

W H E N

Opening Your Eyes

F A I T H

to God's Presence

B E C O M E S

All Around You

S I G H T

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SHIMMERING ATTRACTIONS

*We saw His star, and we have followed its glisten
and gleam all this way to worship Him.*

MATTHEW 2:2 THE VOICE

WHEN I (DAVID) TURNED FIFTY, I was reflecting on where I'd come from, who I was, and where I was going. I come from a long line of artists, and though I had always deeply appreciated visual art, I had never explored my own talent (or lack of it). So I shared this with Beth, who, in her typical noticing way, gave me a certificate for an art class at a local community art center. I discovered quickly that each day I had an art class was the best day of the week, and that I did have the seeds of some latent talent I could access.

One portrait class I took was taught by Ellie Siskind. I vividly recall my struggle throughout the course to represent mouths and noses, expressions and gestures. Yet the one thing that stood out from Ellie's instruction was her use of cadmium red as an underpainting technique. Cadmium red has a slight orange-like hue that almost vibrates when you see it. Ellie would underpaint her portraits with the color and then cover over 99 percent with the natural tints of the subject. The small amounts of the red that remained around the

edges or were allowed to break through suggested vitality, energy, life. Even though not central to the painting, the red's presence excited.

A shimmering attraction in the spiritual sense has a similar quality. It might be a common object, scene, or sound, or it might be infinitely rare. Yet like the striking effect of this artistic technique, God draws our attention to something in our life. He animates the inanimate. And its presence excites.

Sometimes these shimmering attractions happen on the road you've taken a thousand times or through the window you've looked out every morning as you make the coffee. Suddenly, though often subtly, something lifts from the scene before you with inexplicable prominence. It might not be unusual at all, or it might be quite extraordinary. Whatever it is, for some reason you are drawn in, drawn toward this glistening point of interest in order to take a closer look.

TAKE OFF YOUR SANDALS

One of the most poignant examples of this type of God encounter in the Bible is the story of Moses and the burning bush. At the time it happened, Moses was watching his father-in-law's flock of sheep. One day, he decided to lead them into the wilderness, choosing a path that curved toward Sinai, the mountain of God. The hot, dry climate lent itself to wildfires, usually caused by lightning strikes. So, as he approached and noticed a bush engulfed with flames he might have formed an initial rational explanation. Yet something about what he saw provoked him enough to take a deeper look.

Read slowly this first-person perspective we've crafted based on the biblical account in Exodus 3:1-6, paying attention to the scene as it progresses, noticing what you notice:

One crisp morning I was shepherding my father-in-law's flock of sheep as I did on most mornings. For some reason, I guided them far away from the usual paths and pastures to the other side of the desert and came to a place known as Horeb.

As I approached a small bluff there, a special messenger of the eternal One appeared to me in a fiery blaze from what looked like a bush. I did a double take, blinked the sand out of my eyes, and peered at the bush, but to my amazement the bush wasn't consumed by the inferno. I thought to myself, or to be honest whispered out loud to no one in particular, *Why's this bush not burning up?* I instinctively moved closer to get a better look.

As the eternal One saw me approach the bush to observe it, he addressed me by name and said, "Moses, Moses!" You can imagine how shocked I was, but cautiously whispered, with eyes closed now, "Here I am." Then I heard the words, whether with my ears or in my spirit, "Take off your sandals and stand barefoot on the ground, for now you know I am here and where I AM is holy ground."

Was the bush on fire, yet not burning? Or was the Presence within the bush afire with dazzling brilliance? Suddenly, it doesn't matter. Whatever the source of the shimmering, Moses was accosted by this unanticipated sight in which he encountered the Lord in the middle of this flaming shrub! What do you notice as you read the story? Does anything provoke curiosity, a question, or spark new insight related to this familiar yet strange scene?

Here are a few observations:

First, notice how Moses seems inadvertently drawn toward the wilderness on this path that led to Mt. Sinai. Though a lot of Old Testament history will happen later on Mt. Sinai, at this point, Moses would have had no sense of that. Isn't it curious that he was prompted to take an unfamiliar path to a place that would become saturated with significance to him and to Israel in the not-too-distant future? (Remember, Mt. Sinai is where Moses met with God for forty days and received the Ten Commandments.)

Second, observe Moses' amazement at what he saw. Though his brain could have provided a rational explanation, he seemed to

know immediately that there was something extraordinary about this flaming bush, a “cadmium red” quality about the fire that shimmered even though the bush was not destroyed.

Did you see the effect this shimmering attraction had on Moses? He was drawn toward it, convinced that he needed to move closer, to pay closer attention.

Finally, once God saw Moses approach the bush to observe it more closely, God called to him by name. God spoke—once he was assured that Moses noticed the shimmering attraction and was walking toward it to give this curiosity his full attention.

This encounter can make us wonder how many times we walk by a “burning bush” and don’t bother to notice it, our curiosity doused before its spark can take hold. How often do we see a glint of something that catches our eye but fail to slow down or stop and approach because we’re in such a hurry, so pragmatically absorbed in what we’re doing or where we’re going? It is the paradox of revelation and mystery that we encounter in a shimmering attraction yet too often fail to recognize and move toward for a better look.

BEDAZZLED

The phrase *shimmering attraction* suggests light, reflection, movement. When you encounter an object or scene or sound of this nature, it interrupts your normal consciousness and what you’re doing or thinking about. It grabs your attention, whether it’s as small as a firefly, as subtle as an unfamiliar birdsong, or as encircling as a double rainbow. Generally there is an aspect of beauty; however it may be humble beauty in a garb quite unremarkable.

Shimmering attractions seem to take you by *surprise*. You don’t seek them; they seek you. When encountered, they cause an inner double take: “Hey, what was that?” “What did I just see?” And yet they also seem a bit ephemeral to your normal consciousness and

can be easily dismissed or ignored. You may circle back to it a few times, being gradually drawn into it as its deeper and personal invitation registers with you.

They also have an *alluring* quality. They draw you in, begging for closer examination, for deeper reflection. Shimmering attractions arouse your curiosity as they lift off the page of your life like a highlighted phrase or sentence, drawing your attention and registering with importance. In fact, the word *shimmering* is often used in contemplative literature to explain *lectio divina*, an ancient way of listening to God's personal word in Scripture. In the first movement of *lectio*, we are often instructed to listen for the word or phrase that shimmers.

It's also not uncommon for there to be an element of *place and timing* when you encounter one of these divine displays. You find yourself at the right place, at the right time, under the right circumstance. For Moses, it was simply another day as he shepherded his flock near Mt. Sinai. But it was also a time when God was increasingly grieved by the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt and moved to initiate action because of their cries of distress. God lit a fire to get Moses' attention, to ask for his help in delivering the Israelites from their harsh enslavement and to lead them into their own fertile and spacious land (Exodus 3:7-8).

One final note about these shimmering attractions: They often deliver the personal message "*God sees me.*" Unlike encountering a transcendent moment (discussed in chap. 3), which opens us to see God in a new and expansive way, this particular beacon of light transmits a signal that actually confirms to us that just as "God's eye is on the sparrow, so his eye is on me." For that reason, these encounters are particularly meaningful because you come to know experientially that *you* are seen by God.

Though each shimmering attraction has its own unique presentation and is its own unique experience, the nature of each will

share some or most of these qualities. See if you recognize them in the following example as it happened in the life of one of Beth's directees, whom we will call Terri.

A SLIVER OF MOON

Three o'clock a.m. is a dreadful time to be awake. Terri agonized as she considered the conundrum: the amount of sleep up to this point wasn't enough for the day ahead, and the amount of sleep left to the night, if it came, would leave her groggy and in a stupor. So she finally gave in and slipped stealthily from her bed, hoping not to wake her husband or the dogs. Unfortunately, the latter were on to her.

Terri made her way, dogs in tow, to the kitchen, where she opened the sliding glass door to let them out. Immediately her attention was arrested by a sliver of moon squarely in her line of sight. This moon, more than three quarters obscured by darkness, left evidence of only a squint of the sphere. Terri gazed at it, lingering with its presentation, something so alluring to her that she couldn't look away.

Quietly and without fanfare a gentle thought formed in her mind. *This is how you see things. You see only a small part. I see it all.* The thought registered soundly with her. It addressed something she knew about herself, of her tendencies to judge life situations on partial knowledge, giving way to fear and feelings of intimidation. The words she heard were not sharp or condemning. They didn't shame or rebuke or chastise. They were spoken simply and gently. She knew they were for her. And she suspected they were from God.

Terri carried this experience with her for several days, continuing to reflect on its meaning and the general sensation it left her with. She wondered at the fact that the moon only presents itself as a sliver at certain times of the lunar cycle and directly in view from her back door only during this particular season. She also considered

her waking from a deep sleep for no apparent reason. Was God's Spirit subtly nudging her to wake up? Was God drawing her toward something he wanted to speak through? *Does God do that?*

As we processed this experience together in spiritual direction, Terri was fully assured of God's presence and action through this crescent luminary. She shared her experience with me in a calm, confident way and with deep gratitude. After all, the God of the universe, the One who created the moon, had leaned toward her to convey something that he felt was important for her to know.

Since this encounter, Terri has noticed that when faced with something happening in life that is overwhelming or not according to her plans, the memory of this incandescent image reminds her that she only sees a small sliver of what is happening. The effect has helped her open more fully to God and trust the One who sees her and the One who sees all.

RESPONDING TO A SHIMMERING ATTRACTION

So how do you respond to an experience of a shimmering attraction? What do you do with it? These questions, so natural to our analytic minds, are likely the wrong ones. It's possible that God is inviting you to a new experience of the divine, and so God's changing the channel, so to speak, by initiating in a way that you can't fully explain or control. In a word, this shimmering attraction may be cradled in mystery. And what should you do when you encounter mystery?

You linger. You slow down and stay with what you've encountered, becoming present to it with all your being, senses, and spirit.

You contemplate. As you linger, you take a closer look by allowing that which has drawn your attention to be the singular focus of your attention, letting it be what it is and taking it in.

You wonder. You simply let the questions that emerge within you rise up. You release your need for answers or insight. You allow yourself to marvel, *How is it that among all the billions of human*

beings on this planet I deserve to be so personally addressed in what seems a hand-picked moment?

You bow. You allow the encounter to humble you, to shape your posture into one of meek receptivity. Rather than taking control of the experience, you simply say, “Speak, your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10).

You follow the thread. At times shimmering attractions will be complete and contained at the moment. At other times, they will be a part of a thread in the seam of the fabric of life’s journey—one that other new invitations from God will come through. Like the magi, you see the first shining of his star and then echo their words, “We saw His star, and we have followed its glisten and gleam all this way to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2 *The Voice*).

God longs to grow your sensitivity and responsiveness to these sparkling harbingers as you move through your life’s particular geography and approach each day willing to be interrupted by a burning bush. One way you can practice paying attention is to reflect on the past—the last few days, weeks, or months—and consider whether you’ve had any experiences that now resemble what we’ve described as a shimmering attraction. Here are some questions to help you explore whether it may have been God initiating with you through this means of revelation. (And by the way, we encourage you to process this exercise and others in the book with a spiritual friend or mentor, or in a small group. Something important happens when we use our own words to speak out loud to others what God is inviting us to consider and notice.)

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

What experience(s) have you had recently that reminds you of a shimmering attraction?

Pick the most prominent one and then recall what stood out to you when you first noticed this alluring signpost.

What in your life needed to be addressed by God through this encounter?

How would you describe your experience of God through it?

How did you react initially to God's revelation?

How is God inviting you to respond now?

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