



The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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Ulysses and The Beautiful after Kant

By Martin L. Cowen III

The goal of this essay is to review what we have learned about The Beautiful as a consequence of our 5 Sunday school lessons on Immanuel Kant, using our experience with our close reading of *Ulysses* as an example.

Before beginning, let us acknowledge the enthusiasm, friendship, interest, and loyalty to the Kant project that motivated our study of the extraordinarily difficult texts. Also we thank our students of James Joyce's *Ulysses* who have worked since November 29, 2011, reading, researching, studying, and teaching one another *Ulysses*.

As we learned in FOR Sunday school, Kant says that the four moments (or categories) of the Beautiful are moments of quality, quantity, relation, and modality. The beautiful is experienced as an entirely disinterested satisfaction, that is universal, that is purposive without a purpose, and that is necessary.

The main idea from Kant is that The Beautiful is experienced as a **satisfaction**. The Beautiful is not experienced cognitively, through understanding. The Beautiful is experienced emotionally, **by feeling**. The Beautiful is a certain type of satisfaction.

The satisfaction comes from seeing an object and detecting that there is "something" there, not yet fully understood.

Perhaps one way to say this is that a certain positive "tension" is created in the presence of the object which is deemed to be beautiful.

An example of this experience occurred during our 17th meeting of our close reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. As you may know, *Ulysses* is regarded by the Board of Modern Library as the number 1 best novel of all time.

The top five novels are: *Ulysses* by James Joyce, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. There are two lists by Modern Library, the Board's List and the Reader's List. The top five of the Reader's List are: *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand, *Battlefield Earth* by L. Ron Hubbard, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. *Ulysses* is number 11 on the Reader's List.

Our method for studying *Ulysses* is to assign 8 pages, more or less, per reader for extremely close study. Each reader works up his/her section and presents his/her section, as do the other presenters, to the whole group in a teaching session

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lasting two or two and ½ hours. We have 8 readers. We have met 17 times. We have finished 15 chapters. Chapter 15 took 3 meetings because the chapter was about 180 pages long and we divided the chapter into 60 page segments. We have read to page 612 of the 783 page book. We are 78% done. We started our study on November 29, 2011. We will finish in May, July, and September 2015. The project will have lasted 3 years and 10 months, if we finish on schedule.

Ulysses is regarded as the number 1 best novel, because it is Beautiful.

Here's how:

The reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is very difficult because there are so many puzzles in the text. One of our study aides is a 641 page book of footnotes called *Ulysses Annotated* by Don Gifford. James Joyce famously said that: "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality."

We just finished the climax of the book. The climax (pun intended) of the book occurs in the Red Light district of the Ireland called Nighttown. In the last 10-page section, Steven Dedalus, a main character, who has been knocked out by a British soldier in a drunken fight over a girl, mumbles a few words: "Who... drive ... Fergus now. And pierce ... wood's woven shade?" The other main character, Leopold Bloom, misunderstands the reference. A Google search of "Fergus now" or "'wood's woven shave" reveals that Steven Dedalus is attempting to quote in his stupor a poem by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) entitled, "Who goes with Fergus?" Fergus is a Celtic mythological king from about the 3rd century A.D. Here is the brief poem.

Who will go drive with Fergus now?
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

The poem calls upon the young man and the maiden to stop brooding about "love's bitter mystery" and to turn to nature and the mythic past.

This poem is a key to the whole book.

The central action of *Ulysses* is Leopold Bloom's day long torment concerning his wife Molly's trisite with her music producer Blazes Boylan, to occur at 4 p.m. this Thursday, June 16, 1904. *Love's bitter mystery* is present in the emotional

About the name "The Eudaimonist"

A eudaimonist (pronounced "yoo-DIE-mon-ist") is one who believes that the highest ethical goal is individual happiness and personal well-being. The term derives from the ancient Greek word eudaimonia, which means, roughly, "well-being."



Disclaimer

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Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

Mission Statement

The Fellowship of Reason® is dedicated to the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

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Fellowship of Reason
P.O. Box 28891
Atlanta, Georgia 30358
(770) 471-9800

E-mail
info@fellowshipofreason.com



IMMANUEL KANT
From a painting

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turmoil of Leopold Bloom depicted in the entire novel.

Another connection is this: the poet William Butler Yeats was born in Sandymount, Dublin, Ireland. *Ulysses* begins at the Martello Tower, at Sandymount.

And another: W. B. Yeats was in love with a woman named Maud Gonne. Maud lost a 1-year-old son. Maud asked that she be buried with the baby shoes of her infant child. Maud was an heiress and buried her son in a mausoleum purchased with her inheritance. After the child's death and burial, she met with her husband, from whom she was separated, at the child's mausoleum. They had intercourse beside the child's coffin hoping that by *metempsychosis* the soul of the dead child would transfer to the newly conceived embryo. *Metempsychosis* means the transmigration of a soul from one body to another. *Metempsychosis* is a major theme of *Ulysses* and comes up for the first time in chapter 4 of 18.

Maud Gonne's real-life suffering at the loss of her son parallels the fictional loss of his 11-day-old son suffered by Leopold Bloom, another major theme of *Ulysses*.

There are hundreds of puzzles like this in *Ulysses*. This particular puzzle is one of the most important.

A related puzzle that occurs immediately after this reference to the Yeats poem is the appearance of the ghost of Leopold Bloom's son Rudy.

Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, hold a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.

One interpretation that we did not discuss last Tuesday is the similarity between this boy phantom and the boy phantom who appears at the end of *Suor Angelica* in Puccini's *Il Trittico*. The opera premiered at the Metropolitan Opera on December 14, 1918. *Ulysses* was published by Sylvia Beach in February 1922. The timing, though theoretically plausible, is not good. We do not know whether James Joyce saw Puccini's *Il Trittico*.

The point of all this is that according to Kant, it is precisely the **perception of a clue to a higher meaning**, not yet discovered, that creates the feeling of satisfaction that Immanuel Kant calls The Beautiful.

In the present case, we claim to have learned at least part of the higher meaning from the clue. The higher meaning is no longer hidden, in this small detail. There is also noteworthy **satisfaction** in the discovery of the higher meaning.

Credit for the unpuzzling belongs to Google research. Google reveals that Yeats' birthplace as Sandymount, the starting location of *Ulysses*. Wikipedia reveals the existence of Maud Gonne, Yeats unrequited love for Maud ("love's bitter mystery"), and Maud Gonne's interest in *metempsychosis* because of the loss of her infant child. Secondary sources claim that Yeats is related to James Joyce as Virgil is related to Dante, the composer of *The Divine Comedy*. Virgil

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accompanies Dante into the Inferno, but does not rise with Dante therefrom. In the same way, secondary sources declare that we will not see Yeats again in *Ulysses* after leaving the Hell (the *Inferno*) of Nighttown.

Another indicator of the depth of mystery in *Ulysses* is Frank Delaney. Frank Delaney is a 72-year-old Irish novelist living in Connecticut. He is performing a close reading of *Ulysses* via podcast. As of April 1, 2015, Frank is on episode 251 of his podcast, which considers a paragraph in chapter 6, about 100 pages into the 783 page book. Frank Delaney figures that he will complete his close reading of *Ulysses* in another 20-25 years, before Frank Delaney's 100th birthday.

Ulysses is beautiful, by Kant's definition, because of the satisfaction one feels when detecting in the reading a higher meaning, not yet discovered. Because of this enormous complexity, some book club readers of *Ulysses* start the book over immediately after concluding the last chapter.

It is the tension of the impending discovery of the higher meaning of a work of art or literature that is the satisfaction Kant calls The Beautiful.

The tension might be described as a spiritual place between the mundane and the divine. Perhaps with some, we tread on dangerous ground by using words like "spiritual" and "divine." "Spiritual" simply means "of or pertaining to consciousness." "Divine" means "God-like." For a Eudaimonist, "God-like" simply refers to that which is marvelous, amazing, awesome, presently, and perhaps always, beyond our capacity to understand.

The mundane is our work-a-day world. There is no mystery. We are simply performing our common tasks with our usual competence under no particular stress or bother. Nothing unusual happens. Imagine moving the laundry from the washer to the dryer or vacuuming the living room or approving a routine work document after review. These are mundane tasks. That is our mundane world.

The divine is not accessible to us, generally, perhaps never. The divine is an anticipated place, a suspected, a hoped-for place. Perhaps it is precisely that to which Kant refers when he talks about our sensing of a higher, as yet undiscovered, purpose (purposefulness without a purpose); the suspicion that there is some higher meaning (in art, in literature); the positive feeling in the presence of the recognition is the satisfaction identified by Kant as the Beautiful.

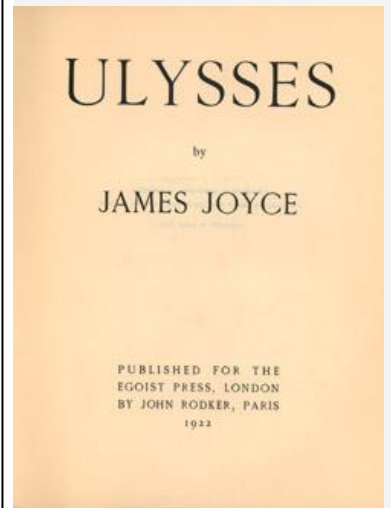
An expression such as "That performance was divine" conveys this thought.

Metaphors for that place between the mundane and the divine abound and are the very subject matter of art.

Here is a passage from *The Golden Compass* (1995) by Philip Pullman.

At that moment he fell still, the vault of heaven, star-studded, profound, was pierced as if by a spear.

A jet of light, a jet of pure energy released like an arrow from a great bow, shot upward from the spot where Lord Asriel had



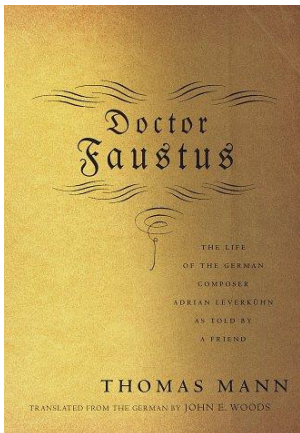
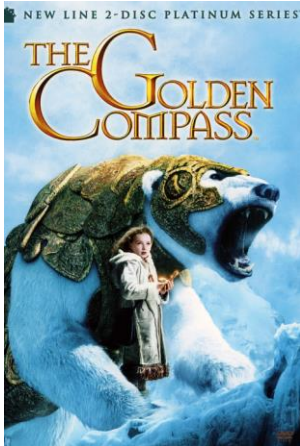
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joined the wire to Roger's daemon. The sheets of light and color that were the Aurora tore apart; a great rending, grinding, crunching, tearing sound reached from one end of the universe to the other; there was dry land in the sky—

Sunlight!

In this scene, the mundane world is cold arctic tundra. By special "science," a doorway to another dimension is ripped open. The heroine Lyra will shortly climb through.

So Lyra and her daemon turned away from the world they were born in, and looked toward the sun, and walked into the sky.

We are currently reading *Doctor Faustus* (1947) by Thomas Mann (1875-1955). This book is similar to *Ulysses* in that its references are many and the layers of meaning are many. The experience of reading draws the reader from the mundane toward the divine, or if you like, some higher, though not yet detected, meaning. We know the higher meaning is there. We just do not yet understand it. We had the same Thomas Mann experience with his books *Death in Venice* (1912), *The Magic Mountain* (1924), and *Joseph and His Brothers* (1933-1943). There is a higher meaning to be detected upon the simple storyline.

There is an actual feeling associated with the lifting from the mundane toward the divine by great art and literature. Sometimes, as in *The Golden Compass*, the lifting is visually expressed in the art. The mundane is "down here." The divine is "up there." Somehow, the observer is suspended between the "down here" and the not accessible "up there."

We recently enjoyed the film *Interstellar* (2014) starring Matthew McConaughey as Cooper. There is a mysterious ghost in the story. There are strange and difficult-to-translate communications from "somewhere." There are powerful feelings between man and woman and father and daughter, "love's bitter mystery." There is a great visual rendering of a tesseract. A tesseract is four-dimensional analog of the cube. A five-dimensional world is trying to communicate with our four-dimensional world—height, width, depth, time—using a tesseract.

Cooper finds himself suspended between the mundane world (that he can see and, with great difficulty, communicate) and the divine world of the unknown, but certainly detected, five-dimensional world.

Interstellar is a beautiful film.

"Interstellar" means among the stars—a great candidate for the name of the place between the mundane and the divine. Was the name chosen by the creators of the film for exactly this reason?

Music can provide a similar experience of lifting one from the mundane world toward the divine. The experience of Puccini's *Il Trittico*, previously mentioned is an example. *Il Trittico* is Italian for Triptych which is from the Greek adjective meaning

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about
Fellowship of Reason call:

Martin at 770-471-9800

Susan at 678-358-8415

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“three-fold.” Reference to a three panel painting is sometimes intended. Obviously, *Il Trittico* refers to Puccini’s three part opera, *Suor Angelica* being the middle, and perhaps most important, story.

Sometimes in FORum as a whole, sometimes from Oratory in particular, we experience a “lifting” from the mundane toward the divine. President Mandy’s self-analysis and Frank’s commentary on Mandy’s self-analysis are recent examples of the lifting from the mundane toward the divine that we have experienced.

Architecture achieves the elevating effect from the mundane toward the divine. The ceiling of the Cathedral at Chartres is 120 feet from the floor. The effect is to draw the visitor from the floor (from the mundane) to the ceiling (toward the divine).

Painting frequently pictures a mundane setting in a divine context. *Sierra Nevada Morning* (1870) by Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) pictures some deer by a lake below a mountain range drench in sunbeams.



Hardanger Fjord by Norwegian painter Hans Gude (1825-1903) pictures a man, his toddler son, and their dog walking to the water’s edge with the fjord in the background with sunbeams streaming through cumulus clouds over the towering mountains.



From the mundane to the divine we are drawn.

**FOR’s mission is to
promote the
personal
flourishing of our
members through
reason.**

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Thomas Cole (1801-1848) an American artist is the founder of the Hudson River School of Art. Influenced by Romanticism, this group of painters featured landscape and wilderness. Thomas Cole's sequence of paintings called The Course of Empire: The Savage State, The Arcadian or Pastoral State, Consummation of Empire, Destruction, and Desolation is fabulous.

Pieter Breughel (1525-1569), a Dutch Renaissance painter, is famous for his *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565). The work is radiant.



Painting, architecture, dance, music, and literature are all sources of beauty.

We had a marvelous discussion one day at FOR Runners about "It." "It" is the special something infusing a work of art or performer rendering it or him/her as somehow special. The "It" is identical with the Thomas Aquinas' idea of radiance. The "It" is also identical with Immanuel Kant's idea of spirit expressed in the following passage from §49 of the Critique of Judgment that we studied in FOR Sunday school, though we only got through §22.

We say of certain products of which we expect that they should at least in part appear as beautiful art, they are without *spirit*, although we find nothing to blame in the on the score of taste. A poem may be very net and elegant, but without spirit. A history may be exact and well arranged, but without spirit. A festal discourse may be solid and at the same time elaborate, but without spirit. Conversation is often not devoid of entertainment, but yet without spirit; even of a woman we say that she is pretty, an agreeable talker, and courteous, but without spirit. What then do we mean by spirit?

Spirit, in an aesthetical sense, is the name given to the animating principle of the mind. But that by means of which this principle animates the soul.

Radiance might be described as the presence of the divine within the work.

Let us admit that we are talking about art feelings and that communication concerning any feelings, including art feelings, is difficult. One has to have "been there, done that." We can only recall the experience to another who has had the experience.

We have talked about this before. There are categories of experience that cannot be shared. The experience of pregnancy cannot be shared with a man. The experience of love cannot be shared with a person who has not experienced

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love. The experience of parenthood cannot be shared with a person who has never been a parent.

We hope to signal to those who do not understand that there is something here worthy of experiencing and understanding. In 1987 we saw the film *Moonstruck* starring Cher and Nicolas Cage. The movie played the music from Puccini's *La Bohème*. A scene from the Metropolitan Opera Franco Zeffirelli is shown in the film, the scene at the Paris gatehouse in the snow between Mimi and Rodolfo. These fictional characters thought that *something* was there. We made a silent promise to find that *something*. It took us almost 20 years to "get it." We "get it" now.



In conclusion, thanks to our FOR Sunday school audience for studying in 5 lectures Immanuel Kant on Beauty. Thanks to our intrepid students of James Joyce's *Ulysses* for our so-to-be 4 year adventure with close reading.

We have suggested that Kant's insight into The Beautiful that the beautiful is precisely that satisfaction one experiences when a meaning or purpose is detected in a work of art, though not yet specifically identified.

We have given an example from our study of *Ulysses*. We discovered and unpacked a clue to the meaning of the whole of the novel in the Yeats' poem, *Who Goes with Fergus?* The key reveals that the major theme of *Ulysses* is love and that events in the life of James Joyce's poetic hero, William Butler Yeats, are echoed in key events in the novel *Ulysses*.

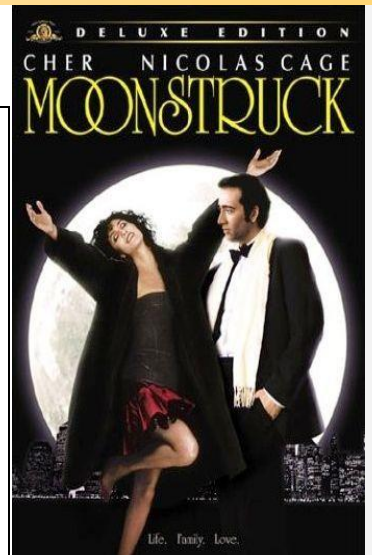
We learned that when the clue is unpacked, or the puzzle solved, the satisfaction in the work of art is great.

We have suggested that the shift from the mundane toward the divine is related to, if not identical with, the Kant idea that the "satisfaction" one feels in the presence of the Beautiful is the recognition of a meaning or purpose beyond that which is immediately present.

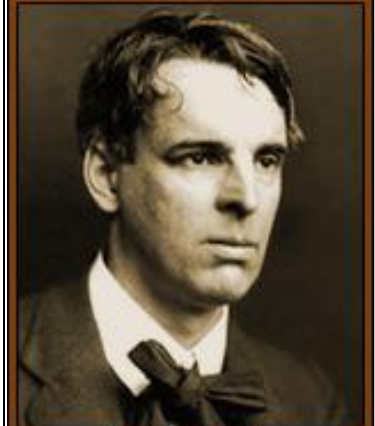
We will want to come up for a name for the place that great art takes us. *Interstellar* was a candidate, though ultimately unsatisfactory because it limits us to science or science fiction. The feeling we experience in the Cathedral at Chartres cannot be called "interstellar."

We can say, for certain, that we would like from time to time to rise above the mundane and toward the divine. Perhaps what we call that place is not so important. Having a name for that place, though, would be useful for sharing the experience or evoking the experience in other initiates.

In parting, let us suggest that the name for that sacred place between the mundane and the divine is, simply, The Beautiful. Let us suggest that the name for the elevated feeling experienced in the presence of The Beautiful is Euphoria, from the Greek, meaning "to bear" and "well," to bear well.



William Butler Yeats



1865-1939
online-literature.com

Events

For detailed info on all upcoming events, visit
<http://www.meetup.com/fellowshipofreason>

Adult Sunday school at FORum: 1st Sunday 10 a.m.

Members and friends of FOR are invited to attend Adult Sunday School before FORum on the first Sunday of every month at 10 a.m. at the Atlanta Freethought Hall, located at 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA 30080.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

FORum: A Celebration of Human Achievement: First Sunday 11 a.m.

FOR's premier event. Meet and greet at 10:30 a.m. The program starts at 11 a.m. Presided over by FOR's President, members give presentations such as Celebration of Freedom and Celebration of Talent. A 15 to 20 minute Oratory on an ethical subject highlights the program. A short conversation called FORum during which audience members share their thoughts concludes the program at 12 noon sharp. We enjoy post-program conversation at local restaurant for further fellowship. Children's Program babysitter from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Martin Cowen director: 678-641-9321.

FOR Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, near Candler Park at the Flying Biscuit, 1655 McLendon Avenue Northeast, Atlanta. Breakfast at the Flying Biscuit follows at 9:15 a.m. Breakfast lovers, walkers, and joggers welcome! Martin Cowen: 678-641-9321

Taped Lectures/Discussion Group: 1st / 3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

A small group of friends listens to taped lectures in a private home on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

Fifteen members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at an undisclosed location.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

FOR Pub: last Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR like to meet at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30307, on the last Wednesday, at 7 p.m. to adult beverages and fun.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

Poetry Club: 4th Saturday, 3:00 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR like to meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at a local coffee shop to share their enjoyment of poetry.

Trent Watkins, coordinator

Ulysses Study Group: last Tuesday of every other month at 7:30 p.m. Potluck

Members and friends of FOR are invited to attend a 4-years-long study group of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. We meet at Sally's house in May, July, September 2015. When done we will have spent 3 years and 10 months in this study.

Remember it is potluck so bring some breakfast food or drink to share.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

Birthdays

- April 9 Kathleen Allen
- April 9 Erik Bauer
- April 9 Kate Miller
- April 19 Leah Mickens
- April 24 Peter Brookner
- April 24 Susan Menich
- April 29 DeAnn Campbell
-

- May 2 Frank Vickers
- May 21 Dan Barber
-

**Join us for our
next monthly
FORum:**

**4775 N. Church
Lane, S.E., Smyrna,
GA 30080**

**May 3, 2015
Sunday 11 a.m.**

(Meet, Greet at 10:30 a.m.)

**FOR Children's
Babysitter**

from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Organized Educational
Program from 10:30 a.m. to 11
a.m.

Adult Sunday school
10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: _____

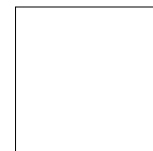
Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!



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