

Open Windows

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No breakthrough in 20th Century medicine was driven more by serendipity than the discovery of penicillin. The first penicillin spore was carried by a random London wind through an open window and landed in one of Alexander Fleming's petri dishes. Fleming recognized the significance of this breeze borne visitor, but it has been said that penicillin discovered him rather than the other way around.

Chance, Pasteur reminds us, favors the prepared mind. Years of training allied to native genius enabled Fleming to see the significance of the spore. What is true in research is true in life. What cannot be sought can be welcomed: Buber teaches us that deep, I-Thou experiences are not forced; we must prepare our souls. Encounters will not always prove meaningful. The possibility only exists if we are open-hearted.

Hints of genuine meeting, with God, with other human beings, blow in the window of our lives each day. Since through the tedium and predictability of existence there is so much wild chance, one cannot know, as Fleming did not, what may suddenly present itself. Will this be a rewarding breeze? Everything depends upon whether we leave the window open.