

Close Encounters of the Spiritual Kind

Recently, on a lazy TV night, I had the chance to see again Steven Spielberg's 1977 movie Close Encounters of the Third Kind. It had caught my mystical imagination (as well as funny bone) many years ago, so I sat through it again, ads and all. The movie opens with signs around the planet of mysterious "visitations" that leave an imprint of longing on those who experience these strange presences passing over the land. These inner brandings and stirrings drew people together and culminated in a moving ceremony of welcome to a people from outer space. It was an elevating story of invitation to the More, of spiritual transformation.

Everyone on life's spiritual journey experiences "close encounters" and processes of transformation:

recognition of inner resonances and stirrings,
deep attention to the vibrations of God's presence and call,
and brave steppings-forward into the Spirit's movement of change.
God troubles our inner waters with Grace, and makes us New.

In the movie, a uniformed official investigating the "visitations" could not make sense of the response that an African nomad made about what he had seen. The officer was too embarrassed to write in a report: "*The man said the sun came out last night. He says it sang to him.*" Ah... That's when we pay attention, letting ourselves feel the grip of anticipation, a meeting about to happen.

Spiritual encounter is often unsettling. The movie's main character (Richard Dryfuss), cried desperately, "I just want to know that it's really happening." We too ask, "***How can I learn to trust my innerness, this unsettling, this desire in my heart for communion?***"

How? *Listen* to the mysterious tunes planted by the Spirit in your heart. Despite your pressured life and these worrisome times, nurture the new stirrings or stretchings in your consciousness and spirituality. Be present to this encounter with the Spirit. Share your story and seek guidance. Something is "really happening!" Follow your yearnings. The Spirit is moving!

We are always "in the midst" of transformation of mind and spirit in our personal lives and the quality of our world today. The Spirit's winds stir us to grow in compassion and generosity every day. Periodically we have to learn new tunes. We are "always and everywhere" in the processes of transformation-- "visited" and invited to "close encounters" with our God.

Reflection

In a group or alone, reflect on some specific "close encounters of a spiritual kind" you have experienced. In what ways were your spiritual yearnings stirred? How was your life disturbed and nudged? In what ways were you changed?

Today, what kind of close encounter or transformation do you feel invited to—in your personal life and as a member of the global community?

Responses to: mbrownop@aol.com www.racinedominicans.org/retreats/inspiration
Scroll down for book suggestions

**BOOKS IN THE SIENA BOOKSTORE THAT ENCOURAGE
“CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF A SPIRITUAL KIND”**

Inviting Silence: Universal Principles of Meditation. Gunilla Norris, 2004. 100 pages.

Excerpts from chapter “Begin to Begin”:

*Can we recognize that now and then there comes
an inner sense, a fleeting thought, a little yearning
To live our lives differently?*

*We don’t know what this means or what it requires...
But the longing continues...*

*Could we sense that this longing is not lack...
Could we receive it as an invitation instead,
a calling, a small voice inviting us home,
back to our truer self?*

*This shift in thought can move mountains.
It can let us begin to begin. 9-11*

What contemporary spiritual writers say of this little book:

Jack Kornfield: “Just reading this book makes you want to sit down, take a deep relaxing breath, and refresh your spirit.”

Brother David Steindl-Rast: “What Gunilla Norris has to say is heartwarming, heart-healing. She takes the reader by the hand and leads the way—practically and down-to-earth—into a peace of heart that is beyond words.”

Thich Nhat Hanh: “Gunilla Norris’s simple precepts for meditating and living have a translucent quality. We can all benefit greatly by observing them”

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation. Parker J. Palmer, 2000. 109 pages

From the fly jacket:

“Is the life I am living the same as the life that wants to live in me?” With this searching question, Parker Palmer begins an insightful and moving meditation on finding one’s true calling. *Let Your Life Speak* is an openhearted gift to anyone who seeks to live authentically.

The book’s title is a time-honored Quaker admonition, usually taken to mean “Let the highest truths and values guide everything you do.” But Palmer reinterprets those words, drawing on his own search for selfhood. “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it,” he writes, “listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.”

Vocation comes from listening to and accepting “true self” with its limits as well as potentials... We find communion with others and ways of serving the world’s deepest needs.