

Seeing Yourself Through God's Eyes

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I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being. —Hafiz

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds. Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves. Let us be aware of the source of being, common to us all and to all living things. Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion—towards ourselves and towards all living beings. Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other. With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us practice the establishment of peace in our hearts on earth. —Thich Nhat Hanh

Ancient Witness: Luke 12:6-7

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“You are precious to me!” Every child should hear this. Every adult should hear this. Everyone should be raised on this. Jesus heard this. The gospel accounts say that when he was baptized, he heard the voice of God: “You are my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased!” (Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22, Matthew 3:17) It’s an image of God cooing in his ear the way any parent would to their infant. “You are precious to me, Jesus.”

And so you could say that baptism is a sign, a signal that God loves, that God whispers to us: “You are precious to me.” God gazes at the world and at us with unconditional positive regard.

Most of us most of the time don’t comprehend this message when the Voice speaks to us. We’re either too young or too preoccupied or too distracted or whatever. But not Jesus. Jesus heard it. He was profoundly aware of it. He took it to heart. It guided his life and actions. After hearing and understanding this reality, he went off on his mission. And part of what Jesus was about was getting others to hear this Voice, too. He wanted others to have this same awareness that he did: “You are my beloved child. You are precious to me.”

After Jesus saw himself through God’s eyes, he was able to reflect this Divine Reality to the world. Jesus’ life points us to God because he was aware of how God saw him. Jesus was centered upon this reality. This provided him with a spiritual foundation to embody God’s love and to show others the nature of God through his life. This loving, affirming nature of God that we see in the way of Jesus reminds me of the old song:

*Jesus love the little children, all the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

Jesus' life shows us that *all* the children, *all* people, are *precious in God's sight*. You are precious!

I've talked about how important it is to see others through the eyes of God, and this week I want to shift the focus to seeing *ourselves* as God sees us.

So I want to introduce you to one of the most important spiritual exercises today. One that is much more difficult and demanding than it seems. Here it is: Sit in a quiet place, no distractions, close your eyes, and practice seeing yourself as God would see you. Sometimes it might be helpful to start big—picture the stars, the big blue planet of Earth. Get closer—see the deserts, the mountains, the farms, the cities. See the people, the crowds, the faces, each as God would see them, with love and compassion, with tenderness and attention. And then, there you are in the distance. You get closer. You are now seeing yourself through God's eyes. You are so valuable, so precious, so important.

Now, this vision is extremely difficult to attain. Some are never able to do it. For most, it is only a flickering image. So I suggest that you meditate and focus on this for a while. Let it really sink in and permeate your mind.

Another way to get into this state is to visualize someone who is very precious to you. Maybe it is a child or an infant that you are holding close to you. Just think about what they mean to you and how much you care for them. And now you are getting a feel for how God is seeing you. Gradually substitute an image of yourself.

But, again, let me warn you. This is a very difficult exercise. Most people who try it give up, so you need to be patient. Many people are so hard on themselves, and when they look at themselves, it is not through the loving, caring eyes of God at all. Rather, they see themselves through the eyes of a very harsh critic. In these eyes, every little fault and weakness is held up to ridicule.

I had a friend who worked with an organization for battered and abused women. He would help them with legal advice; he would comfort, console and support them; he would help them and their children find shelter, and he would accompany them to court where they would testify against their husbands or boyfriends. He told me that a common strain that he saw in these men was poor self-image. These men were often frustrated with themselves. Either they saw themselves as failures or as not measuring up to a certain set of standards. They felt bad about themselves and were angry with themselves. And it was this constant state of self-hatred that led them to explode at any seemingly minor incident. These men were usually extremely hard on themselves.

Strangely enough, according to my friend, this attitude was also common among the women who were abused. It is true that many of the women felt trapped, and they were. They had no other place to live, no other source of money, no protection from the violence. But in addition, they were trapped by their own negative self-image. Some would feel—deep down—that they almost deserved the punishment and abuse. How they saw themselves often kept them from leaving their violent and destructive situations.

Seeing ourselves, not as a ruthless critic would see us, but as God would see us, is part of healing. It helps us make healthy decisions. Perhaps many of us, to lesser or greater degrees, have a little of either the victim or the aggressor within us. Perhaps many of us feel unlovable, inadequate, guilty, stupid, undeserving. Perhaps many of us find it impossible to see ourselves as God sees us.

Like parents who lovingly gaze at their child, God sees everything in us that is tender and beautiful. Jesus turned the prevailing image of God on its head, away from one who judges us harshly. He contrasts a God that you fear with a God who comforts. Jesus talked about the way that God sees us when he said, “Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God’s sight.” The idea is that if God sees each seemingly insignificant sparrow, then God sees everything about each one of us, who are of so much greater value. A sparrow does not even land or hop on the ground without God seeing it. “Even the hairs on your head are all counted,” said Jesus. God sees and knows us better than we see and know ourselves.

What an incredible thought! I mean, we think that we know ourselves, and sometimes that nobody else really sees and understands us. We many feel that we are alone, but there is someone who sees all of our hurts and hopes, our deepest desires and defenses better than we do. It was Nietzsche who said:

We are unknown, we knowers, to ourselves... As far as ourselves are concerned we are not knowers.

Loving means seeing. It is clear sighted. It pays attention. Rabbi Harold Kushner talks about God who not only forgives our failures, but also sees our successes where no one else does, not even ourselves. In one of his books he writes:

God redeems us from the sense of failure and the fear of failure because [God] sees us as no human eyes can see us. Some religions teach that God sees us so clearly that [God] knows all our shameful and nasty secrets. I prefer to believe that God sees us so clearly that [God] knows better than anyone else our wounds and sorrows, the scars on our hearts from having wanted to do more and do better and being told by the world that we never would. (When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough, p. 188)

So you see, God’s clear-sighted vision is not so much judgment as it is grace. God does not observe us to catch us in a mistake, but rather to savor and to embrace us. Again, Kushner writes,

Only God can give us credit for angry words we did not speak, the temptations we resisted, the patience and gentleness little noticed and long forgotten by those around us. (p. 187)

There are many who object to the idea of God because they only know of a violent, judgmental and punishing image of God. But here, we have a different image of boundless, endless love—unconditional positive regard.

In a recent book, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, Christopher Germer, a Clinical Instructor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, writes,

Self-compassion is a form of acceptance. Whereas acceptance usually refers to what’s happening to us—accepting a feeling or a thought—self-compassion is acceptance of the person to whom it’s happening. It’s acceptance of ourselves while we’re in pain. (p. 33)

And like marriages, Germer says that self-compassion goes through three phases: *infatuation*, *disillusion*, and *true acceptance*. (p. 224) In the last phase, we give ourselves kindness not just to relieve pain or with any hopes to change ourselves. We give ourselves kindness *unconditionally*. We move from the intention of *curing* ourselves or *completing* ourselves to simply *caring* for

ourselves. Seeing ourselves as God sees us is not a starry-eyed or idealized view of ourselves. We come to realize that we're not protected from the pain of living and that we have to work with what we have and who we are. There's a way that you're able to sit quietly with somebody in distress just as a compassionate presence and not try to "fix" them or "solve" the situation. Think of it like this, and just sit lovingly next to yourself.

God's clear-sighted vision does not overlook our weakness, but it sees so much more. And when we see ourselves as God sees us, this is what we do, too. It reminds me of a short prayer:

O God, help me to believe the truth about myself no matter how beautiful it is!
(Macrina Wiederkehr quoted in *A Grateful Heart* edited by M. J. Ryan)

This is what seeing ourselves through God's eyes can do for us. It can help us believe the truth about ourselves *no matter how beautiful it is*.

Thomas Merton was talked about seeing with the eyes of God, "*seeing the secret beauty of your heart, the depth of your heart where neither sin nor desire can reach, the core of your reality, the person that you are in God's eyes.*"

I think that it starts here and moves outward. If we can see ourselves in this way, then it becomes natural to see others in this way, too. When we hear the divine affirmation, "You are my beloved child. You are precious!" then we adopt a new identity, a new way of life.

As the poet, Hafiz, wrote,

I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being.

Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan Buddhist that I like to read, put it like this:

A great deal of chaos in the world occurs because people don't appreciate themselves. Having never developed sympathy or gentleness toward themselves, they cannot experience harmony or peace within themselves, and therefore, what they project to others is also inharmonious and confused. (Chogyam Trungpa quoted in *The Essential Chogyam Trungpa* edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian)

I'll close with a story of two monks walking down a road when a carriage pulled by horses comes barreling straight toward them. Both of them jump out of the way just as it approaches. The old monk jumps up from the ditch, dusting himself off, and runs after the carriage, saying, "May you be blessed!" The young monk says to him, "Why did you say that? Why would you wish him blessed? He almost killed us!" The old monk said, "Do you really think if he were truly and deeply happy that he would treat others that way?" When we learn to be more truly compassionate with ourselves, we will become more compassionate with others.

Friends, let us learn—let us practice—to develop gentleness toward ourselves. Let us see ourselves as God sees us. Let us see that we are, each of us, God's beloved child. Let us see the sacred resemblance. And let us hear the whisper, "You are precious!"

(NOTE: The spoken sermon, also available online, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)