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“This Shining Moment in the Now”

Life has a way of yanking us into humility! One day, super-adrenalated, doing my errands at a high rate of speed and feeling awesomely efficient, I needed a new notebook, and *that* is what humbled me.

The store had notebooks with flowers, cartoons and poems. Then I saw “the one.” Great colors, snappy geometric design and cool letters on the front, E’s, H’s, whatever! I snapped up the notebook and continued over-doing until I finally collapsed in exhaustion. Days later, my mind slowed down enough to read the letters, I saw what they spelled: “Here and now.” Oh! *Here and now!* I get it...finally!

Not only that, but the inside cover contained a stream of spirituality. The oversized letters read like a prayer: “care now. speak now. reach now. believe now. laugh now. simplify now. connect now. ask now. forgive now. make things now...remember now...love now...feel it now. appreciate now.” Had I paused that afternoon in the store and paid attention, the day may have gone better!

Every October I pull out the poem that Ingrid just read, its images alive and vivid: digging, cutting, repairing, sharpening, pruning, mowing...and the title vivid too, “This Shining Moment in the Now.”¹ Here we are, in it! Here and now, in the moment! Fleeting and at the same time full, this moment shines with clarity if we pause and notice. We can spend our moments working, texting, eating, exercising. We think, plan, daydream, stew, worry. And we have a choice.

We can enter into the next moment with intention—this one right here with hulking clouds out the window, the wind raw. This moment of newness. Look. Even if you’re sitting next to the same person you sat next to last week, they’ve changed since then. You have, too. You’ve had conversations that have changed you, received news that’s changed you. You’ve seen things that have recalibrated your whole being, adding not only memories but maybe changing the way you think about something or someone.

This moment, and this one...and now this one...*is* new. We don’t know where it leads. But we have a choice right now, with the last wasps overhead, to either ignore the passing of the moment and react automatically to life, or to seek “shining moments in the now”—and live them on purpose.

Now when people ask what Unitarian Universalists, UUs, believe, it’s hard to describe, right? We can always say what we don’t believe in—creeds, doctrines, some will say God. Or we can try to explain what we *do* believe. I like to say that our faith tradition helps us *live life on*

¹ David Budbill, “This Shining Moment in the Now,” *While We’ve Still Got Feet*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press.

purpose. Not on automatic. We have principles (seven of them, printed on the back of the OOS). They help us find our way. Help us make decisions not only from the neck up but with our whole selves—our hearts, our dignity and sense of value. They help us get along with each other. On purpose.

Our principles seem obvious. Who doesn't believe that every person is important, that all people should be treated fairly, that we should accept one another and be free to search for what is true and right? What person of conscience doesn't believe that everyone should have a vote about what matters, that we care for planet Earth? But you know, while our principles feel like common sense, we forget them with astonishing regularity. In moments of anger or hurt, even the most evolved among us can react from the gut, be quick to judge, quick to protect ourselves, quick with our opinion.

Family therapist Terry Real counsels married couples about conflict. "You have a choice," he says. "You can be right, or you can be married!" Same with us. We gather in this place to remember our best selves and to appreciate the best selves of each other. Even so, we have strong opinions, don't we! This is why we covenant, or agree, at the beginning of every service, "to dwell together in peace, to seek truth in love, to help one another." And when it comes to opinions, we have a choice: we can be right or we can be in healthy relationship with one another. We need to remind ourselves to respond in the moment to what's going on and to open ourselves to what *could be* a "shining moment in the now."

Last week, Marion sent an email about the unit she and Jen are planning about bullying. Think of the moments in a bullying situation. Those who follow the news cycle have experienced their fair share of late. From the bully's perspective, the push or shove, the sharp words, can erupt with little forethought—an aggressive impulse. Writer Nancy Jalbert calls such behavior "a display of force that has no depth...no content other than...the immediate, thoughtless shove of this very moment...[The bully, she says] will say and do things without the capacity of forward thinking about consequences...not to mention...‘unintended consequences.’"²

In the moment of bullying, we might hope for redemption—that the bully backs down or shows compassion or asks for forgiveness. For this we pray. Alas, many bullies lean into that abusive energy. Or they walk away, leaving what's happened to foul the air. Either way, their behavior continues to do damage, sometimes for years.

The range of moments on the other side of a bullying encounter may start with dread, "a sinking feeling," as Michelle Obama put it recently, when a woman at work or on the sidewalk is subjected to an unwelcome advance or rude talk...or worse. Moments of pain sink in, and years can pass with the truth buried in a dark corner, unaddressed and untold.

Thankfully, we live in a time of readiness to address bullying. In the past two weeks, fueled by a woman's campaign to be president of this country, waves of stories about misogyny have appeared on the Internet. Wikipedia defines *misogyny* as "dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women." Misogyny has come under fire for generations, and today the fire burns especially hot. A bright energy is moving many, many women past their internalized pain,

² Personal conversation with Nancy Jalbert.

fear and shame into the light, toward wholeness. A roar of solidarity is helping them tell their stories. Supporting them. Lifting them to a new reality. Moments of taking on bullies are “shining moments in the now”: the moment a kid stands up to a playground bully or when a woman’s sinking feeling becomes a voice of strength.

The other night, John and I watched the last presidential debate at a friend’s house. Back home, too riled up for sleep and too disheartened for more news, I happened to turn to Dick Pollock’s Facebook page—someone had mentioned the outpouring of love on it. Now, photographs are literally “shining moments in the now.” We grab our phones to capture a moment that means something to us. That matters.

Dick had an extraordinary gift for seeing, an eye for “moments in the now.” The color and light of his photos, the words of his captions—ordered and presented just as he had chosen to share them with the world—felt like meeting him through a new lens. Not only that. His posts over the years replaced that night’s cynicism with peacefulness. Sadness too, to be sure, and gratitude for all that he was—but also the peacefulness of “a shining moment.”

What about your “shining moments in the now”? I invite you to recall an instance when time seemed to stop and, just for a moment, you had a shining moment of clarity, a moment that has stayed with you. I invite you to share with us. Maybe a sight. Or an expression on someone’s face. Who would like to share in just a sentence or two a “shining moment in the now”? (Sharing: new babies, last loons of autumn, beauty on the trail)

Presbyterian theologian Frederick Buechner writes:

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is....
touch, taste, smell your way
to the holy and hidden heart of it
because in the last analysis
all moments are key moments,
and life itself is grace.

Life gives us shining moments of clarity. Stopping and finally seeing three simple words—“here and now”—puts busy-ness into perspective. Working outdoors all day, getting ready for winter, we see “the curse of thought” contrast with the “shining moment in the now.” Hurtful old incidents come to light and ignite a rallying call for justice. A beloved photographer literally frames one “shining moment in the now” after another. Shining moments of clarity.

Let us pause and make room in our daily lives for the now. Let us wake up to what is right before our eyes.

So may it be.