted to them and to the comforts they provide), we know in our heart of hearts that our lives encompass so much more than mere "things," and that we are spiritual beings living in a spiritual world.

This collection of Rudolf Steiner's lectures and meditations on staying connected with those who have died can help deepen one's understanding of these things. More than that, it provides concrete and practical instructions for all who wish to consciously engage in the great work that the living and the so-called dead can do together.

Specific indications are given about how we can learn to work together with those we love who have passed through the gates of death into the invisible world. The cumulative effect is staggering. Gradually, we come to realize that the so-called dead and indeed the whole spiritual world are involved in and care deeply about every aspect of earthly life. Thereby, we come to understand the supreme importance of earthly life as the only sphere in the universe where death can be experienced. And not only death: earth is above all the place of connection, of relationship and love. *Love, connection, relationship occur only on the earth.* We had better take care of them. Those fruits we take to heaven.

Above all, we learn that we do not live—or love or experience—for ourselves alone. All our experience feeds the universe. We are the books the dead read. Our thoughts and feelings are the works of art that brighten and instruct their lives. When we meditate (or pray) and do our spiritual practice, when we organize our lives to serve and make manifest the good, the true, and the beautiful, then we are doing so not only for ourselves but for all beings in all worlds. Truly, we are called to serve: to offer up our experience for the sake of the world's evolution. Not only do we take it all with us, we must also give it all away. When we do so, we live together with world evolution. We cannot do it alone, but only in and through and with those we love—in and through and with love. For the work of the earth is love: that the substance of the earth become love. And work with the dead, as Rudolf Steiner shows, is an important part of this task.

Finally, on a personal note, I must say that living and working with the concepts and exercises contained in these talks and meditations has changed my life. This is a most practical book. Do what it recommends and you will experience the presence of the dead in your lives. You will know that the community of human beings on both sides of the threshold is not theory, but reality.