Those Eureka! Moments

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One of the biggest mysteries in life is the phenomenon of experiencing an epiphany – that incredible light bulb moment when you shift from bewilderment to perfect realisation. Famous epiphanies include Archimedes' figuring out of how the volume of mass could be measured while he was immersed in a public bath. We don't know whether it was more his alleged running home naked shouting 'Eureka' or the actual discovery that made him more famous – maybe it was a combination of both. Perhaps all inventors, scientists, discoverers and artistes go through countless epiphanies which may explain their slight craziness – think Einstein and Beethoven.



But one does not necessarily have to be extraordinary or eccentric to experience an epiphany. It can happen to regular folk in the most ordinary circumstances.

At a date with a potential candidate for a romantic liaison everything is going well – he is cute, wears nice clothes and says sweet, complimentary things about you. But you still feel repulsed. After long agonising – the dude is gloriously rich too – you pinpoint the reason for the inexplicable disgust: he can't keep his eyes off himself – stealing glances at the mirrors in the restaurant, on the spoon and even in the reflection of your spectacles. The man is a total narcissist and will soon embark on an excruciating session of his accomplishments. A crucial epiphany before an exit strategy.

You could be lying in your bed, trying to go to sleep but failing miserably. After endless tossing and turning and trying various foetal positions you realise that it is all futile because your stomach is trying to tell you something: that it was a stupid idea to skip dinner in an attempt to lose weight.

It goes without saying that children have constant epiphanies – everything being new and all. A toothless baby realises the power of her cuteness and will smile and gurgle at the right moments, turning the parents into putty. A toddler screaming at an unbearable pitch at a public place has discovered that this particular act is especially embarrassing for the parents and they will give him anything to shut him up. A teenager realises that the parents will instantly know he has smoked, skipped tuition or has forged their signature on the report card because they've already been there, done that in their own pubescent years.

Similarly parents get frequent epiphanies. They will realise that statements like: 'eat it, it's good for you', 'why can't you be more like So and So's daughter?' and 'why don't you wear that nice shirt I got you', will have completely opposite effects of what they had intended.

A wife has endless epiphanies. Nagging him about calling the electrician to get the lighting fixed is useless. Waiting until he stumbles in the dark and stubs his toe is far more prudent and stress free. He is unlikely to ever show more enthusiasm while going to dinners given by her side of the family. Fuming over his incapacity to know what she wants, his lack of consideration and sensitivity is a waste of breath: males are made this way – to become Neanderthal after marriage.

The workplace is often the birthplace of many epiphanies. Besides the occasional lifesaving invention or two, valuable breakthroughs are made in terms of understanding why certain things happen to you.

You are trying to give a presentation and find that most of your colleagues look like they are about to fall asleep, the rude ones get up and leave while the kind ones feign interest. Why isn't it working? You realise with horror that your voice is at a D flat, low and droning, making it impossible for people to stay awake. Solution: get some perky young thing with a C sharp voice to present your ideas.

Thus while an epiphany is supposed to be something rare and special, or even spiritual, it can occur as frequently as everyday.

It is when you know for sure that ice cream brings profound happiness, that you will never win the lottery and that people are averting their eyes because there's a chunk of spinach between your teeth. ■