

# Strange Days of the Soul



God must, in some way or other, make room for himself, hollowing us out and emptying us, if he is finally to penetrate into us. And in order to assimilate us in him, he must break the molecules of our being so as to re-cast and re-model us. The function of death is to provide entrance into our inmost selves. It will make us undergo the required dissociation. It will put us into the state organically needed if the divine fire is to descend upon us. And in that way its fatal power to decompose and dissolve will be harnessed to the, most sublime operations of life. What was by nature empty and void, a return to bits and pieces can, in any human existence, become fullness and unity in God.

— Teilhard du Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (Collins, 1960)

As the saying goes, 'it is terrible to fall into the hands of the Living God'. In our terms, it is the sudden fate of the ego to find itself out of the driving seat, and plunged into another world of air that is the Self—the one we may find in us who is really there.

My spiritual emergency was a breakdown of seven months during 1989. The run-up to this period was fairly classic: over-exertion, and ego assertion, to the point of burn out. The year previous (my 30th) I'd had seven books of poetry published in a year, and had organized a South Bank launch for my anthology *Transformation*<sup>1</sup>. I'd been aware of needing to stop, needing a break, and had been invited down to Tuesley Manor by Viscountess Bronwen Astor, an inspired Christian whose philanthropy extended to making over part of her grounds and a house called The Quarry to retreatants of various kinds, lay and religious. Tuesley Valley, originally a pagan site named after the god Tue, is a potent pocket of land just south of Godalming: one of Nature's healing places which, like Culbone near Porlock in North Somerset, has a primeval depth.

I decided to come as I thought for a month. My plan was to have some space and catch up with my writing without some unwanted pressures, and the hassle of London traffic.

One month became seven as my plan fell to pieces. I was basically exhausted but resisting the invitation to let go, not wanting to waste precious time in this unique location. However every attempt to write rose up only to fall flat, grey and lifeless. I felt as if I was sitting in a fog, or rather, something more subtle and insidious, a kind of obstruction in the air that prevented me from making any progress. Slowly, repeated failure became panic as something else, something far more potent, began to take place. This became located in the Christian experience leading up to Easter and then beyond, into the light of the summer. Essentially, this was crucifixion—the death of the ego, and resurrection—the birth of the transpersonal self.

At the time it was like hell, a limbo without flames. Some of the intensity of what happened was also no doubt fanned by solitude, long hours alone under the eaves of a large country house where there was no escape. It was as if God was outside all the windows looking in; somehow I knew my number was up. Perhaps this vaguely paranoid state indicates a kind of displaced self/'Self'-witnessing; certainly it was my ego's fearful perspective of change, which I came to express in the poetry I did manage to write<sup>2</sup>.

It was also a deeply physical experience as well as being emotional (depression and anxiety). A number of rebirthing sessions with Bronwen, who had trained with Leonard Orr, greatly aided and deepened the process ('It is dark and the air breaks in freezing waves'); my body responded in a gestalt like way ('As your hands rise, frozen, half-raised—fingers splayed'), and it was after one of these that I had one of several distinctly emergent experiences.

An early evening experience of deepening depression had once again become panic. I withdrew upstairs and sat in an armchair in my room as the light faded outside, simultaneously anxious and furious at this suspension of faculties, willing some final breakthrough to happen. Nothing happened. At least for some minutes. Then I noticed I couldn't move. My body became as if liquid, deliquescent. I went to lift up my arm and nothing happened. Then the sensation of heat began to appear on my forehead, like fingers gently pressing there— but very hot fingers. There was no avoiding them. The light deepened outside, the lit candle flickered. The heat on my forehead became like a disk of sustained warmth. Then slowly it began to fade; and my power of movement returned.

Because of my work with the theme of Apocalypse, I had been looking at the Book of Revelation. I found myself walking over it and opening it at random. The sentence stared out at me: And the servants of God shall be sealed in the foreheads.

The rest is in the poem 'surrender', prior to and after this, one of several numinous happenings that became my path, both inside, and outside as I worked in the wild valley garden to clear the length of stream.

How did I get through this—especially when it continued to seem so open-ended? There was a fundamental paradox for me throughout between will (making an effort) and surrender (letting go, handing over). I realize now that in some way they were the polarities of the dynamic process I was in, but I couldn't get my head around that at the time. Certainly, I learnt to surrender—hence the title of the poem. I learnt to become more Taoist about it, going with the flow. Also I was seriously trying to 'read the signs' so regarding as a creative process however (seemingly) impossible, was also very important. Finally, and as mysteriously a third thing emerged beyond will and surrender and that was intuition, and choice. And in early September, unfinished as the sentence was, I decided: enough. Time to return to London, my patient partner, and the world—or at least my more hermit-like version of it. Somehow the time was right. And as I sat gazing out of the window of my attic room on that last morning at the woodpigeons flying in and out of the still full-leaved trees beyond the stream, wondering what it had all been about or for, a voice quite distinctly in my ears said 'You had to fail in order to heal'.

That was my final lesson, one I am still learning. But as I sat a month later in my little garden shed studio in Kew, working on a long poem, I had a sensation I'd never had before; of a well of strength beneath me and inside me, a well that has never run dry. For then on too, my relationship with poetry as an exclusive discipline changed, and I began to see my work was about people, not just my literary achievement. I began writing my 18 month correspondence course *Chrysalis—the poet in you*<sup>3</sup>, and my one to one work with people began, entering into the journey of psychospiritual therapy<sup>4</sup> and healing. 'And all these things shall be added unto you'.

Jay Ramsay

1 Transformation—the poetry of spiritual consciousness, with an Afterword by Sir George Trevelyan (Rivelin Grapheme Press, 1988). Some copies remaining from JR/Chrysalis.

2. *Strange Days* (Stride Publications as Taxus Press, 1989). Enquiries: RML@stridebooks. co.uk

3. for further details please see [www.lotusfoundation.org.uk](http://www.lotusfoundation.org.uk) or call 01453-759436

4. psychosynthesis, The London Institute, Hendon, NW4: 0208-202-4525.