

EPIPHANY

Russell Delman January 6, 2021

Dear Friends,

The startling events in the U.S. capital yesterday inspire me to connect with you and share a few words.

January 6, the day of riotous behavior in the U.S. remarkably coincides with the day that Christians call Epiphany. While in that tradition it is associated with the birth of Christ, it has other, wider meanings as well.

Definition - 1) A sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something OR **2) an intuitive grasp of reality, usually through an event that is striking.**

In common usage, epiphany means to have a moment of great clarity in which something comes to a head and is seen precisely, with startling clarity, often in transformative ways.

Some “epiphanies” and lessons that are emerging for me from the events yesterday:

Delicate Shame – When I think of all my international friends and students witnessing the United States in such a state, a delicate shame fills my body. I want to say, “we are better than this” or “this is only a few of us”. Still, in my heart, I see these actions as one expression of the collective consciousness, of which I am a part.

Humility - Since coming of age during Vietnam, I long ago lost my childhood illusions about the specialness of my country. Still, I hold onto the vision and ideals out of which the U.S. was born. With all our faults, I still see the positive vision for humanity to which we aspire. It takes some humility to personally own that one aspect of our collective consciousness is being expressed through the assault on our capital. This is not just a few “bad actors”, not just a “them”, it is bigger than that.

Speech matters: Words not only describe they create. We cannot separate the power of the word from human actions and our influence on each other. People must be held responsible for their words. My intention is to use

speech for healing and to be aware of the effect that my words are having on others. While kind, caring, healing speech is essential, finding effective ways telling hard truths is equally important.

Responsibility: It is remarkably rare for people to take responsibility for the effects of their words, attitudes and actions. While I am not amazed at the president's inability to see his inflammatory role, I continue to be stunned by so many people, who are not evil or ignorant, refusing to acknowledge their responsibility for inciting these behaviors. My epiphany is to go further in taking responsibility for what occurs in my world.

Hurt people, hurt people: This powerful truth reminds me to look at how destructive actions come from deep pain. This does not absolve people from responsibility for their actions, but helps me not add to the negativity in a situation through reducing these perpetrators, in their entirety, to their worst selves and intolerable actions. When my thoughts increase division and alienation, I am part of the problem.

A Long and Winding Road Together

Overall, the biggest Epiphany is just how far we must go to create a just, verdant and functional world. It is obvious that we have the resources on our planet for EVERY person to be well-fed with all the necessities of life. We also have the potential as a species for EVERY human being to feel respected, valued while having abundant opportunity for freedom, creativity and happiness.

Hopefulness: This is potentially a reckoning for all of us. By ALL of us, I mean the collective consciousness of the world. Whether the U.S. is seen positively as a beacon of light or negatively as a hostile imperialist country, it generates very powerful images in the world consciousness.

IF there can be something like a world epiphany for the dangers of hateful inflammatory speech, for intolerance, for ignoring the needs of others, for dividing the world into us and them, then, perhaps we can take a collective step toward our planetary potential.