

Guilt

Every man is guilty of all the good he didn't do.

—Voltaire

My entire being focused on a single drop of liquid as it was about to plunge down into a clear mass pooled below. As the pounding in my head faded, I moved closer to the drop. Then, in an instant, I soared toward the drop, as if I were whirling on the Matterhorn ride at Disneyland. At the same time, my mind hammered me with a myriad of questions. Where am I? How did I get here? My curiosity ended as my eyes adjusted and were able to focus on the IV drip connected to a bag of saline solution next to my bed. It was obvious that I was in a hospital room, but I didn't remember what had happened to me. Was I still a part of this life, or was I somewhere else? My perceptions were strong, but somehow different.

Suddenly, I had an overwhelming feeling of being trapped—imprisoned in my own body. I opened my mouth to scream, but nothing came out. A strange cast of characters appeared before me. I had seen these faces in the past, maybe a long time ago. One face, in particular,

stood out from the rest. It was a man's face, with an intense expression that seemed to bore right through me. I knew that beyond those eyes was some kind of ancient wisdom. Did he carry all of the answers to my inquiries? Did he want to divulge them to me? His face seemed to grow larger as it came closer and closer to mine. He was just about to open his mouth to speak when the locale changed.

Suddenly, I flew out a window and before me was an incredible scene of a violet, blue, pink, and orange sunset. I felt an immediate sense that the sky was expressing a joyful celebration of itself, as if its colors were alive and breathing. Then all of the hues blended together in the most delightful way to form a multitude of flower arrangements, landscapes, and rainbows rising in the background. As I attempted to understand this fascinating setting and discover its meaning for me, the man from the hospital room appeared again. This time he spoke. His words were abruptly drowned out, however, by the piercing sound of a telephone ring.

I crashed back into reality and was annoyed that I wasn't able to hear the message from the phantom male in my dream. I blindly reached for the phone and pulled it to my ear.

"Hello," I mouthed grumpily.

"Hi, James. Wake up. It's Annie from KPZ. Ready for the radio show?"

"How much time do I have?"

"About twenty minutes."

I pushed the covers aside and began my morning ritual of acknowledging the Universe for giving me another day of life and asking for God's light of protection. I tumbled into the kitchen and prepared my coffeepot for two cups of java. I pulled out a pad and pen in anticipation of the radio show. It was helpful for me to write or draw messages when spirits came through.

As I sat, waiting for the magical elixir to brew, I thought about my dream experience and could not help but speculate about its meaning.

Like most people, I have always been fascinated by dreams. They are mysterious imaginings that belong in a world all their own. Throughout my life's work as a spiritual medium, I have discovered that dreams reveal many important things to us, but we have to take the time to find out what to look for and how to use the information. For me, the first step in understanding the meaning of a particular dream is to write it down. If I don't, as time goes by I am less likely to remember the facts and images of the dream experience.

During the day when we are conscious, our psyches are bombarded by an enormous quantity of stimuli. Although we are usually unaware of all that goes on around us, our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual selves are dramatically affected by the thoughts and images that come our way. The subconscious mind stores these stimuli, and when we sleep, it replays the impressions of the day as dreams.

Although I am not an expert in dream interpretation, I know there are various types of dreams. Some dreams display our mental and emotional anxieties as nightmares. Other dreams are symbolic, and these are usually elusive because most of us don't get the symbolism. For instance, a rat may not literally mean a rodent, but rather someone we think of as a "rat." There are also telepathic dreams. In these dreams, our loved ones who have passed over may be trying to convey a message to us.

Another type of dream is a premonition. In this dream we can actually see, feel, or experience a future event. In 1994 I dreamed of a train coming through my dining-room wall. I didn't see the train *per se*, but it felt like a train in the dream. The sound was loud, and the whole house shook. Wine glasses flew off shelves and shattered on the floor. Three days later, at 4:31 A.M., the Northridge Earthquake struck Los Angeles. As I ran out of my bedroom, I could see items falling off shelves and found shattered glass all over my dining-room floor. The dream I had about the train was warning me. Experiencing a real

earthquake often sounds and feels like a train rattling by. One doesn't necessarily have to be a psychic to have a dream premonition.

As I stared at my blank pad, anticipating my first sip of coffee, I went over the dream images in my mind, trying to figure out their meaning. Last night's dream seemed to have affected me more than most. I felt that the ambiguous man, whoever he was, had a very strong message to give me, and I wouldn't rest until I could decipher it. I wrote in detail all the images and sights of the dream. In doing so, my mind began to wonder about consciousness, the spirit world, and the myriad of thoughts and experiences our spirits take with them when they leave the physical world at death. I thought of all the unresolved issues we leave behind, and how they hold us back from living in complete freedom and joy. Everyone, whether dead or alive, has some unfinished business. Why is this? I wondered. Why would souls choose to go through extremely traumatic experiences that shape their ideas, personalities, and lives and then leave the world without answers to their problems? Why do we hold on to painful experiences? Could there be something positive that comes out of these experiences?

The answer came quickly . . . *lessons*.

All of our life situations happen in order for us to learn. These experiences are actually gifts for the soul. The gift wrappings may not be what we would like or what we had expected, but the contents are uniquely designed just for us. The Universe is perfect, and its timing is perfect. A soul goes through life's most common and challenging emotional lessons in its quest for understanding and to move forward in its development.

My frustration grew as I tried to figure out what lessons might be learned from my dream. In the meantime, however, I had to get ready for the radio show, so I would have to wait until that night to determine if it was possible to finish my dream and get answers to my questions. The phone once again interrupted my thoughts. The show was about to begin.

IT WAS MY FAULT

“We have one of our favorite guests on the show today. He is world-renowned spiritual medium James Van Praagh. Hi, James. Welcome back to the show,” said Rona. Rona was the morning deejay on one of the most popular radio shows in the country, and over the years I have been her guest many times.

Before I began the messages, as I do on any radio show, I spent a bit of time centering my energy. As soon as my eyes looked down at my pad, I focused my mind on a place of receptivity, so that I was prepared to hear, feel, or see any spirits that might be around the caller.

“Today we have Theresa on the line. Say hi to James, Theresa.”

“Hi, James,” Theresa replied.

As I heard the sound of the caller’s voice on the other end of the phone, I locked into it to see what energies, if any, were around her. At that moment, I heard a rather high-pitched voice and received an impression. In my mind’s eye I could see a young man standing right next to her left shoulder. I knew instinctively that the young man was her brother.

“Good morning, Theresa.” I said. “Did your brother pass over around the age of twenty-two?”

“Yes,” she said.

Her brother projected a scene onto my consciousness. It contained blood and black particles running through a human vein. Then I saw an arm lined with needle marks. The young man was crying.

“Your brother is giving me the impression that he died of a drug overdose. Is that correct?”

I could hear Theresa heave a sigh. It seemed that this validation stunned her, as if she were experiencing the agony of his death all over again. She began to cry.

“Keep breathing,” I said to her.

After a few moments, she whispered, “Yes.”

The spirit then impressed me with his name . . . Mark.

“Mark is telling me he is sorry. He didn’t mean to go this way.”

Theresa once again began crying, and then suddenly became silent.

Rona quickly jumped in. “Theresa, are you still there?”

A few seconds later Theresa let out a howl. “It was my fault. I should’ve stopped him. It is because of me that he died. I wanted to stop him, but I couldn’t.”

At that moment Mark sent thoughts to tell her to stop beating herself up about this.

I said to Theresa, “It was his choice. You had nothing to do with it. He loves you.” As I conveyed the message to her, she kept crying.

She answered, “He called me that night. I knew it was him, but I couldn’t pick up the phone. I knew he was probably high, and I just couldn’t deal with it again.”

“Who is Roger?” I asked.

The mention of Roger once again set Theresa off. “Oh my God. I can’t believe it! Tell him I am so sorry. Please.”

“Mark can hear your thoughts, Theresa. You can tell him directly how sorry you are.”

Rona chimed in. “Do you know anyone by the name of Roger, Theresa?”

“Yes, yes, I do. Roger is an old boyfriend of mine. I introduced him to my brother. I didn’t know Roger was into dealing cocaine.”

Poor Theresa continued to sob. Both Rona and I tried to reassure her that everything was okay.

But Theresa continued her lament. “If I never introduced them, my brother would be alive today. Roger sold him the drugs that killed him.”

I immediately said to Theresa, “Your brother wants you to know you did nothing wrong. He had to find out for himself. If you want to do something for him, please forgive yourself. He doesn’t like to see you in pain.”

Theresa then said, “Can you ask him what he wanted that night when he called me? I have been trying to figure it out. I should have picked up the phone.”

I sent out a mental thought to Mark asking him what the phone call was all about. He showed me photographs laid out on a bed.

“He is talking about photos in a shoe box. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” she responded.

“He is saying something that sounds like *purity* or *party*, no, more like *pretty*. I am not sure what this means.”

Theresa reacted with recognition. “Oh God. I was the oldest sister, and I was responsible for taking care of him. When he was learning how to talk, he would look up at me and say, ‘You look purrry.’ He couldn’t pronounce ‘pretty.’ He would say, ‘I love you, purrry.’”

I could sense relief in Theresa’s voice.

Rona interrupted, “Thank you, Theresa. We have to take another call now.”

“Wait! Can I tell you one more thing?” Theresa asked.

“Yes, go ahead,” said Rona.

“The photos you mentioned. Mark did keep photos in a shoe box. When they found him in his room downtown, there were photographs all over the floor of me and him when we were little kids.”

I interrupted Theresa to tell her that her brother was saying at that moment, *I love you, Pretty*.

Because of the time constraints of a radio program, it is difficult to give some callers the level of help they need. There was no way Theresa’s guilty feelings about her brother were going to be resolved in a few minutes on the phone. Usually, I, or someone from the radio station, will assist a caller in locating a therapist in the area.

Right after this phone call, there was a break, and I asked the station manager if I could speak off the air with Theresa.

“Her brother really needs to set her straight and is begging me to talk to her longer.”

The station manager said, “Sure,” and gave me Theresa’s phone number.

After the show, I called Theresa, and she was still crying.

“Don’t you feel better now that you’ve had a chance to speak with your brother?” I asked.

“Yes . . . but I still feel guilty about not being there when he needed me.”

“That is something you will have to process and forgive yourself for. You can begin by looking at the situation from a bigger perspective, outside of yourself.”

Then Mark began to communicate and took our conversation in quite an unexpected direction.

Tell my sister that I came back to the earth to experience one of my life lessons.

“What was it?” I asked Mark.

Mark continued. *As a soul, I had to learn about not letting substances keep me from dealing with the everyday experiences of life. I have had several prior lives in which I abused alcohol and drugs. I died of overdoses in two other lifetimes. This time I came back to see if I could beat the addictive personality that I had so often. That’s what I came to do in this life. It was a test to see if I had grown.*

I conveyed this information to Theresa.

“Are you kidding me?” she asked in a frozen tone of voice.

“No. This is what he is saying.”

Mark further explained. *Addiction is a tough one to learn. When you are high, you don’t have to be responsible; it’s the easy way out of not dealing with stresses and choices in your life. I guess I wasn’t strong enough or believed in myself enough to beat it, but I tried. You do get better with each life opportunity. I will have to do it all over again, but I have promised myself that I will overcome it. By the way, thanks for all the prayers.*

Mark’s profound insight left both of us in awe.

Theresa asked, “Where is he now?”

“He says he is in a place of reflection, like a hospital, but not really

a hospital. He sees himself clearly as a soul and wants to help you and other people understand why he had his drug problem. He is saying, *People can start looking at drug addiction from a different point of view and perhaps show addicts more compassion.* He says that you shouldn't feel guilty about his addiction."

"Thank you, James."

"He wants to pass on one more thing. He is saying, *People should make every attempt possible to let go and heal their addictions while in the body, because they don't want to bring that memory and that yearning over here. It dirties the mind.*"

I have heard this before from spirits, and I cannot stress enough the importance of this fact. When we pass over, our cravings come with us. It is much easier to release our physical, mental, and emotional addictions in human form than as spirits, because addictions are part of our human nature, and we are more effective in breaking human habits in human bodies.

Theresa was satisfied. "My dream has come true. I spoke to my brother, and I feel better."

And with that, I said good-bye. It was a beautiful start to my day.

This reading is typical of why I *love* mediumship. It is such a healing and powerful exchange between the physical and spiritual levels. When a person has the chance to communicate with a loved one, he or she can begin to see events from a new perspective. Theresa could have spent an entire lifetime beating herself up with unnecessary guilt. However, she was afforded an opportunity to witness the bigger picture of a soul's journey and the lessons her brother chose to experience. Knowing this, Theresa would be able to heal much more quickly with her new insight about addiction. She would also be able to see people in her life as souls learning their lessons.

All types of guilt, including self-imposed guilt, can devastate us. Guilt sets us up to feel completely responsible for the outcome of a

situation. I see this every day in my work. Relatives commonly wrestle with guilty feelings over the death of their dearly departed. “I should have been there at the hospital to call a nurse.” “I could have kept him on the feeding tube; he might have come out of the coma.” In Theresa’s case, “I should have picked up the phone and saved his life.”

Guilt is inherent in humans. I believe it is a type of coping mechanism, albeit a flawed one. Its purpose is to let us know that we have done something wrong. Guilt seems to be one of those things that all of us have, yet don’t know how to deal with. Often we squelch it and learn to live with it. We can see the irrationality of guilt in others, because it is far easier to forgive other people’s mistakes than our own. For some illogical reason, we hold ourselves up to a higher standard than we do anyone else. By understanding that guilt doesn’t change anything, other than to make us feel bad, perhaps we can begin to let it go.

WHY THEM AND NOT ME?

Survivor’s guilt is another prevalent form of guilt. This is guilt felt by individuals who have survived some type of catastrophe or disaster in which others have died. These survivors feel as though they have experienced good fortune at the expense of others. Many feel that they could have done something to keep the others alive. Again, this is based on an illogical belief in superhuman power. Often, survivors of a catastrophe feel unworthy and experience a fair amount of depression, sadness, numbness, and lack of interest in life.

A few years ago I led a workshop in New York City. A spirit with a great sense of humor and a twinkle in his blue eyes came through. I immediately got a sense that this spirit was with a group of guys in a cabin in the woods. They were all laughing, fooling around, and drinking shots of tequila.

“Does anyone here recognize this scenario?” I asked the crowd.

Sometimes spirits don’t always know how to direct me to the person in the audience to whom their messages apply. I scanned the audience to see if I could feel any connection. I did. It was way in the back on the left side of the room. Then I had another very clear vision. A big red apple dropped from a tree into a lake and made a huge splash. I shared the image with the audience.

“Does anyone relate to this?”

There was only silence.

I know that when I receive visions as conspicuous as these, spirits have a strong message for someone. Many times I will wait until I get more information. So this time I waited.

“I am seeing a fishing line,” I said to the audience. Finally, there was a murmur from the back left side of the room. A man with salt-and-pepper hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, raised his hand halfway.

“Do you understand this?”

He barely spoke up. “Yeah.”

“Please speak up, so we can all hear you,” I said.

“Yes, I think so. I used to go fishing with my buddies at Apple Lake in upstate New York. We would rent a cabin. Could that be it?”

I knowingly smiled. “Do you understand the name Tucker?” I asked. “Tucker is a giant sort of guy with a mustache and slight paunch.”

This detail got to the man in the back. He stared down at the floor and nodded his head. This was obviously disturbing to him.

“Who is Tucker?”

“My buddy . . . Jimmy Tucker.”

“He wants to say hey to you. And he is not the only one. There are a bunch of guys here.”

And with that remark, this poor man held his face in his hands and started crying like a baby.

The woman on his left put her arm around him and petted him. She whispered, "It'll be all right." But the man's sobs intensified as he managed to mumble a few words.

"What did you say?"

He responded in a thick New York accent. "I should be there with them. I should've saved them. I should've been with my buddies. I don't deserve to be alive."

There was an incredible hush in the room; no one knew how to react.

The scene became quite clear. A group of four men stood behind the man in the plaid shirt. I sensed that they were like one big family.

"Who is Mike or Mikey?"

The man wiped away his tears. "That's me."

The woman next to him helped him to stand up, so he could speak with me. The microphone runner also helped him to his feet and held the microphone in front of him so he could be heard.

"There are four men standing behind you, and they are laughing. *Let Mikey do it!* one of them says."

This made Mike smile.

"Yeah, they used to goof with me like that. I was the small one, and they called me Mikey. Can you tell them I'm sorry? I'm so sorry." Mike began crying again. "I can't sleep at night. I get some awful nightmares. I don't know why I am still here. I don't feel like living."

Once again the room fell silent.

One of the spirits placed an ethereal blanket on Mike's shoulders.

"Now one is covering you with a red blanket. It has a number on it."

The woman next to Mike, whom I assumed was his wife, mumbled something about a blanket.

"Yeah, I got it," he said to her.

He turned to me. "I sit with the red blanket on the patio."

"Each one of them is showing me their badges. They're policemen, aren't they? The number fourteen comes up. Was this your precinct?"

“Yeah, that’s us. The fourteenth. The blanket is from there; it has the number fourteen on it. It’s the only thing I kept.”

I watched this bunch of guys slap Mike on the back and heard another name.

“Who is Joey Malone?”

Mike laughed. “My partner. Is he here too?”

“He is telling you to say hello to Sheila and the baby for him. He says he is fine.”

“That’s his wife and kid. I will tell them.”

“They are showing me that you are looking at a plaque.”

“I went downtown last week to look at it. I kind of felt they were there too.” Mike’s voice broke off.

“They are showing me the plaque.”

I took a breath. “Was this the World Trade Center?”

“Yes, it was,” Mike said softly.

The audience gasped.

I saw a Starbucks cup next to the plaque and asked, “Did a cup of coffee spill when you were there?”

Mike bowed his head in disbelief. “Oh my God, oh my God. Yes, I did. It was weird. I kept putting the cup back on the ledge, and it kept falling off.”

“Joey says it was him. He was messing with you. He said you knew it was him.”

“Holy sh—t!” Mike put his hand up to his mouth. “I’m sorry. Yeah, I knew it was him. He was always doing things like that.”

He turned to his wife. “Remember? Didn’t I say that to you?”

She nodded her head.

“This is unbelievable!” Mike exclaimed. Then he said with sadness, “I want to know why I’m still here. I don’t want to be.”

“You have to,” I answered without hesitation.

The guys then gave me another message. “When you were just starting out in the force, did you save a little boy’s life?”

“Let me think. Yeah, I remember. It was in a tenement uptown. I got there just in time; otherwise the kid would be dead. His father was kicking him over and over. He would have kicked him to death.”

“Why don’t you think of that situation?”

“I don’t know . . . just never do. It happened a long time ago.”

“Well, that is what they want you to know. To these guys, you saved that boy’s life. If it were a choice between saving that boy or them, they would have wanted you to save the boy.”

Mike looked at me. “I don’t get it. What has one got to do with the other?”

I could barely keep up with the thoughts flying into my mind, and I had to speak quickly to get it all out.

“You are going to have another opportunity to save lives. You’re here because you still have work to do. That’s your soul’s plan. You need to be in a particular place, because you will save two women. These women are doctors, and they will accomplish great things. So you see, you never know the reason why certain things occur. There is a higher order to things, even though we are unaware of it.”

Mike looked stunned, as did many in the audience. I was also dazed.

“Thank you,” Mike said. He seemed to have grown two feet taller with this prediction. “I hope that’s the case. Tell them I understand.”

I turned to the audience. “We never know what is waiting for us right around the corner or the opportunities afforded us in which we can influence or help others.”

I assured Mike that his buddies heard every word he said. “They know every thought you have too.”

I described their actions to Mike. “They’re tossing a pitcher of beer over your head.”

Mike laughed. “That’s amazing. The last time we were all together, we were playing softball, and we won. We celebrated at the bar, and the next thing I knew, they were dumping a pitcher of beer on my head. Unbelievable! Hey, could you tell them one more thing?”

“Sure.”

“Tell them I love them. They’re the best guys around. And tell Joey to get the hell out of my dreams, would ya?”

The audience laughed.

And so began Mike’s road to healing.

This is another example of how people beat themselves up with guilty feelings. In Mike’s case, he couldn’t see the good he had done, but looked only at what he couldn’t do.

So what exactly is guilt’s function and what does it motivate us to do? Freud thought guilt served to effectively regulate social behavior. If people didn’t feel guilty, so the argument goes, they would be much less likely to care about hurting other people’s feelings or damaging their property. In other words, guilt motivates us to act good; otherwise we would all be transgressors. Another theory has to do with punishment. We must punish the guilty when they do wrong and heal the social damage done. That’s all well and good, but, unfortunately, innocent people often punish themselves for not doing anything wrong.

A third type of guilt, which I run into all the time, is the guilt that is imposed on one person by another. Most of the time I deal with the living who feel guilty about how they treated a deceased person or the fact that they didn’t do enough for that person. However, occasionally spirits express guilt for inflicting their wants and needs on someone else when they were alive. In order for these spirits to move on to the higher spheres of the heavenly worlds, they need to make amends with their loved ones on earth.

YOU ARE STUPID

The following reading was done before members of my monthly Spirit Circle in southern California. As with all my demonstrations, I never know what will happen beforehand, so I am just as surprised at those

who show up as the audience. As I tell my students, some spirits are better at manipulating the energy spheres in order to connect with the living, and some spirits have greater desire and intention to get their messages across.

“There is a lady standing behind a gentleman here on the side, and she won’t be quiet. She is very powerful and is demanding to speak.”

As I pointed to seventy-three-year-old Bryan Patterson, he slumped down into his seat. I knew the old guy was a bit embarrassed that he had been targeted.

“Sir, may I come to you?”

“I’m just here to watch,” he said.

I surmised that Bryan had come out of curiosity and had not expected to be the recipient of a message.

“There is a woman standing behind you wearing a red sweater. Her arms are crossed in front of her. She is pretty insistent that I come to you with her message.”

“Oh boy. What does she want?”

There were some chuckles from the audience.

“She is talking about Virginia, not the name, but the place. Did you live there?”

“No.”

“She is saying you did. She is calling you *stupid*. She keeps repeating, *You’re stupid!*”

“Oh, she always did that. It was her nickname for me.” Bryan smiled. However, the rest of the crowd seemed uncomfortable.

“Now let me think . . .” He looked at the woman on his left side. She looked back at him with a puzzled expression.

“Yes, we did live in Virginia. We moved down to Richmond to stay with her father before he died.”

The feisty spirit woman then moved right up to me and stared at my face. She was very desperate to get her message across. I telepathi-

cally reassured her that I would. Then I told her to back away from me if she wanted my help.

“This woman is saying that she was your wife Mollie. Was this a second marriage?” I asked.

“Yes. I was married twice. She was my second wife.” Bryan thought a bit. “Well, she was my second, and I was her third.”

“She is speaking about Marie. Mollie won’t stop about Marie. She says she didn’t like Marie.”

“She really didn’t know Marie,” replied Bryan.

“She is telling me that Marie was in her way. Now she is showing me Florida.”

Mollie became even more insistent.

“She wants me to make sure that you understand what she’s saying. Do you understand this?”

“Oh, yes, I do.”

Bryan was a very sweet man. He seemed like the kind of man who wouldn’t hurt a fly.

“Sir, if I may be so bold,” I continued, “I don’t feel that you and this Mollie really were equals.”

“Many others have said the same thing.”

“What is her problem with this Marie?” I asked. “She is talking about something she did to Marie and something about moving to Florida.”

Bryan tried to explain. “I met Mollie while I was still married to Marie.”

Many in the audience nodded. We got the picture. Mollie was the other woman.

Bryan continued, “Mollie and I worked together, and we got to seeing one another. Mollie fell in love with me and used to tell me how terrible Marie was and that Marie was lying to me.”

“Do you think Marie would have lied to you?” I asked, seeing and feeling where this communication was going.

Bryan looked down at the floor. "Ah, well, no. I don't think she ever did. I know she didn't. But Mollie didn't like her."

Suddenly, Mollie began talking about three kids. "Did you have three children? Mollie is saying you did."

"Yes, Marie and I had three children. But I left them to live in Florida with Mollie. She didn't like kids."

The audience muttered their disapproval. It was clear that Mollie broke up a nice family home.

"I see." As I watched this spirit in front of me, I realized the effect of her actions on many people's lives. Mollie too had realized how she had affected the lives of a family for her own selfish gain. She began to cry right in front of me. Her seemingly demanding personality began to waver. At that moment, I felt compassion for her.

"Mollie is giving me the impression that she was a tough lady. She felt that she was superior to you, and you were subservient to her. She told me that you used to do everything for her—anything that she demanded. Oh my goodness, she tells me that you used to do all the laundry, shopping, cooking, and cleaning, while she stayed in bed and watched television and read magazines. Is all this correct?"

Bryan was embarrassed. "Is she ashamed of me? I tried to do the best I could for her. I loved her and would do anything for her."

Everyone in the room was shocked, including me. It was not the reaction we were expecting.

The biggest surprise of the evening was still to come.

"The reason Mollie came here tonight is not only for your benefit," I said to Bryan. I began to receive an overwhelming sense of grief from this spirit.

"Bryan, Mollie came here tonight to let you know that she is sorry. She is very sorry for what she did."

"Really? She never said she was sorry, ever. Are you sure you got her?" he asked.

“Yes, I’m sure.”

At this point Mollie began sending me her feelings, thoughts, and images very quickly. They were everything that she failed to show to Bryan when they were together.

“She feels extremely guilty about how she treated you in life. She is telling me that she didn’t see what she was doing to you and didn’t ever take the time to see your enormous capacity for kindness until she left this world. Mollie is telling me that she should have known that you were her teacher during her lifetime. You were brought into her life, so that she could see how someone could share love unconditionally, with no strings attached. You loved her, no matter how she treated you. She is sorry that she lied to you and is feeling terribly guilty about ruining your life and your relationship with your children.”

Tears rolled down Bryan’s face. “Deep down, I did know the truth, but I felt sorry for Mollie. I wanted her to experience love.”

“Have you recently been invited to a family reunion?” I asked.

Bryan responded, “Yes. How did you know that? I am going next week to see my three kids. It’s been a while since I’ve seen them.”

“Mollie is sorry that she lied to you about Marie. She felt that she forced you to divorce Marie. You were her security blanket in a way. She is telling me that Marie never lied. She feels a lot of guilt and shame about her lies. She wants you to please convey her deepest apologies to Marie.”

Bryan replied, “She can tell Marie herself. She is sitting right here.”

He turned to the white-haired woman whose hand he had been clutching during the entire reading.

Everyone gasped. They were on the edge of their seats anticipating Marie’s side of the story.

Marie spoke. “I understand. Tell her that she doesn’t have to feel guilty anymore. Actually, Mollie brought Bryan and me closer together. We have learned so much about each other because of her. We share so

much now because of what happened. Our children have also taught us. We are very grateful to be with each other at this time of life.”

With Marie’s words of forgiveness, the harsh features of Mollie’s face changed. I could see her turn younger and softer. I knew she was free to move on. She thanked me, and I acknowledged her.

All the people in the room got on their feet and gave Bryan and Marie a standing ovation.

So what is the first step in recognizing guilt and knowing its purpose? Look at your life and ask yourself: What makes me feel guilty? Is it a relationship? Perhaps you spend more time at work than with your family. Your feeling of guilt might mean that you need to change your behavior. If you choose to ignore the problem, you might suffer consequences. But if you listen to your feeling, you might change your behavior for the better. In this instance, the feeling of guilt has been helpful.

Once you realize a behavior change is in order, a good first step is apologizing. But it’s easy to apologize. The next step is a bigger one—actually taking action and changing behavior. We want to learn the lesson and not have to repeat it. Once we recognize the problem and deal with it, we are able to move on with our lives. We don’t need to obsess about it; we can make our amends, learn, and move on.

Feeling guilty for things we cannot change is a different matter. Whether in this life or in the afterlife, guilt can weigh heavily on our souls and grip us so tightly that we are unable to move on. When we cannot change a situation because we have no control over it, we must let go of our self-condemnation. Guilt can quickly turn into regret and self-pity. The only way out is through acceptance and, as Marie showed us, forgiveness.