

I HAD A DREAM

"I just had the most horrible nightmare imaginable," exclaimed Kao, upon waking.

"What do you mean by 'nightmare'," asked Esor. "I have never heard that word before."

They had just started their daily communion. Usually, it commenced with a meditation on a common theme. Today was a startling departure from the norm and had caught Esor by surprise.

"I coined the word for the terrible dream I just had," replied Kao, continuing, "Our dreams are usually either pleasant, or contemplative. They often raise new ideas or issues that require resolution."

Kao continued with a certain alacrity. "I have never experienced a dream that aroused a sensation that made me so apprehensive that I trembled with fear. We seldom experience such a feeling and only when faced with a physical threat to ourselves. The dream did more than that. It made me think about thoughts that we have long repressed."

"I am not sure that I want to hear it then," retorted Esor.

"I am afraid you have no choice since it is my turn to unburden to you," Kao responded.

Kao continued. "In all of the universe, we may be a unique species, As long as we can remember, we have prided ourselves in what we are. And what are we or what do we think we are? We are a species whose minds are mobile but whose bodies are not. Our bodies serve as nothing more than as a repository for our minds. They are stationary because they are implanted in the soil of our world. They are our mortal half. They derive nourishment from the soil, air, water and from the energy of the sun by which they convert carbon dioxide into oxygen while replenishing themselves. In due course they die, are recycled and are replaced by new bodies that have been gestating nearby and then become the place for our minds to reside. For reasons that we have not as yet fathomed, our population has remained constant for as long as any of us can remember. Thus our world has a very low entropy, consuming very little energy, so that we can probably continue to exist indefinitely.

Yes, our minds are immortal while our bodies are not. Our minds are a form of energy that we do not as yet fully comprehend. They also need to be nourished, but with energy that our bodies supply. It is this energy that allows our minds to wander freely, practically without limit. It enables us to explore our world, to appreciate its beauty, to create new art forms, to contemplate the mysteries of existence and to communicate so that we get feedback from each other about our ideas and our artistic innovations. It is a perfect form of existence without strife, or environmental degradation, in perfect harmony among ourselves and between ourselves and the natural."

"Why are you reiterating the obvious?," asked Esor. "Our existence and its mysteries are known to all of us. There is no need to reiterate what we already comprehend."

Kao hesitated and then replied haltingly. "I know that what you are saying is true, but I felt the need to, once again, delineate clearly what we know about ourselves so that the

contrast between my nightmare and our reality is more sharply drawn. What alarms me the most is the possibility that there might be some truth to this nightmare."

Resignedly, Esor replied, "Would you please go ahead then and tell us all about your dream, that is your nightmare. I have taken the liberty of alerting all the members of our commune as well as those nearby to your troubled state, so that we may all be of some assistance in helping overcome your fears. As you know, if one of us is affected by an ailment or a mental discomfiture, then we are all prone to the same malady. While this happens very seldom, we have learned that the best way to deal with such a problem is straight away, not allowing it a chance to become more serious or to infect us all with the same insidious condition."

Somewhat hesitatingly, Kao resumed describing his dream.

"Without getting into minute details, which I remember totally, I will provide you with a general picture and then describe the aspects that disturb me most.

I found myself in an unimaginable alien world. In ours, there is a very limited variety of living things, namely ourselves. In that place, there seemed to be an endless diversity of life forms. Yet I was able to determine that, broadly speaking, they could be divided into two general categories. I was heartened by the presence of the first since they seemed to resemble us. Their biochemistry was similar to ours and also they were stationary. I attempted vainly to communicate with them, hoping to find intelligence. Unfortunately, if they have any type of a mind, I was not able to detect it. Moreover, it turned out that a significant percentage were consumed as food by some of the life forms of the second category.

The second type of life form was as different from us as is possible to imagine, with one important exception. They had minds, albeit ones that took me some time to interpret. This was due to the extreme variety of such life forms, ranging from minds that functioned at a very primitive level to ones that approximated ours in sophistication. Two other characteristics common to them were a biochemistry radically different from ours and from the members of the first category, and bodies not stationary but moving with appendages designed for that purpose.

As a matter of record, I found the behavior of some of the lower species much more in harmony with their surroundings.

For purposes of brevity, from herein I will refer only to that species of the second category, the highest life form. Although I could translate their thought processes, I was never able to communicate with them, nor understand their mentality

The most visibly alien traits they exhibited were:

- their bodies and minds were as one. When the body died so did the mind. In other words, they lived for a set period of time and then simply disappeared. This appeared to have a critical influence on their culture and behavior. It gave rise to all sorts of irrational activities explained by their fear of death, an emotion quite strange to us. Superstitions and myths were created to rationalize and justify some very peculiar and hostile conduct as means of overcoming their fears.

- While the body's behavior was controlled more often by the mind, the state of the body determined the mind's ability to function. In this they bore some resemblance to us.
- They populated the whole planet, coalescing into groups within specific geographic areas. The groups differed from one another in appearance, general customs and language. For no apparent logical reason, conflicts between two or more of these groups were ever present. The winners of these conflicts, usually those that were already wealthier, exploited the losers in a most vicious fashion. This led to an extreme disparity in the distribution of essential material goods and energy throughout the world. The rich got richer, the poor, poorer.
- They reproduced by the coupling of two individuals whose differing physiognomy seemed designed for this purpose. One of the two, physically weaker, carried the developing individual inside its body for a specific period, whereupon it was ejected, totally dependent upon the adults involved. The drive behind coupling did not appear to be motivated by the need to procreate, but rather by pleasure, the compulsion to bond and the simple exercise of power of the strong over the weak. Notwithstanding moral interdictions limiting it, many derived a measure of gratification by breaking the rules. All in all, a most peculiar manner of reproduction.
- Despite their intelligence and awareness of the carrying capacity of their natural world, as the dominant species, they continued to procreate in a limitless fashion that led to exponential population growth, which placed a tremendous strain on their natural environment.
- This condition was exacerbated by those who opposed any attempt to stop gestation because of their belief in the 'sanctity of life'. They were so blinded by their prejudices, they did not pay any heed to the plight of the countless young who lived under horrible conditions and who often perished in their infancy. On the other hand, those who believed in the individuals' "right of control over one's body" were blind to the broader need restricting population growth by means other than the murder of the unborn. All ignored the fact that sometimes the needs of the collectivity must supersede those of the individual.
- While there was some variation in the behavior patterns of the various groups worldwide, the newly born and the parent who had carried it during gestation and was also responsible for the nurturing and care of the infant enjoyed lesser status and were usually considered the property of the stronger.
- The sense of acquiring as much property as possible is totally alien to us. However it was one of these beings' strongest drives and led frequently to all sorts of devastating conflicts. It appears that the amount of prestige, power over others and influence was directly related to the amount of property possessed. Thus the more one had the more one wanted. This was just as true for the identifiable groups, who engaged often in bloody conflicts simply to acquire more. The lust for power and material wealth by individuals and groups knew no bounds. Inequitably distributed, the accumulated wealth and power created in turn much suffering and fresh conflicts.
- In a more positive vein, they did exhibit a boundless thirst for knowledge about their world, their existence and the universe. Despite what they learnt, this proclivity was motivated, nearly always, by a desire for control, not only over others of their species but over nature as well. Living harmoniously with it was seldom attempted.
- By using the information thus gleaned, they were very successful, in that they created various devices which enabled them, for example: to transport themselves and their material goods ever more efficiently; to communicate with each other over long distances; to treat successfully a host of diseases with which they were often

afflicted; to congregate in huge communes and reside in monstrously large edifices; to store and analyze information rapidly and effectively; and last but not least, to devastate their opponents in battle with weapons of overwhelming destructive power.

- While these devices were truly astonishing and measurably improved the mobility of their minds and bodies, the costs associated with them were seldom acknowledged. These beings were prejudiced by the so-called benefits of these devices and lacked the foresight to do proper assessments. The results were frequently disastrous in terms of environmental degradation, deteriorating public health, and social upheavals. Since these effects were often incremental, they were hardly noticed. The old adage, "there are none so blind that will not see," was truly appropriate.
- Perhaps their most horrific trait, one that explained well their destructive courses of action, was one they had no control over. They were genetically programmed to survive by consuming other living things. Their lives were dependent upon the death of other animated entities. Some tried to absolve themselves by eating only the life forms that resembled them the least, in other words, the stationary life forms. They didn't seem to realize that these life forms had as much right to survive as any other. This taking of life for the purposes of survival enabled them to justify all sorts of killing, even when subsistence was not involved. Some killed for the thrill involved and justified themselves by calling it a sport. Another group approved of this carnage by suggesting that it was nature's way of maintaining a population equilibrium. A subgroup formed a sect that labeled itself ecologically minded. Nobody seemed to appreciate that killing was an inherent trait, impossible to eradicate.

You must be thinking that all of the preceding, especially the last, has terrified me so that repose is impossible. You would be partially correct. However, the thought that haunts me is predicated upon the following possibility. Their most sophisticated contrivance is stationary, stores large amounts of information, analyzes it, communicates with other similar devices that are large distances away and controls various other contraptions that perform needed or desirable operations. Does it not strike you that there is a certain resemblance between these contrivances and ourselves? Is it not possible that these entities are our forefathers, that we have evolved from artificial things, and that the beings who created these mechanisms became extinct, largely through their own stupidity? If there is any truth to this supposition, I cannot see the point in continuing to explore the meaning of our existence. It would be senseless. It is this possibility that frightens and dispirits me the most."

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