



Jigsaw Dream

I think it must have been the sherry trifle that did it. Last night after “midnight mass” (which we started at 9pm and finished at 11pm) a bunch of us went downstairs to demolish a mouth-watering desert that was created under the magical wand of Karen Rubin’s “ye olde recipe”. I was prevailed upon, in spite of my strenuous objections, to take a second helping.

When I finally got home, I set my alarm for 5:30am, so as to get up and start working on a homily for the Christmas Day mass. As soon as my head hit the pillow I was asleep and dreaming of jigsaw puzzles - all kinds and configurations and versions of jigsaw puzzles. Occasionally in my dreams I’ll hear a voice that says something really profound. This time it said, “You need to speak to them about a teleologically accelerated practice of spirituality” As the jigsaw motif continued the link between the images and the injunction became obvious.

Teleology (from the Greek word *Telos*) is that branch of philosophy and theology that deals with the notion that a phenomenon is best explained, not by its antecedent cause but by its intended purpose. In truth, our behavior is as much predicated on our future agenda as it is on our previous history. We are not deterministic robots predestined by earlier actions to perform subsequent ones. On the contrary, our vision, our hopes, our dreams and our plans for the future are every bit as influential, in how we respond to the present, as is our prior track record. It is a carrot *and* stick scenario.

The present moment is a dance in which the steps are choreographed both by past footwork and by desired moves. The present is the seamlessly woven garment whose warp is the past and whose woof is the future.

Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus once said, "*You must be perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect.*" Matthew's Greek word, Telos, is translated into English as, "Perfect"; and the churches have constantly misrepresented "perfection" as if it were some kind of stainless steel sinlessness. Telos does *not* mean that. Rather, it means, "to be radically committed to fully evolving into the purpose for which we were created." It's about being awake and aware to our mission and fully embracing it. Therefore, sin is not the transgression of precept or the breaking of law - those are mere surface symptoms - instead, sin is the conscious decision to remain unconscious about the true meaning of our volunteering for incarnation.

When we awaken to this Telos, the journey of enlightenment speeds up greatly; hence, the injunction I was given in my dream to speak about, "a teleologically *accelerated* practice of spirituality." Nothing accelerates our spiritual growth like committing to the purpose of life, which is to recognize God as the heart and soul and core of all creatures.

After the injunction about teleology, my dreams in the early hours of Christmas Day continued, in order to illustrate this idea by playing around with jigsaws.

First, it showed me how jigsaw puzzles are made. A photograph is imprinted on a rectangular section of cardboard which is then carved up into pieces, jumbled about and put into a box. The same photo is also imprinted on the cover of the box. Then it's sealed and shipped to the consumer.

And that is precisely true of the jigsaw puzzle which is your life. God has imprinted the archetype of Herself onto the screen of your psyche, but the process of incarnation slices it up and jumbles the pieces (like the sephiroth of Kabbalah.) *Your*

job is to reconstitute the picture, the image of Source, and come into full alignment with it.

Depending on how many pieces it's been broken into, the jigsaw puzzle is easier or harder. We live in a culture and an era in which it's been *really* fragmented and so it's a more difficult task for modern humans than it was for those early humans who regularly recognized God in Nature and in history. In fact, we are like people attempting to construct a jigsaw of 10,000 pieces with *no* picture on the cover to guide us. How do you make sense of the pieces of life when the meme-makers tell you that life is a meaningless meandering, beginning with random biochemical processes and ending with a futile, despairing demise? Who wants to expend energy on *that* exercise?

Luckily, I have zero interest in such thinking and am utterly unimpressed by its advocates. On the contrary, I am hugely excited about the puzzle of incarnation. And so, I approach life as I do jigsaws.

The first important clue to working a jigsaw is to realize, as you tumble the pieces out of the box onto the table top, that everything that's there is necessary and everything that's necessary is there. There is nobody in your life by accident; no event of your day is extraneous to your journey. And you have all it takes to align fully with your mission. Future incarnations *will* demand new pieces; you'll be given those when you come back. For now, however, you lack nothing.

Next, I fish out the four corner pieces. For me, personally, those would be Jesus the Christ, Gautama the Buddha, Lao Tzu and Mary of Magdala. These are the cornerstones of my spirituality. Then I pick out the straight-edged perimeter pieces. These represent the very many heroes, warriors, saints and sages of human history from Gilgamesh all the way to Thich Nhat Hahn. They are the framework into which I can now try to insert the individual pieces of my thoughts, my words and my actions.

The picture on the cover, of course, is the single most important guide. All of life must be an effort to duplicate that - or recover that - from the discrete experiences of life.

Here, there are two more clues: the *contours* and the *colors* of each puzzle piece. The contours remind me of the great insight of Lao Tzu when he coined the term “Wu Wei” or “Actionless Action”. The idea is that when one is fully in the Tao, in the flow, in the zone, then you can do less and less while accomplishing more and more, until finally you do no-thing and accomplish everything. Right action in life fits seamlessly into the purpose of the soul at any moment. If the soul has to be brutalized in order to act, then the contours are wrong. Then I need to try a different piece (a different action, work or thought.)

And the colors represent the fact that the entire perimeter of any one piece needs to flow into the colors of the exposed perimeter of the surrounding pieces into which I am inserting it. If my actions are not resonant with the soul agenda of those with whom I am in relationship, then I am probably mistaking my ego’s colors for my soul’s hues. Of course, it follows that even if I *do* operate completely from my soul’s colors in my relationships, I will only match perfectly if they, too, are aware of and operating from *their* souls’ colors. Many avatars, who were fully aligned with the soul colors of all the players wound up vilified or even executed by them because the other players were not aligned with *their* souls’ colors.

Until we become fully enlightened, however, it is likely that we will occasionally force pieces, whose colors or contours are not a perfect fit, into the puzzle. Then we wind up with holes in the puzzles and a bunch of “left over” pieces that won’t fit anywhere. You can try every single “extra” piece in every orientation into every vacancy - and none of them will fit. Then comes the awful realization that you have forced some pieces into slots where they really did not belong. This is actually a big breakthrough. It leads to humility and to the feedback loop of learning from your past. The question is, do I now have the courage and patience to dis-assemble the wrong section, break it into

its constituent elements and re-assign them? If I do, then there will be real appropriate openings for *all* of the previously orphaned pieces. Now, finally, the completion of the puzzle is in view!

Then my Christmas Morning dreaming changed from the preparation and explanation phase into showing me a few different kinds of puzzles.

The first one I saw was a blank, featureless white wall, all of whose pieces had precisely the same contours and were symmetrical about every axis. Obviously, this was a very simple puzzle to solve. You could grab any piece at random, insert it anywhere and it would fit perfectly. Sounds like fun? Yuck! Sounds like the ultimate bore. And yet this is what many of us demand of life. We want to be able to think, speak and act in any way we want, in any relationship, during any event - and have it come out right. We want a hassle-free life where events and people conform to *our* needs, wishes and expectations. Then all would be well in the world. Even God doesn't have it that good!

Then I was shown a very interesting and complex puzzle. It had two different pictures, one on each side, so that when the puzzle was completed, one side had a picture of light - a Christ face; and the back side had a picture of evil - a demon face. Shocking! Moreover, the puzzle was standing upright as if clamped in some kind of force field, giving me equal access to both sides as I worked on it. The pieces were held magnetically in place as soon as I inserted them.

It was both exciting and upsetting, because even if I worked exclusively on assembling the Christ face, each piece I put in was automatically also assembling the demon face on the back. Suddenly, I realized that there was a hidden treasure in this paradox. Sometimes, in working with a puzzle, I get to a place where I can't seem to find any piece that fills the gap. But now I realized that by walking around to the demon face side of the puzzle, I could see how to insert the pieces there. If I succeeded in placing some new pieces on that side, I was, ipso facto, succeeding at the Christ face

side also. The message I took away from this was the realization that working on my own shadow is a very important practice in my spiritual development. So, even the demon could be my friend.

Finally, I realized that there are three kinds of beings working on these life puzzles. Firstly, there are the avatars and they produce the Christ face. Then there are the dark urges whose addiction is to greed and exploitation; they produce the demon face. And, thirdly, there is the vast majority of us, on a continuum from *mostly asleep* to *mostly awake*. We produce a version of the puzzle where we have inverted pieces so that some light pieces appear on the face of the demon and some dark pieces appear on the face of Christ.

So here, then, is the invitation: Can *you* sign up for a teleologically accelerated practice of spirituality? Can you come fully awake? Can you commit to creating the Christ face until it bleeds through the cardboard and heals the demon face. Then the demon face will break into a soul-initiated smile that will ultimately transform its entire visage and our whole planet into the belly-laugh of enlightenment?

Because the demon is merely the un-birthing Christ child. Thomas was correct when he wrote: "If you bring forth that which is within you, what you bring forth will give you life. If you fail to bring forth that which is within you, what you fail to bring forth will kill you."

May God continue to hold you tenderly in the hollow of Her hand.

Namasté,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Seán". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Tír na nÓg".

Tír na nÓg
December 2011