

1 DROWNING

Beams of light from a bright full moon broke through the sombre clouds masking the night sky. The moon rays focused on a solitary figure dressed in white, running across the grassland. The moon beams looked like a searchlight, as the shifting clouds directed the rays, almost perfectly tracking the young man's flight across the meadows. It wasn't clear what the man was running from, all that could be heard were his heavy gasps of breath and the thudding of his feet on the soft grass. The man slowed down. Now you could see his face dripping with beads of sweat, scrunched up with pain and fear, his hands on his hips attempting to steady himself. He was startled by the distant sound of angry voices coming towards him. He started running. Almost immediately his legs buckled, as they lost their grip on the wet grass. The voices were getting closer and louder. He still couldn't see them, but could hear four maybe six angry men shouting. The ground dipped suddenly, he just managed to stop himself from tumbling uncontrollably into the water below. He tried to push the long water reeds to the side, as he waded into the water, but the reeds kept springing back whipping his face. His feet started sinking into the sludgy lake floor, his wet clothes weighing down on his weakening legs. The mob caught up. They were on top of him pushing his head down into the murky water, his arms thrashing ineffectively against his assailants.

That's when I woke up, jerking upright from my sleep, struggling for breath. The bedroom was filled with the sound of my wheezing; the passageways in my lungs had shut tight, suffocating tight. I stretched out my right hand fumbling for a Ventolin inhaler, put it in my mouth and tried to breathe in whilst simultaneously pushing down on the pump. The first attempt failed, I involuntarily spewed out the medicinal vapour from my lungs. I kept on trying, each time making steady headway. On the fourth attempt I managed to keep the reviving spray inside, long enough to penetrate deep into my lungs. The wheezing subsided. The panic was over. I switched on the light so that I could see the time: 3:58am.

My body was covered with perspiration, the bed sheets were damp. I bent forward for the towel lying at the foot of the bed, got out of the sheets, sat on top of the duvet, and rubbed myself dry. Through the bedroom window I could see the full moon just like the one in the dream. I was tired and lonely. I slumped down and rested my head in the cup of my hands pressed against my bent knees.

My thoughts went back four years earlier to the first morning of my married life; the breakfast table at The Oberoi in Mumbai. I had selected the table with the best views of the Arabian Sea lapping gently against the Marine Drive sea wall. I was about to devour an oversized masala dosa. Rita's plate was empty. The curls of her dark shoulder length hair rested gently on her shoulders, the summery dress with bright red and yellow flowers hugging her curvaceous body. She was looking down at the white table cloth, her arms resting on the table, her slender fingers clasped around a glass of orange juice.

'Aren't you going to eat anything?' I asked her.

Rita continued to look down at the table. I couldn't see her face. I remember holding out my hand, tenderly placing my fingers under her chin delicately tilting her head so that I could see into her beautiful brown eyes. As her head lifted up, a teardrop dislodged from her watery eyes and gently trickled down her right cheek.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

'Nothing,' said Rita. Her normally sweet melodic voice was replaced by a trembling hesitant whisper.

'Aren't you feeling well?' I asked again.

'Don't you remember what happened last night?' replied Rita.

'What do you mean?'

'You didn't tell me that you had nightmares.'

'I don't have nightmares.'

'Last night you got up shouting, waving your arms. You hit me.' She brushed aside her hair, to reveal a small slightly red blemish on her left cheek.

I remembered staring at the bruise on Rita's face.

'I didn't know what to do. I'd never seen you look like that. I was terrified. I didn't know what to do. I just hugged you, until you calmed down.'

‘Something was disturbing me, and I’m not sure, but I think I got up. I just don’t remember what I was dreaming. I would never mean to hurt you,’ I replied.

Had I had the same dream again tonight? It was haunting me. Could I have hit Rita whilst trying to fight off the phantom mob that was trying to drown me?

Now I was alone and there was no Rita. I wiped the tears from my eyes, stretched out and let my head drop on the pillow. My tired eyelids were soon shut; my breathing back to normal. I turned from one position to the next, trying to get comfortable. Perhaps it was too hot. I got up and opened the window. It was still and calm outside. Inside my head it was anything but still and calm.

At 6:00 the alarm went off. I reluctantly got out of bed and went into the bathroom. It was the same routine each morning, quickly brush my teeth, shave, shower and get dressed. Then into the kitchen, which was small and compact, gaze out the window to see the early risers walking to Gloucester Road tube station. A strawberry fromage frais, a croissant, some coffee, a fistful of vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants and I was ready to leave for work.

It was Monday. Maria the cleaner was due. I took out two crisp £20 notes, swiped a blank A4 paper from the inkjet printer sitting under the computer in the corner of the room and wrote a note: ‘Dear Maria, Please find £40 for last month. I am away next week, no need to come. Regards Arjuna.’ I lifted up the glass vase, resting in the centre of the replica antique dining table, and placed the note together with the money underneath it.

I galloped down the four flights of stairs to the mews side road where my BMW M3 was parked. I opened the door, flung my jacket onto the passenger seat, banged shut the door, turned the starter key and sped off down the mews all 350 throbbing destructive brake horse power thrusting me onto the A4, out of the city. Six seconds later I was doing 60mph whilst still in second gear. My foot full on the accelerator one moment and then off the next, slamming on the brake pedal to stop for the many red lights. The halt at the traffic lights gave me enough time to slot in the Ibiza Anthem CD, its thumping techno beat smothering the scream of the high octane revving engine.

Big Group Plc’s headquarters, where I worked, was along the M4 about 20 miles past Heathrow Airport. At this time of the morning, heading against the traffic, the roads were relatively clear allowing me to experience the full power of the M3. By 7:30, I was cornering the sharply banked slip road taking me off the motorway into the business park where Big Group was located. The tyres screeched, attempting to keep grip on the slippery road, as I turned the hairpin bend. As I came around the bend, I saw a car upside down on the grass verge lying on its crumpled roof sandwiching a completely smashed windscreen. Two paramedics were taking the ragged remains of the unfortunate driver into the ambulance, his face covered.

A gust of wind blew away the cloth, unmasking the corpse and revealing not a stranger, but my own bloody lifeless face. I took my foot off the accelerator, and leaned forward to switch off the CD, tears streaming down my face. I just wanted to die. I wished it had been me and not someone else lying dead. It would all be over, the pain, the unhappiness, the futility of a pointless, hollow vacuous existence.

I parked next to Chris, my boss’ car, a blue Jaguar XK40. I felt like crap. Perhaps if I acted as if everything was great, everything would be great. I deliberately strutted through the revolving doors, gave a quick enthusiastic good morning to the security guard, and sprinted up three flights of stairs, two at a time, to the top floor where the office was located, the lift being too slow. It was working. I was feeling better no one would be able to tell how I really felt.

I needed another coffee. I would often go to the coffee machine before settling in at my desk. I had to walk past Chris’ office to get to my office. The door was open. Chris was in his late forties, a little plump around the waist, wearing half rimmed reading glasses which didn’t suit his boyish features. He was busy reading through his emails and briefing papers.

‘Can I come in?’ I asked.

‘Course you can, do you want a coffee?’ replied Chris as he got off his chair, walked around his desk and sat down on a small green three seater sofa. He motioned me to sit down next to him.

‘How are things?’ asked Chris.

‘Oh, yes. Fantastic. Couldn’t be better,’ I lied, my head bowed down looking at the wooden floor.

Chris looked at me, poured a coffee out of the coffee pot, and started to slowly sip it.

'I'm off to Italy tomorrow, just for the day to see how the team's getting on with the acquisition. I want to check that they have completed a thorough due diligence, you know how tricky those Italian accounting rules can be. That's this week. Then next week, Wednesday, I am off to Rio to facilitate a three day workshop with Victor and his team to help them decide which acquisitions they should focus on.' I said breaking the brief silence.

'Sounds like you've got it under control. Let me know if you need me to do anything.'

'I've got it covered,' I replied confidently.

'Anything else?' asked Chris.

'No,' I got off the sofa and headed towards the door.

Just before I got to the door, I turned around and said.

'Oh yes, there is one more thing.'

'Yes what is it?'

'Will it be okay, from next week on, for me to come in slightly later on Tuesdays and leave a little earlier on Thursdays?'

'Well as long as you get your work done. I trust you. You're responsible enough. Is anything the matter?'

'No. Everything's fine,' I replied. I stood there at the door, wondering whether to tell Chris or not. 'Well you know that Rita and I split up last month.'

'Yes I heard.'

'We went to a counsellor before we split up to see whether there was anything that we could do to salvage the marriage.'

'And..' said Chris encouragingly, seeing that I was having difficulty in talking about this.

'The counsellor advised us there and then that we should separate and that I should move out.'

'Was that the first session?'

'Yes it was'

'A bit premature to make such conclusions so quickly, wasn't it?' asked Chris who was no longer relaxing on the sofa but sitting on the edge of the seat listening attentively.

'It was such a relief to find somebody who really understands. We were arguing all the time and I'd tried everything. I even read 'Men are from Mars, and Women are from Venus', but it was no use.'

'Is that why you're living in Kensington now?'

'It's great to be single again. I just felt so pressured around Rita - you know what I mean.'

'Well marriage can be difficult at times, Clare and I have had our tough times too, but we always got through it. Be careful of people who are quick to give advice,' cautioned Chris.

'I'm sure Clare loves you Chris. Rita doesn't love me, I really don't think that she ever did,' I replied.

'Are you sure of that, Arjuna?'

'Yes I am. This counsellor's a professional. A friend of mine who's also a psychologist had suggested him. He comes highly recommended. Anyway this counsellor, Rupert, suggested that I come and see him twice a week to help me get through this. He's a trained psychologist and I'm planning to see him on Tuesday mornings and Thursday late afternoon.'

'Is he charging you for this?'

'Yes, of course. Why wouldn't he?' I asked, slightly puzzled by Chris' question.

'Well, by telling you to split up with Rita he's landed himself a potentially very lucrative patient.'

'I'll only see him for a couple of weeks. It's not going to take long to get myself sorted out.'

'I hope you're right. Good luck for Italy and Brazil. You can debrief us on how you got on, in a fortnight's time at our next Management Team meeting.'

'Thanks Chris for being understanding. I've got a lot to prepare for Italy.'

'Yes. You better get along. I'm always here if you need to talk about it.'

'Thanks. I really appreciate it.'

'You're welcome.'

The rest of the day went quickly. I had several meetings during the day with Treasury, Legal and PR departments all concerned with the proposed acquisition in Italy. In between meetings, I was busy scanning for urgent emails and preparing a check list together with an agenda for my next day's session in Milan. At about four o'clock my mobile started ringing.

'Hello, Arjuna speaking.'

'Arjuna. Hi, it's Martin. Are we still on for tonight?'

'Shit! Is it tonight? I thought it was next week.'

'Haven't you got it on your pocket PC thing, I thought you were organised.'

'Sorry Martin. It's just that things have been a bit busy at work.'

'Look. Are we still on for tonight?'

'Yes I can make it, might be a little late and I'll need to leave early. I've got a 7:15 flight tomorrow morning to Milan.'

'Stop making excuses, get your arse into gear and get down to The Blue Anchor by 7:30 – and by the way the drinks are on you.' With that Martin disconnected the phone.

I quickly finished the check list, downloaded all the necessary files onto my lap top and headed to the Blue Anchor pub in Hammersmith to meet with Martin.

The Blue Anchor backed onto the Thames next to Hammersmith Bridge. I found Martin sitting outside looking across the river at our old school, St Paul's. Martin was wearing a dark blue and white striped double cuff shirt, beige double pleat trousers with turn ups, and a pair of well polished full brogue brown leather shoes. His blonde hair was beginning to thin and recede on both sides of his temple. At six feet Martin was a little taller than me, but had the same athletic build looking fitter than the average 33 year old.

'I see you've already got a drink. I got held up in traffic. I'll just get mine.' I said.

'This will be finished soon. Get me another IPA and a bag of Cheese and Onion.' Martin spoke in a deep baritone voice, clearly enunciating his words, people said that we sounded very similar to one another. Martin would have easily got a job as a BBC newscaster.

I returned with Martin's pint of IPA, a bag of crisps and a bottle of Corona with a wedge of lime sticking out of it.

'Who's that poofy drink for?' teased Martin pointing at the Corona.

'Piss off! How long are you back from New York for?'

'Just a week. I'm back for our twenty year school reunion.'

'Oh that. I'm not going.'

'It'll be great. Ollie, Russell, Nick, Steve, Johnny and Patrick they're all going to be there.'

'I don't know.'

'Are you wearing contacts? It looks a lot better than those awful specs you used to wear.'

'No, I had corrective laser surgery done when I was in Sao Paulo Brazil working on that billion dollar acquisition last year. I think they call it Lasik. Its great not having to wear glasses anymore.'

'It works does it? Anyway how's it going? How's Rita, where is she? I thought that you'd bring her. Now I've got to talk to you all evening.'

'It's over between us. We split up, it's finished.'

'Hey, look I didn't know. Sorry. How is she?'

'I don't know, I haven't spoken to her or seen her in weeks. I've rented a flat in Kensington.'

'When did this happen? You two looked so great together, she seemed perfect for you'

'That's what I thought too. It's been building up for a long time. Perhaps she never loved me.'

'How can you say that? She looked so happy when we saw her at the wedding. I can't remember her ever not smiling. I just can't believe it.'

'Well looks can be deceptive. She fooled me for a long while, she fooled everyone except Rupert.'

'Who the hell is Rupert?'

'He's the marriage counsellor who straight away saw through Rita and advised us to split up.'

'Some counsellor!'

'Whose side are you on?' I asked. It always upset me talking about Rita.

'Yours of course. It's just difficult to take it all in, I liked Rita and you two just looked great together. Look I'm sorry. If you don't want to talk about it, that's fine with me.' Martin put his arm around me and gave me a hug.

'Yeah I know. Talking helps. I don't think that she ever loved me. The whole thing was arranged. Her uncle knew my Dad from Nairobi. Her parents wanted her married off quickly, her Uncle called my Dad proposing a match. Rita just went with what her parents wanted.'

'What neither of you had a choice?'

'No it wasn't like that. Those kind of arranged marriages don't take place any more. Rita's uncle proposed that we meet and check each other out. I dated her a few times. You met her on our third date in Hampsted. Do you remember?'

'At that Mexican place?'

'Yes that's right.'

'That was only your third time together?'

'Yeah. I thought that she was the one. Rita fitted nicely into that mansion in the country, with its gravel driveway encircling the large water fountain and the three kids; you know the dream that I keep on going on about. She was Miss Right. I was certain. That's why we got married so quickly.'

'So what went wrong?'

'I don't know. We argued all the time. I was never good enough for her, nagging all the time. It's simple, she never ever loved me. She was just keeping her parents happy. You know how traditional she is.'

'Yes I know. But I thought that's what you liked about her. You know getting in touch with your roots and all that. Didn't you tell me that?'

'You're right. But the whole thing was doomed.'

'What do you mean?'

'Mum's very superstitious, so she checked our horoscopes with the astrologers to see if they matched and fix the best day to get married. Check with the Gods that everything was okay.'

'So your Mum went to Russell Grant?' laughed Martin.

'Look Martin this is serious.'

'Sorry, but it sounds crazy'

'Our horoscopes matched. But the astrologer told us that it wasn't a good year to get married. I couldn't wait. I thought the whole thing was a load of crap. Anyway my Mum kept on going to see different astrologers until she met one, who said it would be okay for us to get married provided we did this special ceremony to appease the Gods.'

'Oh yes.'

'Yes and he charged us a £1000 for it.'

'He suckered you and your Mum.'

'I thought it was a load of crap, but I wanted Mum to be happy so I went along with it. Anyway perhaps the other astrologers were right and we should have waited.'

'You don't really believe that do you?'

'I didn't. But now I don't know. I used to pray; now I don't. Did anyone or anything ever listen to my prayers? I thought that something was listening to them. But I'm not sure, things are such a mess. Perhaps there isn't anything up there. Does anybody really know?'

'God and religion are a load of twaddle. Have you heard of Immanuel Kant?'

I stared back at Martin, wondering where he was going with this question.

'Kant, do you know who he is?'

'Yes, but I don't know what he wrote. That's what you layabouts studying PPE at Oxford spent your time doing. I did a real subject.'

'At least I learnt something useful about life at Oxford, not like you uncultured Cambridge Engineers,' retorted Martin.

'Get on with it, what about Kant?'

'Well Kant reasoned that the gods were just a convenient imagination for us to pin our sense of guilt. That's what you are doing. I'll email the quote to you. I can't remember it off hand. God doesn't exist. You've got to just get on with things.'

'You're talking like Gordon Gekko. You've been too long at Silverman Brothers, they've got to you.'

'Gekko?'

'You know, Michael Douglas played that real sleaze bag called Gordon Gekko in that film Wall Street. That 'Greed is Good' speech?'

'Ah yes. Greed can be good. At least Gordon was honest about what he wanted. You're more like Gordon than me. You even have the same hair style, with your hair gelled back like that, and aren't you the one

helping Big Group suck up everything around it. I don't see you complaining about how much you're getting. Greed's great, it works, it helps the economy. Money does make the world go around. Everyone's greedy they're just not honest with themselves. At least Gekko was honest. He wasn't a hypocrite.'

'Maybe, you've got a point. Look I've got to go, and get ready for Milan.'

'I'll see you at the reunion weekend. It'll take your mind of things. You'll enjoy it.'

'I'll think about it,' I hollered back as I walked towards my car.

The £40 and the note were gone. The kitchen was cleaned, and the bedroom neat and tidy. My crisply ironed shirts hung on the outside of the wardrobe door. I smiled as I put them into the wardrobe. I was exhausted, I was soon fast asleep. I woke up at 0500. I seemed to have this uncanny habit of getting up at precisely the right time when it mattered most: a plane to catch, important event, that sort of thing.

The flight was delayed several hours, mechanical problems, getting me into Milan at 11:30. It was a hectic day with back to back meetings. I had asked my secretary to book me into the Duce Palace and change my flight to the first one in the morning. I could use the time to get to know the Italian team a little better. Besides I loved the Risotto al Funghi accompanied by a vintage Chianti served at the Michelin rated hotel restaurant.

It was nearly midnight by the time dinner and all the speculative gossip was over. The talk was about who was going to be fired in the next re-organisation and how long it would be before Chris took to become the next CEO of Big Group. I got into the room, lay on the bed and switched on the TV tuning into BBC World. The hourly news was heralded by the latest catchy tune and slogan *'Making Sense of It All'*. As always the news was disturbing. This time, the Roman Catholic Church in the US issued a public apology for some 4500 priests who had molested over 11,000 children over a period of 50 years. Next, a special report on the 16 million people butchered in West Africa as a result of various conflicts in the last 20 years. Then, an investigation discovering death camps in Zimbabwe, where one teenager had been gang raped seven times in one night and her 11 year old roommate raped on a daily basis for over a year. In the same place a hardened sixteen year old, a graduate of these death camps described the utter joy of listening to the screams of mercy as he tortured innocent victims. Next it was coffee growers in the poorest parts of the world getting less than their cost of production for coffee, due to massive over supply.

After the news was HardTalk an interview with Alec Baldwin, Hollywood tough man, calling for more armed security in the US, on planes, on trains, on street corners, in Starbucks. So the list went on.

I picked up my mobile and dialled Martin's number. It went through to voicemail.

'Martin, hi, Arjuna here. This world's a total mess. Maybe you're right, how can there be a God allowing all this shit to happen to innocent people. Look I've decided. I'll see you at the re-union. Don't forget to send the email. Send it to arjunaa@hotmail.co.uk. Ciao.'

The rest of the week sped by as I busied myself with the Italian acquisition and preparing for the Brazilian strategy workshop.

Saturday, the 20 year school re-union. I wanted to be alone; I quickly separated myself from Martin and the rest of the group, and headed towards the sports gym. I climbed up the steps to get to the viewing gallery. I put my arms on the railing and bent over looking intently down onto the wooden boarded gym floor. Just standing there in silence, thinking back to what had happened over 20 years ago.

'There you are. I wondered where you got to. I was about to give up looking for you. What's up with you?' asked Martin as he came towards me.

'I hate this place.' I shot back.

'What?' said Martin, seemingly not quite hearing me.

I continued looking down at the gym floor. My thoughts went back to a cold winter's day, when I was twelve. It was the interclub indoor athletics day held in the school gym. I wanted to do my bit for my club and fit in with everyone else, 'C' club. It was my first race for the club. The whole school would remember my athletic prowess; my emphatic victory. What a way to start my school career at St Paul's. I had put myself down for the sprint shuttle. There was a mistake and somehow I'd been entered for the ten lap steeplechase. The race started, I sprinted to the front of the pack. Perhaps I could win this race. Then the hurdle came and I was unsure how best to get over it. I misjudged the height. My shin hit the bar as I toppled over it, grazing my knee, my specs flying right in front of where the rest of the pack was heading. Crunch. One of the runners stepped and cracked one of the glass lenses. A large bruise had formed on my shin. I was on my

hands and knees groping for my specs. I put them on and started running, pain shooting up my leg. All I could hear was the crowd laughing at me. I continued running, now I was right at the back of the pack. I couldn't see clearly through the cracked lens. The next lap and the same dreaded hurdle. I hit the bar a second time and fell again, specs flying further, the laughter increased. Blood was dripping from my gashed shin. I was disheartened, thinking about the eight more excruciating laps to run. The pain was getting worse, by the eighth lap I was merely hobbling around. I could hear them behind me, I was about to be lapped, the humiliation. That was when I started to have trouble breathing, I was starting to wheeze. I didn't want to be lapped and I remember summoning up my final reserves of energy sprinting to stay ahead of the pack and preserve some little honour. The formidable steeple hurdle was coming up. I just didn't have enough spring in my legs to clear it. Thwack! I hit my shin harder than ever against the metal bar. I tumbled forward crumpled in pain clutching my leg, desperately trying to hold back the tears. I knew that everyone was looking. I continued haphazardly searching for my specs, the roars of laughter from the balcony boomed in my ears. Just one kind hearted runner knelt down, gave me my specs and helped me up. It was Martin. He ran ahead leaving me behind, as I hobbled on to finish the race in crushing defeat.

As I stood there on the balcony, twenty years later, I could still hear the mocking laughter of that merciless crowd.

'I hate this place. I shouldn't have come. Look I'll give you a call this evening. Thanks for being a friend.' With that, I brushed past a confused Martin and headed to the solitary flat in Kensington.

Later on that evening I was busy checking my emails. True to his word Martin had sent me some quotes. The message was titled 'Hope this helps: there is no God, got it from Tony a few months back.' I printed out Martin's note and slowly began to read it. It was a philosophical essay, five sections to the email all neatly headed up. I found it heavy going, re-read some of it several times:

1. God is simply an invention of man to pin his sense of duty/guilt

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) an outstanding German philosopher who in his masterful work 'The Critique' written in the 1780s wrote:

'In a word, he [mankind] needs a moral intelligence; because he exists for an end, and this end demands a Being that has formed both him and the world with that end in view. It is waste of labour to go burrowing behind these feelings for motives;.... It is merely that the mind inclined to give expansion to its moral sentiment here voluntarily imagines an object that is not in the world, in order, if possible, to prove its dutifulness in the eyes of such an object.'

2. God and religion are simply a primitive biological and sociological conditioned response, just like a dog's attitude towards its owner

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), the great British natural scientist (I guess there must have accidentally been one or two bright sparks who went to Cambridge!) once and for all had shattered the fragile and puerile stories of creation with his meticulous observations of life. In *The Descent of Man* (1871) he wrote: *'The feeling of religious devotion is a highly complex one, consisting of love, complete submission to an exalted and mysterious superior, a strong sense of dependence, fear, reverence, gratitude, hope for the future and perhaps other elements. No being could experience so complex an emotion until advanced in his intellectual and moral faculties to at least a moderately high level. Nevertheless, we see some distant approach to this state of mind in the deep love of a dog for his master, associated with complete submission, some fear and perhaps other feelings... The same high mental faculties which first led man to believe in unseen spiritual agencies, then in fetishism, polytheism, and ultimately in monotheism, would lead him, as long as his reasoning powers remained poorly developed, to various strange superstitions and customs.'*

3. God is Impotent and as good as Dead

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the much celebrated 19th century German philosopher and forerunner of the existential movement wrote in *'Beyond Good and Evil* (1886): *'Why atheism today? "The father" in God is thoroughly refuted; likewise "the judge," "the rewarder". Likewise his "free will": he does not bear – and if he heard he would still not know how to help. The worst thing is: he seems incapable of making himself understood: is he himself vague about what he means? These are what, in the course of many conversations, asking and listening, I found to be the causes of*

the decline of European theism; it seems to me that the religious instinct is indeed in vigorous growth – but that it rejects the theistic answer with profound mistrust”

Even if God did exist he clearly doesn't have either the power or the inclination to do anything. Isn't all the suffering in the world and confusion about whether or not there are gods sufficient proofs of the non-existence of an omnipotent God? There's nothing up there that's going to answer your prayers or guide you.

4. God is Simply a Psychological Projection of the ideal father figure

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Austrian Neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis would have told you that there are no gods. You are simply projecting what you would have liked your own father to be ideally, an all loving and caring transcendent figure. Freud wrote in 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho Analysis' (1933): *'The rest of our enquiry is made easy because this God-Creator is openly called Father. Psycho-analysis concludes that he really is the father, clothed in the grandeur in which he once appeared to the small child... He therefore looks back to the memory-image of the overrated father of his childhood, exalts it into a deity and brings it into the present and into reality. The emotional strength of this memory-image and the lasting nature of his need for protection are the two supports of his belief in God.'*

5. Conclusion

Arjuna, you don't need God to win in this world. This is the conclusion of the brightest minds, intellectual giants, that have ever lived; Kant, Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud, Voltaire, Mills, Wittgenstein, Marx and Bertrand Russell. Each and every one has reached the same inevitable conclusion. Religion and god is an outdated concept. God is just a figment of human imagination, a reason to have a strong sense of duty, an ideal father figure that would always be there for you, a primitive evolutionary puppy like emotion. Finally, you yourself said that the world is full of evil and suffering which conclusively proves that a loving omnipotent God cannot possibly exist.”

I found a marker pen and went through Martin's email and carefully highlighted in luminous yellow Nietzsche's words: *'Likewise his "free will": he does not hear – and if he heard he would still not know how to help.'*; and the section on Freud: *'He therefore looks back to the memory-image of the overrated father of his childhood, exalts it into a deity and brings it into the present and into reality.'*; and finally Darwin's observation: *'The same high mental faculties which first led man to believe in unseen spiritual agencies, then in fetishism, polytheism, and ultimately in monotheism, would lead him, as long as his reasoning powers remained poorly developed, to various strange superstitions and customs.'*

I picked up the phone and dialled Martin's number.

'Hi Martin. I got your email, thanks. It was a bit heavy going.'

'Yes, sorry I knew it was a bit OTT when I sent it. I got it from Tony only a couple of weeks ago. He thought that I might like it. I don't know why he sent it to me. It was complete chance that I had it in my mailbox – strange that you should be thinking about this kind of stuff. I thought that it would help. Perhaps it didn't help.'

'That's okay. I'm glad that you sent it. I've often had some of the same kinds of thoughts as these guys. It's reassuring to know that some of the greatest minds that have ever lived have also thought about this. I've wondered whether religion was just a total load of baloney.'

'Well it is. I didn't send you another piece that I did on Karl Marx. He said that *"religion was the opiate of the masses"*.

'What does that mean exactly?'

'He meant to say that religion was something that was invented and instituted by the bourgeoisie to keep the poor oppressed. The poor when they go to church feel happier and relieved, they are then less likely to complain, less likely to start a revolution and overthrow the ruling classes. So religion is like some massive tranquiliser that sedates and subdues the less intellectual masses.'

'Do you really believe that religion is just some massive valium tablet?'

'Yes I do, and the more I think about it, I find more and more supporting evidence for that belief. Just think about it. People are more religious where there is oppression, where there is less oppression there is less religion. You know yourself how many religious people there are in India which is so poor, whereas in the

UK less than 5% of the people go to church regularly on a Sunday. People are free and are not oppressed that is why they do not need religion, whereas when you are poor and desperate you need religion. Ergo religion is just an opiate designed to relieve tension, a man made invention to keep things in check. The facts speak for themselves.'

'I hadn't thought of it like that. Thanks. I must get to sleep.'

'You're welcome. Call me whenever.'

I put down the phone and went to sleep.

The password for Chapter 2 is bereshit