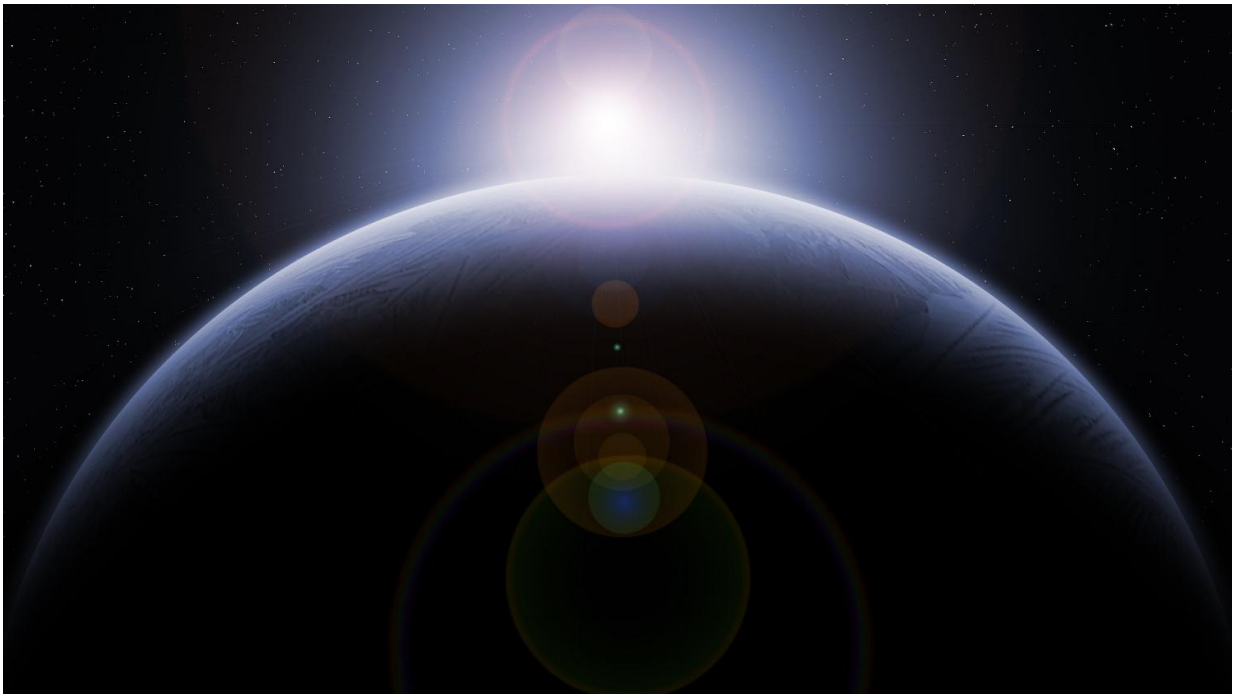


Afraid of heights in space: NASA astronaut details flight

May 3 2018, by Stacey Plaisance



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When NASA astronaut Joseph Acaba was out doing a spacewalk during a recent trip to the International Space Station, he held on tight. That's because Acaba is afraid of heights.

"If you look at the pictures, I'm holding on to the railing," he told a crowd at the Stennis Space Center on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. "It

does take a little bit of work while you're doing a spacewalk to realize, okay, it's okay. You are not going to fall."

Acaba was making his first public appearance—on the ground—since his Feb. 28 return from the [space](#) station. He spoke to employees at the space center and with The Associated Press after his talk about his experiences in space; future trips to the [moon](#) and beyond; and working with his Russian counterparts.

Acaba, who has logged more than 300 days in space on three separate flights, said [space travel](#) for private citizens is closer than many think.

"In the next year or so, we're going to have commercial flights flying NASA astronauts, and that's the first big step," he said. "And, it's never going to become routine. Going to space is difficult, but I think here in the near future, we are going to have more opportunities for people to fly in space."

The ultimate goal, he said, is to get humans on Mars. But the path to Mars goes through the moon first.

"It's a logical first step to go back to the moon," he said. "And while we've been there before, it was a very limited time-frame, and we have new technologies that we want to test, not only on the lunar surface but just orbiting the moon, getting some kind of a gateway so that we can go to Mars from there."

The goal is to get to Mars in the 2030 time-frame and to the moon before that, he said.

Acaba took off on Expedition 53/54 with a crew of Russian colleagues on Sept. 13, 2017. While Acaba was working quite closely in space with his Russian colleagues, tensions between Russia and the U.S. have heated

up back on earth over allegations the Russians tried to manipulate the U.S. elections.

In his address to NASA employees, he said it was "nice to see where you can work in a field that kind of rises above all the politics that's going on." He described the Russians as "great to work with."

During the mission, which lasted nearly six months, Acaba and the crew conducted a number of scientific experiments. The research focused on such projects as the manufacturing of fiber optic filaments in microgravity, improving the accuracy of an implantable glucose biosensor and measuring the Sun's energy input to Earth.

Acaba completed one spacewalk on the mission, to lubricate an end effector and install new cameras on the station's arm and truss.

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