



*I would rather live in a world
Where my life is surrounded by mystery
Than live in a world so small
That my mind could comprehend it.*

— HENRY EMERSON FOSDICK

The Other Side of the Veil



Sunday morning more than lived up to the promise of its namesake, the sky a perfect sapphire frame for the brilliance of the sun. Mountains and trees were defined with crystal clarity. The rocks seemed alive, the early morning rays transmuting them into dazzling reflectors of light, as the two returned for their last visit to Joshua Tree.

“Want to talk about it?” Zeus asked.

“Not really. There’s not much to say.”

“Anyway, I’m glad you decided to return.”

“For a while it was touch and go,” Larry said. “I probably wouldn’t have had a chance of returning if I hadn’t heard my own voice calling me back. I had a vague sense of being in two places at the same time, separated by layers and layers of Consciousness yet connected by a long silver thread. The curious part of being in the Void isn’t the stillness or the incredible sense of peace. It’s more than that. There’s a completeness, a perfection so absolute that it’s virtually impossible to formulate thought or intent. I cannot imagine, given the totality of All That Is, whatever prompted the Creation to seek more. I know trying to explain it doesn’t make sense. Words somehow aren’t enough.”

“Funny, that,” Zeus commented. “How people love words! How they delight in rearranging the letters to symbolize thought,

believing they know anything at all. Kinda' reminds me of a wonderful story."

Larry laughed. Everything reminded Zeus of a story. "Go for it, O great Doggie-San."

"Well, since you insist," Zeus said. "This story takes place thousands of years ago, before the destruction of the last temple in Jerusalem. It was on Yom Kippur, the most sacred day of the Jewish year, when the high priest entered the holy of holies and communed directly with his God. During this particular session with the Almighty, he prayed for divine guidance, for peace among the tribes, for forgiveness on behalf of all humankind for any sins committed during the previous year. He entreated with his heart, pleaded with his mind, and petitioned with all the fervor his soul could muster.

"The following day, in the privacy of his rooms, he thought about the eloquence of his prayer and once again reached to God. 'Please tell me, Ha-Shem, was my prayer well received?'

"'Yes,' came the answer, 'it was.'

"'And was it not the finest prayer you heard?' the rabbi asked.

"'No, my child it was not. Another in your synagogue delivered a prayer that moved me even more.'

"The rabbi was shocked. How was that possible? 'Who,' he asked, 'spoke a prayer more perfect than mine?'

"'Kefa,' came the reply.

"'But how is that possible?' the rabbi exclaimed. 'Kefa is the janitor. He keeps the synagogue clean and runs errands. He knows nothing of prayer.'

"'Yes, this is true. But Kefa knows he knows nothing of prayer, so when he wished to speak to me he simply said, 'Dear God, I am a simple man who knows nothing save that I love you. I do not know the proper prayers and dearly do not wish to

offend you. So instead of speaking words, I will recite the alphabet. Please rearrange the letters in whatever manner pleases you most.’

“If you offered this option to God,” Zeus asked Larry, “do you think he would be able to rearrange the letters to fully describe your experience?”

Larry spoke with a new voice neither of them had heard before. “What a loaded question! First of all, it implies that I agree there is an entity called God existing separately from humans. Second, it suggests that this God, who has permitted Free Will to be the driving force behind Creation’s infinite diversity, would actually entertain dialogue that could abrogate this precious gift. It’s a nice story, but I have trouble with the concept of relegating the Great Unknowable Mystery to the confines of an anthropomorphic pronoun like ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘it.’ Somehow, even trying to name God seems blasphemous.”

Larry found his voice growing surprisingly intense. “How do you rationalize making an object-noun of God when you claim that the I AM THAT I AM is no less than the infinite sum total of the unfolding Creation? In fact, wasn’t it you who intimated that separating humankind from God is the fatal flaw in the premise upon which Western religion is built?”

“Whoa there, buddy!” Zeus responded. “Interesting thought, but don’t lay that one on my doorstep. I don’t recall ever saying such a thing. But while you’re on a roll, go for it. I’d like to hear more of your take on Western religion.”

Larry looked puzzled. He was certain he had heard these ideas. If not from Zeus, then who? Why were new thoughts flooding his mind like a torrent unleashed by a broken dam? Where was this new voice in him coming from?

“That’s an easy one,” Zeus chided, eavesdropping on Larry’s train of thought. “Change the point from which you

view and you change what you see. The trouble with most people down here is they want everything they see to conform to the point from which they view, which—if you ask me—is a little ass about face.”

“Thanks,” Larry said. “I guess we both have to get used to the new me. What a trip! You’re right, by the way—in case you need my validation—it’s the unwillingness to let go that’s humanity’s main stumbling block. We get so entrenched in our beliefs, we’d rather defend and die than move past dogma and live.

“I suppose that’s what’s at the heart of my beef about religion. Anyone would admit there’s a lot of good in scripture. However, that doesn’t justify it as the foundation for such a huge building. Imagine what would happen if the underlying base of a skyscraper was only 98 percent. We’d get the same heap of conceptual rubble we find today all over the planet. There’s no question that belief in the separation—or the fall—of humanity from God *is* the driving force that fosters blind adherence to religion. Help me out here, if you don’t mind—I’ll have to schedule memorizing the Bible for my next life. It’s the part about wolves looking like sheep and trees growing bitter fruit.”

Zeus laughed. “Be happy to, good buddy. You are no doubt referring to Matthew 7:15–20:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

“Damn you’re good!” Larry exclaimed. “Is there anything you don’t know?”

“Just a parlor trick,” Zeus said. “Any kid will soon be able to do it, and—if I may paraphrase—greater works than these shall they do when they awoken to their true natures.”

“That quote is exactly what I was trying to remember,” Larry said. “Just consider the fruits that the collective trees of religion have borne. Throughout history, humankind has evoked the many names of God to rape and pillage, kill and maim, subjugate and ravage—generation after generation drowning in their own blood.”

Larry’s voice reached a pontifical pitch. “Read any mainstream newspaper, listen to any newscast—the overwhelming recurring theme deals with the evil fruit of the tree of belief: terrorists, massacres, mothers killing children, husbands killing wives, children killing classmates, peasants with chain saws killing forests, toxic runoffs killing lakes and oceans, multinational corporations killing smaller competitors. Now read the sacred texts. Aren’t they full of words like “battle,” “kill,” “judgment,” “hatred,” “revenge,” “fear,” “jealousy”? Don’t the ancient myths speak of wars and enslavement, good versus evil, black versus white, my God versus yours? They have elevated separation to an art form.”

“Quite an indictment,” said Zeus. “Sounds like you’re fixin’ to butt horns with the whole world. What would you say to those who claim none of the writings are to be taken literally, that they are merely metaphors, stories rich with inner meaning?”

“To them I would say,” responded Larry, not losing his stride for a moment, “then so is the alphabet a metaphor, containing within its bosom answers to all the challenges your mind can frame. We’ve already seen how a myth can be shaped to validate whatever conclusion you’re backing. What I’m questioning is the

assumed authority of the written word. How does one argue when ‘God’ speaks? If the entire Universe is God, then any voice, any event, any thought is an aspect of that God. When I have a thought, it comes from God. When I speak, it is God speaking. When I see you, or a tree or the sky, I see God. If I truly *see* this and know it with all my heart and soul, then no one need ever fear me, for I can do no harm.”

This last phrase poured out of Larry with a vehemence that took his own breath away. He was beginning to revel in his new voice—part of him imagining himself preaching from a soapbox in London’s Hyde Park. In his mind’s eye, he envisioned throngs of people hanging onto each syllable, each transformative concept triggering waves of epiphany.

Zeus could only chuckle. “Ain’t nothing more of a pain in the butt than a born-again believer.”

But if Larry heard the remark, it had no dampening effect on his discourse. He was on a roll. “Yet the so-called holy texts beseech believers to kill in the name of their God. In some passages, God promises revenge and retribution upon the believers’ enemies. This cannot be the same God I know. No part of me feels compelled to fear God. Why should I prostrate before God’s altar when I worship him with my entire life? Every beat of my heart, every breath I take, every thought, every word and deed is begotten in the name of God, for God.

“Every bird, every tree, every flower is His prophet. How words pale to insignificance in the face of *their* glory! Why live in the shadow of interpretation when the sun illuminates every atom of my being? Must I listen to the sounds of yesterday’s trumpets when each moment the celestial symphony resonates anew in my own Consciousness?

“I say, forget the wisdom of the past. If you must quote, then quote from the depths of your own heart. If when you look into

that sacred space you find nothing, then remain silent. In that silence you will make room for the Great Mystery to arrive. If your heart is already filled with preconceived belief, then it will surely pass you by.”

“Very impressive!” Zeus said. “That must have been one helluva trip into the cosmos you took last night. I’d like to package some of your passion and sprinkle it all over this little planet. It’d sure make our job a lot easier. But, if you don’t mind a suggestion, you might want to lighten up a bit and give folks some space to maneuver.

“Getting back to my question, I know language can’t explain your journey into the Void. But if you put aside your supposition that God doesn’t use words to talk to us mortal beings—supposing, for the sake of argument, he could—would he be able to rearrange the letters of the alphabet to fully describe your experience, as he did for Kefa’s prayer?”

“Okay, okay,” Larry responded. “I get the message.” The fervor in Larry’s voice began to ebb. “If I allow that God is a noun and imbue him with the three O’s—omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience—as all true believers do, then by definition he can do anything, make silk purses out of sows’ ears, construct skyscrapers out of dental floss. After all, he *is* God! So I guess he would have the words to explain the nature of exploding Consciousness—at least to himself.”

“Clever answer. You’re suggesting that even if he could stuff your indescribable, mystical adventure into Never-Never Land through the strainer’s twenty-six holes, who else could possibly understand?

“Intellectuals revere the mind,” Zeus continued. “Their quest to understand in terms they already accept keeps them locked within the prison of reason, able to comprehend and accept only what will pass through the twenty-six holes. They

would rather measure, analyze, and hypothesize about the properties of water than take one sip. When it comes to love, would you rather be the anthropologist writing volumes about how various indigenous tribes have practiced it throughout history or the one having the ecstatic experience? Or consider the different perspectives of Schrödinger’s hypothetical pussycat and the scientist who’s wondering how it’s doing.”

“*What? What? . . . What? What?*” The invisible bird voiced Larry’s confusion.

“Erwin Schrödinger. You know, the Viennese physicist who shared the 1933 Nobel prize with Paul Dirac for his contribution to the development of quantum mechanics. It seems both he and Einstein were arguing against the premise that the wave and particle properties of subatomic bits are complementary. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, on the other hand, proposes that the more precisely a particle’s position is determined, the less precisely its momentum is known in this instant, and vice versa. In other words, you cannot know the position and the momentum of a particle simultaneously because when you measure one, you randomize the other. It is this uncertainty that lies at the heart of quantum mechanics as well as the rest of the Universe beyond the illusion’s domain.

“The mere thought that Creation could be infused with a large dose of probability, rather than the certainty of a conscious Creator, drove poor Schrödinger absolutely batty—or in his case, catty! He posited his famous cat paradox to ridicule the whole affair. In case you want to actually carry out this imaginary experiment—which I highly discourage—here are the ingredients you’ll need: one cat, one sturdy box, one radioactive atom, one bottle of poisonous gas—cyanide will do just fine—one Geiger counter, one hammer.

“First, set up the Geiger counter inside the box so it can monitor the state of the decaying atom. Second, put the hammer and bottle of poisonous gas inside the box and rig them up so the hammer, when it receives a signal from the Geiger counter, will break the bottle of gas. Third, insert the cat and the radioactive atom in the box. Fourth, close the box and wait.

“Radioactive particles have a certain probability of spontaneous nuclear decay—which means that over any period of time, the atom may or may not emit an alpha particle to trigger the Geiger detector to release the hammer to break the bottle to kill the cat.

“There’s no way to see inside the closed box, so no one knows whether the cat is alive or dead until the lid is opened. According to Schrödinger, the cat’s condition is simply a function of whether or not a radioactive decay has occurred. Case closed.

“However, Heisenberg, and other eminent physicists such as Niels Bohr, argued that since observation is needed to determine whether or not the atom has decayed, it’s this act of observation that determines the state of the cat. Case reopened.

“Common sense, championed by Schrödinger and Einstein, bucked heads with the quantum ‘heresy’ espoused by the Bohr camp. Bohr and Co. suggested a superposition of mutually exclusive, simultaneous realities in which the cat was both alive and dead. At one point, in total frustration with Einstein’s obstinance, Bohr reputedly made a profound remark to his learned colleague: ‘You are not thinking. You are merely being logical!’”

“What an amazing statement!” Larry said. “It’s a nice way of saying ‘you can’t get there from here.’ Bohr and Einstein were talking about two different though interpenetrating worlds and were trying to bridge the gap with language and logic. ‘Quantum

physics and the Newtonian model meet at dawn to settle a matter of honor.’ How was the dispute finally resolved?”

“It never was,” Zeus responded. “Punches and counter-punches go on to this day. The new physics, examining the realm of subatomic particles, trespassed into the realm of time/space. There physicists uncovered a new, unsettling paradoxical way of looking at things that usually raises more issues than it resolves. However, science has a powerful tool that lets it drill ten additional holes into the strainer. Using symbolic shorthand and the ten integers, 0 to 9, they have been able to develop mathematical expressions for the so-called world around the corner. It’s been said that mathematics—along with its analog, music—is truly the language of the gods. Some of these equations are brilliantly constructed representations of the mysterious world beyond the Veil. However, interpreting their full meaning has turned out to be a sticky wicket indeed.

“So the battle rages on. Apparently, in the view of quantum physicists, Schrödinger’s cat exists in two parallel, nonlocal universes simultaneously. In one, he is very much alive; in the other, quite dead. This curious indefinite system can be described mathematically as a superposition of all possibilities, and crazy as it seems, it can even be demonstrated experimentally. However, once such a system is observed or measured, it collapses into a definite state. The cat is either dead or alive.

“Some would go a step further and argue that matter doesn’t actually exist unless it’s observed. Following out this suggestion to its illogical conclusion can lead to some riotous sidebars. If matter requires an observer to exist, will God do? How about the conclusion that all matter must be conscious? Doesn’t that suggest that Schrödinger’s cat might have a say in determining its future?”