

The Cannon, the Confetti and the Light

“The people of the world have a fixed destiny. But the spiritually developed receive what is not in their destiny.” —Abu’l Hasan Khirqani

I dreamed that I was standing in a huge field many square miles in area packed toe to toe with the rest of the human race. It was a partly cloudy spring day. It looked like we were in a farm field in the Midwest. In the center of the field was an immense cannon, pointing skyward. The cannon went off, launching several tons of large, multicolored confetti into the air. As the confetti came down, everyone including myself caught a handful. We all began reading the confetti we caught, because on each piece of paper was written a word or a phrase.

I looked at mine and some of the words were: peace, fairness, Tim’s genes, chocolate, thinking, writing, helping others, Emily Dickinson’s poetry, and many others. As I read them, I realized that these would become my values, interests and predispositions. I realized that in my hand I was holding my destiny.

Everyone around me began talking and acting on the pieces of paper they caught. Since one of my slips of paper read “thinking” I just observed. Looking through the crowd, I could see my sister Rose talking to the people around her and I remembered that she enjoyed people.

On my other side I could hear a dispute taking place. Two men were fighting, and the people around them were pulling them apart. Then I had a profound, mind-blowing insight. I pushed through the crowd and said to them. “Listen! You are fighting because you caught different pieces of paper. Had you each caught the confetti of the man you are fighting, you would be him! You’d have his body, beliefs, likes, dislikes and values. It’s all accidental!”

One of the men said, “No! We are fighting over a woman, and we have each *chosen* to woo her. Our desires and relationships are free choices!”

I answered, “But can’t you see? Your choice of which particular woman to pursue is influenced by the confetti! Your choices are built on the accidental values, so they are just as accidental as they are!”

At this, the man scowled at me, put his hands firmly on my chest and shoved me so hard that I fell back in between people’s feet.

That dream ended and another began. I was standing on a plain at night. In the distance under faint moonlight, I could see that there were people standing around me on the plain, but we were no longer cramped together. Instead, about 200 yards separated each of us. Without knowing how, I sense that the whole human race was standing somewhere on this same plain. Again, I guessed it was the Midwest.

It felt like a fall evening, as it was getting chilly.

In my mind, I somehow had the knowledge that in the center of the plain, where the cannon had been, there was now an incandescent ball, maybe 1,000 feet in diameter. I felt I had seen a photo of it somewhere. I knew the light was pure goodness, and I had the urge to go toward the ball. I began walking. I walked past other people, men, women and

children. Most stood still looking at something I could not make out in their hands. Occasionally, I would see others moving. Some went in the direction I was going, others in the opposite direction, and others in different directions.

As I walked for what seemed like a long time, I suddenly realized that the plain was thousands or maybe hundreds of thousands of miles across. We weren't on Earth, but where were we? I stopped because I realized that I could never reach the ball during my lifetime by walking. An intuition told me to reach in my pocket. I pulled out some little pieces of paper. I lit a match and saw that it was the confetti. I turned over one marked "Play the guitar," and saw the other side was marked "Ticket."

Then I heard an engine, looked up and saw a bus approaching in the night. I waved, and the bus stopped. I climbed aboard and handed the ticket to the driver. As I looked for a seat, I noticed the bus was mostly empty. A woman who climbed into the bus after me showed the driver her ticket but she didn't want to give it up. The bus driver argued with her, saying, "That's not how it works. If you don't give up any of your confetti, you have to stay put."

But she replied, "On the other bus, when I gave them my ticket, they gave me another ticket and *still* gave me a ride."

He nodded, "Yeah, but that bus wasn't going toward the light."

Since he wasn't budging, the lady angrily huffed off the bus.

As I rode, I thought about how I'd never play the guitar again in my life. I said to myself, "*Well, I guess I'll have other satisfactions to keep me going.*" I rode three or four hours until the bus stopped. At that point, it was going to turn away from the light so I got out and continued walking. I knew there'd be another bus or maybe a plane, and I would have to give up another ticket to get another ride.

While I walked, I pictured the ball of light. I must have seen it on TV or somewhere, because in my memory there were a lot of people close to it, enjoying the warmth and light. There were other people who came between those basking in the warmth and light to walk directly into the ball of light. I knew they were gone, annihilated. This caused me to feel torn. I wanted to bask in the light, but I also wanted to be *in* the ball of light. Yet I knew that I couldn't do both.

I woke up feeling pressure in my chest. Then I recalled being emotionally torn by the two desires in the dream about the round white light. This reminded me of the first dream, and I again pictured the crowd packed together and the cannon pointed straight up in the air. In my mind's eye, I saw the cannon explode again and the confetti go flying upward again, repeating the whole process for the next generation.

Commentary

This quasi-story was based on an article I wrote called *The Cosmic Bang of Morality: Accidental and Necessary Values*. Here are some excerpts from it:

A tremendous amount of suffering in the world comes from trying to force our accidental values on those around us who have different accidental values.... We become

angry or judgmental when someone close to us doesn't care about the things we care about. It also causes anger and burnout in activists who cry out to others in frustration: "Why don't you care about the rain forests?!!" "Why don't you care about campaign finance reform?" "Why don't you care about...?"

Having different values also increases distrust and miscommunication between different ethnic and religious groups, causing or increasing conflict...

Life on Earth would be somewhat hellish if there were only accidental values. For each generation the cannon would go off, people would catch their values, and they'd proceed to have conflicts with others until they were replaced by the next generation. Fortunately, there's something that I would call "necessary values." These are values that are necessary if humanity is to progress, or even survive.

People may learn some necessary values accidentally. Tolerance is one. Some people learn tolerance from their parents. Some have naturally tolerant dispositions. Most don't. Tolerance is necessary because if people are tolerant of others' values, the world gets along much better. If they become extremely intolerant, then it's over for most relationships, religions, and nations. Another necessary value is a healthy balance of action and reflection, since some people act too much without thinking, and some people think too much without acting. A third necessary value, one which no one is born with, is delaying gratification. If everyone pursued immediate gratification, few would go to work. Society's infrastructure would crumble. Fortunately, many of us rear our children to be able to delay gratification.

Some values I would call "ultimately necessary," meaning necessary to get to a fully peaceful state. If you think about the following three examples, you'll see how the phrase "fully peaceful state" could be taken to mean either personal or international peace.

A first ultimately necessary value is a desire to get to the root of a problem. Too many people treat symptoms without addressing the source. They're always reacting to the crisis of the week; phrases like "crisis management" and "putting out fires" may come to mind. Some pride themselves on always nipping problems in the bud, but they're still ignoring the roots.

A second ultimately necessary value is honesty. Not "honesty" as in merely always telling the truth and using only verified facts, but "honesty" in the sense of being aware of the assumptions and limitations of our thinking. For instance, it has been an assumption to believe that thinking only with the (logical) left side of the brain is enough.

A third ultimately necessary value goes beyond tolerance. I call it "care for the whole." Not only do I tolerate values not close to my heart, but (as long as they're not destructive) I care for them simply because others hold them. I may actively support them just because they're needed somewhere.

Most necessary values must be taught, although sometimes we learn them from example or experience. Often, we need to give up some of our accidental values to make room for some necessary ones.