

AN ACCIDENTAL JOURNEY, THE SPIRITUAL PLANE AND A VERY LATE BREAKFAST

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I

On arriving home Wednesday around 9:30 PM, Molly received a call from her friend, Jasmin. Although she listened sympathetically to Molly's description of the horrors of her day's journey, neither of them realized how intensely it had affected Molly. Other subjects were introduced by both, leaving Molly feeling better but somewhat alone after they'd hung up. Molly knew then that there was more to her sojourn than she'd been able to share with Jasmin. Molly's luggage was scheduled to arrive Thursday and so, since she had no intention of unpacking her carry-on bag, she had no need to delay longer comforting herself with one of her drugs: TV. She watched for an hour, turning in about midnight. By then, although she was aware of an underlying sense of dissatisfaction, the exhausting strain caused by hours of unrelieved tension had combined with the hour of TV to produce a sufficient state of numbness.

Earlier that day, at the Charlotte airport, Christie had arranged the re-routing of Molly's baggage to La Guardia, where she was due to arrive at 8:30 PM, hours before the baggage. At Christie's suggestion, therefore, Molly spoke with Richard at La Guardia to arrange delivery of her baggage. (By the time she was speaking with Christie, around 6:00 PM, Molly was so mentally fatigued and foggy that she had begun to write down whatever she considered important, a step which later seemed to have an unforeseen benefit.)

At La Guardia, Richard informed Molly that her bag had already left her original destination and would indeed reach La Guardia by midnight. He said emphatically that it could not go out to her immediately, as she wanted, but would be delivered the following day, Thursday, before 10:00 or 11:00 AM. That, plus all the details in general required to obtain her baggage, seemed like just one more cruel twist delaying her reaching the point where handling details would finally end.

Molly had continued her note-taking on her 8½ by 11 tablet, which Richard noticed when Molly asked for his name. Later, finally home, asleep, Molly was startled in the middle of the night by the buzz of her doorbell, the caller identifying himself as "baggage." After Richard's denial that such prompt delivery was possible, she was shocked to receive it this soon. Perhaps the note-taking had helped. In any event, the night was not very restful, following a not-very-restful day.

The intense disappointment about the aborted trip, the strain of hours of uncertainty, the final details of seeing about her luggage and the interrupted sleep probably all played a role in the intense sadness Molly felt immediately upon awakening Thursday morning. She was aware of feeling unexpected dread at the thought of confronting her suitcase which she had placed-- thoughtlessly at the time but thankfully for the moment-- beyond her view from her position in bed. Molly knew she would not take care of the tasks awaiting her unless she first confronted the emotional pangs demanding her attention. She needed to talk to someone and made a call. Then another, as not all she needed to address had been covered in the first. Then she made a third. And still another, a fourth.

Each person with whom Molly spoke had listened attentively and with understanding. Her clarity had increased with each call. She had been aware from the beginning of the first call that much of her sadness was due to not arriving at her scheduled destination, a trip which she'd anticipated eagerly since making her plane reservations several months previously. One point of which she hadn't been aware, as she had waited patiently on Wednesday-- first, two and a half hours at her airport of origin, then, later, four hours at the Charlotte airport for her connecting flight-- was that the wait which had had been uncomfortable earlier in the day had become almost unendurable by the end of the day.

That is, for as long as Molly believed she would arrive at her destination-- a conference-- the tension felt tolerable. She hadn't known when the weather would permit the first leg of her flight to depart and had been able to tolerate that uncertainty, not knowing if she would make her connecting flight. She hadn't known-- if she missed that flight-- if she would be able to obtain a phone number of the person who had arranged a pick-up at the airport, to drive her the last thirty miles to the conference, and she had been able to tolerate that uncertainty. She had been able to tolerate the uncertainty of not knowing-- if she did obtain a number-- if she would actually reach that person and-- if she did-- if the person would be able to reach the pick-up driver before he or she left for Columbus.

All of that uncertainty had been tolerable, not too much more than a nasty nuisance until the point when Molly realized she would not be able to reach her destination, would not arrive at the conference, that she would have to return home. Once she realized that all this tension would ultimately have served no purpose, the endless waiting changed from annoying to almost unendurable. But... she hadn't noticed the change at the time. When she realized, at about 6:00 PM, that she would have to return home, on a 6:49 PM flight, her sole focus became arranging the return of her luggage and making that flight.

So, lying in bed Thursday morning, Molly saw-- for the first time-- how sad she had felt, without noticing, at the end of the previous day. She realized that this delayed reaction was compounding her sadness, her grieving, at the loss of her eagerly-awaited attendance at the conference. Although not aware of it when she first awakened, the delayed reaction compounding her grief was the source of the intense pain which had led her to make a call, and then another and another and still another as she attempted to deal with her feelings.

II

It was during the first call that Molly realized how painful Wednesday had become *after* the moment she realized she would not reach the conference and how unaware of that pain she had been at the time. She realized, too, during this call, that what she would need to do

Thursday, to manage the day, was divide her attention between her internal world and her external world, between her inner pain and the outer tasks-- unpacking and scheduling other activities-- both of which required and deserved attention. And so she gained from that call both clarity about why she felt so sad as well as understanding about how to treat herself compassionately-- to neither push too hard to take care of tasks, nor to assume she had to avoid them entirely in order to comfort herself emotionally. Another lesson in balance appeared to be that while the previous day had been a disaster, it had not, in fact, been a catastrophe. Still, Molly did not want to minimize the hurt she was experiencing. The balance lesson here, it seemed, was to see simultaneously that the experience was hurtful, that she needed and deserved comforting, even while recognizing that it was, nevertheless, not a catastrophe. "That is," Molly thought aloud, "I think that I need to neither minimize my pain nor exaggerate it; not all disasters are catastrophes even though some might be. Anyway," she continued, "it seems I need to appreciate the need for balance in handling today." Molly had the distinct impression that this was also an incredible lesson that went far beyond the day.

This recognition of the need for balance was the first lesson she received from the stressful ordeal, consistent with her belief that we all draw to ourselves each painful experience as something we need in our spiritual evolution. From seeing what she had gained from the experience, beyond what it had cost, Molly was feeling significantly better when the first person she called could talk no longer. They hung up, but soon Molly realized she needed to talk some more.

Despite the decrease from the earlier intensity of her pain, she suspected that balance was probably not the only lesson of the experience and wanted to explore further. In her next call, Molly wondered if this had been Universal Spirits (her term for a Higher Power, or 'U Spirit', as she shortened it) way of showing her that bad things happen to good people. She had been so happy in recent months that she wondered if U Spirit saw her as needing a reminder that sadness could still be a part of her life.

Molly wondered further, since she had also been feeling so empowered recently, if this experience had been a way for U Spirit to show her that there are powers far greater than hers-- that no matter how well she had planned the trip or executed the plan-- there was still a force that could stop her in her tracks. This seemed a highly unnecessary lesson, since, although she hadn't experienced much sadness lately and had experienced much happiness, she daily-- several times each morning-- offered prayers of gratitude. That is, she believed herself to be highly aware of the limitless power outside of herself that she considered Higher Power. Before having a chance to ponder this further, the second person she had called needed to get off the phone.

Still feeling unfinished, Molly made another call. She explored the possible meaning of the loss she was experiencing. Was this U Spirit's way of showing her-- despite all the new and wonderful people and experiences which were becoming part of her life-- that newness and expansion were not a major part of aging (she had recently embarked on what she saw as the final third of her life)? Was It (as she referred to U Spirit) showing her that loss was a part of aging despite the fact that it was not one she had encountered recently? That certainly seemed a reasonable way to understand another lesson of this painful experience. Perhaps it was important for her to be prepared for the advent of loss in her future, and what a wonderfully gentle way this would have been to help her to prepare. After all, she had lost

only a five-day experience, no health or material thing, nothing that would significantly affect her life. So it was, really, a very caring message, she thought. She realized that she was now seeing it as nurturing. The end of Molly's third call left her noticing that she was now feeling very much better, but still needing to talk.

During her fourth call, she reviewed the various lessons. With particular reference to the lesson regarding the need for balance and that regarding loss, Molly contemplated the possibility that U Spirit saw her as needing these lessons more than she needed the trip to the conference. From those new awarenesses and from having gained clarity about her sadness by sharing it with people who had been open to it, Molly could barely believe that she was actually feeling good when her fourth phone conversation ended.

After getting off the phone and feeling so much better due to the attention she had given her feelings, as well as the attention she had received in the process, she realized how helpful all of these people had been. Molly realized further what a gift from U Spirit it was that she had been able to contact such wonderfully helpful people. So Molly offered a prayer of gratitude, saying she believed that each of these people were angels for her through which U Spirit had sent her help. Then, she mused, "Maybe all people who helped me were actually emissaries from It to me." That seemed eminently reasonable and left her instantly full of even more gratitude for the many people who had helped her over the years as well as recently.

Then Molly found herself reflecting, "Maybe even people who hurt me were sent by U Spirit to help me, just in a different way." Although Molly was not as certain of the validity of this, and in part she didn't really like the idea, another part of her thought it, too, seemed reasonable. "That," she thought, "would mean that all people who cross my path are actually there to further my growth and spiritual evolution, at least if I am open to that." That not only seemed reasonable; it felt comforting at the same time. Now Molly wasn't just feeling better; she was wondering if maybe she had gained more than she had lost from the experience.

She decided then to make another, brief call to a friend, Pam, in part to let Pam know that she hadn't made it to the conference but mainly to share what Molly was by now viewing as considerable gifts, valuable new awarenesses. After briefly discussing Pam's surprise and summarizing the nightmare tale of Molly's previous day, Molly was able to describe the evolution in her perception of the experience, from painful to incredibly worthwhile. Pam then asked-- as she knew of Molly's wish to write-- if Molly was going to write about it. As soon as Pam asked the question, Molly knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that that was the true gift of her experience: the opportunity to realize her dream of writing, in this case about the evolution of an experience. This one, which had at first presented pain so intense that Molly had needed to spend several hours processing it, had turned into one that was giving her intense pleasure, the pain having receded to the mildest tinge of disappointment.

Pam pointed out how fresh the experience was, thus how accessible for Molly to capture in words. Once again Molly experienced that certainty of knowing that she'd had a moment ago when Pam first mentioned writing. Of course! Pam was right, absolutely right. Not only was Molly having a spiritual experience and spiritual lessons to write about; in addition she had no plans for four days, having let all her friends know she would be out of town for that period. Her car was garaged for a week, her mail was being picked up, and "If I play my

cards right," she thought, "I not only have the greatest subject to write about; I have the time to do it!" Molly was elated.

She replied, "I hadn't even thought of writing about it but I know without a doubt that that is exactly what I want to do." Molly added, "Now I understand why my trip was taken from me, why U Spirit presented me this apparent loss. Far from being a loss, I can now see it for what it is, in reality: a gift."

III

After they got off the phone, Molly was not only no longer sad, she was very happy. She loved to write, had often received valuable lessons from painful experiences and had never once written down the totality of the evolution from painful experience to valuable gift. Now she had the chance to do that! She was thrilled and a bit awed. "Now that I have this chance, will I really do it?" she wondered. "Will I really use the time I now have to do what I believe with all my heart is exactly what I want to do and right now, this minute, have the opportunity to do?" Molly believed she would; she could not believe she could possibly let anything stop her.

Finally Molly felt totally ready to face the day and her tasks, including the suitcase. That didn't mean she would unpack it. In one of her last phone conversations she'd realized that if she wasn't going to allow all the visible work in the house screaming for her attention to divert her from her chosen path, she would have to make a list of the bare minimum of work she could attend to in order to make sure she got to the computer to write. Unpacking did not seem a high priority, but no longer was the reason for deferring it the reminder of unbearable pain which only a short time earlier had been associated with seeing the suitcase.

As Molly got up and moving, anticipating breakfast, a shower, dressing, then making her list and getting to the computer, another seductive possible lesson seemed to be inching its way forward from the edges of her mind. She paused, sitting down on her desk chair to pursue it. Related to her awareness of a few minutes ago-- the possibility that even people who hurt her were put in her path by U Spirit to provide her with some necessary lesson-- she began to think of some specific people whose behavior had hurt her a short time earlier. She wondered if their behavior had been meant to hurt her, regardless of whether or not the hurtfulness of their earlier decision had been intentional.

The way they had delayed informing her of that decision and the totally misleading way they had worded it-- so she had been unable to see the impact of their words when she finally was "informed"-- clearly suggested their awareness of the humiliating way in which they had treated her. Yet, powerless as she'd been-- despite exhaustive effort-- to change the situation, that very powerlessness had led her to leave, to make a major change in her life which happened to have been made at the precisely right time to do it. So regardless of their hurtful treatment, hadn't they, in fact, ultimately helped her, despite their having had neither awareness nor intention to do so? Since the answer, whether Molly liked it or not - and she did not - was most certainly 'yes', "what," she wondered, "did this say about them-- about people whose behavior had been mean?"

What it said, came the answer, was that they had done exactly what they had needed to do, as they saw it. "But", Molly protested, "if they were in denial of other options, options

which would have been more humane or been a more humane way of handling the option they chose - wouldn't this mean they had not really 'needed' to do what they'd done? " Molly realized then that-- if they had, indeed, been in denial of other options-- they must have needed to be in denial. "And," she couldn't help reasoning, "if they needed to be in denial of other options, did they in fact truly 'have' other options?... If they needed not to be aware of other options, then they didn't in fact actually have any-- which means they had, in fact, done exactly what they needed to do." Molly, reluctantly, very reluctantly, contemplated this new way of looking at the perpetrators of her not-so-long-ago mistreatment.

This way was correct, she finally concluded with a sigh. "So," her thoughts persisted, "if people who have treated me hurtfully were only doing what they needed to do, maybe everyone does what they need to do given where they are on their spiritual path." As soon as that awareness presented itself, she knew instantly that she had grasped another truth, one that, for Molly, was momentous.

For several decades, a major goal for Molly had been to become a compassionate person. She saw that she had just now received a lesson that provided a perspective critical to her becoming such a person, if she could fully incorporate the lesson. Restating it, she reflected: everyone does what they need to do at the point where they are on their spiritual path. If they did hurtful things-- as she now saw it-- whether or not they acted with intent, whether or not they acted with awareness, those were the things they *needed* to do. "I could hold them responsible for their actions, but not blame them," she thought, "since blame, for me, would apply only to taking a hurtful action for no reason, and if I hold to the lesson I just received, there is really never any action taken for *no* reason."

This seemed to Molly to be a substantive basis for having compassion, a rationale, as it were, for compassion for all, including the meanest. "If I could just incorporate it in my heart and mind," she thought, "it would exist beyond just this moment, just this experience; it would become a fact of my life." While she knew she wasn't there yet, she was elated to have now this more substantive rationale for what she had been drawn to for so long simply because it "felt right."

That, she concluded, was unquestionably the culmination of the entire experience, the point to which this morning's-- and yesterday's-- events had inexorably been leading. She knew that she had received a major, incredible boost in her evolution to becoming a compassionate being, compassionate, that is, even to those who hurt her. Compassion toward anyone else is easier, she knew well.

Molly was incredulous: what a journey. Bedroom to airports back to bedroom had apparently been mere preparation. The unanticipated but real traveling seemed to have taken place without moving her body. She realized she was very happy, amazed that she was-- within scant hours of feeling miserable-- but happy nonetheless. Now, she knew with certainty, she was really ready to move physically, which she did; she rose and headed for the kitchen and a very late breakfast. Four days later she did finish writing about her experience and felt very pleased... very pleased and also still a bit incredulous.

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