

## **Parable opens the door**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

I HEARD a wonderful parable at a workshop I attended last week run by a colleague of mine, trainer William Whitecloud, who wrote *The Magician's Way*.

There was a door leading to heaven. A man kept knocking and knocking at the door and begging God to let him in.

"Why won't you answer the door?" the man beseeched.

The story goes on with the desperate protagonist doing cartwheels, elaborate gestures, and banging on the door again and again.

"Why won't you open the door, God? What am I doing wrong?" he cried.

In the next scene he is praying, weeping, fasting, doing more cartwheels, handstands, good deeds, acts of kindness -- to no avail.

"God, why won't you open the door to heaven? Please open the door, God. Why are you not hearing me, my Lord?" he cried, still banging on the door.

One day the voice of God was heard, speaking through gritted teeth.

The man was yet again pleading: "Please open the door to heaven, God. I do so much for you. Why won't you open the door?"

And God snapped: "Who said the door isn't already open?"

It's a wonderful metaphor for how much drama we put ourselves through without even testing the handle ourselves.

Whitecloud told another parable -- a true story from his life in South Africa -- which had an even greater impact on me.

It was the story of a man brought into hospital who had been found bleeding to death, and severely bruised. Apparently, the man had been in the jungle doing some sort of work when out of the bushes came a lion. The man got a terrible shock and began running for his life.

Two minutes went by and he was darting through the jungle, the wild bushes cutting his feet and face, slashing his body. Another five minutes and his feet were shredded from running over rocks and through dense foliage, 10 minutes and he fell down into a ravine.

He tumbled and tumbled until he had broken several ribs and bones in his legs. But not one to lie still in the face of a hungry lion, he miraculously got up and went hobbling on and on, driven by adrenalin and pure terror.

When they finally found him, he had collapsed in a pool of blood, broken from head to toe. By this stage he'd been running for half an hour non-stop. The irony of the story is that had the lion really been chasing him, it would have got him after a few seconds no matter how fast he ran.

And while the initial sprint was understandable, the near-fatal injuries he sustained from pounding on and falling down rocky ravines, were totally unnecessary.

The point is that we tend to run and run for no actual reason.

What came to mind was the amount of energy we all put into sprinting, long after the lion has gone away. In my own life I was inspired to prove myself as a result of things that happened in my childhood.

Which was a good thing to a point, but somehow -- long after teachers who were derogatory about my abilities and school bullies had vanished -- I was still racing, racing along a path fraught with prickles and stones and deadly ravines.

For a time I turned into a workaholic, driven to succeed to the point of utter annihilation of my personal life. To take the first metaphor, I was still banging on the door to heaven long after the latch had been unlocked.

In the 1980s, as a finance journalist, I wrote a book called *The New Boy Network* about what drove so many of our entrepreneurs to succeed. Many were from immigrant backgrounds or had some sort of humiliating experience in childhood, several had been interned in war camps or had been persecuted in their countries of origin.

Sir Peter Abeles, for instance, the man who started transport giant TNT, admitted that as a Jew he spent much of World War II in a chicken coop, hiding from the Nazis.

It answered a question about why so many of our corporate heroes couldn't stop after the first millions or even tens of millions, often to their own destruction or disgrace. As the 1980s came to a close and many doyens had died or faltered, it led me to conclude: what drives you, often drives you over the edge.

We are all driven to overcome the unflattering or unfair conditions of our past, long after the real threat has gone. Many women can still hear the lion at their heel telling them they are not beautiful enough even though some partner worships them, many of us are still tap-dancing in a bid to be loved and noticed despite our adoring friends and swishy assets.

We run on even though the race has been won, or the door to happiness has been opened.

After the workshop I was able to stop and ask: How much is enough? For when we are consumed with running, we never get a realistic perspective of our own greatness.

[www.ruthostrow.com](http://www.ruthostrow.com)

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