

The Afterlife of Herbert Hill

Michael Ortiz Hill

(for Steve Lovold and Lamont Green)

August 30, 1943

Dear Mrs Hill:

In reply to your letter of recent date, I'am indeed sorry to advise you that your son, in trying to escape, fell about 60 feet and was so severely injured internally that he passed away.

He was rushed immediately to the Pinal County Hospital for x-rays, but died about eight hours after the injury, in the hospital.

Rev. S.B. Hannah, our prison chaplain, performed the services at the funeral.

Sincerely yours,

A.G. Falker
Warden

CHAPTER ONE – WELCOME TO THE WAKE

I've been singing Johnny Cash
"San Quentin you were living hell for me"

(San Quentin and Folsom being among the "resorts" where grandpa reclined.)

And singing Merle Haggard ("I turned twenty one in prison doing life without parole") imagining a cyber wake for Herbert. I especially liked the Grateful Deads homage to Merle.

The Dead,

Why, of course.

Most curious returning like this.

Claire and I have shared alternative lives of Herbert, otherwise known as:

Jim North

AKA Homer Bradford

AKA Herbert N. Baker

AKA William S. Carter

AKA William S. Lawrance

AKA Thomas S. Wentworth

AKA Thomas L. Wentworth

AKA Thomas B. Horan

AKA Homer Bradford Horan

From Claire:

"Well, I wish I had poetic gifts or could write good novels. I sure imagined a lot of good Herbert novels. I used to kind of like the idea that he escaped from Alcatraz and swam through shark infested waters. When we lived in San Francisco there were some escapes like that... made an impression on me. I was also interested in the impossible idea that Herbert Nichols was Herbert Hill and so dad's surrogate dad was his real dad...."

Myself, I dreamt he was a psych patient in a facility in Reno. When I awoke, I called them, but they wouldn't tell me anything. I pleaded as one nurse to another, "But you don't understand! This is my grandfather!"

The sentimentality card didn't fly.

I take these alternative Herberts to be very real and its clear that he had many selves.

What did Walt Whitman say, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain *multitudes* "

I even suggested to Claire we gather an anthology from we grandchildren – THE MULTIPLE LIVES OF HERBERT HOMER WILLIAM THOMAS JIM BRADFORD S. L. B. NORTH WENTWORTH HORAN CARTER LAWRENCE HILL.

This being said, as the night is long and the wake is keeping me awake, I consulted the I Ching after meditating today.

The context?

Well – in the African tradition in which I practice medicine it is said that the ancestors, the *midzimu*, inspire our bodies, and so the deep work of both initiation and healing is involved with the healing of the ancestors. With those who have passed I look into how they are doing, see if they are troubled and if there is anything I might do to assist.

Regarding MR ALIAS, the I Ching was astonishing.

He is just fine.

Hexagram 24 Returning. Unchanging.

An unchanging hexagram is fairly stable – no “changing lines” through which a hexagram transforms into another.

(A passing note – The I Ching was dad's oracle as it was his mentor C.G. Jung.)

A couple of quotes from my friend Stephen Karchers impeccable translation, Total I Ching and his I Ching: The Symbolic Life:

“It is emergence from death and the underworld Ghost River, the incessant Return

of life and spirit. It suggests the souls that return and the rituals to call them. Return is the 'coming and going' on the river of time and the flow of symbols that unfold the Way.

"Return is one of the fundamental motifs in all the myths and philosophies of the I Ching, the return to and of the Way and the eternal return of all things. It is the return of the spirit after the first funeral and the stripping away of the old.

"This is a Realizing Figure, a Nuclear or Core Theme of Change. It is part of a Zone of Radical Transformation"

This is not the portrait of a troubled soul.

Don't know the rites of purification on the other side – MR ALIAS was no saint – but he found his way through.

CHAPTER TWO – A LITTLE MORE CONTEXT

A little more context here before I write on the afterlife of Dads dad.

Long ago I was a student of Lama Sogyal Rinpoche and studied the bardo teachings. Whatever I say here will simplify obscenely so I ll be most brief. Bar do is Tibetan for "in between" and the Tibetan Book of the Dead speaks in detail the luminosity and confusion a soul faces after shedding the body. After death is a remarkable opportunity to be liberated.

Dad, of course, was quite familiar with the Book of the Dead and we talked of it the last year of his life. He also had the parallel book, Budes translation of The Egyptian Book of the Dead, in his library.

I studied with Sogyal while I was beginning my work with dying people. Later, as a nurse, it was my honor to do bardo teaching to the recently deceased. Also, in my initiation, the rites of death – the descent and return from the place of the ancestors – has been the essential way of transformation and my training as a practitioner of tribal medicine.

When I initiate others with Mandaza Kandemwa passing through the gates of death is fundamental.

And so – Herberts passage!

CHAPTER THREE: THE LAST EIGHT HOURS

What was the spiritual event in Herberts soul those eight hours from the fall to when he expired?

Primary hexagram is Ghost River, Repeating the Gorge.

“Kan, Ghost River, is the sacrificial pit at the Earth Altar and the underworld waters that flow beneath it. Its symbols are rushing water, holes, pits and snares, tombs and graves, prisons and the Yellow Springs, the deep center where the dead live... It represents a critical moment that requires courage and determination in face of the great fear engendered by the ghost world, a time to confront and dissolve obstacles, venture, fall and move on. Immediate future: an unending series of challenges.

“Take the risk without holding back. Conquer your fear. Accustom yourself to danger. This is a critical point that could trap you and become a grave. Summon your energy and concentration and confront the challenge. Face the danger, take the plunge.”

(Deenas book, Entering the Ghost River is about the Ghost River we all entered into with September 11th. We were in Zimbabwe at that time so

the Ghost River the initiates were in was continuous with the immersion of the world. The Ghost River hexagram *is* bardo and it is relentless.)

The Fourth and Sixth changing lines are noteworthy because they both invoke prison. Indeed, when I was sharing with my friend Steve Lovold (who had been a prisoner for a year in the California Mens Colony) he said, "Well he did escape prison, didn't he?"

(My friend Lamont Green, sixteen years "down," escaped prison in another way. He made prison the place where he discovered the meaning of freedom.)

Yes.

He did.

Herbert was imprisoned in his life.

Fourth line:

"This is a border between the strong and the supple. The Pit as a prison. You are trapped and cut off and cut off, don't fight it. Lay out an offering to the hidden spirits. Give of yourself.... You are right on the border. The liminal place where events emerge. This is the story of the story of a Queen of Xia. Pregnant with the heir, imprisoned in a pit when her husband was killed in an insurrection. She escaped through the through the window in the pit with the aide of allies.

Sixth line:

"If you go on as you are you will be bound, judged and imprisoned. Change now! Still you compulsions. Disperse the bad blood and then you can come forth. Do not stay in mourning for the past. Your melancholy and pain will trap and cut you off. It is time to discipline the demon country within you. Offer the old in sacrifice and there will be excellent results."

(I was chatting with Herbert this afternoon, and told him the Greek myth of Bellerophon.

Bellerophon was much a legend in his own mind and believed he was an undefeatable warrior. He was riding his winged horse Pegasus when

Pegasus' haunches were bit by a gadfly and he was thrown from the sky and died.

I remember well my Bellerophon moment.

I was eighteen and at the top of a pine tree in the Santa Cruz mountains. Quite intoxicated with Carlos Casteneda and the belief that I'd be spiritually free forever if I merely transcended the fear of death.

I leapt from the top of one pine tree toward the top of another - and fell eighty five feet.

In retrospect I imagine it was Herbert who took my body or perhaps I was merely taken by the common fantasy of undefeatability we shared in common.

I could easily have died his death then.

God has since been most generous with teaching me about the frailty of the flesh.)

CHAPTER FOUR: BREAKING OUT TO FREEDOM

What was Herberts' pilgrimage from breaking out of the prison of his body to RETURNING?

Primary hexagram FLOURISHING/ RISING SUN

(Here we segue to the common understanding of the Tibetan and the Egyptian books of the dead.

When I speak to corpses about finding their way to freedom I say, "You will see bright lights and dull lights. The brightness might frighten you at first but move toward it. The dull light might seem safer but it is a trap. The brightness will burn away old memories and old ways of being.

In the Egyptian book of the day the moment of spiritual liberation is COMING FORTH BY DAY: SUNRISE.

After death one is in the judgement hall of Maat where ones soul is weighed against the feather of truth. The soul is purified by facing ones true story, and is freed to the measure one was real.

As with Herbert.

(Two changing lines)

Relating hexagram: FIELD
FLOURISHING is also the “energy” in this reading.

FLOURISHING:

“The root of *jin*, flourishing, is the spirit that protects and animates the sun. At the rising of the sun, everything on earth is pushed into sprouting. Flourishing is the inner ground and drive that enables you to undertake the difficult journey that leads to deliverance.

Fourth changing line:

“Advancing like a bushy tailed mouse. Trial: adversity, hungry souls and angry ghosts.
Not an appropriate situation. Though you have the strength to advance you are being timid, furtive and scattered. As you prosper, greedy people and bad memories attack you. Make a bold move. You know what is right. Strip away your old ideas.

Sixth changing line:

“Flourishing with lowered horns. A Rising Sun. You can control the situation by direct action. Hold fast and deal with your troubles first. You have to confront the negative images you have of thing based on past experiences. This is difficult but it opens the way.
Gather energy in order to respond when the call comes. Inner stripping leads to a breakthrough.
You are escaping from an impossible situation. An unconscious force is biting through to help you. These comings and goings release bound energy. Prepare for a decisive new move.
This means losing the way and becoming trapped for three years._The Pit as a snare. If you go on like this , you will commit a serious a serious

transgression. You will be bound and judged and imprisoned. Change now or be trapped.”

Change now or be trapped

And so he did. The moment of decision emphatically presented itself and the oracles are startlingly aligned with what was his situation or fate of his soul. They suggest that he left to change, that he chose freedom.

May this be true.