

Journeys

There was fog everywhere. Thick, impenetrable. Everywhere I looked, that was all I saw . That and a really long line of people. The line snaked in front of me in an endless progression. In back I couldn't even see all the people.

"Am I healed? Is the virus gone?" I thought. The people nearest me, some in front and several in back, turned and looked at me. A couple smiled. Then I heard the voices, "Did you expect it to be this beautiful?" "Oh yes! Now I get to see Him!"

There were other voices that sounded very confused. "What are you talking about? Where are we? What about my investments?"

I looked around thinking there would be people handling the crowd. I saw a figure in the far distance standing by a very large gate, holding a clipboard. So this had to be a final check before allowing us to leave. Good! I did not want to infect anyone with this horrid disease. I didn't mind waiting so decided to stay put in line.

Suddenly figures appeared, Robin Williams, Michale Jackson, Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendricks, and many others. They started performing. I expected a cacophony, yet only heard Michale singing one of my favorite songs. Normally I would have left the line to watch him, but I didn't want to lose my place. Numerous bodies drifted toward the performers, there were only a few who left in front of me, but several left behind me. They disappeared into the fog, the performers departed, the people who had left the line didn't not reappear. I felt just a small twinge of discomfort, then shrugged it off. I was getting closer to the person at the gate, and that's all that mattered. Though I didn't remember walking forward, I was soon in front of the gatekeeper.

"Name?" I said it, the gatekeeper consulted a list on the clipboard. "You're a non-believer. I will have to get you a guide." I was moved, without being touched to the left of the gatekeeper, and then the fog seemed to swallow up the gate, and the person who was keeping me from

leaving.

“ Hello, I'm called Ray-sa.” A woman stood near me, as I had not seen her approach, I was a bit nervous. There was something about her, I couldn't put my finger on it. She was intrinsically beautiful . As I puzzled about it, her face and overall aspect seemed to change. Before her aspect was as close to divine I could ever believe, now she seemed ordinary. Then her aspect began to change again, and an African-American man much taller than I was standing before me. Then in quick progression, he became Asian, Muslim, A Tibeta Monk, A female teacher, a lady astronaut, an Female Asian wrestler. Then she became what I assumed was a Jewish elderly woman. Without saying anything to me, yet looking me right in the eye. She paused. Scrunched her brow and assumed the aspect of the ordinary woman. Yet on the edge of my vision if I didn't turn my head as I looked at her, the edges of her outline continued to change color.

“So, to you, this will be your first time. Your first journey?”

“First time for what? Journey? Where am I going? Where did I go?” I was not sure what was going on.

She smiled, “Can I ask you where you think you are?”

“Some facility where the victims of the virus were put to keep the public safe from us.”

“What is your last memory?”

“ I was in the Hospital, I was very sick with the virus, that COVID-19 thing. The ICU was overwhelmed, there weren't enough ventilators, there was chaos. Then I was here, so I must have been cured.”

She looked more serious, “Would there be another conclusion?”

I shook my shoulders, “Like what?”

She reached out and took my hand. “Could you have died?”

The idea neither frightened nor startled me. As the thought became real to me, I felt calm and

completely accepting.

“So I’m dead?” I wanted to be totally sure.

“Yes. You died.”

“Where am I? What happens now?”

“You are at, what some would call the gate of Heaven.” She paused, letting that statement sink in. “As for what happens now, that will be up to you.” I felt confused.

“Up to me? What do I need to do? Pass a test? Take up a religion? Not that I will.” I was sure about the last. She let go of my hands and gestured to a medium sized metal table, the kind every garden place sold. Two metal chairs were on each side of it. There was an umbrella shading the table, and chairs. None of these items had any color of any kind. It all blended in with the fog. I moved to one of the chairs, I was thinking how much I would have liked to have a pad on the chair, and one appeared. Once I sat, she tilted her head, changed her aspect to look like a man, with glasses, then asked; “Are you needing anything else?” I grinned, normally I would have asked for an ice cold lemonade, to help with the heat. But I wasn’t thirsty, hungry, hot, cold, tired, sore. I didn’t know what I felt, I wasn’t even sure I had many feelings left. So I said; “No Thanks.” The guide sat in the other chair, remaining a man, yet the skin changed and he looked possibly Mexican.

He said, “Everyone who comes to this place has a different thought as to how it is supposed to look, and what they are going to do here.” The Guide gestured, and when I looked I could see a beautiful place that defied description, people walked around in what I thought might be togas, but some had no clothes at all. There were people flying, running in the air, and dancing. The Guide gestured and the scene vanished. Stunned, I said, “Where was that?” He smiled, “It is the section for people who think that this is what Heaven is. Another gesture, and everyone was eating. The whole place was made of food, none of the people were obese, yet there was something uncomfortable about it. The scene changed and alcohol was running out

of the fountains; change again and drugs were everywhere. I saw places filled with lakes, ponds, and an abundance of fish. Dog parks, where the dogs cared for the people. Cat palaces where cat's controlled the people. I saw a place filled with soft fabrics is every color of the rainbow, where people were having sex constantly. The performers came again, this time I heard Janis, again not feeling any desire to get closer. I couldn't see the line of people, but knew that some were leaving to go to these artists. I was about to ask, but the guide now in the appearance of a very elderly Asian man said, "When one uses a item, be it drugs, food, alcohol, or even this virus to take their life, they have committed suicide. They go to a level where they must work out the damage they have done."

"How do they work it out?"

Instead of telling me, he took me to someplace that looked like a business, I saw other buildings out the window. People dressed in suits were either at desks, or bustling about. Behind many of these people were what I would have once classified as ghosts. No one seemed to see them, often walking right through them. The ghosts were saying, things like; "I'm so sorry. I made a huge mistake. What I did was wrong." None of the people heard them. Then we were at a house, a woman was yelling at a teenage girl. As her mom screamed at the girl I saw the girl was doing self mutating. Two of the spirits stood on each side of her saying; "You're such a wonderful girl, you've got so much to live for. Things will change. You are loved, treasured." The girl didn't seem to hear them, and I felt great sadness this close to her.

"Get me out of here!" I demanded, my guide smiled sadly, and whispered something to the girl. This she may not have heard, but you could tell what he said had touched her. The picture, or vision, or whatever it was faded, and we were back at the table. He had now become a woman dressed in a ochre sari, yet her skin was white.

"You considered suicide twice, but could not go through with it, this is why you hear and see the performers."

I was still feeling genuinely upset, and lashed out at her. “Well if you had to live with what I did you would want to kill yourself too!”

“Because of the person who hurt you?”

“Of course!”

“Yet in the life before this one you were the one who hurt them.”

I would have bristled, yet her words had a complete ring of truth. My anger vanished, there was no emotion left, or so I thought.

“So that’s all there is? Action, reaction, and result. Then start again?” I was empty.

She smiled in a gentle way, “Things do not have to be that way. First love who you are, then learn to accept the one who did the hurting, try your best to understand why they did what they did, and forgive their actions, then you can love who they were.”

“How do I do any of those things? Especially now that I’m dead?”

“While you wait for your turn to go back, try to find something to trust. Then work on growing that trust into love. That will bring you to people who can give you love, and in time you will be able to give that love to the one who hurt you.”

“Sounds as if that will take a lot of time.”

Her smile grew bigger. “You are in a place that is not on the same rules about time, and date as you were once. You will have plenty of opportunity to do this.”

“Isn’t there an easier, softer way to get this accomplished?”

“Of course, but you said you would never believe in anything or anyone. That is why you can not go through the gate. That is the entrance for people who believe in God.” Her aspect changed to a child, I wasn’t sure if it was a boy or girl, and though the body was shorter, somehow it was still able to pin me with it’s eye’s.

The child continued; “When you were young you did go to a church, and your faith was that of the pure child you were. But though there were many things that protected you from the hurt,

in time those things couldn't stop it. Because of the pain you had once caused it was your destiny to be hurt. You could say this was predetermined, however the others who cared for you as a child could have removed you from the one who was causing the pain. So there were a lot of actions that were the result of past actions. Even this virus is from past actions."

"Is there something the people who are alive can do?"

"They are doing it, but I know things would change faster if all would pray for everyone in the world. Not just their friends and family, or people they know. ". The child shrugged, and now a black dwarf sat across from me. "However that matters little now, as you are dead,". The dwarf said.

I sat for a while in silence, my guide sat with me. I thought about all the things that I had heard, then said, " so if I again believe in God, then learning to love the one who caused the pain will be easier and faster?" The dwarf nodded. Then added, "I will say that believing will not be easy, for many of your lives you have neglected God, and scorned anything to do with that thought."

I sensed a great letdown, a feeling of hopelessness; "So either way I'm going to have to work at this."

The woman in the ocher sari was back, "Fear not! This is not impossible. I will send you to someone who can help speed up the process here, and will continue to work with you once you get a body again."

I instantly felt courageous, and wanted to move with her to this person. I felt I would know them the minute I saw them. But something was still bothering me, so I asked, "Why were some of the Heavens I saw filled with the very things you listed cause people to die before they were supposed to?"

She looked very somber, "People spend their whole life acting in the right way, living by the so-called *Golden Rule*. They don't overeat, but wish they could. Do not overindulge in alcohol, but

deeply desire the effect. They protest drugs, but would love to get the high. There are even such people in the Heaven where sex is so constant, who spent their lives screatly wanting to know what it felt like to be in a physical incounter with someone of the same sex.”

Suddenly we were standing, she had become the first woman I had met, but was now in the body, and face of a man. This aspect of my guide was so divinely dazzling it was almost hard to look at. I tried my best. The angelic aspect got toned down, and still in an ochre outfit he moved along a wall, I had not seen till then. I followed. I had no feeling of time passing, yet I knew somehow it did. Our journey didn’t seem to go far, nor take long, then we got to a different place. My guide held out both his hands, I placed mine in his without hesitation.

“Close your eyes.” The voice speaking was neither male or female, and seemed to come from everywhere at once. I did as it said. My guide continued, “Picture your favorite place, or you can create whatever place would appeal to you the most.”

I opened my eyes, seeing only my guide I asked, “This will be my afterworld?” Even here I had an issue with saying Heaven. My guide didn’t mind, but nodded. “One final question, I know I wasn’t the only unbeliever here today. Where are the others like me?”

He pointed back the way we came. Now I saw people who had no color, they were almost exactly the same as the fog. They were at wisp desks, on vapor phones, cooking nebula meals, giving murky lectures to obscure students. I even saw a man sitting in a wheelchair which was sitting on a comet that zoomed around. Everywhere else I saw people sleeping, some in beds, some on couches, and some on the very fog itself. I looked back at the guide. “Am I the only one? The only non-believer who got this far?”

He shook his head, “Like you someone is praying for them, they get free from that place, but they also have to accept where they are. Many of them shut down when the guide with them mentions God, Heaven, or anything of a spiritual nature. So they need to stay in this

realm till they can be open enough to accept. Now is the point that we part..."

"But what about my afterworld?"

"Look behind you."

I turned around, there was a beautiful arched entrance. I saw flowers of every description the colors beyond anything that was on Earth. Smells so pure I couldn't take it all in. Beyond the entrance was a field of grass, with lavender throughout the field. A pathway leading from the gateway to open buildings painted white, with soft pads and couches. The buildings or gazebos had soft cloth drapes made of the finest silk. Near these stood several people on the right of the path, one turned and opened their arms to me, I ran into them.

© March 2020

2712 words