

On Life and Meaning

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Episode 75 – Matt Cosper – Beyond the Veil

Newer, Deeper Realities

And now a personal word,

Many years ago I wrote a novel, a psychological suspense story. I wrote the novel when I was a young attorney. The novel was as much therapy as anything else for a complicated relationship that had ended and a career in law that had just begun. I thought I might become an author. The novel was a first go.

The main character is named Mickey Newman, a professor of religion—a certain irony there as later in life I became an academic. There are two other main characters: Brooke Worthington, a criminal defense attorney, and Karisa Campbell, a college theater major. Over a weekend, secrets intertwine. Murder results. There is a scene in the novel when Mickey awakens from a dream. This is what I wrote:

The early morning sun glistened through the blue tint of the kitchen window. Dust streamed in the light. Sparrows and thrush sang in the backyard. And on the ledge a salamander scurried along vines of orange bougainvillea. A beautiful morning, the kind of soaring April morning that quickened exaltation and invited worship of the divine. Mickey opened the window and filled his lungs with circles and tetrahedrons, vortex and bloom.

He sat at the breakfast table in his frayed Boston College sweatshirt, wondering about his dream. For ten minutes after he awoke, he stared at the ceiling, thinking about crucifixion and the release of pain. He thought of the refreshed frescoes at the Vatican depicting Saint Peter crucified upside down, and the first tenet of Buddha at Benares: all egocentric life is suffering; all such life is pain. Mickey wondered whether Jesus was so filled with ego in Jerusalem, so intent on martyrdom, that he forced the scandal of his death. Idolatry having its price. Or whether his transcendence lay in his broken body, wholly egoless on the cross.

Mickey unfolded *The Herald* across the kitchen table. Easter weekend. Talk of war again. And of trials without end.

The violence of his dream disturbed him, but he knew he lived in Samsara: the ocean of desire that spins creation and destruction in an endless whirl. A realm as much voyeuristic as participatory: Eros and Thanatos rumbling in ego-driven life down the rapids of history. Caught

then in the currents of energy and time, his problem was a spiritual one, demanding a daring response.

A sign then. Jesus the Anointed One. Siddhartha the Enlightened One. Overcoming Satan. Overcoming Mara. Mickey liked the notion of Jesus as Buddha: a stalwart shepherd leading his flock to nirvana. Jesus' life and charity, his discipline and dynamic, Buddhist in nature, using the skillful means of parables, teaching the good news of the here and now, that the kingdom of God is at hand, now, through the transforming repentance of right mindfulness, living his life as a Zen koan, leaving the listener/observer shocked and perplexed, subverting norm and convention, now, to snap a newer, deeper reality.

I wrote that scene twenty-five years ago. Today I am sitting across the table from Matt Cospo, a maker of theater, whose work is snapping listener/observers into newer, deeper realities.

There are moments I'm convinced that the material world is all there is, that other dimensions are stories we tell to comfort us. We know death looms, and our imaginations are in overdrive to make sense of our existence. There are other moments when other dimensions could not be clearer: when I think of someone, and a moment later they contact me, or when I anticipate what is about to happen, and it happens.

Matt Cospo calls himself a sorcerer. I think of him as a shaman. He is in the liminal space between this reality and the next. He is a conduit to the dreams we dream and to those we awaken from that demand our response.

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