An Introduction to the Astonishing Journey of a Fool

Jesus said, ‘Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All.’—The Gospel According to Thomas

All of us come into this world infused with unique talents along with limitations. If you are observant, you can see how life has a way of unfolding around our individuality that complements these characteristics in a way that is beyond chance. Some of us can sense this while others cannot. This simply reduces down to the fact that certain people intuitively understand that life has purpose while many others still do not have the capability for this insight. The capacity for this awareness is directly related, if not married, to the inherent, if not inherited characteristics of an individual that has acquired the aptitude to question their own existence. Without this inquisitive and skeptical tendency, enlightenment will never be accomplished. Yet there is a paradox to all of it as many persons living today undoubtedly cloak themselves within these inquisitive and skeptical perspectives and still cannot come to any useful conclusions. What is essential to understand is that initiating the processes has little to do with knowing the answer in as much as it has to do with the courage to ask the questions and in seeking the answers which for many people, appear to be intentionally sequestered if not overtly suppressed. Most of us assume that this capacity has something to do with the individual mind and intellect. But how pray tell is this capacity to ask determined let alone developed?

In my experience, there have always been burning questions that appeared to reflexively emerge to the surface of my consciousness at times when all of the distractions in my life were silenced. They also appeared to be intimately connected to dreams, which is also a time when the ambient chaos of life is muted. As far back as I could recall I was confronted with visions within my childhood dreams that were repetitive, nonsensical, and downright frightening. Yet, there came a point before my adolescence where I developed some level of control over the visions, as I discovered that they could be willfully manipulated. This rapidly precipitated the end of these visions as I specifically recalled saying to myself, “These dreams are really nonsense. I will no longer allow them to remain an influence upon my life.” It was from this point that I determined that dreams were meaningless and that I would be far better off not contemplating them forever.

Yet the questions still remained, as I had endless discussions with friends, relatives, colleagues, and mentors throughout my formative years in regards to what the purpose of
this life experience is all about. This question, along with additional inquiries in regards to the concept of God, what happens when we die, divine justice, politics, war, economics, etc, inspired endless discussions that ensued without any durable or gratifying answers. It should also go without saying that a significantly greater amount of energy was invested within both formal and informal conventional academic endeavors with exactly the same results. These concerns, at least in-part, inspired me to go to medical school in the hope that if I became a student and studied the science of the human being, while witnessing life at the margins within the practice of the healing arts—then surely I would find my answers. Although a rational deduction, I completed medical school with far less of an understanding and capacity to answer these questions then before I started.

From the perspective of my medical school experience, the summation of my insight into the living human soul and its relationship to the universal world culminated with an incident that at the time I thought was quite peculiar. It occurred in my third year, while I was in my obstetrics and gynecology rotation. A close friend of mine was following a patient who was within the last stages of terminal ovarian cancer and it was apparent that she didn’t have much longer to live. This clearly warranted a high level of concern, and I specifically recall keeping her in my thoughts, as she was close to this transitional threshold; and even more so, because neither of us had ever witnessed anyone, let alone a patient, die. Shortly after being entrusted into our peripheral observations if not concerns (which is about all that any of us are capable of achieving at that level of training), she subsequently died in the early morning of a gray autumn day. Although I was not present to witness her passing, my friend was on call that night and was present at her bedside the moment that she took her final breath. This was the first time either of us had experienced death, yet I was only peripherally involved, so I was very curious to know what he observed within her final seconds. Eventually, I found him sitting alone in an alcove outside of our conference room before our morning report commenced, staring at a wall in what appeared to be a deep reflection. As I walked over and sat down next to him I eventually asked him about her death and what he observed. He then turned to me and looking straight into my eyes, earnestly stated that, “There is no God. There is just nothing.”

I recall at the time thinking that he might be playing some very bizarre joke on me because we had known each other for quite some time and I did not think that such a viewpoint could exist within his nature. The experience of medical school through the stress, boredom, revelry, and ungodly amounts of time invested in individual and collective studies with its ensuing reflections and contemplations can intimately draw individuals together, and within this friendship of two young men from the same geography, working class roots, and similar interests, we became fast friends. I was also aware of the fact that he was a product of a parochial education, and was at some point in his life, religious. Yet, he was now looking straight into my face proclaiming that there is no God. This all struck me as something that was so painfully predictable that it could have been a cliché right from the script of an exceedingly familiar movie; one of many that have been produced in different versions throughout many decades. An idealistic young man with hopes and beliefs, goes to medical school, and through the trials and tribulations of science and conventional medicine, comes to the astounding conclusion on
a cold gray autumn morning after witnessing his first death, that God does not exist. It would not be an exaggeration to state that many if not most of us find ourselves in the same conflicting predicament at the end of our medical education when belief is challenged if not shattered by what appears to be an ineffable mystery that no one can solve let alone escape from—as I am convinced that my friend saw no resurrection but just a terminal phase to the end of a common life. Of course, we have all been trained to contemplate this through the empirical means of our physical science, but could this experience have been any different if we were trained to consider it in a broader perspective? And if so, could we still uphold our vocation’s scientific and therapeutic principles?

In all fairness, my medical school was considered a very progressive institution and I cannot accurately express my profound gratitude for the magnanimous souls that inspired, tutored, and mentored us. To be sure, many of my mentors had developed profound spiritual capacities and insights, and without having their presence within my life as living examples of how to be a doctor, I would have accomplished nothing in my career of any significance. Yet our training was conventional and entrenched within the physical plane of experience. Ruled by evidence based medicine, individual insights, no matter how truthful they may be, have little significance to students that are being conditioned to follow an empirically based science. Furthermore, if the student possesses undeveloped intuitive capacities, then they may gain very little in regards to what it takes to become a truthful, comprehensive, and holistic healer. In retrospect, although my mentors did not directly speak to me in regards to the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of healing, this was still indirectly conveyed to me through their presence, compassionate actions, and deeds. Although not expressed in words, this is infused through the manifestation of love.

How essential it is for all of us within the vocation to understand this. In the past, those who were receptive to these sympathetic energies could intuitively learn from others what was not overtly taught within the curriculum. Today, our medical education is becoming far more reliant upon a system of standardization that is removing the element of human mentoring to a much greater level within their overall experience. Clearly, there are irresistible forces behind this transition, yet the undeniable fact remains, that our medical students are receiving less in the way of direct human contact, and more through emotionless and uninspiring virtual experiences. Perhaps this may be a more effective way in conveying logical facts to students, but without a counterbalance in the way of hands on sympathy if not overt love, the vocation, at least in the form of a healing art, is doomed to extinction…

Well, of course the end of this type of movie is always about redemption, because let’s face it—any other ending would be just too depressing. Perhaps we can start by acknowledging that this experience is not just some conventionally trite cliché, but is more of a profound universal human experience that should more accurately be referred to as archetypal. It has taken many years for this movie to evolve and it has still not reached its anticipated ending. We now see that the once young doctors went out into the world to practice their profession, steeped in the stress and demands of a conventional
modern life, wrestling with the ineffable if not empty fate of death that will eventually befall all of us, and still not knowing whether God really exists through the healing principles that their vocation habitually promotes. Throughout all of this, some of the doctors left medicine to pursue other careers, while a few fell victims to their own doubts and stress through mental illness and addictions. Undeniably, some became superficial and professionally callous, rotely following protocol and amassing wealth and power at the cost of suppressing the larger insoluble questions. Many strove to find balance and meaning but soon realized that this endeavor put them at odds with pervasive forces within their profession that have become impossible to ignore. Those who were fortunate enough to have completed medical school with their faith still intact generally fared better. Virtually all of them are now dealing with midlife issues which in itself can become the most powerful catalyst for meaning and change.

As for myself, something within my nature has always told me that this sentiment of “God does not exist.” is wrong. Although I had long ago concluded that the religion of my youth was as erroneous as my own dreams, I placed all of my faith in finding the answers to my questions within the science of our time, not realizing that this form of science has absolutely no place let alone consideration for God or the spirit. And if I had not already realized this through my medical school experience, over time, I was now beginning to see that my beloved science has really no interest in answering my questions, only ignoring or refuting them. What is even more disheartening is that by convention this is the form of science that my beloved vocation is forcefully aligning itself with. One cannot help feeling orphaned if not betrayed by all of this.

It is astounding to consider that in this day and age, the last vestige of materialism within the natural sciences remains entrenched within the science of conventional medicine. Virtually all of our other sciences through quantum observations, Heisenberg’s uncertainly, Higgs boson wave and particle phenomena, Superstring theory, torsion fields-zero point energy, Psi phenomena, etc., have overwhelmingly demonstrating to us that matter exists because of consciousness. Yet, the science of conventional medicine continues to promote archaic patterns of thought that hammers into its pupils concepts which dictate that consciousness exists because of matter. This viewpoint is in opposition to human experience and what science has truly conveyed to us. This traditional viewpoint of materialism is based completely upon conjecture and was indefensible even many decades ago.

Compelled then by my intuitions, I followed the lead of many others who have walked the same path and began again to search for my answers within sources that the champions of our modern conventional science disregard. What I found fascinating is that these sources all contain the same universal messages; the major theme being the marriage of human consciousness to physical and non-physical experience. Very quickly one recognizes the importance of these non-physical experiences which, for the most part, originate within mythological sources whose very foundations rest within the dreams of humanity. This led me to a disturbing conclusion, which was that I had intentionally shunned all awareness of my dreams to the point where I became literally
dreamless. It was only through my own pilgrimage initiated vicariously through the experience of other person’s dreams and visions, where I began to long for my own experiences. This did not happen immediately, but seemed to follow a cadence that was independent of my own will.

After what amounted to years of contemplation, I had to eventually conclude that the science that I had come to love and cherish is a dead end. Further, I conceded that if there were spiritual forces existing beyond the meridian of my consciousness, then I willfully open myself up to their presence. I can actually recall the moment when this decision was made, which was the point in my life when my own intellectual ego no longer supremely reigned—as I was now prepared to subject myself to something greater—if it really did exist. In part, I also rationalized that I was initiating a process that was incapable of harming me, and even if there was nothing beyond the physical world, I would still be far better off pursuing this path than to have never walked it. I then immediately experienced the archetype of an oppressively heavy burden being lifted off my shoulders along with an invigorated and enlivened heart.

Some time later, I found myself in what was the first of many significant dreams, as I was walking in an eastern direction along a familiar road that was leading me to a geographical border. As I came to the end of the road, I discovered to my right a lovely and mysterious woman (whose face I could not identify) clothed in a white flowing gown, beckoning me to journey with her. Instinctively, I followed her down a path that led from the road into a familiar patch of woods. While following this graceful being, I was surprised as I began to notice that the landscape was changing and I kept saying to myself, “I have lived in this area most of my life, but I never knew that all of this existed here.” We began walking up a hill and as I reached the top I beheld an astonishing sight that literally took my breath away, as I gazed upon a majestic silver ocean that conveyed to me a profound sense of wholeness, love, power, and understanding. The energies of the sun, earth, moon, wind, water, and stars surrounded me, and as I looked down from the hill a gathering of my beloved family and friends had assembled to help celebrate this event. Then there were literally fireworks that I was expressing into the sky to consummate this moment of celebration. And then the dream ended.

Upon arising that morning my impression was one of a great sense of astonishment and again an enlivened heart. It was not until later when I became compelled to begin my studies of esoteric science that I came across a passage which stated that it is only through astonishment that the impulse of truth reaches our inner soul; as it is within that moment when we are truly experiencing universal consciousness. Subsequently, I have met many persons who have had similar dreams which have been described to me as an awakening or celebration. This is a very important archetype which is now descending upon many of us. In retrospect, my dream contained significant archetypes that also invoked such concepts as the anima, and perhaps even the prodigal son. Yet, the meaning to all of this only really culminated when I later discovered the statement of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas, which tells us that the seeker shall seek until he finds, but what he finds will disturb him. Yet, through deep contemplation and reflection, eventually an astonishing clarity will ensue, and peace and strength will reign within. This highly
alchemical passage became my mantra and it must be experienced in one form or another before meaning and an astonishing sense of understanding can descend upon the person who is willfully and actively seeking wisdom within their personal spiritual pilgrimage.

Yet, a paradox to all of this exists. Although this process demands a meditative approach, we cannot become disengaged from our life’s obligations as it would be a mistake to go off seeking wisdom by way of astonishment within an ascetic or monastic life if it is in conflict to our karmic debt and obligations. This method of remaining grounded to this life and our own self is an alchemical approach which is further elaborated upon within our culture’s scriptural mythology when it is suggested that we seek council with the Father within the deepest recesses of our inner soul. (1) This passage is intimately linked to a profound archetypal truth elaborated by the Master who conveys to us that this practice is a healing endeavor designed to transform not only the self but all that our consciousness enshrouts as this clearly would benefit no one else if it only occurred in a cave, mountain-top, or even the inner sanctuary of a monastery. It must occur within our own room, and for all intents and purposes, this is the practice and ultimate goal of Alchemy, which is simply to transform if not transmute something from its lower form of being into a higher and more rarified state through hidden or occult energies that ultimately merge with themselves into a greater whole. For the modern alchemist, this can only be accomplished through our own transformation mediated through a spiritual presence and it must go on to benefit all of those whose lives we touch.

For the committed soul, this transformational healing task is an enormous responsibility and becomes our life’s greatest challenge. By willfully choosing to become healers, we have voluntarily placed ourselves within a vanguard that has the most significant potential for positive change. This is clearly not a task for the peripherally curious or uncommitted since one’s conditioned truth and certainty about what we think we know, will dramatically change—bringing about uncertainty and chaos, at least for a time. And even when truth is found, there are so many distractions that exist within the physical life that vie for our attentions, that even after miracles are experienced one may still doubt their validity. So, if this is such an arduous task, then why do it at all, as it seems that only a fool would consider it?

Well, the short answer to this question is that we have been designed to do it, as one will discover that for most of us, this is the only thing that one can do that will bring an enduring inner peace. Some may call this Altruism, which is usually defined as an unselfish concern for the welfare of others, or simply selflessness. Yet, I would go so far as to state that there is no such thing as Altruism, only love. Although there are many reasons why people choose medicine as a career, the true healers are drawn into this profession through a sincere and overwhelming sense of compassion as they have no other vocational choice in life, and it is still amazing when my students express to me that the major reason why they went to medical school was “To help people.” This remains the archetypal reason and although they may not know anything more than this, it is an essential reason—and it is enough. And again, it remains astonishing to see how many young people are harboring these impulses. As senior physicians and educators, we have
to remain committed in fostering this sentiment, because if it dies, the entire vocation goes with it.

It remains certain that in the end everything must die—everything that is except for love, compassion, wisdom, and an inextinguishable search for the truth which are all spiritual in origin. Although our generation will perish from the earth, those that come after us will continue to expand upon these endeavors if we still continue to value these imperatives by fostering those qualities within the younger souls of persons compelled to follow the way of truthful, holistic, and comprehensive healing. To be sure, there remains powerful forces that have grown within the medical industry and our science that are now striving for total domination over our individual souls which can be frightening to challenge; and at times it seems that the independent practitioners have no capacity to arrest this. Perhaps this conclusion is inevitable, but even out of this potential, if not inevitable death, a new entity is destined to emerge despite the will of this arrogant Beast. This new entity will redefine itself as something both ancient and thoroughly modern. This can only occur through the will of those that have been compelled to know and practice the art of healing who possess the courage to look beyond the Beast and within their higher self for guidance.

For most of us, we came into this world to be challenged, to make mistakes and learn from our experiences, and to succeed by having the opportunity to live a more meaningful—if not heroic life. Above all else, we came into this life to experience love in its infinite manifestations. Life itself is the ultimate paradox as it is a combination of the most earnest and sobering of experiences, to the mundane, to the ridiculous and absurd. Essentially, what must be recognized is this: that in part, life is a joke, and that in the end we must come to understand its meaning. That means that we cannot take any of this too seriously and must learn to laugh not only at all of it, but most importantly at our own self. There is tremendous strength and wisdom in foolishness and that the attitude that one should wisely adopt within this endeavor is that of a fool’s pilgrimage. Do not look for guidance on this journey solely within the rational intellect of the mind because there is literally no humor within the soul of one that cannot see beyond itself—only conjecture, doubt, and fear.

The origins of humor and foolishness are within the joyful essence of the spirit. It has been said that the fool can be wiser than the wisest of all kings and that laughter is the greatest of equalizers. The natural fool or jester was thought to be divinely inspired and touched by God, and in many instances was the only significant voice of criticism, infused with the power to level any aristocrat. The wiser the king the more powerful was his jester.

Laughter is also infectious and is the ultimate remedy for the greatest of all afflictions, which is simply fear. If we can lower ourselves to the level of a childish fool, we are actually elevating ourselves up to the level of the gods. In a story that has been repeated many times, a student asked a rabbi, “Why do we not see the face of God like in the old days of our ancient ancestors?” His reply was because nowadays no one can stoop so low. (2) Yet, if we cannot lower ourselves to this level, it remains probable that many of
us will spend a large part of our life on futile endeavors fueled by our egotistical tendencies, lusts, and desires, that will undoubtedly feed into our personal and collective spiritual isolation. This creates a more joyless, arid, and sterile existence, all in the pursuit of transient and illusionary goals that lead us on a journey that concludes at the edge of a cliff that marks the end of all of it, only to be left standing at the precipice questioning why and what it all meant. At that point, could one find the courage to laugh at the wake of regrets, missed opportunities, darkness, chaos, and even destruction that, to a certain degree, all of us will have left trailing behind us? It is at this precipice where we will be subjected to the riotous laughter of the gods. The question to be asked is, “Will we receive this with our own laughter, or will we be shamed by this judgment? Will we get the joke?

In Carl Gustav Jung’s collection of prophetic writings entitled Liber Novus (Red Book), in the passage entitled The Way of What is to Come, it states:

“The spirit of the depths stepped up to me and said: ‘... Do you believe, man of this time, that laughter is lower than worship? Where is your measure false measurer? The sum of life decides in laughter and in worship, not in your judgment.’” (3)

For those who seek to know the sum of life and to live within its fullness, take heart in this endeavor with the knowledge that astonishing truths are destined to be discovered for anyone that can come to understand its mysteries through the eyes of an inspired fool—as this is the place within the soul where we possess the courage to ask the questions and to seek the answers to life’s most challenging universal riddles.

(1) Matthew 6:6, “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

(2) Carl Gustav Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, page 377

(3) Carl Gustav Jung, Liber Primus, “The Way of What is to Come”