

Of Dreams and Premonitions

Although I have always believed in the existence of psychic forces and ESP, and in the power of dreams and premonitions, I myself have never experienced a truly direct encounter with the occult. It has happened that soon after thinking about a person, I met him or her unexpectedly in the street, or received a letter or phone call; but this happens to most people and is not an unusual event. I have experienced on two or three occasions weird moments, which I took to be “prophetic vision” which quite unnerved me.

I recall an occasion in 1960, at the funeral of my husband’s Aunt Ella, sister of his mother. At a good old age, she fell and broke her hip. It never healed properly, and she gradually went into a decline and died a couple of years later, in the sanatorium in Gegera where she was being cared for. She was buried in the cemetery there.

When we gathered at the grave, I noticed a small area nearby, where several small tombstones indicated that it was a special plot for babies and young children. I was shocked at the sight, and began to imagine to myself how a mother feels when her baby or young child dies. How would I feel if such a thing happened to my little girl Varda? I sank so deeply into this thought that I could visualize such a situation. I became oblivious to my surroundings as a great wave of sorrow overwhelmed me and I saw myself placing her beloved blue teddy bear in the grave to keep her company. I came to myself just as the service ended and felt a terrible fear that I had seen into the future and what it held for us.

Fortunately, I was wrong. Such a tragedy never befell us, and Varda flourished and grew into an attractive, intelligent and happy young woman. Time showed that this moment, however vivid, had not been a prophetic vision, and must have been rooted in other elements. In fact as I slipped into middle age, I came to discount the belief and importance I once

attached to omens and premonitions, and I wondered that I allowed the occult to play so influential a part in my life.

I suffered deeply from anxiety when I was young. Taking a trip, whether by car or plane was often a torture, because I felt so strongly that something terrible was in store for me. But I have come to believe that premonitions are largely the projection of one's own fears and anxieties. I often cancelled plans or gave up on trips, without admitting the real reason, which was that I didn't want to take the risk of my children becoming orphans. In those days of frequent air accidents, Alex and I never traveled together, only on separate coordinated flights. When our sons were old enough to travel alone, they kept the same precaution. But the travels I did undertake always passed off smoothly and this gradually created a calming affect on my imagination. We only gave up this rule when our children were old enough to cope if something bad happened to us.

During the period of our sons' army service, my sense of vulnerability left me entirely. Moments of panic, which I sometimes had about them, proved ungrounded; and when they were in real danger or even injured, I had no warning intuitions whatsoever.

Once I was alone at home in the morning, busy with some chore, when I suddenly heard my youngest child calling me, loud and clear, "Ima! Ima!" I ran quickly through the apartment, and even opened the front door, but found no one. I expected a phone call, but none came. There was no aftermath. The day passed normally, except that I was quite shaken for some time.

Nevertheless, as I have said, I know there are people who do have extrasensory perceptions, some kind of contact with spirits, even if but once or twice in their lifetime. When my second son was born in Tel Aviv, we cabled the good news to my parents in Melbourne. They were not at all surprised, they subsequently told us, for the night before my father had dreamt that his father, dead almost forty years, came to him bearing a tray with

wine and sponge cake for making *kiddush* (the blessing over the wine), and my father had understood immediately that this was a message about a new grandson. Three years later, my older daughter was born on the fortieth anniversary of the death of this same grandfather, an event that made a deep impression on my father.

My husband had two stories about dreams of the same genre, one his own experience, one his mother's, both much more dramatic than my father's happy vision. Whenever the conversation turned to the subject of ESP and experiences with the occult, Alex's stories usually topped any others.

One morning when he was a young teenager in Riga, he rose as usual to go to school, and was surprised to find his mother in the kitchen in a state of great agitation. He asked her what was wrong, and she replied. "I had the most terrible dream. My mother, may she rest in peace, came to me and was very cross. 'A fine daughter you are,' she said. 'You don't care about me at all. Look what a state I'm in – my dress is all torn, I am terribly cold, and you do nothing to help me.' Oh, dear, such a terrible dream. I'm so upset!"

Alex reassured her as best as he could but had to hurry off to school. Returning as usual for lunch, he was surprised not to find her at home. "Mother had to go to Toocum," his father explained, which was her home town, about an hour's ride from Riga. "There was a phone call and she had to go. She should be back by evening."

His mother indeed returned towards evening, tired and quite worn out. The family asked what had happened. Why did she suddenly rush off to Toocum?

"Well," she answered slowly, filling a glass from the samovar, "in the middle of the morning I had a phone call from Toocum, from the Hevra Kadisha (the burial society). It seems a violent storm occurred a few days ago, and a tree fell down on my mother's grave and broke the tombstone. When they discovered it, they called me to come and make arrangements for a new stone! So I had to go to Toocum...."

My husband's second story was about an event after World War II. He had left Riga in 1929 to study in Germany, and subsequently went on to Palestine. With the rise of the Nazis, he entreated his family to flee Riga and join him in Palestine, or even continue on to his mother's brothers in Australia. But his parents felt they were too old to make a fresh start in a strange land (they were then in their early sixties) and decided to remain where they were. My husband's younger brother Yehezkel, but nicknamed Atzya, chose to stay with them.

A stroke had disabled Alex's father and he died a few months after the war broke out, but before the Germans came. His mother and younger brother remained in the Riga ghetto. My husband was in America at the time, having just managed to get away from Europe on the eve of the war, and was working for the Irgun (National Military Organization in the Land of Israel). He eventually joined the U.S. Army in 1943, and took part in the Normandy landings. He had no news from his family in all those years, and so sensed by the time the war was over, because all his enquiries remained unanswered, that they had perished in the Holocaust.

After the war, he began to have a recurrent dream that he was back home in Riga. He dreamt that he entered the apartment and went to the closet where his mother had kept her hats and coats. To his surprise he found a letter addressed to him; opening it he found a photograph of a skull, which he understood to be that of his mother, and a letter bearing a Hebrew date. It had no significance for him, but he remembered it when he woke up, and made a note of it: the 10th of Kislev, 5702. A few months later, my husband heard that an old family friend and neighbor, Rabbi Mordecai Nurock, who had been exiled from Riga to Siberia during the war, had arrived in New York. He went to see him in the hope of learning something about the fate of his family.

Rabbi Nurock told Alex that his brother Yehezkel had fled the ghetto to join a group of partisans in the forests, but the Latvians later betrayed the group and all its members were killed. His mother had remained in the ghetto until it was gradually liquidated. The terrible winter Death March to the forest of Rumboli was the culmination of a series of punitive measures taken by the Germans, after the discovery of a secret ammunition cache in the ghetto. It took place over three days toward the end of November 1941, according to the Hebrew calendar from the 7th to the 9th of Kislev, T-Sh-ab (5702/1941). By the 10th of Kislev it was all over. This was the date my husband had seen in his dream.

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After having written all this, I began to recall strange experiences I had after my father passed away in November 1979. It was a joke in the family that my father often found money in the street. Nothing of importance – a coin, or a folded note, and once a pretty little cameo brooch that I still have. It so happened that sometimes, after I visited his grave, I would find a shekel or other coin in the vicinity or at the entrance to our home. The first time I was terribly shocked; it was so clear to me that my father was nearby that I could almost feel his presence.

Such incidents recurred and I began to accept them as quite normal. One I particularly recall, which made me feel very happy. The wife of our older son gave birth to their first child, a boy, and I went to visit her in the hospital. There was a vase of flowers standing near the bed, which was in danger of being knocked over. I went and moved the vase to a safer spot, and under the base I found a shiny coin, a shekel.

I was simply flabbergasted. My father had been, perhaps still was, in the room. I was sure of it. It took me a few moments to recover my composure. Of course, this could have been simply coincidence, I said to myself. Someone might have dropped the coin there,

perhaps the messenger boy who had brought the flowers, and it was just my interpretation that gave the coin its special significance. But messenger boys don't usually arrange flowers, and such events had happened too often to be mere coincidence.

Gradually such incidents became less and less frequent, until they faded away and never recurred, but the memory of them remains very strong. I still believe it really was the spirit of my father wanting to tell me that he was still around, still worrying about me, still keeping a protective eye on me, until he found his eternal peace.

I also have an early childhood dream the memory of which I have carried with me all my life. It was so vivid that I have never forgotten it, though I am not sure it falls into the psychic category. I dreamt I was in a dark tunnel creeping towards a distant light. When I eventually emerged from the tunnel I saw a group of men waiting for me, but I don't remember if the dream continued further. I often wondered about this dream, and only recently began to think it might be a birth memory – a reasonable assumption, which I feel I can accept, but is impossible to prove. Such are my own experiences with psychic or near psychic happenings.