

The second week in Bhutan, Asha and Rukmini's daughter, Sana, wasn't herself, refusing to take nourishment of any kind, listless and not sleeping. The local doctor had no explanation. The evening of the third day, Rukmini was sitting outside reading when a Raven circled overhead before landing at his feet. "Please bring Sana." When Asha walked outside carrying her baby daughter, she immediately recognized the Raven from Taktsang, the Tiger's Nest. "Follow me."

Rather than flying, the Raven walked slowly leading the way. After crossing a meadow filled with daisies and flowering magnolias, they arrived at a small farmhouse. A woman in traditional dress was working in the garden. Instantly, Asha remembered her dream, the crystal forest with leafy spear shaped trees. The Raven sat on the woman's shoulder as she made a tea from pureed asparagus, giving it to Sana in tiny sips using a small, intricately carved, wooden spoon. Arriving back in Paro, Sana was not only smiling, she was laughing. Neither Asha nor Rukmini were concerned there was no medical or scientific explanation for what had happened.

At the work session the following morning Asha was quick to ask. "Humans believe they're superior. What if we found out the opposite was true, we're not as evolved as we think, maybe even on the lower end of the evolution chain?"

Lapis - "There's a balance in the natural world. We're the ones out of balance. We kill each others over our beliefs and ruin our environment. We think animals are inferior because they can't communicate, when, in truth, they can. They don't kill each other for sport. I remember my father telling me how so much he was taught at University has now been proven false. We better be ready, sometimes the truth can be painful." Shilli - "With what we're doing, no one can accuse us of being risk averse!"

Shilli - "Just an idea. I agree we should start with the research that's been done. Couldn't we also use texting and social media, just as an experiment, ask everyone a simple question and see what happens?" Julian - "Ironic the latest tech communication is tweets and a bird logo."

Lapis - "What question would we ask?" Emilie - "Has an animal, a flower, bird, ocean, tree, a fruit, a star every communicated with you?" Asha and Shilli - "Let's do it!" The number of responses in twenty four hours was an unexpected shock. "The horse I was riding last week told me he was sick." "When I was lost a firefly showed me the way home." "A wave knocked me over, I was struggling to breathe underwater when a voice said *Relax, let it carry you*. It saved my life in a riptide." "My husband's smiling face was in the trunk of a giant pine tree. He died in a car accident last year." As the answers continued to pour in, Julian created a data base.

After the trial in the Hague and the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis felt their mentors, their attorneys, were as close as family members. The issue had come up more than once. What if they had to choose between loyalty to their family, (a parent or sibling), or an attorney? Follow the advice of a family member or an animal?

With the attorneys' working vacations obviously more work than vacation, the only opportunity for Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis to get to know the lawyers' spouses was during dinner. Jane's husband, Trine, was an astrologer. Jane - "Do any of you know anything about astrology?" Shilli - "Does it have anything to do with double stars, star clusters, nebulae, asteroids, what about Mercury retrograde and guardian planets?" Trine - "Astrology believes the positions of the heavenly bodies effect the lives of humans on earth. Predestination doesn't exist in astrology. You have the choice to make things happen. Astronomy follows the scientific method, using physics to study planets, stars, and galaxies."

Laughing, shaking her head, Asha - "I just realized. You're my best friends and I don't even know your birthdays." Shilli - "October 24th." Julian - "February 4th." Emilie - "December 24th." Lapis - "November 22nd. How about you, Asha?" Asha - "August 15th, India's Independence Day." Trine - "Does anyone know the time they were born?" Julian - "2:20 P.M." Trine - "If you're up for it, I'll do your chart. You can tell me what you think of astrology." Julian - "Sure, it'll be fun."

Paul Osprey's wife was a marine biologist. The rest of the evening's conversation was about oar fish, also called ribbon fish, once believed to be sea serpents. Never ending questions and answers about the largest bony fish in the sea, growing to fifty feet long, weighing over a hundred pounds.

A few nights later, after dinner, while new mothers, Emilie and Asha, were catching up on baby talk, Shilli, Julian, Lapis and Rukmini walked to their favorite café by the river for coffee and cake.

Julian - "Lapis, do you miss Russia?" Lapis - "Yes and no. So many things are changing, Asha and I were talking yesterday about the political riots in Russia and India. You know, Julian, when Emilie told me you don't believe in coincidences, I wasn't sure what to think. Now I get it. A few months ago I found a charge card on the sidewalk in Copenhagen. When I phoned the number on the back to tell the company, they told me to destroy the card, asked for my name and phone number. For six months I'd been trying to figure out something for a research project at med school. When the owner of the card phoned to say thank you, we started to talk. Was it a coincidence he was the specialist who had the answer I was looking for? Not a chance!"

As they approached a small field, Rukmini motioned, "Follow me." Walking to a nearby weeping willow tree, blue poppies sprouting from the trunk, he motioned for everyone to sit. Taking out his harmonica, "Watch this." After the first few notes, the sound almost incongruous in this setting, a single butterfly appeared. In less than a minute, a swarm surrounded the tree, an almost hypnotic sound of fluttering and flapping wings, flying in a widening circle before disappearing in the clouds. Rukmini - I just learned that butterflies communicate, not only with sound and physical movements, but with color? What color did you hear?" Lapis' smile was ear to ear. "Butterfly color."

As they neared the café, two men walked past. Overhearing "I feel like a smoke," smiles all around. The Kingdom of Bhutan, one of the safest places on Earth for the natural world, was the only country that doesn't allow the sale or import of tobacco, smoking banned in all public places. Settled in at the café, ordering their favorite blueberry cake, Julian asked - "What's it like to be a father?" Lapis - "Everything changes, someone's totally dependant on you. You know my awful temper. It's getting better, Learning to be more flexible isn't easy." Rukmini - "When Sana was born, I was as excited as I was scared." Shilli - "You guys are married. My love life is non existent." Lapis- "If Emilie were here, she'd lecture you about her worst fault, impatience. She's out there, Shilli, be patient." An hour of conversation passed in what seemed like a few minutes. Rukmini- "Asha and Emilie will be wondering where we are."

The following morning there was a note on the conference table in handwriting no one recognized.

What lessons have you learned
from experience,
from each other,
your mistakes?

When Asha returned from the kitchen with lemon grass and ginger tea - “What’s that? It wasn’t there just a minute ago.” Rather than talking about the interspecies corridor, today’s meeting would take a different turn. Lapis - “Not me, who goes first? Do you think people know why we are in Bhutan, what we’re working on?” Emilie - “I don’t know. We’re lucky to have the King’s support.”

Julian was thinking. “Lessons learned. From experience? The trial was a condensed version of law school. I don’t believe in coincidences. Curiosity is everything. Intellect versus reality. The five of us trust each other. Never give up. My mistakes? When I made a whopper, thinking about what to do, both Marcus and Samuel came to mind. Marcus - “Admit your mistakes; trying to cover them up makes everything worse.” I can’t believe some of the stuff I thought was true just last year.” As usual, Julian’s wardrobe provoked questions. Yesterday’s T shirt was dark maroon with the word *Immutable* with a X through it. Today’s was hunter green with WIP in large white letters. Emilie - “What’s WIP?” “That’s me, work in progress.”

Emilie - “Have learned so much from all of you. The most important is how I feel when we’re together, a safe place to say anything without being judged. In Denmark, we’re raised not to stand out or draw attention to ourselves. When I started working on the environment with Vestas Wind Systems, I did exactly the opposite. Mistakes? Reacting too quickly, expecting others to share my standards, judgmental. My friends call me a perfectionist, I like things in order, have an eye for detail. Noticing the tiny thing to be corrected rather than the whole picture isn’t always good. From experience? Some people heal faster than others. Being able to hear things other people can’t has its responsibilities. Turning to smile at Julian, WIP.”

Asha - “Lots of mistakes. All the times I saw something wrong and didn’t speak up. Forgiving myself for that hasn’t been easy. Marcus taught me to feel comfortable asking for help, Samuel to pay attention to my instincts.”

Lapis - “Most important - never forget that things aren’t always what they seem. Am trying to do better with my bad temper, am quick to take offense, headstrong, not always using my time wisely, going to extremes. This might surprise you. When bad things have happened, more often than not, at least for me, it’s worked out to my advantage. I didn’t know it at the time, especially when things didn’t turn out the way I wanted, wasn’t until much later.”

It was unusual for Lapis to speak openly about things very personal to him. “Something else that’s really strange. I’ve learned that what I don’t know has really helped me. Had I known about certain things, especially specifics about what I was researching in medical school, the similarities that others were already working on, I’d have stopped and never gone ahead. The most important thing I’ve learned is to value what you don’t know.”

Shilli - “I just read about how many important discoveries were totally by accident, not at all what the person was working on. Am trying not to take myself too seriously. Having a twin has saved me. Even when we’re diametrically opposed on one thing or another, the trust will never go away. Other than Matheus, I never thought it was possible for me to feel the same for anyone else, but that’s how I feel about all of you. Am still learning to be more spontaneous, open to surprises, guess I like to be in control. In school, when I have to take some time off to recharge, not to beat myself up about it. Admitting what I don’t know is easy, since what I do know is infinitesimal. Have doubts that maybe we’re not up to what we’re doing? Is this what therapy feels like? Anyone hungry?”

After lunch, ready to get back working on the interspecies corridor, Asha noticed something.

Looking at Shilli's necklace, Asha was intrigued. "I never saw that before, what is it?" Shilli - "Matheus, Neil and I were hiking in the desert last year when I noticed something shining in the distance. It's a piece of bark. The color reminded me of Marcus' coat." Reaching inside her blouse, Emilie pulled out a gold chain with a small circular charm. "Lapis and I were sailing when I noticed this piece of cork floating on the water. I thought of Marcus." Lapis took off his shoe, pulled out a tiny piece of a seashell and put it on the table. Julian opened his wallet. "My first day of college, going to the dorm, this was glistening on the walkway, a piece of glass shaped like a half moon. I kept it for luck."

Asha - "Would you mind taking off your necklaces?" When Asha took the deep pink wild cherry blossom from her hair, putting it on the table, Shilli, Emilie, Lapis and Julian followed suit. Randomly placed with the flower petal, the pieces of wood, cork, shell and glass formed two letters, S and D. When Emilie asked "What does it mean?" an orange and white cat leapt onto the table. After knocking Julian's notebook to the floor, the tabby jumped down and ran away.

Leaning down to pick up the notebook, Julian saw something underneath the table. "It's an SD card. Does this belong to any of you?" Asha - "What's an SD card?" Julian - "It's a Secure Digital memory card." Lapis - "Is it possible computers aren't as smart as we think?"

After the remarkable experiences of the last several years, it was second nature for Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis to be ready for anything. Once the SD card was uploaded to the computer, no one could believe what they were seeing and hearing.

The video conference began, an elephant, chimpanzee, bonobo, cat, orangutan, dog and a dolphin, each in their unique environment, communicating, in minute detail, the specifics of what they needed. When the chimpanzee went to a nearby keyboard and began playing the refrain of Lapis' song "Changes free the hearts of you and me" a written message appeared on the screen.

[Thank you for helping us to be heard.](#)

