**http://www.johnsherman.org/truth\_is\_all\_that\_matters/2013/09/the-looking-what-it-is-what-it-does-and-how-it-works.html**

**The Looking: What it is, what it does, and how it works**

**The Cause of All Our Troubles**

The fear of life is the sole cause of all human hatred, greed, aggression, and all the rest of the neurotic stupidity that falls from our fearful alienation from our own lives.

The fear of life appears at, or near birth for most of us, and infects the human mind with chronic fearfulness and anxiety, and a generalized alienation from and distrust of life itself. It causes the newborn mind to shrink away from life into a relationship with all experience that is rooted in suspicion, distrust and fear.

This underlying context of fearfulness is not the experience of fear with which we are all familiar. It is below the level of conscious awareness, and it is mostly inaccessible to us, except through its symptoms. The fear of life is more like an autoimmune disease. It spoils life for us by corrupting every component of the developing structure of personality through which we have the experience of life.

**There Is No One to Blame**

Someone I spoke with the other day expressed surprise at the fact that I do not blame society, education, government, or greedy corporations for the misery of human life.

When I look at the sorry state of society, the despicable state of organized education, the inability of governments to serve their people at the most basic level by providing access to nourishing food, clean water, health care, and safety from both governmental and non-governmental bloodshed, I see only the misery of the individual human mind writ colossal.

It’s plain to us that most of us suffer from a chronic state of anxiety and distrust of life. Just look around. Look at the drugs advertised on TV. Look at how we worship fear; how we are fearful even to speak of it lest we allow others to see that we are afraid. Look at your own mind and see how often it turns to denial, resistance, or aggression when things go bad.

There is no one to blame for our inability to understand ourselves, much less understand others. There is no one to blame for the profound impoverishment that greed inflicts on the entire human community, or for the hatred and cowardice that poisons the relations between nations now teetering on the brink of an insane orgy of murder and destruction over oil and religion.

Every human being on the planet is at least as scared as you are. Humanity truly is one creature, and the self-destructive madness that seems about to engulf us again in our time is nothing but the combined symptoms of the fear of life in billions individual human. We are in this together, and we will sink or swim together.

The fear of life and its effects are entirely to blame for the sorry state of human affairs we find ourselves in now. There is no one to blame for our crippled and contracted relationship with life; no one to blame for our silent sorrow. Not even ourselves.

**The Power of Attention**

We have control over nothing in life but the focus and direction of our attention, and even that, only intermittently. After all, our experience of every present moment is already here before we notice it, and therefore we cannot change it. Every moment in experience is on the surface of a vast ocean of cause and effect reaching back in time to the big bang, and outward in space to the end of the universe.

The present moment is also within that ocean. What I do in the present moment shapes the next moment and affects the future unfolding of my life. This is where attention lives, attending to some matters and not attending to others in the fluidly present moment. Energizing what it touches and allowing the rest to fade and sink back into the ocean of cause and effect and its random shaping of events.

The control of our attention, our ability to choose, however sporadically, where it should go is exactly what you use to try to look at yourself in the first place. The fear of life dissolves when touched by the willfully directed attention of the human mind. Without the power to direct the focus of attention, however clumsily, we cannot even understand the suggestion to look at ourselves, much less accomplish it.

**Looking at Yourself**

Accomplishing that act of focusing attention on *what it feels like to be me* is what I call *looking at yourself*, and it requires nothing more than to make one whole-hearted effort to experience the *feel of you.*

What I call the *feel of you* is that simple feeling of your presence here that you call *me*. Just that, nothing more — *what it feels like to be me.* Strangely enough, you might find this act very difficult to do, and the feeling of *me* to be frustratingly elusive. You may even find it difficult to know whether you have succeeded in this simple act at all.

Take heart, and try for patience. I promise you that if you try, you will succeed, no matter what you think about it.

**What Looking at Yourself Does for You**

Until now, there have been many attempts at solving the problem of the generalized un-satisfactoriness of life as a human being. Some of these practices can provide some easing of the discontent. However, nothing has been offered that can *permanently* free us from this curse or cure this disease.

The looking is not a spiritual teaching and does not oppose spiritual aspiration; nor is it religious or against religion. The looking occurs in a different realm altogether. It occurs in the direct and natural experience of human life.

The first concentrated effort to look at yourself, to taste what it feels like to be *me*, destroys that context of fearfulness and alienation from life. When that unseen, unnoticed, underlying context of the fear of life disappears, the mind finds itself in a deep and intimate engagement with the natural experience of human life for the first time.

The reaction to that unaccustomed intimacy can be unsettling at first. We have taken to calling this a *period of recovery*, in which the old psychological structures collapse and new ones start to emerge, now from a context of sanity. The mind goes through a period of regeneration and although some are at ease with it, others experience great mental pain and torment. But no matter how long this process takes — six months, a year, five years or more — and no matter how painful or easy it may seem, the end is certain: simple sanity and a clear mind.

It is better to think of that time as a *fresh start*, the beginning of a new relationship with life, and an opportunity to start experiencing freshly what it is to be human and alive. Freed from the cloud of fear for the first time in memory, we learn human living from scratch. We see clearly for the first time the unnoticed fact that we can influence the unfolding of our life by the intelligent application of the power to concentrate and move the focus of our attention at will.

**The Recovery Period**

The recovery period is often characterized by flare-ups and occasional relapses into old patterns of relationship and behavior and old points of view. Once you make that first direct contact with the feel of you and the context of fear evaporates, those old patterns are running on momentum, and all that allows them to continue to hold that momentum is your free-falling attention that habitually gravitates towards them. Although if left to their own devices those old patterns certainly fade away in time, when addressed directly with intelligence and the willingness to see what actually can and cannot be done about them, they can be deprived of the energy they require to exist. You can use the informed and skillful control of the focus of your attention to deny them that energy, thereby greatly weakening their strength and hastening their departure.

Much more importantly, the regular use of the power of attention will strengthen your understanding and your skillful, intelligent engagement in your own life will flourish and clarify in a continuous, focused, and natural manner for the rest of your life.

That power of attention liberates itself in that first act of looking at yourself and, from then on, the unfolding of your life is within your power to influence for the first time. The more you exert that influence, the stronger and more focused it will be. There is no end that I can see to what we can accomplish when we are all free of the bondage of fear and alienation from life.

As you go through your daily activities, you will notice from time to time that what you are attending to is not something that actually needs your attention in that moment. It does not matter whether it is good, bad or indifferent to you. Whenever you do notice that, just take a moment and deliberately move your attention to something neutral, like breath. Focus your attention for a moment on *the sensation of breathing*.

I am confident that if you will try this once, you will continue to work with it and, in the process, you will find yourself more intimately connected with the moment-to-moment feel of life, and you will get better at making use of the amazing power to control your own attention. One of the greatest gifts of the loss of the fear of life is a growing confidence in our ability to see what we can do in our lives, and a growing skillfulness in doing it.

Nothing can stop you from beginning right now to practice and to experiment with the movement of attention. That power, however atrophied in minds that are still afflicted by the fear, can be awakened and strengthened by self-training and practice.

You are not at the mercy of the swirl of circumstance that is your life. The looking helps you reclaim you life, discover the power you have, and fear not what you cannot do. There is much more to a good life than the absence of pain.

**The Looking Is Medicine**

The medicine is a simple action in the mind, to be performed once deliberately, and then repeated whenever the notion strikes you.

Nothing whatever is required of you but to do it. This is not a teaching or a philosophy; it involves no therapeutic process, no sudden clarifying bursts of insight, and no new understandings. It is a single act, performed at least once, and it has nothing about it to recommend it except that it works.

I know it sounds almost magical. It actually seems preposterous to state that such a simple thing as this could have the effect I claim. The only way you can know for sure is by doing it and paying attention to what happens afterwards.

Try it now if you will, it cannot hurt you, it costs nothing, and it is easy to do. Just look at *yourself* right now with your mind’s eye, try to get a moment’s recognition of the experience of *you* present here now, the *feel* of you, the person. The feel of what you call *me*. Ask yourself NOT *Who am I?* or *What am I*? or *Where did I come from?* or *Who or what should I be?* Ask yourself merely this:

*What does it feel like to be me, always here, always the same?*

You are not looking for an answer, a definition, a concept. This question only points to the pure sensation, a feeling, before the name.

That is all there is to it. If you tried to do what I just suggested, you have already done all that needs to be done to rid yourself of the distrust and the sense of disaffection with your own life. It will take some time for the results to begin to show and for you to be able to recognize them for what they are, but you can expect a couple of things to happen relatively soon.

First, you might find yourself trying to repeat this act. You may decide to establish a regular practice of some sort, or you may just find yourself doing it from time to time, unexpectedly. You may also develop a habit of doing it whenever certain circumstances arise, such as brushing your teeth, washing the dishes, etc. Whatever form it takes, you can expect to find yourself trying it repeatedly; even if you are convinced that nothing is coming of it, you will find yourself trying to get that glimpse again.

You may experience a period of calm and relief from the burden of the need to keep and ever-watchful eye open for threat or promise in the river of sensation and thought about sensation that is the ever-changing experience of life. Then, as time goes on, you may experience some confusion and distress arising from the unexpected intimacy, the overwhelming richness, and the sheer raw closeness of your experience of life.

You can trust that all the distress and confusion about the changes taking place in your experience will pass soon enough, and there are many people available in the [*Looking…* forum at JustOneLook.org](http://www.riverganga.org/Community/Board/forum.php) that will be able to help you navigate those sometimes difficult waters.

As that period of distress and confusion fades away, you might begin to notice the occasional *absence* of some previously habitual negative reaction to circumstances, maybe something minor and personal, like a tic of irritation at the behavior of people around you, or shame about some shortcoming of your own that you try to hide even from yourself.

A complete restructuring of the psychological apparatus of the mind is now underway, and this structure is the sole means by which we have the conscious experience of life. The old habits born of the fear are falling away to make room for new insights, points of view, and understandings that are consistent with the natural experience of life. The whole mind is undergoing a radical and automatic reset. This restructuring is taking place mostly outside of conscious awareness but, from time to time, you will notice its effect in the absence of some of the old habits that have simply died out.

In time, you will be surprised by the ease with which all stubborn ignorance and distrust of life just vanished, and you may come to see with us the urgent need to spread the news of this simple act throughout all of humanity.

If you are interested in the actual experience of people who have already left behind the context of fear, just visit our website, read and listen to the [testimonials](http://www.justonelook.org/community/testimonials.html), or go to our [community forums](http://www.riverganga.org/Community/Board/content.php) and spend enough time there to get a sense of the conversation in progress. See whether your experience with the looking rings true with what you find there.

**Looking Can Save Humanity from Self-Destruction**

All that we want now is to offer to every human being the chance to free themselves from that incessant hum of fearfulness and anxiety that ruins the experience of life. We want all people to be able to experience for themselves the wondrous adventure that is life as a natural human being free of neurotic anxiety. We want to bring to the ears of every human being on the planet, in their native languages, this simple suggestion, and to welcome them into the community of their peers where they can contribute their unique vision and understanding of human life to the whole.

Word is spreading. There is a growing online community of people who have taken this medicine, and are now finding new freshness and satisfaction in their experience of life. They speak of a growing clarity in their practical understanding of their own life circumstances, and a burgeoning trust in natural human intelligence. You may be among them.

Some are reporting fresh new insights and understandings that arise naturally, and serve the relationship between human intelligence and a natural human life. Some come seeking help with the confusion and anxiety that can flare up as the protective psychological mechanisms begin to disintegrate and new healthy structures begin to take form. Some who have already passed through that period of recovery and regeneration come to offer help and encouragement to those who are still reeling from the profound effect the looking has had on their experience of life. They speak of discovering a new and alive skillfulness in navigating that discomfort in ways that support the healthy development of the new personal context, now free of fear.

This simple act of inward looking can bring about the reconciliation of each individual human mind with natural life, and it has the potential to bring about the reconciliation of the entire human species with itself.

John Sherman

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