



Living in The Radiance of Being

There is an excellent book by Allan Combs published in its second edition in 2002, bearing the title *The Radiance of Being*. This title alone brings to mind two aspects of life that might interest us in the 21st century.

Our century is marked by two seeming polarities – on the one hand the magnificence of our universe and its story, and on the other, the seeming intractable problems facing the planet and its peoples. I ask myself how can I celebrate the one and at the same time bear the sorrow and pain of the other?

The plain fact is, we do it all the time, apart from those periods when the sorrow overcomes us. Romantic love may often come with deep pain as in the archetypal Celtic myths of Tristan and Isolde, and Arthur and Guinevere not to mention the near legendary story of Abelard and Heloise. Joseph Campbell in his celebrated series *The Power of Myth* recounts the response of Tristan to being told his love for Isolde will result in his death:

If by my death, you mean this agony of love, that is my life. If by my death, you mean punishment that we are to suffer, if discovered, I accept that. And if by my death, you mean eternal punishment in the fires of hell, I accept that, too.

Not all suffering is restricted to difficult situations of romantic love, but I venture to say that most if not all suffering is set over against something that we value dearly, and have not been able to fulfil. It is a perennial problem how to live with pain, sorrow and apparent evil while at the same time 'living in the radiance of being.' Jesus and many heroes and heroines of history faced this in their own life, and took the most difficult choice of all – the sacrifice of their lives.

The refusal of life has never been a option for most people, but sometimes there can be an acceptance of the mediocre, and this is where tragedy lies. If we really are the emergent reality of a huge and beautiful universe, whose origin and ongoing source we embody, then the celebration of life and its radiance



must surely be our fascination, and not the passing ills that are set against it.

There is always sunrise.

There is always sunset.

But there is only one Earth, spinning in the light of our one Sun.

Everywhere is antipodes to somewhere else;

the one having a sunset,

the other a sunrise,

There has only ever been

one gold medal to win,

and we are all winners

because we are all connected.

Your success is our success,

your glory is our glory

your sorrow is our diminishment too.

Every molecule in our vast divine web of attraction and relation

can mount the podium today,

e'en though it be a cross that raiseth me

and sing the song of Creation

"Consumatum est - We made it!".

'Consumatum est', T Parton, 13/8/12

Our religion is not against celebration. I think we are over the mentality that fun is out of bounds. What we are not over is a reluctance to celebrate the presence

of God/Divinity in all its emergence around us. Let's celebrate the seasons; celebrate the arrival of mangoes in spring and tasty tomatoes or asparagus in summer. Celebrate the shortest day — our ancestors knew the days would be getting longer from then on, and they saluted the birth of the light. This was Christmas in the northern hemisphere. No wonder Jesus' birth was placed in conjunction with the heavens, and even the magic star of Bethlehem.

The body knows about the radiance of being. There is not one ecstasy of our lives which does not have its seat in our bodies, whether it is the enjoyment of a fine wine, the best coffee, love-making, childbirth, a dip in the ocean, massage, sublime meditation or prayer.

Our bodies are a microcosm of the universe, embodying everything remembered from the first living cell and before. Our bodies are the descendants of the survivors of the several major extinctions of species that each almost terminated life on earth - the last being about 75 million years ago when a meteorite strike caused a climate change that finished the age of the dinosaurs. We were smaller mammals then, living in the trees and the forests, and gradually our ancestral line grew in body and brain size until here we are today.

We can bask thankfully in the radiance of being knowing that millions of life forms before us accepted life not knowing that one day one of their descendants would be standing up in the sunrise, inheriting their amazement, and wondering about our place in the scheme of things, and where life might be leading us.

It is a not uncommon experience that when people look back on life, they can think that everything that has happened to them seems to have been laid out for them as though it had been planned. I am thinking that this might well be the case for those who consistently have accepted life with its adventures and dangers rather than living with an acceptance of mediocrity.

Hopefully there is something of the Olympian in us all.

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Photo: Mary White