

DEFINING MOMENTS

MOST OF US, AT SOME TIME OR OTHER, WILL ENCOUNTER A DEFINING MOMENT. THESE ARE THOSE UNIQUE MOMENTS IN TIME IN WHICH WE HAVE A MAJOR CHOICE, A FORK IN THE ROAD. THE PATHWAYS REPRESENT DIFFERENT MORALS, RISKS, OR RELATIONSHIPS, LIFESTYLES OR CAREERS.

ULTIMATELY THE CHOICE COMES DOWN TO WHAT WE THINK IS KNOWN (SAFE) AND WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW (RISKY OR UNSAFE). IT IS A CHOICE BETWEEN WHAT WE HAVE HABITUALLY BEEN DOING AND WHAT WE HAVE NOT.

THIS MOMENT OF CHOICE IS NEITHER A NEW CONCEPT NOR UNIMPORTANT.

DEFINING MOMENTS ARE THOSE TIMES IN WHICH WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DECISION THAT DRAMATICALLY AFFECTS US, SETTING THE PATH AS IT WERE, FOR THE REST OF OUR LIFE. IT IS A CHANCE TO MOVE OFF ROUTINE. THESE CHOICES ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE ONES WE MAKE ALL DAY, EVERY DAY. THEY ARE NOT WHETHER OR NOT TO HAVE SUGAR IN THE COFFEE.

EVERY FABLE, GOD, OR HERO STORY I CAN THINK OF HAS A DEFINING MOMENT IN IT. IN HERO STORIES THE HERO LITERALLY GOES DOWN A PATH ON AN ADVENTURE OF SOME SORT WHEN S/HE ENCOUNTERS A FORK IN THE ROAD. USUALLY THERE IS SOME SORT OF GUIDE THERE (AN OLD CRONE, MYTHICAL CREATURE, OR A VISITATION FROM A GOD IN A DREAM AS THE HERO FALLS INTO A TRANCE OR SLEEP). THE GUIDE SAYS THAT GOING DOWN ONE ROAD WILL BE EASY AND SAFE, BUT THE OTHER ROAD WILL BE FRAUGHT WITH RISK AND DANGER. THE GUIDE HINTS THAT THE LESS SAFE ROAD IS PROBABLY THE ONE TO TAKE, BUT LEAVES THE DECISION TO THE HERO.

AS THESE ARE MYTHS REQUIRING THE HERO TO BE A HERO, THE HERO TAKES THE UNKNOWN RISKY ROAD (USUALLY NERVOUSLY). THE HERO IS THEN TORN APART IN SOME WAY, PHYSICALLY OR SPIRITUALLY, FIGHTS VARIOUS DEMONS AND TRIALS, THEN IS REASSEMBLED (USUALLY WITH HELP FROM SOME SUDDENLY APPEARING STRANGER) INTO SOMEONE STRONGER OR BETTER.

THE TRANSFORMATION BRINGS THE HERO INTO CONTACT WITH HIS/HER CORE SELF, FINALLY KNOWING WHAT S/HE TRULY BELIEVES, IMMUTABLY AND IRREVOCABLY. WITH THE STRENGTH OF THIS MORAL DEFINITION THE HERO IS THEN ABLE TO GO FORTH AND DEAL WITH WHATEVER ELSE COMES.

THE REAL PROBLEM FOR US IS NOT NECESSARILY MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES WHEN DEFINING MOMENTS OCCUR. IT IS THE MORE ELEMENTAL PROBLEM OF KNOWING WHEN A DEFINING MOMENT IS UPON US.

MY LIFE, A JOURNEY OF CONTINUOUS AND TUMULTUOUS CHANGE AND EVOLUTION, (AND SOMETIMES DEVOLUTION) HAS HAD MANY DEFINING MOMENTS. UNFORTUNATELY, I WAS SO BUSY BEING BUSY THAT I DID NOT RECOGNIZE THEM UNTIL AFTER THEY HAD PASSED. SADLY, DEFINING MOMENTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO "DO OVERS". WHEN THEY ARE THERE, THEY ARE THERE. ONCE HAPPENED, THEY ARE GONE AND YOU DEFINITELY CANNOT RE-CREATE THE MOMENT.

ACCEPTING THIS, THE FOLLOWING ARE GOOD QUESTIONS:

"HOW DO I KNOW WHEN A DEFINING MOMENT IS UPON ME?"

"IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN DO TO BE READY TO RECOGNIZE ONE WHEN IT OCCURS?"

FOLLOWED BY:

"WHAT DO I DO WHEN ONE HAPPENS AND I ACTUALLY NOTICE?"

DISCOVERING PAST DEFINING MOMENTS

LET US DEAL WITH THE FIRST PART FIRST. IT IS USEFUL TO BE ABLE TO NOTICE DEFINING MOMENTS AS THEY APPEAR SO THAT YOU CAN MAKE CONSCIOUS DECISIONS. A GOOD EXERCISE IN HELPING YOU KNOW WHAT THESE EVEN LOOK LIKE IS TO GO BACK OVER YOUR LIFE TO FIND THOSE MOMENTS IN WHICH SOMETHING HAPPENED THAT WAS A TURNING (OR NON TURNING) POINT.

AT FIRST THIS MIGHT SEEM DIFFICULT BUT IT IS NOT AS HARD AS YOU THINK. MOST OF US CAN, OR HAVE, LOOKED BACK ON OUR LIVES AND SAID - "WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF I DID X INSTEAD OF Y WAY BACK THEN?" THE ODDS ARE GOOD THAT ANY TIME YOU CAN THINK OF LIKE THAT WAS A DEFINING MOMENT.

GET OUT A PIECE OF PAPER AND PEN, FIND A QUIET PLACE WITHOUT

INTERRUPTIONS, TURN OFF THE PHONE, RADIO OR T.V., AND SIT DOWN WITH YOUR FAVORITE BEVERAGE. NOW, WRITE DOWN THE FIRST TIME YOU CAN THINK OF WHEN THE ABOVE PHRASE WOULD WORK.

DON'T GET INVOLVED IN WHAT YOU WRITE OR MAKE ANY VALUE JUDGEMENTS AT THIS TIME.

ONCE YOU HAVE WRITTEN DOWN ONE OF THEM, OTHERS WILL PROBABLY COME. JUST GIVE YOURSELF THE TIME, AND THE QUIETNESS OF MIND, TO REMEMBER. LET YOURSELF DRIFT HARMLESSLY AND WHIMSICALLY DOWN MEMORY LANE. WRITE DOWN ANYTHING THAT EVEN SMELLS LIKE A DEFINING MOMENT. AFTER A FEW HOURS YOU WILL HAVE MORE OR LESS EXHAUSTED YOUR MEMORIES BUT YOUR MIND WILL CONTINUE WITH THE EXERCISE. YOU MIGHT DREAM OF MORE IN THE COMING NIGHTS, OR SUDDENLY THINK OF ONE LATER ON IN THE DAY WHILE DOING SOMETHING ELSE (LIKE DISHES, DRIVING, WHATEVER). REMEMBER THEM AND ADD THOSE TO THE LIST.

AFTER A WEEK OR SO YOU SHOULD BE FINISHED. NOW YOU CAN GO BACK OVER YOUR LIST CRITICALLY. REALLY EXAMINE THESE MOMENTS TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE WOULD HAVE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY IF YOU HAD MADE ANOTHER CHOICE. IF SO, CALL IT A DEFINING MOMENT.

UNDERSTANDING PAST DEFINING MOMENTS

LOOK AT EACH OF YOUR DEFINING MOMENTS IN THE LIST SEPARATELY. GO BACK TO THAT TIME AND REMEMBER WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN YOUR LIFE AT THAT TIME.

ONLY DO ONE DEFINING MOMENT IN EACH SITTING.

PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO HOW YOU FELT. YOUR EMOTIONS, OR EMOTIONAL STATE, IS VERY IMPORTANT.

DEFINING MOMENTS MOST OFTEN OCCUR WHEN WE ARE PRESENTED WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE HOW WE GO ABOUT OUR LIVES AT A CORE VALUE LEVEL. USUALLY WE ARE DOING SOMETHING THAT IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH WHO AND WHAT WE ARE AT THE MOST INTIMATE LEVEL.

BUT CHANGING WHAT WE DO IS MOST DIFFICULT. CHANGE ITSELF IS DIFFICULT. WE WILL DEAL WITH CHANGE IN OTHER ESSAYS. FOR NOW, WE ARE ONLY LOOKING AT THOSE TIME IN WHICH YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO STEP OFF THE BEATEN PATH.

WHEN REMEMBERING YOUR HISTORICAL DEFINING MOMENTS TRY AS HARD AS YOU CAN TO FEEL WHAT YOU WERE FEELING THEN. AFTER GETTING INTO THAT EMOTIONAL STATE RECALL THE EVENTS OF THE MOMENT. LEAD UP TO THE DEFINING MOMENT. RECALL WHAT YOU WERE DOING AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING AROUND YOU. REMEMBER WHAT WAS GOING ON AT THE TIME OF THE DEFINING MOMENT. NOW REMEMBER WHETHER OR NOT YOU WERE AWARE THAT YOU HAD A CHOICE TO MAKE AT THE TIME OF THE DEFINING MOMENT. REMEMBER WHAT IT FELT LIKE WHEN THE CHOICE ARRIVED AND HOW YOU FELT WHEN YOU MADE THE CHOICE.

CHANGING YOUR MIND AS A CLUE

HERE IS SOMETHING INTERESTING ABOUT DEFINING MOMENTS. YOU CAN ACTUALLY MAKE A CHOICE TO GO DOWN ONE LANE OR ANOTHER, START OUT ON THE JOURNEY, THEN CHANGE YOUR MIND AND GO THE OTHER WAY. THERE IS, OF COURSE, A STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON THE "DO OVER". HOWEVER, A PERIOD OF GRACE DOES EXIST. PERHAPS WHEN YOU ARE REVISITING YOUR OLD DEFINING MOMENTS YOU WILL FIND ONE OR TWO TIMES WHEN YOU HAD, OR WISHED YOU HAD, CHANGED YOUR MIND.

THIS IS THE TRICKY PART.

IF YOU DID CHANGE YOUR MIND WAS IT BECAUSE YOU WERE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY OF YOUR NEW COURSE, OR AFRAID, OR UNCERTAIN, OR DID YOU CHANGE IT BECAUSE THE WAY YOU CHOSE WAS NOT THE NEW, HARDER WAY BUT A CONTINUATION OF THE OLD? DID YOU HAVE ONE OF THOSE "PIT IN THE STOMACH" FEELINGS?

WHERE IS THIS GOING?

AS WE MOVE INTO A PERIOD OF HIGHER LEVELS OF AWARENESS, YOU WILL ENCOUNTER MORE DEFINING MOMENTS. MANY OF THESE WILL BE MORE SUBTLE THAN THOSE PRESENTED TO YOU EARLIER IN YOUR LIFE.

IT IS MY BELIEF THAT THE DEFINING MOMENTS WE FACE DURING THE NEXT FEW YEARS WILL BE FAR MORE CONSEQUENTIAL, FAR MORE CRUCIAL TO OUR DEVELOPMENT, THAN THOSE OF OUR HISTORIES.

BEING AWARE, LISTENING FOR AND WATCHING FOR THE SIGNS, BEING COGNIZANT OF THE PROGRAMS WHICH HAVE LED US ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, IS NOT ONLY A GOOD DEFENSE, IT IS AN ESSENTIAL OFFENSIVE STRATEGY FOR US AS THE VEIL WEAKENS.

