

PROFOUND HUMANNESS AS EFFULGENCE

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I've always wondered why saints have haloes and certain Hindu deities have blue faces and enlightened Buddhist monks have swollen, shining foreheads. I've always wondered why Lord Buddha has that peculiar expression on his face. Not anymore.

I met a young fellow this year who once was part of our group and he threw up his hands and said, "Why, Maureen Jenkins, I never thought I'd see you again in this life " And inside myself I said, "You didn't." And as we shook hands, he was saying to himself, "I didn't." I'm sure my head wasn't shining, and as I look around this room, none of you are sporting anything like haloes, but something about all of us is at least as visibly different as if our faces had turned blue.

When one is engaged in the world with radical integrity, there is a severe propensity to fall into effulgence when that engagement becomes intensified or integrity is intensified, unless one prevents it by self-depreciation, cynicism or just fear of going too far. Effulgence is no occult thing. If you'll pardon the metaphor, it's more like athlete's foot than magic.

Like athlete's foot, for instance, anyone who knows what they're looking for can more or less spot if effulgence has happened or not. That is, effulgence is no more a story you whomp up about your life than athlete's foot is a story about your feet.

Effulgence is both a solitary and a corporate experience. (What we have called "resurgence" in society today is just the corporate side of effulgence.)

It's contagious.

Effulgence has no relation to how you feel.

Effulgence as I've said can be prevented, but once contracted, it will occur chronically for the rest of your life.

No one is immune.

I'll describe this phenomenon in four ways, as shown on your chart.

ENDLESS AFFIRMATION -- Effulgence is gratitude in the midst of suffering.

UNLIMITED POWER -- Effulgence is certitude in the midst of weakness.

PARADOXICAL ABUNDANCE -- Effulgence is joy in the midst of humiliation.

RESTLESS TRANQUILLITY -- Effulgence is harmony in the midst of resentment.

Endless Affirmation

Sometimes, in the midst of one's suffering, one is flooded with gratitude for the very universe which is such pain. This is effulgence. Kelapa Dua setup began four days before the Consult. It was the damndest chaos you've ever seen. After Sunday's opening night feast, we decided to move the plenary tent 1/2 mile away. Between 11 PM and 7 AM, the entire operation -- tent, tables, chairs, decor, blackboard -- just shifted out into the middle of this big plateau. We showed up the next morning to start and all you could say was, "What colleagues we have! What did I ever do to receive the honor of working with people who do things like this?"

I was talking to another colleague one time about some of the people she knew who had left the Order. All of a sudden she said, have you ever counted the dumb things like washing dishes or making a few phone calls that came up just when you were about to walk out the door, and you ended up staying? And a scenario started in my head that went on for days, just sheer gratefulness for meaningless little events, gratitude that took my breath away, for the way it's all happened.

Sometimes the 20th Century itself seems to take on an identity all its own. I used to teach CS-I and LENS and so forth, but I feel as if I've just met the 20th Century recently, that it's walked into communities on legs and strode about. People recount especially the past 30 years again and again -- the railroad was taken out, the cotton was mechanized, the Dutch finally were driven out, the Germans occupied, the Americans occupied, the farms no longer make it. Some small towns became great metropolises and some small towns got smaller. You listen to the pain and the pain and the pain of it and you sit in an opening feast and watch the people of these times take all that pain and sing about it. What a time to be alive!

Unlimited Power

And sometimes, in the midst of your weakness, you experience shocking power in your very impotence. This is effulgence. I guess many of us have gone to more funerals this year than any year we can remember, Funerals for the community, our colleagues, our consultants. And never have we watched so many just give up hope and die inside in the face of today's suffering. And you who remain find yourself just moving. Not so much out of heroism, sometimes, as fear. You find yourself engaged -- not just working, but loving the village, the town -- admitting its claim on your life. You find yourself living in the same contradiction that lives in the village. For a contradiction without always sends spies within your ranks, like the Trojan horse. The community in which the major contradiction was fragmentation was the same place where the team couldn't bring itself to meet even once and the Auxiliary couldn't possibly work together. You show up engaged. When you turn, however, to tactics, it's sheer liberation. You do the tactic that goes the way history, the community and all your forces are going and suddenly tactics are spinning a mile a minute. Some of you may remember a Monday night back on the West side when a truck hit a butane tank over at the bus barn. Crash from the truck with the

ba-room That's what happens with tactics. It's such power that you just want to crawl under the table. I can't count the number of times that people have turned to me lately when things were really breaking loose and whispered, "Is it always this chaotic?" I say, "I sure hope so."

This power does two things to you. First, you acquire a breathless respect for the thrust, the trends, call it the face of the mystery that lives in the community or the group. Absolutely nothing else is even remotely interesting. You find yourself a fanatic about the contradiction, like Sherlock Holmes. Secondly, you show up utterly confident in what you're doing. I don't mean relaxed. I mean, you don't worry about whether the butane tank will go sky-high if you hit it. You just don't. You worry about hitting it right, but as for whether the thing will come off, you just know it will. People say, "Aren't you worried about this thing? What will we ever do if this doesn't come off?" And you just yawn and tell them to watch carefully when the truck starts.

Paradoxical Abundance

Sometimes in the midst of life's humiliation, one is overwhelmed by the abundance of his empty life. This is effulgence. When the musical Peter Pan was on stage, Mary Martin did a lot of flying with the aid of wires while singing. It was, I understand, glorious from the audience. So are most of the events we put on -- schools, councils, consults and forums. As the one whose job it is to stand behind the curtain with the wires and pulleys, you get a little jaded about these flying arias. Marge and I just really have to pull like hell to get Steve Allen off the ground sometimes, let alone floating buoyantly across the village. And it's tough to get excited about David and Jon's glorious team numbers when you've had to put them back on key once every line. And we all bear that relationship to each other. But sometimes while you're tugging at wires, you notice that it's just a phenomenal show. And there you are, a part of it.

We had our son Jean-Paul in Philadelphia this year while we traveled, and stopped in to visit a few times. We'd walk in with GSD slides and the house and sojourners was going a million miles an hour in New Jersey, inking, working out, with this preschool brigade in the midst of it all. And we'd sit down and share campaigns. You'd just begin to burst with the victories, the issues that were being dealt with. The whole house tingled with the delight of that campaign. I can't even imagine what New York or Maliwada or Oklahoma City must be like.

Standing the other morning in the assignment room, Bob Vance stumbled his way through Indian name after Indian name after Indian name and then started Egyptians. The whole sleepy roomful of people started to come alive and wake up. By the time he hit the name of anybody in the room, we'd have gone anyplace. The joy of having your name on the board really couldn't change that much by being in one column or another column.

Restless Tranquillity

Sometimes, in the midst of resenting life, one finds oneself in harmony with the world's assaults. This is effulgence. It's the ten minutes in the outer office before the really big call. It's sitting on the speaker's platform watching the faces of the community. It is being poised to strike and terrified, knowing your tactics are all done and waiting to watch them unfold. You watch yourself like the coyote and the roadrunner dropping over the cliff, and instead of falling, you're floating. You're floating on history.

It happens when you really are assigned to do that thing you dreaded -- the thing you just knew would show the world once and for all what a real mess you are. You set out muttering to yourself, blundering just like you knew you would, and sometimes notice that it is in fact getting done.

Two mosquitoes were sitting on the edge of a pile of sewage and one is crying and the other has its wing around her and says, "Well, honey, you know wherever we are, is a pestilential hole." And it's hard to get really scared anymore. Where else would you be but in a village? The weather and the discomfort and your disastrous mistakes sometimes just show up as your allies. When the Consult got underway in Lorne, the snow which had blocked us at every turn -- literally, just wasn't a block anymore. You walked through it. Only the destiny of that village was there.

Effulgence is as human and ordinary as meat and rice but the taste of it is what allows engagement to sustain us and those with whom we work. It happens in the midst of engagement and integrity. It does not happen through harder working, counseling, preaching, and legislating. These are wonderful and good but effulgence transforms life. Beware that you keep your eyes on life, on engagement, lest you lose your eyes. In closing, I'd like to read one poem.

"When the Ripe Fruit Falls"

When the ripe fruit falls,
its sweetness distills and trickles away
into the veins of the earth.
When fulfilled people die,
the essential oil of their experience enters
the veins of living space, and adds a glisten
to the atom, to the body of immortal chaos.
For space is alive
and it stirs like a swan
whose feathers glisten
silky with oil of distilled experience.