

Enjoy! What will be, will be

By Ruth Ostrow

LAST week my cleaning-lady turned up with a very sad face. A single mother with kids, she has worked for years to save enough money to take them to Bali for a holiday. And then the Jakarta bomb goes off.

"I just feel so confused. I can't get my money back now. We are staying in the heart of Kuta. I just thought everything would be OK. I thought there was no reason to worry and that we'd have a wonderful time," she said forlornly.

It's been the same for many people I know. The shock that has come in the wake of the recent terrorist attack on our embassy has made everyone nervous, including me.

"I think you should follow your heart. Since you are already committed just wait and see what unfolds, and if it really feels bad for you to get on that plane with your children, then you'll make that decision at the time," I say, wondering whether or not it is wise to put oneself in harm's way.

Certainly, if a person is looking for rest and relaxation then heading to a destination on high alert is not necessarily the ideal thing.

But then I remembered a story a rabbi told me.

A specialist he knew was treating a young girl for a life-threatening ailment, the details of which escape me. The odds were against her.

She was not responding to the medication and the outcome looked bleak. But the doctor, who had a deep affection for the girl and her family, refused to give up. Finally, he tried some new form of treatment which worked and she began to respond positively.

Within a short period she had gone into remission. The prognosis was excellent and the family was rejoicing. The doctor was imbued with a deep sense of satisfaction.

Then one night the family rang him in tears. The girl had died.

"How, when, why?," the doctor asked, scouring his mind for something he'd missed. "She was killed by a car," the father replied.

"It was the will of God. You can't cheat your fate," the rabbi said to me in an ominous voice.

I heard a similar message in India at the feet of world-famous spiritual teacher Ramesh Balsekar, revered as an enlightened being.

"There is no need to fear going on planes or terrorism. It is a waste of time," he said. "If you are going to die, then you are." In that laughing, jolly way great seers have he added: "So what was the point of worrying?"

"And if it is not your time to die, then even if you are in a dangerous situation, you will not die. We do not know when our time is going to come, and all we can do is just live."

A friend who is about to travel abroad offered her two-bobs' worth. "I have read too much Oedipus Rex to cancel a plane ticket out of fear," she said.

I knew exactly what she meant. In the Greek classics, humans often think they can cheat fate, cheat the gods, but their arrogance and their sad efforts end up bringing about the very thing they were trying to avoid.

Sophocles wrote his very famous play to show men do not control their own destiny no matter how much they try.

Female lead Jocasta, on hearing a prophesy that her son Oedipus would murder his father and mate with his mother, put her child in the woods and left him to die so the prophesy would not be fulfilled, however someone found the baby and took him to another shore.

Years later a young Oedipus on hearing similar words from an oracle left his home in order to avoid his fate. He didn't know he was adopted and that the place he travelled to would lead him to fulfil his destiny.

It is highly likely there's a person out there who is, at this very moment, changing an airline ticket in order to stay out of harm's way.

Pre-destination or not, wouldn't it be a bummer if having chosen to stay at home "safe as houses", there is a rumble and for no reason a ceiling falls and kills them? Or on the way to the milkbar they have a head-on collision?

The truth is that we don't know what is around the corner, and our attempts to avoid calamity may in fact hasten a bad outcome.

In the end, it comes down to personal belief as we stand at the crossroads. Some people believe we make our own luck, some are existentialists. Others believe our fate is sealed.

Shakespeare wrote in King Lear: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport."

In any case, if we do take the view that our ultimate destiny is not ours to know or control, then it does at least free us up to enjoy the ride!

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