

Seeing with the Heart Rightly

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Twenty years ago this year, Thich Nhat Hanh's "The Miracle of Mindfulness"¹, was published in English. In the intervening years, *mindfulness* has become part of our language and its practice has penetrated many of our institutions. This simple, yet profound, little book touches something in the human psyche – a longing, a

hunger perhaps, that our frantically busy and fractured world, for all its wonderful inventions and opportunities, is unable to meet.

The Miracle of Mindfulness came to mind as I was reflecting on the title of our contemplative community: Contemplative + Evolution + Network. It seems to me that the *Mindfulness* aspect of Buddhist spirituality corresponds to *Contemplative* dimension of our Christian spiritual tradition. Both involve being:

- *present*
- *awake, alert*
- *conscious of all that makes up this moment*



Our daily contemplative hour is about tuning-in to the vibrancy of life within us, connecting us with the Life that beats and throbs throughout cosmos: human, non-human, and even what we tend to think of as life-less matter. It is about seeing with, what Raimon Panikkar calls *the third eye*, the intuitive capacity by which we perceive that dimension of reality that is not accessible to our senses or our intellect. He writes: The nature and function of the "third

¹ Thich Nath Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*,

eye" ... is what opens us to the *advaitic* intuition.'² Whereas our sensory and intellectual perceptions are dualistic, the *advaitic* intuition says *not one, not two, but both – and, this as well as that*. It is that unitive vision which can hold the tension of opposites, the yin and the yang, without denying one or the other, in a greater vision of non-duality.



Our everyday world is torn apart by dualism and its all-pervasive consequences. It sets people, social groups and nations against each other. It is driven by strong individualism, competitiveness, the “I” culture of selfies and iPhones, of entitlement, the competition to be better than, to win at any cost, a grasping for power, violence, wars, and so forth. In the process we lose sight of the fundamental oneness of the web of life, in which everything is *inter-independent* (another Panikkar expression), from the least to the greatest of the Earth and its life systems, as well as the entire cosmos.



In our time we are seeing the reaction of the Earth’s natural environment to the way of life we have created: unprecedented weather conditions, devastating storms, floods, fires and prolonged droughts. Our major river systems are under extreme stress. The plants in our gardens are burning

² Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, Orbis Books, New York 2010, p. 92.

with the sun's heat, even while their roots in the soil are kept damp. Parts of U.S. have experienced cold such as has only been recorded in the Arctic. Low-lying islands and estuaries are threatened by rising sea levels. Species of animals and plants are being driven to extinction at an unprecedented rate ... the litany of devastation can go on and on.



We sit in daily contemplation, knowing that such contemplation can bring change in our collective human consciousness. As we do, we find that we ourselves are the first to be changed, to be transformed. What happens in that hour flows over into the whole of our lives. We develop *third eye* vision which gradually becomes our habitual way of seeing and experiencing the world. We believe that, as more and more people develop *third eye* vision, they contribute to the evolution of human consciousness to that level of seeing.

Raimon Panikkar writes about this way of seeing:

*This third degree of knowledge comes into being, not when we see or know, but when we are conscious that we are seen and known. It is neither sense knowledge nor rational knowledge, and yet it is inseparable from both.... It emerges when the dynamism of knowledge inverts its direction, as it were: we are aware that in touching we are touched, in knowing we are known. It is conscious that there is an illumination from above.... It is a wholistic participation which produces a conviction which is more than physical or rational.*³

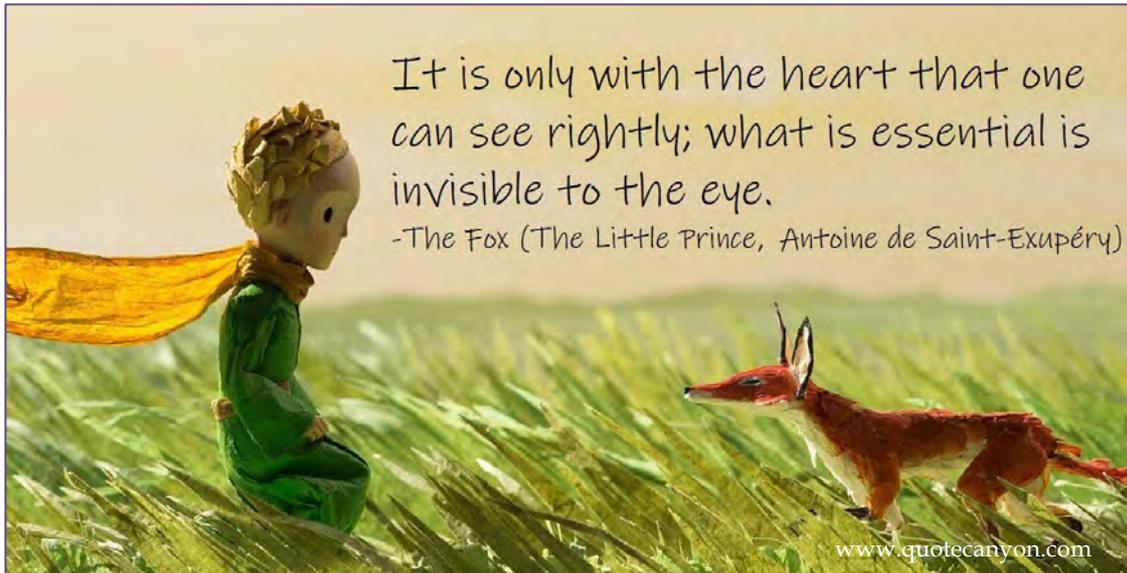
How do we spend our daily contemplative time? It is tempting to tune out from all the devastating trends of today's world. But the call is to do just the opposite:

- to allow our consciousness to *hold and feel* all the pain of the world, human and other;
- to hold that pain within the *Infinite Well of Compassion* that is the God revealed in Jesus;
- to become conduits of the *healing power of divine love and compassion* for the wounds of the world.

³ Ibid.

Panikkar's writings are profound and not easy reading, though well worth the effort. But every now and then, I pick up *The Little Prince* and delight again in its deep wells of wisdom which express contemplative seeing with utter simplicity.

Here is the Fox's 'secret' entrusted to the little prince as a farewell gift⁴.



May we all come to see with the heart rightly.

⁴ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, translated from the French by Katherine Woods, Puffin Books, p. 84. The image is from <http://quotecanyon.com/antoine-de-saint-exupery-sit-heart-one-can-see-rightly> used with permission.