

“Epiphanies: Moments that Change Our Lives”
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It was February, 1971. Astronaut Edgar Mitchell had just walked on the moon, as part of the Apollo 14 mission. But it was on the way back home that “it” happened. He was gazing out the window of the spacecraft at the jewel of the Earth slowly turning on its axis, with the unimaginable depths of space beyond. A feeling of the deepest awe tingled inside him and he was filled with an inner conviction “as certain as any mathematical equation [he’d] ever solved.” He knew that the beautiful blue world to which he was returning is part of a living system, harmonious and whole –and that we all participate in what he later came to call ‘a universe of consciousness.’

Captain Edgar Mitchell was a man trained as an engineer and scientist, and so he was most comfortable in the world of rational thought and physical precision. “Yet the understanding that came to him as he journeyed back from space felt just as trustworthy –it represented another way of knowing.” (noetic.org)

A way of knowing that the Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, were far more acquainted with. Writing 100 years before Mitchell gazed upon the Earth from space, Emerson said, “Everything in nature contains all the powers of nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff.”

When her book, Epiphanies was published, Dr. Ann Jauregui was nervous about how it would be received. At her first reading, at a small bookstore in Berkeley, she took a deep breath and launched into the pages she had selected. Soon, she felt a warm receptivity in the room. The question and answer period was lively.

“Then,” says Jauregui, “something happened that took me completely by surprise.

“A woman who had been standing alone at the side of the room raised her hand. Shyly she said, ‘I feel moved to share an experience I’d almost forgotten. As a child, I was lying in the grass..., daydreaming. My eyes suddenly went to the yellow blur of a dandelion, and I just felt the universe open up to me.’ She paused, searching for the right words. ‘It was immensely peaceful, ecstatic –like

the truth of the way things are. It had the quality of a new revelation and yet something I had always known, even before I was born.”

Then a young man raised his hand and said, “May I ask you, did you ever tell anybody about your experience? I’m wondering, because something like it happened to me once. [I was in] a completely wordless, timeless place –beautiful – and I never told a soul.”

“No, I don’t think I ever told anybody until tonight,” she said. “It was so simple, so inconsequential in what we call the real world. Invisible, really.”

Ann Jauregui believes that “every person we see on the street has a story like the woman at the side of the room, that it comes with being a person.”

No one can define the experience of an epiphany, what it should look like *for us* . Jauregui has also found that people’s stories of their personal epiphanies seem to have three fundamentals: there’s an unexpected moment of revelation or deep recognition, an experience of time and place suspended, and very often, a not-telling or “forgetting.” (Pause)

Like many other thoughtful people, we Unitarian Universalists value science and what it has revealed to us about the nature of things. But, at the same time, we recognize that science is intrinsically incomplete. There is always more to discover. Quantum physicists are delving into previously unimaginable realms: ephemeral matter, curved space, liquid time and multiple dimensions.

Jauregui likes the idea, and so do I, that someday there might be a science “big enough to hold all of our experience.” For now, I strive to keep an open mind to that which can be explained by our current understandings of science, as well as to that which goes beyond those understandings.

Dr. Ann Jauregui is a practicing therapist. She says she has learned to allow for silences in her sessions with clients, because sometimes it is in those quiet moments that significant insights occur.

One of her clients, a young man, after sitting quietly for some time, said, “I’m feeling something. I felt this once before. When my friend Allan died in a rock-

climbing accident. At his memorial on the mountain, I felt so sad, but I also felt so glad to have known him. Sorrow and joy. They felt the same. Like kneading bread.” He made a gesture with his hands.

“Sorrow and joy...everything folded together. And now I’m just feeling all of it...here.” He held an open hand to his heart. “No, it’s bigger...This extends beyond...*This is what I’ve been looking for.*” (paraphrased)

He adds that the only thing that could interfere with this reality he has discovered is himself –his superstitious self, the one that tells him he’s not entitled to be happy. “All that stuff I learned along the way about how I don’t deserve it...But now I feel the kneading again. [Both] “me’s” are me. All one piece. *I can feel it.*” Tears are sliding down his cheeks. “Everything. It’s all one piece.”

This young man was able to move beyond that feeling of two selves –one open to the sense that “everything is all one piece,” and the other one that learned to live in the material world, where happiness is a prize given only to the deserving. The sense of duality points to a larger challenge. And that challenge is that we live in a mostly secular society.

There isn’t much support for the moments of revelation that come to us. With whom can we share these experiences, with whom can we feel confident that the hearer will understand or even respect our stories? The world we live in being what it is, it may seem easier to tuck them away, to “forget” them as we move back into our daily lives.

Sometimes, though, there are epiphanies we know instinctively we must try to hold onto. We are in the moment of revelation and then, “crazily, we are back in the world again, asking, ‘am I going to lose this?’” (Jauregui)

Dr. Jauregui characterizes this place where the two realms meet as the most interesting place of all. “Standing here, at the point where they touch, one can see into both realms and see oneself seeing,” she says. “Later, even in forgetfulness, even when there is only the remnant of puzzlement, nothing will be quite the same,” she assures us.

The Dalai Lama has said, “It is not that we are material beings trying to be spiritual, but that we are spiritual beings trying to be material.” I think children are born with a sense of spiritual wholeness, which is gradually worn away as they adapt to the material world. I’ve seen it in my own children. I think epiphanies are moments of our spiritual nature breaking through, allowing us to glimpse once again the essential wholeness of everything.

If this is true, then an epiphany is an opportunity to be intentional about keeping that glimpse, that vision, before us, in spite of the disapprobation of the dominant culture. We can “tend” our experience, just as we tend a garden. We can cultivate and nurture the sense of wholeness, the sense that we have and always will have everything we need. That it is within us and all around us.

What are your moments of epiphany? Remember, everyone has had them. It may take some time and reflection to remember them, but they are there. And it’s your experience, so only you can define it. No one else has the right to say, “Oh, that wasn’t a REAL epiphany.” It’s in the FEELING, not the details. If it feels like one to you, then it is.

I doubt that any of us will have the opportunity to look out the window of a spaceship to gaze upon the earth. But it’s not the setting that matters. An epiphany can happen pretty much anywhere. Sue Fliess, a busy professional with children, was heading to the grocery store one morning. A car in front of her had a bumper sticker on it that read, “What if the Hokey Pokey IS What It’s All About?” She smiled to herself and then stopped. “Wait. What if it is?”

What if life is a simple dance? What if life is meant to be enjoyed, not to be taken too seriously? Fliess is discovering that life isn’t something to master. It’s an adventure to be experienced. She’s now less concerned about what she *should* be doing and focusing more on that she *is* doing. She says that she is starting, one foot at a time, to “put her whole self in.”

Let us honor those glimpses of “what it’s all about”; trusting that they are important, even if we don’t fully understand their significance right now. That’s OK.

As Sara Moores Campbell has said, “We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight.”

May we gather up these precious gifts and weave them, like threads of the finest gold, into the fabric of our lives.