

Waking Up to Mystery

*Awareness of a mystery is shared by all people. . . .
Those to whom awareness of the ineffable is a constant state of mind
know that the mystery is not an exception but an air that lies about all being, a spiritual
setting of reality; not something apart but a dimension of all existence.*

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The above quote has encouraged me to explore how mystery is a dimension of my existence. As Heschel says, “it is an air that lies about all being, a dimension of all existence.” There is the big and ongoing mystery of how and why we are here at all, but that is really too abstract for me to grapple with. I want to practice becoming aware of how mystery permeates every aspect of my life, no matter how seemingly insignificant. I think one of the ways mystery breaks through to us is when we realize we all are one—all of creation is related, but we can fail to appreciate mystery when we are caught in the illusion of the separate self.

I was reminded of this oneness today when I was meditating. In addition to its spiritual benefits, meditation has lots of physical benefits. It is calming and centering and has a way of settling the storm within you. My physician has encouraged me to regularly keep track of my blood pressure and I've found that it is always lower if I take it after meditating. This morning I was in a rush, worried I'd be late for an appointment, but I knew my day would go better if I took the time to meditate. While I was meditating I felt something touch my knee and it was Moze, my border collie, gently resting his head on my leg. I could feel my blood pressure go down as I petted his head, and I wondered at the mystery of how he knew I needed his comfort and support at that moment.

I'm thinking of the mystery of how it happens that when I am feeling lonely or sad, I might run into a friendly neighbor who stops to chat with me and changes the mood of my day. It is a wonderful and somewhat mysterious gift how the smiling face of a friend or even a stranger can alter my mood for the better. A couple of weeks ago I received an email from a woman who had been in a leadership program that I facilitated for many years. She said she was in the program about fifteen years ago and decided to look me up. Through the mystery of the internet she found me. We met for lunch and had a lovely time.

The mystery of death and rebirth is manifested to us through the changing seasons. I am sad to see the dead foliage of the beautiful stand of Turk's Cap Hibiscus I had in my front yard, but I'm confident that they will come back just as they did two years ago after the snowpocalypse.

Complacency and self-absorption can blind us to the mystery. But awareness of its presence is a healing balm for our souls. I am aware of the mystery of our five senses and how they keep us in touch with the miracle of all that surrounds us. Covid and even the common cold have made us aware of what it is like to lose the senses of smell and taste. I have a friend who lost his sense of smell years ago after a bad cold. He tells me that every once in a while he has an "olfactory moment" and it brings him great joy. This is a reminder to me to keep awake to the myriad of mysteries that surround me and to the blessing of the senses that enable me to experience the miracle of creation.

Mystery, to paraphrase the poet, Gail Onion, can shake our souls awake. The ever-present mystery of relationship—how we find each other, take care of each other, learn from each other, and love each other is a source of awe and wonder. How were we lucky enough to meet these precious souls who, in Onion's words, "Make sweet the bitter" and "make bearable the unbearable"? I want to be intentional about waking to this "spiritual setting of reality", this dimension of all existence". I don't want to be asleep when mystery unveils its presence.