

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
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Look!
for Harriotte Ranvig

“Dick. Look look. Oh, oh, oh. Look, look, oh look.”

Name that quote!

Yes, it's the opening of the Dick and Jane books, featuring the much-maligned whole-word, phonics-free method by which some of us actually learned to read. I will never forget the first day of first grade; it began with *Look!* and I've never looked back. It is only now, so many years later, that I've learned that the Dick and Jane I knew and loved were apparently the Protestant versions; the Catholic and Seventh-day Adventists were reading about Judy and John,¹ renamed for Catholic saints. Of note is that, until 1965, none of these ubiquitous books featured multi-ethnic characters. And although I don't remember it, my sainted teacher, Miss Martin, must have been expected to teach the questionable sequence in which Dick and Jane are given zip-up laundry bags with which to play.² “Oh, oh, oh. Look, look, oh look!”

It was my colleague, Robert Fulghum, who sent me back to reminisce about my reading debut. His beautiful little piece is entitled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. It enumerates sixteen things we learn as children that, when applied, might just be everything we need to be happy and good adults. I commend them to you; for today, I'm thinking about number sixteen. Bob Fulghum writes, “Remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – the biggest word of all – LOOK.”

Do you know the work of Frederick Franck? When I think of “look,” after Dick

¹ *Judy, John, and Jean* were the Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist versions of *Dick, Jane, and Sally* (and how is it that John didn't lead the lineup?!)

² wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_and_Jane

and Jane, I think of Frederick Franck. He was born in the Netherlands,³ though he became a U.S. citizen. He was a dental surgeon who worked with Dr. Albert Schweitzer in Africa, a painter and sculptor,⁴ and an author – a true Renaissance man. His book *The Zen of Seeing* is considered a classic.

Frederick Franck's motto, attributed to the seventh century Chinese monastic Hui Neng,⁵ is “The meaning of life is to see.” In his work, though, the eyes are only one vehicle for vision; with St. Bonaventure, he distinguishes “the eye of the flesh, the eye of reason, and the eye of contemplation that sees unto liberation.”⁶ Authors Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat remember him as someone with profound “insights into what it really means to open your eyes and see the abundant wonders and miracles in front of you.” He believed – and dedicated his life's work to the belief – that if we could look and see that clearly, there would be peace.

Frederick Franck tells this beautiful story about the spiritual practice of seeing:

“Grandfather's house was full of treasures.... [and] the greatest treasure by far ... was what Grandfather referred to as his 'stereopticon.' To this contraption, more properly known as a 'stereoscope,' I probably owe my ... way of perceiving the world.

“The antique contrivance consisted of twin lenses set in a leather-covered housing, lined with red velvet. From this housing, a kind of wooden slide rule jutted forward, with a device at its end in which you placed twin photographs. Then, pressing the velvet edge to your face, you saw through the lenses an oak tree, not flat, as in a picture, but all in the round: a living presence. For hours, I could sit and watch the miraculous three-dimensionality of cows in a meadow, of lovers dallying under lilac bushes full of white doves, [and] of Princess Juliana of the Netherlands riding her piebald pony...

“And so it came about that sometimes, when I got tired on the long, solo hikes I loved, ... I found I could command my eyes: 'Now, look as if through the stereopticon!'

3 1909-2006

4 His sculptures are in the Modern Museum of Art, the Whitney, the Fogg Art Museum, the Tokyo National Museum, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine!

5 Hui Neng was the sixth (and last) patriarch of Chinese Zen.

6 His mission was to empower his students to make what he called a “mystical connection” with their subjects, thus releasing the “inner artist.”

And suddenly, every blade of grass sprang to life again, and stood there in a space all its own; clumps of trees broke up into individual living beings, each one rising from its own roots deep in the earth. People ... underwent an extraordinary metamorphosis: they, too, became ... unique, mysterious beings.... When seen stereoscopically, [each thing] became a poignant, living presence....

“Grandfather's gadget, I now realize, was the mute master who initiated me into seeing, who gave me the first hints that one's everyday eye can become an awakened eye, an eye that can do infinitely more than merely look.... [an eye awakened] from its habitual slumber to fully conscious perception.

“There are drawbacks to this eye awakened,” Frederick Franck concludes. “You can't cut down that sumac that is in the way [because it's] 'only a sumac' ... The waiter is waiter-no-longer once you see the tremor in that hand ... The cow is no more 'cattle' when you have drawn those eyes.... Stereoscopic seeing may make you relatively harmless; it also makes you vulnerable.”⁷

It's beautiful, isn't it? It's what e.e. cummings was celebrating in his poem that ends, “now the ears of my ears awake and the eyes of my eyes are opened.” You know it; here it is:

i Thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any – lifted from the no
of all nothing – human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and

7 Frederick Franck, “The Steropticon,” in *Parabola* magazine, Fall, 1997

now the eyes of my eyes are opened)⁸

There's a fabulous story told by Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck, in which she recounts her experience as a piano major at Oberlin conservatory. She writes, “I was a very good student; not outstanding, but very good. And I very much wanted to study with one teacher who was undoubtedly the best. He'd take ordinary students and turn them into fabulous pianists. Finally, I got my chance to study with *the* teacher.

“When I went in for my lesson, I found that he taught with two pianos. He didn't even say hello. He just sat down at his piano and played five notes, and then he said, 'You do it.' I was supposed to play it just the way he played it. I played it – and he said, 'No.' He played it again, and I played it again. Again, he said, 'No.' Well, we had an hour of that. And each time, he said, 'No.'

“In the next three months, I played about three measures, perhaps half a minute of music. Now, I had thought I was pretty good: I'd played soloist with little symphony orchestras. Yet we did this for three months, and I cried most of those three months. He had all the marks of a real teacher, that tremendous drive and determination to make the student see. That's why he was so good. And at the end of three months, one day, he said, 'Good.'

“... What had happened in those three months? I had the same set of ears I started with; nothing had happened to my ears. What I was playing was not technically difficult. What had happened was that I had learned to listen for the first time... I learned to pay attention. That was why he was such a great teacher: he taught his students to pay attention. After working with him [we] really heard, [we] really listened. When you can hear it, you can play it. And finished, beautiful pianists would finally come out of his studio.”⁹

Look! Listen! Look!

Last weekend, snowshoeing along a spectacular trail in Maine, Kem and I emerged from the woods into the bright, winter sunlight. Someone had tromped out a message in huge letters, now frozen into the side of the snowbank. It said, “Look up!”

8 e.e. cummings, XAIPE, #65

9 Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen*, pp. 9-10

And there, above the clean line of towering, drifted snow, wind-scoured against a copse of evergreens, was a perfect, cloudless, “true, blue dream of sky.” Exquisite. My eyes returned to the message. “Look up!” And – I had missed it at first – in smaller letters, “Thank you!” The closing words of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* proclaim, “Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.”

Thank you.

My spiritual companions, may we, too, “look, look, oh look.” The eye of contemplation sees unto liberation. Let us look as if through the stereopticon, the everyday eye becoming an awakened eye, everything becoming to us a poignant, living presence. It takes practice – spiritual practice: months of “No,” perhaps, until one day, “Good.” It is good: to learn to pay attention, to awaken the ears of our ears, to open the eyes of our eyes. Let's look up! Let's say, *thank you*.

