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2009

Hummers

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Hummers

The first image to come to mind at the word "hummer" might be that of a very large vehicle. Tiny but beautifully colored, fast-flying, stop-action birds are also called hummers. These latter are perhaps not as frequently seen as are the giant cars that can be found on our streets, freeways, or parking lots. But hummingbirds, whenever and wherever present, are quite readily noticed and recognized. They received their nicknames from the sound of their rapidly beating wings as they fly past at amazing speeds, or as they pause in midair while taking food from a flower or a feeder.

Hummingbirds draw our attention in a manner that differs greatly from when we see a big, boxy, faux SUV. That a creature so small and delicate performs as it does touches something in us that is of a different order from the kind of admiration we might have for a conveyance having no economy of size in relation to the dimensions and weight of the passengers. To see a hummingbird in action, or even at rest, elicits an inner smile as we acknowledge beauty that is not related to large size, weight, or other physical characteristics that we often use as criteria for meriting our attention.

"Good things come in small packages," applies not only to jewelry and to hummingbirds, but also to some of the little, every-day thoughts and inspirations, recognitions and acknowledgements that occur within us almost every day. If our powers of observation and reflection were restricted exclusively to large issues, to matters that elicit strong emotions, or to lines of thinking centered on particular problems, we could look back at the end of a full day and find some satisfaction, yet also experience a sense that something is missing. If we fail to notice the "hummers" in our day, we let pass a significant part of our lives.

Children, being short of stature, tend to notice small creatures on the ground and might be fascinated with them. As we grow older, taller, and more experienced, and also interested in personal relationships, businesses, and creative enterprises, most of us are not particularly impressed by the sight of ants crossing a sidewalk. But we can be quite moved by a few notes of a favorite and meaningful piece of music, by a glance at a photo of someone we love, or by a brief acknowledgment of the blessing of healthy drinking water. We are adults, but momentary and small experiences are as important to us as the long hours of concentrated effort we expend on teaching a class, composing a document, planning an event, or carrying on a focused conversation.

Hummingbirds are able to keep their bodies motionless while beating their wings at an extremely rapid rate, and also by rotating their wings so as to move neither forward nor backwards. To us who are so accustomed to either being in motion or stationery, the sight and sound of a tiny bird hovering over a flower is to witness a feat of nature: prodigious motion accompanied by immobility. Our eyes inform us of the facts, and our faces likely relax into a smile as our minds and hearts respond to the ordinary and extraordinary actions of a hummer.

Whether we live in a place where hummingbirds hover or where none exist, we thrive as humans when we notice some of the small blessings of life at the time when they occur, or when we briefly reflect on them at the end of the day. Little hummers are good for us.