

CARAVAN OF STILTS

Martin Zwick

I.

We all know that the expedition we are planning and which, Inshallah, we shall undertake in the fall, has been attempted at least once before. But the documents in our archives that tell us of that earlier expedition into the Gobi are fragmented and contradictory. The most reliable of these documents indicates that the expedition failed, that its members desisted from their attempt to cross the fearsome desert, that there were casualties. We need to contemplate the possible reasons for this alleged failure. I bring you news today of a surprising finding made by our scouting team in one of the caves of the mountains to the north of our camp that may bear on this question. But first, let me provide some necessary background.



When we first learned of the means those earlier travelers employed to cross the desert sands, we were stunned by the brilliance of these means, and eagerly adopted them as our own. By now most of us are becoming adept with our stilts, and before long it should be possible for us to walk some distance on them even while the sandstorms are blowing. For those of you who are newcomers to the caravan, let me tell you of the background of this ingenious though difficult practice.

It seems to have been the insight of one Sari-Ogli, who ascertained that sand particles, because of their weight, do not rise above a certain height even in the most violent of sandstorms, so walking on stilts during such storms would protect travelers from nearly impossible breathing conditions and would allow the expedition to proceed during the storms. The importance of this cannot be overstated. We estimate that in those days the sandstorms blew for an average of four hours a day, during even the most propitious months for expeditions, and now these dangerous conditions occur more frequently. If our caravan could not continue its advance during the storms, the possibility of reaching our destination, given the provisions we can reasonably expect to carry, would be nil.

Not only did the device of stilts solve the problem of the sandstorms, but the problem of carrying food and water was also solved by harnessing sheep with these very same stilts, the sheep being used to carry water – and even members of the expedition – and later for meat. Amazingly, the sheep could be sustained by feeding on the small amount of organic matter in the sands.

The ingenuity of those early travelers makes it difficult to understand why the expedition failed, if indeed it did. There is, of course, in these accounts, mention of an attack by wild camels on Soloviev, one of the travelers, but it is hard to imagine that experienced desert travelers would not have kept their distance from these dangerous and unpredictable beasts. The account lacks plausibility also because it is inconceivable that the death of one of these valiant travelers would have been sufficient to induce the others to call off their attempt to find the legendary city they hoped to excavate. Great preparations were made for that expedition and many technical problems were solved. The travelers were highly motivated and hardened to the rigors of desert travel. It is unlikely they would have abandoned their great dream at the first casualty. But so, I admit, the stories tell us.

I myself do not believe it. There is other evidence that supports the view that the expedition did in fact continue. Moreover, we have indications that years later other expeditions by our league were mounted, led by one or more members of the original group. Evidence about these later expeditions is more plentiful, but it is less convincing. We may have here simply the multiplication of legend based on that first expedition, stories told around the campfire by sedentary romantics.

Let me now return to the finding that I mentioned at the outset. The team has discovered what appears to be a fragment of a journal and is scouring neighboring sites to see if related materials can be found. The author of the journal seems to be a young member of an expedition who became separated from his group because an injury made him unable to walk on stilts. If the journal proves authentic, it supports the existence of those secondary expeditions which followed the legendary caravan of Skridlov, Yelov, Sari-Ogli, and the others.

The journal also contains some critical observations about stilt-walking. Since this technique is central as well to our own expeditionary plans, these observations must be carefully evaluated. Yet what is in my view of even greater importance is that the account raises a possibility, not hitherto considered by us, that there were in fact more expeditions to the lost city we are seeking than we have imagined and that these expeditions may have utilized other means of travel.

Here is the young man's journal...

II.

In my fall, I broke my leg. I tried to get up and walk again on my stilts, but the pain was difficult to bear. Some friends noticed that I was falling behind and came back to help me, for which I was grateful. It is difficult to walk on stilts, and especially difficult with a fractured leg, but arms supporting me on both sides made it possible for me to continue walking. Not everyone in my immediate group was so solicitous. Most were uninterested, being focused wholly on practicing their skills as stilt-walkers. Some of my companions were convinced that breathing air free of sand ought to make my pain bearable, that it would speed healing of the fracture, that the correct method of walking on stilts would not put stress on my legs, and that, had I been walking correctly, I would not even have

fallen. Some who had similar falls but without injury seemed to doubt that I had broken my leg. I sensed that my struggles were viewed as holding up progress of the caravan, although this judgment was unspoken.

I was, for a time, persistent at trying to get back onto my stilts, but my efforts to walk on them were pitiful. I fell down onto the sand many times after only a few steps. To leave the caravan to attend to my leg seemed risky. It was stormy; the terrain was inhospitable; the caravan was moving swiftly. I feared being stranded. Yet to continue walking in my present condition was impossible. I hit upon a temporary solution. I broke off a small piece of one of my stilts and made it into a splint. This gave some support to my fractured leg, and slightly eased the pain while walking.

But having unequal stilts added difficulty. I had never managed to fully master the art of walking on my stilts while they were intact, although I always kept up with the others, and was even asked by one of the guides to instruct some new caravan members in the more simple skills of stilt-walking. But now, I was worse than the rankest novice, moving unsteadily and falling very often.

There were no doctors among us. I sought help from the caravan leader, but leaders were chosen for their skill in stilt-walking or for their capacity to organize expeditions. They didn't have medical knowledge. Some even dismissed such knowledge as indulgence, a waste of time, or foolishness. The first aid that was offered me was not of much help, but I didn't want to leave the caravan, so I continued walking on my stilts for as long as I could.

Once, after a bad fall, I hit my head on a rock and was briefly unconscious. When I came to, the caravan had moved on. I struggled to my feet and onto my stilts in the hope of catching sight of it in the distance. The clumsiness of my effort and the fogginess of my brain sent me crashing to the ground. My leg was painful, my head was throbbing, my eyes and lungs were bitterly protesting the sand-filled air. Suddenly I noticed someone watching me, and after our glances met, he approached, offering in his outstretched hand a wet cloth which he told me to drape around my nose and mouth. It would make breathing easier, he said. He noticed the stilts by my side and my attempts to walk on them. He asked me about them, and I tried to explain, but he had spent his whole life amidst the storms, and knew nothing else. They continued, he was sure, to high altitudes, and were the natural condition of the terrain when the storms blew. The thought that one could get to a region of cleaner air by walking on stilts was ridiculous to him, and to continue doing this with a fractured leg would only result in more severe harm. He urged me to find a doctor who could fix my injured leg.

Although reluctant to abandon my efforts to catch a glimpse of the caravan in the distance, I agreed. With my new friend supporting me, I was able to walk without too much pain, and after a while, I even got somewhat used to walking in the midst of the storm. A new thought arose in me. While motion above the sandstorm was certainly much easier on the eyes and lungs, and while the upper contours of the storm gave clues about the terrain below, it seemed unlikely to me that these clues would be sufficient to know

where it was safe to move. Inside the sandstorm it was hard to see and exceedingly difficult to breathe, but still one could see some details of the land, rocks, and bushes, and other features of the terrain that were completely invisible at stilt height. Leaders of the caravan maintained that knowledge of these features was unnecessary, but I wondered if absence of detailed knowledge of the terrain might cause the caravan to lose its way and even multiply falls such as my own. Perhaps those caravan members who were able to navigate well in this rough terrain had once actually gained such knowledge and so were able to read a great deal in the contours of the storm created by the objects below.

I wondered also if there had ever been others in circumstances like my own. I had never given much thought to the repeated loss of members of the caravan. I assumed that many of these travelers had never learned to walk properly on stilts, but I was also sure that some had mastered the skill and still for some reason had fallen by the wayside. Now I suspected that perhaps they too might have suffered some unexpected injury and, not finding in the caravan the help that would have enabled them to continue as active travelers, decided to – or simply let themselves – leave the caravan and tend to their wounds.

I thought that if I became familiar with the terrain from below, after my leg healed I might be able to continue my journey and eventually rejoin my companions. My friend also told me that some villagers had developed a material that filtered the air better than ordinary scarves; this enabled them to move in the midst of storms almost as rapidly as we were able to move on stilts. There were even tales of expeditions by villagers to the lost city. I set out to obtain this material. I imagined that I might still be able to rejoin the caravan, and with this new material and knowledge of the terrain, make a contribution to its progress.

III.

This is as far as the journal goes. Let me first state my own reactions, and then open the matter up for general discussion. There is no indication that this young man had any sense of the scope of the undertaking in which he was briefly a part. For this reason alone, I deduce that he was a member of one of the secondary expeditions. Also, he gives no indications of the strength of character which would have made him acceptable to that first expeditionary team of Skridlov and the others. He is plainly sincere, but naive and a little self-pitying.

Still, his account of his experience with stilt-walking should not simply be dismissed. If this practice has limitations, it is essential that we find out about them before we embark on our voyage. As to this alleged new material that the young man said enabled better filtering of sand from the air, our research committee extensively considered many such materials, and concluded unanimously that any method of breathing in the storm was inferior to breathing above the storm on our stilts. Nothing can compare with the relief of

having fresh air for our lungs to breath and with the exhilaration of being above the storm with clear vistas to chart our direction of movement. After all, sand-breathing methods didn't prevent the villagers from getting lost or from falling into wells and crevasses. How could anyone expect to travel any distance in this way?

The young traveler's speculations about the loss of members during expeditions can likewise be dismissed. In our experience, those who have left us because of difficulties encountered in our preliminary forays into the Gobi were unable to adapt to the difficult regime necessary for any caravan into the desert. Or they were not really interested in reaching the lost city. Perhaps this young man was an exception. I doubt it, but it is possible. Still, there is something in this account which reminds me of stories of that wild camel attack in the first expedition, although I cannot pinpoint what my association is.

This journal fragment, I'm sure you will all agree, is an interesting finding. There were in the cave some charred remains of additional pages near what might have been a campsite. Quite possibly the young man may have been forced to use some pages of his journal to light a fire to keep himself warm. It is unfortunate that the account stops suddenly. It's hard not to wonder what finally happened to the young man. Perhaps he managed to rejoin his friends. Perhaps he gave up in despair. Or perhaps he attempted some other route entirely.

Are there any questions?

CARAVAN OF STILTS: Questions and Answers

Martin Zwick

Martin Zwick: I wrote some version of this – I’m not sure exactly when, but it might have been 1980s or 90s. It sat in my files for a long time. I wanted to take the occasion of this meeting to put it “on the record.”

Questioner: Do you see a relationship between how you’re speaking about the sand and what Mr. Gurdjieff speaks about Zilnotrego in *All and Everything*?

MZ: Can you tell me about Zilnotrego?

Q: Somebody correct me if I’m wrong. There’s this material, cyanic acid, that’s in the way of the falling of the ship Karnak, and the captain comes in and asks him, “What should we do?” You can’t go through it because it’s dangerous. You could wait here, or you could go around it, but the point is that... I guess I’m answering my own question...

MZ: That makes it easier for me; thank you. How did you answer your own question?

Q: Well, let me ask it in a different way. What is the sand? Is it a metaphor or is it just sand?

MZ: Of course it’s not just sand. I read this story as a metaphor, as a very rich metaphor, for the difficulties that life throws up in our faces and the stilts obviously are a way of getting above the sandstorm. I think that the basic aspects of this metaphor are pretty clear. The finer aspects, some of the details, are not so clear. And, of course, what is really mysterious is why they called off the expedition. The expedition – as metaphor for work – continued, but *in Meetings* they called off the expedition, so what does that mean?

Q: This is my impression: stilts are unnatural elevations, and people fall off if they try to get up there.

MZ: Yes, of course. And I see stilts as a metaphor for a kind of work, obviously. And – that’s your point –these methods have their hazards, like Icarus.

Q: I have a question: have you ever walked on stilts yourself?

MZ: I actually bought a set of baby stilts, just to have a little bit of the experience. It’s really quite difficult, though I didn’t work at it for very long.

Q: I’m interested in whether anyone else has, and if so what observations do you have, that could add to this.

Q: In our theatre group in Beverly, one of the acts included four of us on stilts, and we were all in costume, so walking on stage, looking through cloth to maintain our balance. I think Bill was on a set of stilts, I was on a set of stilts, and there were two others on stilts, and it was not unusual if one got hit to lose one's balance, and need help. The stilts that we were on -- actually anybody in the construction business knows these stilts, because they attach to the calf. The foot is on a base, and then the stilts go down to the floor, and you can walk around. It's not so easy. The kid stilts have a foot piece, but it doesn't attach, and is even more difficult, and many of us did that as children. Do you have anything beyond that, Greg?

Q: Just to follow up on Greg's question. I had a class of students a few years ago at the little school we have there at Two Rivers Farm and our project over the course of the spring was to build stilts, half a dozen of them, for children, and we made the stilts with adjustable foot pegs, so that as they raised their proficiency...and we agreed to establish some conditions to demonstrate proficiency, like going up and down steps, climbing up hills, irregular surfaces. And as they acquired that balance and judgment and ability to be upright, they would raise the pegs up. The more adventuresome ones even drilled new holes to raise the pegs even higher. It was a great experience for them and for me to feel the possibility of walking in a different way.

Q: So, I hear group work metaphors. I hear group members left. And how we thought about them after they left. Can you please tell us anything directly about healthy group work?

MZ: I was talking explicitly about people leaving groups. I remember wondering, "How come we don't see X anymore?" I think in general, except for those people who had close friendships with somebody who was no longer coming, there wasn't that much concern. If people didn't come, they're gone. We're on our journey, we're on our caravan, we don't have the time or the interest. If you're not part of our caravan, you're not part of our caravan. So I had that experience as a member of groups, then of course I had the experience on the other side, so it was quite illuminating. So I think the fact that in the story the group moves on is typical. The group *has* to move on. That's lawful, and many people who leave groups unavoidably want to catch up with the group. But I think the loss of members of groups is something that is not adequately thought about, felt about, understood. I think it's worth thinking about.

Q: So, the group, the original group that we read about in *Meetings* had this mission, and you raised the question "why did they turn back?" Was it Skridloff who was killed by the camel?

Q: That one casualty -- they decided, however they decided, whatever it was they decided, they ceased. Yes, you said that. It's fascinating, why would that do it. One of the

things that struck me most about this story was how each member of this group figured out some way...somebody figured out the sheep, somebody figured out the stilts, aspects of using them or disassembling them, so the “groupness” of that venture is really striking. But in my experience, people don’t cease when somebody leaves, but the group changes. And that is not always properly honored. I guess that’s the whole of it. I have no idea why the mystery city...we could say the mystery city is our wish, our aim, and so forth, but they figured out some other way to get there, I guess. But there was an end of it in one case, but in the one you describe, nobody knows what happened to the group, nobody knows what happened to the fellow.

MZ: Right, it’s quite mysterious. I don’t have any explanation as to why that was sufficient to end the expedition.

Q: But I like that there are different groups.

MZ: Yes, there were multiple expeditions.

Q: I just wanted to say, having learned to walk on stilts as a child, that the thing that perhaps we forget is that falling off the stilts *is* the natural order of things. It’s climbing back on them that is the important part. As, as regards the chap who fell off and broke his leg, well, if your leg’s broken, you have to fix your leg before you can climb on to stilts.

MZ: That’s right. Yes, it was lawful that with a broken leg this person had to leave the caravan.

Q: And I’d also like to say that it’s true that a group is made of its members and if one of them leaves it changes the group. It’s not that they travel on and it’s unremarked. It’s changed. It’s felt deeply by everyone.

MZ: Well, in my experience, sometimes deeply, sometimes not so deeply. Sometimes, someone is no longer there and... so and so is (just) no longer there. I think some absences are felt deeply but some are not.

Q: Maybe it depends on how long they travelled together.

MZ: Even that.

Q: Couple of random associations. It was Soloviev who was killed. And he lost his head. I don’t know what that means. He ran off in a very emotional state, and he lost his head. The camel bit him, severed his neck, and almost decapitated him. Another association is that in your story we need to know the details on the ground as well as to float above things. We need the below as well as the above. And so, whether you intended it that way or not, I thought it was interesting, because Gurdjieff says that man is higher than the angels because he has to work his way up from the bottom, so we have a practical

understanding of the laws that the angels don't have because they don't have to deal with the laws down here. The other comment about groups, maybe because I'm a psychologist, when people leave our groups, I always do an exit interview. I talk to them.

MZ: You talk to them as a group leader, but someone leaving the group impacts the entire group.

Q: Of course, someone coming in impacts it; someone leaving it impacts it, because the gestalt is changed. But I've heard lots of stories, just like this, of people leave groups, they're gone, so we're better than they are, or they didn't have the stamina, or some self-serving nonsense like that.

MZ: They weren't really serious...

Q: And maybe this is a parroting reflection of what people read into Ouspensky's attitude towards groups, but it seems to be a lack of external considering, and it's an easy way out. Plus it doesn't necessarily leave a good taste in the member who left who may then bad-mouth the group.

Q: In my view, a very essential point about this story is being entirely missed. That is to say the parallel ideas of success and failure, in as much as when you leave a group it is observed by people in the group that you have failed – you're no longer in our group – but it may be that the person has made more progress than anyone else in the group, and has left and found a better direction or another direction for themselves. They also could be wrong, and have failed in the group. So, in this story, it illustrates to me personally the two dynamics working at once – that you fall off – that you leave – the speculation in your eloquent story that it can be seen as both sides of the coin. The person who left is – oh, poor chap, he didn't get it, he was lazy, he didn't come to the meetings, he didn't understand it, whatever; at the same time, he may need necessarily to be somewhere else, and in fact is making more progress than anyone else in the group who is still stuck in the group. We'll all been there, perhaps. So, I think the story is richer than even this idea of someone leaving the group, because clearly the allegory of the journey and all these pitfalls that come with the search, the journey, and the rest of it, they indicate the pitfalls and perhaps the progress that can be made. Or not. So again we see Gurdjieff playing with the dichotomies all the time. But the work for me at least in this story is to seek out, not so much the resolution, but to hold the two ideas up at once.

MZ: Thank you very much. I see these journeys as – they're not motion in a straight line from beginning to objective. They're circuitous, they have reversals. At least in my experience the work is not simply unidirectional... sometimes it may be more like a random walk. Events change things. There also are multiple paths. Maybe this young man found some other means to get to the lost city; maybe not. Maybe this young man organized another group, another expedition. Who knows? But there are multiple

possibilities. Things are more complex than simple narratives of expeditions that leave a place and finally get to their destination. There are reversals. Natural reversals, obstacles that come up that have to be overcome; sometimes are, sometimes aren't. People fall by the wayside. People recover. Here I am reading this story. What does that say? Obviously the story is at least partially autobiographical, partially not, I wouldn't want to parse which is what, but I think things are complex. The very phenomenon of this organization, these meetings, is an innovation relative to standard organization of the work. Or so it strikes me.

Q: I just wanted to pick up on something that Rose said. She said that when we fall off the stilt, you have to get back on and I seem to remember that in *Meetings*, where this story is related, that a fair amount was said about how they got on the stilts, and it wasn't an individual effort. It was a group effort. And everybody needed help. And we helped one another. And I say "we," because I think this is a story about us. We help one another, which is an aspect of group work, but the help is given to those who want it, who feel that they need it, and are willing to accept it. And so it's very much a product of a group effort. And we can't get on the stilts – at least the way it's represented in Gurdjieff's writing – it's not something we do on our own.

MZ: Yes.

Q: I can remember one of the earlier metaphors in Gurdjieff's book was "I have leather; if you want shoes I have good leather." Especially in Nicoll, he has this thing about staying above the ground but being on stilts, I would assume, it being a group effort, that they were on a higher level. This thing about the wild camel – like a camel is a ship of the desert. It usually *helps* you across the desert, and it being wild I kind of see it as being a guide that was wrong, a wrong kind of guide to have who had a disastrous effect on one of these travelers.

MZ: It's mysterious that an experienced traveler in the desert would come that close to a wild camel. I'm sure he would have known better.

Q: Why the camel? I suppose it's the only animal in the desert. It's just that it is the ship of the desert. It's usually your guardian. I just come from listening to the discussion; it isn't something I've thought about much at all. But it was just...it being group work...they gave up. You kept on asking: why did they give up?

MZ: Or *did* they really give up?

Q: Gurdjieff said the guy died from a bite from a wild camel.

MZ: It seems implausible that they would give up.

Q: I would just like to point out that the man that was killed by the camel had set out to kill the camel. He was going to shoot it. And, I think somewhere it said that the camel represents consciousness or conscience. I think that's an interesting aspect of this story that we could look into.

Q: When we use the phrase "group work," invariably we think of multiple people, different sexes, different ages, working together towards a common aim. Gradually over time, I've come to recognize that I myself am the group, that is, there are various aspects of myself. One of us has to be attending to the daily necessities of life, another one has to be pursuing the accumulation of knowledge, another one has to be dealing with social instabilities, another one has to be involved with active-being-mentation. It's the multiple aspects of myself that serve together as a group, and in the case of this particular metaphor, they might have abandoned the expedition to the lost city by virtue of the fact that they had found it, within themselves. As a group there was no longer any need to discover the truth. They *were* it.

MZ: I can't think of indications in the story of the kind of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that would have gone with having succeeded in finding the lost city. And I would take exception to...I'm sure we are multiple...but I don't think our multiplicity can substitute for the help of other people. It's hard to be impartial about oneself.

Q: I have a question about the lost city also, a comment, and that is I assumed that it was going to be the ruins of an ancient place, and so what I gather is that you can't stay there. It's like climbing a mountain. You go up there, you have an experience, and then you come down. You can't stay in the lost city. It's just something you're hoping to find there that may not even be there at all. So there's that aspect. I've been to ruins. I talked about going to Karnak yesterday; I've been to Chaco Canyon before there were tourists who went there. And you don't really find anything material necessarily, you just have an experience there, and something stays with you from that experience, although Gurdjieff did find things in ancient Egypt and maybe some of the other places he went. It helped shape the work. I don't know. But the aspect that you can't stay there. You just go there, get what you can get. You have to come back. So, like he said, they may have realized that maybe what they would find there wasn't really what they were looking for, after Soloviev died, and that maybe what they needed to find – what Gurdjieff did after that was go to a living monastery where he had a real teacher and where he learned the movements.

MZ: You're mixing real history and the metaphor in the story.

Q: I'm using my own metaphor.

MZ: Maybe all the preparation and all the ingenuity and all the working together in a sense maybe that's the kind of accomplishment of what they were seeking.

Q: That's what I meant to say. It's the process rather than the result. In the process, they learned what they needed to learn, and they realized that the result itself wasn't necessary anymore.

MZ: It breaks the metaphor of the story, because they had gotten to the point where they were skilled as travelers, so that now we've mastered all these problems, we've solved all the technical problems, we've become accustomed to the conditions, now we're about to set out. But maybe that's right. Maybe if you've mastered the problems and you're ready, maybe in some sense you've already accomplished something.

Q: Can you tell us how working with Gurdjieff's writings has influenced you. I can see it has. It's wonderful to see that. Just anything you might say about the writings of Gurdjieff, since you intimately are working with those writings yourself, right? How did the writings ... Is there anything you want to say about Gurdjieff's writings and what you've done here.

MZ: I think you give me a benefit of the doubt that I don't deserve, quite frankly. Or you're challenging me in a way that...I don't mean by "challenging" that you're... My personal history with the work is complex and this isn't quite the right place to bare my soul more fully than I've already done in the story which is a partial baring of the soul. So, to be honest, which I should be – what's the point of not? – my first encounter with the work was through Ouspensky's *In Search*. I'm not sure that I feel like giving my own work history right here and now. Obviously it affected me deeply...insufficiently, but it has affected me.

Q: I'm referring to the writing.

MZ: The writing came out of a crisis. If the writing doesn't show that it came out of a crisis, then it isn't effective. A crisis with respect to the work. I guess we should be thankful for those crises that teach us things, that we survive, that we learn from. I feel I learned from that crisis, but it was a difficult point. I mean I wrote this at a time of difficulty in my relationship to the work. Maybe that's apparent. I wrote this in the 80s, maybe early 90s, I don't remember exactly when, under the impact of very strong personal experiences, and the reason I wanted to present this here is kind of just for the record, actually not so much for myself, but just for the record – this is someone's experience expressed in fiction, altered, disguised, not totally disguised. But I think this is part of the story, that many people...The fact that in groups the mysterious disappearance of people again and again and again was very striking to me, and in one group that I was in, I knew that someone was facing a very serious medical problem, and the person had left, and the caravan goes on, and maybe individuals have connection with this person

who was no longer coming, but there was something about it that didn't quite feel right to me. Something doesn't feel right that the caravan goes on, because the caravan must go on, like the show must go on. So I just wanted to put this on the record, so to speak.

Q: One of the things that occur to me as I was listening to your story and also listening to the comments, not remembering precisely the story as it appears in *Meetings*, that the preparation that occurs for the group is at the functional level. They all learn the practical skills. The thing that happens is this horrendous cruel shock – of a nature that no one had anticipated being possible. And yet it is the kind of true shock that shifts all of the pieces to reconsider the wisdom of going on that particular path at this particular time in that particular direction. And when we were working a little bit with the Enneagram – it seems like ages ago, but it was actually just a couple of days ago – we hinted at that, that the part that happens next is of a different nature than the preparation that's necessary at the beginning. And if this shock that happens at a crucial moment is so great, the continuation cannot occur, you go back to the beginning. And my sense – just a gut sense – is that they were not prepared psychologically, emotionally, to proceed, albeit they were very prepared physically, and mechanically. And so, go back to square one. Reconsider what you really need for this search.

MZ: I think the chapter ends, and then the next chapter in *Meetings* is a totally new subject. It would have been nice if somehow this idea would have been present in the text. You're giving them the benefit of the doubt; you're giving them a deeper... It just seems like they...oh, one of our members is killed, this is a dangerous thing, that's the end of our expedition...Maybe it's unsaid. Do you think you would feel that in that *Meetings* chapter?

Q: I'd have to reread it. But the conversation that has happened here today gives me that sense.

MZ: It's interesting that the physical preparation obviously is just the physical preparation, and doesn't speak to a deeper preparation. We're accustomed to the notion of shocks as helpful. But we're not accustomed so much to the notion of shocks as really destroying or undermining, or knocking us off our balance. Shocks are supposed to be good things that fill the interval and we continue. But shocks don't have to be, aren't necessarily, that. They can be disruptive. That's why processes don't continue in a straight line because the interval is filled with shocks that take a process off in a different direction. So, in a sense, this is an illustration of the Law of Seven, of things being deflected.

Q: I wasn't here at the beginning, so please could someone stop me if this passage from *Meetings* has already been read, but I thought it was a good parallel with the story of the stilts and getting above the storm, so I'm going to read a brief passage. "*In these deserts,*

one had very often to pass through winds and storms during which movement sometimes becomes quite impossible both for man and beast since the wind lifts quantities of sand up into the air and, whirling it along, deposits mountains of it where a moment before there were hollows. So I reflected that progress would be impeded by the whirlwinds of sand. My next thought was that sand because of its weight cannot rise very high, and that probably there was a limit beyond which not a single grain could rise. Deliberating in this way, I decided to find out about this hypothetical limit. For this purpose I ordered here in the village an especially high folding stepladder, and with two camels and a driver, set off into the desert. After one day's journey, I was preparing to camp for the night when a wind suddenly arose, and within an hour the storm had become so violent that it was impossible to remain stationary, and even to breathe owing to the sand in the air. With some difficulty we began to set up the ladder I had brought, and somehow, even making use of the camels, we steadied it as best we could, and I climbed up. Can you imagine my astonishment when at a height of no more than 25 feet I found not a grain of sand in the air? My ladder was some 60 feet in length. I had not climbed up a third of its height before I emerged from that hell. There above was a beautiful starry and moonlit sky, silence and stillness such as is rarely found even at home in eastern Persia. Below there still reigned something unimaginable. I had the impression of standing on some high cliff, on a sea-coast, overlooking the most terrible storm and upheaval."

MZ: Thank you. It's a wonderful description of states that are possible, that maybe we've all had occasional glimpses of. But it is above the storm. And maybe there are some things that can only be seen in the storm. Maybe.

Q: When I first encountered that story, my instinctive reaction to it was that of course, it's human and normal to not continue an expedition when somebody that you're responsible for has died because of it. Perhaps this is the lesson – not to continue when life is at stake. They had seen that they were reaching beyond their grasp or something like that. All of this business about getting above the storm and so forth was too big a risk to take, and you just have to start over and do something different at a certain point. So in that sense, yes, a shock is valuable, potentially; it shows you who you are. You're only human.

MZ: If that... Yes, that's a very human response to this story. But to the extent that the story is a metaphor for getting above the storm... I mean it works as a straight literal ordinary human story. It's natural, it's understandable, but as a metaphor for trying to get above the storm, it's puzzling why it led to this complete abandonment of that journey.

Q: I'd like to throw in another theory into the pot. All of a sudden, it struck me – it's like a Djarklom, a shock. I hope I'm not making this up, but didn't they split into groups after this death?

MZ: Two groups?

Q: Two or three groups. It would be great if it was three.

MZ: Irv says two.

Q: Let's add one more. Anyway, there's something that makes me want to revisit Chapter 2, when this planet was forming, and then a shock occurred and it was split into three. So there's something about a Djartklom – it can be evolutionary or involutinal, but there is this inevitable shock. So I think it's a really good question, and I hope you remember it.

MZ: Which is a good question?

Q: Your question, about why did they stop.

MZ: I have no idea.

Q: I view the sand as emotions, and the reason Soloviev died is that he encounters negative emotions, and tries to kill them instead of standing back and staying with the group and observing...

MZ: There's the sand and there's the wild camel...

Q: The sand is emotions – it comes in storms.

MZ: And the camel?

Q: As a group, you can see above it. The camels were negative emotions. They're wild and he feels like he has to attack it on his own, and instead – that's the destruction of him – you have to stay with the group. That's why he has to die.

MZ: Are you saying that an attempt to simply kill, as it were, the negative emotions is intrinsically a very dangerous thing and that isn't the right way to deal with negative emotions?

Q: In Sufism – I heard someone use the word “Nafs” over there – it's the ego. The teaching is not to kill the ego; it's to train the ego.

MZ: Negative emotion is not equivalent to ego.

Q: I'm saying the wild camel can be an expression of the ego, the Nafs.

Q: We're out of time. I wanted to let one other person speak. He's been waiting for quite a while.

Q: Just a very quick comment. Your reading reminded me of two things, one literal and one metaphorical. The literal one is at Sherborne this time of year we had an annual fête,

a party around Mayday, and it was a big event. We opened up the grounds to the community, the village we lived in, and the director of the World Wildlife Fund came down and gave an opening lecture because it was a fund-raising event. In preparation for this, Mr. Bennett asked that we make things, in particular for the children to have a play area, and we had a great woodworking shop and I made a pair of stilts, and I spent quite a bit of time on them. I sanded off all the rough edges, and made the handles so the kids could pull them up, and everything. And I was stationed next door to the children's play area, when the event started, and I didn't see any stilts, and I asked one of the mothers who was caretaking the children there about my stilts from the woodworking shop. And she said, "Oh, I threw those out. It's obvious someone would have broken their leg." The metaphorical thing real quick: there's a fascinating new show that just started on PBS that's called "Civilization," and the first segment of it is about war and they focus on how in the Oaxaca valley in southern Mexico where there are lots of ruins – there's a Monte Alban, which was a big site built on top of a hill, but previous to that, we're talking over three thousand years ago, the inhabitants of these valleys fought with each other, and there were lots of fortifications and sites that they used, and this area, when I was there – I went there the year before Sherborne and traipsed all around, visiting all the ruins, and now with the advent of these new-fangled little drones, every American university has got graduate students down there, and one of the things that's come up with recent developments with these tools is that they're finding hundreds of sites, so metaphorically there seems to be an advantage to having the different perspective of just a little bit of height to see things totally differently, because one of the segments shows this one young student with his drone and his computer and he's just on a hill and he lets it fly up a few feet and he looks on his computer with the camera and he says that, oh, we have to go explore that site because it obviously has got a little bit of an angle to it. And he went over there and found that it was in fact a pyramid. So, metaphorically, getting a little bit higher and having a different perspective can be read into your story, too. This drone didn't go more than 18 feet in the air; just went a little bit up, and you could see things totally differently.

MZ: In the *Meetings* chapter the sand mimics the contour of the land, and so it's instructive, you can read things, but still you can't see *through* the sand, so I would think that there are some things that you see better from a distance, from that elevation, but there are some things that maybe you don't see as well. And that maybe there's no absolutely optimal view that gets you everything. You either have a view from a height or you have a close up view. You can't have both. So you get something, but you give up something. And there's some way that maybe people who are used to walking in the terrain in the midst of storms might be adapted to it. I'm just messing with the story a little bit. But my general feeling is that you can't get it all. The height gives you a perspective, but it doesn't give you the fine detail.

Q: Thank you, Martin. That's great.