

Illumination Stimulated by Waves

Jude Atkinson, May 2020

A few weeks ago, my niece spoke to me about her fascination with the bioluminescence that was lighting up the beaches at night here in California. She wanted so badly to see this phenomenon. I encouraged her curiosity as I had seen them before and thought them to be magical. After a couple of different beach night explorations, we resigned to the fact that we may have possibly missed these blooms. However, one night while lying in bed, she finds a confirmed sighting via social media and asks if we should take a trip to see it. In our PJs, we hopped in the car and headed down to San Diego, wondering if it would still be visible after our hour-long drive. Keeping our expectations at bay, we arrived at the beach and began walking towards the water, unsure if we would even see anything. At one point she said, “is that blue?!”. I could feel our excitement build as we worked our way towards the water. The closer we got, the more I could feel my inner child giggle and smile. I was full of wonder. I could hear echoes of kids around the beach mirroring this fascination as well. I think wonder, imagination and fascination provides a unique connection to your heart via your inner child, who essentially takes you to a place of heart-centered connection to all that is.

So, as I sat there feeling this experience with my heart, of course my curious mind kicks in and considers the structure and science behind all of what my senses were experiencing. What am I really seeing? What is this bioluminescence? Well, basically these particular organisms are tiny single-celled plankton called dinoflagellates. When they become concentrated in large groups (at times as high as 20 million cells per liter), they result in a discoloration of the water known as “red tides” during the day and cause a bioluminescent phenomenon at night.

Bioluminescence by definition is the biochemical emission of light by living organisms. It is typically produced by the oxidation of a light-emitting molecule, generically called the luciferin — in conjunction with a catalyzing enzyme (either a luciferase or photoprotein).¹

According to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, the dinoflagellate cell is triggered to flash by imposed mechanical stress. Any mechanical stress of sufficient magnitude, such as handling by a predator, forces in waves, surge, or even swimming animals (including humans) can trigger the luminescence.

As with everything, there is also a polarity. This beautiful show in its brevity also had an adverse effect on the surrounding wildlife. On our drive to and from San Diego, my niece and I came across numerous areas along the coast that had an extremely pungent smell, it was sulfur-like and just foul. This was noted to be from many of the dead fish and sea animals popping up on the shorelines as a result of the red tide.

As stated by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, it's important to note that "some but not all red tides are toxic. In toxic red tides, the dinoflagellates produce a chemical that acts as a neurotoxin in other animals. When the dinoflagellates are ingested by shellfish, for example, the chemicals accumulate in the shellfish tissue in high enough levels and in turn cause serious neurological affects in birds, animals, or people which ingest this shellfish." ²

Now back to the heart, as I sat there looking at the water that night, listening to the rhythm of the waves, connecting to the experience, I observed. I observed within. I noticed an energetic point of resolution, where the vibrations of the two polarities produced by the dinoflagellates came together to resolve, within my heart. To explain, in this moment, I could simultaneously feel deep love for the organisms creating this incredible beauty, while at the same time feeling the pain (in a form of compassion) for the loss of life that occurs as a result. These opposing vibrations were felt simultaneously in my heart. There, they resolved into a feeling of oneness where everything was an expression of itself. There was no separation and everything just was within and without all at once.

After we went home from the beach, I took some time to think about and analyze this experience, as it has revealed itself quite a few times in my life. There were three common threads I found from these experiences:

1. A feeling of profound love and being overcome by beauty, stimulated by my senses all firing simultaneously.
2. At the same time, my heart was feeling polar opposites via a form of pain transcended into deep compassion and empathy.
3. The vibration of both of these resolved within my heart and manifested as an experience of unified polarity leading to a brief experience in singularity.

To further illustrate this common thread, I can describe a couple of these experiences. The first time it happened, I was sitting facing a beautiful lake with my back against a tree. Each of my senses were focusing on different things, the feeling of the wind blowing against my skin, the twinkle of the sunlight sparkling on the water, the smell of the pine tree I was sitting under... all my senses were engaged in a moment and my heart began whispering profound gratitude. That seed of gratitude vibrated throughout my being and I began to breathe with the rhythm of the wind. I could see the wind make its way across the lake, journey into my lungs. It was then pulled back out by the lake tide rolling back at the shore. It was a rhythm controlled by nature and in that state, in those breaths, it all became one, the wind, the water, the trees, the birds, the grass, and the consciousness I observe as "me". Everything, moved in unison and I experienced a love like I never had before.

This experience happened to me again some years later, while watching my aunt take her last breath. My aunt was... my person. The genuine love I have in my heart for her is simply inexpressible. It was an absolute gift to sit with her for a few months of her journey, going from a difficult end-of-life illness to her soul's ultimate freedom. Through this process, I remained very present. I had no expectations and allowed my heart to feel whatever it may, it was fully open. In her last moments of this reality I sat in what felt like the ultimate paradox. It was profoundly beautiful and incredibly painful all at once. I was experiencing a deep joy, knowing she was shifting to ultimate freedom and peace, while at the same time experiencing the profound loss, the detachment of her physical presence in this/my reality. In this moment, I experienced the two polarities coming together in my heart and resolving into a feeling of oneness. There was no separation between us, or anything for that matter, and I felt a peace like I have never felt before.

Being in this knowing was just like the triggered bioluminescence flash of the dinoflagellates, the wave spun me into illumination for a brief moment in time and then back out. Each time, the feeling was incredibly profound but also very brief. However, the understanding always remained: a knowing of boundless love and unity can be found within the heart.

¹ Steven H.D. Haddock, Mark A. Moline, and James F. Case. Bioluminescence in the Sea, 446. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-marine-120308-081028>

² Dinoflagellate Bioluminescence. Latz Laboratory, Scripps Institution of Oceanography. <https://scripps.ucsd.edu/labs/mlatz/bioluminescence/dinoflagellates-and-red-tides/>