Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Gerrie van der Walt)



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Air travel is not for the faint of heart. Although I don't have a fear of flying, I do have a fear of pretty much everything else involved: getting through security, missing my connection, losing my luggage, etc. So when a recent trip from Milwaukee to upstate New York devolved into a multi-day travel odyssey, I was amazed to find myself reveling in the experience.

It began after I'd led a five-day retreat for the Pallottine Fathers on the Wisconsin-Illinois border and was dropped off at the airport five hours before my flight. Armed with a new novel, a cup of coffee and a two-hour webinar on compassion and courage, I patiently whiled away the hours. As the time for my flight to Detroit neared, a delay was posted and I knew there was no way I'd make my connection. Attempts to get rerouted proved unsuccessful, so I returned to my seat, accepting the likelihood that I'd be sleeping in the Detroit airport on the travel yoga mat packed in my carry-on. A stranger sitting nearby suggested I try to get on the flight to New York's LaGuardia Airport, which was boarding at the gate opposite ours. My first angel on this trip.

Although I was not optimistic about my chances, I went to that gate anyway and asked if there might be any way to squeeze me on that flight. Two minutes later, boarding pass in hand, I looked over at my first angel and shouted, "You are my hero!" He smiled and gave me the thumbs up.

Of course, LaGuardia is hours from my home, so I needed a new plan — and fast. I texted my middle child, who lives in Manhattan, and a few hours later I was at her apartment for an impromptu sleepover. As I ate late-night falafel and laughed with Olivia, I felt grateful for the unexpected turn of events. In the morning, we sipped coffee at a little café and visited Grant's Tomb, a first for this New Yorker, before heading back to her place so I could catch my train.

After hugging my daughter goodbye, I climbed into the Uber and met Francisco, my second angel. He asked if that was my daughter. Yes, I said, explaining that I wasn't even supposed to be here. "But you’re having a good day, right?" Francisco asked.

Surprised by the question, I smiled and said I was, adding that we have to look for beauty in the challenges. From there our conversation went straight to God. Francisco asked me why I thought God created "all of this," sweeping his arm to show me the world. We talked about God's incomprehensible and overwhelming love, about mercy and about our purpose here on earth.

Eventually he asked if I had a religion and when I said I was Catholic he asked, "So you believe in Jesus and Mary and the Trinity?" He said he did as well, adding that although he was born in the Dominican Republic, he had earned a theology degree in Spain. Imagine my surprise, although at this point nothing should have surprised me.

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When we arrived at Penn Station, we idled and chatted a bit more about all things spiritual, and Francisco asked me again: "Why are you here? What is your purpose?"

"I think I am here to learn to love unconditionally and to find an internal joy at my core that cannot be shaken by the world around me," I answered. Satisfied, he gave me my bags and we shook hands, two soul friends meeting for just a passing moment on a shared path. Boarding my train, I wondered what else God might have in store on this magical detour.

I found out after I got home.

Although I wanted to rest and considered skipping an evening event for which I had registered, I felt bad about a last-minute cancellation, so off I went to the satsang (a gathering in the yogic tradition). The visiting speaker, Brian, a self-declared "wandering monk" who crosses various spiritual traditions, began to talk with infectious joy about the Divine, and I smiled as I realized he was asking the same questions Francisco the Uber driver had asked. Angel No. 3.

I felt a slight panic rising as I began to contemplate the fact that there must be meaning for me in these mystical "coincidences" that had served as spiritual rest stops all along my unexpectedly complicated journey. But the panic was overridden by joy and awe so great that I practically floated home, eager to share the experiences with my husband and son — although, truth be told, words failed to do it justice. I pulled out my journal, hoping to capture the moment, but soon realized I couldn't. At least not yet. I needed time and space for everything to sink in, to let my soul marinate in the spiritual graces.

I wish I could say that feeling has stayed with me uninterrupted, but that's not how life works. We don't get to stay on the mountaintop, but we can remember the transforming and transfiguring mountaintop moments — how we got there, what we

are meant to learn and how we might find our way back; or even better, find our way forward to the next place we are called.

My travel-inspired mountaintop keeps bringing me back to Scripture: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2) I wasn't the one offering hospitality, but because I was willing to choose curiosity and openness over frustration and fear, I was given angels who "entertained" me, challenged me and changed me. I will never forget them.