

## *From the Kitchen*

8 August 2012



I'm strapped into my seat and the aircraft is sitting on the tarmac at the terminal, as it has been for over ten minutes. What is delaying our departure? A truck. The catering truck has delivered our simple refreshments and now it can't be detached from the side of the aircraft. Engineers are on the way.

Life is full of events over which we appear to have no control and which have an impact on our activities and which may cause us to change our plans. Getting to the airport itself is a gamble – as prepared as we may be, events can get in the way of a timely arrival. A trip that ideally takes around seventy minutes and often takes eighty, can become two hours if there has been a collision on the freeway or one of my tyres goes flat.

Similar events may get in the way of arriving on time for a concert, a play or a date. A date may be forgiving but the concert and play don't care whether I make it or not. My teachers used to care if I arrived late and they made their displeasure known in clear ways – often with the aid of a cane or strap. Even when it was not my fault – forgetting my homework and having to go back for it when I was half-way to school was, to me, an external event out of my control. Teachers saw it differently.

In Australia, these events over which we have no control – I will call them 'fate events' – are usually no more than a minor annoyance, compared with fate events in many other countries. In Palestine a fate event may mean the death of half your family and leave you maimed for life, on top of the mental-emotional trauma you have been suffering from for decades. In Afghanistan it can be someone's decision to blow himself up in a crowded marketplace.

Fate events include floods and fires and earthquakes, as well as bits of space junk falling from the sky. To avoid these, one needs to just not be there when they happen. If you are, your future will depend in large part on how you respond to what the Fates chose to hit you with. The difference seems to be between two types of people: those who believe that Clotho determines the length of the thread of their lives and Atropos will cut it when she chooses; and those who believe that, while Clotho and Atropos may have their intentions and Lachesis may play with their lives, they themselves can choose to stretch the thread, even add to it, and gleefully entertain Lachesis.

Fate events can also lead to pleasant experiences. On one trip I asked for and was accommodated on an earlier flight than the one I had booked. I ended up sitting next to someone who had also not expected to be on that flight. What I had anticipated would be just another flight became a very informative one. Of course, had I flown as originally intended, *that* flight might have been interesting, for different reasons.

Maybe the ancient Greeks were right – the Fates cannot be fooled with. Shakespeare put this idea beautifully: "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may." There are people who are frightened to leave their house for fear of being hit by a car and die

in their bed when a wayward car runs in to the bedroom. And what about the people who are hit by lightning three or four times and survive?

Do we attract experiences to us? If so, for what purpose? Does a person need more than one lightning strike? Is each of us born with a set of lessons to learn and experiences to have? If so, do some of us spend our allotted lifetime and all our energy to resist this?

Does any of this matter in the end? Is the important thing what the actual ‘scheme’ is or what we believe it to be? If it is the scheme, then our belief is irrelevant in how we are in life because that belief will, by definition, be part of the scheme. If our belief is important because that belief can change outcomes, is that not also part of the scheme? If that is true, do we really have any control over our lives?

Given the vast number of human cultures on the planet, and the even larger number of interpretations of those cultures by their respective adherents, one could argue that we are all taking part in an experiment to learn what works best – what is the best way to be here.

Many of the disparate beliefs are based largely on what made life possible for a group of people thousands of years ago. The adherents seem to have not recognised that their environments, technology and other circumstances have changed. Each group, and each individual in that group, believes it is the custodian of the only truth.

Douglas Adams may have been right: we are all part of a massive experiment designed to discover the truth – an experiment conducted by alien white mice.

I could sum up with Adams’ words: “I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.”